

GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GEDSI) POLICY

Version	01		
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INTRODUCTION

At Palms Australia, we are committed to fostering diversity and inclusion across all facets of our organisation. We recognise and embrace individuals of various genders, ages, disabilities, cultural backgrounds, linguistic diversity, and sexual orientations. We believe that inclusivity, diversity, and equality are not only integral to upholding human rights but also serve as catalysts for poverty reduction and the promotion of a just, sustainable, interdependent, and peaceful world.

This policy delineates Palms Australia's dedication to realising these values within our internal structures and throughout our programmatic endeavours.

To achieve this goal, we must understand the ways in which people can be affected by (often intersecting) drivers of marginalisation and exclusion and commit ourselves to adopting approaches and strategies to overcome these drivers. As an organisation that works in partnership, Palms Australia understands that the responsibility for addressing inequalities and inclusion issues is shared by both Palms Australia and its partners.

DEFINITIONS

Disability: In line with the definition used in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)¹, the term, 'persons with disabilities' includes those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Of key importance to the conceptualisation of disability set out in the CRPD is the understanding that experience of disability arises not from *impairments* (i.e. problems in body functions or structures) alone, but from the interaction between a person's *impairment* and the *barriers* they have to full participation in their community on an equal basis of others². The experience of disability is diverse. A broad range of types and degrees of impairment interact with a range of environmental factors, as well as other factors such as gender and age. This means that no two people with disabilities are likely to have the same experience.

Understanding of and responses to disability have changed throughout time and across contexts. The rights-based approach encapsulated in the CRPD is now commonly accepted internationally however other approaches are still prevalent in communities around the world and may impact on how communities treat people with disabilities.

¹ <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

² Plan and CBM (2015) *Practice Note: Collecting and Using Data to Inform Disability Inclusive Development*

Exclusion: Exclusion is a process by which people are isolated or segregated from benefiting from services or opportunities being offered to others due to the diversity they present.

Gender: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a society considers appropriate for a person based on his or her assigned sex at birth. Gender roles are dynamic and change over time. The term sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals.

Gender-based Discrimination: The situation where there is a bias based on a person's sex or gender that leads to defining the role he/she should play in society. An example of gender discrimination is where a woman is paid less than a man would be paid, solely on the basis of being female.

Equality: Equality is about equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for all people. It does not mean that everyone is the same. Inequality is a result of unequal power distribution between people, exacerbated by ongoing discrimination, weaknesses in laws, policies and institutions, and social relations that normalise inequality.

Gendered Violence: Gendered violence is an expression of power or control over individuals or groups because of their gender. Gendered violence includes domestic, family and sexual violence, sexual harassment and assault, stalking, intimate partner violence and violence amongst household and workplace members.

LGBTQIA+: This is an evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual.

Inclusion: Is the way an organisation's culture, values, workplaces and behaviours make a person feel valued, included and able to participate fully. It relates to a work environment where all people are treated fairly and respectfully, with equality of opportunity.

Disability Inclusion: is the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion of their rights, and the consideration of disability-related perspectives, in compliance with the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Disability inclusion within development is mandated by Article 32 of the CRPD, which states that development programs should be "inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities". Disability inclusion encompasses both the *processes* and *outcomes* of activities. It aims to ensure that:

- People with disabilities participate in the project or activity in the same way as other members of the community; and
- People with disabilities benefit equally from the project or activity.

Palms Australia will adopt a twin track approach (see Figure 1) to disability inclusion. This includes:

- Disability mainstreaming initiatives which are activities designed to ensure that all development activities include a disability perspective and are fully accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities.
- Disability specific initiatives which are activities specifically targeted at people with disabilities, to increase their empowerment and participation.

Figure 1: Examples of the twin track approach within Palms Australia programs



BACKGROUND

People face exclusion and marginalisation due to various forms of discrimination, which may overlap. These include race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class, or socio-economic status.

