

Muslim Aid's Gender Equality Guidance

About this guide:

As an organisation rooted in the values of justice, compassion, and human dignity, Muslim Aid recognises that addressing gender inequality is essential to fulfilling its humanitarian and development mission. This guide has been developed to provide a clear guideline for staff on how Muslim Aid can become a more gender-equal organisation - both in its internal culture and programming. It outlines our commitment to tackling inequality and promoting fairness across all aspects of our work, ensuring that the rights, needs, and voices of all genders are actively respected and represented.

The guide introduces Muslim Aid's core gender equality principles and serves as a practical resource for staff and partners. It provides clear, actionable guidance on how to mainstream gender equality within policies, operations, and programme cycles - from the assessment of needs and creation of a project design to implementation and evaluation. By embedding gender-sensitive approaches throughout the organisation, this guide aims to ensure that Muslim Aid's interventions are inclusive, effective, and aligned with both humanitarian best practices and Islamic values.

This guide is structured into **four** main parts. The first part introduces key concepts related to gender equality. The second outlines Muslim Aid's vision and commitment to gender equality and provides guidance on how to mainstream gender within the organisation's internal systems and culture, while the third focuses on gender mainstreaming within our programmatic work. The fourth and last part of the guide provides guidance to the staff on what can they do individually, in their roles, to address gender inequality within the organisation and its programmes. Additionally, the guide includes practical tools and resources to support staff in gender equality programming.



Part 1: An Introduction to Key Gender Concepts

Introduction

Understanding and addressing gender inequality requires a shared language and clear grasp of the key concepts that shape our work. This section introduces foundational gender concepts that are essential for building a common understanding across Muslim Aid's teams, programmes, and partners. These concepts help us see how power, roles, expectations, and opportunities are distributed differently across genders and why a more equitable approach is needed.

We explore terms such as **gender**, **gender norms**, **gender inequality**, and **gender equality**, and explain the importance of approaches like **gender programming** and/or **gender mainstreaming**. In this part we also introduce the concept of a '**Gender-Scale**' widely used in the international development and humanitarian sector for organisations to assess/rate their programmes on gender equality.

By deepening our understanding of how gender operates at individual, societal, and institutional levels, we can begin to transform systems and practice - both within our organisation and through the programmes we deliver. These concepts lay the foundation for the practical steps that follow in later sections of this guide.

What is Gender?

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expectations, and norms that societies assign to individuals based on their perceived sex. Unlike biological sex - which is determined by physical and genetic characteristics - gender is shaped by cultural, social, economic, and religious factors, and it can vary widely across different societies and over time.

From an early age, individuals are socialised into roles considered appropriate for their gender. These gendered roles can determine who is expected to care for children, who leads in the

community, who has control over resources, or who has decision-making power. These expectations are not fixed or universal; they are fluid and can be challenged and reshaped.¹

Understanding *gender as a social construct* allows us to critically examine how inequalities between men, women, and gender-diverse individuals are maintained and how these inequalities can be addressed to build a more just and equitable society.

What are Gender Norms?

Gender norms are the informal ‘rules’ and expectations that societies and cultures assign to individuals based on their perceived gender. We internalize and learn these ‘rules’ early in life.² These norms shape how people are expected to behave, dress, speak, and engage in social roles - such as caregiving, leadership, or work. For example, a common gender norm might expect women to be nurturing and domestic and men dominant and independent. Below is an example:

While gender norms can vary across cultures and change over time, they often reinforce unequal power dynamics and limit individual freedom. Challenging harmful gender norms is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone can live according to their own choices and potential.

What is Gender Equality?

To understand gender equality, it is essential to first recognise what *gender inequality* is.

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment, access, or opportunities individuals face based on their gender. This often arises from entrenched social norms, cultural expectations, and institutional structures that privilege one gender over others - typically favouring men and boys, while limiting the rights, voices, and choices of women and girls.

Gender equality, by contrast, refers to a state where people of all genders enjoy the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in all areas of life. It means that an individual's potential is not determined by their gender identity or sex, and that no one is held back by discrimination or bias.

In practice, gender equality is realised when women, men, girls, and boys are equally respected and valued, and have equitable access to resources, services, and decision-making - whether in education, health, livelihoods, or public life. Importantly, gender equality does not mean treating everyone the same; it means recognising and fairly addressing the different needs, experiences, and barriers faced by individuals based on their gender.

At its heart, gender equality is a matter of human rights and social justice. It requires transforming systems, structures, and norms that reinforce inequality. It also involves

¹ UN Women Training Centre glossary on definitions

² UN Women Training Centre glossary on definitions

acknowledging the specific disadvantages faced by women and girls, while recognising that men and boys can also be constrained by harmful gender expectations.

Why Is Gender Equality Important?

Gender inequality manifests in many forms, including disparities in education, income, healthcare, political participation, and protection from violence. It also affects men and boys, especially when rigid gender norms limit their emotional expression, caregiving roles, or life choices.

Globally, the impacts of gender inequality remain stark:

- Women represent **nearly 70% of the world's poor**.³
- Girls account for **over two-thirds** of the 129 million children who are out of school.⁴
- Women carry out **three times more unpaid care and domestic work** than men.⁵
- Every year, **12 million girls** are married before the age of 18.⁶
- In many contexts, **boys are also disadvantaged** - for example, being pushed into hazardous work (including their recruitment as child soldiers in many conflict zones) or discouraged from expressing emotion due to harmful gender norms.⁷

In the context of humanitarian and development work, promoting gender equality is not only a moral imperative but it is essential for impact. When gender inequalities go unaddressed, access to services is skewed, community resilience is weakened, and long-term development is compromised. Advancing gender equality strengthens communities, economies, families, enhancing the well-being of all, and contributes to peaceful and sustainable societies.

How to address Gender Inequality?

In a nutshell, addressing gender inequality within humanitarian and development work requires deliberate, informed, and sustained efforts. It is not enough to recognise that inequality exists; we as an organisation must take proactive steps to dismantle it through both **targeted gender programming** and **gender mainstreaming**.

These two approaches are essential and complementary and together, they create pathways toward more inclusive, impactful, and equitable outcomes for all.

³ UN Women, *Facts and figures: Women and poverty*, 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

⁴ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report*, 2023. <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en>

⁵ ILO, *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*, 2018. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang-en/index.html

⁶ UNICEF, *Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects*, 2023. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends/>

⁷ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>

What Is Gender Programming?

Gender programming refers to initiatives or projects that are specifically designed to address gender-based inequalities. These programmes intentionally focus on the unique needs, rights, and capacities of women, girls, men, and boys, particularly where inequality is most entrenched.

Examples include:

- Livelihood projects targeting women-headed households.
- Menstrual health initiatives in schools.
- GBV (Gender-Based Violence) response and prevention programmes.
- Male engagement programmes to shift harmful norms.

Gender programming is often **targeted** and focused on transforming power dynamics and outcomes for those who are most marginalised.

What Is Gender Mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming is the process of integrating a gender lens into **all organisational processes, programmes, and policies** - regardless of their primary focus. A **gender lens** is a way of analysing situations, designing programmes, or developing approaches that explicitly consider and address the existing differences and inequalities between women and men⁸. Rather than treating gender as a standalone issue, mainstreaming ensures that gender equality is considered at every stage: planning, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, staffing, budgeting, and reporting.

This means asking:

- Who benefits from this programme?
- Whose voices are included or excluded?
- How do social norms or gender roles affect access, participation, and outcomes?

When done well, gender mainstreaming **prevents the reinforcement of existing inequalities** and enhances the effectiveness of interventions by making them more inclusive, responsive, and just.

