

The Gender Equality Policy of *the ant*

the ant is committed to promoting *gender equality* * within the organization and seeks to make it alive in all areas of our work.

* **Gender Equality** is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field.

I. How the Gender Equality Policy Evolved

The Gender Equality Policy (GEP) of the ant is an attempt to address concerns of gender inequality within the organization and in its field programmes. This policy was developed through April 2010-April 2011 through a process of action-learning with support from an organization called Gender@Work. In this process, a three member Change Team (CT) comprising of Jennifer Liang (Managing Trustee & ED), Roshmi Brahma (Coordinator) and Juren Wari (Coordinator) were chosen to anchor the change process of making the ant more gender equal. In a series of 3 workshops through the year, the change team was supported in by Gender@ at to work through the process of developing a dynamic gender equality policy within the ant in consultation with the others in the organization.

The ant team went through a series of consultations and trainings during this period of April 2010-April 2011. The following are some of the things that happened:

- a. Core team consultations and buy-in; including a 2 ½ day workshop to list out existing provisions and practices within the organization and need for new ones
- b. Developing an in-house gender training team of 6 members.
- c. gender sensitization training with all staff
- d. Gender trainings with farmers, women and other groups at the field level.
- e. Adapting and producing a toolkit for gender training in the field with support from development communication designers.
- f. Framing the Gender Equality Policy.
- g. Forming a Gender Equality Committee (GEC) within the ant.
- h. Sharing the Draft Policy with experts from Gender at Work and incorporating the recommended changes
- i. The Board of Trustees consulted on the Gender Equality Policy

II. Concerns which necessitated the Gender Equality Policy

- a. Alarm about the diminishing and weak programmes to address women's inequality in communities we work in. The discourse and action on women's equality is negligible when compared to the other programmes.
- b. Concerns about the lessening number of women staff within the ant compared to men in the organization and the high turnover of women in the organization. It is always a struggle to retain women staff.
- c. The tension between being gender sensitive and yet demanding high performance from women needs to be opened up and addressed as this is causing heart-burn within the organization.

- d. Concerns about the lower representation of women in managerial, supervisory and other leadership positions in the organization and over representation as field workers which are lower in position.
- e. With new number of staff joining in and also staff turnover, it was getting difficult to hang on to the best practices for gender equality which existed in the culture of the organization. It can no longer be taken for granted that everyone would automatically pick up these practices. Hence, a need was felt to institutionalize some of these practices within the organization.

In view of all the above, we felt that the gender lens of the ant has to be sharpened urgently if we are serious about changing women's status for the better, in society as well as within the ant. Besides, there is a necessity to set up policies and systems to ensure that the new lenses are used!

III. Political commitment to Gender Equality

- a. We believe that women become victims of discrimination, injustice and unequal opportunities because a patriarchal society promotes unfair differences in behaviour, role, responsibilities & entitlements of men and women.
- b. We believe that more women are among the marginalized and vulnerable both within the ant and also in the communities we work with. We will challenge policies and practices – within the organization, in our programmes and in society that make and keep women poor, vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed.
- c. We recognise the pluralism and diversity of women. That women are not a homogenous group and gender discrimination faced by women depends on and is often compounded by their class, community, religion, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and experiences of violence which they have faced.
- d. We will strive to be a dynamic and learning organisation that places women's empowerment at the heart of our organization and in our programmes and will address gender imbalance at the level of the individual, the organization and also in society.

IV. Gender Balance in our Programmes

- a. We will promote a stronger understanding of the links between gender inequality, patriarchy and women's discrimination among communities and groups we work with. *This will be done through regular gender orientation and gender training programmes. We will strive to conduct basic gender and follow-up trainings with all the women, farmers, health committees, children and other village groups promoted by the ant.*
- b. We will ensure that at least 30% women are present in all meetings, events, discussions, committees in the various field programmes conducted by the ant and try to strive for 50% representation. The field teams will also ensure that women are not just represented in numbers but are given a chance to voice their concern in meetings/ committees / programmes/ events where there are both men and women. Gender wise representation and role of women will have to be reported in the presentations of their work made by the various teams at the bi-monthly staff meetings. This may require a fine balance of asking women staff to be there in the villages at times when women would be able to spare the time for meetings and the family responsibilities of such women staff members.

