

# Gender Policy

## I. A Brief about Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre

Accion Fraterna (AF), Anantapur was founded by Father Vincent Ferrer in 1982. Since then, Accion Fraterna has been working towards people's empowerment through drought management, environmental sustainability and policy advocacy. Major interventions have been soil and moisture conservation, rain water harvesting, horticulture, rain-fed agronomical practices, bio-gas and people's institution development. Over the years, AF has made a substantial contribution to increasing the land productivity and improving the conditions of drought hit farmers in the district, as also through creating a favourable and enabling policy environment for a people centered watershed development approach at the State level.

Presently, AF's work area comprises of 230 habitations in 8 mandals (out of 63) in Anantapur district, which consist of Rappthadu, Dharamavaram, Atmakur, Kuderu, Kalyandurg, Beluguppa, Settur and Kundurpi. It reaches out to a total of about 60,000 families or a population of 3.5 lakh in these 230 habitations. AF's focus is on enhancing the quality of life of resource poor farmer-and-farm-labor families through promoting:

- a) Sustainable agriculture
- b) Sustainable diversified livelihoods, particularly for women
- c) Alternate skill based employment for under educated youth
- d) Access to basic services
- e) Advocacy for pro-poor policies

This is being achieved through community based organizations, (CBOs) adopting a participatory approach encompassing social and gender equity. This commitment of the organization reflects in its vision statement given below.

### AF's Vision

- Every farmer/farm labourer leads a respectable life with social equity, gender equity and human dignity, in an atmosphere of democracy and peace.
- People and nature live in harmony with each other showing due care for sustainable environment and bio-diversity.

## II. Situation Analysis

Anantapur, located in southern Andhra Pradesh (AP), is one of the poorest districts of the country. The district has a population of 3.7 million or about 800,000 families. About 20% of the population comprises of Dalits and Tribals, and 60% consists of other backward communities. 75% of people are living in the rural areas. They have an average land holding of a meager 5 acres and are dependent on rain-fed agriculture and farm labor for their livelihoods. Anantapur, being chronically drought-prone, rainfed agriculture is a losing gamble with about only 3 normal crops in 10 years resulting in perpetual poverty and a vicious cycle of indebtedness. The farming community is in severe distress, which is manifested in malnutrition, illiteracy, illness, deprivation and caste and gender based discrimination.

As per the Human Development Report of India, prepared and published by the Planning Commission of India in 2001, with regards to the Human Development Index (HDI) Andhra Pradesh ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the country. Whereas within the state, amongst the 23 districts, Anantapur ranks at number 20 on both HDI and Human Poverty Index (HPI) and lags behind in terms of indicators that reflect human development (per capita district domestic product, adult literacy rate, life expectancy, IMR, access to basic amenities, etc).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) is the third important index, that takes into account the inequalities in achievement between women and men using the same dimensions and variables as the HDI does. On this parameter, the district ranks at number 19. In terms of the Gender Empowerment Measurement Index (GEMI), Anantapur ranks 17<sup>th</sup> among 23 districts. This indicates that women in Anantapur district are at a greater disadvantage with regards to the three indicators i.e. percentage of women representatives elected in local body elections, rate of violence against women and child sex ratio. (Source: *Andhra Pradesh Human Development Report 2007*)

The sex ratio of Andhra Pradesh has improved by six points in the past decade from 972 in 1991 to 978 in 2001 and is far better than that of the country. However, the sex ratio of Anantapur district at 958 is lower than that of the state. The table below shows the difference in sex ratio for all the 8 mandals of the project area that Accion Fraterna works in. It is evident from this table that in terms of literacy, women in all the mandals of the district are far behind men.

