

Policy on Gender Equality

CESO|SACO conducted a gender audit during 2008 and 2009. The exercise made it possible to analyze the integration level of issues inherent to gender equality in our organization and within our programs. The results of the audit attest to the strong intent of the various stakeholders involved – Volunteer Advisors (VAs), personnel, board members – to ensure that CESO|SACO promotes gender equality within its **institution**, its **partnerships** and throughout all of its **programs**. Therefore, this new policy stems from a collective desire to foster sustainable development that is focused and proactive with regard to gender equality.

CURRENT STATUS

CESO|SACO intervenes in socio-economically diverse environments where women and men carry a wealth of knowledge that must be recognized. We also experience this reality within our own organization. The multiplicity of contexts in which employees, VAs, clients, partners and beneficiaries work gives rise to invaluable opportunities for sharing, dialogue and learning. However, despite the potential and abilities of each of these individuals and communities, numerous constraints and an inequality of opportunity can prevent them from meeting their interests. Indeed, numerous studies and statistics prove that inequalities between women and men remain a reality in all countries and regions where CESO|SACO operates, including Canada. Women disproportionately continue to bear the burden of poverty; endure physical and sexual violence; and suffer the repercussions of conflicts and natural disasters. Moreover, women are still largely under-represented in governments and political institutions, which greatly limits their potential to promote their needs and interests. Gender disparities in educational access likewise perpetuate the marginalization of women in political, social and economic spheres.

This status report serves as a reminder that efforts to promote the elimination of gender-based discrimination must continue. The international community has devised legal and political tools to foster the achievement of such objectives, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and consists in one of the most important milestones in this history of the promotion of women's rights. Women's human rights have been enumerated by a series of other treaties, conventions, resolutions, declarations and guidelines, promulgated by either the United Nations or regional bodies. Recently, political authorities around the world joined together to bring about the Millennium Development Goals, all to be achieved by 2015. Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is one of the eight goals. As a result, the international community is sending the highly significant message that “**progress for women is progress for all.**”

CESO|SACO's UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER EQUALITY:

- ❖ Advancing **equal participation** by women and men in **decision-making** for the sustainable development of their societies.
- ❖ Supporting women and girls facing barriers and oppression in achieving full enjoyment of their **human rights** and **fundamental freedoms**.
- ❖ Reducing gender-based inequalities and all forms of discrimination in the **access to and control of resource and development benefits**.
- ❖ Promoting the **recognition and enhancement of contributions** of all women and men within their respective environments.
- ❖ Recognizing that within the scope of gender equality is implicit the reality of **intersecting identities**. Women and men do not represent homogenous groups. Other dimensions of social identity (age, religion, class, race, sexual orientation, ability etc.) create particular experiences of oppression or privilege. Achieving gender equality requires recognizing that developmental policies, programs and projects can affect different women differently (women of colour, women with different abilities, women from different economic classes, women of different religions, women of different sexual orientations), and therefore in all of our work there should exist an understanding of gender equality as a place where the barriers, the resistance, and the vision for social change reflect these social contexts.

POLICY RATIONALE

Gender equality is an essential condition for carrying out **CESO|SACO's mission**:

We strengthen social and economic well being in Canada and abroad through engagement of skilled and experienced Canadian volunteers working cooperatively with our partners to effectively service client needs.

This policy also helps strengthen **CESO|SACO's vision**:

*We envision a world where there are sustainable social and economic opportunities **for all**.*

Gender equality is also an integral part of **CESO|SACO's core values**. Furthermore, CESO|SACO recognizes that in order to make these values flourish, the organization must unequivocally and transversally integrate gender equality into its sustainable development vision.

