



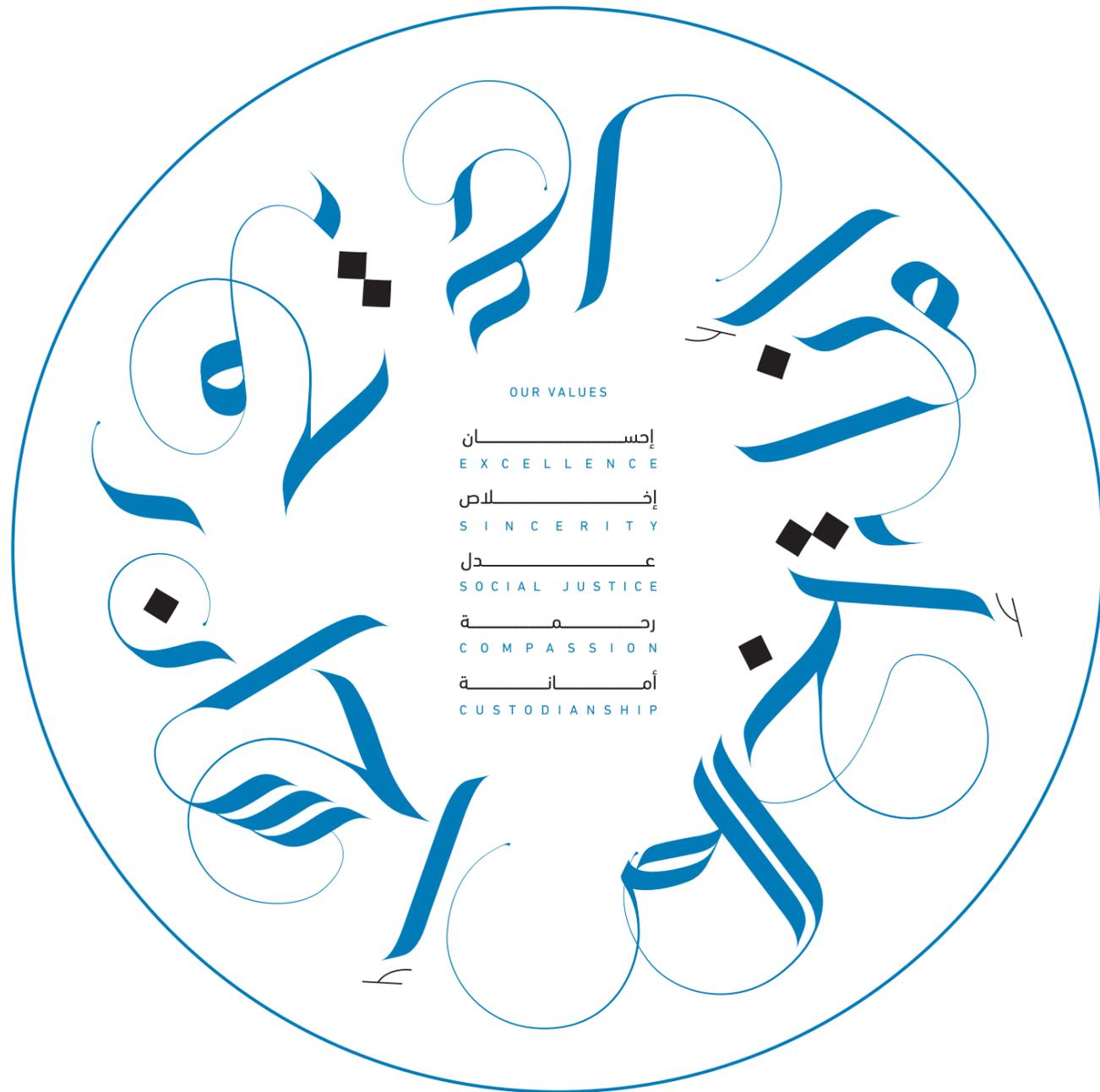
*"The best of you are the best of  
you in fulfilling (rights)."  
(Prophet Muhammed, narrated  
by Ahmad, Sahih)*

# Gender Justice Policy

April 2015



# Version Management



Title	Islamic Relief Gender Justice Policy
Category	External
Policy type	Stance Policy
Version Control	IP/V9/14112014
Date of Creation	9 October 2014
Last Modified	15 April 2015
Review Date	21 March 2017
Approving Body	Board of Trustees on recommendation of Board of Directors
Date of Approval	Board of Trustees - 21 March 2015 Board of Directors - 17 November 2014
Document author	Iman Sandra Pertek
Contributors including:	Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano, Atallah Fitzgibbon
Internal Reviewers	Dr Mohammed Kroessin, Risky Mohamad, Dr Saydul Alom
External reviewers	Dr Azza Karam, Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, Michelle Gyeney Dr Abdullah Aljudai (section on faith perspectives)
Department:	Strategy, Policy & Process Division (SPP)
Policy Owner:	Iman Sandra Pertek, Senior Policy Advisor

1. Introduction .....	5
2. Definitions .....	7
3. Scope .....	8
4. Rationale .....	9
Faith perspectives informing gender policy .....	11
5. Context .....	16
6. Policy statement .....	19
7. Our strategic gender commitments .....	19
8. Procedures/ Guidelines .....	24
9. Related Policies .....	24
10. Annexes .....	25
Annex 1: The policy development process .....	25
Annex 2: Examples of Islamic Relief experience on gender in programmes .....	26
Annex 3: Muslim women in history .....	28

© Islamic Relief Worldwide 2014

This publication is subject to copyright. The contained text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. Islamic Relief Worldwide request that all such use be registered with us to monitor the impact for advocacy purposes. For usage in any other circumstances, translation or adaptation, permission must be sought and a fee may be charged.

For further information please email [irw@irworldwide.org](mailto:irw@irworldwide.org)

## 1.

# Introduction

**Islamic Relief (IR)'s mission is to eradicate poverty and end human suffering.**

**To achieve this, it is crucial that issues of injustice are given a major focus, along with the reasons injustice persists. Within the category of injustice is gender injustice, which IR is prioritising within this paper.**

“Gender” is the social term which identifies a person as female or male. It suggests roles, characteristics, behaviour and activities which are seen as appropriate for men and women in a given context. The term “sex” describes the biological distinctions between men and women.

This document focuses on the central components of IR's Gender Justice Policy, and it will inform other policy briefing papers on gender-based violence and other related topics. In support of this process, IR has launched a Global Gender Working Group and is consulting with gender experts from international organisations (for further information see Annex 1 on page 24).