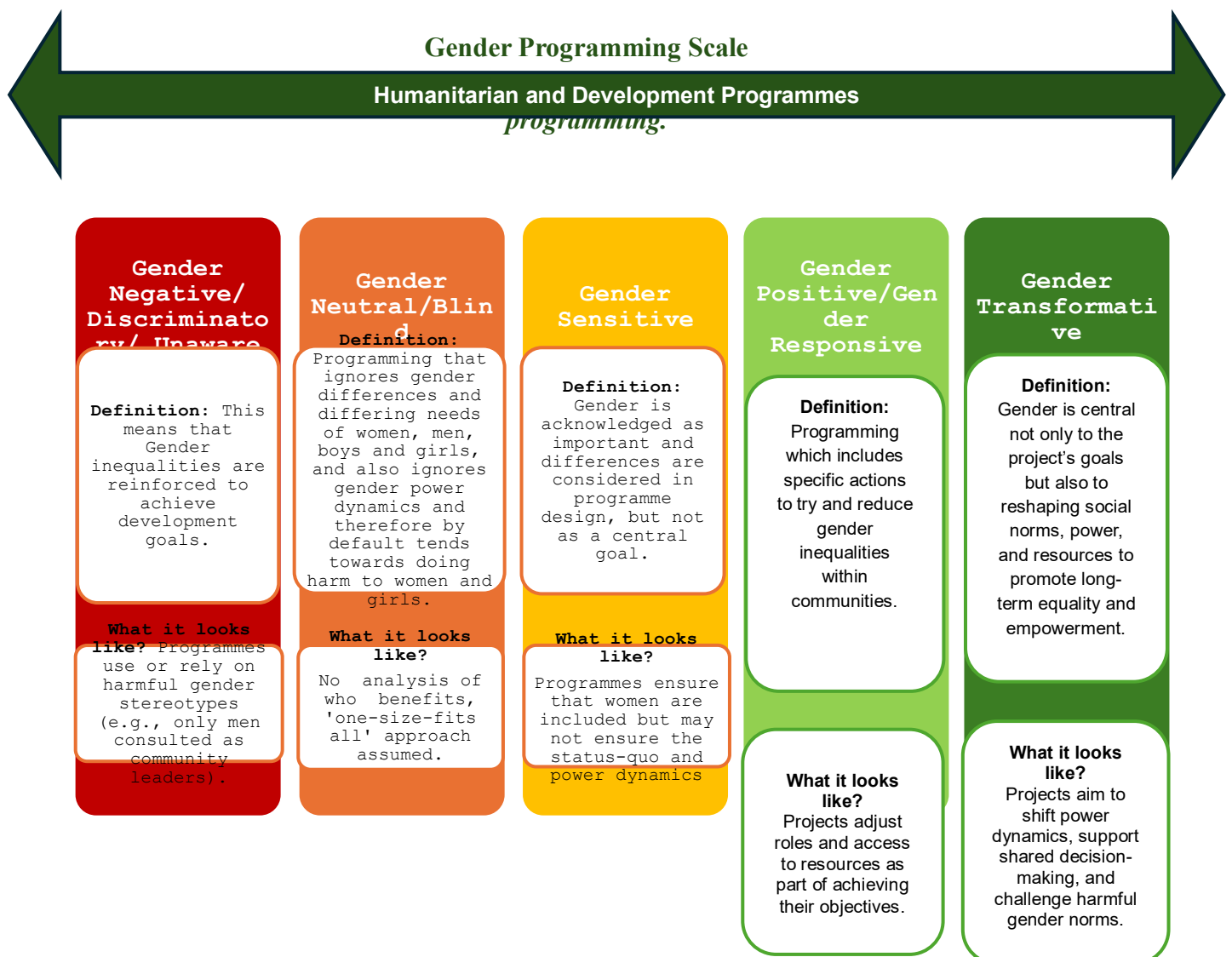
Both gender programming and gender mainstreaming are detailed in the second and third section of this guide.

⁸ Definition by UNFPA <https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/gender-lens>

What Is a ‘Gender-Scale’?

In humanitarian and development work, it’s essential to understand how our programmes impact gender dynamics. To help with this, many organisations use a **gender-scale** - a practical tool for assessing how gender is considered (or not) in programming. This scale helps teams reflect on whether they are unintentionally reinforcing inequalities, merely acknowledging them, or actively working to shift the structures that sustain them.

The degree to which gender is integrated into a programme can be seen as a continuum - ranging from approaches that reinforce inequality, to those that transform it. At one end, programming may be **gender negative/gender unaware**, reinforcing unequal norms to achieve outcomes. **Gender neutral** programming ignores the issue altogether, which can result in unintended harm. **Gender sensitive** and **gender positive** programming recognise gender differences and incorporate responses but may not address the root causes. At the most ambitious and effective end, **gender transformative** approaches aim to shift power, roles, and structures for lasting equality.





Part 2: Gender Equality at an Organisational Level

Muslim Aid is committed to promoting gender equality in a way that respects faith and cultural values, while upholding universal human rights. This involves engaging women, men, girls, and boys - both together and separately - in creating inclusive, respectful, and empowering environments where all individuals can thrive.

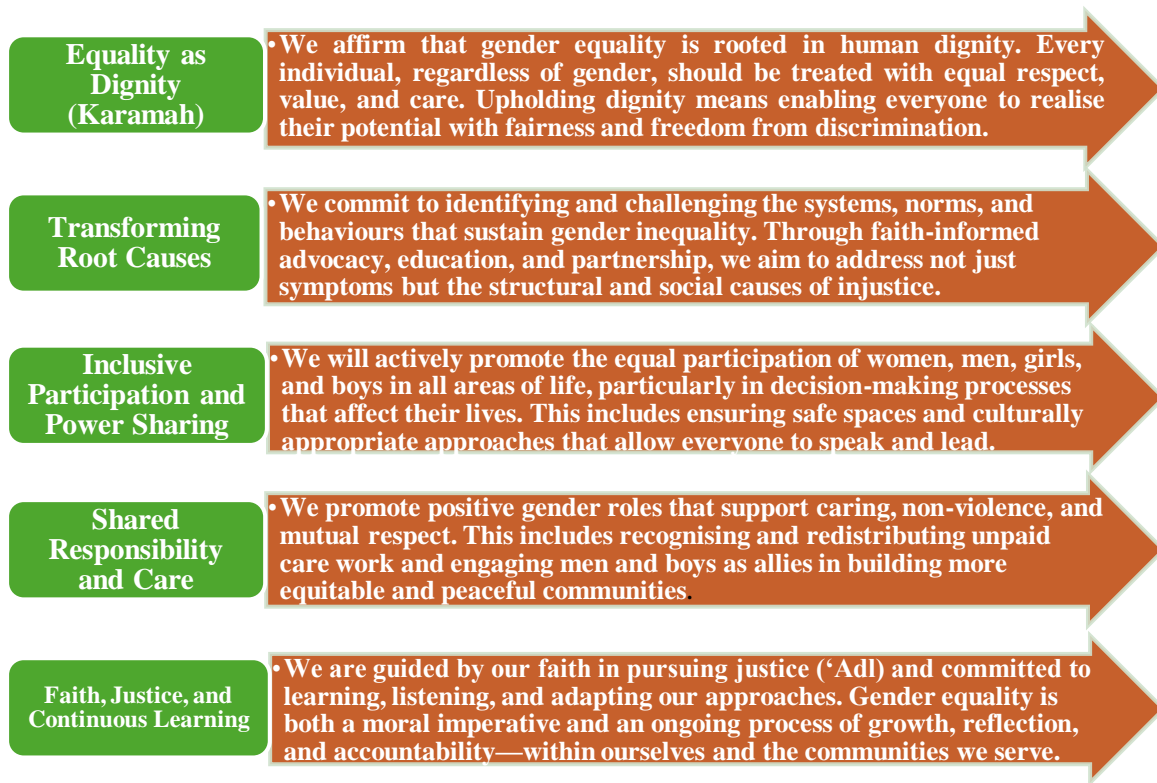
Introduction:

Achieving gender equality requires more than just programme-level changes. It must be reflected in the internal structures, policies, behaviours, and systems of an organisation. At Muslim Aid, this means ensuring that both our Headquarter and Country Offices model the values of dignity, fairness, and justice in how we operate internally. Gender equality in the workplace is not only a moral and faith-based obligation, it also a key to building effective, resilient, and inclusive teams capable of delivering meaningful change.

This section of the guide provides practical guidance for all departments and staff—senior leadership, human resources, operations, supply chain, finance, logistics, and others on how to embed gender equality in their everyday roles. Whether at headquarters or in a field office, each individual has a part to play in building a workplace where all genders can thrive.

Muslim Aid Gender Equality Principles:

At Muslim Aid, we believe in the ‘*Inside Out*’ approach - the idea that our internal behaviours, values, and systems ultimately extend beyond our organisation and shape the way we engage with communities. The way we operate internally is not separate from the impact we create through our programmes. For this reason, it is essential that we not only recognise gender inequality within our own structures but also commit to actively addressing and reducing it. By cultivating a culture of inclusion and fairness internally, we ensure that our external work reflects the same principles - creating lasting change from the inside out. Muslim Aid seeks to advance gender equality across organisation and in its programmes. Our vision for gender equality is guided by our organisational values and strategy. Based on which we have created our principles for gender quality.



Gender Equality at an Organisational Level

The Role of Senior Leadership

Senior leaders are responsible for setting the tone and direction of the organisation. When they champion gender equality consistently and visibly, it signals to all staff that this is a shared organisational value.