People experiencing discrimination based on these factors encounter specific obstacles to engaging in social and economic endeavours, leading to consistently poorer outcomes compared to others in their communities. Their exclusion persists due to factors such as a lack of understanding or respect for human rights regardless of identity, exclusion from decision-making processes regarding their concerns, reluctance, or incapacity to challenge entrenched stereotypes, and failure to recognise and address societal power imbalances.

Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity³. Palms Australia is committed to promoting social inclusion as a powerful means of reducing poverty and we centre our inclusion approach on gender equality, disability inclusion and cultural diversity.

Despite decades of international efforts attempting to address issues of gender inequality globally, women continue to experience greater disadvantage than men in accessing opportunities which is in direct violation of their human rights. This is also true of people identifying as LGBTQI+.

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion> and [United Nations. Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development, 2016.](#)

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all of Palms Australia's activities. All Palms Australia employees, global program and office volunteers, Board Members, contractors, and partner organisation staff are required to read and be familiar with this Policy.

POLICY

Palms Australia is committed to:

- Upholding and advocating for the human rights of all individuals, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class, or socio-economic status.
- Ensuring the inclusion and representation of vulnerable individuals and those impacted by intersecting forms of marginalisation and exclusion in our activities; and
- Integrating these principles in our work through an intersectional approach which acknowledges and addresses the complex and interconnected nature of discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion experienced by individuals.

In this context, this Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Policy aims to ensure that Palms Australia undertakes its work through the lens of gender equality and social inclusion to:

- Empower women and advance gender equality;
- Empower people with disabilities and promote their human rights so they can achieve economic self-sufficiency, freedom, choice and dignity;
- Protect and promote the rights and support the reintegration efforts of internally displaced persons; and
- Ensure that other vulnerable groups are identified and included in Palms Australia's development efforts so that no one is left out.

This Policy aims to do so by:

1. Setting out our understanding of how marginalisation and exclusion impacts our work;
2. Establishing guiding principles on GEDSI so that we can make decisions and take actions that are consistent with our commitment to GEDSI; and
3. Developing our approach to incorporating GEDSI considerations in all our development work and across all aspects of our organisation.

WHY IS GEDSI IMPORTANT TO PALMS AUSTRALIA?

Gender

Palms frequently operates within societies where economic resources are predominantly controlled by men, reflecting patriarchal norms. We recognise that discrimination against women and girls is complex and intersects with various aspects of their identities, such as race, disability, non-binary gender identities, age, religion, class, and other factors.

In addition, while women and girls suffer disproportionately from many forms of discrimination, men and boys as well as non-binary gender identities can also be targeted on the grounds of their race, disability, class, age, religion, nationality. Intersectionality emphasises the importance of not looking at any one characteristic in isolation but rather adopting a holistic approach to social inclusion.

By tackling gender inequality within our programs and alongside our Partner Organisations, Palms Australia can help to dismantle harmful stereotypes and biases against women's participation. Moreover, we can confront power imbalances and the culture of discrimination that perpetuates gender-based violence.

Disability Inclusion

It is estimated that 15 per cent of the world's population (approximately 1 billion people) have a disability and that 80 per cent of these people live in developing countries.⁴ Therefore, people with disabilities are likely to be present in any community a volunteer is working in.

There is a clear link between poverty and disability. People with disabilities are often among the poorest of the poor as they have less access to education, skills training, and employment opportunities - opportunities which could otherwise reduce poverty. They are also particularly vulnerable during and after natural disasters and conflict situations. Extreme poverty may cause disability for many reasons including lack of access to adequate nutrition, preventative and curative health care, clean water and sanitation, and unsafe working conditions. Despite this link, people with disabilities are often unintentionally excluded from development programs, simply because those programs are unsure how to include them or unaware that they can have different needs.

Including people with disabilities in development programs is essential to poverty reduction and effective aid⁵ as it can help to break this cycle of poverty and disability.

Furthermore, many activities designed to include people with disabilities also have a broader positive impact on the community and development effectiveness. For example, installing ramps on public buildings will also benefit those who are elderly, have temporary injuries, are pregnant or are accompanied by small children. Similarly, presenting information in a range of formats (e.g. audio and visual) can help make information more accessible to people with low literacy, and take account of different learning styles and personal preferences for accessing information.

