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MANGROVE FOUNDATION OF INDIA (MFI)

Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Policy

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Approved By	Governing Body / Board of Trustees
Review Frequency	Every three years, or earlier if required
Policy Owner	HR or Administration Department

1. Introduction

Mangrove Foundation of India (MFI) is committed to promoting inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development through community-based ecological restoration, environmental education, livelihood development, and community empowerment.

MFI recognises that gender equality and social inclusion are essential for building resilient communities, protecting natural resources, and ensuring that the benefits of development reach all sections of society. Women and girls, particularly those from fishing, coastal, rural, and economically disadvantaged communities, play an important role in natural resource management, household livelihoods, community welfare, and environmental conservation.

MFI acknowledges that gender-based discrimination, unequal access to resources, limited decision-making opportunities, unpaid care responsibilities, and social barriers can prevent individuals from participating fully in development initiatives.

Through this policy, MFI commits to integrating gender equity and social inclusion into its organisational practices, programmes, partnerships, and community engagement activities.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear framework for promoting gender equality, preventing discrimination, ensuring equal opportunities, and strengthening the participation and leadership of women and other marginalised groups in MFI's work.

The policy aims to:

- Promote equal rights, opportunities, dignity, and respect for all individuals.
- Ensure equitable participation of women and men in organisational and community development activities.
- Strengthen women's economic independence through livelihood development, skills training, SHGs, and enterprise promotion.
- Integrate gender considerations into environmental restoration, climate resilience, and natural resource management programmes.
- Prevent gender-based discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and violence within MFI's workplace and programmes.
- Promote inclusive decision-making and leadership at organisational and community levels.
- Establish accountability, monitoring, and grievance redressal mechanisms for implementing gender equity commitments.

3. Scope and Applicability

This policy applies to all MFI-related activities and individuals associated with the organisation, including:

- Governing Body members, trustees, management, and employees.
- Project staff, field coordinators, consultants, and contractual personnel.
- Volunteers, interns, researchers, and programme facilitators.
- Project partners, implementing agencies, contractors, and service providers, to the extent applicable under their agreements and relevant laws.
- Community members, beneficiaries, SHGs, and participants in MFI-supported programmes, in relation to programme participation, conduct, safeguarding, and grievance mechanisms.

The policy applies to all MFI offices, project locations, field activities, training sessions, community meetings, workshops, travel undertaken for work, digital communication, and other activities conducted under MFI's authority or on its behalf.

4. Policy Statement

MFI shall promote gender equity as an integral part of its organisational culture and development approach.

MFI shall not discriminate against any individual on the grounds of sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, disability, caste, religion, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, or other status protected under applicable law.

MFI recognises that equality does not always mean treating everyone identically. Equitable measures may be required to address historical disadvantages, unequal access to resources, safety concerns, and barriers to participation.

MFI shall strive to ensure that all individuals can participate meaningfully in its programmes, access opportunities fairly, contribute to decisions affecting their lives, and benefit equitably from development interventions.

5. Guiding Principles

5.1 Equality and Non-Discrimination

All individuals shall be treated fairly and respectfully, without discrimination or exclusion.

5.2 Equity and Inclusion

MFI shall identify and address barriers that prevent women and other marginalised groups from accessing programme benefits, leadership opportunities, training, employment, and resources.

5.3 Participation and Representation

MFI shall encourage meaningful participation of women and underrepresented groups in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

5.4 Dignity and Respect

MFI shall promote a safe, respectful, and supportive environment free from harassment, intimidation, exploitation, and abuse.

5.5 Empowerment and Agency

MFI shall support individuals, particularly women and girls, in strengthening their skills, confidence, financial independence, leadership, and decision-making capacity.

5.6 Accountability and Transparency

MFI shall define responsibilities, monitor implementation, address grievances fairly, and periodically review progress against the objectives of this policy.

