
Preface

Gender equality and social inclusion are significant to achieving sustainable environmental conservation and climate resilience. Recognizing this, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) has undertaken a comprehensive review and update of its Gender Policy to align with evolving global gender frameworks, climate finance requirements, and Bhutan's national gender commitments.

The updated RSPN Gender Policy integrates international best practices, emphasizing gender-responsive project design, mandatory gender assessments, gender-sensitive budgeting, stakeholder engagement, and strong monitoring and reporting mechanisms. It also introduces clearer grievance redress systems, strengthens sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) safeguards, and aligns with the international best practices and standards requirements to provide continued leadership role in gender responsive conservation.

This policy update reaffirms RSPN's commitment to fostering equitable participation of all genders in conservation and climate adaptation efforts. It serves as a guiding framework for RSPN staff, implementing partners, and stakeholders, ensuring that gender considerations are effectively mainstreamed across all projects and institutional operations.

We extend our gratitude to all contributors, gender specialists, environmental experts, community stakeholders, and partner organizations, whose insights and expertise have enriched this analysis and policy update. Through collaborative action, we strive to create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable environmental future for Bhutan and beyond.

(Chairperson)
Royal Society for Protection of Nature

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Preface | |
| Acronyms | 01 |
| Definition | 02-03 |
| 1. Introduction | 04 |
| 2. Scope | 04 |
| 3. Principles | 04 |
| 4. Goals and Objectives | 05 |
| 5. Alignment with International and National Legal Frameworks | 05 |
| 6. Gender Mainstreaming | 06 |
| 7. Gender-responsive Planning and Budgeting | 06 |
| 8. Gender Impact Assessment | 06 |
| 9. Gender Action Plan (GAP) | 07 |
| 10. Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation | 07 |
| 11. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) | 07 |
| 12. Grievance Redressal | 07 |
| 13. Governance and Accountability | 07 |
| 14. Institutional Capacity Building | 07 |
| 15. Effective Date and Revision | 07 |
| Annexure 1: Gender Impact Assessments | 08 |
| Annexure 2: RSPN Gender Action Plan Template | 09-11 |

Acronyms

| | |
|----------------|---|
| AF: | Adaptation Fund |
| CEDAW: | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CSO: | Civil Society Organization |
| ES: | Environmental and Social |
| ESSF: | Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework |
| GAP: | Gender Action Plan |
| GBV: | Gender Based Violence |
| GRB: | Gender Responsive Budgeting |
| GCF: | Green Climate Fund |
| ILO: | International Labour Organization |
| LGBTQ+: | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and any person who doesn't feel belonging to the previous categories |
| NEPA: | National Environmental Protection Act of Bhutan |
| RSPN: | Royal Society for Protection of Nature |
| SEAH: | Sexual and Emotional Abuse and Harassment |
| TVET: | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UNFCCC: | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

Definition

Gender: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities of individuals. It influences how people perceive themselves and how they interact with their environment, including conservation efforts. It differs from sex, which is biologically determined.

Gender Equality: Gender equality is the state in which individuals of all gender identities have equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes. It involves removing barriers that prevent participation and representation of marginalized groups in conservation and development.

Gender Equity: Gender equity involves recognizing differences in experiences and needs across gender groups and implementing fair policies to correct historical disadvantages. This means ensuring specific support mechanisms are in place to level the playing field.

Gender Mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming is the practice of systematically integrating gender considerations into policies, programs, and projects. It aims to ensure that all genders benefit equitably from initiatives.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting: A budgeting approach that considers gender perspectives in allocating financial resources. It ensures that gender equality commitments translate into concrete financial support for programs addressing gender disparities.

Intersectionality: A framework that recognizes that gender does not operate in isolation but intersects with other identities such as ethnicity, disability, class, and sexuality. Addressing intersectionality ensures an inclusive approach to gender policy.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV): SGBV encompasses any harmful act directed at an individual based on gender. This includes domestic violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination that may occur within conservation programs or workplaces.

