

Gender and Diversity Inclusion Policy



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INTRODUCTION

MRDI was established in the year 2001 with its broader mission of developing the standards of media, well-being of the people and empowerment of women and other marginalized sections of the population. To comply with its commitment MRDI, over the years, has developed number of policy documents to guide the organization keeping on the right track, ensure fair operations and safeguard the stakeholders and beneficiaries of diverse identities.

Diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.

MRDI firmly owns and practices the belief that no human beings can be deprived of their rights and entitlements due to gender, religious, ethnic, social, economic or cultural identity. This stand of MRDI applies to all staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. To uphold this stand, guiding principles on gender need to be worked out and documented. Out of this felt need, a gender policy was initially developed in 2009.

In the context of organizational growth and programmatic expansion, MRDI developed its 5-year strategic plan in 2021 highlighting strategic objectives and key performance indicators for smooth functioning towards sustainability of the organization. The plan envisions just and open societies where all people enjoy their rights with the mission to support the development of a strong and independent media that exercises excellence in journalism, and to empower all people including the marginalized to freely enjoy their right to information.

The gender objective of the plan suggests to work toward gender equity both internally and in programmes using a gender transformative approach. In order to attain this objective and in accordance with changed situation and context the gender policy has now been reviewed and updated.

This updated policy document with the title “Gender and Diversity Inclusion Policy” includes introduction, guiding principles, strategy, perception of gender, objectives and scope, policy measures and steps for implementation. The board approved the updated policy in its meeting held on 13 September 2025 to come into immediate effect.

OVERVIEW

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives aim to create workplaces and societies where everyone feels valued, respected, and has equal opportunities. Historically, D&I efforts evolved from addressing specific inequalities, like racial discrimination, to recognizing a broader spectrum of differences. Today, D&I encompasses a wide range of characteristics, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, and more, ensuring that all individuals can contribute their unique perspectives and talents.

Women constitute half of the world’s population, yet their economic participation and recognition remain disproportionately low in many parts of the world. According to World Bank data, as of 2024, the labor force participation rate for females in Bangladesh stands at 44.2%, while for males, it is significantly higher at 80.9%. This highlights a clear gender gap in formal employment opportunities (World Bank, 2024).

In Bangladesh, women contribute significantly to unpaid domestic and care work, spending an average of 11.7 hours per day on these tasks, compared to just 1.6 hours by men. This unequal distribution of labor has significant economic implications. A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) found that women’s unpaid household and care work was valued at

approximately 14.8% of Bangladesh's GDP in 2021, reflecting their critical yet underappreciated economic contribution (BIDS, 2021).

There are less studies which show the impact of not encouraging the diverse population in the workforce, which draw them into more vulnerable and oppressed situations. The problem and need of these vast groups remain unheard and unaddressed.

KEY COMPONENTS OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: *

- **Diversity:** Recognizing and valuing the unique differences among individuals, including visible and invisible characteristics.
- **Inclusion:** Creating a culture where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and empowered to participate and contribute.
- **Equity:** Ensuring fair access to opportunities and resources, recognizing that individuals may need different levels of support to succeed.
- **Intersectionality:** Understanding how multiple aspects of a person's identity can intersect and create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

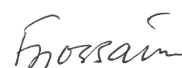
Benefits of D&I:

- **Increased Innovation and Creativity:** Diverse teams bring a wider range of perspectives and ideas, fostering innovation.
- **Improved Employee Engagement and Retention:** Inclusive workplaces where employees feel valued are more likely to retain talent.
- **Stronger Employer Brand:** Companies with a strong commitment to D&I attract top talent and build a positive reputation.
- **Better Business Outcomes:** Diverse and inclusive organizations are often more successful in attracting customers, understanding markets, and achieving business goals.