IR's 2008 Handbook on Gender Analysis in Programme Design includes the following:

*“Although Muslims may feel many of the social and emotional differences between genders relate to our natural predisposition as humans (Fitrah), we can see that these roles are not all universal. Even within the Muslim world, gender relations and roles differ substantially and of course within the wider community even more variance can be observed. Islam lays down basic rights and obligations within the family and community, but within this broad framework considerable diversity in culture and gender roles is considered legitimate. As in all communities the rights of women and other groups are not always respected which leads to even greater cultural and gender disparities manifesting themselves. Gender roles are different across societies and within the same society, because they are influenced by class, economics, ethnicity, educational background, age and other factors. They may change significantly over time either naturally or due to societal pressure, or as a result of a changing context (e.g. in times of crises and war).”*

**Inequities based on gender can deprive people of dignity and, as underlying causes, they perpetuate the**

vicious cycle of poverty. They often intersect with other inequities such as those based on race or religion. IR cannot ignore issues of gender in the humanitarian and development field if we hope to improve the efficiency of our programme delivery to both female and male recipients of IR's assistance.



One of IR's roles is as a **duty bearer**. We have a moral and organisational obligation to ensure that our programmes reach out to women, girls, men and boys equitably, according to their needs, interests, aspirations, vulnerabilities, and capacities. We need to reach out to them regardless of their identities and we need to prioritise the most disadvantaged groups. IR also has a responsibility to address the root causes of the denial of equal and equitable rights (see Definitions) to females across the world. In Muslim communities extreme suffering caused by denial of rights is widespread.

Meeting this responsibility is at the core of IR's values, particularly the promotion of social justice ('*adl*). Gender justice, justice between females and males, is an intrinsic part of this. This paper will help define, in a faith literate way, how we approach gender justice internally and externally.

Standing up for Gender Justice is an active choice for IR because of its centrality to upholding human dignity, which is at the heart of everything we do. We chose the term gender justice because it encapsulates both equity and equality (see Definitions). Within many Muslim communities, the use of the word “equality” often lends itself to controversy because it is perceived as promoting sameness between the genders. It is also associated with certain forms of secular feminism that might see religion as oppressive and/or regressive. In this context the word “equality” is sometimes seen as threatening to the principles underlying Islamic gender relations, which do not promote sameness between

the genders but rather focus on balanced partnership and symbiosis between them. In some circles, this has created a preference for the word equity. However, even among international agencies and organisations focusing on gender issues, there is a strong consensus that, as in this document, equality is not intended to imply sameness between men and women.

As a faith-inspired INGO, we have a moral obligation to explore gender issues through an Islamic lens. The following religious imperative gives us clear guidance, which is our basis for this Gender Justice Policy:

*“You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly – if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.”*  
[Qur’an 4:135]<sup>2</sup>

In order to address the Gender Justice Policy’s complexities, we have separated it into three main products and a number of sub-products.

Main products:

» **IR’s over-arching Gender Justice Policy** (this document)

This outlines the broad statements that show the organisation’s commitment to taking gender justice into account in all our humanitarian, development and advocacy work as well as in our internal processes and procedures, remembering that this policy is based on Islamic framework.

» **IR’s policy briefing papers**

These will be detailed policy analyses and advocacy positions on specific gender issues. Papers are being developed to support a campaign on GBV issues, specifically domestic violence, early/ forced marriage and female genital mutilation/ cutting (FGM/C – See Definitions)

» **IR’s theory of change on gender justice**

The sub-products planned include guidelines for policy implementation, action plans, gender justice toolkit,

advocacy strategies, national adaptations etc. The process of the Gender Justice Policy development involved an extensive consultation process with trustees, field offices, partners and HQ staff, as well as some scholars (see Annex 1).

**What is Islamic Relief’s experience with gender justice?**

IR has worked passionately on specific gender-based projects in countries across the globe such as Iraq, Yemen and Sudan to name a few. These projects:

- » support increased access to resources, services and opportunities
- » increase the participation and protection of women, girls, men and boys from different social groups
- » highlight the organisation’s contribution to the achievement of the third Millennium Development Goal to “promote gender equality and empower women.”

In some contexts, we have strategically prioritised providing support to women and girls who were most disadvantaged in those communities. While applying participatory and context-specific approaches which are gender just (see Definitions), we have gained community trust and promoted the equitable participation of women and men through culturally sensitive programmes, in ways appropriate to a faith based approach.

In 2010, Islamic Relief’s Board of Trustees took steps to prioritise the advancement of gender issues in the organisation. Since then, gender has been specifically identified as a cross-cutting issue which sits within the faith literacy theme in our 2011-2015 Global Strategy. This strategy calls for the integration of gender analysis into programming while engaging with the strategic needs of our beneficiaries. In 2013, the Trustees chose gender-based violence (GBV) as a leading theme of IR’s global advocacy campaigns to uphold the organisation’s strategic commitment to gender justice.

For specific examples of IR programmes addressing gender, please see Annex 2.

2.

Definitions

The following definitions inform this policy document:

**Equality:** All humans, female and male alike, are equal before God and deserve equal recognition for the value and importance of their lives to society, as well as access to equal opportunities and their God-given rights to fulfil their human potential<sup>3</sup>. IR does not see gender equality as implying that men and women are exactly the same, it is instead a scale to maintain a balance between them. Regardless of the differences and similarities of both sides, each side must be seen as equally important to society. So equality must be maintained in order to encourage the existence of healthy communities with all members able to reach their full God-given potential.

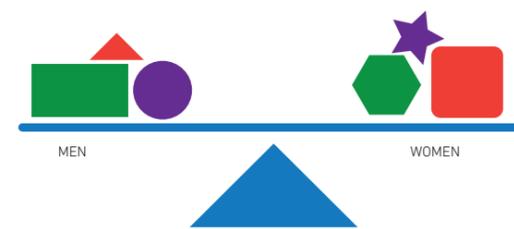


Figure 1: Gender equality as a balance, equity as a means to equality

**Equity:** A process of fair but not necessarily similar treatment to all female and male individuals according to their needs, social standing and circumstances. The aim of equity is the achievement of social justice and well-being, and to accomplish the state of equality described above.

**Family:** The first and most important unit of society and a divinely ordained institution. It is founded upon the institution of marriage, which is considered a long-term union between a woman and a man who enter it as equal/equivalent partners based on a contract for which the consent of both parties is required. Family in Islam refers to both the nuclear and extended family structures. It is protected by the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of all members, these rights are enshrined in faith teachings.

