



**VICTORIA INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON ENVIRONMENT AND  
DEVELOPMENT (VIRED) INTERNATIONAL**

*Bringing Science Home to integrate Environment and Development*

**Gender Equality Plan (GEP)  
2024–2029**

*Empowering Equity | Advancing Sustainability | Driving Inclusive Development*

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>GEP:</b>	Gender Equality Plan
<b>VIRED</b>	Victoria Institute for Research on Environment and Development (VIRED) International.
<b>UN:</b>	United Nations
<b>SDG:</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>GESC:</b>	Gender Equality Steering Committee
<b>GBVH:</b>	Gender Based Violence and Harassment
<b>HR:</b>	Human Resource
<b>MEL:</b>	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
<b>CSO's:</b>	Civil Society Organizations

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Empowerment:** achieving control over one's life through expanded choices. Empowerment encompasses self-sufficiency and self-confidence and is inherently linked to knowledge and voice. Empowerment is a function of individual initiative, which is facilitated by institutional change.

**Equal Opportunities:** Absence of discrimination, as in the workplace, based on race, color, age, gender, national origin, religion, or mental or physical disability.

**Gender balance** refers to the equitable representation of different genders, typically men and women, in a given setting (e.g., leadership, workforce, governance). It emphasizes proportional representation to ensure that no gender is significantly over- or under-represented.

**Gender Balance:** To place or keep in equilibrium or proportion, such as balancing competing interests among the different gender within an organization or institution.

**Gender Based Violence:** Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UNESCO 1999 p.53)”

**Gender Disaggregated Data:** For a gender analysis, all data should be separated by sex in order to allow differential impacts on men and women to be measured.

**Gender Discrimination:** Gender discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights.

**Gender equality:** requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Achieving gender equality requires changes in the institutional practices and social relations through which disparities are reinforced and sustained.

**Gender equity:** refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognizes that women and men have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between the sexes.

**Gender Focal Person (GFP)** is a designated individual within an organization tasked with coordinating, facilitating, and monitoring the integration of gender equality principles into all policies, programs, and operations. The GFP acts as the liaison between the organization's leadership, staff, and external stakeholders to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed across all levels of decision-making, planning, and implementation.

**Gender Focal Point:** The Centre of attention or interest concerning issues that are gender related.

**Gender harassment** refers to unwelcome, hostile, or degrading behavior that targets an individual based on their gender or gender identity, without necessarily involving sexual advances. It includes verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct that demeans, marginalizes, or undermines someone because of their gender, often reinforcing gender stereotypes or perpetuating inequality in professional, academic, or social environments. This form of harassment is often subtle and systemic, and may include behaviors such as sexist jokes, dismissive attitudes, demeaning comments, exclusion from decision-making, or derogatory remarks about gender roles.

**Gender mainstreaming** The ECOSOC Resolution defines mainstreaming gender as "...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, such that inequality between men and women is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality".

**Gender parity** is a numerical concept referring to equal number of girls and women, boys and men relative to their respective number in the population.

**Gender parity** refers to the numerical equality of men and women (or all genders) in a given domain, often expressed as a 1:1 ratio or 50:50 representations.

**Gender** refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, and relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them

**Gender sensitivity:** the ability to recognize gender needs and constraints and the ability to recognize men's and women's different perceptions and interests arising from their different social positioning.

**Gender-responsive:** Practices that take gender into consideration.

**Inclusivity** refers to the active, intentional, and ongoing effort to ensure that individuals of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities feel welcomed, respected, valued, and empowered to fully participate in all aspects of an organization, institution, or community. It involves eliminating barriers to access and opportunity, addressing systemic inequalities, and fostering a culture where diversity is not only acknowledged but embraced as a strength

**Sex:** refers to the biological differences between males and females. Sex differences are related to males' and females' physiology and generally remain constant across cultures and over time.

**Sexual Harassment:** unwelcome acts of a sexual nature that cause discomfort to the targeted person. These include words, persistent requests for sexual favours, gestures, touch, suggestions, coerced sexual intercourse and rape.

**Sexual Offences:** an offensive disrespectful impudent act directed towards persons targeting their sexuality.

**Zero Tolerance:** The policy or practice of not tolerating undesirable behavior, such as violence or illegal drug use, especially in the automatic imposition of severe penalties for first offenses.

