



# FORUT Gender Policy 2023-2028

FORUT – Campaign for Solidarity and Development

Revised and approved by FORUT Board January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## 1. Introduction

This document presents FORUT's gender policy, revised in 2023. The document is valid through the next programme period from 2024-2028. It contains an introduction to the topic, gives definitions, and states how gender equality is related to our vision, mission, and policy. In addition, it describes shortly how we are working to achieve a more equal and gender just world in our ongoing international development cooperation with our partner organisations.

However, this is not an exhaustive strategy nor an action plan, but an outline of our common understanding and basic principles as well as presenting our common vision on a more inclusive and diverse community. It is also a vivid document in the way that we are on our way toward a more gender just world, and we are willing to learn from each other and develop our understanding of how a more gender diverse world would look like.

Discrimination and marginalisation of women is the most systematic and widespread form of oppression in almost all societies and cultures and is as old as humanity itself. Despite significant progress having been made during the last century, the structures of oppression persist in legislation, politics, the economy, and in the family. In the last couple of decades, we have also seen powerful forces pushing back against the tide of women's emancipation. Furthermore, the global impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change, conflict, and other crises have highlighted how fragile gender equality gains truly are, threatening rollbacks to progress in many areas, from education and health to employment, food security, and protection from violence (UNICEF Gender policy 2021-2030).

FORUT believes that gender equality has proved to foster democratic development, speed up poverty alleviation, provide justice and anti-discrimination as well as secure more sustainable and successful projects, communities as well as nations. Gender equality is therefore necessary to achieve all other development goals and is a

fundamental and inalienable human right recognised in UN human rights conventions. Therefore, FORUTS will go beyond simply responding to the manifestations of inequality, and instead work actively to remove the underlying structural barriers – such as harmful social norms and gendered power systems – that perpetuate inequalities. This transformative, values-based approach, which simultaneously empowers disadvantaged children, adolescents and women, positions gender equality as fundamental to child rights and seeks to chart a clear path towards a more just, equitable, empathetic, and inclusive world for all (UNICEF Gender policy 2021-2030).

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this gender policy is to create an internal common understanding in the entire organisation about how FORUT understands gender equality and how we will work toward achieving a more gender just society. The goal is to achieve gender equality which means that women and men, boys and girls, transgender, non-binary and more gender diverse persons enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society. FORUT recognizes the need to address gender holistically, including the ways in which gender intersects with other dimensions of people's lives. This includes addressing its linkages with race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and social status (class, caste etc).

Through this policy, FORUT commits itself to ensure that gender equality is fully incorporated in all our international work both as an end in itself as well to achieve our vision. This implies that as we are exposed to new theories of gender beyond the binary understanding, this will be included in this policy, and we will in the following period learn how to include these perspectives in our work.

## 3. Definitions

FORUT defines *gender* as the social and cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between them, as opposed to the biological definition of the sexes. In this construction lie norms of how women, men, girls, boys, transgender, non-binary and more gender diverse persons should be and behave in a given society. Gender is formed in relations between human beings and varies through time and space, and as a social character it implies a possibility for change through political and social action. Gendered roles and relationships are both dynamic and changeable. Further, variables such as age, religion, geography, occupation, class, sexuality, ethnicity, disability etc., intersects to create perceptions about gender.

Gender identity is a person's individual concept of identity in terms of gender, whether it is being a man/boy, woman/girl, both, or neither. Gender identity is not necessarily linked to the sex of a person.

*Masculinity* refers to gender characteristics, not sex, stereotypically relating to the roles and social expectations of what it means to be a boy or a man. *Femininity* refers to gender characteristics, not sex, stereotypically relating to the roles and social expectations of what it means to be a girl or a woman. However, masculinity and

femininity can simultaneously be present in men, women, transgender, non-binary and more gender diverse persons, without subtracting from the gender label they identify with.

#### 4. Fundamental principles

**FORUT main target groups are women, children, and youth.** The rationale for securing a gender perspective in the work of FORUT is as part of our vision:

*“... a peaceful, democratic and just world where everyone is secured human rights and a dignified life, and where alcohol and drugs do not jeopardise people’s safety and human potential.”*

Gender equality is implicit in the use of the word “everyone”. Everyone cannot be secured human rights and a dignified life without gender equality. A world without gender equality is neither peaceful, nor democratic nor just.

Additionally, our policy document states that FORUT’s goal is that people have the power to change their lives and our mission is to:

*“... mobilise, organise and empower people, especially women and children, to develop their potential. They shall be able to demand their rights and combat poverty, injustice and oppression with democratic and peaceful means.”*

FORUT recognizes that gender norms and expectations impact all children and women, and that girls, as well as children of diverse genders, are at disproportionate risk of gender-based discrimination, rights violations, and denial of full access to resources and opportunities. A specific focus on these individuals and populations is therefore necessary to advance their rights and wellbeing, and to achieve the broader vision of a more equitable world demanded by the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### 5. Strategic approach to gender issues

Gender power relations indicate how men access various levels of structural control and power over women, thus enhancing inequalities. Since gender and gender power relations are time and context specific, they can and should be challenged and changed. Gender equality is therefore both a goal and means to a more just and democratic society.

