

GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

prepared for
ER Development Projects



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1 Background to development of framework

Edmund Rice Development's (ERD) vision is a world where people access opportunities and live free of poverty and injustice. As articulated in its [2023-2025 Strategy](#), Gender Equality is one of the five core commitments of ERD (Gender Equality, Locally-Led Development, Rights-based Approaches, Safeguarding and Collaboration). ERD acknowledges that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a just, peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Therefore, ERD has embarked on a process of consolidating its efforts to promote gender equality through its programmes and development of an ER Gender Equality Framework is a major step in this direction.

In addition, since 2021 ERD has been responsible for the ER global capacity development programme. ERD delivers this programme in collaboration with partners, including Edmund Rice Foundation Australia (ERFA) and the governors of ER development projects globally. As part to this work, the need to build capacity around gender equality was identified as a priority during 2022. Therefore, it is essential that gender equality is understood by the leadership in ER Mission, to ensure informed policy and decision-making throughout ER development projects.

As the first step in building capacity around gender equality, a Gender Training Needs Assessment of ER development projects was undertaken in 2023.

The findings have helped to inform the development of this ER Gender Equality Framework.

The purpose of this document is to outline a broad approach that can be used to promote gender equality in ER projects globally. In the next section, a brief description of the issue is provided. This is followed by an overview of the international commitments to achieve gender equality in section three. Section four provides a summary of the state of world's women highlighting the need for further efforts. Section five provides a summary of approaches being used to promote gender equality. In line with international best practices, a gender equality framework is proposed for ER development projects in section six.

WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY:

"Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls' and boy. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female." (OECD, 2023)

Gender equality implies that *males and females have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development.* (USAID, 2008, p. 5).

2 The challenge: gender inequality

Gender inequality refers to the *disparities between women and men in a society in terms of their access and opportunities in the social, economic, and political spheres and their share in decision-making power at all social levels* (INEE, 2023).

Gender inequality is a social phenomenon in which people are not treated equally or are discriminated on the basis of their gender or sex. One sex/gender is routinely privileged or prioritized over another.

The nature and causes of gender inequality are multifaceted and complex and are deeply rooted in the fabrics of societies. Social structures and institutions perpetuate them.

There is no country in the world who could claim that they have achieved gender equality.

World Economic Forum, 2022

Gender inequality affects us all but is particularly unfair to girls and women.

Efforts to promote gender equality are being made globally and a brief overview of international commitments in this regard is provided in the next section.

TIMELINE OF COMMITMENTS:



3 History of international commitments on gender equality

Gender equality was made part of international human rights law by the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. It recognises that: *“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”* and that *“everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status.”*

In 1967, United Nations Member States adopted the [Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#), which states that *“discrimination against women is an offence against human dignity’ and calls on States to ‘abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women”*.

- **1948** - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- **1967** - Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- **1979** - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- **2000** - Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)
- **2015** - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This led to the adoption of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) by the General Assembly. CEDAW was the first legally binding international treaty aimed at the elimination of all forms of sex and gender-based discrimination against women (United Nations, 2014; 2019). Various efforts were made by the signatory countries over the years to improve the state of gender inequality and to fulfil their commitment under CEDAW but still the world was far from achieving gender equality.

Therefore, gender equality and the empowerment of women was made one of the eight [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#). Unfortunately, at the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs, it was revealed that gender equality was the most off-track of all of the Goals (United Nations, 2014).

In 2015, MDGS were replaced by the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) as *“shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future”* (United Nations, 2023) and achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (goal 5) is part of the agenda. Governments and international development sector actors are actively engaged in endeavours to achieve this goal by 2030. SDG 5 is a cross-cutting priority across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development framework and a quarter of the indicators included in the SDG framework implicitly or explicitly address gender equality.

4 What is the current state of world's women?

Despite all the international commitments and actions by the world community, women and girls are still marginalized. For example:



50%

The global labour force participation rate for women is just over **50%** compared to **80%** for men.