Moving Forward:

- **Ongoing Commitment:** D&I is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing process that requires continuous effort and evaluation.
- **Open Communication:** Encouraging open dialogue and feedback is crucial for creating a safe and inclusive environment.
- **Accountability:** Establishing clear expectations and holding individuals and organizations accountable for D&I outcomes is essential.
- **Continuous Learning:** Organizations should invest in training and development to build awareness and understanding of D&I principles.

The Gender and Development approach aims to attain sustainable development through women empowerment. This does not mean only to provide loans, education and health services but also



aims at removing the patriarchal social system. This patriarchal society has to be replaced by such a justice and equality-based system which will provide men, women and people of other genders with equal rights and opportunities, access to resources, equal exercise of power and the right to take decision by themselves.

[*https://www.diversityaustralia.com.au/](https://www.diversityaustralia.com.au/)

VISION AND MISSION OF MRDI

Vision: Just and open societies where all people enjoy their rights

Mission: To support the development of a strong and independent media that exercises excellence in journalism, and to empower all people including the marginalized to freely enjoy their right to information, working with partners in Bangladesh and beyond

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE OF MRDI RELATED TO GENDER

Strategic objective 3: To work toward gender equity both internally and in programmes using a gender transformative approach

PERCEPTION OF GENDER

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and access to resources in society. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it can change over time.

Regarding its approach to gender, MRDI aims to establish itself as a gender transformative organization where both quantitative and qualitative gender analysis is done, and specific outcomes seek to transform unequal power relations among male, female and people of other sexes and **diverse identities** through changes in roles, status and through redistribution of resources. MRDI cherishes the value of belief in equity in all its outcomes. While gender is included as a programmatic objective of the strategic plan, the issue is addressed as a cross component in all the programmes. The programmes of MRDI aim to challenge existing norms and attitudes that reinforce gender role stereotypes. Gender is built into the response and the causes of inequality are addressed head on.

1. GENDER AND DIVERSITY INCLUSION POLICY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1.1 Policy Principles:

- 1.1.1 This Gender and diversity inclusion Policy will be considered as an integral part of other policies of MRDI Like HR Policy and activities.
- 1.1.2 The policy will play a complementary role in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender sensitive programmes.
- 1.1.3 This policy will also help to achieve Mission and Vision of MRDI.
- 1.1.4 This policy will validate MRDI 's gender and diversity related activities.

1.2 Strategy:

- 1.1.5 Develop gender and diversity acceptance at all levels of the organization.

- 1.1.6 Create gender balance by recruiting men, women and people of other sexes and diverse identities at all levels of the organization upon availability and based on the principle of equity.
- 1.1.7 Make all the employees understand the policy properly through orientation session.
- 1.1.8 Take effective measures through positive discrimination in favour of women and people of diverse identities by identifying biological difference and marginalized position of women and people of diverse identities in order to achieve the gender equity.

2. GOAL:

Establish diversity inclusion equality and equity at the institutional and programme levels of MRDI among people of all genders and diverse identities.

3. OBJECTIVES:

- 3.1 To give top priority on the equality of men, women and people of diverse identities.
- 3.2 To ensure zero tolerance to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and bullying in any form
- 3.3 To create an enabling environment for women and people of other sexes and diverse identities in MRDI for their free and equal participation through positive discrimination.
- 3.4 To ensure planning and implementation of development activities in order to achieve gender equality.
- 3.5 To create necessary infrastructural and other facilities- by developing gender sensitive budget.
- 3.6 To take necessary steps to establish representation and participation of women and people of other sexes and diverse identities at all levels of MRDI.
- 3.7 To ensure analysis, monitoring and evaluation of all programmes of MRDI on the basis of the Gender and diversity inclusion Policy.

4. SCOPE OF THE POLICY:

This policy will be applicable to all employees and beneficiaries of MRDI through covering following areas:

- 4.1 Organisational aspect
- 4.2 Programmatic/Project aspect

4.1 Gender Policy In Organisational Aspect:

4.1.1. Values, Behavior And Culture

All the employees of MRDI of every level will maintain an environment within the organization that will play a facilitative role in achieving gender equality in all the activities of MRDI.