- c. We will endeavour to secure resources to support our work on gender and women's rights, including promoting women's groups and federations, training programmes and advocacy work.
- d. All proposals for funding will be vetted by the Gender Committee before being sent to the funder to check if women's concerns are adequately represented in the proposal.
- e. We will engage with women's movements, organisations and networks to strengthen our work on women's empowerment.
- f. We will keep gender as a separate criterion along with other criteria by which we measure our programmes in our half yearly programme evaluations and any other evaluations of our programmes carried out by the ant.
- g. We will promote women as active agents for change and avoid using negative stereotyped images of women and girls during the conduct of our programmes as well as in our training and other communication materials.

V. Promoting Gender Equality within the ant

- a. We will actively promote our gender equality policy through recruitment, selection, induction and appraisal processes.

b. Reservation in Recruitment

The ant will strive at all times to maintain a healthy women to men ratio within the organization ensuring that there are at least 50% of women staff in the organization at any point of time. A reservation policy for reserving certain posts for women will be followed for every new project till the number of women staff is equal to that of men staff. The number of posts reserved for women will be announced before start of the recruitment process. The Gender Equality Committee will ensure that the reservation so announced will be followed and the GEC will have to be approached if there are any exceptions to be made.

c. Promoting Women's Leadership

The ant will work to see that women are present in the organization not just in numbers but in decision making and leadership too. Special Effort will be made by the organization to promote **women's leadership** within the ant:

- i. *The Gender Equality Committee will monitor the gender composition of the coordination team, supervisors and also the strategic core of the ant i.e. the decision making body of the organization. Women will be given preference – if they so qualify – to rise in decision making levels in the organization. We will ensure that women form at least 30% of the coordination team as well as of the strategic core of the ant. Women will be trained and actively groomed for leadership posts within **the ant**.*
- ii. *Skills and competencies of women staff will have to be built up to ensure that they are able to provide leadership at all levels irrespective of the post or the work to which they*

are assigned. Women staff in the ant will be encouraged and helped to prepare individual plans for building their capacity, skills and leadership qualities. The ant as an institution will also develop a plan to build up leadership qualities and skills among women staff. This plan will be reviewed every year by the GEC.

- iii. *Computers and English are two skills essential for supervisory and leadership functions within the organization which women staff from the field lack. Hence, support in terms of fee concessions & also time allotment can be made available to women staff to acquire these skills if they so wish. Applications can be made to the GEC for these.*
- iv. *Special encouragement will be given to women staff to pursue their studies. Applications for fee sharing and leave can be made to the GEC who will deal with it according to guidelines on a case to case basis.*
- v. *Increasing Mobility of Women Staff: All effort will be made to address poor mobility of women in the organization which keeps them from rising to supervisory and higher levels. Some Resources for this could come from the “Gender Equality Fund”. (the below is just an illustrative and not an exhaustive list. Anything which can promote the mobility and empowerment of women staff can and must be taken up).*
 - Designated motorcycles and scooters to be made available for women staff to go to the field.
 - A second-hand motorbike will be made available for women staff to learn riding. Insurance for trainer and trainees
 - Women staff will be helped to acquire loans to buy motorcycles and bikes which they can use in the field.
 - The organization will reimburse all legally applicable fees and charges incurred by women staff for acquiring driving license. Reimbursement will be against actual money receipts. In addition, they will be allowed leave – up to a maximum of 5 days – in order to get their driving license.
 - The ant is committed to address the issues of mobility faced by women staff to ride motorcycles due to severe dress code restrictions on them by their communities. From working with designers to modify their traditional attire to bringing up the issue with traditional institutions which impose such strictures, the ant is committed to reduce this handicap faced by women.
- d. **A Gender Equality Committee (GEC)** will be constituted which will work to respect, protect, fulfil and promote the rights of women within the ant. (see VII for details on role of Ant Gender Equality Committee).
- e. A special “**Gender Equality Fund**” will be created within the organization from where programmes and projects to address gender balance issues within the organization can be supported. A strategy to build, manage and grow this fund will have to be designed by the Managing Trustee in conjunction with the Board of Trustees. A good start would be to keep a part or whole of any fees, consultancies and earnings made by any work done on gender by the ant into the “Gender Equality Fund” of the ant.
- f. The Sexual Harassment Policy will be reviewed and fused with the Gender Equality Policy of the ant (see Annexure1). This is to ensure that there is no duplicity and that the Sexual Harassment policy does not remain in paper alone. The GEC will also function as

a Sexual Harassment Committee and address grievances whenever they arise. It will have an external expert as part of the committee.