-20%

On average, women globally are paid about **20%** less than men for the same or comparable work



28%

Worldwide, only **28%** managerial positions are held by women



26%

Only **26%** members of lower and single houses of national parliaments around the world are women and women's share is slightly over **one third** in local governments.



>75%

Women and girls are responsible for over **75%** of all unpaid care and domestic work globally



1/5 girls

Nearly **one in five** young women still get married before the age of 18



200 million

At least **200 million** girls and women still have been subjected to female genital mutilation, mainly in 31 countries



26% globally

Globally, **26%** of ever-partnered women aged 15 and older (641 million) have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a husband or intimate partner at least once in their lifetime



800 women/day

Every day in 2020, almost **800** women died worldwide from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. A maternal death occurred almost every two minutes in 2020 and 95% of them occurred in low and middle income countries.

The World Bank, 2022;
UN Women, 2022;
United Nations, 2023

This state of affairs necessitates a conscious effort to promote gender equality in all development interventions.

5 How gender equality is being promoted in international development sector

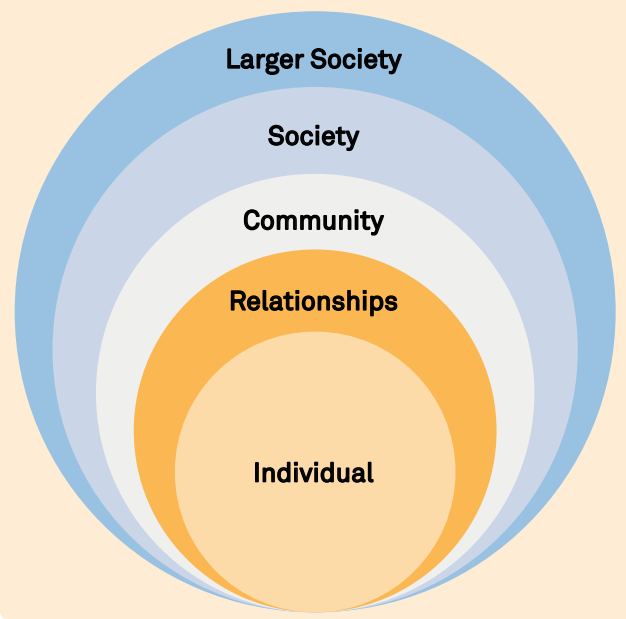
Conventional gender methodologies tend to focus on treating the symptoms of gender discrimination, such as women's unequal access to resources and benefits, without addressing the structural determinants of gender inequality. It is increasingly recognised that it is not enough to treat the symptoms; these approaches have repeatedly failed to achieve long-lasting and transformative impacts. For sustainable change to occur, the root causes of gender-based inequalities must be addressed. Therefore, transformative approaches to gender equality are getting prominence in international development sector.¹

Gender transformative approaches seek to challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations, while working towards redistributing power, resources, and services more equally (UNFPA, 2023). Unlike conventional methodologies of burdening women with the responsibility for striving for equality, gender transformative methodologies engage men and women together as agents of change. It acknowledges that unfair distribution of unpaid roles, discriminatory gender-related social norms, unequal power relations and formal and informal structures and institutions limit the opportunities for women and men to achieve their full potential.

¹ Almost all major actors in international development sector e.g. UN agencies, USAID, OECD, International NGOs (e.g. Care International, Oxfam, World Vision etc.) and Foundations (e.g. Gates Foundation) are emphasizing the need for using transformative approaches to gender equality.

Women are often excluded from participatory and decision-making processes due to their socially defined roles, and therefore their particular needs and perspectives are not considered. At the same time, men struggle with strict and unrealistic expectations of masculinity that can result in negative behaviours and coping mechanisms. Therefore, it is critical to engage both men and women in the process. Also, gender influences people and societies formally and informally, from individual and interpersonal levels to systemic and structural ones (UNFPA, 2023). Efforts to improve gender equality are therefore needed at all levels (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1: Levels of interventions to promote gender equality



