



**SAHARA
AND SAHEL
OBSERVATORY**

GENDER POLICY

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Acronyms

AF	Adaptation Fund
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GEARI	Gender Equality and African Regional Institutions
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GCGHU	Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
OSS	Sahara and Sahel Observatory
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

DEFINITIONS^{1,2}

Discrimination: Gender discrimination which involves treating individuals differently because of their sex. This can lead to systematic and structural bias against women, in areas such as income distribution, access to resources, and participation in decision-making.

Empowerment: Process of increasing one's ability to exercise control over one's life and make strategic choices through enhancing opportunities for participation and decision-making in various aspects of one's life.

Gender Equality: Equal rights and responsibilities are guaranteed for all people, men and women, with the opportunity to have their respective interests, needs and priorities taken into account. It's not only about the promotion of women's rights, but also about the involvement of the male gender in changing gender roles and promoting gender equality.

Gender equity: Fair, equitable, and impartial treatment of individuals of all genders, whether male or female, thereby contributing to eliminate bias or social disadvantage based on gender roles, social norms, or differences between the sexes. This approach is necessary as it is sensitive to the unique needs of each gender, to cultural barriers, and to the history of discrimination that has had an impact on specific groups.

Gender inequality: Differences existing between men and women in their access to resources, status, and well-being, which are generally enjoyed by men, and which are often institutionalized through laws and customs.

Gender mainstreaming: Process identified to address and incorporate the needs and interests of women and men, in any program, policy, strategy, administrative or financial activity.

Gender sensitivity: Ability to recognize gendered needs and limitations, as well as the different perspectives and preferences of men and women that result from their different social contexts and experiences.

Gender: Societal expectations, behaviors, attributes, and rights that are deemed appropriate for both women and girls, and men and boys, within a specific time and society. Gender roles also involve the relationships between men and women, and between women, and between men. These societal expectations and relationships are shaped by socialization processes. They are context-dependent and subject to change. Gender determines what is considered desirable, permissible, and valuable for individuals within a given societal context.

¹ https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/OPG-Annex-4_GP-and-GAP_approved-March2021pdf-1.pdf

² <https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/10000003-EN-THE-GENDER-POLICY.PDF>

Gender-based labor division: Overall Social system in which both sexes play a set of gender roles. This division is not based on ability but on gender. The gendered division of labor is the key stake in gendered social relations, to legitimize hierarchical relationships between men and women.

Gender-sensitive indicator: A number, fact, or perception that indicates the extent and level to which a program or project is achieving its goals and improving gender equity.

Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit (GCGHU): Independent body within the OSS that reports directly to the Executive Secretary. It is responsible for ensuring adherence to governance principles and regulations. It oversees the implementation of OSS' policies and procedures, and addresses grievances or complaints raised by stakeholders, partners or any individual or entity working or involved in OSS' activities. This unit plays a crucial role in promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct, while effectively managing and resolving any grievances or disputes that may arise within the organization.

I- INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a paramount prerequisite in achieving development objectives. However, gender inequality remains a major obstacle to economic growth and poverty reduction in the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) (hereinafter also referred to as "Observatory") area of action. In many societies, men enjoy more rights, responsibilities, opportunities and benefits than women.

The persistence of gender inequality is considered detrimental to the law and to economic and social progress. It is therefore considered necessary to seek human development opportunities for women and men through effective policies and sustained investments aimed at reducing inequalities in Africa.

Featuring the highest rates of illiteracy, African women and girls are among the poorest in the world level. Women's participation in formal labor market is low and the discrimination against them in many parts of Africa has a negative impact on their productivity, which leads to huge income disparities between women and men. Even in agriculture, a sector largely dominated by women, their productivity is 30% lower than men's due to the lack of access to essential inputs.

Africa's gender equality goals³ reflect a strong and hopeful vision of a continent where women and men have equal rights, namely i) equal access to justice and protection, ii) equal access to water, sanitation, energy, health, education and other public services, iii) equal access to productive resources and means of action; iv) equal pay; and v) equal opportunities to participate in the creation of wealth.

In line with international commitments, and in order to address major gender challenges, African organizations are striving to achieve gender equality and ensure women's rights are fully applied. International meetings and major events have stressed the urgency of institutionalizing gender policy in regional, sub-regional and national policies and programs. The following are some of these international commitments and instruments that have inspired the OSS Gender Policy:

- The Millennium Development Goals, converted into the Sustainable Development Goals since 2015;
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981, and the specific rights of women, subject of an additional protocol in 2003;
- The Solemn Declaration of the Heads of States of the African Union on men-women equality in Africa, in July 2004;
- The Gender Policy of the African Union in December 2008;
- The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which considers gender equality as a key area of intervention that could lead to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction;
- The ECOWAS gender Policy and all its implementing instruments;
- Gender policies of some countries of OSS field of action.