Key actions for Senior Leadership include:

- Embedding gender equality into strategic plans, priorities, and performance targets.
- Ensuring diverse and gender-balanced representation in senior decision-making bodies, including boards and country management teams.
- Integrating gender indicators into key performance frameworks and reporting (including the organisational strategy).
- Allocating sufficient financial and human resources to support gender-focused initiatives, training, and staffing.
- Speaking publicly and regularly about gender equality and leading by example in inclusive leadership behaviours.

Gender-Responsive Human Resources (HR)

The HR function is central to creating an inclusive workplace. Policies and practices must ensure fairness, inclusion, and support for the diverse realities of women, men, and gender-diverse staff.

Key actions for HR include:

- **Recruitment and Promotion:** Use inclusive language in job adverts and implement bias-free recruitment processes. Monitor gender balance in hiring and advancement. Avoid reinforcing gender norms that disproportionately place women in caregiving or junior administrative roles such as assistants. Promote women's representation in technical and leadership roles.
- **Equal Pay:** Regularly review compensation data to identify and correct gender-based pay disparities.
- **Flexible Work:** Offer flexible and remote working arrangements to support staff with care responsibilities across genders.
- **Menstrual Health:** Ensure access to clean, private facilities and menstrual hygiene products; include menstrual health as part of wellness and leave policies.
- **Workplace Safety:** Implement clear anti-harassment policies and provide regular gender sensitivity and unconscious bias training.
- **Women-Only Spaces:** Encourage the formation of safe spaces such as women-only meetings or forums where women staff can express themselves freely and build solidarity.

Mainstreaming Gender Across Departments

Gender equality is everyone's responsibility. Every department, regardless of its focus, can and should contribute to building an inclusive workplace.

a) Finance

- Apply gender-sensitive budgeting to ensure adequate resources for gender-related initiatives.

b) Logistics and Supply Chain

- Involve women in designing and delivering logistics and aid processes.
- Use gender-responsive criteria in supplier selection, such as engaging women-led enterprises or suppliers with inclusive practices.

c) IT, Admin, and Operations

- Ensure equal access to digital systems and technology for all staff.
- Use inclusive practices in equipment distribution, training, and system design.

Building a Culture of Gender Equality

Beyond systems and structures, the daily experience of working at Muslim Aid must reflect inclusion and respect.

Actions for building a gender-equal culture:

- Celebrate key moments like International Women's Day and 16 Days of Activism.
- Create gender focal points in each team or country office.
- Recognise and reward inclusive behaviours and team contributions.
- Engage men and boys in conversations about allyship, care roles, and respectful workplace behaviours (A great way to do this is by organising seminars, trainings and workshops)
- Provide structured opportunities for women staff to connect, share experiences, and support each other, including through women-only meetings or staff groups.

Accountability and Continuous Learning

Ongoing monitoring and reflection are essential to ensure we make real progress.

Key steps include:

- Conducting **gender audits** at both HQ and Country Office levels.
- Establishing **gender scorecards** and regular progress updates.
- Ensuring anonymous, gender-sensitive complaints mechanisms are accessible to all.
- Reporting transparently on staffing and leadership diversity, disaggregated by gender.

As a faith-inspired organisation, Muslim Aid's approach to gender equality is deeply rooted in Islamic values: **justice ('adl)**, **dignity (karamah)**, and **compassion (rahma)**. These values guide our mission not only in how we serve communities but also in how we treat one another. All staff have a role to play regardless of department or seniority. Gender equality is not a side activity; it is foundational to our integrity and effectiveness.

Gender equality at the organisational level is not a one-time event, but a continuous journey. By embedding equity into leadership, HR, systems, and culture, Muslim Aid can become a workplace where everyone - regardless of gender - can contribute meaningfully and feel valued.

This part of the guide focused on building a gender-equal organisation at the departmental level, offering guidance on how different functions and systems can mainstream gender within their internal practices. The final section of the guide shifts the focus to the individual level, providing practical advice on how every staff member regardless of their role or seniority can contribute to advancing gender equality through their daily actions and decisions. Together, Parts 2 and 4 highlight that achieving gender equality is a shared responsibility, encouraging

all teams and individuals to reflect on their role in creating a more inclusive, respectful, and just workplace.



Part 3: Gender Mainstreaming in Programmes

Introduction

Gender equality in programming is not simply a technical requirement or an optional feature - it is a moral, strategic, and operational imperative. When projects overlook gender dynamics, they risk reinforcing inequalities, excluding the most vulnerable, or even causing harm. To be effective, inclusive, and aligned with Muslim Aid's faith-driven values of our programmes must consciously address the different roles, risks, and needs that people of different genders face.

As defined in the first part of this guide applying a **gender lens** means critically examining how gender norms, power relations, and social expectations affect access, participation, and benefit from programmes. A gender lens enables us to see how a project might be experienced differently by women, men, boys, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. It also helps us identify where inequalities exist, and how to challenge them through our design, implementation, and evaluation practices.

This part of the guide is divided into five sections. The first section offers practical guidance on how to integrate gender equality across the entire programme cycle - from design and assessment through to implementation, monitoring, and close-out. The remaining sections focus on Muslim Aid's key thematic areas: [WASH, Education, Food Security & Livelihoods \(FSL\), and Emergencies](#), providing tailored advice for mainstreaming gender in each sector. For detailed sector-specific guidance, you can refer to those dedicated sections.

Project Development and Needs Assessment

The first opportunity to embed gender equality in programming begins at the earliest stages of project development. This includes how needs are identified, how assessments are carried out, and how priorities are shaped. A gender-sensitive needs assessment ensures that we do not treat people as a homogenous group, but rather recognise and respond to the diverse realities they live in. Too often, proposals are developed under tight deadlines, and gender is included as a 'cross-cutting' theme without actual meaningful integration. In such cases, gender considerations are reduced to basic disaggregated data - used more for donor compliance than impact - and risk becoming a superficial tick-boxing exercise. This approach not only misses the point but also undermines the effectiveness of the intervention.

To avoid this, teams should intentionally plan time and resources to conduct a **gender and power analysis exercise**. This analysis should go beyond numbers to explore the underlying norms, barriers, and inequalities that shape people's experiences. Its findings must directly inform the programme design, shaping objectives, activities, and outcomes to ensure the intervention is both inclusive and impactful.

That being said, staff must always collect **sex- and age-disaggregated data (SADD)** and analyse how roles, responsibilities, risks, and access to resources differ across gender groups. But as aforementioned, numbers alone aren't enough - qualitative insights are just as critical. Focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and participatory mapping exercises and

gender scorecard can help uncover deeper dynamics, such as who controls decision-making in the home, who can move freely in the community, or who has access to health services or education.

Special attention should be paid to the inclusion of underrepresented voices - such as women with disabilities, widows, adolescent girls, or transgender individuals - whose needs are often invisible in general assessments. Where appropriate, assessments should be conducted in gender-segregated settings, allowing women and girls to speak openly without fear of judgment or backlash. This may also require recruiting female enumerators or working with trusted community intermediaries.

Ultimately, **the findings of the gender analysis should inform the core objectives, strategies, and design of the project** - not simply be appended as an afterthought. For example, if the assessment finds that women cannot access markets due to mobility restrictions, the project should consider localised services or transport support. Designing with a gender lens means identifying barriers to participation and building pathways for inclusion from the outset. **Muslim Aid's Gender Marker** should be used as a tool to determine which stage the project is on the Gender scale (mentioned in the first part of the guide) – staff should always try to design programmes that are gender transformative.

Budgeting for Gender

Gender equality cannot be meaningfully addressed without dedicated resources. To ensure that gender is not treated as an afterthought or a secondary concern, every project budget should include clear and sufficient allocations for gender-related actions.

This includes **funding for human resources**, such as hiring dedicated gender staff or focal points. Assigning gender responsibilities to already overstretched project managers or assistants undermines both effectiveness and accountability. A focused, qualified team member is needed to lead gender analysis, support implementation, and monitor progress throughout the project cycle.

Projects should also **allocate funds for gender audits, rapid gender analyses (RGA), and ongoing training** for staff and partners on gender equality and inclusive practices. These investments help teams reflect, learn, and continuously improve their approaches.

In addition, teams should consider:

- **Budgeting for community engagement activities** that create space for women's participation (e.g. women-only focus groups, childcare for consultation meetings).
- Ensuring **financial provision for gender-sensitive MEAL systems**.
- **Allocating funds for safeguarding mechanisms**, including the development of complaint and feedback systems that are accessible to women and other at-risk groups.

- **Supporting local women-led organisations or consultants**, recognising their role in community trust-building and sustainability.

By budgeting for gender from the outset, Muslim Aid can ensure that its commitments are not just written into proposals but built into how programmes are planned, delivered, and measured.