5.1 The Gender Integration Continuum

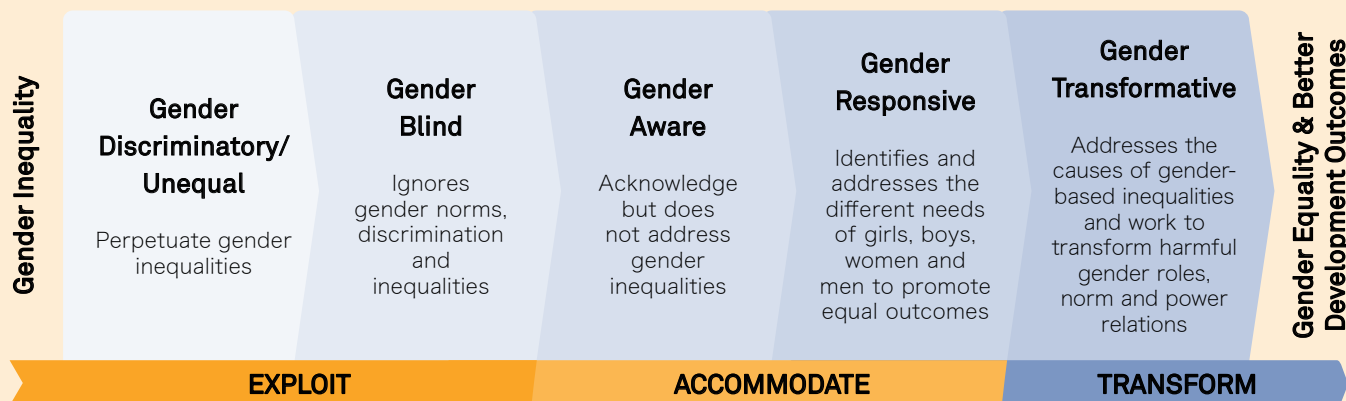
Over the past three decades in the international development sector, numerous frameworks and tools have been created to provide guidance on addressing gender inequalities. As a result gender integration at the stages of planning, design, implementation, and measurement of programmes has gained visibility. A useful tool to start forming an understanding of progression of gender approaches in the development policy and practice is **Gender Integration Continuum** (GIC), which was originally developed by the **Interagency Gender Working Group** (IGWG²) (Figure 2).

² The IGWG, established in 1997, is a network of multiple nongovernmental organizations, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), cooperating agencies, and the Bureau for Global Health of USAID.

The GIC describes a continuum: from ignoring gender inequalities and other forms of exclusion (or even perpetuating and reinforcing the intentionally or unintentionally), to acknowledging the existence of differences, to the most advanced stage of enacting transformative change by the achievement of fully equal rights (IGWG, 2017).

The ultimate goal, in a long-term perspective, rests on being able to identify strategies to move a project along the continuum toward a Gender Transformative Approach.

Figure 2: Continuum of gender programming³



³ Adapted from *Gender Integration Continuum of Interagency Gender Working Group*; UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale. See <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/8794>.

The classification of a programme or policy along the gender continuum is a helpful tool to assess the current level of gender integration. It allows to ask how things can be moved towards being more transformative; with the ultimate goal of achieving both gender equality and better development outcomes.

TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS FROM GENDER POINT OF VIEW



- **Exploitative Gender Programmes/Policies** intentionally or unintentionally reinforce or take advantage of gender inequalities and stereotypes to achieve project outcome, or where they exacerbate inequalities.
- **Accommodating Gender Programmes/Policies** acknowledge but work around gender differences and inequalities to achieve project objectives. Although this approach may result in short term benefits and realization of outcomes, it does not attempt to reduce gender inequality or address the gender systems that contribute to the differences and inequalities.
- **Transformative Gender Programming** seeks to transform gender relations to promote equality and achieve programme objectives by:
 - a. fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms and dynamics,
 - b. recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment,
 - c. promoting the relative position of women, girls and marginalized groups, and transforming the underlying social structures, policies and social norms.

IGWG 2017

6 How ER Mission can support gender equality

6.1 Gender equality in ER development projects currently

When assessed against the IGWG’s continuum of gender programming, it is evident that all ER development projects accommodate gender and some actually include elements of transformative approach. None of the Edmund Rice projects reviewed are found to be gender exploitative (*Table 1*).