Gender-Disaggregated Data: Gender-disaggregated data refers to statistics collected and analyzed separately for different gender identities. It helps to identify disparities, monitor progress, and inform policies for equitable outcomes.

Gender-Sensitive Indicators: Metrics designed to measure progress in gender equality across programs and policies. These indicators track participation, leadership representation, access to resources, and impact assessments related to gender initiatives.

Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation: A process of assessing programs and policies based on their impact on different gender groups. It ensures accountability and continuous learning to improve gender integration in environmental and climate programs.

Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation: A process of assessing programs and policies based on their impact on different gender groups. It ensures accountability and continuous learning to improve gender integration in environmental and climate programs.

Gender and Climate Resilience: The relationship between gender and climate resilience focuses on how gender inequalities affect an individual's capacity to respond to climate change. Gender-responsive strategies in conservation ensure all individuals have equal access to adaptation resources and decision-making.

Gender-Inclusive Decision-Making: Refers to ensuring that all gender identities are represented in leadership and policy-making positions. Conservation and environmental governance structures should provide platforms for gender-inclusive participation.

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH): SEAH refers to actions of sexual misconduct, abuse of power, or coercion in professional and project-related environments. Organizations must establish strong policies and mechanisms to prevent and address SEAH issues.

1. Introduction

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) is a citizen-based non-governmental organization devoted to the conservation of Bhutan's environment. Established in 1987, RSPN collaborates with the Royal Government of Bhutan, Civil Society Organizations, and international development partners to strengthen conservation efforts through community engagement, education, and sustainable livelihoods. The RSPN recognizes that environmental conservation cannot be achieved without gender-inclusive participation. All genders, including women, men, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals, have distinct roles in managing natural resources, mitigating climate risks, and adapting to environmental challenges. Integrating gender perspectives into conservation ensures not only sustainability, but also equitable benefits for all.

RSPN envisages to be a recognized leader in conservation, where gender equality is not merely an objective but a significant principle throughout all facets of environmental protection and sustainable development in Bhutan.

RSPN will inspire and empower all genders towards an active participation in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment through comprehensive educational programs, community engagement initiatives, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

2. Scope

This policy applies to RSPN Board, Management, Staff, Committees, Partners, Grantees, Service Providers, and any other third parties receiving RSPN's financial support or collaborating with RSPN on programs and projects.

3. Principles

- 3.1.** Facilitate equal participation of women, men, and marginalized groups in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices shape project outcomes.
- 3.2.** Promote equitable access by addressing structural barriers that limit access to resources, technology, and financial services for women and marginalized communities.
- 3.3.** Address social and cultural norms by implementing interventions that challenge gender biases and promote inclusive practices.
- 3.4.** Reduce gender-specific vulnerabilities through risks mitigation related to climate change impacts and socio-economic disparities that disproportionately affect any gender.
- 3.5.** Examine how gender intersects with other factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and disability.
- 3.6.** Ensure gender findings are publicly reported and used for program adjustments for promoting transparency and accountability
- 3.7.** Encourage participatory approach by engaging community members and stakeholders.
- 3.8.** For equity in resource allocation, ensure funds are distributed fairly across all gender groups.
- 3.9.** Establish long-term commitments and sustainability to funding gender-responsive initiatives.

4. Goals and Objectives

4.1. Goals

4.1.1. Mainstream gender equality across RSPN's programs, projects, and institutional operations, and enhance leadership and decision-making roles for all genders.

4.1.2. Provide equitable access to environmental and climate finance, education, and capacity-building opportunities and eliminate barriers to the participation of underrepresented gender groups in environmental leadership roles.

4.1.3. Promote gender-responsive low carbon and climate resilient development and integrate gender-sensitive approaches in ecosystem management, biodiversity protection, disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies, and sustainable land use.

4.2. Objectives

4.2.1. To ensure equal participation of all genders in RSPN programs and decision-making structures and strengthen institutional capacity to integrate gender considerations into all environmental conservation projects.