Gender-Responsive Implementation

Once a project is underway, the commitment to gender equality must be sustained through daily decision-making, interactions with communities, and practical delivery of services. Implementation should ensure that all planned activities remain **inclusive, safe, and equitable**.

This involves continually adapting delivery methods based on the different realities faced by women, men, and marginalised groups. For instance, training schedules may need to be adjusted to fit around women's unpaid care work; distribution sites may need to be made safer with adequate lighting and security; and childcare options might be necessary to allow mothers to participate.

Frontline staff, partners, and volunteers must be equipped with **gender sensitivity trainings and refreshers** so they can identify early signs of exclusion, gender-based violence, or unintended consequences. For example, if a woman's increased involvement in a programme leads to conflict at home, this must be identified quickly and addressed with protective or mitigating strategies - such as involving male partners in awareness sessions or linking households to local mediation mechanisms.

Importantly, implementation should not only benefit women or address needs, but it should also challenge harmful norms. This includes **engaging men and boys** in gender equality initiatives, promoting shared caregiving roles, and challenging perceptions that leadership or technical skills are inherently male domains. Gender equality programming in action means promoting transformation, not just access.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL)

A project's effectiveness cannot be fully measured without understanding its impact on gender dynamics. Monitoring and evaluation systems should therefore integrate **gender-sensitive indicators**, measure progress toward gender outcomes, and ensure participation of diverse community members in data collection and feedback loops.

Quantitative tracking might include how many women vs. men are reached, employed, trained, or supported. But equally important are qualitative findings, such as whether women feel safer, more empowered, or more involved in decision-making processes. These insights often emerge

from **gender-disaggregated focus groups**, **perception surveys**, and participatory reflection methods. Throughout the course of the project **gender marker** must be used time to time to assess the project's progress on the gender scale. This guide strongly recommends conducting periodic project level gender audits.

In addition, **safeguarding and complaints mechanisms** must be designed with gender in mind. Women and girls may not feel comfortable using general feedback channels - anonymous, confidential, and women-led options must be made available. This ensures not only that projects remain accountable but also that emerging issues of harm or exclusion are addressed before they escalate.

Monitoring also includes **continuous reflections by staff**. Teams should meet regularly to ask:



By building gender into our learning processes, Muslim Aid enhances its ability to adapt and grow as a responsive and rights-based actor.

Gender-

Are we reaching the right people?

Sensitive

Close-Out and

Who is being left out?

The final stage of **Are our assumptions about gender roles still valid?** teams should assess and reflect on what has been achieved or missed in terms of gender equality. During project close-out, teams should conduct a final review **What can we adjust?** roles, access, safety, and power.

Where possible, final evaluations should involve separate consultations with women, men, and gender-diverse participants to ensure all perspectives are captured. Staff should assess not only outputs but **transformational change**: Have women gained more voice in their communities? Are harmful gender norms shifting? Are men more involved in caregiving?

Exit strategies must also be gender-aware (if not gender transformational). If a project supported women's groups, safe spaces, or local leadership structures, plans should be made to transition or sustain those efforts beyond the project's lifespan - ideally by linking them to local women-led organisations or existing government structures. Failing to plan for sustainability can risk undermining or reversing the progress made.

Finally, all learning, whether positive or negative, should be documented and shared internally and with communities. Muslim Aid must be transparent about challenges, willing to learn, and committed to improving how gender equality is embedded in its programming long-term.

Integrating gender equality into each stage of the project cycle is both a technical process and a value-driven commitment. It requires awareness, humility, and continuous learning. By applying a gender lens from the earliest assessment to the final handover, Muslim Aid can ensure that its programmes are not only more inclusive and impactful, but also more just.

Part 3.1: Gender Mainstreaming in WASH

Introduction:

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are essential services that profoundly impact people's health, dignity, safety, and livelihoods. But unfortunately, these services are not experienced equally. Around the world, women and girls bear the brunt of poor or unsafe WASH systems.⁹ They are more likely to walk long distances to collect water, experience threats to safety and privacy when using public toilets, and face stigma around menstruation.¹⁰ Despite being the primary users and managers of WASH at the household level, women and girls are often excluded from decision-making in WASH projects and institutions.¹¹

At Muslim Aid, we recognise that **WASH programming is not gender neutral**. It either reinforces harmful inequalities or becomes a platform to challenge them. For WASH projects to be truly effective, sustainable, and just, gender equality must be built into every stage of a programme - from needs assessment to design, implementation, monitoring, and closure. This section of the guide outlines how to do that.

Designing WASH Projects Through a Gender Lens

To address gender inequality in WASH, programmes must begin with **a gender and power analysis**. This means examining who has access to WASH services, who controls them, who bears the burden of related labour (like collecting water), and who is excluded. The design process should engage women, men, and gender-diverse individuals from all parts of the community - including those often left out, like women with disabilities, single mothers, or girls in puberty.

A **gender lens** ensures we see these differences clearly and plan responses accordingly. For example, if a latrine design does not provide privacy, it may remain unused by women; if handwashing stations are placed in public areas without accounting for stigma around menstruation, they may actually discourage use.

A good WASH design process will:

- Consult women and girls in meaningful ways (separately if needed).
- Understand the practical and social barriers to accessing WASH.
- Identify risks of gender-based violence or exploitation in WASH settings.
- Include women's rights organisations and local gender experts in planning.
- Use **participatory tools** to involve community members in analysing their own context.

⁹ UN Women (2020). [Gender Equality and WASH – Policy Brief](#).

¹⁰ UNICEF (2021). [Gender-Responsive WASH Programming](#).

¹¹ WaterAid (2019). [Integrating Gender Equality into WASH Programmes](#).

Two especially helpful participatory methods are:

- **Transect Walks**

A transect walk is a guided walk through a community, usually done separately with men and women. Participants point out key water points, toilets, bathing spaces, or unsafe areas, and discuss:

- Who uses them and when,
- What challenges or risks exist (e.g. lack of lighting, long distance),
- How physical access or layout affects safety, especially for women and girls.

This real-time observation helps programme teams understand barriers that might not come up in formal surveys.

- **Seasonal Calendars**

Seasonal Calendars can be used for WASH and other sectors. It helps communities map how daily tasks change throughout the year. Women and men list what they do month-by-month like farming, caregiving, water collection, and hygiene maintenance - and discuss:

- Time spent on each task,
- Seasonal stresses (like longer water collection times during dry season),
- Differences in workload between genders.

This tool reveals when women are overburdened and when interventions can be most supportive or least disruptive. Incorporating these tools not only improves the accuracy of project planning but also builds trust, inclusion, and local ownership. The resulting insights should directly inform project objectives, facility design, behaviour change activities, and decision-making processes.

Gender-mainstreaming in a WASH project would look like:

- Active and repeated consultations with women and girls on the design, installation, and rehabilitation of water points, sanitation facilities, and hygiene spaces - ensuring their safety, preferences, and lived experiences are fully reflected.
- Inclusion of women in Water Management Committees (WMCs) with real decision-making power, not just as token members, but as active contributors in planning, budgeting, and operations.
- Focused advocacy and education around Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) - including culturally appropriate awareness-raising, access to menstrual materials, and private, safe facilities for menstrual care at schools, health centres, and public spaces.

- Conducting gender-sensitive risk assessments that identify protection risks - such as GBV or harassment near water points, latrines, or bathing areas and adapting infrastructure accordingly (e.g., lighting, locks, separate entrances).
- Training male and female hygiene promoters on gender equality, inclusive communication, and respectful engagement - ensuring both genders can lead hygiene behaviour change activities.
- Scheduling activities at times convenient for caregivers, often women, to ensure their participation is possible alongside household and livelihood responsibilities.
- Using sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data to track who accesses WASH services, who participates, and who benefits and then adjusting delivery if gaps appear.
- Creating women-only consultation spaces or forums, particularly in conservative or male-dominated communities, to ensure that women's voices are captured safely and meaningfully.
- Partnering with local women-led organisations or community groups to design, deliver, and monitor WASH activities - ensuring sustainability and local ownership.
- Ensuring dignity kits include more than just menstrual pads—they should reflect the actual hygiene and cultural needs of diverse groups (e.g., lactating mothers, adolescent girls, displaced women).
- Conducting periodic WASH focused gender safety audits.

Designing with a gender lens helps ensure that WASH interventions do not unintentionally reinforce inequalities but instead contribute to empowerment, safety, and dignity for all.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Measuring Gender Outcomes

Measuring the success of a WASH project should include how well it has promoted gender equality. This means moving beyond counting how many women attended a session or how many water sources were installed.