Divine Law prioritises the protection of the family and future generations. Healthy stable families are considered to be founded on mercy, love, partnership, close relationships, cooperation and the concept of completing each other. The peace, security, emotional, psychological and moral nurturing offered by a stable family unit is greatly valued and seen as essential for the spiritual and economic growth of its members. The

family is based on the principle of financial and social *takaafu* (solidarity) between family members to ensure social cohesion, unity and continuity, as well as on the principle of justice and balance.

**FGM/C:** Defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as ‘all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.’<sup>4</sup>

**Gender:** The term refers to the social meaning given to being a woman or a man. The associated social characteristics, including roles, activities and behaviours seen as appropriate for females and males.

Gender defines social relations between and amongst females and males, it provides norms and practices through which biological differences may result in perceived social differences. These can shape opportunities and barriers to the well-being for both females and males in the fulfilment of their human potential.

These social differences between women and men are context specific and diverse, they can depend on factors such as age, class, ethnicity and race and may change over time as societies evolve. IR recognises that gender distinctions stem from biological distinctions defined by the term “sex”, and that the social environment determining the life situations of women and men are often dictated by social understanding and expectations of what it means to be a woman or a man. Therefore, gender analysis in humanitarian and development work is essential for designing sound and just interventions in relation to the lived realities of women and men.<sup>5</sup>

**Gender-based violence (GBV):** This is any harmful act done to a person because they are female or male. The types of violence vary across cultures and regions and are often taboo to mention in public, seen as issues to be kept private. GBV can include domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking of women and children, forced prostitution, early and forced marriage, FGM/C (see above) and honour killing.

**Gender integration:** The process of integrating gender justice considerations into organisational development and programme delivery. This covers internal and external processes and procedures, leading to treatment and impact which is fair, but not necessarily identical for both men and women.

**Gender-just:** means that any differential outcomes,



impact and implications resulting from humanitarian and development intervention need to be just, equal/equitable for women, girls, men and boys, according to their realities, roles and responsibilities etc. It should also take into account the socially constructed and biological differentiations of females and males.

**Gender justice:** guided by an Islamic understanding it encapsulates both equity and equality. These terms, as complementary, emphasise both the equal value and importance of women, girls, men and boys to society, and the importance of equity in treatment of all people, regardless of their status. This should include equal opportunities and equitable access to resources and services according to gender needs, as well as recognition of all. IR recognises that only equitable treatment creates the conditions that allow for the attainment of equality in societal value. In IR areas of work this means ensuring equitable access, participation and protection according to people's needs, aspirations, capacities and vulnerabilities etc. It should reinforce protection of cohesive family, increase security and ensure the well-being of all its members.

**Gender-based programming:** The design of relevant programmes which tackle structural causes of poverty, power imbalances and socio-economic disparities triggered by gender injustice and gender-specific impact assessments. Also, the process of integrating gender analysis into every phase of the project cycle, including collecting and analysing gender disaggregated data into separate components.

**Inequality:** This implies social disparity, which occurs when someone is undervalued or unrecognised in society. For example if they have been denied equal opportunities and rights.

**Inequity:** Lack of equity, the result of unfair treatment, lack of consideration of a male or female's needs or social standing; unfairness.

**Sex:** The biological characteristics typical of women and men. For example, women can breastfeed and men cannot.<sup>6</sup>

**Social justice:** Fulfilment of the rights of poor and vulnerable people, empowering the dispossessed to realise their God-given human potential and develop their capabilities and resources. The capacity to distribute wealth and opportunities within society with justice.

**Vulnerable groups:** Men and women of different social groups and cross-cutting identities, who become vulnerable through the interplay of factors such as abandonment, loss of relatives or loss of crops. Being a woman or a child does not automatically imply vulnerability.

3.

## Scope

This Gender Justice Policy document is a response to the top line findings from a gender mapping exercise with selected field offices, beneficiaries and IR partners, as well as numerous consultations with teams from our headquarters. IR found the most urgent issues to be:

1. The need to develop a top line Gender Justice Policy with a clear indication of Islamic Relief Worldwide's stance and commitment on gender justice issues.
2. The need to systemise gender justice integration into all areas of IR's work, in particular emergency response, including data collection mechanisms and measuring impact.
3. The need to train staff on gender analysis in humanitarian and development issues and increase technical capacity in programme delivery.
4. The need to reflect Islamic values and the example of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH, See Definitions<sup>7</sup>) to stand up for gender justice in a world where gender inequities prevail.

### In light of the above, this policy document aims to ensure that the organisation:

1. Develops a clear direction on issues of gender justice.
2. Develops external and internal recommendations.
3. Continues to ensure that key faith teachings are used as reference points, emulating the traditions of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)<sup>8</sup>.

The policy sets out clear commitments that seek to institutionalise gender justice analysis in organisational practices and supports the current global strategy and standards of accountability. This policy aims to promote *adl* (justice) and *khair* (goodness) in the society through IR programmes, projects and interventions and internal institutional arrangements.

For more information on the methodology and the development process of the Gender Justice Policy see Annex 1.

4.

## Rationale

IR has a long-standing commitment to gender justice and female empowerment. We have a presence in over 40 countries and have firsthand experience of the consequences of gender inequities, which means we have the opportunity to be agents of change.

Feedback from our field officers tells us that we must maximise these opportunities in the cause of achieving gender justice. This led us to employing a deeper level of gender analysis, to promoting everyone's right to protection, to equitable access and to greater participation, so we can improve the impact of our programmes and tackle the root causes of poverty.

Since we started, Islamic Relief has voluntarily adhered to a range of international standards<sup>9</sup>, committing ourselves to the cause of advancing gender justice in our humanitarian and development work. IR believes that although our values are founded in justice derived from faith, there are cultures and traditions around the world which persistently exhibit gender gaps and disparities.

Today, more than ever, the need for faith-inspired action on gender justice has never been greater. This Gender Justice Policy is a positive step towards ending demeaning practices and ensuring gender-sensitivity in IR's internal and external undertakings.

We acknowledge that gender inequities and inequalities are the consequences of a variety of economic, political and socio-cultural problems prevalent in the communities where we work. These are exacerbated by cross cutting issues of power relations, social status, education and poor accountability. Among these issues our greatest concerns are:

1. The denial of God-given and inalienable rights and access to justice.
2. Inequitable distribution of resources, services and opportunities. This can occur when, depending on their gender, certain social groups have more or less power to access and control distributed resources at community or family level, this is contingent upon the dynamics within each household and the ways these dynamics can affect the capability of individuals.
3. Limited participation of women, girls, disabled people, older people, ethnic minorities and other socially excluded groups throughout the project cycle, from needs assessment to monitoring and evaluation, and in decision making processes at community and family level.