³https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/African_Union_Gender_Policy_2009.pdf

Since the 1990s, the OSS has been contributing to a large number of gender-equality dedicated literature and studies, especially on the role of women in the environmental field. As a regional institution, the Observatory believes that it is well suited to disseminate the concept of gender.

It has also been decided in January 2011, to incorporate the gender into the OSS programs, under the Gender Equality and African Regional Institutions (GEARI) project. The OSS has therefore set itself the goal of gradually integrating the gender concept into all its units (Earth, Climate, Water, etc.) and projects. The OSS has therefore set itself the objective to gradually integrating the gender concept into all of its units (Earth, Climate, Water, etc.) and projects. This task relies on the program implementers and is carried out with the support of the Gender Focal Point, who ensures that gender equality remains an ongoing issue within OSS programs.

This Policy will enable the Observatory to promote the integration of the Gender concept in its activities, and to make its interventions more effective, efficient and relevant while responding to the key needs and aspirations of women and men.

This Policy specifies the objective and vision of the OSS in terms of gender equity, and outlines an accountability framework to ensure Policy oversight of the Policy and achievement of results. It supports and completes the OSS environmental and social policy.

With the adoption of the Gender Policy, the OSS commits to:

- Create an enabling and sustainable gender environment;
- Establish frameworks and mechanisms to combat discrimination and ensure gender equality;
- Mobilize partners and resources for the effective implementation of the Gender Policy;
- Streamline and harmonizing OSS strategic documents and programs related to gender;
- Strengthen the capacity of the OSS staff and experts involved in gender mainstreaming;
- Strive to integrate the gender concept into all OSS programs, projects and activities.

II- RATIONALE

Gender inequality is one of the most important global issues of the day. Several international organizations, including the UNFCCC⁴ and climate funds such as the AF^{5,6} and the GCF⁷ and others, highlighted the importance of addressing this challenge and recognized the critical role of women in community development and the importance of equal participation in decision-making in order to achieve sustainable development.

In this line, the OSS Gender Policy (hereafter also referred to as the "Policy") recognizes the intrinsic link between ecosystems and natural resources on the one hand, and societies and populations, on the other hand, with a special focus on gender equity. It embodies this commitment by making gender equality a key part of its 2030 Strategy⁸.

This Policy recognizes that the benefits derived from climate change projects would be more far-reaching and effective, if greater emphasis were placed on the empowerment of women and vulnerable communities. Therefore, a key factor in ensuring the success of implemented projects is to recognize the importance of these two social components.

As a result, women and vulnerable communities are the focus of special attention by the OSS, and are defined as target groups in its projects and programs, through dedicated communication plans adapted to the specifics of each country. These actions allow vulnerable target groups to have equal opportunities to benefit from environmental and climate change information and to share their concerns.

The Gender Policy shall be subject to periodic review and revision, to ensure that it is in line with international standards and national regulations and policies.

III- OBJECTIVES

The Gender Policy provides the OSS with a framework to guide its efforts to achieve gender equality, particularly in support of women, in the programs and projects it conducts in its area of operations. It provides relevant and rigorous indicators for decision-makers to adapt and align their policies, strategies and programs in the region.

⁴<https://unfccc.int/gender>

⁵https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AFB.B.34-35.Inf_1_Draft-of-the-Updated-Gender-Policy.pdf

⁶<https://www.adaptation-fund.org/document/updated-gender-policy-and-gender-action-plan/>

⁷<https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gender-policy>

⁸http://www.oss-online.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/OSS-Strategie2030_En.pdf

Through this Gender Policy, OSS is committed to:

- Create an enabling and sustainable environment for gender equality within its own governance and staff, and within the programs, projects and activities it implements;
- Establish a framework and mechanisms to combat discrimination and ensure gender equality;
- Streamline and harmonize the OSS' strategic documents and programs related to gender;
- Strengthen the capacities of the OSS staff and experts involved in gender integration;
- Mobilize partners and resources for effective implementation of the Policy.

The overall objective of this Gender Policy is to promote participatory and equitable development for women and men, and to ensure equal and fair access to resources and opportunities for both sexes, with full respect for their fundamental rights.

The specific objectives of this Gender Policy are to:

- Ensure an active participation of both women and men in the development process and an equal access to information, resources and opportunities for both sexes;
- Ensure that both women and men have equal access to the OSS support, programs and projects, and to their results and impacts (gender equity);
- Ensure that women have the same rights, power, responsibilities and opportunities as men in the operations and functions of the Observatory (gender equality);
- Ensure that the OSS activities do not hinder advancements in gender equality and equity;
- Integrate gender information, awareness and training into the Observatory's projects and programs.