5.7 Intersectionality

MFI recognises that gender-related disadvantages may overlap with caste, disability, age, poverty, location, and other social factors. Programme design shall consider these intersecting barriers wherever relevant.

6. Gender Equity in Organisational Practices

6.1 Recruitment and Employment

MFI shall promote fair and transparent recruitment and employment practices.

The organisation shall:

- Provide equal employment opportunities to qualified candidates.
- Use gender-neutral and non-discriminatory recruitment procedures.
- Base selection, promotion, and work allocation on relevant qualifications, competence, experience, and performance.
- Encourage women's participation in technical, managerial, leadership, and field-based roles.
- Avoid discrimination related to pregnancy, maternity, marital status, or family responsibilities, subject to applicable law and legitimate role requirements.
- Promote fair remuneration for comparable work in accordance with applicable law and organisational procedures.
- Provide equal access to training, professional development, and career advancement opportunities.

6.2 Safe and Respectful Workplace

MFI shall endeavour to maintain a workplace that is safe, inclusive, and free from gender-based harassment, bullying, intimidation, and discrimination.

All employees, volunteers, and associated personnel shall be expected to:

- Maintain professional boundaries and respectful conduct.
- Refrain from sexual harassment, unwanted sexual advances, gender-based insults, threats, or discriminatory behaviour.
- Respect privacy, confidentiality, and personal dignity.
- Report concerns through designated grievance channels.
- Cooperate with authorised investigations and corrective measures.

MFI shall establish and communicate appropriate procedures for reporting and addressing workplace complaints.

6.3 Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities

Where feasible and consistent with operational requirements, MFI shall promote practices that support employees in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

These may include reasonable work scheduling, appropriate leave arrangements, and consideration of caregiving responsibilities. Statutory entitlements shall be provided in accordance with applicable law.

6.4 Capacity Building and Gender Awareness

MFI shall encourage gender sensitisation and inclusion training for employees, volunteers, field staff, and relevant partners.

Training may cover gender equality, respectful communication, prevention of sexual harassment, safeguarding, inclusive community engagement, and gender-responsive programme implementation.

7. Gender Equity in Programmes and Community Development

MFI shall integrate gender considerations across its environmental, educational, livelihood, and community development initiatives.

7.1 Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Development

MFI shall promote women's participation in livelihood programmes linked to sustainable natural resource management and community resilience.

Relevant interventions may include:

- Formation and strengthening of women's SHGs.
- Skills development in crab fattening, palm-leaf handicrafts, tailoring, agroforestry, and other locally appropriate livelihood activities.
- Support for women's entrepreneurship, access to markets, and collective enterprises.
- Financial literacy, savings, responsible access to credit, and business management training.
- Leadership development and participation in livelihood-related decision-making.
- Access to relevant government schemes, technical support, and institutional linkages.

Participation shall be voluntary, and women shall retain control over their personal decisions and income. MFI shall seek to avoid interventions that increase women's workload without corresponding benefits or support.

7.2 Gender-Responsive Environmental Conservation

MFI recognises that women and men may have different roles, knowledge, responsibilities, and experiences in relation to coastal ecosystems, fisheries, agriculture, and natural resources.

MFI shall endeavour to:

- Involve women in mangrove restoration, nursery management, biodiversity conservation, lake restoration, and community monitoring.
- Recognise and value women's traditional and local ecological knowledge.
- Facilitate women's participation in village-level conservation committees and project consultations.
- Ensure that project-related livelihood opportunities are communicated transparently and are accessible without unjustified gender-based restrictions.

- Assess how conservation activities affect women's and men's livelihoods, access to resources, safety, and workload.
- Encourage women's representation in decisions concerning natural resource management and climate resilience.

7.3 Equitable Access to Training and Project Benefits

MFI shall promote transparent beneficiary selection and fair access to project resources, training, livelihood support, and other benefits.