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## 1.0 Introduction and Context

VIRED International is a research, policy, and advocacy organization committed to promoting sustainable development, environmental conservation, and social equity across East Africa. Guided by principles of inclusivity and community empowerment, VIRED International engages with diverse stakeholders, from grassroots communities to regional and international actors, to address pressing ecological and socio-economic challenges. The organization operates under the motto: *“Bringing Science Home to integrate Environment and Development.”*

Recognizing that gender equality is a cornerstone of sustainable development, this Gender Equality Plan (GEP) outlines VIRED International’s strategic commitment to promoting gender-responsive practices both within its organizational structure and in its research and field operations to meet the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.

Nationally this plan aligns with Constitution of Kenya, 2010, National Gender and Equality Commission Act, 2011, Sexual Offences Act, 2006 and Employment Act, 2007. Internationally, it aligns with the African Union Gender Strategy, and international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 5). It seeks to institutionalize gender equity in VIRED’s human resources, programs, partnerships, and decision-making processes.

## 2.0 Policy Statement on Gender Equality

VIRED International is committed to:

- i) Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men across all levels of the organization.
- ii) Promoting an inclusive work culture that respects diversity and prevents discrimination or harassment with zero tolerance to the alternative.
- iii) Mainstreaming gender in all research, programs, and engagement with stakeholders.
- iv) Ensuring the voice of women and marginalized groups are strengthened through its work

## 3.0 Objectives

The objectives of this Gender Equality Plan include:

- i) Achieve and maintain gender balance/parity in leadership, management, and field teams.
- ii) Integrate gender analysis and gender-responsive indicators in all research and programmatic activities.
- iii) Ensure a safe, inclusive, and supportive workplace, free from gender-based violence and harassment.
- iv) Foster work–life balance through flexible and supportive HR policies.
- v) Build internal capacity on gender equality and inclusion through continuous training.

## **4.0 Institutional and Governance Priority Action Areas**

### **4.1 Governance Structure**

To realize the above objectives, VIRED International has established a Gender Equality Steering Committee (GESC) reporting directly to the Executive Director. This committee guides the implementation, monitoring, and review of the GEP. The governance structure ensures that gender is not an isolated agenda but is embedded across operational and strategic levels. This cross-cutting governance structure reflects VIRED International's commitment to mainstreaming gender balanced framework through an inclusive leadership process.

### **4.2 Work-Life Balance and Organizational Culture**

Work-life balance and organizational culture play a significant role in shaping and influencing gender roles, particularly within professional and institutional settings. Supportive work-life policies and inclusive organizational cultures are crucial for dismantling traditional gender roles that promote gender discrimination practices. They create space for both men and women to thrive personally and professionally, enabling equitable participation, leadership, and representation across all levels of an institution. VIRED International will achieve the work – life balance and organizational culture by:

- i) Promoting flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote work, parental leave).
- ii) Fostering a culture that values gender equity through leadership modeling and communication.
- iii) Creating channels for anonymous feedback on gender and inclusion issues.
- iv) Conducting annual organizational culture assessments
- v) Instituting regular well-being initiatives
- vi) Encouraging respectful and inclusive communication
- vii) Promoting a culture of shared domestic responsibility
- viii) Celebrating diversity and inclusion days

### **4.3 Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making**

Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making is a critical pillar of gender equality. It refers to the equitable representation and participation of all genders, especially women, in senior leadership roles, governance structures, and key decision-making processes within an organization. As a research and development organization, inclusive leadership enables better design, implementation, and evaluation of community-based programs. When both women and men contribute to decisions, especially those affecting environmental management, livelihoods, and education, outcomes are more equitable and impactful. Consequently, gender balance in leadership is not just a numerical goal, it's a catalyst for transforming organizational culture, policies, and impact. In view of this, VIRED International continues to:

- i) Target at least 33.3% representation of each gender in senior and mid-level management roles.
- ii) Include gender balance as a criterion in selection panels and board recruitment.

- iii) Ensure transparent recruitment and promotion practices that address bias and recognize diverse leadership potential.
- iv) Support leadership training and mentorship programs for women and underrepresented staff.
- v) Include gender considerations in governance structures, ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive and participatory.

