



*Striving for a healthy and inclusive society*

## **Gender Policy**

**Revised February 2023**

## 1. Introduction: HDI's Work in Gender Equality

At HDI, we recognize that gender norms – the societal expectations of how men and women should behave – deeply influence an individual's sexual and reproductive health, agency, and ability to exercise their rights. Within relationships, patriarchal gender norms shape our expectations and power dynamics (e.g., our understanding of consent, who decides if/when to have sex or whether to use contraception, and who is responsible for preventing pregnancy). At the societal level, these norms influence the acceptability of young women (and men) accessing SRH services, contraceptives or becoming pregnant. They also influence the normalization of violence against women and girls. Rigid gender norms lead to stigma and discrimination against people of different gender identities and sexual orientations, who do not fit traditional ideas of masculinity or femininity. These gender norms are also upheld by individual health providers and are perpetrated by the systems and policies in which they operate, influencing access to and the quality of health services. Such norms are learned and reinforced at multiple levels of the socio-ecological model – individual, family, community, systems and policies – and therefore require work at each level to promote gender equality.

Despite a strong legal and policy framework, inequitable gender norms persist in Rwanda, hindering the full attainment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. As a human rights organization, HDI places great importance on gender inclusion and mainstreaming.

## 2. Definitions

HDI subscribes to definitions provided by the United Nations, which defines **Gender** as the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas **biological sex** is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, gender is an acquired identity that is; learned, changes over time and varies widely within and across cultures. [1]

**Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** According to the United Nations, Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to violence directed toward or disproportionately affecting someone because of their actual or perceived gender identity. The term 'gender-based violence' is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials around the world place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. This includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It is a human-rights violation and that it also directly affects SRH outcomes and, consequently, socio-economic development.

**Gender Equality:** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or

female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration – recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a ‘women’s issue’ but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

**Gender discrimination** is unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on gender.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for all of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making all concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that people benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.[2] The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

**Gender Identity:** Gender identity reflects a deeply felt and experienced sense of one’s own gender. Everyone has a gender identity, which is part of their overall identity. A person’s gender identity is typically aligned with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender (sometimes shortened to “trans”) is an umbrella term used to describe people with a wide range of identities – including transsexual people, cross-dressers (sometimes referred to as “transvestites”), people who identify as third gender, and others whose appearance and characteristics are seen as gender atypical and whose sense of their own gender is different to the sex that they were assigned at birth. Trans women identify as women but were classified as males when they were born. Trans men identify as men but were classified female when they were born. Cisgender is a term used to describe people whose sense of their own gender is aligned with the sex that they were assigned at birth. Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation and sex characteristics.(<https://www.unfe.org/definitions/>)

**Human Rights-Based Approach:** A conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human-rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities that lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress.[3]

**LGBTQIA+:** An umbrella acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other identities.

**PSEAH:** The prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

**Sex:** The biological distinction between female, male, and intersex.

**Sexual orientation** refers to a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people.

### **3. Policy Statement**

Health Development Initiative (HDI) is committed to confronting and challenging harmful social norms that hindered gender equality, and discrimination and human rights violations based on gender, including gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment. Furthermore, HDI is committed to mainstreaming gender in its programming and project design.

Our commitment to gender mainstreaming and gender equality is inspired by internationally and regionally agreed standards. Internationally, our work falls in line with the conclusions drawn from the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regionally, our work is inspired by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Locally, our commitment is guided by the National Gender Policy, National Strategy for Gender-Based Violence Prevention, National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), and Human Reproductive Health Law.

This policy aims to establish a clear, consistent commitment to the promotion of gender equality for all of our staff and rights holders, at all levels.

In order to support the implementation of this policy, an accompanying work plan will be developed each year to set time-bound targets and outcomes assigned to specific staff at HDI.

#### **Scope**

All HDI staff members, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, position within the organization, working relationship with HDI, seniority, marital status or any other status are responsible for the implementation of this policy.

