



OBSERVATOIRE DU SAHARA ET DU SAHEL
SAHARA AND SAHEL OBSERVATORY

SAHARA AND SAHEL OBSERVATORY GENDER POLICY



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Summary

The Gender Policy of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) translates the Organization's attachment to the respect of the principles of equality and equity between men and women and its commitment to act towards the promotion of social justice, equal opportunities, diversity, and equity in its zone of action, constituted of Sahara and Sahel countries.

The Policy will allow OSS to promote the integration of the Gender dimension in its action and to make its interventions more effective, efficient and relevant while responding to the priority needs and efforts of women and men.

Taking into account the close linkage which exists between natural resources and populations, OSS Gender Policy aims to make of gender equity an essential factor to take into consideration in its projects and programs with the overall objective of promoting sustainable development in the Sahara and Sahel region.

By adopting the present Gender Policy, OSS commits to:

- Create a favourable and sustainable environment in terms of Gender;
- Set up a framework and mechanisms to combat discrimination and ensure gender equality;
- Mobilize partners and resources for the effective application of the Gender Policy;
- Rationalize and harmonize the OSS strategic documents and programs related to Gender;
- Strengthen the capacities of the OSS' staff and experts involved in Gender mainstreaming;
- Strive to integrate the gender dimension in all of OSS programs, projects and activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a prerequisite for achieving development results. However, gender inequality remains a major obstacle to economic growth and poverty reduction in the OSS zone of action. In many societies, men and boys enjoy more rights, responsibilities, opportunities and services than women and girls.

The persistence of gender inequality is considered as detrimental to both law and economic and social progress. It is thus deemed necessary to look for human development opportunities for women and men through effective policies and sustained investments with a view to reducing inequalities in Africa.

Featuring the highest rates of illiteracy, African women and girls are amongst the poorest at the world level. Women's participation in the formal labour market is low and the discrimination against women in many parts of Africa has a negative impact on their productivity and leads to huge income disparities between women and men. Even in agriculture, a sector that is largely dominated by women, women's productivity is 30% lower than that of men due to lack of access to essential inputs.

Africa's objectives in terms of gender equality reflects a strong vision full of hope for a continent where women and men have equal rights, namely i) equal access to justice and protection, ii) equal access to water, sanitation, energy, health, education and other public services, iii) equal access to productive resources and action means; iv) equal pay; and v) equal opportunities to participate in wealth creation.

Aware of the major challenges related to gender and in line with international commitments, African organizations are striving to establish gender equality and ensure women's rights. International meetings and major events have stressed the urgency of institutionalizing gender policy in regional, sub-regional and national policies and programs. Some of these international commitments and instruments that have inspired OSS Gender Policy are the following:

- The Millennium Development Goals, converted into the Sustainable Development Goals since 2015;
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981, and the specific rights of women, subject of an additional protocol in 2003;
- The Solemn Declaration of the Heads of States of the African Union on men-women equality in Africa, in July 2004;
- The Gender Policy of the African Union in December 2008;
- The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which considers gender equality as a main field of intervention which could lead to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction;
- The ECOWAS gender Policy and all its implementing instruments;
- Gender policies of some countries of OSS zone of action such as Burkina Faso.

2. CONTEXT

2.1. Status of Gender Equality at OSS

The OSS Gender Policy takes into consideration the intrinsic linkage between natural ecosystems and natural resources on the one hand, and societies and populations, on the other, and focuses on equality between men and women. It demonstrates this commitment by making gender equity, a key factor for sustainable development of the Sahara and Sahel region, based on its main development lever, namely its population of women, men, girls and boys.

Gender equality is central to OSS mandate and is a major challenge for the Environment and Development. It is perfectly integrated in the different international agreements and charters which allowed to recognize the crucial role played by women in the development and the importance of an equal participation in decision-making to achieve sustainable development.

Since its creation in the 1990s, OSS has been contributing to a great number of literature and studies dedicated to Gender, on the role of men, women and children in the field of natural resource management in Africa, but also integrated gender equality issues into most of its projects and management administration.