- g. Similarly, we will ensure coherence between and among all our human resources policies – sexual harassment policy, diversity, gender, grievance, recruitment, remuneration, leave etc. The HR policy of the ant should reflect gender concerns of the gender policy with the following leave and allowance rules incorporated into it:

h. Maternity & Paternity Leave

- *For Women during Pregnancy*

- 1 hour rest / siesta in afternoon. Beds to be designated for this.
- Office work / some other lighter work in last 3 months of pregnancy.
- 3 months leave – 6 weeks before EDD (expected date of delivery) and 6 weeks after delivery.

- *For Women Post delivery*

- a. There will be an option of part time work till child is 2 years old with pay according to negotiated days. The person must apply to the ant's administrative committee for this and the gender committee can be consulted to decide on a case to case basis.
- b. All full time women staff will be entitled to *Bokali allowance* of Rs.500 per month (and 10% increase every year starting 2012 automatically until reviewed by BoT) till the child is two years old. This is an allowance paid to keep a help to look after the child while the mother is on duty.

- *Paternity Leave for full time male staff of the ant*

- 15 days paternity leave will be granted for all men staff upon birth of their child and to be taken within the first 6 weeks of the birth of the child or as soon as return from any duty that may have kept him from being present at the time of birth.
- Full time men staff will be entitled to *Bokali allowance* of Rs.500 per month till the child is 6 months old. (I am sure you all must have decided WHY men staff should get for 6 months while woman staff should get only for one month. Either parity should be there or at least an explanation should be forthcoming) This is an allowance paid to keep a help to support the wife in looking after the child while the father is on duty. This allowance is only for those who need it and the person will have to apply to the ant's admin committee for such an allowance.

i. Challenging fixed gender norms in culture

The ant will challenge all such cultural and societal practices which promote unequal freedom to men and women and also fix stereotypical roles for women & men in the organization. For e.g. Men in the ant are expected not to go around bare-chested or wearing vest or shorts on the campus as women do not have the freedom to do the same. Similarly, men are expected to cook, clean and tend to guests as much as women are expected to do. All staff and volunteers are expected to make special efforts to challenge gender norms in public fora as this would help change the community.

VI. Implementation and Accountability of the Gender Balance Policy

- a. The ED of the ant – helped by the Gender Equality Committee - will be responsible for ensuring implementation of the policy across the organisation.
- b. The policy will be reviewed (compulsorily during the annual meeting) to ensure that it is relevant and reflects progressive debate on gender equality and women’s rights.
- c. A brief report of the same will have to be given by the ED to the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees.
- d. We will ensure that all staff understand the gender policy and have appropriate skills and tools to implement it in their sphere of work. Gender Orientation programme will be done within 6 months of new staff joining the organization. In addition, the gender committee will ensure that at least regular gender follow up training is done with all staff, at least once a year. Self reflection workshops & action planning on gender equity will be conducted once a year for senior staff on gender.
- e. All staff will be responsible for reflecting the ant’s values on gender equality and equity in their attitudes and actions.

VII. Composition & Functions of the Gender Equality Committee (GEC)

- **Composition:** The Gender Equality Committee (GEC) of the ant will be made up of 3 persons on a rotational basis – 2 women + 1 man – from amongst senior members of the organization i.e. coordinator level and above. One of the 3 members of the GEC will have to be from the ant’s Admin Committee. This is to ensure a sync between the work of the admin committee and the GEC. For the first 2 years, to ensure that the Gender Equality Policy takes off smoothly and is institutionalised, the ED will be a part of the GEC as an additional member. (Either the ED position must be reserved for women or clause here to say that “If the ED is a man, the senior most woman staff of the ant will also be on the Committee as an extraordinary member.”
 1. Beyond that, the ED will be available for consultation and support as and when required.

