



# GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The World Vision Approach and Theory of Change



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World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.



This document presents World Vision's **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)** approach and theory of change. GESI is integral to achieving World Vision's "Our Promise" global strategy and child well-being objectives. As a child-focused, Christian, and community-based organization, World Vision serves all people, regardless of nationality, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

The GESI approach and theory of change provides guidance on how to contribute more effectively to the well-being of the most vulnerable children, their families, and communities through evidence-based GESI transformative change.<sup>1</sup>

## OUR PROMISE

Our strategy works to empower vulnerable children, their families, and communities to transform their realities and build bright futures.

## WHAT IS GESI?

World Vision defines GESI<sup>2</sup> as a multi-faceted process of transformation that:

- Promotes equal and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, and well-being of the most vulnerable
- Transforms systems, social norms, and relations to enable the most vulnerable to participate in and benefit equally from development interventions
- Builds individual and collective agency, resilience, and action
- Promotes the empowerment and well-being of vulnerable children, their families and communities

**Gender equality** is the state or condition that affords women and girls, men and boys, equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources. It includes expanding freedoms and voice, improving power dynamics and relations, transforming gender roles, and enhancing overall quality of life so that males and females achieve their full potential.<sup>3</sup>

**Social inclusion** seeks to address inequality and/or exclusion of vulnerable populations by improving terms of participation in society and enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for human rights. It seeks to promote empowerment and advance peaceful and inclusive societies and institutions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Refer to World Vision's global impact framework and strategic initiative 2.2, which focus on capturing, utilizing and communicating evidence of impact.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to World Vision's GESI glossary of key definitions for additional concepts.

<sup>3</sup> See UN Women; USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy; and Naila Kabeer on empowerment.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG# 5, 8, 10, 11 and 16 which emphasize equality and inclusion.

## WHAT IS OUR GESI THEORY OF CHANGE?

The purpose of the World Vision GESI Theory of Change is to build a common understanding of the pathways of change required to achieve gender equality and social inclusion and to promote and guide the systematic integration of gender equality and social inclusion within and across programming sectors.

### World Vision's GESI Theory of Change states that:

#### If

- Women and girls, men and boys, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations have equal access, decision-making and participation at individual, household, community and society levels
- Systems are equal, fair and inclusive at individual, household, community and society levels
- The most vulnerable have enhanced well-being

#### Then

- **Individuals** are empowered to achieve agency, voice, and full potential
- **Households** have equity, fairness, shared responsibility, and balanced relations
- **Communities** engage in collective action, mobilization, and resilience
- **Societies** establish transformational systems change

#### Thus

All children, their families, and communities experience life in its fullness.







**There are five domains of change necessary to result in greater gender equality and social inclusion. Those five domains are:**

**Access** | The ability to access, use, control, and / or own assets, resources, opportunities, services, benefits, infrastructure.

**Decision-making** | The ability to make decisions free of coercion at individual, family, community, and societal levels.

**Participation** | The level of engagement in societal affairs and systems of power that influence and determine development, life activities and outcomes.

**Systems** | Equal and inclusive systems that promote equity, account for the different needs of vulnerable populations and create enabling environments for their engagement.

**Well-being** | Agency, capability and status, relating to confidence, dignity, sense of worth, safety, health and overall physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being.

**WELL-BEING** is a precondition for benefitting from equitable and inclusive access, decision-making, participation, and systems. Without **WELL-BEING**, the most vulnerable will be excluded from program improvements in the other domains; and *without changes in access, decision-making, participation and systems, their well-being will not change in the long term.*

In addition, as marginalization and exclusion are based on unequal systems or relations and social constructs such as 'race', 'gender' and 'disability', all domains are impacted by existing structures, social norms and relationships. All programs need to identify and address underlying norms and power relations that impact all five GESI domains and across all levels of the ecosystem.

World Vision's GESI Theory of Change is informed by current best practice and research on gender equality and social inclusion. It reflects World Vision's focus on well-being outcomes for the most vulnerable by highlighting the relationship between the GESI domains and well-being.

## WHAT IS OUR GESI APPROACH?

World Vision's GESI Theory of Change encompasses integrated systems and rights-based approaches toward the advancement of gender equality and social inclusion. The objectives of our GESI approaches are to achieve agency, empowerment and transformation to support the five domains of change.