- I. All staff members will believe that all men, women and people of other sexes and diverse identities are equal human beings and this belief will be reflected in their activities.
- II. All staff members of MRDI will believe in equality of all irrespective of their gender, religious, ethnic and other identities.
- III. Respect will be shown to the role of all human beings irrespective of their gender identities in every sphere of the society.

- IV. Gender-friendly words will be used while speaking, preparing official document and communications.
- V. Rules and regulations will be made in such a way that all facilities are provided on the basis of equity.
- VI. Management of MRDI will remain alert that men are not deprived in the name of gender equality.

4.1.2 Gender Committee:

(A) Gender committee

- I. MRDI will form a gender and diversity inclusion committee which will be responsible for addressing any allegation of misconduct raised by any person within MRDI.
- II. The committee will consist of 5 persons with one representative from the Board of Directors, one external expert from outside MRDI and three representatives from Grade-II, Grade-III and Grade-IV.
- III. The representative from the Board of Directors and external expert will be nominated by the board.
- IV. The representatives from Grade-II, Grade-III and Grade-IV will be selected by the Executive Director and focal points approved by the Board of Directors.
- V. The representative from the Board of Directors will chair the Gender Committee.

(B) Reporting and responding procedures

- I. Acts of misconduct or improper activities may be disclosed in writing (hard copy or email to the common contact address), telephonically or in person to any of the members of the Committee. However, all reports are encouraged to be made in writing, so as to assure a clear understanding of the issues raised.
- II. The members of the committee will meet within five working days of receiving the complaint to discuss about the actions or investigations required on the reports received.
- III. The Committee may exclude any of its members or any person of MRDI it deems appropriate from any meeting, investigation or other proceedings, depending on the nature of the complaint or if any conflict of interest arises.
- IV. The Committee will launch an investigation addressing the allegation. The Committee itself may conduct such investigation or it may appoint other appropriate parties, internal or external, for conducting the investigations if deemed required.
- V. The Committee will be responsible to ensure that the investigation is carried out using appropriate channels, resources and expertise.
- VI. The Committee will conclude the investigation and decide regarding the appropriate actions to be taken within three months of receiving the report. However, for complicated cases, the timeline can be extended up to further three months as deemed required by the Committee.
- VII. Administrative and legal measures will be taken at all levels of the organization against any kind of sexual abuse, harassment or any gender-based violence.

4.1.3 Internal Gender And Diversity Audit

Yearly internal audit will be conducted to assess and check the institutionalization of gender equality and equity into organizations, including policies, programmes, projects and/or provision of services, structures, proceedings and budgets. Report will be prepared and findings will be shared with MRDI staffs.

4.1.4 Recruitment, Promotion And Leave:

(A) Recruitment Policy:

- I. Recruitment policy will be developed on the basis of gender sensitive HR policy.
- II. Programmes will be taken focusing women's marginalization, security and reproductive rights in order to increase gradually the number of woman staff to 50%.
- III. At least one third of the recruitment committee members will be female.
- IV. People of all regions of Bangladesh irrespective of their religion, race and social identity will enjoy equal opportunity in jobs.

(B) Vacancy Announcement

- I. The sentence "Women and people of diverse identities are especially encouraged to apply" will be mentioned in the vacancy announcements as applicable.
- II. Special facilities for female workers that prevail in the organization will be mentioned in the vacancy announcement.

(C) Application sorting and selection procedure

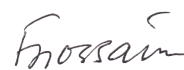
- I. In addition to other qualifications and experiences of the candidate, gender awareness issue will be considered.
- II. In case of equally competent candidates, subject to fulfillment of other requirements, women and candidates of diverse identities shall be given preference for recruitment.

(D) Promotion

In case of employees with similar qualifications, female employees and employees of diverse identities will be given priority for promotion.