4.2.2. To enhance gender-responsive labor policies, ensure equal pay, parental leave, and work-life balance at RSPN.

4.2.3. To collect and utilize gender-disaggregated data to inform project design, implementation, and evaluation, and promote gender-responsive budgeting, gender audits and compliance reviews, ensuring adequate financial resources for gender equality initiatives.

4.2.4. To encourage community-based gender-sensitive conservation models, empower local stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups and youth, and promote gender-sensitive awareness campaigns

5. Alignment with International and National Legal Frameworks

5.1. International Legal Frameworks

This policy aligns with the following international conventions and commitments to gender equality and sustainable development goals, but not limited to:

5.1.1. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW)* – A global treaty advocating for the rights and equality of women and marginalized groups.

5.1.2. *Paris Agreement (2015)* – Recognizes the importance of gender equality in climate action and calls for gender-responsive climate policies and programs.

5.1.3. *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* – Specifically *SDG 5 (Gender Equality)* and *SDG 13 (Climate Action)*, ensuring gender-responsive approaches to environmental sustainability.

5.1.4. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Gender Action Plan* – Ensures gender considerations are integrated into all climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

5.1.5. *Adaptation Fund Gender Policy (2021)* – Mandates gender mainstreaming in climate resilience projects to enhance social inclusion and equitable resource distribution.

5.1.6. *Green Climate Fund (GCF) Gender Policy (2023)* – Calls for gender assessments, action plans, and monitoring to ensure that climate finance benefits all genders equally.

5.2. National Legal and Policy Frameworks

Bhutan has demonstrated strong commitments to gender equality through national policies and regulatory frameworks, including:

5.2.1. Labour and Employment Act (2007) – Provides safeguards against workplace discrimination and promotes equal opportunities for all genders.

5.2.3. Bhutan CSO Act (2007) – Defines regulations for civil society organizations, ensuring inclusivity in environmental governance.

5.2.4. National Environmental Protection Act (2007) – Calls for sustainable environmental management, ensuring equitable access to natural resources.

5.2.5. Bhutan's National Gender Equality Policy (2020) – Establishes guiding principles for gender inclusion in governance, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

5.2.6. National Plan of Action for Gender Equality (NPAGE) (2019-2023) – Provides strategic directions to close gender gaps in political, social, and economic domains.

5.2.7. National TVET Gender Strategy (2024-2028) – Promotes gender parity in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), supporting economic empowerment.

6. Gender Mainstreaming

6.1. As gender equality and equity is an essential foundation for achieving sustainable environmental conservation, biodiversity protection, and climate resilience, integration of gender perspectives in programs and projects is critical to foster sustainable economic development.

6.2. Carry out gender analysis for identifying the different roles, responsibilities, barriers to participation, opportunities identifying areas where projects can promote gender equality and equity.

6.3. Facilitate participatory decision-making processes to mainstream all genders in policies and programs.

6.4. Mainstream gender across all stages of project development and implementation to promote equitable participation, benefit-sharing, and decision-making opportunities for women, men, and marginalized groups.

6.5. Bridge gender disparities if any by providing targeted financial support for marginalized groups.

6.6. Measuring the effectiveness of gender integration into plans and projects, RSPN shall adopt key gender-sensitive indicators.

7. Gender-responsive Planning and Budgeting

7.1. Ensure that annual work planning and budgeting is based on gender equality and equity goals

7.2. Align budgetary and execution decisions with gender-sensitive policies and action plans.

7.3. Strengthen capacity for gender-focused financial decision-making.

8. Gender Impact Assessment

8.1. Carry out mandatory gender impact assessments and risk related to gender starting from project design to project evaluation and implement corresponding gender-responsive risk mitigation and management measures.