FORUT is imposing a gender mainstreaming strategy<sup>[1]</sup> in its development work to ensure that gender equality and human rights are a crosscutting issue in line with Norad’s

criteria for funding. Further, we have in our Gender equality programmes, traditionally, mainly focused on women *empowerment*. By empowerment we refer to increasing the personal, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities. In empowerment lies the ability of a person to control their own destiny, which is in

accordance with the FORUT vision. In addition to inform the women on their fundamental rights, FORUT, through our partners, are supporting them to claim these rights. Empowering of women and children will for good reasons continue to be an important strategy for FORUT.

However, even though knowledge and support are fundamental, we recognize that empowerment is not enough to realise a more gender equal society, and in can in some circumstances even make the women more vulnerable. This is especially true where gender programmes ignore men and tend to leave them free of responsibility for changing harmful aspects of prevailing patriarchal masculinities such as heavy alcohol consumption, gender-based violence, risky sexual practices, abusive and discriminating language, drinking, and driving, etc. Such practises are not only discriminating and harmful for women and more gender diverse persons; they also reduce the quality of life for men themselves.

Therefore, FORUT aims for an *inclusive approach* engaging men and boys in the work towards gender equality alongside its support to women's empowerment. FORUT also find this approach as a complementary strategy and an effective way to change the gendered structures in society, not only empowering the vulnerable groups and make them responsible on an individual level.

To achieve gender equality, structures that reinforce gender discrimination must be challenged. It is therefore important for FORUT and our partners to identify, focus on and *challenge power structures* that prevent people of all genders from benefiting equally from a sustainable and just development. This means that we sometimes have to use gender equity – understood as positive discrimination - as a mean to achieve gender equality. Equity ensures that women and men and girls and boys have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when reaching the finishing line (UNICEF Gender policy 2021-2030). This is not just about women, but about the fair and just treatment of all sexes that considers the different needs of all people, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group. This is a commitment beyond ensuring equal participation and representation, and beyond stating that all genders should have equal values and enjoy equal rights.

Gender equality calls for breaking up unjust gender norms and unequal power relations and includes strategies to confront patriarchal structures and cultural resistance to change. This requires a high degree of gender awareness among us and our partners. Achieving this requires training, changes in attitudes and mainstreaming of gender issues in our organisations.

## **6. Gender and alcohol**

FORUT's main aim is to reduce harm done by alcohol and other drugs and promote child rights, good mental health, and gender equality through supporting and strengthening local organisations working with a rights-based approach.

It is well documented that alcohol and drug use, as well as problems created by such use, has a very strong gender dimension. This is also our experience from many years of

community development work in many different cultures and countries. We often see that the use of alcohol is a risk factor for violence, unsafe sex and other types of harm suffered largely by women. The harm is caused by heavy alcohol consumption mainly by men, and too often it is considered a social/cultural factor that cannot be changed. These men are, in addition to causing harm to others, more exposed to severe consequences themselves such as alcohol-related death, reduced life expectancy, accidents, injuries, poverty, poor health and unemployment.

The gender dimension will always be considered in the planning and implementation of FORUT's specialized programme Alcohol, Drugs and Development.

## **7. Gender and health (sexual and reproductive health and mental health in particular)**

FORUT also aims to support meaningful and diverse partnerships with governments, NGOs and others that promote children's, adolescents', and women's ability to access their fundamental human rights, including their rights to adequate health and nutrition, to sexual and reproductive health and rights, to clean water and quality sanitation and a proper mental health care. Additionally, we fight for a world in which everyone can live in a peaceful and just society, free from the experience or threat of violence and harmful practices in all settings, including, among others, gender-based violence, neglect, exploitation, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and violence experienced in and outside the home, and in online spaces.

## **8. Monitoring and compliance**

A large part of monitoring our compliance with this policy will be through FORUT's and our partners' regular monitoring. It is the responsibility of the Secretary General and the International Programme Director to ensure that policies, programme planning, and implementation include and mainstream gender equality. Therefore:

1. Policies, strategies, and programme planning, including results frameworks and funding applications, are based on analysis of power inequalities and rights, and indicator data are gender disaggregated.
2. All FORUT and partner information, communication and educational materials and tools are inclusive of gender equality and do not promote harmful masculinities.
3. All partner projects in the areas of advocacy, capacity-building, empowerment, and service delivery shall endeavour to give all genders equal voice and serve all genders equally.
4. FORUT and its partners should have a Gender Policy which include procedures to be taken in the event of an incident of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, or discrimination within the organisation.
5. FORUT will not partner with organisations that directly or indirectly promote patriarchal masculinities, undermine gender equality and the LGBTIQ-community.
6. Adequate human and financial resources have been allocated for work on gender equality, and there shall be a Gender Equality focal person in the Programme Department in FORUT.

## Further reading

Two publications by FORUT elaborate on our approach to addressing Child Rights and Women's Rights in the cross section with alcohol and substance use.

- ✓ *"Childhood matters"*: Alcohol and drug problems from a child rights perspective
- ✓ *"Masculinity in a Bottle"*: A manual on how to discuss masculinity and drinking habits
- ✓ *Alcohol's impact on the rights of women and children in the Global South. A literature review* (2019). Anne-Marie Laslett and Megan Cook. La Tobe University

Booklets are available from the FORUT web site [English - FORUT](#)

<sup>[1]</sup> *Gender mainstreaming* is defined as: "The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetrated. The goal is to achieve gender equality. As such, gender equality is the overarching and long-term development goal, while gender mainstreaming is a set of specific, strategic approaches as well as technical and institutional processes adopted to achieve that goal" (ECOSOC agreed conclusions, 1997/2).