(E) Leave

- I. In case of earned leave, casual leave, festival leave, medical leave same rule will be applicable for the employees of all genders. Female and male employees will be entitled special leave for the following causes.
- II. Female employees will be entitled six months' maternal leave with salary on maximum two occasions. If required, another two months' leave without pay can be taken with the maternal leave.
- III. Each female employee entitled to maternity leave is given the flexibility by MRDI to select the time frame of 6 (six) months around her delivery time that she wants to avail as maternity leave, as per her convenience. However, such an employee has to specify in writing her desired starting date of the leave in the application for leave.
- IV. A female employee willing to avail maternity leave will have to apply one months prior to the expected date of commencement of such leave.
- V. An expecting female employee will give notice in writing to the authority stipulating her expected confinement time and request for leave approval. The notice must be accompanied by a certificate signed by a registered medical practitioner stating the expected date of the employee's confinement. Such employee will be approved a leave for 6 (six) months starting from her desired date as specified in the notice.



- VI. A female employee will not be subject to termination or any disciplinary action during the period of her maternity leave.
- VII. If a female employee is discharged, dismissed, removed or terminated from employment by MRDI within six months before or eight weeks after her delivery without showing sufficient cause in the notice of such separation, she will still be entitled to the monetary maternity benefit (equivalent to the amount payable for 4 months) under usual circumstance.
- VIII. The payment for the maternity leave period will be disbursed to the concerned employee at the end of each month in the usual salary disbursement process.
- IX. An expecting female employee will have to nominate a person for the purpose of receiving maternity benefit payment in case of her death.
- X. A female employee will be entitled to 6 (six) months of unpaid maternity leave (entitlement to only 6 (six) months' leave but no payment for such period) if at the time of her confinement she already has two or more surviving children.
- XI. A male employee is entitled to 8 (Eight) days of paid paternity leave around the date of his childbirth. Any weekly holiday or public holiday falling between the approved paternity leave will be inclusive in calculating the leave period.
- XII. An employee willing to avail paternity leave will have to apply one week prior to the expected date of commencement of such leave.
- XIII. To facilitate the multiple roles of women, both female and male employees will be entitled to take three days' extra leave to attend sick children and in case of death of close relatives (parents, spouse, children, parents-in-law).

4.1.5 Monetary And Other Facilities

Employees of all genders will get equal salary, house rent, travel allowance, gratuity, increment and medical allowance. Enough budgets will be allocated in the core program and project as well for ensuring special facilities of female employees. Organization will keep budget for part time staff during the six months' maternal Leave of female staff.

4.1.6 Infrastructural facilities

There will be separate toilet for female staff at the MRDI office.

4.1.7 Staff Development and Training

Training for capacity development of staff will be arranged in and outside the organization. Special training, as required, will be arranged for female staff to ensure their participation at all levels of the organization.

- I. Principle of positive discrimination will be followed in favour of women and people of diverse identities with respect to decisions regarding recruitment, placement, transfer, training, etc., if applicable, subject to fulfillment of the necessary terms and conditions of competence.
- II. Gender and Development training will be arranged for all staff emphasizing the women's special needs, gender-based violence and multiple roles of women and people of other sexes and diverse identities. Special management training will be arranged for ensuring participation of women and people of other sexes and diverse identities at the management level of the organization.

- III. Initiatives will be taken to facilitate visit of women and staff of other sexes and diverse identities to different organizations of Bangladesh and other countries to increase their experience.

4.1.8 Show cause, suspension and termination

Staff can be terminated according to the HR policy. But if any staff is sexually harassed by another staff, which is proved by proper investigation, the perpetrator will be terminated through proper procedure.

4.1.9 Other facilities

- I. Long journey during pregnancy and menstrual period will be relaxed.
- II. If any staff is assaulted by any outsider, organization will extend every kind of help (legal and economical if required) to her.
- III. Organization will arrange counseling support and other assistance if any employee is tortured mentally and physically by her/his family member.