4. Security risks and protection for all women, girls, men and boys who are particularly vulnerable to violence in conflict, post-conflict and emergency situations.

This Gender Justice Policy has been developed to help IR address the root causes of poverty. The policy lays out a plan to engage and amplify the voices and visibility of those who face structural barriers to being heard and counted. We want this to ensure that people in the communities where we work are empowered as change makers, able to fully participate in all aspects of life.

Inequalities exist because of unequal power distribution and the violation of rights. More specifically, women, girls, men and boys are all entrenched within complex social relations, often leading to unequal power to access resources, services and opportunities, or to participate in decision-making at the household and community levels. In certain contexts, a person's socioeconomic or legal status can also have negative implications on access to wealth and assets.

In order to address the core **causes** of gender injustice, we need to bear in mind a wider theory of change and understand the domains of change. Causes are given some focus in *Introducing the IRW's ISD Programme Policy Document* (Fitzgibbon, Aminu-Kano, 2014)<sup>10</sup>. They can be any of the following:

- » political
- » physical
- » human
- » social
- » spiritual
- » environmental
- » financial

Often, gender justice may be undermined by external forces such as macro-economic, environmental, poor governance, corruption and lack of vertical accountability between state and citizens, to name but a few.

The Gender Justice Policy provides the foundation for improving the situation in communities where, prior to this, interventions may have unwittingly supported pre-existing gender inequalities. This is known as gender blindness, causing unintended harm as well as wasting resources and efforts on projects unsuitable

for local gender dynamics. IR recognises that lack of diligent gender analysis<sup>11</sup>, which would recognise these dynamics in the needs assessment phase, may lead even the most careful programme design to widen, rather than reduce, the gender gap. Also, if gender perspectives are left out at the programme design stage, this may lead to family tensions, break-up, or even increased domestic violence, to name just a few potential side effects<sup>12</sup>. For instance, in programmes targeting women, the limited involvement of men may be a cause of their exclusion and marginalisation, and could also prevent men from receiving assistance.

Therefore, it is important to have a policy which will ensure due diligence in considering gender complexities in all areas of our work, ensuring the holistic well-being of all members of society, with an emphasis on just outcomes for the females and males we serve.

IR is most concerned with the violation of God-given rights and teachings on gender roles and responsibilities. These rights and teachings are derived directly from the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophets, for more information about this please refer to the IR policy paper *Human Development in Islam* (Aminu-Kano, 2014).

Even though many Muslims around the world believe that justice and women's rights are enshrined in the Qur'an, we often observe gross violations of faith teachings in practice. Distortions of Islam, affected by misinterpretation, local culture, traditions and social norms, are a major factor in legitimising people's misapplication of faith guidance in their daily lives.

This can impose restrictions and can dictate what is religiously acceptable and what is not. It is often further exacerbated by poor levels of theological knowledge in the community, leading many to internalise these distorted messages without a clear understanding of how traditional practices and perspectives may have influenced their view of religion. This leads to women often being given lower status, which is an inaccurate reflection of traditions established during Qur'anic revelation.

Religion has become intertwined with cultural norms, with a severely negative impact for women and girls. This is of particular concern because of the Islamic imperative – 'to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil'<sup>13</sup>.



## Faith perspectives informing gender justice policy

As a faith-based development organisation, religious texts inform our approach to our work, including gender issues. The principles at the core of our work are based on the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The actual practices of the Prophet himself provide further guidance about how Muslims might translate the lessons of the Qur'an and Sunna (see Definitions) into practice. We can also draw upon rich traditions from Islamic history.

The following section summarises some of the main points.

### Principles

Direct research, as well as several consultations with Islamic scholars, point to the relevance and importance of the Islamic concepts of dignity, justice and rights and responsibilities. These are the benchmarks for defining balanced relationships between genders.

IR has placed upholding and maintaining human dignity at the centre of our approach to human development. This commitment reflects the Qur'anic verse:

***"We have bestowed dignity on the progeny of Adam..."*** [Qur'an 17:70]

It is also a reference to the Qur'anic story of Creation which emphasises that both women and men originate from the same essence (from a single *nafs*<sup>14</sup>), setting a landscape where all humans are equal:

***"People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide..."*** [Qur'an, 4:1]

These verses make the dignity and equality of all humans, males and females, quite clear, so any affront to the dignity of a person is in contradiction to God's message. Any form of injustice degrades a person's dignity.

Islamic scriptures clearly indicate that humanity has been granted special responsibilities by God, which are not differentiated by gender. For example, when God appointed human beings as guardians of the earth, this responsibility was given to all humans, irrespective of gender – ***"...I am putting a successor on earth..."*** [Qur'an 2:30]

According to the Qur'an, the biological differences between men and women are part of the Divine plan to divide us all into pairs<sup>15</sup> in order to maintain harmony and equilibrium<sup>16</sup>. One cannot thrive without the

other, as they complement each other and facilitate procreation. The entire chapter *al-Nisa*, The Women, in the Qur'an, is fully dedicated to the affirmation of women by uplifting their status and detailing their God-given rights. Empowering women by acknowledging their social status, economic independence and autonomy, this chapter also addresses the needs of widows and orphans in terms of inheritance and family law as well as commanding all to stand firmly for justice in all human relations (Qur'an 4:135).

Qur'anic verses provide the basis for IR's focus on the maintaining of dignity and our commitment to justice, inclusivity and equal opportunities. Qur'anic verses celebrate the diversity of creation and acknowledge that gender issues are connected with other aspects of social identity. There are a number of occasions where diversity is emphasised and unconditional equality between all people is reinforced<sup>17</sup>, for example:

***"People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware"*** [Qur'an 49:13]

Numerous Qur'anic verses teach us that humans will be ranked according to their ethics, morals and good deeds, the only measures that matter to the Creator, who does not rank one gender above another:

***"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do."*** [Qur'an 16:97]

While God Himself does not distinguish in His judgment between males and females, humans often fall short of being able to attain this all-encompassing justice, falling into the trap of judging men and women differently for their actions.