Mandal	Sex Ratio	Male Literacy Rate (%)	Female Literacy Rate (%)	Total Literacy (%)
Anantapur	958	81	63	72
Rapthadu	920	68	42	56
Kudair	946	63	40	52
Dharmavaram	955	70	47	59
Kalyandurg	964	68	46	58
Beluguppa	956	68	41	55
Kundurpi	952	64	39	52
Settur	964	63	38	51
Atmakur	940	67	44	56

Source: *Handbook of Statistics–2004-2005, Chief Planning Officer, Anantapur District.*

All the farmers in the district have shifted from subsistence agriculture to commercial cropping. 80% of the cultivated area is red gravelly soils and all the farmers with red soils have switched to mono-cropping of ground nut under rain-fed conditions. It has reduced the soil productivity and increased the outbreak of pests and diseases. The traditional subsistence diversified food crops, like coarse cereals, millets and pulses, which are important for food and nutritional security at the farm household level have gradually all been displaced by one cash crop. Additionally, rapid degradation of forest cover has also worsened the negative consequences for women who have to provide for food, fuel wood, fodder and water.

The recurring droughts, and crop failures are creating distress and a sense of hopelessness among the farmers. During 1999-2004, about 500 farmers in the district (highest number in the country), committed suicide – leaving women alone to cope with the situation.

For a majority of landless, small and even medium farmer families, especially women, the main source of income in drought years and otherwise is wage labor in agriculture. Though the wages paid to the agriculture labor have increased over time (from Rs. 30 per day to Rs. 100 per day), women who spend far more time in agricultural activities than men, are still considered inferior and for similar work are paid about 30% less than men.

In Dharmavaram and other mandals of the district, losses in traditional livelihoods like silk weaving, basket making etc, have also led to specific negative gendered implications for both women and men.

Anantapur district has about 100,000 educated unemployed rural youth in the age group of 18-25 years. Poverty at home and the fact that schools are far away and education is expensive, every year about 25 to 30% rural youth, especially girls, are dropping out of school at the primary level itself. Their education is grossly insufficient to find them any employment in

government or private sector. They have neither the entrepreneurship nor the skills or capital to take up any alternate self-employment.

All the above mentioned economic and capability disadvantages need to be located within an overall context which is patriarchal and unequal. While it is true that often decisions at a household level are taken jointly between the man and the woman, it is also a fact that the man's opinion prevails. Property ownership traditions are in favour of men, and customs of dowry etc ensure that girls are considered a burden. The Gender Empowerment Measurement Index already indicates high violence against women, and anecdotally also, there appears to be an increasing trend over the last few years of girls being forced into trafficking. Taken together, the situation is grim for the women and girls in the district, and concerted efforts need to be made to enable them to attain well-being and equality.

### **III. Concept of Gender & Gender Mainstreaming**

Accion Fraterna (AF) recognizes that while both men and women face deprivation and exploitation of their basic human rights and are vulnerable, in most instances, women face greater vulnerability. Even though women are not a homogenous group and their situation varies with age, caste, class, religion, ethnicity and place of domicile, overall the subordination of women in our society makes them poorer and more vulnerable than men. Women face social and cultural discrimination, have less access to resources, lack in agency and are less likely to be involved and represented in decision-making bodies.

AF believes that any development effort which is not gender sensitive will lead to further marginalization and inequity. In recognition of this, AF strives to address gender issues in all aspects of its functioning. The Gender Policy document of AF is a public statement of its commitment to promote gender equity, and establishes the basis for AF to ensure that gender differences are taken into account and dealt with in relation to the organisation and all its programs.

Gender is a social construct. Gender is largely in the realm of behaviours, attitudes, values and stereotypes that translate into objective realities such as do's, don'ts, roles, skills, choices and power relations. Gender is a culturally acquired specific set of value characteristics that influence and determine the social behavior of women and men and the relationship between them.

The heterogeneity in the social structure in our communities gives rise to multiple facets of gender. Understanding gender issues has to be accompanied by a thorough understanding of the context of its occurrence. Therefore, gender cannot be generalized.

Gender equity is a basic human right. Integrating gender in organizations is not only an equity issue, but restoration of basic human right. It involves not only bringing women and men on board but goes beyond numbers to more substantive or qualitative issues of changes in gender relations. Hence, integrating gender needs to be process-oriented with an action-reflection-learning cycle.

Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions and opportunities to realize and fulfill their full human potential, participate in and contribute to the political, social, economic and cultural development processes. However, gender analysis reveals that providing equal opportunities for women and men does not necessarily yield equal results, and that different treatment of women and men may sometimes be required to achieve sameness of results.

#### **IV. Goal and Objectives of AF's Gender Policy**

##### **Goal**

The goal of Accion Fraterna's Gender Policy is to promote the development of a democratic and peaceful society, in which women and men enjoy equal conditions, opportunities and rights, and become active partners in the process of development.

##### **Objectives**

- Empower women and girls to realize their full potential as human beings and as agents in development.
- Enhance women's, men's, girls' and boys' equal participation in planning implementation and benefit sharing in all policies and programs supported by Accion Fraterna.
- Establish a gender sensitive culture, promoting values such as participation, team work, transparency, concern, mutual support, accountability and fairness within the organisation and the communities supported by AF.
- Create a gender voice in society and a voice against all forms of discrimination, domination and violence, and build public opinion in favour of an enabling and gender sensitive policy environment.

#### **V. Mechanisms and Structures for Mainstreaming Gender**

AF's vision and mission places emphasis on social equity between all people, with gender equality and equity being one of the important values that it strives to mainstream in institutional structures, processes, and programs. AF also recognizes that in all spheres and parameters of development, women are far behind men and that along with mainstreaming gender in all its practices and programs it is equally important to facilitate women specific projects/interventions that will address women's concerns and ensure their empowered participation. **AF thus follows a twin track strategy, comprising of the following two components:**

- **Specific activities aimed at women's empowerment.**
- **Integration of women's and men's concerns, needs and interests throughout the development process (in all its policies and programs).**

Towards this end, AF's Gender Policy lays down guidelines for action at both the organizational and programmatic levels.

##### **(A) ORGANIZATION LEVEL**

- i. **Diversity** - Accion Fraterna has about 100 competent and committed staff members. AF considers them as its principal resource. A look at the gender balance of staff shows that AF has 16% women on its rolls. At the field level there are about 36% women, which is indeed very good, though the ratio is still weak at senior management level. This profile has to be looked at in a historical perspective. Up to 2002, AF was part of RDT (known as Ecology Sector), with a focus on only watershed development. RDT's structure was sector based with a separate women sector, where only women staff worked. The nature of the job was different in watershed development and it required staff to work strenuously in open fields during the harsh summers also. Women coming into RDT mostly chose other sectors and the Ecology Sector remained largely male. After 2002, once AF became an autonomous organization, it started working on correcting this imbalance.

AF's location has also been a handicap in this matter. Anantapur is one of the most backward districts of Andhra Pradesh, and its remoteness means that few women from outside want to come and work here.

However, AF is committed to improving the gender balance at all levels in the organization.

- **Equal Opportunities** – Accion Fraterna is an equal opportunity employer – it encourages women candidates to apply for all its posts and does not discriminate on the grounds of marital status, pregnancy, caste, class, religion or disability.
- **Preference for women in case of equal scores in selections** – During recruitment process if two more candidates are found scoring equal points (for the same post), then the woman candidate will be automatically preferred.
- **Reservation of positions for women** – To achieve gender balanced representation of women and men, the organisation has reserved 50% positions at Field Coordinators level for women only. Such reserved positions will not be filled up by men. In order to maintain the 50% women ratio, over induction of women may also be done.
- **Policy of internal promotion and relaxation only to attract women candidates** – AF follows a policy of internal promotions for filling up vacancies at higher levels. The only exception to this policy is when there are suitable woman candidate from outside, then the promotion is opened up only for external women candidates. AF has also proactively promoted women within the organisation as Area Team Leaders (ATOs) and has taken steps to build their capacities for these leadership roles.

ii. **Staff Policies**

Based on AF's understanding of the double burden borne by women who work outside their homes, and of the responsibility to create safe and enabling work spaces for women, AF will develop staff policies which will support women on both these dimensions. Some examples of such enabling policies include preferential consideration for single women, for housing on campus, provision of flexible hours of work for women staff, especially for expecting and young mothers, arranging transport for women staff for work related travel at night, hiring of couples as staff and making efforts to place them at the same location, maternity and paternity leave, etc. This is only indicative, and these policies will be developed to keep pace with changing societal and organisational realities.