Further details are the ER Development Projects Gender Assessment 2023 Report (available from ERD on request).

Table 1: Rating of ERD Projects on Gender Equality Programming Continuum

Sr. No.	Gender Equality project continuum rating	# of ER Projects
1	Gender Discriminatory	0
2	Gender Blind	0
3	Gender Aware (with elements of gender responsiveness)	3
4	Gender Responsive	8
5	Gender Transformative (mainly Gender Responsive but with elements of transformative approach)	4
TOTAL		15

6.2 The way forward for ER development projects

“We proactively support projects that tackle the root causes of structural power imbalances that have historically disadvantaged women.”

ERD Strategy 2023-2025

This indicates that ERD aims to use a transformational approach to gender equality. Edmund Rice Foundation Australia (ERFA) also has a commitment to a transformational approach to gender equality. The approach of these two key ER funders is in line with the international best practices (*Annex A*) and has guided the development of gender equality framework for ER development projects. This also aligns with other major partners including Irish Aid and Misesan Cara (*Annex B*).

The goal of this ER gender equality framework is to develop a common understanding of how gender equality is approached by ER development projects and to support projects to adopt a gender transformative approach. While there is no one-size-fit-all approach and each development project will choose the most contextually relevant interventions, this framework is intended to support more consistent, effective and integrated programming to achieve gender equality.

Although not every project is expected to be using Gender Transformative Approach as it will require human and financial resources, ER projects should adopt a Twin-Track approach (DFAT, 2021) where:

1. **Gender should be integrated into all projects:** gender analysis should be conducted for all projects and a gender lens should be applied to all projects at all phases of the project cycle to ensure different needs and concerns of⁴ girls, boys, women and men are taken into account and promote equal outcomes
2. **Targeted Investments or interventions:** these will be the projects where Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment is the key objective and a Gender Transformative Approach is to be used to address the root causes of gender inequality.

⁴ This GE Framework for ER development projects is the starting point and will be expanded to be more inclusive in the light of learning from its implementation.

6.3 The conceptual framework for ER projects to promote gender equality

A Gender Transformative Approach being adopted by ER projects requires working on three dimensions: agency, structures, and relationships.

These three dimensions are intimately related, structuring and influencing one another⁵ (Figure 3).

- a. **Agency:** *is defined as the ability to make choices both in the household and in society. Every woman has agency, and she analyses, decides, and acts without any development interventions being involved. At times, she does so in ways that challenge gendered power inequities; at times, in ways that reinforce them. Agency is strengthened by building individual consciousness, confidence, self-esteem and aspirations (non-formal sphere) and knowledge, skills and capabilities (formal sphere).*
- a. **Structures:** *broader social structures condition women's choices and chances. These could be formal (laws, policies, procedures and services) and non-formal (discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices). Despite some gains in women's rights, in many countries laws remain weak in regulating control over resources and family matters such as inheritance; land ownership; and protection against violence.*

Also, social norms can prevail over laws and can be detrimental to gender equality. They can inhibit women's collective agency by limiting their political roles or access to positions of power. Through their actions, individual agents contribute to producing, reinforcing, or changing structures; at the same time, structures shape agency in important, and often unrecognized ways.

- a. **Relationships:** *refer to social relationships through which women negotiate their needs and rights with other social actors, including men. These include the power relations through which people live their lives through intimate relations and social networks (non-formal sphere) and group membership and activism, and citizen and market negotiations (formal sphere).*