Additionally, the Qur'an informs us that each person is fully responsible for his or her own deeds, and has the ability to make individual decisions, what in more contemporary terms would be called 'agency' and 'self-determination'. Muslims believe that everyone will be held accountable for deeds committed by their own agency on the Day of Judgment as defined in the Qur'an:

***"And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. Then to your Lord is your return, and He will inform you***

**concerning that over which you used to differ.” [Qur’an, 6:164]**

Justice is a central and fundamental principle in Islam. In the chapter on women (Surah al-Nisa), the Qur’an says:

**“You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly—if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.” [Qur’an 4:135]**

We start from acknowledging that God is Just (‘Al-Adl’<sup>18</sup>) and He created everything, including His commands and directives, in justice. The principle of justice is derived from religious scriptures and examples of the Prophets embodied in the Shari’ah<sup>19</sup>. We recognise that any outcome of relations between women, girls, men, or boys which leads to injustice is flawed. As the Qur’an says:

**“Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.” [Qur’an 16:90]**

The ultimate aim of life for both female and male, according to the Qur’an, is to serve the Creator<sup>20</sup>. Using this as a basis, then the cultivation of positive relationships between males and females can be a form of worship.

Justice is a balanced fulfilment of rights and responsibilities. There can be no justice where God-given human rights are violated or where duty bearers fail to discharge their responsibilities. Biological differences should not become an excuse for valuing men and women differently from each other. Their equal recognition is important for communities to thrive.

The Qur’an and the Sunna remind us how oppression is unlawful and that we need to respect the rights of others in this worldly life, as the balance of justice will be established by God in the hereafter<sup>21</sup>. An example of this comes from Abu Hurairah, the companion of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), who tells us that:

Messenger of Allah said, **“On the Resurrection Day, the rights will be paid to those to whom they are due so much so that a hornless sheep will be retaliated for by punishing the horned sheep which broke his horns.” [Muslim Riyad al Saliheen, Chapter 26:204]**

Rights and responsibilities in Islam are properly framed as reciprocal within the family and wider community units and are aligned to various objectives of Islamic ethics (*Maqasid al-Shari’ah*). The rights of women and

men in relation to one other and their responsibilities mean that, for most cases, one’s rights cannot be separated from one’s responsibilities, within the confines of one’s capabilities.

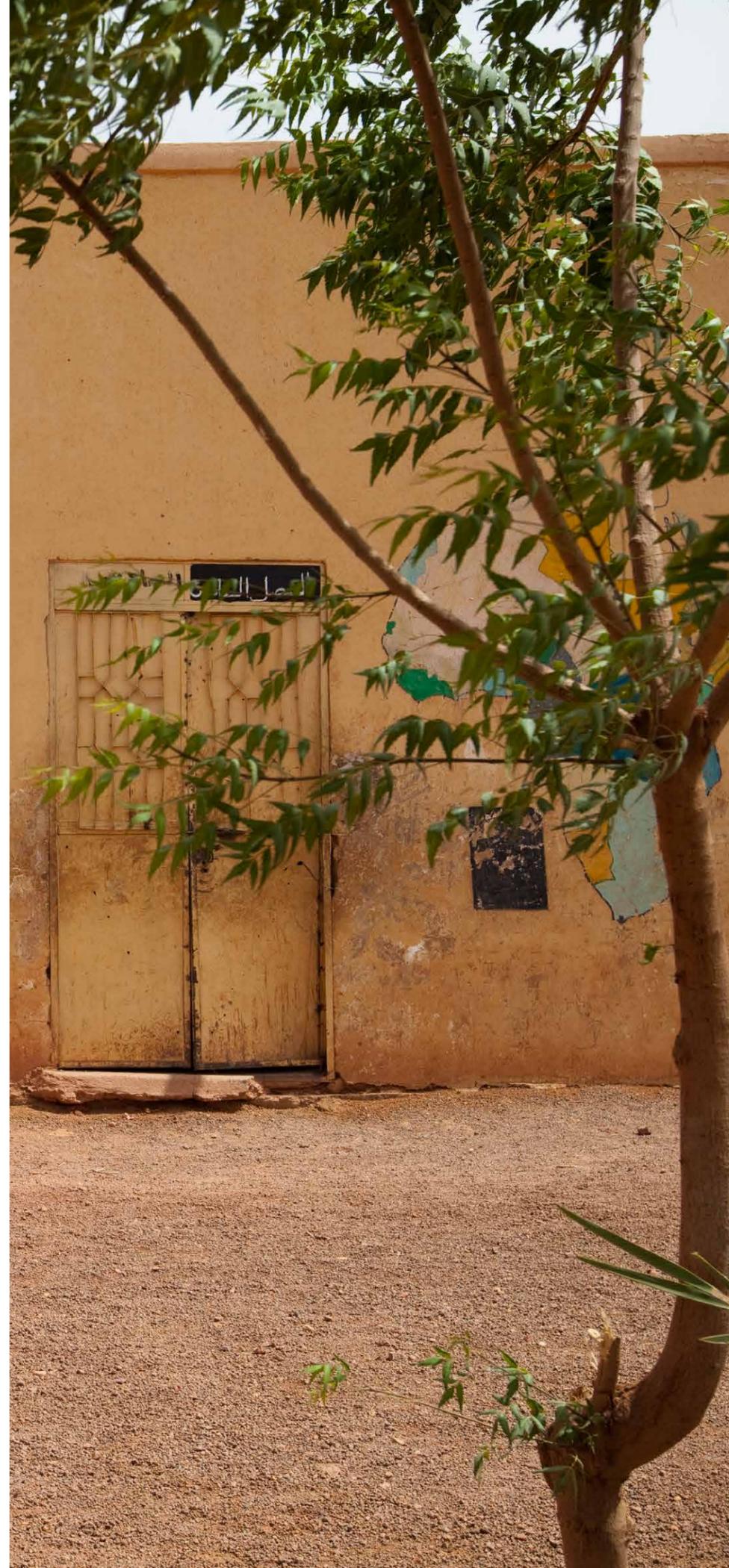
**“God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear” [Qur’an 2:286]**

In Islam, rights and responsibilities are set out within divine revelation at individual, family, community and societal levels with one’s circumstance and position dictating the nature of these obligations, within a socially just equilibrium. For example the poor have rights over the affluent, children over their parents, and older parents over their adult children. Rights and responsibilities in Islam are outlined in the Islamic Relief policy document *Human Development in Islam* (Aminu-Kano, 2014)<sup>22</sup>. This guidance aims to protect equal rights for all females and males, this is covered by *Maqasid<sup>23</sup> al-Shari’ah* (the objectives of Islamic law provided in the Qur’an).