The organisation shall endeavour to ensure that:

- Eligibility criteria are communicated clearly.
- Women and marginalised groups are informed about available opportunities.
- Training schedules and locations take account of accessibility, safety, and caregiving constraints where practicable.
- Participation is not restricted by discriminatory social norms or practices.
- Beneficiary selection is documented in accordance with project requirements.
- Complaints regarding exclusion or unfair treatment can be raised without fear of retaliation.

7.4 Education, Youth Development, and Community Awareness

MFI shall promote gender-sensitive environmental education and community learning.

Activities may include awareness sessions on gender equality, environmental stewardship, leadership, life skills, and equal opportunities for girls and boys.

All child-related activities shall follow appropriate child safeguarding procedures, age-appropriate participation practices, and applicable legal requirements.

7.5 Inclusive Community Participation

MFI shall encourage the participation of women and underrepresented groups in community meetings, consultations, and project reviews.

Where appropriate, MFI may facilitate separate consultations or focus group discussions to enable participants to express their views freely and safely.

Community participation shall be respectful, accessible, and voluntary, with reasonable efforts to accommodate language, mobility, safety, and other relevant needs.

8. Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse

MFI shall adopt a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, abuse, and retaliation in connection with its workplace and programmes.

Sexual harassment and related misconduct may include unwelcome sexual advances, sexually coloured remarks, inappropriate touching, requests for sexual favours, sexually explicit communications, and other prohibited conduct under applicable law.

MFI shall:

- Communicate expected standards of behaviour to employees, volunteers, and relevant partners.
- Provide accessible and confidential reporting channels.
- Respond promptly, impartially, and sensitively to complaints.
- Protect complainants and other participants from retaliation.
- Maintain confidentiality to the extent permitted by law and necessary for a fair process.
- Refer matters to appropriate authorities where required by law.
- Take proportionate disciplinary or contractual action when misconduct is established.

Legal Compliance

MFI shall comply with applicable Indian laws relating to workplace equality, sexual harassment, maternity benefits, child protection, and other relevant protections, as amended from time to time.

In particular, MFI shall comply with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, and applicable rules.

Where the law requires an Internal Committee, MFI shall constitute it in accordance with the prescribed requirements. Where an Internal Committee is not legally required, MFI shall establish an appropriate mechanism and facilitate access to the competent Local Committee or other legally designated authority, as applicable.

Complaints shall be handled through the legally prescribed process wherever required. This policy does not replace statutory complaint procedures or the rights of any person under applicable law.

9. Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting

MFI shall endeavour to integrate gender considerations into programme planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation.

Depending on the nature and funding requirements of a project, this may include:

- Identifying the different needs and priorities of women, men, girls, boys, and other relevant groups.
- Setting measurable gender-related objectives and indicators.
- Allocating appropriate resources for women's participation, skills development, accessibility, safety, and leadership.
- Assessing potential gender-related risks before project implementation.
- Reviewing whether programme resources and benefits reach intended participants equitably.

- Incorporating gender-related outcomes into project reports and donor reporting, where applicable.

Gender-responsive budgeting shall be proportionate to the size, objectives, resources, and context of each programme.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

10.1 Governing Body / Board of Trustees

The Governing Body shall:

- Approve the policy and provide overall oversight.
- Promote organisational accountability for gender equity.
- Review significant implementation issues and progress reports.
- Ensure that appropriate resources and responsibilities are assigned.

10.2 Management

MFI management shall:

- Translate the policy into operational procedures.
- Ensure that staff and relevant stakeholders are informed of its requirements.
- Integrate gender considerations into project proposals, budgets, and implementation plans.
- Address identified gaps and support corrective action.

10.3 Gender Focal Person

MFI shall designate a Gender Focal Person or an equivalent responsible officer to:

- Coordinate implementation of the policy.
- Support gender-sensitive planning and training.
- Maintain appropriate records of activities and indicators.
- Facilitate access to grievance mechanisms.
- Compile periodic progress updates and recommend improvements.