Starting in 2008, several workshops involving OSS staff have led to a better comprehension of the Gender dimension in the Organization's actions and strategy. Since then, the integration of the Gender dimension in the activities and strategic guidelines of OSS is managed by a gender focal point designated by the Executive Secretariat.

The OSS 2020 Strategy is centred on the sustainable and concerted management of natural resources, with two major axes "Water" and "Land" and two cross-cutting themes "Climate" and "Populations". Since the 2020 Strategy adoption, the socio-economic issues have become some of the major themes tackled by OSS action. Thus, the Gender dimension thus find a conducive framework for its application and consideration than within the projects and programs conducted by the Organization.

Therefore, OSS recognizes that incorporating Gender equality into its practices will help produce significant improvements for society as a whole by reducing poverty and hunger and promoting economic growth. This Policy will also help to build climate resilience among all population groups, especially the most vulnerable residing in rural areas in its member countries.

2.2. OSS Experiences and Lessons learned

Since the 1990s, OSS has been contributing to a great number of literature and studies dedicated to Gender equality and particularly to the role of woman in the field of environment. As a regional institution, OSS considers itself as well positioned to disseminate the notion of Gender.

In 2008, OSS benefited from the support of the Canadian Development Agency (ACDI) in its approach to develop capacities among its staff through the organization of capacity building and awareness-raising sessions. During this period, a number of actions have been identified as part of an assessment process for a better integration of the Gender dimension in the institution, as detailed below.

In a second step, and in the frame of Gender Equality and African Regional Institutions (*GEARI*) project, it was decided in January 2011 to integrate « Gender » within OSS programs. Thus, OSS set the objective to gradually integrate the concept of Gender in all its programs (environment, water resources, climate change, biodiversity, etc). This task eventually relies on the programs' implementers and is carried out with the support from the gender focal point that ensures that Gender remains a permanent concern within OSS programs.

List of actions carried out by OSS in terms of Gender:

- **Integration of Gender in OSS's Official documents:** statutes, Regulations and Procedures
- **Integration of Gender within documents issued by OSS:** female applications are encouraged in calls for tenders and proposals and section on Gender is integrated in the project documents, concept notes, communication plans and strategy.
- **Strengthening of the capacities of the women executives** by favouring their participation in national and sub-regional workshops
- **Advocacy to favour and guarantee the presence of women** at projects' national and sub-regional workshops.
- **Integration of « Gender » section in all reports of OSS:** annual reports, projects and programs' reports.
- **Participation to several regional events and publication of press releases** outlining the role of rural women, such as the *Atlas of Land Cover/Use* in Mauritania.

Vulnerable groups, including women and young people, are receiving a special attention of OSS and are defined as target groups for several projects and programmes implemented by OSS. This is being carried out by dedicated communication plans that correspond to each country's specificities. These actions allowed for this vulnerable target group to receive the same chances to benefit from information related to Environment in general and on Climate Change and to share their concerns.

A detailed list of actions conducted by OSS is enclosed in annexe 2.

3. OSS GENDER POLICY

3.1. Purpose

The purpose of the present Gender Policy is to provide OSS with a framework for guiding its efforts to achieve Gender equality and particularly to support women's diverse roles in the different development programs, projects and actions conducted at the level of its zone of action.

The Policy specifies OSS's goal and vision related to Gender equality and outlines an accountability structure for ensuring policy oversight and results achievement. It accompanies and compliments OSS Environmental and Social Policy and responds to the investment guidelines and performance and reporting standards of international financial partners (e.g. the Green Climate Fund, United Nations System, the Adaptation Fund, the African Development Bank, etc).

Its application in OSS projects and programs should provide decision-makers with relevant and rigorous indicators to adjust and align development policies, strategies and programs in the region.

The Policy must be periodically reviewed and revised to assure its alignment with international standards and national regulations and policies.