4.2 Gender Policy In Programmes Of MRDI

- I. Integrate gender and diversity perspective in all training programmes, as appropriate.
- II. Ensure that throughout the proposal development process, the programmes and projects seek to contribute towards gender diversity, gender equality and empowerment of the disadvantaged people, especially women, girls and people of diverse identities. Gender analysis of stakeholders will be conducted where applicable.
- III. Projects/programmes will assess the scope of inclusion and participation of women and people of diverse identities and ensure affirmative actions in its interventions, where possible and relevant.
- IV. All research and advocacy-related materials will be developed in a gender sensitive manner, where applicable
- V. Participation of women and people of diverse identities will be especially encouraged in the training, fellowship and other activities of capacity building of media and journalists.
- VI. Inclusive staff training on behavioral aspects of gender norms will be organized
- VII. Allocate an optimum percentage of the total annual budget for gender-focused programmes and initiatives.

MEAL

- a. Tools for monitoring and evaluation will be developed for each project and the organizational structure to capture gender disaggregated data and information at all possible levels of project cycle implementation and management.
- b. All MEAL reports will incorporate gender and diversity disaggregated information, as and where appropriate.



Executive Director
Media Resources
Development Initiative (MRDI)



Chair
Media Resources
Development Initiative (MRDI)

MRDI's Steps In Implementing The Gender And Diversity Inclusion Policy

1. MRDI Board of Directors and all staff have been informed about this policy. HR rules and other activities will be in compliance with this policy.
2. Gender audit findings will be shared among staff members and followed up.
3. Required budget will be allocated to implement this policy.
4. Board of Directors, Executive Director and senior team members of the organization will play vital role in implementing this policy.
5. Spirit of the policy will be taken into consideration while writing new project proposals.
6. This policy can be reviewed in future to accommodate emerging issues and challenges.

DEFINITION

1. **Bullying:** Bullying is when an individual or a group of people with more power, repeatedly and intentionally cause hurt or harm to another person or group of people who feel helpless to respond. Bullying can continue over time, is often hidden from others, and will probably continue if no action is taken. Bullying can occur in a variety of environments.
2. **Sexual Exploitation:** Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. It defines the term "sexual abuse" as the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.
3. **Sexual Harassment:** Any action or comment known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning or unwelcome to the recipient with sexual overtones either direct or indirect notions. Sexual harassment includes:
 - A. Unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication) as physical contact and advances;
 - B. Attempts or efforts to establish physical relation having sexual implication by abuse of administrative, authoritative or professional powers;
 - C. Demand or request for sexual favours;
 - D. Showing pornography;
 - E. Sexually coloured remark or gesture;
 - F. Indecent gesture, teasing through abusive language, stalking, joking having sexual implication;
 - G. Insult through letters, telephone calls, cell phone calls, SMS, pottering, notice, email, chatting, social media posts, cartoon, writing on bench, chair, table, notice boards, walls of office, factory, classroom, washroom having sexual implication;
 - H. Taking still or video photographs without consent or with consent but using them for the purpose of blackmailing and character assassination or any other bad intentions;
 - I. Preventing participation in sports, cultural, organizational and academic activities on the ground of sex and/or for the purpose of sexual harassment;
 - J. Making love proposal and exerting pressure or posing threats in case of refusal to love proposal;
 - K. Attempt to establish sexual relations by intimidation, deception or false assurance.
 - L. Provoking the male colleague by different gesture.

4. **People of diverse identities:** People of diverse identities are individuals with different backgrounds, such as gender, age, religion, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background or other personal characteristics who bring unique experiences and views
5. **Staff:** Anyone who works for MRDI. This includes directly or indirectly employed core or contractual staff, Board members, contractors, consultants, volunteers, local coordinators and interns. Also, to cover downstream implementing & cooperation partners. These downstream partners are expected to agree to work under the policy as a condition of their involvement with MRDI.