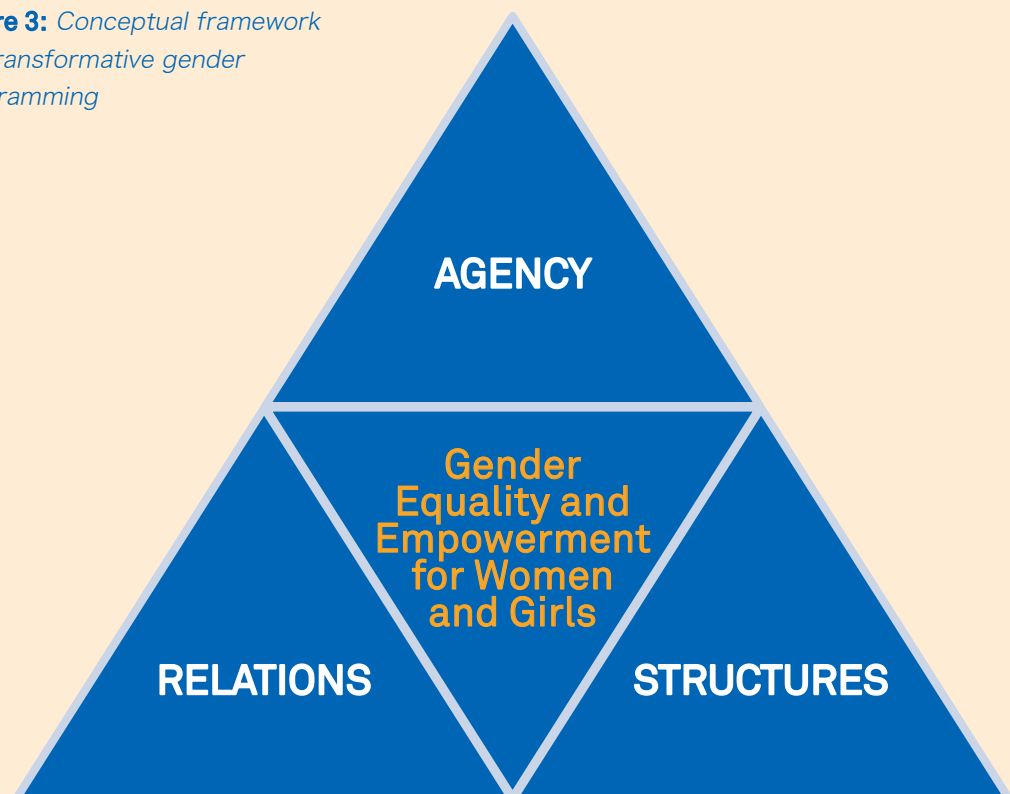
Both agency and structure are mediated through relationships between and among social actors while, at the same time, forms and patterns of relationships are deeply influenced by agency and structure. Empowerment, in part, consists in *individual women building relationships, joint efforts, coalitions, and mutual support, in order to claim and expand agency, alter inequitable structures, and so realize rights and livelihood security* (Care International 2020)⁶.

⁶. <https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SII-Womens-Empowerment-Global-Research-Framework-with-annexes-2006.pdf>

⁵. Care International: http://gender.careinternationalwikis.org/_media/care_gender_orientation_pack_18-2.pdf

The framework suggests if development interventions build agency, change social relations and transform structures, women and girls realize their human rights and people of all genders live in gender equality.

Figure 3: Conceptual framework for transformative gender programming








This conceptual framework for gender-transformative change for ER development projects is operationalized through interventions in five domains:

1. Access,
2. Decision-making,
3. Participation and leadership,
4. Social norms and
5. Policy.

An M&E framework should also be developed around these five domains to track changes and consolidate and report progress.

The Framework below (*Table 2*) defines each domain and provides examples of interventions under each domain.

Table 2: Framework for gender transformative approach

Dimensions of Empowerment	Domains of Change	What it means	Type of activities/ Interventions
Enhanced Agency and Changed Relations	Access 	The ability to access, use and control, information, resources opportunities and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building individual’s capacities through training and access to information, Putting mechanisms in place to facilitate access to opportunities and services
	Decision-making 	Equitable decision-making within the household both in productive and reproductive sphere and ability to exercise sexual and reproductive rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensitizing men/boys and women/girls on gender issues Promoting shared decision-making in the household
	Participation and Leadership 	The level of engagement in societal affairs and systems of power that influence e.g. participation of women in community sphere/ decision-making, change in paid and unpaid roles Women’s engagement in community leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensitizing men/boys and women/girls on gender issues Leadership and life skills training Male engagement to change traditional roles around unpaid domestic/care work Membership of organisations or CBOs
Transformed Structures (formal and informal)	Social Norms Change 	Reflecting on the current harmful social norms, creating a new norm and abandonment of an existing norm. Alliance with men/boys as a change-partner for gender equality at the household, institutional and public levels. Women’s engagement in community leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changing attitudes/social norms towards GBV such as engagement of religious and traditional leaders to end harmful practices, and the use of drama and media to challenge gender roles within families and reframe the concept of fatherhood Broader sensitization and/ or dialogue on negative masculinities Role model promotion
	Policy Change 	Local level as well as national and international Policy change through advocacy	Advocacy for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in national curricula including more equitable parental leave and affordable childcare Transparent and accountable mechanisms to prevent and respond to GBV Gender equitable local by-laws