### AGENCY

World Vision's GESI approach sees development participants as active agents of change, rather than mere victims of exclusion or inactive beneficiaries of development. Our approach raises awareness and fosters demonstration of **agency** so that vulnerable individuals (and groups) who previously exercised little power develop their own capacities for self-understanding and expression, and gain control over their lives, resources, beliefs, values and attitudes.<sup>5</sup> Agency facilitates self-empowerment—**power to** and **power within**—through individual consciousness and the transformation of personal attitudes, self-perceptions and power relations. Participants develop critical consciousness and see themselves as capable, with a right to choose, act and influence their lives, households, communities and societies. In addition to self-transformation, agency also facilitates collective empowerment—**power with**—through social cohesion, movement building and collective action for sustained change.<sup>6</sup>

### EMPOWERMENT

World Vision's GESI approach facilitates **empowerment** by challenging deep structures of inequality and exclusion, and enhancing human rights, power and agency of vulnerable populations. While empowerment often comes from within and cannot be done to or for anyone by others, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine possibilities for empowerment.<sup>7</sup> World Vision uses five programming approaches to support empowerment:

**SOCIAL MODEL:** is used to understand how social construction disempowers individuals and increases social exclusion. The approach emphasizes that vulnerable people and groups are not the problem; rather society needs to adapt to the needs, perceptions and differences of individuals, such as adolescent girls or persons with disabilities.

**POSITIVE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT:** is used to empower vulnerable children and adolescents along with their families, communities and/or society to reach their full potential. Interventions build skills, assets and competencies; enhance child participation and the engagement of adolescent girls and boys; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the external supporting environment; and transform systems.<sup>8</sup>

**MALE ENGAGEMENT:** is used to promote inclusive change and transformational shifts in gendered social norms and relations. This approach empowers men and boys as allies and agents of change through the promotion of alternative and positive masculinities, shared decision making, equitable division of labor in caregiving or unpaid tasks, healthy and gender-equitable relationships, nonviolence and elimination of harmful practices such as child marriage.

**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS:** is used to support women and girls to acquire the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. It includes GESI-specific programming interventions for leadership development and the socio-cultural, political, economic empowerment of women, adolescent girls and the girl child.

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:** is used to support economically marginalized groups to gain control over economic, financial and material assets and resources. Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is integral to this approach.<sup>9</sup>

5 Kabeer 1994; Sen, 1997; Batliwala, 1994; Rowlands 1997; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2018; CARE.

6 Rowlands discusses power when writing about the meaning of women's empowerment.

7 USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy.

8 Youth Power 2019; World Vision Child Protection and Participation.

9 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Gender Equality Strategy focuses on WEE dimensions such as financial inclusion & services, knowledge, economic power & voice, and market opportunities.



## TRANSFORMATION

Our GESI approach and theory of change advances WorldVision's mission and core values to promote human **transformation** by reaching the most vulnerable children, their families and communities.<sup>10</sup>

The focus is on challenging the root causes of vulnerability that sustain gender inequality and social exclusion, such as restrictive socio-cultural norms, unequal power relations and disempowering systems. The transformation approach therefore seeks to shift **social norms**, establish or re-establish **gender and social relations**, bring about **structural and systemic change** (economic, social, political or other), and create **an enabling environment** in favor of greater equality and inclusion.

GESI transformation requires **sustainable change within an ecosystem** that considers the interplay between individual, household, community and societal levels. These ecological levels allow us to understand the range of factors that impact gender equality and social inclusion, across the five GESI domains of access, decision-making, participation, systems and well-being.

## WHO ARE THE VULNERABLE?

While vulnerability depends entirely on context, evidence suggests that gender inequality and social exclusion disproportionately affects children—girls and boys, women, people with disabilities (PWDs), and people living in poverty. Other factors of vulnerability or exclusion include refugee or migrant status, ethnicity, religion, age, language and health status. Working with communities, World Vision identifies the most vulnerable children<sup>11</sup> as those that are living with two or more factors:

- In abusive or exploitative relationships
- In extreme deprivation
- With serious discrimination which prevents them from accessing services/opportunities
- With vulnerability to negative impact from a catastrophe or disaster

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Individuals are diverse and identify as part of different groups, therefore inequality or exclusion is intersectional. The GESI approach examines overlapping and inter-related vulnerabilities, which may be simultaneously based both on gender inequality and social exclusion. For example, women with disabilities may face double marginalization because of gender norms and stigma toward persons with disabilities. However, a woman with disability may have lower levels of exclusion if they are not living in poverty and have better access to services and resources.