The requirements to abide by this policy can also be found outlined in job descriptions and staff code of conduct in order to hold staff accountable. To support accountability for this policy, compliance will be included in performance evaluations and annual organization-wide reviews.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis in line with the creation of the annual work plan.

#### **4. Commitments**

Gender is a core consideration at HDI from the programs we implement, to the way we mainstream gender in the workplace, to the way we monitor and report on gender; HDI recognizes the critical importance of mainstreaming gender in the workplace, ensuring gender equality in program and project design and implementation, and encouraging our strategic partners to operate as well through a gender lens.

Furthermore, HDI is dedicated to providing a safe environment for all, free from all forms of gender discrimination, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation to ensure that all staff and rights holders can reach their highest attainable state of health and well-being.

The following are specific commitments HDI makes in order to ensure gender is ingrained in all operational aspects of HDI operations:

- Provide equal employment opportunities to all people regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, background, or any other status by ensuring that job announcements include non-discrimination and equal opportunity clauses.
- Train and sensitize employees, interns, volunteers, fellows, contractors, and partners on gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and the gender transformative approach to which HDI adheres as part of staff orientation and regular refresher training
- Train and sensitize rights holders on HDI's gender policy and mechanisms of reporting cases of gender-based violence, discrimination and/or SEAH, as outlined in HDI's policies on prevention of SEAH; human rights, diversity and inclusion; and whistle blowing.
- Ensure that the workplace is free of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and any other forms of gender discrimination and abuse.
- Ensure that HDI's communications and advocacy use inclusive and positive language and images to uphold our commitment to gender equality.

- Incorporate gender analysis in the preparation, design, implementation, and monitoring of programs and projects.
- Continually adapt and tailor existing tools to the Rwandan context, HDI's operations, and international best practices in gender analysis.
- Take every opportunity for growth in the areas of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, including collaborating with national, regional, and international gender experts for continuous learning and improvement
- Engage in strategic partnerships with organizations that promote and strengthen gender equality, including actively engaging small emerging feminist, women-led, and LGBTI-led organizations
- Advocate at the national and regional level for revision of legal frameworks, which limit access to sexual and reproductive health, and/or places hinders the realization of a gender just society
- Regularly report on HDI's progress in its gender work to partners, donors, and the general public.

## **5. HDI's Approach To Gender**

In order to effectively promote gender equality and ensure gender is mainstreamed within HDI and its strategic partners, HDI employs several approaches including: considering gender at every phase of program and project design; ensuring HDI's advocacy, outreach and communications promote gender equality and maintain gender sensitive language; mainstreaming gender within the workplace; supporting new and existing strategic partners to mainstream gender in their organizational operations; and playing an active role in the fight against gender-based violence and discrimination.

### **5.1. Gender Mainstreaming in the Workplace**

HDI is composed of a dedicated team, passionate about human rights, equitable health, inclusion, and gender equality. HDI has achieved this by actively seeking to hire staff who uphold its core values of gender equality, equity, and non-discrimination. In addition to subscribing to the principles of gender equality, equity, and non-discrimination, HDI expects its staff to become gender champions in their day-to-day lives. HDI promotes a working culture free from SEAH and discrimination, and encourages staff to maintain HDI as a safe space for all forms of gender expression. The transformation we see in our staff from day one at HDI, is a testament to our commitment to building a team of gender champions.

During the recruitment process, HDI has a number of policies and procedures which guide gender mainstreaming in the workplace. The Human Resources manual outlines the procedures for hiring new staff. The policy aims to achieve gender equality in all ranks and functions of the organization. Once staff are recruited, they are trained in HDI policies as part of their orientation. This is to ensure that we provide equal employment opportunities to all people regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, background, or any other status.