AF is committed to formulating and adopting a sexual harassment redressal policy. It is also working on incorporating gender sensitivity indicators in its overall performance review of staff. AF will continue to invest in building staff understanding and capacities on gender issues. Towards this end, Accion Fraterna will organize gender trainings for all its staff members (women & men) at regular intervals, to build gender perspective and in order to weave in gender concerns into planning, implementation and monitoring of programs.

iii. **AF Women Team**

AF has created a forum and a space for all women working in AF called the AF Women Team. The objectives of the Women Team are a) to build solidarity and cooperation between the women staff, b) to provide a forum to share their problems at work and at home; and to take up action on these in consultation with AF administration, c) to suggest gender sensitive policies and procedures to AF, d) to suggest gender sensitive interventions in programmes and in the CBOs, e) to identify training needs of women staff, and f) to interface with RDT's Women Core Team

(WCT) for mutual support and learning. The women team meets once in a month for one full day. The Director or any other staff will attend only on their invitation.

**iv. Gender specialist**

Accion Fraterna will try to induct a full time or part time Gender focal point person to support gender integration within AF. Gender focal person (a woman) will be responsible for providing inputs for proactive gender policies within AF and in its programmes, for monitoring gender initiatives, and for organising gender sensitisation opportunities for staff and people at various levels. She will also work towards enabling procurement, development and dissemination of reading/reference material related to gender issues. The organisation will establish a core team in each Mandal to support gender mainstreaming in all the programs. Further, the Gender focal person will facilitate the empowerment of AF Women Team through capacity building, promoting systems of conflict resolution, and grievance redressal within AF.

**v. Governance**

The Governance structure of AF has two bodies. The first one is the Board of Trustees (BoT) and the second is the Executive Committee (Core Team) headed by the Director. While the BoT is the highest policy making body and legal entity, the Executive Committee is appointed by the BoT and is responsible for execution of the programmes in pursuance of the objectives of BoT. Presently, there are no women members in the BoT. The Executive Committee has three women members out of 10 members. Efforts will be made to invite women to the AF Board of Trustees, as Trustees or special invitees, in order to create a gender balance. Efforts will also be made to arrive at greater gender parity within the Executive Committee.

**(B) PROGRAM LEVEL**

**i. Sustainable Agriculture**

The two broad objectives of the sustainable agriculture program of AF are:

- Protecting the small farmers by making their farming viable.
- Promoting sustainable agriculture which is low cost, low external input and eco-friendly, through Sasyamithra Groups and their Samakhya.

These village institutions and the sustainable agriculture program focus on addressing the concerns of women farmers for growing various food crops by promoting mixed and border crops, intercrops, trap crops and vegetables. The program will continually review its interventions from the point of being relevant to women and improving their well being and position within household and society.

Some specific steps (indicative) towards gender equality being family twin membership and equal participation for women and men in CBOs both at General Body and at the Executive Body level, facilitating participation of equal number of women and men in Farmers Field Schools (FFS) thus providing equal opportunities for learning, skill building and participation in decision making on agriculture matters, village level Seed Banks managed by a sub-committee comprising of equal women and men, thus ensuring access and control of women on seeds and choice of crops, and as a policy, cash payments in any of the interventions carried out for the target families by AF exclusively made to women only. AF, through the Sasyamithra Groups and their Samakhya, will also continue to work for equal wages to be given to women and men.

AF will periodically keep conducting gender analysis of its sustainable agriculture program to further understand the concerns and priorities of women and men and re-strategize its interventions to address them.