In the case of competing women’s and men’s rights, God entrusted that through partnership and consultation (for example *shura* - consultation) spouses will reach agreements and maintain their affairs justly (Qur’an 16:90), aiming to support each other to do good deeds<sup>24</sup>. Marital life in Islam is recognised as an expression of God’s mercy and as one of His signs. Hence, peaceful, harmonious and fulfilling spousal relationships are encouraged:

**“Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live within tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect.” [Qur’an 30:21]**

The family is the first and most important unit of society and a divinely ordained institution. It is



founded upon the institution of marriage, a long-term union between a woman and a man who each enter it with the status of equal and equivalent partners. Marriage is based on a contract which needs the consent of both parties.

Family in Islam refers to both the nuclear and extended family structures and is protected by the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of all members enshrined in faith teachings. These prioritise the protection of the family and future generations as one of the objectives of Divine Law (*Maqasid al-Shari’ah*). Healthy stable families have mercy, love, partnership and close relationships at their foundation.

The peace, security, emotional, psychological and moral nurturing offered by a stable family unit is of great value and is essential for the spiritual and economic growth of its members. The family is based on the principles of justice, balance and financial and social *takaafu* (solidarity) between family members to ensure social cohesion, unity and continuity. *Takaafu* stands for alleviating one’s burden, assisting each other, mutual care, providing financial support and advising each other.

The relationships between women and men are established on the concept of *wilayah* which in principle means protecting one another. *Wilayah* also assumes that public responsibility falls on both females and males to do good and stop harm, to be agents of change:

**“The believers, both men and women, support each other; they order what is right and forbid what is wrong; they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such people: God is almighty and wise.” [Qur’an 9:71]**

The concept of protection and cooperation is viewed as necessary for healthy families and just communities. It gives responsibility to both men and women to support, respect and guard each other, so spouses share power and both participate equally in decision-making.

In terms of distribution of household duties, often known as care work or unpaid labour, the religious scripts do not specifically assign such tasks to females or males; however, the Sunna of the Prophet and his family provide strong examples of mutual care and cooperation. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) shared the responsibilities for household duties by serving his family<sup>25</sup> with kindness as opposed to any form of authoritarianism.

There are many injunctions in the Qur’an which emphasise the rights of females and males to education, protection, access to resources and control over them, rights to land, property, capital and rights to work. Seeking knowledge is one of the core obligations of every Muslim, male or female. This comes from the earliest revelations of the Qur’an;

**“Read! In the Name of your Lord who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous...” [Qur’an 96:1-5]**

Many other verses of the Qur'an highlight the importance of seeking knowledge. Similarly, many *hadiths* place particular emphasis on women's education, while examples from the early history of Islam show evidence of open access to education for women, girls, men and boys. History also shows us that women played prominent roles in society, such as teachers to both males and females.

The Qur'an also guarantees entitlement to inheritance for both women and men:<sup>26</sup>

***"Men shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, and women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, whether the legacy is small or large: this is ordained by God."***

**[Qur'an 4:7]**

It also recognises full property and land rights of women, men, orphans and the mentally disabled (Qur'an 2:220, 4:2, 4:4-5, 4:10) and reminds us ***"do not wrongfully consume each other's wealth but trade by mutual consent"*** [Qur'an 4:29]

So according to the Qur'an, women have the right to independently buy and sell property or land in their own name, as well as the right to keep their finances completely within their own control. Women have the right to own a business independently and employ both women and men, for example Khadijah bint Khuwailid employed the Prophet (PBUH) as a trader (See Annex 3). The Prophet (PBUH) did not shy from working for a woman and indeed did his best to satisfy her expectations. The Qur'an has many examples of women participating in the public life of early Muslim communities, for example at the second pledge of 'Aqabah, the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) took an oath from both women and men, demonstrating that women should not be excluded from public affairs.

The Islamic concepts of dignity, justice, rights and responsibilities all reinforce the importance of equality<sup>27</sup> between women and men, as they clearly imply that all humans, women and men alike, should be free to develop their personal abilities and make choices based on partnership, without the limitations set by stereotypes, social roles and prejudices. This underlines the need for gender equity, which calls for women and men both to be treated fairly, according to their respective needs.

## The example of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)

If we look at early Islam, we can find inspiring examples of relationships between women and men.

The Prophet (PBUH) formed a diverse and mutually supportive community, distinguished by its peaceful coexistence. This presented a challenge to patriarchal communities, implying that they should encourage more female participation. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) himself is the strongest example of a women's rights advocate. Abu-Dawood reports that he said:

***"Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men."***<sup>28</sup>

On some occasions he was even mocked and assaulted because of his bold stance on women's status and rights in society. There are many *hadiths* that teach us about the Prophetic example of gender justice, including his determined use of his influence and power to restore the status, rights and respect of the most vulnerable, which at that time tended to be women and girls.

For example when he was telling men that "you [men] have rights over your women" he reminded the men that "women have rights over you [men]"<sup>29</sup>. In the Islamic tradition, the practices of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) are an absolute illustration of the Qur'an in practice and so his preserved Sunna provides an example for gender relations as well as examples for the roles of women and men, including their rights and responsibilities in terms of marital relations, family relations, and relations with neighbours, friends and colleagues. The recordings are extensive, dozens of volumes, and have been explored further in other gender policy papers. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) was particularly concerned about orphans and women, who in pre-Islamic Arabia were most afflicted by inequalities of the system at the time, as in the following *hadith*:

Abu Shuraih Khuwailid bin 'Amr Al-Khuzai reported: ***"The Prophet said, "O Allah, I declare inviolable the rights of two [physically] weak ones: the orphans and women."*** [An-Nasa'i Riyad al Saliheen, Chapter 33, 270]

All the members of the growing Muslim community were treated as equal, with respect, kindness and humility, and women were provided with protection<sup>30</sup>. Virtues encouraged in the time of the Prophet (PBUH) included making peace between people, benevolent treatment towards orphans, and vulnerable and poor people. Good treatment of neighbours, sharing food and goods, kind treatment of parents, loving each other for the sake of God, fulfilling promises, politeness, meeting people with a smiling countenance, dignity and tranquillity were all strongly recommended, while arrogance, persecution, aggression and pre-judging people were strongly discouraged.