For each project, the GTA will require including interventions on each domain. They will look different for various sectors and contexts. The project team will also need to carefully analyse the required level of effort and should plan

accordingly. Tokenistic, one-off activities will not be able to produce transformative change. Please see [Annex C](#) for a checklist to support assessment of Gender Transformative and Responsive projects.

7 Principles for working towards gender equality

- **Work holistically:** Changing gender norms and power relations is challenging and needs to involve societal structures and mechanisms, as well as communities, specific groups in a population, and individuals. This is also in line with Misesan Cara GE approach.
 - **Engage men:** Unequal power relations between women and men and the unequal roles that our societies attribute to them are root causes of gender inequality. The accomplishments of individual women are important, but they need to be considered in the broader context of gender inequalities and men's engagement can help improve power relations.
 - **Policy alignment/integration:** Align programmes/projects with national gender equality commitments, policies and programmes to contribute to wider change as well as leverage resources where possible.
 - **Contextual appropriateness:** While the challenges to gender equality may look alike across various contexts, the factors interacting to create that situation might be different. Therefore, the interventions need to be tailored for each context.
- **Build partnerships:** Working with local government and non-government partners to share knowledge and resources for wider change is important. Also, build partnerships and networks to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance impact.
 - **Monitoring the implementers as well as implementation:** The field teams often come from the same cultural context where the projects are implemented and may have been socialised in similar ways and therefore can perpetuate gender inequality consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, monitor both the implementation and the implementers.

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Annex A: Gender approaches of other key players in international development sector

Actor	Approach
European Institute of Gender Equality	<p>According to the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), <i>Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.</i> Accordingly, EIGE believe, education, training, awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality are important tools for empowering women and girls to claim their rights. Their approach is transformative in nature as it aims at addressing the root causes of inequality.</p>
UNFPA, 2023	<p>UNFPA promotes Gender-transformative approaches (GTA) and believes that GTAs address underlying causes of gender inequality. These include discriminatory legislation, policies, institutions, norms and stereotypes about what it means to be a man or a woman, harmful masculinities, and insufficient support for women's agency and rights. Such approaches typically either focus on challenging negative forces or supporting positive ones. By addressing root causes of gender inequalities, gender-transformative approaches ultimately contribute to the equal distribution of power, resources and opportunities between men and women. In doing so, they go further than activities that only address gender inequalities resulting from discriminatory root causes.</p>
Care International	<p>Care international promotes Gender Transformative approach to women empowerment leading to gender equality: both process and outcome that comprises three dimensions—agency, structure, and relationships. These three dimensions are intimately related, structuring and influencing one another as the triangle graphic shown on page 8 of this document implies.</p> <p>Care international works towards women's empowerment and gender equality by working on all three dimensions.</p>
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	<p>Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation's approach to Gender equality focuses on: agency, resources and institutional structures and has the potential to produce transformational change.</p>

Annex B: Key stakeholders' priorities and approaches to promote gender equality

1. Irish Aid

A Better World- Ireland Policy for International Development Policy has four priority areas: gender equality, reducing humanitarian need, climate action and strengthening governance. Increased allocations of Official Development Assistance in 2019 was intended to be directed to these four areas. The document states: *this new policy will intensify our work on Women, Peace and Security and on gender-based violence*. It further states: *we will increase our allocations to interventions directly related to achieving gender equality, and to scale up our engagement to integrate gender across all of our interventions and in our wider foreign policy and ...we will create a new funding initiative for Women's Economic Empowerment (Pg.15)*. The policy also states *that we will have a focus on how effective institutions can address gender equality, the rights of minorities, the specific needs of people living with disabilities, and the participation of marginalised groups in decision-making* (pg.26) which closely aligns with Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) to Gender Equality.

