

LIFT Gender Strategy

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1.0 Background

The Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) is a multi-donor fund established in Myanmar in 2009. The donors to LIFT are Australia, Denmark, the European Union, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The donors contracted the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) as the fund manager to administer the funds and provide monitoring and oversight for LIFT.

Many donor governments have placed women and gender at the core of their development assistance strategies and LIFT's donors agree that LIFT should be committed to promoting gender equality. Donors to LIFT believe that promoting women's rights will accelerate the progress already made towards poverty reduction and will sustain the achievements in the long run. LIFT donors are very supportive of gender equality and have identified gender equality as a critical cross-cutting issue for the Fund.

LIFT's vision is to be an effective mechanism for channelling aid to partners to achieve its goal of improving the food and livelihood security of women and men affected by poverty and vulnerability in Myanmar. LIFT also aims to be a collective and influential voice promoting programme coherence, innovation and learning, and providing a platform for enhanced policy engagement on agriculture, food security, and rural development in Myanmar. LIFT is expected to continue operations until at least the end of 2016.

The overall objective of LIFT is to make progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 1 in Myanmar.¹ LIFT's purpose is to increase food availability and incomes of 2 million women and men. Strengthening gender integration across all aspects of LIFT, by all implementing partners, will enable both women and men to have access to and control over land, resources and livelihood opportunities.

2.0 Rationale

Gender equality is critical to development,² and therefore critical to achieving MDG 1, which focuses on poverty reduction and sustainable development. MDG 3 (the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) recognizes that achieving equality between women and men is a pre-condition for achieving other goals. Donors agree that LIFT should be committed to promoting gender equality. It is understood that gender equality is a critical component of efforts to eradicate poverty, enhance economic growth, achieve sustainable development, and thus is fundamental to achieving LIFT's objectives. By promoting gender equality, women and men, girls and boys have equal access to social services, livelihood opportunities, production opportunities, land and markets.

LIFT has positioned gender as an important cross-cutting issue in its strategy. All implementing partners of LIFT are responsible to integrate a gender perspective into their LIFT-funded project processes – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with a

¹ MDG 1: Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day; achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people; reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

² UNDP, *Human Development Report, 1995*. <http://www.undp.org/hdro/95.htm>.

view to promoting equality between women and men.³ However, not all of LIFT's implementing partners are adopting gender programming approaches, and only some partners are able to integrate gender in their project cycle.⁴

The key aim of this document is to set out LIFT's expectations in regard to gender equality in LIFT's. The LIFT gender strategy is underpinned by the rationale that gender differences between females and males are socially constructed and that experiences of these differ according to their ethnicity, class, age, culture, caste, religion and historical situation. Gender issues need to be addressed in the context of particular structures and cultures, and sustainable changes in power balances will only happen if strategies involve different groups of women and men, taking into account their very different needs. In this strategy, the structures and cultures of LIFT's implementing partners, as well as their project communities, are to be considered as the context of the work.

3.0 Myanmar Context

Myanmar is one of the largest and poorest countries in South East Asia. It is ranked 149 out of 187 countries in the 2011 Human Development Index.⁵ It has over 100 ethnic groups with an estimated population of approximately 58m, 51% of it is female.⁶ Myanmar is lagging behind its neighbours in most socio-economic indicators. According to a recent country-wide survey⁷, 26% of the population lives below the poverty line. The proportion of female-headed households increased from 19% to 21% of households between 2005 and 2010. Also, female-headed households are much more likely to be in urban than rural areas (27% vs. 19%). According to official statistics, 11% of the female population is illiterate while only 4% of male population is illiterate.

Myanmar has tremendous ethnic and religious diversity; therefore, no single set of norms exist that governs gender relations across the country. However, a pervasive public discourse cultivated over previous decades holds that gender inequality is not a major issue in Myanmar. Due to a shortage of data and descriptive information and analysis of the situation of women relative to men, some suggest that Myanmar culture generally does not manifest gender discrimination, but this is not correct for the entire country.⁸ Even if women and girls generally do not experience the extremes of gender discrimination, they are usually raised to accept gender-based inequalities as part of their social and biological identities.⁹

In most of the social teaching and practices of both Theravada Buddhism and Christianity, which are the main religions followed in Myanmar, males are regarded as superiors over females. Though it is not the fundamental principles of both Theravada Buddhism and Christianity that are discriminatory, the ways in which they are interpreted within a certain

³ LIFT's Annual Report 2010, p. 41-42.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MMR.html>

⁶ There are varieties of data. According to Worldstat info, total population of Myanmar is 54 million with 26.8 million male and 27.1 million female population, ref: <http://en.worldstat.info/Asia/Myanmar>.