Even though the rights of women and the vulnerable were restored under the Prophet's leadership, in line with Qur'anic directives, he was still concerned that ignorant attitudes and behaviour could come back and lead to the violation of women's rights after his death. His very last pilgrimage sermon emphasises the importance of justice between husbands and wives, reminding men and women of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities in their relationship, and the fact that they bear responsibility before God for harmony in marriage. He equated the violation of women's marital rights to a breach of the covenant with God.

To find out more regarding Muslim women in history please refer to annex 3.



## Context

The World Bank estimates that around one billion people are still living in extreme poverty today, in 2015<sup>31</sup>. The poverty and gender injustice are deeply intertwined and to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty often means to first tackle gender inequities – the root causes of poverty. Across the globe, gender inequities are a theme running through different sectors and put the well-being of many people at serious risk.

### Here are some hard-hitting truths:

- » Around half the world's population is female. Yet 70 per cent of the world's poor are also female<sup>32</sup>
- » Women work two-thirds of the world's hours, yet they earn one-tenth of the world's income<sup>33</sup>
- » Women own less than one per cent of the world's property<sup>34</sup>
- » Thirty-one million girls of primary school age are not enrolled in school, yet women constitute 64 per cent of illiterate adults globally<sup>35</sup>
- » At least one woman in every three has been subjected to violence in her lifetime but only around 25 per cent of countries in the Middle East and North Africa have legislation against domestic violence<sup>36</sup>
- » More than 30 per cent of countries in South Asia uphold unequal ownership rights<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the global review of the 2015 Beijing Platform for Action after 20 years, and the ongoing negotiation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the post-2015 agenda, IR's Gender Justice Policy is now moving forward into a new chapter concerning gender equality and women's empowerment.

Without doubt, the goals and indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment are some of the most contentious areas, as the situations for women, girls, men and boys differ across the world. Also,

increasingly complex geopolitical realities create an environment where the accomplishments and struggles of gender justice are dynamic, and especially challenged by humanitarian disasters and conflict settings.

As a faith-inspired and faith-informed, but non-theological agency, IR has developed this policy to guide our international programmes and arrangements, so we can be in line with international standards and faith values. We follow the values and teachings from the word of God in the Qur'an and its practical application in the life practices of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), the Sunna. So it is important to note that contemporary practices of Islam are deeply rooted in local cultures and traditions in communities, which can distort key messages, this can occur with any religion. IR respects local cultures and traditions, so we need to incorporate awareness of cultural customs, myths and assumptions into our work so we can effectively encourage gender justice. We recognise that this is a challenging task. IR does not aim to define what Islam says, we aim to emphasize widely accepted Islamic principles.

Our staff have witnessed many forms of gender injustice in many cultural, political, geographical and situational contexts. These include war zones and natural disasters. Our strong local partnerships give us the opportunity to observe communities up close, so we are in a strong position to reflect on lessons learned. These can support us to stand up strongly for gender justice. For example:

1. **Barriers to asset acquisition.** This is one of the most intractable issues. It involves unequal access to finances, land and the sources of income for both men and women. Even when people have access to assets, their control over them may be limited in favour of another family member due to intra-household power relations. Legal loopholes often mean that women and girls are denied their rights to property and inheritance<sup>38</sup>.
2. **Decision-making power in the household and community.** Communities where males hold disproportionate power are more likely to disregard female participation in community affairs. This means the female perspective is absent from decision-making processes, as is women's know-how, needs and aspirations, which have an enormous effect on development processes<sup>39</sup>.

3. **Denial of the right to work.** Insecurity in families, lack of social acceptability and hostile working conditions can mean women are prevented from working.
4. **Lack of control over earnings.** When women do work, for example in agriculture, they may not be able to decide how to use their earnings, receive equal remuneration or may be required to contribute to the family budget<sup>40</sup>.
5. **Status issues.** Sometimes men view women's income generation as a threat to their status, therefore it is important to ensure that development programmes include men's involvement in awareness-raising sessions.
6. **Limited education access.** Patriarchal societies, cultural barriers, social norms, religious misinterpretations and underdevelopment infrastructure which can lead to physical and security constraints all affect education opportunities for girls and boys. Boys have more educational opportunities as they are perceived as the breadwinners, in line with traditional gender roles<sup>41</sup>.
7. **Social norms.** These can dictate either appropriate or inappropriate roles for females and males. Interpretations of what is masculine and what is feminine can be narrow<sup>42</sup>. Social norms are often responsible for many of the overarching problems of gender injustice, as they cause women to have limited social, economic and political opportunities, as well as a relatively lower status and level of respect. In some societies, even now, female foeticide (selective termination of pregnancy where the foetus is female) happens, this is a clear manifestation of the under-valuing of female lives, attributes and opportunities.
8. **Poor recognition for unpaid labour activities.** Child-rearing, housework, cooking and caring for dependents are the tasks traditionally allocated to females. The allocation of such specific roles to women and girls fuels negative social perceptions and reinforces stereotypes about the capabilities of females. It also prevents women and girls from fully participating in all elements of socioeconomic, political, cultural and family life. If women are expected to perform these traditional duties, those women who earn funds outside the home can become overloaded or marginalised
9. **Gender based violence (GBV).** This is one of the most serious factors perpetuating gender inequalities and poverty. The adverse effects of GBV can leave a lifetime's legacy of physical and emotional consequences, can cause long-term health issues, and therefore lead to socio-economic consequences. Violence against women, girls, men and boys happens inside and outside of the home, and, in many communities around the world, is considered private, discussing it publicly is taboo<sup>43</sup>.

Many GBV incidents are unreported because of the pressure put upon women who go public<sup>44</sup>. GBV is a global phenomenon encompassing a broad spectrum of issues, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking of women and children, forced prostitution, early and forced marriage and FGM/C. Lack of protection measures and monitoring exacerbates women's and girls' limited access to services and resources<sup>45</sup>.

**10. Increased violence in humanitarian and armed conflict settings.** Due to their perceived inferior status, women and girls are more vulnerable in these situations. It is estimated that 80% of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women and children<sup>46</sup>. Risks include:

- » human trafficking
- » forced prostitution
- » security threats in camps and temporary shelters
- » early marriage - often a coping strategy for impoverished families, who, in desperation, seek a marriage for their young daughters<sup>47</sup>

Conflict situations and changing gender roles can also lead to men and boys being physically, psychologically, emotionally or economically abused and mistreated. Men tend to face intense social pressures to provide for their families, which in the context of limited opportunities, can give rise to decreased self-esteem and low aspirations. Without more appropriate ways of expressing their growing frustration, many may turn to drug addiction and increased violence.