8.2. Gauge impacts of RSPN programs and projects on different gender groups at project entry level.

8.3. Identify unintended gender-related consequences and implement mitigation strategies.

9. Gender Action Plan (GAP)

- 9.1. Develop a Gender Action Plan (GAP) for every project in line with this policy to ensure that gender plans are implemented.
- 9.2. The GAP may include priority areas such as i) governance, ii) competencies and capacity development, iii) resource allocation, accessibility and budgeting, and iv) operational procedures.
- 9.3. RSPN shall allocate funds to implement the GAP
- 9.4. Update the Board periodically on the GAP implementation and its compliance

10. Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

- 10.1. Develop and implement a gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress of gender equality and equity efforts
- 10.2. Mandate gender-disaggregated reporting in all RSPN-funded projects to assess gender impacts effectively.
- 10.3. Develop gender responsive Key Performance Indicators such as in the domain of leadership, participation and access to resources.
- 10.4. Ensure that gender-related project outcomes are publicly available and transparently reported.
- 10.5. Commission gender impact evaluation as part of project evaluation and integrate feedback to adjust subsequent programming and planning.

11. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH)

SEAH refers to actions of sexual misconduct, abuse of power, or coercion in professional and project-related environments.

- 11.1 As per RSPN's Service Rules and Regulation (SRR) and GRM, implement zero-tolerance to SEAH within all RSPN programs and operations and enforce strict accountability measures for SEAH violations, ensuring justice and appropriate disciplinary actions.

12. Grievance Redressal

- 12.1. using RSPN GRM.
- 12.2. As per RSPN GRM, provides legal, financial, and psychosocial support for survivors of gender-related grievances and guarantees non-retaliation protections for individuals who report gender-based violations.

13. Governance and Accountability

- 13.1. RSPN Management shall ensure to provide necessary support and guidance on any matters relating to gender.
- 13.2. RSPN shall designate a Gender Focal Person to oversee mainstreaming, implementation, monitoring, and coordination of gender-related actions with support from concerned project staff.

14. Institutional Capacity Building

- 14.1. Equip staff and partners with the necessary skills and knowledge on gender and mainstreaming gender into its programs and projects.
- 14.2. Organize advocacy programs on its gender policy and other development relating to gender to stakeholders.

15. Effective Date and Revision

- 15.1. This Policy shall be effective from July 1, 2025.
- 15.2. Revisions may be made in response to changes in the national and international standards and requirements.
- 15.3. The Gender Focal Person shall coordinate and conduct periodical review and update the policy when needed.

Annexure 1: Gender Impact Assessments

Gender Impact Assessments

RPSN conducts pre-project, mid-term, and post-project gender impact assessments and evaluations as necessary, and measures how conservation programs affect different gender groups, identifies unintended gender-related consequences, and implements mitigation strategies related to the findings from the assessments/evaluations.

Template

| Priority areas | Action | Indicators | Responsibility | Timing | Budget estimates |
|---|--------|------------|----------------|--------|------------------|
| Priority area 1: governance | | | | | |
| Priority area 2: competencies and capacity-development | | | | | |
| Priority area 3: resource allocation, accessibility and budgeting | | | | | |
| Priority area 4: operational procedures | | | | | |

Annexure 2: RSPN Gender Action Plan Template

1. Introduction

1.1 The RSPN Gender Action Plan (GAP) template aligns with the RSPN ESSF and RSPN Gender Policy. The GAP ensures gender mainstreaming across all stages of project development and implementation to promote equitable participation, benefit-sharing, and decision-making opportunities for all genders. It also helps to ensure that projects foster inclusion, equity, and resilience.

1.2 The purpose of this GAP is to:

1.2.1 Identify gender-specific needs and opportunities through systematic analysis, and incorporate gender-responsive strategies into project design and implementation.

1.2.2 Establish measurable gender-related outcomes and accountability frameworks, and build institutional capacity to address gender disparities effectively.

1.2.3 Ensure compliance with donor gender standards, including GCF and AF.

2. Gender Action Plan Overview template

| |
|-----------------------|
| Project Title: |
| Project Location: |
| Implementing Entity: |
| Project Objectives: |

3. Key Gender Objectives

3.1. Enhance participation and equitable access: RSPN facilitates equal participation of all genders in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices shape project outcomes, and address structural barriers that limit access to resources, technology, and financial services for all genders.

3.2 Address social-cultural norms and build capacity: RSPN implements interventions that challenge gender biases and promote inclusive practices, and develop skills and capabilities among stakeholders to advance gender equity.

