Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

FES

FOUNDATION FOR ECOLOGICAL SECURITY

Foundation for Ecological Security
Anand - 388001

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Introduction

As 'ecological security' is the foundation for sustainable and equitable development, Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) is committed towards conserving nature and natural resources through coordinated efforts of the people. In our years of working on ground with the local communities, we realize that models of oppression within society, such as those based on ethnicity, gender, caste, class do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination leading to marginalization and concentration of power in the hands of few.

In India, a wide variety of sustenance is gathered by rural households from their nearby "commons". Although all rural households use the village commons in some degree, for the poor and marginalised they are of critical significance given the skewedness of land distribution towards the more resourceful. The process of environmental degradation and the appropriation of natural resources have specific class-caste-gender implications that are intertwined with locational differences. The interplay of these aspects results in the erosion of both livelihood and knowledge systems among rural communities.

This situation is exacerbated by power differentials where a select few tend to benefit more than the majority, leaving the most marginalized groups in the community, such as women, disadvantaged. These power and knowledge imbalances tend to affect realization of the benefits of decentralized natural resource management. We intend to recognise and address the deep inequalities inherent in the present process of development and move towards a process where development, social justice and ecological security are mutually intertwined. The key to truly equitable and participatory initiatives in community-based conservation will be to uncover 'ways in which women and other marginalised groups can institutionalise the few bargaining strengths they have, and in working out leverages and incentives that would ensure a voice and space for the most marginalised groups within decision-making processes'. Inclusion of women and other marginalised groups in management of natural resources is compelling because such participation has the potential to lead to greater empowerment both within households and in the public life of their communities and also towards a more robust natural resource governance regime/practices.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure a dynamic approach that promotes the inclusion of gender and diversity as the foundation for all our actions, particularly in our organizational arrangements, our engagement on the ground and in our wider public engagement. We want to hold ourselves accountable for nurturing an inclusive and gender sensitive work culture that embraces diversity, promotes respect and acceptance, and one that fosters distributed power, leadership and learning at all levels and in all our endeavours.

Scope

This Policy sets our collective understanding and commitment to gender, diversity and inclusion. It applies to all the offices of FES including Block Teams, Regional Offices and the Coordination Office, and in all aspects of our work from designing and implementing programmes and operations to our engagement with the wider ecosystem of practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

We understand that there will be barriers to effective assimilation of a new culture (cognitive biases, homophily, interpersonal miscommunication, etc.), that might limit its progress to an extent. The learning will be constant and dynamic reflecting an understanding of social identity development so that we can anticipate the tensions that might occur and be proactive about them.

We build a collegial atmosphere in the organisation, by promoting processes such as reverse mentoring giving senior colleague an opportunity to learn from junior members while sharing some experiences of their journey in the sector. This will aid in bridging the communication gap, conversing with women and ethnic minorities will help lessen unconscious bias, normalise conversations about sexuality and gender identities in the workplace, broaden understanding about the different experiences and barriers faced by less represented employees and develop interpersonal relationships between employees.

We will, while understanding these barriers, strive to develop a heterogeneous organisational culture, through effective communication and well-informed organizational behaviour concepts in achieving a more equitable, diverse and a more conducive workplace. Specific strategies and action plan will be developed for its implementation.

Guiding principles

Transparency is the cornerstone of our credibility. We adhere to strict rules and mechanisms to ensure compliance with our transparency guidelines (objective evaluation criteria, equal information to all parties, etc.). Transparency ensures that any deviation from fair and equal treatment is detected very early, and makes such deviation less likely to occur. It thus protects the integrity of the process and the interest of the organization

Accountability is an integral part of the organisation' culture and is continually nurtured and promoted. It helps everyone who is a part of the organisation to be responsible for their professional contribution without being micromanaged or formally obligated. We emphasize upward and external accountability (to donors) without compromising on mechanisms to ensure internal accountability or accountability to communities we work with.

Comprehensiveness ensures that stakeholder engagement is a priority and that all interest groups are consulted from the outset in defining the nature of the problem or opportunity prior to any decisions about management being taken.

Inclusivity ensures every individual's right to express and present themselves irrespective of their religion, culture, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical and

mental ability and acknowledge every individual's specific priorities and unique needs. Promote inclusivity in every programme, activities and procedures and ensure to be inclusive in all forms of internal and external communications with sensitivity, respect and fairness.

Diversity and Representation address the gaps in inclusion and participation of specific demographic groups, including women, people from various castes and class, racially/ethnically diverse individuals, people from different castes and religions and people with disabilities. Every member should accommodate and welcome the diversity within the organization. Every platform should be composed of individuals of different genders, generations, departments, and/or other dimensions of diversity and should include individuals with diversity expertise.