**ii. Women Initiatives and Sustainable Non-Farm Rural Livelihoods**

The sustainable rural livelihoods support program of AF adopts a “women centric approach” and aims at diversifying the family livelihood base by enabling women to take up viable off-farm and non-farm income generation activities (IGAs). AF will organize & support interventions for enhancing women’s awareness and building their capacities in identifying viable income generation activities, preparing proposals, establishing market linkages and skill-building. AF will strive to strengthen women’s role in household and market economy by promoting revival of traditional livelihood activities like sari weaving, mat making, and basket weaving etc.

AF will provide opportunities for gender centric and women led activities like Women’s Day Celebrations, Ecology Days and also explore creation of new spaces for women to organize, learn from each other and to collectively voice their needs, priorities and issues.

AF has ensured equal representation of women in all village level institutions and as office bearers. Further, it will organize trainings for women leaders in leadership development and management of resources and governance. Efforts will also be directed at developing deeper understanding and awareness among the women members on gender discrimination (declining adult and child sex ratio, domestic violence, reproductive and sexual health etc.). Based on the understanding, periodic reviews of strategies to address structural and social issues affecting women’s subordination will be conducted.

**iii. Skill-building for girls**

Accion Fraterna has initiated a program for rural youth for skill development, which can help them to get employment or self employed. AF has started courses in driving, motor re-winding, hospitality services, customer relations, garment making and information technology enabled services. AF will strive to enhance the inclusion of girls in all these training programmes. Special efforts and provisions will be made to enable more girls to make use of these opportunities – like fee concessions, travel passes, hostel facilities, preferential selections etc. At present only boys are enrolled in driving and house wiring and motor winding course. Breaking the gender stereotypes, AF will strive to motivate girls to take up admission in these courses.

AF provides support services for placement of the trained youth particularly girls and acts as a liaison between employers and the trained youth. AF will conduct follow up visits to the companies and ensure safe and supportive work environment for the youth, especially for girls.

Skill-building trainings will provide an opportunity to create awareness and impart information on relevant issues like gender, early marriage, early pregnancy, reproductive and sexual health and other gender related issues etc. AF will equip the trainees with knowledge and skills on the above issues.

**iv. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**

MGNREGA is being implemented in all the 230 villages in 8 mandals of Accion Fraterna’s project area. AF collaborates with the government in enabling proper implementation of the scheme. Besides creating widespread awareness amongst women and men with regards to the rights of labour under the scheme and its provisions, AF will also lobby on the inadequacies in policy, procedures and in actual implementation, particularly with respect to women workers under MGNREGA. For example, it is observed that nursing mothers and single women

are at a disadvantage under the present scheme. Focused efforts will be made towards setting up of work-place crèches and other enabling facilities for nursing mothers and single women.

**v. Project Monitoring & Evaluation (PME)**

- The PME team will work towards creating and strengthening forums for enabling women's participation in the organization and in its programs.
- Accion Fraterna will make allocation of resources for mainstreaming gender in all its policies and programs.
- Research, studies on gender related issues like that of declining child sex ratio, women's land rights etc. will be conducted to develop deeper understanding and to incorporate learnings into AFs strategies and interventions.
- Accion Fraterna will identify gender related issues and networks working on these issues, for networking, cross learning, joint effort, policy advocacy and lobbying.
- Wherever feasible, AF will develop gender specific indicators and will generate gender disaggregated data (both quantitative and qualitative).
- The PME team will conduct review of the gender policy of the organization at regular intervals.

**VI. Conclusion**

The gender policy document of AF is intended to be a set of principles and policies to guide the organization's work on institutionalizing gender concerns. The promotion of gender equality, social equity and empowerment of women is part and parcel of AFs vision, mission and strategic priorities. Thus AF will continue with its proactive efforts at re-ordering gender relations between women and men. Besides making efforts at integration of women's and men's concerns in all its programs and policies, AF will create spaces for women to realize their full potential as human beings so that they may act as equal and valued partners in the development of their communities.

Accion Fraterna understands that mainstreaming gender in the organisation will be a continuous process and is committed to making efforts to bring about changes in perceptions, values and attitudes, at both organisational and personal level.