⁷ UNDP Myanmar, *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar (2009-2010)*, (Yangon: UNDP, 2011).

⁸ Naw Blut Say, *Myanmar Women and Development*. An unpublished Master of Divinity Thesis (Yangon: Myanmar Institute of Theology, 2001), 35.

⁹ Ibid.

context are patriarchal.¹⁰ Women in Myanmar got the right to vote in 1935¹¹, and all constitutions (1947, 1974 and 2008) provide constitutional rights for equal participation of women and men in politics. However, a recent study¹² found that there are various patriarchal norms that work to discourage women's participation in public life and decision-making in several areas in Myanmar. For example, women's place is thought by many to be the kitchen and they are not considered having capacity to lead family and community. On the other hand, men are regarded as head of the household as well as the bread-winner of the family, and these norms are framed differently based on culture, religion, ethnicity and location.¹³

Norms and practices emphasizing women's dependence on men come to bear on women's economic rights and livelihood opportunities. For example, the notion of the male breadwinner has implications for income generation, access to and control over resources as well as wage inequality. In a recent study in rural Myanmar,¹⁴ men were considered to be 'more able' to manage assets and resources, and women's participation in decision-making regarding assets and resources was considered 'immoral'. The lesser value placed on education of girls is another example of traditional norms and practices that constitute disadvantages for women in terms of rights enjoyment and equal livelihood opportunities.¹⁵

A gender assessment done by Save the Children¹⁶ revealed that women are most affected by hunger and food insecurity as traditionally women have the duty of feeding the family. When they do not have sufficient food, women reduce the quantity and quality of the food they eat. Additionally, women beg for food from neighbours and relatives if required, undermining their social status and self-esteem.

As quoted in a recent study on women's participation in Myanmar, "despite laws and policies that document the right of women to social, economic, political and judicial equality, women in Myanmar remain profoundly underrepresented in public life and government - at both local and central levels." The study on women's participation in decision-making and leadership at the local level in Myanmar, conducted in 2011¹⁷ found the most prevailing norm to be the male prerogative of leadership: "Ideas about leadership are set in the home, where men are commonly considered the household head. These ideas are then reinforced in public and religious life, where men dominate positions of power". The same study found that women's participation in local authorities was less than 3%. Following the general election in 2010, women's participation in parliament at both national and state/regional levels is less than 4%.¹⁸

¹⁰ Brenda Belak, *Gathering Strength: Women from Burma on their Rights* (Muang, Chiang Mai; Images Asia, 2002), 35.

¹¹ Win May, *Status of Women in Myanmar* (Yangon: Sarpay Beikman, 1995), 2.

¹² Action Aid, Care and Oxfam, *If given the chance: Understanding barriers to and opportunities for women's participation in public life and decision-making in Myanmar* (Yangon: Action Aid, Care and Oxfam, 2011), 8.

¹³ The study was carried out in Rakhine, Kachin, Kayah and Shan States and Magwe, Mandalay and Ayeyarwaddy Regions, and LIFT is currently working in Chin, Kachin, Rakhine, Shan States and Magwe, Mandalay and Sagaing regions. Therefore, the study is overlapping with some of the LIFT working areas.

¹⁴ Gender and Development Initiative (Myanmar), *Gender-based Constraints in Rural Areas and Women's Empowerment in HDI of UNDP Myanmar, 2011* (Yangon: UNDP Myanmar, 2011), 57.

¹⁵ *Gender-based Constraints in Rural Areas and Women's Empowerment in HDI of UNDP Myanmar, 2011*.

¹⁶ Gender and Development Initiative, *Gender Issues Survey Report*, In Food security project implemented in Mawlamyinegyun and Hlaing Bone areas by Save the Children in Myanmar, May 2010.

¹⁷ ActionAid, Care, Oxfam. (2011- internal document), *If Given the Chance: Women's Participation in Public Life in Myanmar*.

¹⁸ Gender and Development Initiative (Myanmar) (2011- internal document), *Women's Integration in Myanmar Politics*, 2.

At an institutional and organizational level, the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) was formed in 1996 as a direct consequence of the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). The MNCWA is a national mechanism for the advancement of women in Myanmar and could benefit from efforts to strengthen technical skills on gender mainstreaming. The UN Gender Theme Group (GTG), formed in 2009, has as its primary purpose "to mainstream gender in the humanitarian and development interventions of the UN in Myanmar, such as poverty alleviation and livelihood development"¹⁹. It has been instrumental in the discussion with the Department of Social Welfare, which is the focal department for gender and women's issues.²⁰

The Gender Equality Network (GEN), formerly known as the Women's Protection Technical Working Group (WPTWG),²¹ which was formed in 2008 after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar, is now a leading network of civil society, national and international non-government organizations (I/NGOs), UN agencies and technical resource persons in Myanmar responding to gender equality and women's empowerment. Women Organizations Network of Myanmar (WON) was also initiated and formed in 2008 in order to coordinate among local and national women groups and organizations. WON is now a network of over 29 local women groups and organizations.

National non-government organisations such as the NGO Gender Group, Thingaha Organization, Gender and Development Initiative (GDI), the Karen Women's Action Group, Phan Tee Eain and some INGOs such as ActionAid, CARE Myanmar, Oxfam, Marie Stopes International, Swissaid, are taking the lead in promoting gender equality and empowering women in Myanmar. Some of these organizations are also implementing partners of LIFT. With the recent political changes in Myanmar many civil society organizations are actively advocating for greater gender equality. At the same time, many national civil society organizations are gradually prioritizing gender as an important cross-cutting issue, and they are now growing as active change agents working for social justice and equality of women and men in the country.

4.0 Integrating Gender Equality into LIFT

The purpose of the gender strategy is to promote gender equality so that targeted women and men have equitable access to, and control over, resources (e.g., livelihood supports) provided by and benefits (e.g., food security) gained from LIFT-funded projects.

The specific objective of the gender strategy is that all aspects of LIFT-funded projects (including design, implementation, monitoring and learning) integrate gender through gender analysis, gender-sensitive implementation, and the use of sex disaggregated information.

The activities for gender integration are mentioned into general activities and specific activities. The table below describes the general activities that are expected to be carried out by all LIFT implementing partners.

¹⁹ Terms of Reference, UN Gender Theme Group

²⁰ Myanmar Gender Profile: UN Thematic Group on Gender 2000.

²¹ Recently, WPTWG has changed its name to be Gender Equality Network (GEN).

Table 1: Minimum general activities to be carried out by partners

Stages	Minimum general activities
Design	<i>Gender analysis</i> done and integration of findings presented at the earliest possible point so that the entire project concept and structure of the partners would be gender sensitive.
Implementation	<i>Gender equality concepts</i> are adequately introduced to project staff as well as women and men from project communities as much as possible during the project work.
	<i>Facilitation of women's/men's equal and meaningful participation</i> in the project activities and their voices heard in decision-making to be ensured by the project implementing partners.
	<i>Gender sensitive language is used in all documents</i> – resource and information, education, and communication materials, reports, etc.
	<i>Mechanisms and tools</i> are in place to ensure equitable access to and control over resources and benefits by vulnerable women and men from the project community.
Monitoring & Evaluation	<i>Gender impact assessment</i> of the project are to be conducted along with periodic review and learning of the project.
Reporting	<i>Sex disaggregated data</i> is to be collected, analysed and used for on-going project development and reporting - with both quantitative and qualitative information.
	<i>Stories of change</i> that have a clear and communicable positive gender perspective, and challenge gender stereotypes in the life of women and men to be among the highlighted success stories.
Human resource management & working environment	<i>Gender sensitive organizational policies, practices and staff recruitment</i> for the LIFT funded projects for all levels (from management positions to field level positions) by the partners.
	<i>Ensuring that the work places and working conditions</i> for all staff are free from sexual harassment for both female and male staff, and that safe and secure complaint mechanisms are in place.
	<i>Working with other agencies and networks</i> in advocacy and policy issues to transform the structures that maintain gender inequalities in the communities where the partner is working.

Table 2: Minimum specific activities to be carried out by the partners

Outputs	Thematic areas	Minimum specific activities
1. Increased agricultural production and incomes supported through improved production and post-harvest technologies, improved access to inputs and markets.	Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of equal access and control over inputs to women and men • Facilitation for equitable participation of women and men in technical trainings and decision-making • Facilitation for equitable access to the markets by women and men
	Land issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation to have equal chance for land use by both women and men • Facilitation for equitable participation of women and men in land rights training • Facilitation of equal rights for access to land by women/girls

Outputs	Thematic areas	Minimum specific activities
	Irrigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation for equitable participation of women and men in local irrigation systems
	Market linkages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation for equitable access to market-chains by women and men • Capacity building for equitable participation of women and men in markets
2. Targeted households supported in non-agricultural livelihood activities and/or trained in livelihood skills for employment.	Support to micro finance providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of equal access to financial assistance to both women and men • Facilitation and encouragement for equal participation of women and men in family decision-making
	Fisheries sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of equal access to financial and other support to both women and men
3. Sustainable natural resource management and environmental rehabilitation supported to protect local livelihoods.	Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage equal participation in training on climate change by both women and men
4. Effective social protection measures supported that increase the incomes, enhance the livelihood opportunities or protect the livelihoods assets of chronically poor households.	Social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage women participation in cash for work (CFW) programmes • Exemption of lactating mothers in CFW • Cash transfers to female-headed households
	Men and women with disabilities, the aged and vulnerable girls and boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash transfers to disabled/elderly person/child-led households • Develop and implement disabled/elderly persons/child-friendly spaces where they can build their social capital
5. Capacity of civil society strengthened to support and promote food & livelihoods security for the poor.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop gender capacity development plan for local organizations ensuring all staff of LIFT-funded projects receive the minimum gender capacity mentioned in section 5.0
6. Monitoring and evaluation evidence and commissioned studies used to inform programme and policy development.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct gender impact assessment of respective project(s) and incorporate findings in programme and policy review and development
7. Funds are allocated in line with Fund Board policies, gender budgeting principles, and are accounted for in a transparent manner		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct gender budgeting training for LIFT and partners • Coordinate with donors for gender budgeting, and develop gender budgeting principles for LIFT
8. Fund flow and IP performance are monitored and evaluated		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating gender sensitivity in monitoring and evaluation of fund flows and IP performance

5.0 Capacity Development

Capacity development of the implementing partners with regard to realization of the gender strategy is crucially needed. Therefore, LIFT will commit resources to helping its implementing partners to assess their own organizational capacity on gender issues and to identifying their capacity needs regarding the implementation of projects in line with the gender strategy.

To support capacity-building efforts, LIFT will ensure that its implementing partners have access to the following training opportunities:

- *Basic gender awareness and sensitivity training* – this training is to build conceptual knowledge of female and male staff (and staff of partners) on gender issues. It is required that the conceptual formation should be contextual and evidence-based.
- *Gender integration in project cycle management training* – this training is to build technical knowledge of female and male programme staff (and staff of partners) on gender integration in project cycle management.
- *Gender analysis and gender sensitive M&E training* – this training is to strengthen technical knowledge of female and male programme and M&E staff (and staff of partners) on gender analysis in process and progress of the project. This is also for building knowledge on development and application of gender sensitive indicators for projects funded by LIFT.

6.0 Implementation and Management Arrangements

LIFT recognizes that partner organizations from different backgrounds and different workplaces will have their own approaches and their own levels of capacity and understanding on gender and women's rights. While respecting these, LIFT's commitment to build partners' capacity in relation to gender issues remains the same for all partners. LIFT will coordinate with the partner(s) for realization of their action plans and will follow up with partners on how the above training is being used in practice.

The Fund Manager will ensure that the minimum requirements of gender integration (as described in section 4 of this strategy) are integrated in Calls for Proposals and in the assessment of applications for funding. Specifically, proposals will be assessed *inter alia* on the degree to which a gender analysis has been appropriately integrated into the project design and implementation approaches. LIFT will assign two co-gender focal people (one female and one male) at the Fund Manager. The Fund Manager will ensure that its human resource management systems and policies are gender sensitive and responsive, including recruitment, induction, and employee's performance management systems. The Fund Manager will make sure that its staff code of conduct is gender sensitive.

The Fund Manager will allocate additional funds for gender capacity development of its own staff. The Fund Manager will also provide appropriate spaces and opportunities for implementing partners to share their knowledge and experience on good practices of gender integration such as through organizing an annual workshop on gender integration. LIFT will work with other agencies and networks in advocacy and policy issues to transform the structures that maintain gender inequalities in the communities.

7.0 Gender Equality Implications for the LIFT Program

Integrating gender into livelihood and food security activities in the context of LIFT's partners working in Myanmar is vital since gender inequalities can hinder equitable and sustainable economic development.

LIFT will regularly review processes and progress made on gender equality in internal and external policies and practices, acknowledging that changes in gender relations depend on the political willingness to allow more balanced participation by women and men in decision-making processes. It will ensure that it learns from these reviews and incorporates lessons learned into efforts to improve both policy and practice.

The LIFT gender strategy will also be reviewed regularly in collaboration with the implementing partners so that its relevancy and appropriateness will be monitored and evaluated periodically. LIFT will endeavour to provide a strong and clear model for how gender integration can contribute to improving lives of women and men in a practical and strategic way. LIFT will utilize its successes (and failures) as important learning examples for promoting gender and social change in Myanmar.