3.2. Principles

The Gender Policy of OSS is based on the following principles, which are increasingly recognized and accepted:

- **The complementarity between the roles of men and the roles of women**, in the development process and in the family unit is an essential condition for social solidarity and peace, the basis for development. This complementarity should be established with full respect of differences, which requires a permanent consensus.
- **The consideration of gender in the development process is not a mere question of equality**, but a necessity, as well. Inequality between women and men is a real obstacle to development and poverty reduction; hence gender is a question of development that should be taken into account in development strategies and policies.

- **The elimination of gender inequalities requires particular actions in favour of women and men.** These specific actions undertaken for disadvantaged groups are to be understood as dictated by a number of considerations related to equity, social justice and general interest.
- **The integration of harmonious and sustainable gender approach** in the development process requires an effective mobilization of society and international community. Gender is a question of individual and collective adherence and commitment.
- **The linkage between the Gender Policy and the universal principles of human rights and the other national and regional policies and strategies** is fundamental. It must influence the development goals and the selection of programs and action plans' monitoring indicators.
- **The implementation plan of the Gender Policy must be harmonized** with the universal, regional and national development priorities and must reflect local constraints and available possibilities. It allows to verify the coherence of programs and projects with the principles of gender equality.
- **The implementation of this policy follows a specific approach** focusing on well-reasoned and evidence-based decision-making. The achievement of significant and verifiable results must remain the main driving force behind the policy implementation.
- **The definition and attribution of clear roles and tasks** allow to rationalize the Policy' implementation process, increase its efficiency and create a sense of belonging for stakeholders.
- **The maintain of transparency** during the Policy implementation and the presentation of results help to create trust and encourage a larger participation of technical, financial partners, beneficiaries and stakeholders.

3.3. Objectives

The overall objective of the OSS Gender Policy is to promote a participatory and fair development for women and men, and to ensure an equal and fair access to resources and opportunities for both of them with the full respect of their fundamental rights.

The Policy's specific objectives are as follows:

- Both women and men actively participate in the development process and have equal access to resources and opportunities
- Women and men have equal access to OSS support, programs and projects, as well as their results and impacts (gender equity);
- Women find equal rights, power, responsibilities and opportunities within the operations and functions of OSS (gender equality);
- OSS activities do not hinder advancements in gender equality and equity.
- Information, sensitization and training on Gender are integrated into OSS projects and programs.

3.4. Commitments

By adopting the Gender Policy, OSS commits to:

- Create a favourable and sustainable environment in terms of Gender;
- Set up a framework and mechanisms to combat discrimination and ensure gender equality;
- Mobilize partners and resources for the effective application of the Gender Policy;
- Rationalize and harmonize the OSS strategic documents and programs related to Gender;
- Strengthen the capacities of the OSS' staff and experts involved in the Gender integration;
- Strive to integrate the gender dimension in all of OSS programs, projects and activities.

4. THE GENDER POLICY BY 2020

OSS vision in terms of gender aims to promote a further consideration of the gender component in its internal structure as well as the programs and projects it implements. Hence, this Policy mainly targets OSS's internal structure and bodies, as well as programs and projects.

4.1. At the internal level

- **Compliance Mechanism**

In order to guarantee an effective implementation of the Policy, OSS will set up a number of rules in order to ensure that the Organization's staff comply with the operational procedures and respect the standards and steps defined for gender mainstreaming.

- **Institutional framework**

For an effective implementation of the Policy's program, OSS will set up the necessary structures and frameworks and will propose solutions to strengthen the integration of the gender question in all its activities. In this context, OSS will ensure the production of progress reports and the establishment of independent mechanisms for peer-review.

- **Training and knowledge sharing**

OSS will organize training sessions on gender equality to ensure a better understanding of the gender issue among its staff, to promote policies and strengthen mechanisms against sexual harassment, sexist practices and discrimination.

- **Staff**

In 2016, the proportion of women in the OSS staff amounted to 41%. The female supervisory staff represents meanwhile 22% of the Executive Secretariat staff. The OSS will continue to pay particular attention to the composition and diversity of its staff so that women and men have equal access to vacancies, including leadership positions.

