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# Principles of Gender Equality for Development Organizations

## Wheaton Network Initiative on Gender, Development and Christianity

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### Introduction

Headlines abound with studies asserting that a more diverse organization has greater ability to achieve its goals. This diversity is also reflected in the biblical description of Christ's kingdom of shalom, both which has been revealed already at creation and that which is still to come. Diverse voices improve goal achievement, employee engagement and innovation. Research from the humanitarian sector demonstrates that gender equality is a key lever in achieving development goals. Even so, there has been little investigation of how women's equality influences the work of Christian mission, relief and development agencies. For this reason, a cohort of like-minded global organizations began exploring the confluence of three different yet overlapping spheres: 1) global development /humanitarian work, 2) Christian faith, and 3) women's equality—three distinct foci that may hold unrealized yet extraordinary potential when working in unison. The work that follows is an initial offering to aid Christian organizations in their efforts to bring greater gender equality within their organizations and to the communities they serve. Such equality reflects equal opportunity, the perception of fairness, even-handedness and reduction of bias and discrimination in the way our organizations function and the communities they serve.

These principles were developed by a working group birthed out of a Consultation on Development, Gender and Christianity at Wheaton College in 2018. The Consultation brought together over 30 technical experts, ministers, and leaders from global faith-based organizations to discuss best practices and development needs for gender equality in our work and places of work.

These principles represent broadly accepted minimum practices, written through a theological lens, to facilitate organizational growth and development toward greater gender equality.

*These principles are intended to provide:*

- Language for and a roadmap to greater gender equality in your organization. This requires acknowledging that we are on a journey toward this important goal, not to become discouraged by lack of progress, but to celebrate and harness leadership efforts in your organization on this journey
- Guideposts, as we expect organizations will prayerfully and thoughtfully consider how best to use them in their own context. They are most effective if overseen by a designated and empowered representative person or group who can track improvements year over year, and communicate progress and highlight areas that need more attention. Tools are available in the industry for more stringent measurement, these can be made available by a Consultation representative
- A way for organizations to “sign on” to the Principles of Gender Equality and join with like-minded groups. This will publicly declare an organizational commitment to gender equality. These principles, for example, are part of foundation of the Christian Alliance for Inclusive Development.

## Principles of Gender Equality for Development Organizations

**(1) Shalom in the community:** We affirm that we are all called to kingdom community and to be active restorers of shalom, the health and wholeness among all those created in the image of God, called for God's purposes and equipped for God's work. This shalom needs women and men partnering at all levels within our organizations and the communities we serve. Together we must bring our gifts of leadership, proclamation, stewardship and service if we are to reflect Christ's new community. Using these gifts will ensure our ministries are faithful to God's design, and most strategic in achieving our best in missional outcomes.

**(2) God's design of women and men together:** We affirm the biblical truth that from the beginning, man and woman were created in God's image to govern the world side by side (Genesis 1:26-28). The flourishing that God intended through woman and man's mutual service and leadership was undermined by their sin. As a result, their shared-rule deteriorated into male-dominance (Genesis 3:16) which is not God's ideal. The equal value of women and men's shared governance is demonstrated throughout scripture and particularly in the practices of Christ and his teachings. We commit to being explicit and transparent about our commitment to the equal value of women and men.

- a) Does our organization have a clear theological statement that expresses the value and contributions (and limitations, if they exist) for women and men?
- b) Are our theological commitments clearly communicated (and easily available) to external and internal audiences and reflected in our strategic plan, our values, and priorities?
- c) Does this policy statement acknowledge the importance of organizational structures, discussing the balance that should exist in leadership roles of women and men across the organization?

**(3) Women's leadership and influence:** We affirm that women's leadership is necessary to reach our missional goals. As research shows, the best performing organizations have gender balance in leadership roles at all levels and include women and men from a diversity of racial/ethnic communities. Missional effectiveness, creativity, innovation and professionalism is enhanced when organizations have greater gender balance in their leadership, and people bring different perspectives to bear on the significant challenges facing Christian ministries. This mandates that women not only have a seat at the leadership table, but that they have influence within the organization and the broader development community. We believe this commitment to gender

equality in leadership should be modeled in the global office and in local communities. As organizations, we also recognize the need to support and advocate for women's leadership in larger networks and to our varied audiences.

- a) Does our organization have target goals (percentages) for women's representation and professional influence on boards, executive teams, leadership at all levels of the organization, including positions of spiritual leadership?
- b) Do we perform a regular gender assessment of organizational climate to assess how female leaders and staff assess their role and influence in the organization?
- c) Do we report these numbers, track progress, and use the information to reward leaders and divisions promoting diversity or make changes where necessary?

**(4) Intentionality and development:** We are committed to intentionally seeking to amplify the contributions and influence of all women within our organizations and the communities in which we serve. Historical realities have created structural and systemic barriers for women and other underrepresented groups to advance in organizations today. For women of color and marginalized ethnicities and classes, these barriers are greater. With cultural sensitivity in the communities we serve and organizations we partner with, we will affirm and advocate for the dignity of women that Jesus afforded them in Scripture. We recognize the fallen nature of this world and that we are ALL biased, and require intentional work to overcome our individual biases and organizational realities. We will ensure resources are directed both towards education all staff members around gender issues as well as education and intentional development of women to be prepared to grow in their influence in the organization.

- a) Are there active educational efforts to change staff culture and awareness of challenges faced by women throughout the organization that includes bias training and attention to Human Resource policies?
- b) Are there monies, personnel time and other resources targeted to increasing gender diversity through hiring, promotion, retention and targeted development of women for leadership roles?
- c) Are there efforts in place to include the inclusion of women and their voices at all levels, especially the voices of women that are underrepresented?
- d) Are key leaders actively promoting these goals and being vocal about their commitments, both internally and externally?

**(5) Creating a healthy work environment:** We commit to treating all people with respect and dignity afforded them as image bearers of Christ. We will create healthy work environments that promote flourishing of all employees. We will not tolerate sexism or sexual harassment in any form, and commit to protecting and safeguarding our employees and clients from such oppression or harassment, even at the cost of reputation. We agree to advocating and working for healthy work environments not only in our organization, but with the organizations with whom we partner.

- a) Do Human Resource policies and practices of our organization reflect these commitments to professional working environment, and are they made clear to all employees?
- b) Do we have specific safeguarding policies in place at all levels such as harassment report policies and procedures, anonymous systems to report abuse, and resources for those harassed?
- c) Are we survivor-centered, transparent about cases of abuse, and do we hold people accountable for their actions?

**(6) Programming with a gender lens:** We commit to developing all of our programs with a gender equality lens, and being intentional about gender inclusion among the stakeholders we serve. We recognize the high percentage of women and girls that are served by the ministries we lead. We will ensure equal inclusion of women and men, girls and boys in the needs analysis, execution and impact assessment of the work we do. This includes both the empowering of women in efforts like economic development and leadership training as well as attention to the unique needs of women and girls around maternal health and violence. With cultural sensitivity, we commit to upholding the full dignity of women and girls in the communities we serve, and advocating for their appropriate treatment as God's beloved daughters, as is congruent with our Christian faith and witness.

- a) Do we include gender analysis in our program needs assessment?
- b) Based on the gender analysis, do we emphasize the meaningful involvement of women, girls, boys, and men in the program design, research, implementation and evaluation processes?
- c) Does our organization collect gender disaggregated data and use it within impact evaluations?