2. Mísean Cara (MC)

Mísean Cara's Gender policy states a commitment *to promoting gender equality so that any person can live in dignity and without fear, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Mísean Cara is committed to support its members to recognise gender inequalities, their root causes and possible pathways to addressing these. Mísean Cara's intention is that a gender lens is applied to all projects and to all phases of the project cycle – from designing, planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.*

Mísean Cara adopts the following approach towards gender equality by supporting projects

- That are heavily engaged with gender (e.g., gender equality is the principal objective of the project)
- That consider gender in a meaningful way throughout the project cycle, even though they may not explicitly address this topic.

At the same time, Mísean Cara encourages its member organisations to implement projects that promote positive changes in gender roles, norms and power dynamics which is close to Gender Transformative Approach.

The MC gender strategy States that *Misean Cara will review members' project proposals with a gender lens– from being gender blind (not taking gender concerns into consideration) to being gender transformative in their approach. Misean Cara will support projects of member organisations that work along the latter part of the gender continuum, i.e., Misean Cara expects to see gender sensitivity demonstrated, likes to see gender responsive approaches, and would particularly like to see more projects aiming for gender transformatio... Misean Cara is aware that gender transformative approaches require long-term vision and commitment to work towards gender equality.*

Many of Misean Cara's members are involved in projects that are gender sensitive, gender responsive or gender transformative.

3. Edmund Rice Foundation Australia (ERFA)

ERFA is dedicated to promoting gender equality by implementing a comprehensive strategy that combines the DFAT Twin-Track Approach and the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Markers. This approach ensures that ERFA's projects are well-rounded and have a meaningful impact. In all ERFA's partnered projects, there is a strong focus on Access, Decision-making, Participation, and Leadership, as the majority of ERFA's supported projects are Gender Responsive.

Additionally, ERFA ensures that the domains of Social Norms Change and Policy Change are integral components of projects categorised as 'Principal' under the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Marker and are classified as Gender Transformative. For projects categorised as 'Significant,' ERFA Social Norms Change and Policy Change are incorporated when it aligns with the project's activities and outputs.

This combination of strategies allows ERFA to closely monitor and measure the gender responsiveness of projects, ensuring that gender equality considerations are seamlessly integrated at all stages of the project cycle. This, in turn, contributes to the creation of sustainable change.

Annex C: Checklist to assess Gender Transformative and Responsive Projects

Gender Transformative

Gender Transformative: programming which is designed around a fundamental aim of addressing root causes of gender inequality within society.

Sr. #	Criterion	Yes/No
The proposed programme/project:		
1	is grounded in strong gender analysis and an understanding of local context and root causes of gender equality	
2	takes a holistic approach i.e. engage men/boys, women/ girls and intervene at various levels i.e. individual, household, community and broader societal levels	
3	includes interventions that equips and empowers stakeholders (students, teachers, communities and policy makers), to examine, challenge, and change harmful gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women	
4	includes ways to transform harmful gender norms, roles and relations	
5	include interventions for all five domains included in ER development projects gender equality framework	
6	M&E plan includes indicators and targets to measure transformative change	

Gender Responsive

Gender Responsive: programming which includes specific action to try and reduce gender inequalities within communities.

Sr. #	Criterion	Yes/No
The proposed programme/project:		
1	is grounded in strong gender analysis and an understanding of local context	
2	objectives explicitly related to both women's, men's, girls' and boys' immediate or practical and strategic needs	
3	respects gender differences in design of interventions	
4	engages men/boys, women/ girls	
5	Recording of Sex-Disaggregated data in project activities (used to analyze if the project provided equal opportunities to both men and women)	
6	M&E plan includes indicators and targets to measure outcomes for men and women	

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