- **A working environment respectful of gender equality**

Wherever possible, OSS will work to create a working environment that attracts and retains the best female and male professionals. It will aim to promote family-friendly policies, such as helping women to return to work after maternity leave, providing flexibility for nursing mothers, reviewing the provisions relating to paternity and maternity leave to ensure their alignment with the global best practices.

4.2. At the External level

In the framework of its projects and activities, OSS will work to align its action programs with the main priorities of its Gender Policy.

This approach is based on three aspects:

- **Legal Status and Ownership**

Complex factors impede the achievement of gender equality at the level of OSS zone of action, namely disparities with regards to legal rights, economic and social empowerment, health and education. To reduce these disparities, it is essential to set up the necessary legal political and institutional frameworks. OSS's projects and activities will be designed to contribute to changing the culture and mind-set necessary to incorporate these measures.

- **Economic empowerment**

The differences in legal and social status between men and women, and the traditional division of housework condition the ability of women to take advantage of economic opportunities through employment or the creation of their own business. In designing and implementing its projects, OSS will work to provide women with equal tools to help them carry out their own income-generating activities.

- **Capacity Building and Knowledge Management**

Building capacity and improving knowledge on gender issues will enable OSS to acquire the skills and abilities necessary for the development and implementation of relevant policies, to produce results reports taking into account the gender dimension and to better monitor the expected impacts. OSS will work to reduce knowledge gaps in the integration of gender through specific studies and strategic thinking.

5. OPERATIONAL ACTION PLAN (2016-2020)

The implementation of OSS Gender Policy by 2020 will be based on an operational action plan structured around the following axes and indicators:

5.1. Axis 1: Strengthening capacities to promote the integration of gender in OSS's projects and programs

- Elaboration and implementation of a training plan on gender
 - Existence of a training plan on gender;
 - Number of workshops organized on gender;
 - Participation rates of men and women in the training workshops.
- Producing and providing OSS staff with simplified tools for a better gender mainstreaming
 - Number and type of tools created and provided for OSS staff.
 - Identification of gender-sensitive indicators
 - Number of men and women impacted by the projects and programs.
 - Systemization of sex-disaggregated data collection, processing and dissemination.
 - Existence of sex-disaggregated data at the level of projects and programs.
 - Support to the implementation of studies and researches on questions related to gender in relation with the major themes tackled by OSS.
 - Number of projects and programs integrating gender.

5.2. Axis 2: Strengthening institutional mechanisms for a better consideration of gender

- Support the implementation of OSS Gender strategy
- Organizational strengthening
- Number of updated administrative documents taking into consideration gender;
- Financial resources Mobilization
- Sum of resources dedicated to the implementation of OSS gender strategy.
- Encourage networking with other institutions and organizations interested in gender promotion and environment and natural resources management.
 - Number of partnerships taking into consideration the gender dimension
- Gender mainstreaming in OSS communication plans.
 - Number of communication supports integrating gender produced.

5.3. Axis 3: Strengthening sensitization and communication on gender and its challenges

- Promote a better adherence to and ownership of gender by OSS staff.
- Strengthen information and sensitization actions on gender and its challenges.
 - Participation rates of men and women in awareness-raising workshops.
- Make OSS achievements in terms of gender more visible.
 - Production and dissemination of information and sensitization supports (articles, brochures, web site) on gender.
 - Existence of communication supports that take into consideration gender.

5.4. Axis 4: Monitoring-Evaluation

With respect to the action plan monitoring and evaluation, the operational guidance and commitments will be monitored and evaluated within the general framework defined by OSS. This will involve the definition of measures and indicators identified in the OSS monitoring-evaluation mechanism.

The « Gender » focal point will be in charge of reporting results related to gender equality on an annual basis and responsible for monitoring the application of the present Policy at OSS.

The present action plan will be reviewed depending on progress achieved and reforms undertaken at the level of OSS.