<sup>10</sup> WorldVision's Transformational Development seeks to reach the most vulnerable children and their families, empower them and challenge the systems that cause poverty and vulnerability.

<sup>11</sup> WVI Global Guidance on estimating the number of vulnerable children.



# WHAT CAN WE DO TO ACHIEVE GESI GOALS AND OBJECTIVES?

A lot of important achievements have been made in World Vision in promoting gender equality and social inclusion, and positively impacting the lives of the most vulnerable. The GESI approach builds on the gains made in prioritizing four core areas:

1. **Integrating** GESI-transformative approaches in resource development, including proposal design, business positioning and donor engagement.
2. **Applying** a GESI lens in program implementation for program quality assurance.
3. **Strengthening** evidence of impact on GESI.
4. **Promoting** GESI-responsive institutional practices, policies, operations and accountability mechanisms, guided by “do no harm” and protection principles.

The goal is to achieve GESI transformative programming, assessing progress along the World Vision GESI continuum:<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Adapted from the GESI Continuum in “DFID Girls’ Education Challenge: Leave No Girl Behind Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Guidance” (July 2018); and the USAID IGWG Gender Integration Continuum (2017); WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale (2011).





**Some strategies to achieve this include the following:**

### **GESI ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENTS**

- Conduct GESI analysis during the design process, baseline, and as part of ongoing program implementation and evaluation.<sup>13</sup>
- Use the GESI Continuum to assess progress using the five GESI domains, and to understand how to design effective interventions that increasingly move toward GESI transformative change.

### **TARGETED AND INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING**

- Design GESI-targeted and GESI-integrated programming interventions or activities based on GESI analysis of the five GESI domains and socio-ecological levels.
- Map and work with specialized partners with GESI expertise, such as disabled persons' organizations, women's rights organizations, male engagement organizations, relevant government ministries and specialist service providers for collaboration.
- Identify synergies with existing systems (such as child protection, health and other systems) that provide the framework for identifying, monitoring and supporting GESI programming with vulnerable groups.

### **TRAINING AND STAFF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

- Conduct GESI training or awareness raising for staff to unpack and address norms that will affect their ability to serve vulnerable groups and to identify ways to ensure inclusive implementation.
- Recruit and retain staff and volunteers who have GESI capacity and/or represent vulnerable groups.
- Develop GESI leadership among program staff, including the establishment of GESI Focal Points, communities of practice and sector-specific champions.
- Where needed, use GESI technical support for project design, implementation and reporting.
- Publicize and continually apply relevant institutional policies and practices, such as safeguarding, diversity, protection and anti-harassment policies.

<sup>13</sup> Refer to World Vision GESI DME toolkit for tools to conduct a GESI analysis.

## GESI TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- Develop or adapt new tools and resources to support the implementation of our GESI approach and theory of change.
- Utilize existing tools and resources in WorldVision that offer innovative and effective methodologies for GESI-transformative programming, such as Citizen Voice and Action, Channels of Hope, links to community and faith-based structures and ability to use trust built over many years.
- Apply tools for GESI accountability, such as the GESI continuum, to assess progress.
- Integrate GESI into strategic plans, strategy refresh processes, annual workplans and ongoing reviews for ongoing prioritization, implementation and tracking of progress.

## BUDGETING AND FUNDING

- Ensure sustained GESI budgeting and funding. For example, establishing a GESI fund can allow programs to cover additional costs to strengthen the engagement of vulnerable groups. This could include costs such as the provision of child care, paying for caregivers to attend events, sign language interpretation, provision of adaptive devices.

## MONITORING, EVALUATION, LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

- Generate and use innovative GESI evidence and data—both qualitative and quantitative—to enhance participation, access, decision-making, well-being and systems change for vulnerable groups.
- Develop and share GESI best practices to inform new design, collaborative learning and adaptation.
- Test innovative approaches within different funding streams.
- Conduct evaluations of sector-specific inclusive interventions, and of unique WorldVision models, including CVA, Channels of Hope, inclusion funds, sponsorship and the use of child protection and other local structures to support gender equality and social inclusion
- Provide evidence-based GESI thought leadership and build the WorldVision's GESI Technical Brand.
- Strengthen external engagement with peers, donor agencies, and academia. Present on GESI within sector-specific and GESI conferences and author GESI-focused publications.



# WELL-BEING





Where can you find  
more information?

Contact World Vision

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