Monitoring must include sex- and age-disaggregated data as well as qualitative insights from diverse voices. Community feedback mechanisms should be confidential and accessible to women and girls. Women should also be involved as enumerators, observers, and analysts - ensuring that the process is inclusive and trustworthy.

Special care must be taken to monitor risks, such as backlash against women's participation, increased exposure to violence, or stigma due to menstruation. These should be documented and responded to immediately.

Closure and Transition

Gender-sensitive WASH programming does not end with project closure. The exit strategy must consider how gender equality gains will be sustained. For example:

- Will WASH committees continue to include women in leadership?
- Are there partnerships with local women's groups to maintain facilities?
- Have policies been developed to guide inclusive WASH planning going forward?

Final evaluations (including the results from the gender safety audits) should reflect on gender outcomes i.e what has changed, what still needs attention, and how the experience can shape future projects. Learning from communities, especially from women and marginalised users, should be documented and shared within Muslim Aid teams for continuous improvement.

WASH services are a critical entry point for gender equality. When designed and delivered thoughtfully, they not only meet urgent practical needs, but they can transform relationships, shift power, and restore dignity. At Muslim Aid, integrating gender into WASH is not just about better infrastructure, it is about building a more just, inclusive, and compassionate world. Staff across all levels – from technical teams, programme managers to field officers - have an important role to play in making this vision a reality.

Let's build taps and toilets that change lives - not just conditions.



Part 3.2: Gender Mainstreaming in Food Security and Livelihoods

Introduction:

Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) programming is one of the most powerful entry points for advancing gender equality. Globally, women are central to food systems - as producers, processors, sellers, and caregivers - yet they often face deep-seated inequalities¹². These include limited access to land, credit, markets, information, and training.¹³ They are also more likely to carry the unpaid burden of care and household food provision, leaving them with less time and fewer opportunities to benefit from livelihood interventions.¹⁴

For FSL programmes to be effective, inclusive, and sustainable, gender equality must be intentionally mainstreamed throughout the project cycle. This chapter provides practical guidance to Muslim Aid's programme teams on how to integrate gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches in FSL initiatives across design, implementation, monitoring, and exit phases.

Why Gender Mainstreaming Matters in FSL?

Gender inequality is not just a social issue; it directly undermines food security and livelihood outcomes. Women and girls make up a significant share of the agricultural labour force in most regions, yet they often have less control over land, income, technology, and training. This reduces productivity, reinforces poverty, and limits the resilience of households and communities.

When programmes fail to recognise these disparities, they risk reinforcing the very inequalities they aim to address. Gender-blind food or income support may benefit male heads of households without improving women's access to nutrition or income. Similarly, training offered at times when women are busy with care duties may exclude them by default.

By contrast, **mainstreaming gender throughout the project cycle** ensures that:

- All community members - regardless of gender - can benefit from services.
- Interventions respond to actual needs and constraints on ground.
- Projects contribute to fairer power dynamics and improved outcomes for all.

Gender mainstreaming leads to **more effective, equitable, and sustainable programmes**, and aligns with Muslim Aid's values of justice, compassion, and dignity.

¹² FAO (2011). [The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development](#).

¹³ World Bank & FAO (2023). [Gender Equality in Food Systems](#).

¹⁴ UN Women (2015). *Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*.
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015>.

Designing with a Gender Lens

A strong programme begins with a clear understanding of the gender realities in the target community. Conducting a **gender analysis** at the start helps identify who has access to and control over key livelihood resources - such as land, livestock, seeds, credit, training, and market networks - and who does not.

Tools like **seasonal calendars** and **daily time-use surveys** can help map how women and men divide their time between productive and unpaid domestic responsibilities. For example, if women are spending up to five hours a day on childcare, cooking, and fetching water, their participation in a standard training session may not be feasible.

When conducting market assessments, Muslim Aid staff must take care to **identify and challenge gender biases that may influence both the data and the design of livelihoods interventions**. This includes recognising how gendered expectations around certain jobs or skills such as tailoring, beauty services, or caregiving are often automatically assigned to women, while men are steered toward construction, mechanics, or IT.

Such assumptions can limit people's choices, reinforce existing inequalities, and shape programme outcomes in unintended ways. Instead, teams should explore what skills, markets, or services are truly in demand (regardless of gender) and create space for non-traditional participation. A woman may be interested in digital services, carpentry, or solar repair; a man may want to pursue culinary training or early childhood education. Our assessments and recommendations must reflect opportunities, not stereotypes.

Below are some pointers to ensure gender mainstreaming during the programme design phase:

- Offer literacy, financial literacy, and business training tailored to women's needs and schedules.
- Offer technical and vocational training opportunities, using them as a platform to challenge gender stereotypes and social norms that restrict women's participation in specific careers—especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).
- Use mobile outreach, local female facilitators, and trusted community spaces to create safe and culturally appropriate access points.
- Design interventions in ways that account for unpaid care responsibilities, such as offering labour-saving agricultural tools or providing childcare during trainings or meetings.

Where social norms restrict women's public participation, hold separate consultations to ensure their voices are heard. Consider setting **minimum participation targets**, such as 50% women

attendees and 30% women in leadership roles in farmer groups, cooperatives to foster visibility and influence.

Inclusive and Equitable Implementation

Once a project moves into implementation, the findings from gender analysis must translate into tangible action. This means ensuring that both women and men across different age groups and backgrounds have equal access to services, resources, and opportunities, and that no one is excluded. It is imperative to translate the gender responsive programming from paper to action.

Experience from various contexts shows that training sessions and livelihood activities must be designed and implemented with women's realities in mind. Flexible schedules, safe and accessible locations, and childcare availability can make a significant difference in enabling women's participation. Creating safe learning environments, such as women-only training groups or women-led facilitation teams, can further support engagement and confidence building. Often, gender dynamics become more visible during the implementation of a project. Therefore, it is important that the implementation team continues to revisit the gender and power analysis throughout the entire project cycle, so that activities can be continuously adapted to ensure they are inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the needs, realities, and risks faced by all genders.

For example, in FSL programming, empowering women through income-generating activities or financial independence can unintentionally disrupt local norms, especially in contexts where women are traditionally expected to remain in the home. This shift in power dynamics, if not thoughtfully managed, can increase the risk of backlash, including violence against women. To mitigate this, interventions should include soft components such as gender-transformative training, dialogue sessions, and advocacy that engage men and boys. This helps build shared understanding around gender equality and fosters community support for women's participation in economic life.

Throughout the project cycle **women-led cooperatives (SMEs) should be supported** for example, in areas like food processing, small-scale agriculture, or home-based production. This can empower women with both economic opportunities and amplifying their collective voice. These cooperatives also offer space for social solidarity, confidence building, and shared problem-solving.

To promote equality during implementation:

- Ensure that agricultural inputs, vocational training, and financial support are distributed fairly and that uptake is tracked by gender. It's not just about who is invited, it's about who is actually benefitting.

- Facilitate **equitable access to markets**, with special attention to women who may face mobility constraints, language barriers, or caregiving duties that limit their participation in economic spaces.
- Recognise and address the *triple burden* many women face by **promoting labour-saving tools** and integrating support systems like **childcare services** or shared **transportation** where feasible.
- Have a gender transformative approach where entrenched **gender stereotypes are challenged by promoting shared responsibilities** within the household, such as men's involvement in food preparation, child-rearing, and financial planning.

Lastly, it is crucial to actively **engage men and boys** for fostering inclusive change. Working with male community leaders, religious leaders, and family heads to promote gender equality can reduce resistance and foster a supportive environment. Male allies can encourage women's participation, help shift household dynamics, and advocate for fairness in their communities.

Implementation is the moment where principles meet practice. By building inclusion and equity into every layer of delivery, Muslim Aid can ensure its FSL programmes not only reach but uplift everyone they serve.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A gender-responsive MEAL system should be developed and used for all our programmes including FSL.

As stated for all other sections, indicators for FSL programmes should also be **disaggregated by sex and age**.

To capture qualitative shifts in gender dynamics, consider:

- **Focus group discussions** held separately with women and men.
- **Community scorecards** or participatory feedback tools.
- **Stories of change**, shared by women and men about how the project affected their lives.

As stated in the implementation section, projects must also monitor for **unintended effects** such as increased tensions at home if women's income grows faster than men's, or if workload shifts without proper planning. Safe and confidential **complaints mechanisms and safeguarding reporting mechanisms** – managed by trained staff - should be made accessible to all, especially women, to report concerns, especially related to safety, discrimination, or exclusion.

Sustainability and Transition

Gender equality should not disappear when a project ends. Sustainable gender outcomes require deliberate planning and investment in the final stages.