#### **4.4 Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression**

Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression refers to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to enter, grow, and succeed within an organization. This principle is foundational for fostering a fair, inclusive, and high-performing workplace. As an organization working at the interface of science, community development, and environmental sustainability, VIRED International benefits greatly from a diverse and competent workforce. Upholding gender equality in recruitment and career progression is pivotal to our motto of “Bringing Science Home to integrate Environment and Development.” Equal representation enhances innovation in environmental research, improves stakeholder engagement, and ensures co-creation of community interventions. To achieve this, VIRED International continues to:

- i) Ensure gender-sensitive language in job advertisements.
- ii) Monitor and report gender (sex)-disaggregated data on recruitment, promotions, and attrition.
- iii) Implement mentorship and career development programs specifically for women.
- iv) Use gender-sensitive job descriptions and ensure balanced shortlists during recruitment.
- v) Train hiring and promotion panels on unconscious bias and inclusive practices.
- vi) Track and report gender-disaggregated data on recruitment, promotions, retention, and professional development.
- vii) Ensure equal access to leadership development, scholarships, field assignments, and learning opportunities.
- viii) Create clear, transparent career pathways that value diverse experiences and flexible work arrangements (e.g., for staff returning from parental leave).

#### **4.5 Integration of Gender in Research and Program Activities**

Integration of Gender in Research and Program Activities is a critical pillar of achieving meaningful and sustainable development outcomes. Mainstreaming gender across research and programmatic work ensures that interventions are equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the distinct needs of women, men, and marginalized gender groups. VIRED will continue to:

- i) Incorporate gender analysis frameworks in project design, baseline surveys, and evaluations.
- ii) Collaborate with gender experts and women-led organizations during project design, implementation, and evaluation.
- iii) Promote women's participation in community-based projects, training, and leadership.

- iv) Conduct gender analysis during baseline assessments, feasibility studies, and situational analyses.
- v) Collect sex-disaggregated data and include gender indicators in research and program monitoring frameworks.
- vi) Ensure gender balance and representation in community consultations, focus groups, field trials, and dissemination events.
- vii) Develop gender-responsive tools and outreach materials tailored to different audiences.

#### **4.6 Prevention of Gender-Based Violence and Harassment**

Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) is not only a legal and ethical obligation, but also a strategic commitment essential to building a safe, inclusive, and rights-respecting institutional culture. As a cornerstone of this Gender Equality Plan (GEP), the prevention of GBVH reflects VIRED International’s dedication to upholding the dignity, safety, and agency of all individuals across its operations and community engagements. VIRED International is therefore firmly committed to ensuring that its internal workspaces, research environments, and project interventions remain free from all forms of violence, coercion, and discrimination. This commitment extends to safeguarding staff and volunteers, while remaining attentive to local power dynamics in field settings that may disproportionately affect women and vulnerable populations. Proactively addressing GBVH strengthens the organization’s institutional integrity and enhances trust with partners and communities. As such, VIRED International will continue to:

- i) Develop and enforce a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual Harassment Policy.
- ii) Conduct regular staff training and awareness sessions on work ethics, GBV Prevention, gender sensitivity, respectful professional conduct, and power dynamics.
- iii) Establish confidential and survivor-centered reporting mechanisms, including anonymous options and external referral pathways for support.
- iv) Appoint trained gender focal persons and ethics officers responsible for handling complaints and ensuring a non-retaliatory environment.
- v) Integrate GBV risk assessments into project design and field operations, particularly in community-facing work.
- vi) Collaborate with local women's rights organizations and shelters for referral support, training, and guidance.

#### **5.0 Implementation Framework**

A strong Implementation Framework is the engine that turns a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) from intention into reality. For VIRED International, this framework ensures that gender equality actions are systematically delivered, tracked, and refined in line with institutional goals, community values, and donor expectation. VIRED International’s Implementation Framework therefore, operationalizes the GEP across the organization through clear roles, structures, and

timelines by ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed and contributes to sustainable development.

## **5.1 Components of GEP Implementation Framework**

### **1. Leadership and Oversight**

- VIRED International’s Executive Director and Management Team provides strategic oversight.
- A Gender Focal Person coordinates day-to-day implementation and liaises with program and administrative units.