In Australia, 17.7 per cent (just under one in five people) report having a disability, representing a substantial target group for recruitment in Palms Australia programs.⁶ Volunteers with disabilities:

- Have the same right to participate as other Australians.
- Have valuable skills and experiences to contribute.
- Can play an important role in changing negative attitudes towards disability within developing countries by showcasing the potential capacity of people with disabilities.

Disability inclusive development is also important in supporting efforts to meet [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) which emphasise the importance of ensuring no one is left behind by development efforts and include specific targets related to disability inclusive development⁷.

Many development organisations are aiming to more effectively include people with disabilities in their programs, both as active participants and as beneficiaries, however this rarely happens unintentionally.

⁴ WHO and World Bank (2011), *World Report on Disability*,

⁵ Mitra, S., Posarak, A., & Vick, B. (2013). Disability and poverty in developing countries: A multidimensional study *World Development*, 41, 1-18.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) Disability Ageing and Carers Australia: Summary of Findings

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

⁷ See http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/sdgs/disability_inclusive_sdgs.pdf for an overview of how disability is included in the SDGs

Developing targeted approaches to disability inclusion, and monitoring their effectiveness is critical in ensuring people with disabilities are meaningfully involved.

Social Inclusion

Palms Australia acknowledges that the political and socio-economic histories of each country where we work and partner, both domestically and globally, have moulded existing structures and institutions, contributing to the social exclusion of various groups. By embracing a GEDSI policy, we understand that factors like gender, disability, race, and other aspects of identity leading to social exclusion should not be treated in isolation. Instead, they should be seen as part of a broader context that advocates for equal representation, access, and opportunities for everyone. We strive to navigate the diverse contexts in which we operate with sensitivity, while actively promoting and facilitating dialogue on equality and inclusion.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Palms Australia is guided by the following GEDSI principles which apply in all its decision-making and activities:

We believe everyone has the right to equality and inclusion: All members of society have the equal rights and opportunities to participate as beneficiaries and agents of social and economic development, regardless of their identity. By focusing on these rights in all aspects of our decision-making and activities, we embed GEDSI into our work.

We strive to address the root causes of inequality and marginalisation: Transformative change cannot be achieved by addressing the symptoms of discrimination, but rather, must tackle the root causes of it. This includes gaining a deep understanding of the drivers that cause marginalisation and exclusion, developing specific programs and strategies to overcome them, and challenging norms and stereotypes through our programs, practices, and advocacy.

We include the voices of marginalised groups: In our planning and decision-making, we incorporate the perspectives, experience, knowledge and interests of women and girls, people with disabilities, and other relevant marginalised groups who are impacted by our work.

We understand that each context is unique: Whether it is in our home base in Australia, or the countries where we undertake our development work, we operate in systems with structures that oppress and marginalise certain members of the community in intersecting ways. This means we cannot apply a one-size-fits-all solution, but instead must tailor our focus based on the specific context we are working in to develop GEDSI strategies that are effective in addressing and eliminating the root causes of inequity and exclusion. We do this by consulting with community members at all levels and from diverse backgrounds. In our own organisation we consult across our team to gain awareness of and overcome the barriers that affect people involved in our work.

We collaborate and share: We evaluate our experience and key learnings to improve our GEDSI approach and we share our learning with Partners and other organisations within the development sector so as to contribute to and benefit from the knowledge of best practice within the sector.

We do no harm: At a minimum, Palms Australia's work must not cause discrimination to marginalised groups or reinforce the barriers to participation or negative stereotypes that keep people excluded from

participating in the social and economic life of their communities. We have a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination on any grounds within our organisation.