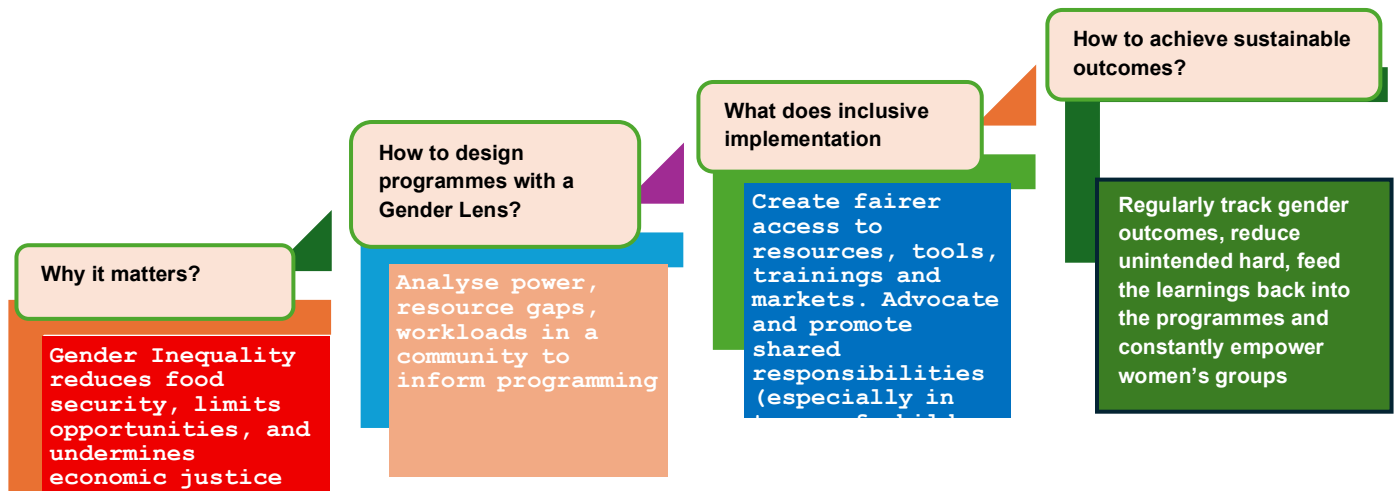
Gender Mainstreaming in FSL

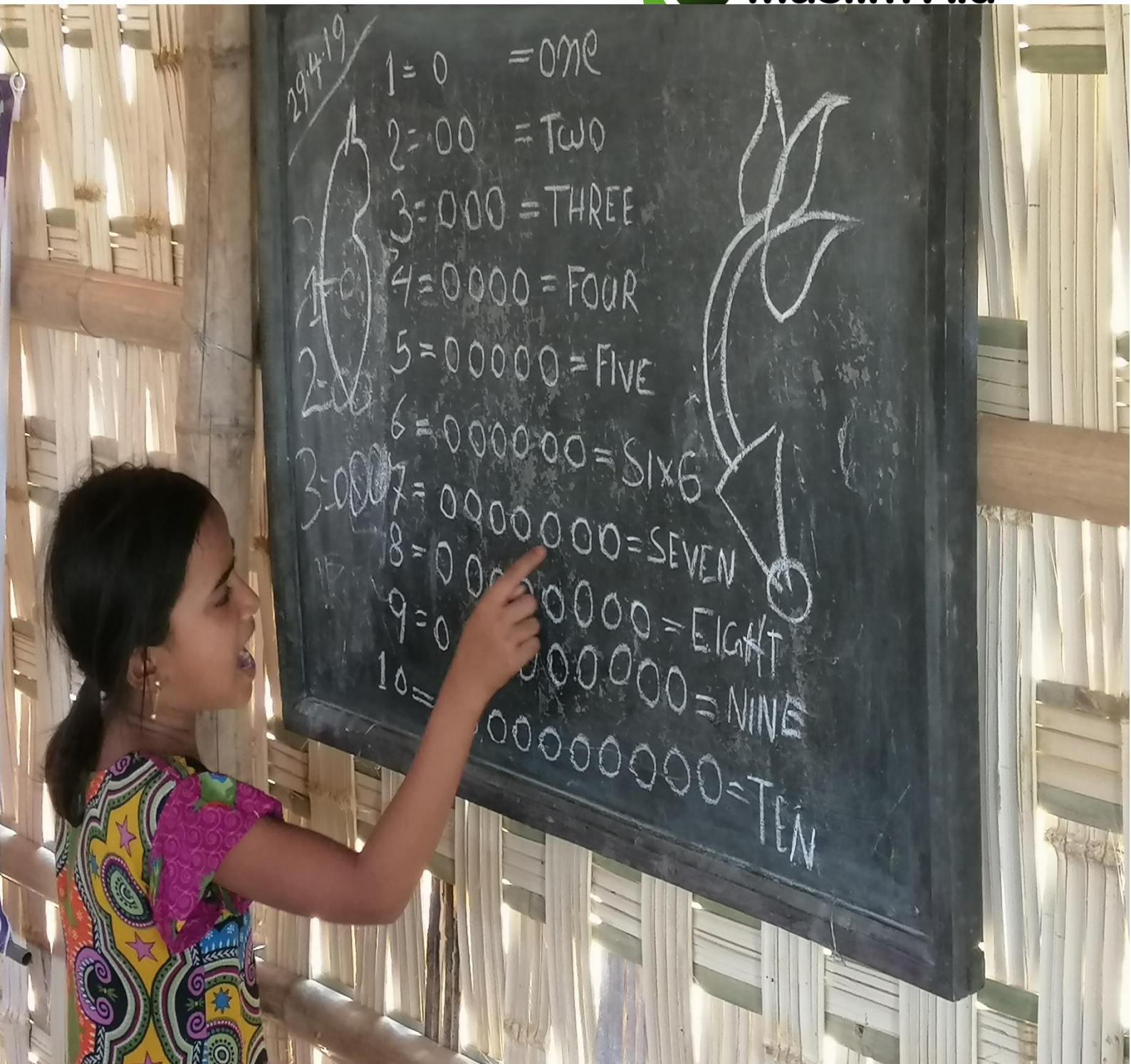
- Strengthening women's positions in **local cooperatives**, governance structures, or value chains.
- Facilitating **market linkages**, mentoring, and access to financial services that support long-term economic independence.
- Encouraging continued use of **labour-saving technologies** and safe community spaces that reduce unpaid burdens and improve productivity.
- Ensuring that **lessons learned about gender integration are documented**, shared, and used to improve future programming.

Muslim Aid believes that by making women's empowerment and equitable resource access part of the core outcomes, not just outputs, projects can lay the foundation for deeper, longer-lasting change.

Food security and livelihoods programming is not only about increasing income or distributing assets - it is about power, opportunity, and dignity. When Muslim Aid applies a gender lens to FSL programming, we help build systems that work for everyone: where women's contributions are valued, where men and boys are engaged in shared responsibility, and where no one is left behind because of their gender.

Gender equality in FSL is not just a goal, it is a necessary path to achieving our broader mission of justice, resilience, and community well-being.





Part 3.3: Gender Mainstreaming in Education Programming

Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful tools for individual transformation and community development. It offers the chance to build knowledge, confidence, critical thinking, and life opportunities. Yet not everyone has equal access to these opportunities. Across many of the contexts in which Muslim Aid operates, deep-rooted gender inequalities continue to affect who gets to attend school, who stays, what they learn, and how they are treated.

Girls may be kept out of school due to early marriage, menstruation without privacy or support, or the burden of household responsibilities. Boys may drop out to support their families, face pressure to adopt aggressive forms of masculinity, or be neglected in environments where girls are rightly receiving overdue focus. These dynamics are not accidental; they are shaped by social expectations, power relations, and institutional structures that continue to value one gender's needs over another's.

Gender mainstreaming in education seeks to respond to these realities by ensuring that **gender equality is considered and addressed at every stage of educational programming**. This includes how schools are designed, how teachers are trained, how policies are written, how families are engaged, and how progress is measured.

Why Gender Mainstreaming in Education Matters?

Education is more than a classroom. It's a system of influence, a space where gender identities are shaped, challenged, or reinforced. If that system is unequal, it not only mirrors but magnifies the inequalities that exist outside its walls, contributing towards an increase in negative gender norms.

Failing to account for gender in education contributes to:

- Girls being left behind in literacy, STEM, and leadership.¹⁵

¹⁵ UNESCO (2023). [*Cracking the Code: Girls' and Women's Education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics \(STEM\)*](#).