To hold ourselves accountable, HDI monitors and analyzes a number of specific gender-related targets:

- Male, female, transgender and non-binary composition of HDI staff to the extent possible, while respecting the privacy of HDI staff
- Promote active participation of women in leadership positions, ensuring at least 50% of the HDI Management Team are women
- Provide for the working needs of men, women, transgender, and non-binary staff (e.g. offering free menstrual products, condoms, and lubricants in the bathrooms, offering maternity leave, having policies that specifically denounce SEAH, having clear and confidential reporting mechanisms)
- Ensure staff are aware of gender issues and gender-based violence by conducting bi-annual refresher training. As an organization that strives to use a gender-transformative approach, HDI also makes a special effort to involve men in the fight for gender equality
- Ensure that staff are aware of the forms of GBV and SEAH and understand the reporting mechanisms and support in place by holding bi-annual trainings on HDI policies
- Ensure there is a team of at least 3 HDI staff in charge of gender mainstreaming and overseeing the component of gender in programs and projects

## **5.2 Gender in Programming and Project Design**

In our programming, we analyze how gender norms and inequalities influence the lives of individuals we aim to reach and the outcomes we seek. Increasingly, we aim through our research and advocacy work to raise awareness of how gender inequality undermines SRHR, and to support our beneficiaries and partners to critically reflect on and challenge inequitable gender norms and attitudes.

We are also conducting research to explore gender and power dynamics within adolescent relationships and how those influence SRH. We are holding intergenerational dialogues and using radio and social media to promote public discussion of harmful gender norms that perpetuate violence against women and

girls. We're also using our voice to facilitate civil society conversations on gender mainstreaming from a feminist perspective. HDI has been leading the national MenEngage Network, which is a platform of civil society organizations working on gender issues in Rwanda. HDI develops its gender transformative approach by transforming masculinities through men and boys engagement to challenge harmful social norms and support positive masculinities.

HDI is committed to ensuring that gender is considered and analyzed throughout all stages of the program and project design, implementation, monitoring, and reporting process. Throughout all stages, HDI commits to analyzing the different needs, rights, and opportunities of men, women, transgender individuals, and non-binary individuals.

Gender analysis will influence every stage of work. As a first step, HDI seeks opportunities to partner with donors offering funding for programs or projects that promote gender equality, gender-transformative approach, gender justice, and/or contribute to the fight against GBV. During the proposal writing process, HDI conducts a review of the most current context surrounding issues of gender in Rwanda and conducts a preliminary analysis of the potential positive impacts of the proposed project. At this stage, the budget is prepared, with a specific line for gender mainstreaming and awareness around gender equality.

Before beginning with the implementation of the project or activity, HDI conducts a more thorough gender analysis to determine which specific considerations need to be in place in order to maintain gender equality and non-discrimination. This includes identifying potential barriers to participation, such as time constraints which may be placed on women, due to their traditional domestic and caring responsibilities. During this phase, monitoring tools are checked and revised if necessary to meet any donor requirements. These tools include pre- and post-tests, impact story templates, participations lists, focus group discussions etc.

As the project is being implemented, HDI uses the tools created, along with any donor-specific tool, and the strategic results framework to collect meaningful data on gender mainstreaming in the project. Gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation is important to know if the projects have created gender disparities or inequalities and to learn from our experience and get to know our best practices. Debrief meetings are also held in order to share lessons learned and recommendations. This information is used to improve future projects and tools.

## **HDI Gender Programming and Project Design Process**



<p><b>Design</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opportunity for funding is identified</li> <li>● Grant management team determines whether opportunity fits within HDI's scope and organizational objectives</li> <li>● Identify a project-specific gender focal persons and do a preliminary gender analysis</li> <li>● gender focal persons reviews proposal to ensure that all elements of gender analysis are being considered</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assess</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender focal persons identifies donor-specific requirements related to gender disaggregation, data collection, compliance</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prepare</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discuss gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and gender policy</li> <li>● Conduct due diligence on activity venues to ensure non-discrimination and safety for all participants</li> </ul>
<p><b>Implement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continuously monitor gender-related M&amp;E indicators</li> <li>● Adjust programs and projects as necessary to mitigate gender inequality and discrimination</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reflect</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender focal persons are present for knowledge sharing and debrief meetings and offers feedback on what went well and what to improve in terms of gender</li> </ul>
<p><b>Report</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender focal persons review final report to ensure elements of gender mainstreaming are incorporated</li> </ul>

**Existing tools:**

- Annual Gender Workplan (2022)
- Monitoring and evaluation data collection tools
- Gender Checklist (created by Norwegian People's Aid)

**Expected tools (2023):**

- HDI gender checklist for programming
- Gender audit checklist for partner organizations
- Additional monitoring and evaluation data collection tools to better monitor gender

### **5.3 Gender in HDI Partnerships**

As much as HDI strives to solidify gender equality and gender mainstreaming in its own operations, HDI is equally concerned with supporting our strategic partners to mainstream gender in their organizations and ensure gender equality in their project implementation. All HDI partners have a contractual obligation to read and understand this policy, as well as the policies related to non-discrimination, PSEAH, anti-corruption, and partnership in general. Partners are also obligated to undergo a gender audit within their own organizations.

Gender mainstreaming and gender equality will be included in organizational capacity building for partners based on the needs of each organization. However, training on HDI policies will be mandatory.

### **5.4. Gender in Communications and Advocacy**

HDI is increasingly digitizing its outreach initiatives to reach more rights holders with accurate information on sexual and reproductive health and rights. HDI is committed to ensuring that the language used in the organization and programs is gender-sensitive and inclusive at all times.

In the realm of advocacy, HDI will strengthen and scale up its efforts to influence decision makers to embrace gender equality and revise policies and laws to remove legal barriers to achieving gender equality. HDI will also continue to seek out opportunities to gather evidence for future advocacy in gender-related issues which either have not yet been identified or lack sufficient evidence.

## **6. Prevention of and Protection against Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination**

In line with its PSEAH Policy, Human Rights Diversity and Inclusion Policy, and Code of Conduct, HDI holds a **zero-tolerance policy** for any form of discrimination, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, harassment, or abuse in the workplace and in the course of work. HDI strives to analyze the potential risk of these violations and mitigate them to the greatest extent possible. This includes bi-annual trainings on HDI gender-related policies, awareness raising among staff and the community, and ensuring proper reporting channels exist.

HDI treats all incidents of discrimination seriously and promptly investigates all allegations of gender-related cases. All complaints will be taken seriously and treated with respect and in confidence. No one will be victimized for making such a complaint.

Any HDI Staff, intern /fellow, beneficiary or contractor who has experienced gender- based violence is encouraged to either report to the disciplinary committee or to the police as stipulated in the relevant policies. In case, the victim opts to report to the police, he or she may inform HDI about it.

Any HDI Staff, intern /fellow, beneficiary or contractor who witnesses an act of gender-based violence or having sufficient evidence must report the incident to the disciplinary committee.

The reporting might be made in oral or in writing. However, the recording of the reporting must be written and signed by the victim or witness who reported the incident in all circumstances. Beneficiaries who cannot manage to come to HDI's office, can report through the hotline number 3530. HDI will support employees, interns, or fellows who will be victims of gender-based violence or have reported as witnesses a case of gender-based violence and will not take any adverse action against them.

HDI will provide any possible support to the victim of gender-based violence who has reported the incident to the police until the matter is resolved by providing sufficient evidence it may have in its possession. The victim must be informed on the outcome of the internal investigation carried against his or her perpetrator. Furthermore HDI commits to supporting the survivor of gender-based violence with counseling and legal assistance should the need arise.

## **7. Monitoring of Gender Policy Implementation**

The gender focal persons will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the gender policy, to discuss the areas of improvement and the way forward. The monitoring and evaluation process of the Gender Policy is to ensure that the gender policy is integrated in HDI operations and programs and see if gender issues (if any) were addressed and discuss on gender indicators to measure the progress towards gender equality.

To monitor the progress, there will be a periodic reporting mechanism to ensure that there is regular follow-up and review in the implementation of the Gender Policy. The findings and recommendations from annual reviews will be used to inform the policy review and update process.

## **8. Associated Policies**

- HDI Code of Conduct
- Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment Policy
- Monitoring and Evaluation Policy
- Partnership Policy
- Partnership Selection and Sub-Grant Management Manual
- Human Resources Manual