OUR GEDSI APPROACH

Across our organisation

Palms Australia is committed to promoting Gender Equality, Diversity, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) in all our operations, both domestically and internationally. To achieve this, we will:

1. Advocate for equality and inclusion with partners and decision-makers.
2. Integrate inclusion principles into all aspects of our work and encourage full participation.
3. Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organisation to provide equal employment and volunteering opportunities, removing barriers to participation.
4. Ensure all staff and partners understand and adhere to our Codes of Conduct. Utilise gender and disability inclusive language in our communications, and refrain from using language that reinforces negative stereotypes.
5. Provide opportunities for employees, volunteers, and the board to regularly participate in training on different aspects of social inclusion to align with our inclusion strategies.
6. Maintain a safe workplace, free from discrimination and harassment, with accountability measures in place.
7. Support staff experiencing gendered violence and uphold a zero-tolerance policy.
8. Investigate and address breaches of our equality and inclusion standards promptly.
9. Encouraging participation in all Palms Australia programs from culturally diverse, indigenous, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.
10. Provide opportunities to individuals from those groups, including women and girls, people with disabilities, youth, and minority people groups, to participate in decision-making.

For monitoring, evaluation and review Palms will monitor and evaluate our programs through an equality and inclusion lens.

1. Palms will ensure all equality and inclusion-related materials adhere to guidelines outlined in the Media Relations Policy.
2. We will incorporate measurable Gender Equality, Diversity, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) outcomes and indicators into program monitoring and evaluation, including collecting gender and disability disaggregated data.

Working with partners who share our commitment to GEDSI:

In order to undertake our work with an effective GEDSI focus, we work with partners who share our understanding and commitment to GEDSI and support them in developing their GEDSI approach. This involves:

1. Supporting our partners in assessing and building their own understanding of, and capacity to implement GEDSI in their work where possible.
2. Seeking input from experts and other civil society organisations to identify good practices and solutions for achieving equality and inclusion and looking for opportunities to engage other organisations who may be more able to address needs or issues that are beyond the scope of our organisational strategy or expertise.

We hold ourselves accountable:

Our GEDSI approach will only be effective if we allow for feedback, reflection, and growth. To achieve this, we:

- Provide context appropriate, safe and confidential mechanisms for people to provide feedback and raise concerns or complaints about Palms Australia, its staff, volunteers, or activities, and those of its partners — this is implemented through our Complaint Management Policy and Whistleblowing Policy
- Periodically assess our own GEDSI practice in the organisation, the degree to which the policy is being implemented, and incorporate lessons learned into future policy and strategy design.

NOTE: These are the ACFID requirements that the section above covers off on:

ACFID 1.1.1 Members demonstrate an organisational commitment to human rights.

ACFID 1.2.1 Members demonstrate an organisational commitment to the inclusion and representation of those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by the intersecting drivers of marginalisation and exclusion.

ACFID 2.3.1 Members demonstrate an organisational commitment to gender equality and equity.

ACFID 2.3.2 Members' planning process includes consultation with those marginalised due to their gender, in particular women and girls, contextual analysis of barriers to their inclusion and identification of opportunities for their participation.

ACFID 2.3.3 Members promote opportunities for those marginalised due to their gender, in particular women and girls, to participate in decision-making.

ACFID 2.3.4 Members monitor and evaluate their progress in promoting gender equality and equity.

ACFID 2.4.1 Members demonstrate an organisational commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities.

ACFID 2.4.2 Members' planning process includes consultation with people with disabilities and contextual analysis of the barriers to social inclusion and participation.

ACFID 2.4.3 Members promote opportunities for people with disabilities and/or their representative organisations to participate in decision-making.

ACFID 2.4.4 Members monitor and evaluate their progress in promoting the empowerment of people with disabilities.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Complaint Management Policy

Media Relations Policy

Whistleblower Policy

Codes of Conduct

REVIEW

This policy will be updated every three years, or earlier if required. The updates will align with ACFID guidance, current good practice, and applicable regulatory advice.

VERSION CONTROL

Version Number	Purpose/ Change	Author	Date
01a	New policy, incorporating information from the previous Gender Equity Policy; Safeguarding Vulnerable People: Policy and Code of Conduct; Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness Policy	Jen Wiggins	22 May 2024