



**RIGHTS INSITUTE FOR SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT- RISE**

**GENDER POLICY**

**JUNE, 2016**

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# 1. RATIONALE

The Rights Institute for Social Empowerment (RISE) is committed to working towards the empowerment of all self-identifying women and seeks to incorporate gender equity in all areas of our work. The Government of Malawi has ratified numerous international human rights conventions such as CEDAW, CRC, Vienna Declaration of Human Rights and various declarations that affirm the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and equality. Section 20 of the Constitution of Malawi prohibits discrimination. Section 20(1) of the Constitution provides that: *“Discrimination of persons in any form is prohibited and all persons are, under any law, guaranteed equal and effective protection against discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status.”* Special recognition of children (ss. 13(h), 23), women (ss. 13(a), 24), the disabled (s. 13(g)), the elderly (s. 13(j)) is found within the Constitution.

However, the capacity of Government institutions to ensure equality is limited across the profile of the society. Cases of the gender-based violence (GBV) both reported and unreported continue to rise. Women and children especially the girl child, continue to be the main victims of GBV while men and boys are the major perpetrators. It is against this background that in the Malawi National Gender Policy and the National Gender Programme which Government approved in 2000 and 2004 respectively, GBV has been recognized as a severe set-back to poverty reduction.

GBV is a human rights issue as it impinges on the sanctity of human nature. In the context of Malawi, GBV has been defined as any unlawful act perpetrated by a person against another person on the basis of their sex that causes suffering on the part of the victim and results in among others physical, psychological, and emotional harm or economic deprivation<sup>1</sup>. We recognize that gender inequality is a major cause and effect of the high prevalence of HIV in Malawi, as 58% of all persons living with HIV are female (UN Country Assessment: Malawi, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Malawi, 2002. National Strategy to Combat Gender Based Violence.

Discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality continues to be prevalent in Malawi in terms of legal, social and economic rights. A basis for this discrimination stems from gender roles and norms enforced by society's institutions and practices.

Unequal socio-economic status based on gender greatly contributes to the higher rate of HIV infection among women as compared to men. Women's vulnerability to HIV is influenced by socio-cultural norms that enforce a woman's economic dependence on their male partners or male family members. This dependence also affects a woman's ability to access resources and health services to cope with the impact of HIV/AIDS. As a result of this power dynamic women lack a level of control in various aspects of their sexual lives (i.e. their ability to negotiate the timing of sex, the conditions under which it takes place, and the use of condoms) which further enhances their vulnerability to HIV infection.

RISE believes that by implementing this Gender Policy we will better be able to reach our goal of reducing gender based violence and promote empowerment of women in Malawi.

## **2.0. POLICY FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. POLITICAL COMMITMENT/PRINCIPLES**

- Women are disproportionately affected by the HIV epidemic
- Achieving gender equality remains crucial in ending the spread of HIV and insuring equitable access to health resources to cope with its impact.
- We acknowledge that women are not a homogenous group and that gender discrimination is influenced by other oppressions which are based on class, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age and nationality.
- An individual's social location determines the extent to which they will be vulnerable to HIV, as well as their ability to access prevention, treatment and care

services, resources, and participation in decision making. Their social location also determines the extent to which they will be able to cope economically and socially with the burden of living with HIV.

- We understand that gender inequality arises from and is sustained through social institutions
- We will work to raise awareness of the importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women as a means of reducing the prevalence of HIV.
- We have zero tolerance for gender-based violence. We will advocate to have rape and sexual assault within marriage be acknowledged on an legal and social level
  - o Without this law, it only enforces and upholds the lack of control women are afforded over their bodies and their ability to control their sexual lives. This includes not being able to negotiate condom use.
- We understand that gender equality is everyone's responsibility and it is critical in reducing the spread of HIV.

## **2.2. AREAS OF ACTION/PROGRAM GOALS**

Gender is not solely a separate issue that should be reported on in isolation; rather, a gender analysis should be integrated into all program designs and monitoring plans.

- Identify additional areas of improvement and opportunities in RISE operations to improve the protection of women and girls.
- We will advocate for gender equity.
- Use community feedback to tailor our programs to the unique needs of women and girls.
- We will promote a stronger understanding of the links between gender and HIV.

## **2.3. INSTITUTIONAL AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

At RISE we strive to strengthen and maintain an institutional environment that supports and encourages gender equality and aims to set an example as an organization that incorporates gender mainstreaming.

- Ensure equal opportunity for career development for all staff no matter their gender
- Actively promote our commitment to gender equity through recruitment, selection, induction and appraisal processes
- All staff will have equal access to general leave and benefits. Female staff are given a paid maternity leave of 90 days.
- All staff will have the same level of salary structure at the same grade
- We will challenge language that normalizes women's oppression and reinforces sexist and patriarchal stereotypes
- We will avoid using negative stereotyped images of women and girls in fundraising and promotional materials
- All staff members' voices will be given an equitable amount of space at meetings and during the decision making process
- Ensure an environment free from sexual harassment and implement a system where staff can report sexual harassment in the workplace in written form

## **2.4. IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

The implementation of the Gender Policy will require the commitment, contribution and participation of every staff member at RISE.

- The Executive Director will be responsible for ensuring the implementation of the policy by all staff members and in all programs and monitoring and evaluation
- Ensure that all staff understand the gender policy and have the appropriate tools to implement it in all aspects of their work
- Provide awareness on recent gender issues to all staff
- Review the gender policy annually to ensure it is relevant and reflects the current progressive debates on gender equality and women's rights
- Incorporate gender sensitivity as one component of staff performance evaluation
- Create and implement all programs with a gender-sensitive perspective. When developing programs we will take into consideration and analyse the following:
  - o Gender roles and norms;
  - o The level of access to and control over resources according to gender;
  - o Decision-making power allotted to each gender;

- The respective needs of each gender;
- The power dynamic between genders.

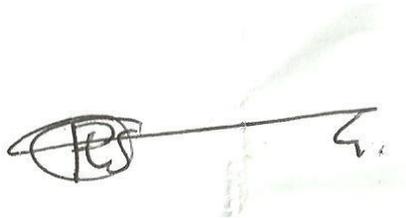
The policy will be reviewed from time to time to suit with the current gender environment and growth of the organization

THIS POLICY IS HEREBY APPROVED AND ENDORSED BY THE RISE  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES HEREUNDER SIGNED:

Name: Mr. Peter L.S Chikakula

Position: Board of Trustees Vice Chairperson

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'P' and 'S' followed by a long horizontal line and a small flourish at the end.