2. Functions & Term of the Gender Equality Committee (GEC):

- a. Ensure that the GEP is implemented in letter and spirit by the organization. The committee will report on their work to the Board of Trustees at every trustees meeting and a report will be filed to the trustees every 6 months by the ED regarding the work of the GEC.
- b. Review and put all proposals under the gender scanner before being sent to the funding agency.
- c. Prepare an annual calendar of gender orientation programmes & trainings at the beginning of the year and ensure that the programmes are held according to plan.

- d. Translate the GEP into the local languages and give to staff members. Ensure that all staff is made aware of the gender balance policy and the various provisions under it.
- e. Attend to complaints and grievances related to gender and sexual harassment.
- f. Ensure that the gender balance policy is reviewed periodically, failing which, it should be reviewed during the annual meeting of the organization.
- g. Ensure that various projects and programmes include gender as one of the parameters on which their performance is evaluated. A report of the evaluation should be submitted to the GEC.
- h. Take decisions regarding applications for the various provisions and entitlements made in the gender balance policy.
- i. Take stock of the Gender Balance fund periodically and work with the ED to plan for it.
- j. All GEC members will serve a term of 2 years with members changing on a rotational basis every 6 months to ensure continuity.
- k. Initially for the first year, the GEC will meet once a month for short durations to review its work and take stock of where the GEP is. Later on, the frequency between meetings can be increased but not less than once every 3 months.

VIII. Plan for Installation of the GEP of the ant

1. The Gender Equality Policy must be passed by the ant's Board of Trustees and should become a policy before the start of financial year 2011-2012.
2. The Gender Equality Committee has to be formed immediately and it should start functioning. Have a first day-long meeting to orient the GEC and plan its activities. The GE will also plan out how the policy provisions will be rolled out and give a time frame for the various activities.
3. After policy is passed by the BOT, an orientation programme will have to be organized for increasing Staff awareness on the provisions of the GEP so that they can start using it. Translation of the Policy has to be done and given to the staff.
4. A plan for the "Gender Equality Fund" has to be prepared and money kept aside to start the fund.

Annexure 1

Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Policy of the ant

Note: This policy has been drafted with the aid of the **Vishaka guidelines (1997)** **CEDAW/Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women)** **(1993)** and **The Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (SHWW)** and aims to maintain their spirit

1.10 Definition of Sexual Harassment:

Sexual Harassment includes but is not limited to such unwelcome sexually determined behavior (whether directly or by implication) as:

- a. Physical contact and advances
- b. A demand or request for sexual favors
- c. Sexually colored remarks
- d. Showing pornography
- e. Sexually nuanced gestures, comments or jokes
- f. Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non verbal conduct of a sexual gesture

1.11 Sexual Harassment is unlawful

It is unlawful for:

- a. An employer , supervisor or co-employee to , in any manner whatsoever , sexually harass an employee of the workplace which she/he s working.
- b. An employer , supervisor or employee to , in any manner whatsoever , sexually harass any individual who is present in the workplace ,or who comes into contact with the employer, supervisor or employee through connection with work.

1.12 Duties of the ant under the ACT and duty of the government:

1. Duties of the ant under the Act

- a. To constitute an Internal Complaints Committee. This shall consist of at least three members of which one will be an external expert. The Committee must be headed by a woman, who will be its Chairperson. At least two of the members of the committee must be women.

NB. Although it is recommended, it is not legally required for the ant to form this committee, as it has less than 50 employees.

- b. To designate a female employee to be a Special Officer whose role will be to receive complaints (formally written). The designation and duties of this officer must be publicized to everyone under the jurisdiction of the organization

1 . Duty of the Government under the Act:

- a. To approve a District level special officer for every district. This individual shall deal with complaints that fall under the circumstances outlined in Chapter IV, point 2.

b. To draw up a list of a Group of Experts (eminent people from various fields who are involved in gender issues, counselors, social workers, lawyers etc) who can be called upon to constitute a Local Complaints Committee within 15 days of a complaint being lodged. The role of a local Complaints Committee is outlined in Chapter IV, Point 2.