IV- SCOPE

The OSS Gender Policy aims to further promote the importance of gender in its internal structure, as well as in the programs and projects it implements. Therefore, this Policy is applied at two distinct but complementary levels:

4.1- At the institutional level

- **Through a Compliance Mechanism** that ensures the effective implementation of the OSS' Gender Policy, and requires its staff to fully comply with the operational procedures and to adhere to the standards and steps defined for gender mainstreaming.
- **Through training and knowledge sharing** to ensure a better understanding of gender concept among OSS staff.
- **Through an institutional framework** that strengthens the integration of gender into all OSS activities, through the preparation of progress reports and the establishment of independent peer review mechanisms.

4.2- At the project level

- **Through adapting the legal status and ownership** of OSS projects and activities in a way that changes the local and regional cultural mindset, and helps to further integrate these gender equality measures into the local how-to-do things.
- **Through economic empowerment** by providing women with the same tools as men to help them carry out their own income-generating activities.
- **Through capacity-building and knowledge management** enabling OSS to acquire the skills and capabilities to produce gender-responsive results reports, to better monitor expected impacts and to reduce knowledge gaps in gender integration through specific studies and strategic thinking.

The OSS Gender Policy is guided by the deep belief in the equality and equity of all the members of the human species, and in the common human rights and values. It is based on the conviction that equity and social justice are key factors in the achievement of the Observatory's objectives, and that the elimination of all gender inequalities need a special action in favor of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

The complementarity of women and men, from the day-to-day life activities to the very core of the nuclear family is a primary condition for achieving collective peace which is the foundation of economic and social development. This complementarity should therefore be maintained with full respect for differences, through a permanent consensus.

Therefore, far from being a trivial matter of gender equality, compliance with the principles of this policy during the project development process is a paramount necessity, to be taken into account so as to ensure the successful implementation of any action taken.

Gender inequality is a real obstacle to lifting as many people as possible out of poverty. Thus, this Policy made it mandatory to adhere it within the OSS' own structures, throughout the entire implementation process of its projects and programs.

As stated above, the vision of the OSS Gender Policy is congruent with the universal principles of human rights. This link weighs in achieving its activities' objectives as well as in selecting its program.

Moreover, the implementation of this Policy is consistent with regional and national development priorities and takes into account local constraints, which ensures that the Observatory's programs and projects adhere to the principles of gender equality.

The implementation of the Gender Policy follows a specific approach that focuses on sound and evidence-based decision-making. Achieving significant and verifiable results must therefore remain the main driving force behind Policy implementation. It also requires that both genders be given equal opportunities to actively participate in Stakeholder consultations and decision-making during project preparation, implementation and evaluation.

Therefore, the Observatory requires from its partners the definition and assignment of clear roles and tasks equally for both genders, in a way that streamlines the Policy implementation process, increases its efficiency, and creates a sense of ownership among Stakeholders.

The OSS strives to maintain transparency in the implementation of the policy and the presentation of results in a way that helps build trust and encourages greater participation by technical and financial Partners, Beneficiaries and Stakeholders. The Observatory also recognizes equal rights for both genders to access and responsibility in all aspects of its programs and projects.

V- OPERATIONAL ACTION PLAN

The implementation of the OSS Gender Policy is based on an Operational Action Plan structured around four axes.

5.1- Axis 1 - Strengthen awareness and communication on gender-related challenges by:

- Promoting a better understanding and ownership of gender concept by OSS staff through outreach activities and awareness workshops;
- Increasing OSS visibility of gender-related achievements through information materials (articles, brochures, and website) production and dissemination, with a special emphasis on gender.

5.2- Axis 2 - Strengthen institutional mechanisms to better understand gender-related challenges, by:

- Requiring taking into consideration the gender aspect in administrative documents;
- Mobilizing financial and human resources to support the implementation of the OSS Gender and SSEAH (Safeguarding from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse And Harassment) policies;
- Networking with institutions and organizations that share the OSS' gender vision;
- Gender mainstreaming in OSS communication plans.

5.3- Axis 3 - Strengthen the capacity to promote gender integration in OSS projects and programs, by:

- Developing and implementing a gender training plan with a track record of the number of workshops held, and the gender participation rate;
- Producing simplified tools to provide OSS staff, to enable better gender mainstreaming, such as gender-sensitive indicators (the number of women and men who are affected by projects and programs, and the number of projects and programs that integrated gender), and the establishment of a gender disaggregated database at the project and program level (built through systematic data collection, processing and dissemination);

- Supporting the conduct of gender-related studies and research on the main issues addressed by the OSS.

5.4- Axis 4 – Monitor and assess, through:

- Track-recording through the Governance Compliance and Grievance Handling Unit (GCGHU), the operational guidelines and commitments within the general framework established by the Observatory;
- The GCGHU's annual reporting of gender equality outcomes. This unit is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Gender Policy at the OSS level, and addressing gender-related complaints.

VI- EFFECTIVENESS AND REVISION

This Policy will come into effect upon its adoption by the OSS Board. It will apply to all OSS activities to the extent reasonably possible, and to those that will be approved after the effective date of this Policy.

This Policy will remain in effect until amended or superseded. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary.