

Mahboba's Promise Gender Equality Policy

1. Introduction

Afghanistan's ongoing conflict disproportionately impacted women and other historically marginalised populations including people with disability. The obstacles that women face regarding achieving gender equality in Afghanistan are compounded by the traditional customs that undermine their status and the gross deprivations caused by policies which remove or ban women from public life. In 2001, an Afghan Presidential statement was released which supports equality between women and men, recognising that the provision of women's rights is a necessary step in peace building and reconstruction.

Mahboba's Promise, as an organisation committed to providing a sustainable future and secure environment for women and children, acknowledges that addressing historical power imbalances and promoting gender equality is central to our work.

Mahboba's Promise defines gender equality as: *women and men having equal conditions for realising their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development.*

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline our commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women - both through our partnerships within Afghanistan as well as through our organisational policies, practices and reform agenda.

The policy:

- Complements the Mahboba's Promise Human Rights Policy that outlines our commitment to upholding the relevant international human rights law conventions including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*.

- Acknowledges that the full and equal participation of all members of society is essential in the promotion of sustainable development.
- Acknowledges that Mahboba's Promise has an opportunity to enact this policy at an institutional level as well as a programming level.
- Respects that we have an obligation and commitment to report on our progress against this policy to donors and beneficiaries.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Mahboba's Promise aid and development programs that operate within Afghanistan as well as our operations in other locations including Australia.

Gender equality to us is:

- Where all people regardless of gender have equal access to rights, power and resources.
- The prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and all forms of gender-based violence.
- The active participation in gender equality initiatives of boys and men.
- Targeted protection and assistance to women and girls as well as gender diverse people.

Gender-based violence refers to: harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.

4. Policy

Mahboba's Promise strives to design and implement policies and programs that support gender equality and promote women's empowerment. We understand that oppression and discrimination must be actively addressed in a way that considers analyses power, privilege and how those with intersecting identities have been excluded or abused.

At the same time, we recognise that in the context of Afghanistan, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is complex with slow progress. Addressing the underlying power imbalances that enable violence against women and girls to occur is challenging and organisations must consider the political sensitivities whilst operating in this environment. Nonetheless, Mahboba's Promise is committed to our own continual learning as an organisation to address these power imbalances at an institutional and programming level - and as an advocate and leader among development agencies.

Mahboba's Promise aims to empower women and girls to realise their full potential and become active participants within Afghan society. By involving women and girls in decision making actions, providing women and girls with the opportunity to develop valuable vocational skills, educating orphan boys and girls to understand the concepts, benefits and outcomes of gender equality and removing gender barriers within the organization itself; Mahboba's Promise aims to achieve gender equality within its aid programs and we hope, create flow on effects into other communities too. Our programs have an end goal of self-sufficiency and empowerment to enable women to fully participate in the reconstruction of Afghan society.

As part of this Policy, we will undertake the following activities.

- **Education:** By educating women and girls about their economic, legal and basic human rights as well as teaching them skills and knowledge that are valuable contributions to society; Mahboba's Promise aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in its community places and programs. Mahboba's Promise also focuses on educating males from a young age about the benefits of equal opportunities and rights for all.

- Program implementation: Mahboba's Promise programs understand that gender is a cross cutting issue and should therefore be addressed in all aspects of development to ensure that women and girls are given equal opportunities to participate in society and have equal access to rights and resources. This is seen through our teaching, permaculture, mid-wife training and dairy co-op programs which aim to empower women to become self-sufficient, confident and skilled members of their community.
- Economic empowerment: By teaching women and girls in Afghanistan productive ways to earn a sustained income, Mahboba's Promise aims to assist vulnerable women and girls to achieve the self-sufficiency and freedom to provide for their families and take control of their own finances. This ensures that our programs have a lasting impact on the lives and position of Afghan women and girls as well as their communities. This, in turn, reduces aid reliance.
- Partnerships: When partnering with other organisations/NGOs in Afghanistan and elsewhere, we will ensure that these bodies align with our gender equality policy the develop their own. Gender equality policies should reflect an understanding of the root causes of violence against women and children including harmful gender norms and power imbalances between men and women.
- Monitoring: We will monitor the development and implementation of programs ensuring that there are specific indicators including sex disaggregated data. To ensure they effectively promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Where possible we will engage experts to continually build our capacity as an organisation to undertake gender-sensitive programming and monitoring. We will also operate according to the principles of Do No Harm to ensure that programs not inadvertently exacerbate or promote harmful gender norms, nor provide an enabling environment where violence against women and girls can occur.
- Organisational learning: We understand that gender inequality affects all of us. We will continue as an organisation to look at gender equality at work - ensuring that our workplace is safe, respectful and free of discrimination. We will tackle harmful gender norms that enable workplace violence, harassment and

discrimination to occur through ongoing training and reflection, ensuring that our HR policies and procedures are compliant with domestic legislation. We will continue to create policies and procedures for safe reporting and follow-up with regards to preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) at work and remain committed to repairing power imbalances and empowering women both through our programs as well as our operations. Ensuring that all staff and volunteers are trained in PSEAH will also further protect beneficiaries and reduce the risk of violence perpetrated by development or humanitarian aid workers.

- Cultural sensitivity: Mahboba's Promise is a grassroots organisation which has a deep understanding of the cultural context of the society that our programs operate in. This knowledge allows us to effectively design programs which promote gender equality and women's empowerment within Afghanistan whilst ensuring they are accepted by the local communities, we operate in. We are committed to working with like-minded individuals and community groups within Afghanistan to achieve gender equality whilst tackling the traditional and cultural barriers that impact on women and girls participation in society.

5. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every 5 years, with performance tracked against the following questions:

- Was program design, delivery and monitoring gender-sensitive?
- Did we regularly reflect and refine our practice as an organisation with regards to promoting gender equality?
- Did we build capacity with regards to gender sensitive programming and evaluation?
- Did our monitoring have gender-specific indicators including sex disaggregated data?
- Did our programming work to address the root causes of gender-based violence?
- Were men and boys involved in finding solutions to gender inequality?

Document Control	
Risk Level:	High (two years)
Approval Date:	Operationally approved 09/05/2023
Next Review Date:	09/05/2025
Responsible Position:	Operations Manager