- Boys disengaging from school due to social pressures or the absence of emotional support.¹⁶
- A school culture that tolerates harassment, reinforces stereotypes, or fails to offer safety and dignity for all learners.¹⁷

Conversely, when education systems recognise and address these issues, they become agents of change. Schools can become places where equality is learned, practiced, and lived, and where every student, regardless of gender, can develop the skills and confidence to shape their own future.

For Muslim Aid, integrating gender equality in education is not just a matter of delivering better programmes. It reflects a deeper commitment to human dignity, fairness, and justice.

Applying a Gender Lens to Education Programming

As mentioned in the first part of this guide, gender lens helps us see clearly where inequalities exist, how they operate, and what can be done to address them. It allows us to move beyond assumptions and ask deeper questions: Who is missing? Why? What structural or social factors are holding them back?

Applying this lens across the education programme cycle allows Muslim Aid teams to plan with intention, deliver with impact, and create systems of learning that promote dignity and equity.

Needs Assessment and Project Design

Gender-sensitive design begins by understanding how gender shapes access to and experience of education. It's not enough to know how many children are in school - we need to know **who they are, how they learn, and why others are excluded**.

This requires:

- Sex- and age-disaggregated data on enrolment, attendance, achievement, and dropout rates.
- Community consultations that engage girls, boys, caregivers, and educators in identifying barriers. This may include separate focus groups or household interviews to ensure women's and girls' perspectives are captured safely.
- Qualitative insights to understand lived realities - such as stigma around menstruation, fears around safety, or cultural expectations around boys' and girls' roles.

¹⁶ UNESCO (2022). *Leave No Child Behind: Global report on boys' disengagement from education*.

¹⁷ UNGEI & UNESCO (2019). *A Whole School Approach to Prevent School-Related Gender-Based Violence*
<https://www.ungei.org/publication/whole-school-approach-prevent-school-related-gender-based-violence>.

Using participatory methods like gender scorecards, daily routines mapping, gender role analysis, or school safety audits, can uncover power imbalances, household dynamics, or institutional biases that are often invisible in standard needs assessments.

From this analysis, project goals and activities should be shaped to address the practical barriers to participation (e.g., lack of uniforms, fees, transport) and the strategic barriers (e.g., social norms, institutional discrimination) that limit autonomy and long-term opportunities.

Gender-Responsive Implementation

Delivery of education must do more than increase access to it. It must ensure that learning environments are **safe, inclusive, and empowering** for all genders.

This can include:

- Safe and private sanitation facilities, particularly for menstruating students, to ensure girls do not miss school due to lack of dignity or privacy.
- Flexible school hours or Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs) for girls who have dropped out due to caregiving roles or early marriage.
- Recruitment and training of female teachers, especially in conservative or rural contexts, where they serve as essential role models and improve girls' comfort in school.
- Active revision of curricula and materials to remove gender stereotypes and promote inclusive narratives.
- Designing BCC for Parent Teachers Committees, to foster gender equality within the communities.

Beyond the classroom, it's important to work with communities and caregivers to shift attitudes and promote shared responsibility. Fathers and male guardians should be part of the conversation about girls' education. Mothers should be supported to advocate for both sons and daughters.

Recognising the triple burden on girls of schooling, household work, and caregiving, can inform adjustments such as providing meals at school, offering on-site childcare, or introducing labour-saving devices at home (e.g., fuel-efficient stoves or water storage solutions).

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

An effective education project must not only track its activities, but it must also reflect on who is benefiting and how.

MEAL systems should:

- Collect gender-disaggregated data on enrolment, attendance, learning outcomes, and retention.
- Include qualitative tools such as interviews, student councils, or anonymous suggestion boxes - to capture hidden issues such as sexual harassment, biased teaching practices, or peer discrimination.
- Use gender-sensitive indicators that measure not just participation but also power, confidence, voice, and sense of belonging in the school community.
- Establish accountability mechanisms for gender-based concerns, including complaints systems that are safe, confidential, and accessible to students and staff alike.

Regular learning and reflection sessions should be held with programme staff and communities to understand emerging gender issues and identify adjustments. These should focus on what is working, what is harmful, and what could be improved and should not just be against numbers, but against real human experiences.

Close-Out and Sustainability

The gains made in gender equality during an education project must be protected and extended beyond the programme's lifespan. This means investing in local ownership, policy influence, and community capacity.

Consider:

- Embedding gender policies and practices in school management committees or parent–teacher associations.
- Strengthening partnerships with local education authorities, civil society organisations, and women's groups to ensure that inclusive practices are upheld.
- Training school staff on long-term gender equity strategies, including curriculum reform, reporting mechanisms, and participatory school governance.
- Documenting gender-related lessons learned and sharing them with local and national stakeholders for system-wide improvement.

Promoting gender equality in education is not about helping girls more than boys, or boys more than girls. It is about understanding how systems treat them differently, and how we can respond in ways that promote fairness, inclusion, and dignity for all.

Education is not just about learning facts. It's about building futures, shifting mindsets, and shaping values. When schools reflect equality, they teach equality. When they do not, they teach discrimination.

At Muslim Aid, mainstreaming gender in education programming is a reflection of our deepest values: compassion, justice, and the belief that everyone has a right to grow, to learn, and to lead.



Part 3.4: Gender Mainstreaming in Emergencies

Why Gender Equality Matters in Humanitarian Crises

Emergencies - whether caused by conflict, natural disasters, or displacement - do not affect everyone in the same way. Existing gender inequalities often become more visible and severe in times of crisis. Women and girls are more likely to face increased risks of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and loss of access to healthcare or education. Meanwhile, men and boys may face unique vulnerabilities such as forced recruitment, hazardous labour, or the pressure to uphold traditional roles as protectors and providers.

Overlooking these dynamics can result in programmes that unintentionally exclude or endanger certain groups. On the other hand, when emergency responses are designed with gender equality in mind, they are more effective, safer, and fairer for everyone.

Muslim Aid believes that upholding the dignity and rights of all people, regardless of gender, is not just a best practice but a core organisational value. Humanitarian action must not only save lives but also lay the foundation for more inclusive and just recovery.

Where and How to Integrate Gender in Humanitarian Action

Effective gender integration in emergencies requires deliberate action from the earliest stages of response. Below are the core areas where gender must be actively considered and applied:

Understanding the Gendered Impact of the Crisis

The first step in any emergency response is understanding the situation - but this must include more than general data. A proper analysis must ask how the crisis is affecting people differently based on their gender, age, disability, or social status.

Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) is a valuable tool here. It helps responders identify who is at risk, who is being left out, and how social and cultural dynamics are influencing people's ability to access aid. For example, women might face mobility restrictions or fear of harassment, making them less likely to attend distributions. Men might avoid health services due to expectations that they should appear strong.

To do this well, responders should speak with different groups separately, particularly women and girls, whose voices may not be heard in mixed settings. Understanding the roles people play, the tasks they take on, and the power they hold within households and communities allows Muslim Aid teams to design responses that reflect real needs not just assumed ones.

Designing Programmes That Reflect Diverse Realities

Once the analysis is complete, it must shape the design of the emergency response. This means more than simply “including women.” It means asking how to create services that meet the needs of all groups - and how to deliver them in a way that protects dignity and safety.

Programmes must account for the unique risks faced by women and girls. This might mean providing menstrual hygiene materials, creating private and well-lit sanitation areas, or setting up confidential referral pathways for survivors of gender-based violence. But it also means recognising that women often play key roles in community resilience and caregiving, and that their knowledge and leadership can strengthen the entire response.

At the same time, design should consider how men and boys are affected by shifting roles during crises. In some contexts, they may feel pressure to “cope alone,” or may disengage if aid is seen as only targeting women. Creating space for men to contribute positively to recovery - such as through shared parenting roles or peer support groups - helps to build stronger communities overall.

Importantly, programme design must be guided by local knowledge and community input. Women’s organisations, youth groups, and faith leaders often hold deep insights into how to design aid that is trusted, respectful, and culturally relevant.

Delivering Services That Are Safe and Inclusive

How aid is delivered matters just as much as what is delivered. Even well-designed programmes can fall short if they are implemented in ways that exclude or endanger certain groups.

This means taking steps to ensure that women, men, girls, and boys can safely access the services they need. For example, distributions should be planned at times that suit those with caregiving duties. Locations must be accessible, and staff should be trained to recognise and respond to safety concerns - especially those related to harassment or exploitation.

Having gender-balanced staff teams, particularly in frontline roles, helps ensure that beneficiaries feel safe and represented. In contexts where cultural norms limit women’s interaction with male staff, female staff can serve as critical bridges, enabling access to vital services.

Community engagement should be proactive and inclusive. Muslim Aid teams should seek out not just the loudest voices, but those who are often ignored. Women's involvement in planning, managing, and delivering aid not only improves outcomes - it helps shift power in meaningful and lasting ways.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL)

To ensure that humanitarian aid is reaching everyone equally, it is essential to monitor and evaluate programmes with a gender lens.