Empowerment ensures all interest groups are capable of actively and voluntarily participating in decision making (both internally and externally) in an egalitarian environment without being compelled, constrained or otherwise left with no other choice.

Statement

Foundation for Ecological Security commits to have multi-cultural, multi-generational and multi-disciplinary collaborative approach in working towards a society where local communities (especially women) gain voice, agency and power to equitably and sustainably manage natural resources. We challenge discrimination based on gender, diversity, disability, sexual orientation and any other forms of exclusion. We strive for a future where every member of the community (irrespective of age, sex, religion, caste, creed, political leaning, economic status, or education background) feels respected and heard, and is appreciated, respected and recognized as stewards of natural resources, has secure rights to resources, is able to participate equally in the decision making processes, becomes an active determinant of their future, and has equal access to economic opportunities and control over resources. Towards this end, we also defy any form of stereotyping and unequal power relations within the organisation, in order to realize the same in our work on-ground.

To realize this worldview, Foundation for Ecological Security shall:

At the organizational level:

• Embed the efforts and discussions around gender, diversity and inclusion within the organizational values of social justice and equity, and foster communication and cross-learning across all levels of the organization to develop a common vocabulary and understanding of these concerns.

• Value the experience, perspective and knowledge diversity that inclusion brings to the workforce and ensure diverse representation and composition of people at all levels of the organisation.

• Nurture a truly inclusive, gender-sensitive and empowering culture where every individual, at any level, feels safe, respected and heard. Emphasise on challenging narratives, breaking stereotypes and celebrating women achievements and success stories.

- Integrate gender equity, diversity and inclusion in the systems and operational functions of the organisation including, but not limited to, accountable recruitment and promotion procedures, training and capacity building, compensation and benefits, management and leadership appointment, career development and talent management, resource allocations, access to opportunities, work flexibility.

- Commit to ensuring that all governing bodies and leadership platforms have diverse representation and have equal participation mechanism in place for all staff members. More specifically, ensure that women constitute at least one-third of the staff at various levels in the organization (block team, regional office and coordination office). To attain this gender parity at both remote field locations (block and regional level) and coordination office, we will encourage recruitment from local universities for sustained association.

- Integrate gender and diversity-sensitive approaches and learning materials in organizational development programmes that help employees understand how diversity and gender inclusivity can positively impact workplace dynamics, including better team and partner relationships.

- All are held accountable and are equipped (through gender sensitization and awareness initiatives for both men and women) to call out bias and everyday discrimination. Engage with men through wholesome, constructive exchanges that promote their understanding and appreciation of gender equality.

- Build partnerships with organizations and individuals working on issues of gender, diversity and inclusion to further and enrich our knowledge and practices on these issues.

Across Programmes and Operations:
- Improve the program design and arrangements to create gender-sensitive, inclusive structures focusing on greater representation of women (at least 50%) at the level of village cadre and in the institutional spaces, identify structural barriers that prevent this and develop action plans and pathways to address this barrier.

- Strengthen the voice, power and agency of marginalized and vulnerable groups (such as women, landless, poor livestock keepers, tribals, dalits), ensuring equal access to resources and equal control over decisions, connecting their concerns to the overall village development across all the villages where FES is directly engaging and in at least 50% of the villages where FES is intervening through partners..

- Drawing insights from the work on Commons, advocate and propagate Commons as structural spaces for proper representation, as strategic spaces to define what is fair and just, and as physical and political spaces particularly for the women in a context where the possession of land remains a men's domain.

- Ensure community engagement and accountability to acknowledge people's self-determined priorities, especially focusing on the ones most vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion and marginalization.

- Integrate gender, diversity and inclusion across all programmes and operations covering the full management cycle, from assessment to planning, monitoring and data collection, evaluation and reporting.

- Institutionalize practices that enable collaboration and learning to increase the shared power of diverse stakeholders.

- Disrupt power equations and popular and prevalent perceptions of poor people, women, livestock keepers, etc. as 'destroyers' and highlight their stake in property and their role in governance. Extend legal co-ownership rights to women, and establish their right to participate in the decision making processes at the local level in true spirit.

- Not only reach, but ensure active and meaningful participation of women and other marginalized communities, and to equitably benefit them and support their empowerment across all the villages where FES directly intervenes and in at least 50% of the villages where FES will be intervening through partners.

- Recognize the role, knowledge and capacities of diverse groups as preservers of biodiversity, protectors of traditional knowledge of ecosystems and as stewards of natural resources.