The Gender Focal Person shall not replace or interfere with the functions of a legally constituted Internal Committee or other competent complaint-handling authority.

10.4 Employees, Volunteers, and Field Staff

All personnel shall:

- Follow the policy and applicable codes of conduct.
- Treat colleagues and community members with dignity and respect.
- Participate in relevant awareness and capacity-building activities.

- Report concerns through designated channels.
- Avoid discriminatory behaviour and misuse of organisational authority.

10.5 Project Partners and Community Institutions

MFI shall encourage partners, SHGs, community groups, and implementing institutions to adopt gender-sensitive practices consistent with this policy and applicable law.

Relevant expectations may be included in partnership agreements, project guidelines, and codes of conduct.

11. Grievance Redressal Mechanism

MFI shall establish accessible procedures for receiving, reviewing, and resolving complaints related to discrimination, exclusion, harassment, or violations of this policy.

Complaints may be raised through the designated Gender Focal Person, authorised management representative, or other formally designated channel. Statutory complaints shall be directed to the appropriate committee or authority as required by law.

The grievance mechanism shall:

- Provide clear information on how and where to submit a complaint.
- Allow complaints to be made without discrimination or intimidation.
- Protect confidentiality and personal information as far as practicable and legally permissible.
- Ensure impartial assessment and a fair opportunity for relevant parties to be heard.
- Establish appropriate timelines and communicate the outcome through suitable channels.
- Provide protection against retaliation for reporting a concern in good faith.
- Maintain secure records and restrict access to authorised persons.

Anonymous complaints may be considered where sufficient information is available to assess the concern fairly. MFI shall not require complainants to confront the person complained against or participate in mediation where such a process would be inappropriate or inconsistent with applicable law.

12. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting

MFI shall monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this policy through periodic reviews and appropriate gender-disaggregated data.

Subject to privacy, consent, project requirements, and applicable law, monitoring indicators may include:

- Representation of women in staff, leadership, and decision-making roles.
- Participation of women in SHGs, training programmes, and livelihood initiatives.

- Access to livelihood opportunities, technical support, and enterprise development.
- Women's participation in conservation committees and community consultations.
- Number and type of gender sensitisation activities conducted.
- Staff and stakeholder awareness of reporting and grievance procedures.
- Progress in addressing identified barriers to participation and inclusion.
- Implementation of corrective actions arising from reviews.

MFI shall use monitoring findings to improve programme design, strengthen inclusion, and inform organisational decision-making.

Personal information and sensitive complaint records shall not be disclosed in public reports in a manner that identifies individuals without a lawful basis.

13. Capacity Building and Communication

MFI shall communicate this policy to relevant employees, volunteers, project partners, and community stakeholders in an accessible manner.

Where feasible, the policy or a summary of its key provisions shall be made available in languages understood by the communities with which MFI works.

Gender sensitisation and awareness activities may be incorporated into staff induction, project orientation, SHG training, community consultations, and partner engagement.

14. Non-Compliance and Corrective Action

Violations of this policy may result in appropriate corrective or disciplinary action, consistent with applicable law, contractual obligations, organisational procedures, and principles of fairness.

Depending on the circumstances, measures may include counselling, additional training, formal warnings, changes to work arrangements, disciplinary proceedings, termination of engagement, or referral to competent authorities.

No individual shall be penalised solely for raising a concern in good faith or participating honestly in an authorised investigation.

15. Review and Amendment

This policy shall be reviewed at least once every three years, or earlier when required by changes in law, organisational priorities, programme needs, or monitoring findings.

Amendments shall be approved by the Governing Body or another authority formally authorised by MFI.

16. Approval and Adoption

This Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Policy is adopted by Mangrove Foundation of India to guide its organisational practices, programme implementation, partnerships, and community engagement.

All relevant personnel and stakeholders are expected to support the implementation of this policy within their respective roles and responsibilities.



Mr .Meerasa
Founder & Director, MFI