### **2. Gender Equality Committee**

- A multi-disciplinary team drawn from different departments (research, programs, HR, finance) will provide cross-functional support and guidance.
- The committee will meet quarterly to review progress, troubleshoot challenges, and ensure integration across departments.

### **3. Capacity Building and Sensitization**

- Ongoing gender training for staff, leadership, interns, and field officers.
- Use of external experts and local gender organizations for technical assistance and training.

### **4. Annual Action Plans**

- Yearly targets and activities derived from the GEP.
- Each department mainstreams relevant gender equality actions into its annual work plan, supported by the Gender Focal Person.

### **5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)**

- Use of measurable indicators (see GEP Implementation Matrix below) to assess progress.
- Annual gender audits and progress reports submitted to VIRED International’s Board of Directors and included in institutional reports.

### **6. Budget Allocation**

- A dedicated budget line for GEP activities in VIRED International’s annual financial plan.
- Resources will support training, data collection, GBVH prevention, community engagement, and MEL.

### **7. Stakeholder Engagement**

- Partnerships with local Community based Organizations (CSOs), universities, and gender networks for shared learning and program collaboration.
- Community-level consultations to ensure context-sensitive and participatory approaches to gender inclusion.

## 5.2 Gender Equality Plan (GEP) Implementation Matrix

### 1. Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Conduct gender audit of leadership structures	Q1–Q2, Year 1	HR & Gender Focal Person	Audit report completed	Baseline understanding of gender gaps in leadership
Set targets for gender representation in leadership	Q2, Year 1	Board & Executive Director	Targets defined and documented	Increased female participation in decision-making
Mentorship programs for aspiring women leaders	Q3–Q4, Year 1	Gender Desk & Senior Management	No. of mentees enrolled	Improved leadership pipeline for women

### 2. Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Review and revise recruitment policies to include gender-sensitive language	Q1, Year 1	HR Department	Revised policies approved	Gender-sensitive recruitment process
Train hiring panels on unconscious bias	Q2, Year 1	HR & Gender Desk	No. of sessions held	Fairer recruitment outcomes
Monitor gender-disaggregated data on hiring and promotions	Biannually	HR Department	Reports generated	Data-informed HR decisions

### 3. Work-Life Balance and Organizational Culture

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Develop flexible working policy	Q1–Q2, Year 1	HR Officer; Executive Director	Policy document approved	Improved staff satisfaction
Formalize equitable parental leave policies	Q1, Year 1	HR Officer	Parental leave policy developed	Enhanced caregiving balance
Conduct annual culture assessments	Annually	Gender Focal Person	Survey reports completed	Improved workplace inclusivity
Host mental health and wellness sessions	Biannually	Admin Team	No. of sessions held	Better staff morale
Introduce respectful communication training	Q2–Q3, Year 1	Gender Desk	Code developed and staff trained	Inclusive work environment
Celebrate diversity and inclusion days	Annually	Admin Team	No. of events held	Awareness on diversity

#### 4. Integration of Gender in Research and Program Activities

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Develop a gender mainstreaming guide	Q1, Year 1	Programs Director	Guide approved and in use	Gender-responsive programs
Train staff on gender-sensitive research design	Q2–Q3, Year 1	Gender Focal Person	No. of staff trained	Inclusive project methodologies
Ensure all project proposals include gender analysis	Ongoing	Project Officers	% of proposals with gender sections	Gender-aware interventions

#### 5. Prevention of Gender-Based Violence and Harassment

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Develop and disseminate anti-GBV policy	Q1, Year 1	HR & Legal	Policy document shared	Clear GBV procedures established
Set up confidential reporting and referral systems	Q2, Year 1	HR & Admin	System operational	Improved survivor support
Conduct awareness and training on GBV and workplace harassment	Biannually	Gender Desk	No. of staff trained	Increased awareness and prevention

#### 6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Develop gender indicators for all programmatic areas	Q1, Year 1	M&E Officer	Indicators defined	Gender integrated in M&E
Include gender results in quarterly and annual reports	Quarterly	M&E Team	No. of reports submitted	Accountability for gender outcomes
Conduct mid- and end-term gender assessments	Mid & End of 3-year cycle	M&E Officer	Assessment reports	Learning for program improvement