1.13 Procedure for lodging a complaint:

1. Before the Internal Complaint Committee

a. A complaint may be lodged with the Special Officer or with any member of the Internal Complaints Committee

b. Within one week of the receipt of the complaint, the Special officer or Member of Committee to whom the complaint is made shall communicate the complaint to the Chairperson of the Committee.

2. Before the District Level Special Officer/Local Complaints Committee

a. This will take place in cases where:

b. There is no Internal Complaints Committee.

c. A Complaint is lodged before the Internal Complaints Committee, and it fails to take any action for a period exceeding one month after the complaint was lodged

d. The allegation of sexual harassment is against the employee/person in charge of the aggrieved

e. individual, and therefore she/he finds it difficult to approach the Internal Complaints Committee

3. It is the duty of the Authority to whom the complaint is made to reduce the complaint in writing, read it out to the complainant and obtain his/her signature

4. Where sexual harassment amounts to criminal offence under the Indian Penal Code, it is the duty of the Special officer/Member of the committee/District Level Special officer to immediately inform the complainant of his/her right to initiate action in accordance with the law. This will be in addition to the proceedings taken forward on sexual harassment.

1.14 Procedure before the Complaints Committee:

1. Both the complainant and defendant have the right to be represented in proceedings by any person of their choice.

2. On receiving a complaint of sexual harassment, the complaints committee will conduct a preliminary investigation, which may include interviewing the complainant, defendant and any witnesses, determining if there are any individuals with direct or indirect information about the complaint, and if so, interviewing them. The following points apply.

a. Any investigation carried out by the complaints Committee must be recorded in writing and

completed within one month of receiving the complaint

b. A copy of the investigation should be made available to the complainant and the defendant on the commencement of the enquiry

c. Whatever the findings of the preliminary investigation, the complaints committee will proceed to conduct a full enquiry as set out below from point 4.

3. Within a period of two weeks from the completion of the preliminary enquiry , the complaints Committee will induct onto the committee and enquiry officer who must be legally qualified in conducting domestic enquiries. She/He will proceed to conduct an enquiry as per the procedure set out below

- The defendant must be given a notice in writing, along with a copy of the complaint, directing him/her to attend the enquiry at a time/place specified in the notice, and to file a written report.
- The complaints committee will not be bound by strict technicalities and will conduct the inquiry with as little formality as possible. This aims to reduce delay and ensure that a prompt hearing can take place.
- In conducting the enquiry , the Complaints Committee:

a. Must be sensitive to the covert and insidious nature of sexual harassment and must take into account that the aggrieved individual may be able to give direct or corroborative evidence

b. Must not permit any evidence or examination based on the aggrieved individual's character, personal life, and conduct, personal or sexual history.

c. Must take care of the respective socio economic positions of the two parties , their hierarchy in the organization and other power differences while evaluating the evidence

d. Must give the alleged victim the option of giving evidence in writing , provided she/he makes herself/himself available for cross examination

e. May direct the defendant to submit his/her intended questions for cross examination in writing , and the committee may disallow questions that it feels are derogatory or irrelevant to the aggrieved individual

f. May, if requested , give the alleged victim the option of providing answers of a sensitive nature in writing in the enquiry proceedings during cross-examination

7. Any perceived delay in filing the complaint of sexual harassment will not be seen to determine the veracity of the complaint by the Complaints Committee

8. The Committee will have the power to summon witnesses and call for any documents or information it considers relevant
9. The Complainant and the defendant have the right to receive copies of the proceedings produced in the enquiry
10. The enquiry must be completed within a period of 90 days from when the enquiry is commenced
11. The Complaints Committee may, if requested by the alleged victim , try to resolve the matter informally by intervening and permitting the parties to resolve the matter mutually before the enquiry, If so,
 - a. The settlement must be mutually acceptable to both parties
 - b. The Conciliation process must be recorded and copies sent to the employer, alleged victim and defendant
 - c. The aggrieved individual has the right to withdraw at any time from the conciliatory process and challenge the settlement, on the grounds that his/her consent was obtained by coercion or fraud

1.15 Findings and Directions

On the completion of an enquiry by the Internal Complaints Committee or a Local Complaints Committee, the committee may

1. Dismiss the complaint which was the subject of the enquiry :or
2. Find the complaint proven and pass a finding to that effect, which may include one of the following
 - a. A declaration that defendant has engaged in unlawful conduct and she/he must not repeat it
 - b. A declaration that the defendant should pay the victim damages as compensation for any loss/damage suffered by him /her or legal heirs as a result of the conduct of the defendant
 - c. A direction that the defendant give a written apology to the aggrieved individual , stating such behavior will not be repeated and assuring that no retaliatory steps will be taken either by the defendant him/herself or anyone on his/her behalf
 - d. Where the defendant is an employee, the committee may direct that a punishment be imposed upon him/her by the employer. The following punishments may be imposed depending in the gravity of the act.