4.1.3 Opportunities: What are the areas where the project can promote gender equality, such as increasing women’s and marginalized gender’s access to technology, leadership roles, or capacity-building programs.

4.1.4 Baseline Data: What are the gender-disaggregated statistics, such as literacy rates, labor force participation, and access to financial services.

| Action Area | Activity | Responsibility | Timeline |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|----------|
| Capacity Building | Conduct gender-sensitivity training for project staff, local leaders, and stakeholders. | Gender Specialist | |
| | Provide leadership training for women and marginalized genders in community organizations. | Training Coordinator | |
| Access to Resources | Facilitate access to climate-resilient technologies, such as irrigation systems, for women. | Project Manager | |
| | Establish financial literacy programs to enhance women’s ability to manage project benefits. | Finance Officer | |
| Participation and Decision-Making | Ensure equal/equitable representation of genders in all advisory and management boards. | Community Liaison Officer | |
| | Organize focus groups to gather input and feedback during project design. | Stakeholder Engagement Team | |
| Monitoring and Evaluation | Collect sex-disaggregated data to assess the gender-specific impact of project activities. | M&E Specialist | |
| | Develop gender-sensitive indicators to track progress on equity objectives. | M&E Specialist | |

6. Gender-Sensitive Indicators table template

| Indicator | Target | Method of Verification | Frequency |
|--|--|---|-----------|
| Percentage of each gender in leadership roles | Equitable representation in advisory boards | Meeting minutes, attendance records | |
| Access to financial resources for women | % increase in one or more specific genders accessing project funds | Financial records, beneficiary surveys | |
| Participation in training programs | % of training participants are of the targeted gender group | Training attendance sheets, evaluations | |
| Reduction in gender-based climate risks | % decrease in reported vulnerabilities | Vulnerability assessments, interviews | |
| Grievance resolution for gender-related issues | % resolution of submitted gender grievances in a specified timeframe | GRM logs, stakeholder feedback | |

7. Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)

7.1. The GRM ensures that gender-related grievances are addressed promptly and effectively. A more detailed explanation of RSPN's gender-focused GRM is provided in Annex 9 of this policy.

8. Implementation Arrangements

8.1 Roles and Responsibilities

8.1.1 Gender Specialist: Leads the development, implementation, and monitoring of gender-responsive actions.

8.1.2 M&E Specialist: Ensures integration of gender-sensitive indicators into the overall monitoring framework.

8.1.3 Community Liaison Officer: Engages with all genders to gather feedback and ensure their participation.

8.1.4 Project Manager: Oversees the implementation of all gender-related activities and ensures alignment with project objectives.

8.2 Capacity Building for the RSPN Implementing Team

8.2.1 RSPN conducts gender mainstreaming workshops for all project staff and implementing partners. This is provided in detail in Annex 10 of this policy.

9. Budget Summary template

| Activity | Description | Budget |
|-----------------------------|--|--------|
| Gender-sensitivity training | Training sessions for staff and stakeholders | |
| Leadership development | Workshops and mentorship programs for marginalized genders | |
| Monitoring and evaluation | Collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data | |
| GRM implementation | Establishment of gender-sensitive grievance systems | |
| Community consultations | Marginalized gender-led consultation activities | |
| Awareness campaigns | Public education on gender equity | |

10. Monitoring and Reporting

10.1. The Gender Action Plan is monitored through:

10.1.1 Quarterly Reports: These document the progress on gender-related activities and outcomes, and highlight challenges and corrective actions.

10.1.2 Annual Reviews: These assess the effectiveness of gender-responsive measures, and identify areas for improvement.

10.1.3 Stakeholder Feedback: Qualitative feedback is collected from focus groups helps and incorporated into the adaptive management actions.

10.1.4 Mid-Term and Final Evaluations: These independent evaluations assess medium-term gender outcomes and long-term gender impacts, by comparing progress against agreed baselines.



RSPN

*Inspiring personal responsibility for
environmental conservation since 1987*

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