This includes collecting data that is broken down by sex and age, but also asking deeper questions: Are people feeling safe? Are their needs being met with dignity? Are women and men able to give feedback and shape services?

Feedback mechanisms must be confidential, safe, and accessible to all - especially survivors of violence or exploitation. Regular analysis should consider not just how much aid has been distributed, but *how* it has impacted people's lives. Have new risks emerged? Has the response challenged or reinforced existing gender inequalities?

Learning must be continuous. Field teams should regularly reflect on who is benefitting and who might be missing out and be willing to adapt in real time.

Muslim Aid's Minimum Standards for Gender in Emergencies

The IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) standards for gender mainstreaming in emergencies focus on ensuring that all humanitarian response activities, from planning to implementation, are inclusive of gender perspectives, and that the needs of women, girls, boys, and men are addressed equitably. This means prioritizing gender equality, preventing and responding to gender-based violence, ensuring women's participation in decision-making, and holding actors accountable for gender-responsive action¹⁸. Upholding those, to ensure gender equality is not treated as an afterthought, Muslim Aid applies clear minimum standards in all emergency programmes:

- **Assessments must include a gender analysis** from the outset. This should include sex- and age-disaggregated data, and active consultation with women, men, girls, and boys.
- **Programme design must reflect gendered needs and risks**, including practical considerations like privacy, access, and safety, as well as deeper goals like voice, choice, and leadership.
- **Service delivery must be inclusive and protective**. Teams should ensure that assistance is delivered in ways that respect dignity, minimise risk, and provide targeted support for those most at risk.

¹⁸ [IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action \(2018\)](#)

- **Participation and representation must be built into all activities.** This includes involving women in committees, consultations, and decision-making processes, not as a formality but as a foundation of meaningful inclusion.
- **Staffing should be gender-balanced and trained.** All staff must understand their roles in promoting equality and preventing harm. Gender focal points should be appointed in all responses.
- **MEAL systems must track gender outcomes,** not just outputs. Complaints systems should be known, trusted, and accessible to all, including those with low literacy or mobility.
- **Leadership must champion gender equality,** making it visible in internal decisions and public communication. Accountability begins at the top.

These standards help ensure consistency, quality, and fairness across Muslim Aid's emergency work, regardless of scale or setting.

Building Back Fairer: Using Crises to Advance Equality

While emergencies are times of loss and disruption, they can also be turning points. In many cases, roles shift for example women take on new responsibilities, communities band together, and assumptions are challenged.

Humanitarian aid can either preserve the inequalities of the past or help communities build something better. When Muslim Aid integrates gender equality throughout our response - from assessments to handovers - we don't just respond to crisis. We help shape recovery.

Let us use this opportunity not only to save lives but to strengthen justice, restore dignity, and set a new course for lasting change.



Part 4: Your Role as Muslim Aid Staff to support Gender Equality

Introduction

This part is designed to speak to *every* individual in the organisation. No matter what your role is, this part of the guide is meant to support you to envision yourself as part of the collective change process, while giving practical, thoughtful and accessible examples of how to act.

What Can I Do as a Muslim Aid Staff Member to Support Gender Equality?

At Muslim Aid, gender equality is not only a policy or a programming priority, but also something we live every day through the way we work, speak, listen, and carry ourselves. It's not only the responsibility of gender specialists or senior leadership. Each of us, no matter our title or department, is responsible for, and has the ability to create a more respectful, inclusive, and equitable environment - both inside the organisation and in the communities we serve.

This part of the guide is an invitation: to reflect on how we show up at work, how we treat others, and how we can contribute, in small but meaningful ways, to a culture that upholds the dignity, voice, and rights of everyone.

It Starts with Us: Culture is Built Through Everyday Actions

Often, people feel gender equality is “not their area” or that they don't have the power to make an impact. “I just work in logistics,” someone might say. Or “I don't run programmes - I just do admin.” But the truth is: *you matter*. Culture is created by what we say, what we allow, what we challenge, and how we treat one another.

Every interaction - whether in a team meeting, during a training, or on a field visit, has the potential to either reinforce exclusion or build respect. Each of us sets the tone for those around us. And when enough people choose inclusion, it becomes the norm.

Every staff member at Muslim Aid contributes to gender equality when they:

- Treat colleagues with fairness and kindness, regardless of gender.
- Avoid making assumptions based on someone's gender.
- Respect different lived experiences, roles, and perspectives.
- Create space for quieter voices, particularly women and junior staff, to be heard.
- Challenge disrespectful or dismissive behaviour, even informally.
- Reflect on their own habits, language, and biases, and choose to grow.

What This Looks Like in Practice (Across Roles)

If You're in Programmes or Technical Roles¹⁹:

- Ensure community consultations include women, girls, men, and boys separately where appropriate.
- Reflect on whether your designs unintentionally reinforce traditional roles or limit participation.
- Invite local women to speak first in meetings; don't assume male elders speak for everyone.
- Include small actions that make big differences—such as hiring female enumerators, or scheduling activities around care responsibilities.

If You Work in HR or Recruitment:

- Promote inclusive job descriptions and remove gender-biased language.
- Look at who's applying and who's getting shortlisted—are there patterns?
- Ensure women have fair opportunities to advance, including into leadership.
- Support parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and respectful return-to-work plans.

If You're in Finance, Admin, or Logistics:

- Think about who benefits from your services, and how. For example, is transport safe for women? Are procurement partners ethical in their labour practices?
- When setting up offices or field locations, consider the needs of women (e.g., sanitation, privacy).

¹⁹ Also covered in part 3 of the guide

- Handle financial processes that fund gender equality efforts with the same urgency and care as any other priority.

If You're in a Leadership Role:

- Model respectful, inclusive leadership by listening actively and visibly supporting gender equality.
- Create time and space for reflection - invite team input on how inclusive your workplace feels.
- Publicly celebrate women's contributions and name power dynamics when you see them.
- Understand that humility, not perfection, is what inspires trust and growth.

The Way We Talk Matters

One of the most powerful tools we have is language. The way we speak about women, gender roles, marriage, leadership, and emotion shapes what's considered "normal" or acceptable.

It helps to ask ourselves:

- Do I use respectful and inclusive language?
- Do I make jokes or comments that rely on stereotypes?
- Do I refer to people's ideas, or just their appearance?
- Do I interrupt women more than men or vice versa?

These may seem small, but over time, they set the tone for who feels valued, seen, and safe.

Spotting Inequality and Speaking Up

Sometimes, inequality hides in plain sight. It looks like only men speaking in meetings. It looks like women consistently taking notes while men lead. It looks like certain colleagues being interrupted or dismissed more often than others.

When we see these patterns, we can:

- Pause the conversation and invite others in.
- Gently ask, "Can we hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet?"
- Name the pattern: "I've noticed women are often asked to handle admin; can we rotate that?"
- Follow up privately with someone who seemed excluded: "I noticed that, you okay?"

You don't have to be in charge to change the tone of a room.

Creating an inclusive culture doesn't require having all the answers. But it does require listening with an open mind. When someone shares that they feel uncomfortable, unheard, or left out, we don't need to defend ourselves. We can respond by:

- Saying thank you.
- Asking what would help.
- Taking responsibility for our part.

This is how trust is built. By responding with humility and care, we make it easier for others to speak up, and we build a culture that supports healing and fairness.

Creating Space for Women's Participation

In many contexts, women are underrepresented in decision-making - not because they lack knowledge, but because the space isn't set up for them to lead.

As colleagues, we can:

- Hold meetings at times that don't conflict with care responsibilities.
- Ensure women feel safe and respected in the workplace.
- Invite and encourage participation, especially from newer or more junior staff.
- Support women's initiatives, mentorship, and peer support spaces.

When women feel safe to speak and lead, the whole organisation benefits.

It's a journey and not a Test

No one gets everything right all the time. Gender equality work isn't about being perfect, it's about being **willing**. Willing to learn, willing to unlearn, and willing to support each other every day.

We will all make mistakes. What matters is that we stay open to feedback, own our part, and keep moving forward.

At Muslim Aid, our strength lies in how we walk this path *together*. Every act of inclusion, no matter how small, adds up to something powerful.

Closing Reflection

As you finish this guide, ask yourself:

- What will I start doing differently tomorrow?

- Who can I listen to more carefully?
- What kind of space do I want to create for my team and community?

Change doesn't require a new title or a new policy. It starts with the choices we make in our daily work.

At Muslim Aid, gender equality is not a destination, it's a mandatory shared responsibility. And you are part of it.