ANNEXES

Annexe 1 | Glossary

Gender: The economic, social, political and cultural opportunities and attributes associated with the fact of being a man or a woman. This may change over time and depending on the society; it is expressed in gender social relationships characterized by their interaction and cross-cutting nature.

Gender analysis: applying gender in development issues. This induces an analysis of labour division according to gender, the identification of the needs and priorities of men and women as well as the identification of their constraints and opportunities to define development goals and select an appropriate intervention strategy.

Recognition of gender-related issues: ability to identify problems arising from gender-based inequalities and discriminations.

Lack of awareness of gender specificity: inability to perceive differences in roles and responsibilities between men and women, and therefore, incapacity to design policies, programs and projects that may have a different impact on men and women.

Gender disaggregated data: gender-based data collection and result analysis. Example: data on the social status and socio-economic roles of different groups of women and men or data based on biological features of men and women.

Gender-based discrimination: different attitude towards people according to their gender.

Gender-based labour division: overall social system where both genders play each a series of roles arising from gender. This distribution is not based on abilities but on gender. Gender-based labour division is the key stake in gender social relationships to legitimize hierarchical relationships between men and women.

Equality between men and women: assumes that women and men have the same goods, opportunities, resources and rewards recognized by society. To achieve this equality, there is a need to change institutional practices and social relationships reinforcing and maintaining disparities between men and women.

Gender mainstreaming: identification process, addressing and incorporating the needs and interests of women and men in any program, policy, strategy, administrative or financial activity.

Gender-sensitivity: ability to recognize the needs and constraints of women and men as well as their interests and perceptions linked to their different status in society.

Gender sensitive indicator: figure, fact or perception aimed at indicating to what extent and at which level a program or project achieves the set goals and manages to improve gender equity.

Gender equity: a fair and impartial treatment of people of any social category, without consideration of criteria such as gender, race, religion, etc. Gender equity is the fact of ensuring the same chances and same rights to men and women. This concept questions gender-based labour division; and to solve this discrimination issue having resulted in these divisions, gender equity must include affirmative action (or incentives).

Gender inequality: differences existing between men and women as for their access to resources, status, well-being generally enjoyed by men, and which are often institutionalized by laws and customs.

Annexe 2 | List of actions carried out by OSS in terms of Gender

INTEGRATION OF GENDER WITHIN COMMUNICATION PLANS OF PROJECTS

- Awareness events at the regional and national levels

Awareness raising events were organized with women as "special target group" in different countries (Senegal, Chad, Burkina Faso) in 2013 and 2014 to exchange on environmental changes and adaptation to climate change. These events were opened to all farmers and were able to gather a great number of women and young girls.

- Gender-sensitive environmental education for scholars (girls and boys)

Environmental education days were organized in the frame of the project REPSAHEL for children aged from 8 to 12 where different activities were carried out such as reforestation, drawing competition, mural fresco, and writing workshops. The events gathered mixed groups of boys and girls, thereof at least 50% were girls in over 20 localities in 7 different countries.

- Gender-sensitive Information and Management system, environmental monitoring, remote-sensing and capacity building

Capacity building actions were organised by OSS and its partners at the national and regional levels. These were generally directly requested by the project coordinators that wanted to reach a maximum of women and young girls in the audience.

- Women specific communication tools (as radiophonic programmes, didactic posters)

Dedicated communication tools for young people and women were elaborated in the local languages and used notably in the frame of the REPSAHEL project.

- For women: a radiophonic programme on land degradation was realised and broadcasted on Malian communities' radios.
- For young people: didactic posters in local languages as well as two radiophonic programmes on land degradation were realised and broadcasted on Malian and Nigerian communities' radios.

OSS boasts several projects directly targeting women. Examples of these programs include:

- **National environmental monitoring Mechanisms (DNSE)**

DNSE aims to equip North African and West African countries with conceptual and technical tools which would allow them to collect and synthesize their achievements in the field of environmental management. This approach led to the set-up of national environmental monitoring mechanisms.