## 7. Resources and Accountability

Activity	Timeline	Responsible	Indicator	Expected Outcome
Allocate annual budget for gender activities	Annually	Finance & Executive Director	Budget line available	Sustained gender interventions
Appoint Gender Focal Person	Q1, Year 1	Executive Director	Focal Person appointed	Dedicated coordination of GEP
Include gender KPIs in performance appraisals	Yearly	HR Department	Appraisal tools updated	Management held accountable
Partner with gender organizations	Ongoing	Partnerships Officer	No. of partnerships formed	Enhanced gender expertise

### 6.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is essential in any Gender Equality Plan (GEP) because it ensures that the plan is effective, accountable, and continuously improving. In VIRED International's GEP, M&E typically involves:

- i) Baseline assessments (e.g., gender representation in leadership)
- ii) Key performance indicators (KPIs) for each activity
- iii) Periodic reviews (quarterly or annually)
- iv) Gender audits
- v) Feedback mechanisms (e.g., staff surveys or consultations)
- vi) Public reporting to communicate outcomes and challenges

Progress is reviewed annually using:

- i) Gender audit tools and staff surveys.
- ii) Sex-disaggregated HR and program data.
- iii) Quarterly updates by the Gender Focal Point to management.
- iv) Mid-term (2027) and end-term (2029) evaluation of GEP implementation.

The indicators may include:

- a. % of women in leadership role
- b. % of projects with gender analysis
- c. % of staff trained in gender and inclusion
- d. Number of GBV cases reported and addressed among others as indicated in the implementation Matrix

## 7.0 Resources and Accountability

Committing resources and building accountability structures affirms that gender equality is integral to sustainable development, environmental justice, and inclusive science. Achieving gender equality requires a comprehensive policy declaration, deliberate and sustained investment of both human and financial resources. Allocating adequate resources and ensuring robust accountability mechanisms is therefore key to operationalizing the Gender Equality Plan (GEP).

In the context of this GEP, "resources" refer to:

- *Human resources*, such as dedicated personnel (e.g., Gender Focal Person, Gender Committee members), staff time for gender activities, and leadership involvement.
- *Financial resources*, including an allocated annual budget to support gender equality activities such as trainings, gender audits, capacity building, and infrastructure improvements and;
- *Technical resources*, such as gender analysis tools, sex-disaggregated data systems, and digital platforms for training or reporting.

Consequently, VIRED International will continue to:

- i) Allocate annual budgets for gender equality activities.
- ii) Appoint a Gender Focal Person to coordinate implementation.
- iii) Hold management accountable through performance reviews and board oversight.
- iv) Pursued Partnerships with gender-focused organizations for capacity strengthening.

## 8.0 Review of the Gender Equality Plan

To ensure sustained progress toward gender equality and alignment with VIRED International's strategic objectives, this Gender Equality Plan (GEP) will be subject to periodic review. The review process is essential for capturing lessons learned, responding to emerging gender-related challenges, and integrating new data, policies, or institutional priorities. It ensures the Plan remains a living document—adaptable, responsive, and informed by practical implementation experiences.

The GEP review will be aligned with VIRED's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, which includes annual assessments of gender indicators, quarterly implementation tracking, and stakeholder feedback. A comprehensive review will be conducted every two years, or earlier if necessitated by significant organizational changes, audit findings, or external developments in the policy or donor environment. All proposed changes or updates shall be presented to and approved by the VIRED International Board of Directors. This structured review mechanism allows for course correction, fosters accountability, and ensures the GEP continues to drive meaningful transformation across both internal operations and community engagements.

## GEP Review Schedule Table

<b>Review Cycle</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Tools / Inputs</b>	<b>Expected Output</b>
Quarterly Tracking	Gender Focal Person and Departmental Heads	Activity implementation reports, indicator scorecards	Progress update; identification of gaps and needs
Annual Assessment	M&E Officer and Gender Committee	Annual gender performance report; stakeholder feedback	Annual Gender Report with recommendations for improvement
Biennial Comprehensive Review	Gender Mainstreaming Committee and M&E Unit and Executive Director	Cumulative data, internal/external evaluations, policy updates	Updated GEP submitted to and approved by Board of Directors
Ad-hoc Review (as needed)	Gender Focal Person + Executive Leadership	Triggered by critical incidents, donor audits, or legal updates	Rapid response amendments; interim guidance or policy memos