- Engage with civil society partners to support gender-based analysis of work and embed gender concerns in the partnership processes.

Responsibilities/Implementation and Accountability

- The Board of Governors play a crucial role in creating an inclusive environment by demonstrating commitment with respect to gender, diversity and inclusion. They play an active role in setting and sustaining an agenda which focuses on gender, diversity and inclusion. The Board will set the tone at the top, advocating gender, diversity and inclusion and acting as positive role models, demonstrating the commitment to realize gender, diversity and inclusion goals.

- The leadership of the Foundation for Ecological Security will ensure this policy's implementation. The leadership will report to the Board of Governors on the status of the implementation of the policy against the metrics defined in the action plan once every year.

- Team heads and Regional heads will actively promote the required attitudinal change implied by the policy and are responsible for aligning gender equity, diversity and inclusion in FES project strategy, action plan, proposal and by sensitizing and empowering the workforce to prioritize gender, diversity and inclusion.

- All staff members will be expected to practice gender sensitivity and establish a collaborative environment where roles and responsibilities for a diverse and inclusive workforce are shared across the system.

- The leadership of FES will endorse the budget needed to enable system-wide advancement of the Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

- All the procedures in course for implementing the policy will be reviewed and assessed by internal accountability mechanisms including performance appraisal.

An action plan based on the Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Policy will be in place for ensuring implementation and accountability for the promotion of gender equity, diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organisation.

A gender and diversity support group including representatives from regional teams and coordination office and comprising members with domain expertise, with clearly defined tasks in all the organisational operations and programmes will support all the verticals and provide guidance for implementing the policy. The group will monitor and evaluate the progress of organisational change and coordinate and regulate the process of gender and diversity mainstreaming to successfully attain the desired objectives. The group will be responsible for promoting good practices, communicating gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities for the workforce.

Resources and Budgetary Allocations

We commit to ensure that robust support and adequate resources are allocated to gender, diversity and inclusion integration across the organisation by way of including these dimensions in all financial guidelines and policies. We will develop methods of reporting and evaluating gender and inclusion related funds allocated and used at all levels across the organisation. We will maintain a qualitative and quantitative success picture portraying the annual gender and inclusion related expenditure and brief implementation outcomes.

Definitions

Disability

Differences in abilities, whether visible or not, inclusive of physical, psychosocial and intellectual impairments, which may or may not hinder their regular functioning, including their jobs.

Sex

The physical and biological characteristics that distinguish people born as males and females.

Sexual orientation

Part of an individual's identity that is reflective of a person's physical or emotional inclination to other people of the same or different sex and/or gender.

Gender

The socially constructed relationship among women, men and other genders, which in turn, determines what is expected, allowed or valued about them, in terms of establishing responsibilities, activities, access to and control over resources and participation in decision making in the public and private domains. These socially constructed relationships, attributes and opportunities are learned through socialization and are dynamic w.r.t. context and time. Gender is an important criterion for socio-cultural analysis in relation to class, race, ethnic group, socio-economic background, sexual orientation and age.

Gender Identity

One's sense of one's own gender as part of their overall identity. It is the internal consciousness of identifying as a man, a woman, or an orientation across the gender spectrum, regardless of the sex assigned at birth.

Gender Equality

Equal rights, recognition and opportunities for all, irrespective of the gender they identify with. Gender equality is not limited to women's issues; it should equally concern and engage all, as a precondition for and indicator of sustainable, people-centric development. Equality here is not implied in the biological sense but in that their rights and opportunities are not adversely affected by the gender they identify with. Gender equality suggests that the needs, interest and priorities of all are equally important and recognizes the diversity of different groups.

Gender Parity

Another term for equal roles and representation of women and men in a given area of functioning in the society.

Gender Analysis

A context specific instrument to critically examine how different roles, responsibilities, activities, opportunities, needs, entitlements and rights affect women, men, girls, boys of different genders. It examines their inter-relationships, their control over resources, participation in decision making in the public and private domains and the constraints they face relative to each other. It ensures that gender based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated by our interventions and equality and justice in gender relations is promoted.

Inclusion

A dynamic state of functioning that removes barriers and enables everyone in the workforce to reach their highest potential while valuing the individual characteristics each person brings to the workplace.

Inclusive environment

An environment where everybody feels heard, respected, included and appreciated, thus promoting a welcoming, unbiased, healthy and high-performing organisational unit. It ensures equal access to resources and opportunities to all, enabling individuals to feel respected, motivated, valued and encouraged to express different perspectives, ideas and experiences.

Workforce Diversity

Acknowledging the diverse identities and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds associated with the people and valuing the experiences, skills and perspectives that they bring to the workplace.