Achievements include:

- The publication in 2013 of a manual for "*Environmental Surveillance in the Circum-Sahara, socioeconomic report 2012*". This manual was elaborated based on the results of an environmental surveillance in 11 countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cap Verde, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia. The methodology and tools developed within this framework allow assessing the vulnerability of ecosystems and people (men and

women) in the ecosystem's area and predicting the risks and environmental changes in order to mitigate their impacts. It gives an overview of the characteristics of the observatories of the Circum-Sahara region and describes the evolution of their situations based on a methodology focused on the use of indicators developed by OSS and its partners. The socio-economic component takes into account the Gender approach is now integrated in data collection and enquiries. The data collected by countries are published in regular reports that mention the characteristics of the population observed, notably whether they were women, men, girls, and/or boys. This also implied the introduction of Gender in the questionnaires used to perform surveys with the local population under the scope of the environmental surveillance observatories. The report is available (in French) at <http://www.oss-online.org/sites/default/files/fichier/Synth-socio-economie.pdf>.

- A specific study targeting Gender was conducted as part of an environmental monitoring observatory in Tunisia (Oueslatia) to define the role of rural women and their needs: 60 women were surveyed based on a tailored-made questionnaire; the results of this survey were presented during a regional workshop organized in 2012 in Tunis.

- **REPSAHEL (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Chad)**

REPSAHEL aims to consolidate environmental observation networks and to adapt them to the needs of the Sahelian countries, particularly in relation to climate change adaptation. It is the first project undertaken by OSS that provided direct awareness actions among local populations in the observatories areas. In this context, all activities carried out for the benefit of local people have been taking into account Gender. As a matter of fact, special target groups focused on women were established in 3 countries: Senegal, Chad, Burkina Faso. Environmental education days were organized in primary schools between 2013 and 2015 and reached at least 50% of girls in their audience in most cases, except when the number of pupils in a school was below 100, in which case all pupils took part of the event. In total, 20 awareness days were organized for the benefit of 200 pupils per school on average reaching 50% girls or about 2,000 girls.

- **ILWAC - MALI**

A radiophonic programme dedicated to women and run by women has been set-up to sensitize women to the sustainable management of natural resources. This programme of about 45 minutes was broadcasted on community radio stations in the Malian region of Kayes and Baoulé.

- **WADIS MAR (Tunisia, Algeria)**

The WADIS-MAR project enabled the realization of an integrated water harvesting and aquifer recharge techniques in two watersheds in the Maghreb Region: in wadi Biskra, Algeria and in Oum Zessar, Tunisia, which are characterized by water scarcity, overexploitation of groundwater resources and high vulnerability to climate change. It takes into account ancestral and local traditional experiences.

The project integrates the gender dimension in all its scientific activities, capacity building actions and communication. It offers equal chances to women and men, notably in terms of capacity building for young researchers. The project plans have undertaken actions for female farmers including a one-day event for dialogue and exchange that was organized in 2016 in Medenine, Tunisia. It was led by female farmers who contributed to the improvement of agricultural incomes through a reasoned irrigation. These women were invited to explain to other women from the civil society their role and the different steps of crop production starting from cropping to commercialization of their products.

- **Sustainable management of the North-western Sahara Aquifer System (SASS III) (Algeria, Libya, Tunisia)**

SASS III aims to develop operational recommendations for the utilization, management, and measurement of water extracted for agricultural purposes, especially in areas where water resources, soils and/or ecosystems are most vulnerable. The socio-economic component of the project aimed to realize a study for a better consideration of Gender equality in the project implementation. Surveys were conducted in two phases with about 3,000 farmers in the first crop cultivation and 1,500 farmers in the second crop cultivation. The surveys were elaborated so as to integrate Gender although this was not highlighted in the results.

- **Maghrebian Storytellers: an initiative related to the CREM project "Regional cooperation in the water sector in the Maghreb "(Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia)**

The *Maghrebian Storytellers* project aims to valorize the role of women in the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) through storytelling. In this context, women will be identified and will receive capacity building sessions on storytelling and will be involved in the facilitation and sensitization of communities in terms of sustainable water management.