DESIRED GOAL OF THE POLICY:

The policy is intended to **contribute to achieving gender equality, regardless of geographical, racial or social status**, in order to make a contribution to sustainable and equitable development and the full exercise and enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms. **It is integral that this contribution take shape both within CESO|SACO and throughout our various projects, programs and partnerships.**

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE POLICY

CESO|SACO's policy is based on the following fundamental principles:

- ❖ Gender equality can only be achieved by **involving both men and women** in an effort to bring about the transformation of unequal power relationships.
- ❖ Gender equality must be considered as an **integral part of CESO|SACO's policies, programs and projects**. To that end, achieving equality requires recognizing that each policy, program and project affects women and men differently.
- ❖ **Women's empowerment** is crucial to achieving gender equality. Women, like men, are **agents of change**. Therefore, promoting the effective participation of women in economic, social and political processes is essential to fostering sustainable and equitable development.
- ❖ In promoting gender equality, simply providing equal opportunities to everyone is not enough: it is also essential to **challenge social inequalities** and take **concrete action** to eliminate gender inequalities.
- ❖ It is fundamental to **integrate and build on the local know-how, leadership, experiences, logics and discourses** in promoting gender equality in the communities where CESO|SACO works.
- ❖ The entirety of CESO|SACO's work should contribute to gender equality.

OUR COMMITMENTS

At the **institutional** level, CESO|SACO is committed to:

- ❖ Integrating gender sensitivity and equality considerations into **institutional work practices and policies** (example: human resource policies, recruitment of new personnel, VA recruitment criteria, decision-making process within the organization, work-family balance, drafting non-sexist institutional communications and documents etc.)
- ❖ Heightening **awareness** of personnel and VAs in Canada and abroad regarding CESO|SACO's gender equality work as well as issues pertaining to gender equality. To heighten awareness CESO|SACO will regularly provide **training** on gender equality that is culturally relevant so that all CESO|SACO personnel and VAs are able to integrate equality considerations into their work. Targeted training will also be made available to programming personnel.
- ❖ Fostering the learning and promotion of **best equality practices** throughout the organization, while exercising critical thinking and encouraging the questioning of existing practices.
- ❖ Supporting the ongoing work of a **Gender Working Group** composed of staff and/or VAs
- ❖ Participating in activities for **enrichment, sharing and learning** with other Canadian and international organizations wishing to work for gender equality.

In its **programming**, CESO|SACO is committed to:

- ❖ Conducting a comparative **gender analysis** in the environments and sectors in which we work in order to develop an informed and culturally relevant integration strategy for gender equality in CESO|SACO's programs. This exercise will enable VAs and staff to take into account the needs, opportunities and barriers facing the people with whom we work while heeding their experiences and abilities.
- ❖ Together with our partners and clients, targeting specific **outcomes** to be achieved regarding gender equality in our programs. These outcomes should be in line with this policy.
- ❖ Supporting clients and partners interested in targeting issues of gender equality as well as specifically supporting women's groups, associations and networks, and marginalized groups to support them in their work as **agents of change**.
- ❖ Developing and adapting CESO|SACO's program management and evaluation **tools** for integrating gender equality. Programming personnel and VAs will be trained to use the tools and will have the opportunity to help develop and update them.
- ❖ Identifying **lessons learned** and **best practices** with clients and partners in their efforts to integrate and promote gender equality (examples: socio-cultural issues and obstacles encountered, mitigation issues and resolutions etc.).
- ❖ Incorporating a perspective that recognizes and promotes gender equality in our **public engagement** and **communication** activities.

RESPONSIBILITY

The policy's implementation is the **responsibility of everyone at CESO|SACO**. Board members, employees, and VAs are therefore responsible for promoting gender equality in conjunction with their work and CESO|SACO's operations. To achieve this goal, CESO|SACO must foster certain conditions that are essential to the policy's implementation by its stakeholders and consequently pledges to:

- ❖ Adopt and regularly update an **action plan** to support the policy's implementation.
- ❖ Allocate **human and financial resources** to support the implementation of the policy and the action plan.
- ❖ Share this policy with staff, board members and VAs and create venues for **discussion** and **learning** so that work teams and individuals can come together to reflect on the policy's implications and find concrete ways to implement it.
- ❖ Share its policy with its many partners and the Canadian public to make known CESO|SACO's position and intent regarding gender equality.