Minor Penalties:

- a. Giving a warning or censure in writing
- b. Fining the defendant
- c. Withholding increment for a period not exceeding one year
- d. Suspension for a period not exceeding four days

Major Penalties

- a. Withholding increment for more than a year
- b. Reduce rank/grade
- c. Terminate his/her services by discharge/dismissal, after paying any dues she/he is entitled

to by law

3. Where the defendant is the employer or in a position of authority, and has as a result of the complaint made adverse change in the service condition of the victim or any witnesses, the committee may:

- a. Direct the employer to restore the particular service condition with full benefit from the date it was adversely changed
 - a. Direct the employer to grant the aggrieved individual the service condition she/he would have been entitled to but the act of sexual harassment , with full benefits, from the time it would have been granted to him/her

1.16 Duties and Liabilities of the ant:

1. Ensure a safe work environment free from sexual harassment
2. Maintain a proactive program to educate all employees as to the definition of sexual harassment and procedure for redressed
3. Facilitate initiation of proceedings if an act of sexual harassment has been brought to its notice.
4. Ensure that the aggrieved individual/witness /supporter is not victimized or harassed for initiating proceedings or giving evidence
5. Ensure that the complainant/supporter /witness is not punished by discharge
6. Respect the confidentiality and privacy of individuals reporting or accused of harassment to the extent possible
7. The ant will be liable and a complaint may be lodged with the Internal Complaints

Committee/District Level Special Officer if it is found to.

- a. Protect a person found guilty of sexual harassment
- b. Pressurize the aggrieved person/witness/supporters from initiating or participating in the proceedings

1.17 Miscellaneous:

- a. The Internal Complaints Committee shall make an annual report to the district level special officer of all the complaints dealt with, and all the action taken
- b. Employees should be allowed to raise issues of sexual harassment at meetings or other appropriate forums

In case a Complaint is lodged against a member of the committee.

- a. As soon as a complaint is received against a member of the committee, the member will be immediately suspended from the post till the completion of the proceedings

- b. The other committee members in consultation with the management will appoint as ad hoc committee member to take over the post
- c. After the completion of the proceedings, if the committee member is found guilty, he/she will be dismissed from the post and a new member will be appointed.

During the proceeding.

- The complainant will be accompanied by a “Companion” of his/her own preference if he/she chooses to continue working for the organisation during the proceeding. This organisation will bear the expenses of the companion when he/she accompanies the complainant for any work of the organisation.
- On the request of the complainant, the service of a counselor will be made available to complainant or the defendant at the cost of the organisation.
- During the proceedings any one of the complainant or the defendant will be allowed paid leave and will be paid half the honorarium for sustenance. After the proceeding is over, the organisation will have to reimburse the remaining part of the honorarium to the victim while the offender will not be given any arrears.

If an ant member is harassed in the village by any villager: (This clause is strictly applicable and fails under the jurisdiction of the committee only when the ant member is in the village related to work of the organisation)

- Chapter IV, V and VI is applicable here
- After receiving the complaint, the committee within a week’s time will meet the concerned village committee/village headman and inform them about the complaint along with an elaborate explanation about this document. It is necessary to read out the written complaint to the village committee/village headman.
- The village committee/village headman will be consulted during the proceedings and can also be present at the hearings.
- The committee will take into consideration the suggestions put forward by the village committee/village headman during the proceedings.
- During the proceeding, the complaint (ant member) will not be allowed to continue work in that village.

- In case the proceeding fails, defendant reluctant to accept the judgment of the Internal Committee, the Internal Committee with the approval of the complainant will approach the District Level Special Officer.
- All expenses related to the proceeding with the District Level Special Officer will be borne by the organisation.