- 11. More women than men are killed in natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes.** IR provides training in how to prepare for disasters (Disaster Risk Reduction or DRR), but many women cannot spare the time to learn these vital skills. This is because they may need to negotiate multiple gender roles and responsibilities, and often need to seek family permission to attend. In general, women are less likely to be prepared for emergencies, in particular in communities where women and girls are not expected or encouraged to perform activities perceived as masculine due to certain social norms, for example, swimming or climbing trees. As a result, females are more likely to be affected or even killed by disasters than males.
- 12. Women as peacemakers.** In conflict settings, women's role as peacemakers and their capabilities to prevent conflict and secure peace are often unrecognised and not integrated into peacemaking mechanisms.

### 13. Gender disparities in urban and rural settings.

Rapid urbanization and population growth means that rural women, for example, are less likely than urban women to receive skilled assistance during childbirth, emphasising the lack of sufficient access to female medical providers in those areas<sup>48</sup>.

### 14. Gender disparities in the labour market.

Females are usually paid less than men. They are more at risk of sexual harassment and the so-called “glass ceiling” barrier which prevents women from progressing in both the corporate and third sectors.

### 15. Unsafe working environments.

Deployment of female staff in humanitarian situations is limited due to dangerous working environment and limited protection measures. This has implications on the capacity to consult and engage with female community members.



Looking at the above harsh realities, we can reflect how groundbreaking Islam was at its birth, as it introduced provisions for women’s, men’s and children’s rights. These would have been seen as radical, considering the wider socio-cultural context of Arabian society at the time. We need to learn from the early Muslim community under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), which transformed patriarchal norms and induced numerous social changes<sup>49</sup>.

In this context, we can consider what IR’s role should be in situations where gender inequities based on biological and social differences prevail. The crucial questions are:

- » How will we work towards restoring the rights of women and men to support balanced communities?
- » What are the most pressing gender issues and problems in the humanitarian and development field of our work which do not align with our faith values?
- » What could IR do to minimise the gap between the theory and practical applications of faith teaching in gender justice issues?

In response, we realise that grounding IR in Islamic ethics calls on us to promote respect for other cultures and that addressing gender issues in Muslim communities requires an approach that respects Islamic perspectives rather than alienating Muslims from their faith foundation.

As one of the largest Muslim-inspired humanitarian and development organisations, Islamic Relief is uniquely well placed to work and advocate for positive change from a faith-literate and culture-sensitive perspective. In particular, if IR is to live up to its values, it is imperative to recognise and respond to gender inequities.

6.

## Policy statement

In order to live up to the standard of faith values and Prophetic examples advocating for gender justice, as well as humanitarian and development standards, Islamic Relief stands by this Gender Justice Policy statement:

Inspired and guided by our faith values, Islamic Relief is fully committed to upholding the dignity of all people and eradicating poverty and suffering through promoting justice, equity and the equal value and importance of women, girls, men and boys, as well as ensuring the protection and promotion of the family as the cornerstone of society.

In supporting the achievement of holistic wellbeing and the fulfilment of human potential, we endeavour to integrate gender perspectives that promote justice for males and females into all our humanitarian, development and advocacy work in a faith literate and culturally-sensitive way.

We will continue to expand our important programmes focussed on providing justice, protection and empowerment, ensuring equitable impact, and the effective access, participation, recognition and voice of both males and females.

7.

## Our strategic gender commitments

It has been necessary to look at the strategic focus areas of our existing strategy in the context of the above Gender Justice Policy. These are Islamic Relief’s Gender Justice Policy Commitments, which the organisation will work to progressively implement throughout the Islamic Relief family:

### Gender responsiveness in Humanitarian Action

#### Equitable access and participation

- » We recognise that women, girls, men and boys are affected differently by emergencies, have different needs in some areas and face different barriers to access our programmes. We aim to ensure equitable access to our services as well as equitable participation and consultation of women and men in our interventions.

#### Increasing protection and accountability measures

- » We recognise that, as a result of power imbalances, women and children are more vulnerable to violence in conflict and humanitarian crises and that they often hold subordinate social status. We aim to increase protection and accountability measures at the onset of emergencies and subsequent phases of disaster management, in the hope of eliminating incidences of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly where physical and social protection may have been weakened.

#### Focusing on women and girls in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes

- » We recognise that the resilience of women and girls is essential for the promotion of integrated and sustained disaster risk reduction strategies. We acknowledge their possible exclusion from many formal interventions. Islamic Relief actively focuses on women and girls in our DRR programmes in order to catalyse their capabilities, build on and improve their inherent coping mechanisms and ensure their involvement in decision making.

## Addressing disproportionate vulnerability

- » We recognise that gender roles and responsibilities may change in emergency and conflict situations. We aim to address cases where men and women, boys and girls, become disproportionately vulnerable in disasters, military conflicts and conflict zones. Vulnerability can be caused by limited mobility, restricted access to finances and jobs, and being prone to abuse as a result of psychological vulnerability. We aim to assist men and women in the transition period of changing responsibilities, for example we will provide support for single fathers who have lost their spouses, or offer income-generating and skills development for single mothers in the role of bread-winners.



## Gender programming in a development context

### Integration of gender considerations in all programmes

- » We recognise that women and men have different roles and responsibilities and different access to and control over resources. We aim to ensure that we integrate gender considerations in all our development programmes to increase their effectiveness, to improve responses to immediate and long-term needs and achieve equitable impact on the lives of women, girls, men and boys.

### Promoting healthy and balanced families and societies

- » We recognise that intra-household dynamics include a division of labour within the family and the household economy. We aim to promote healthy and balanced families and societies based on reciprocal rights and responsibilities. We will therefore promote positive gender relations that emphasise partnership between the genders and their equal importance in building more just societies. We believe that positive gender relations will also support the integrated and holistic development of children.

### Expanding gender-just economic and training opportunities

- » We recognise that women and girls often have limited access to economic opportunities. Our programmes will seek to expand such opportunities in a gender-just manner and provide training opportunities to address imbalances. They will also promote the economic rights of women and girls, such as the right to decent work as well as the rights to land, property, capital and inheritance.

### Equal opportunities for females and males, decision-making and leadership

- » We prioritise the holistic well-being of societies. In reflection of our faith traditions, we work to ensure equal opportunities for females and males, including full recognition of respective social, economic and political contributions to community and family life, as well as promoting equitable and active participation in decision-making and leadership, following the examples of our faith female and male role models.

### Eliminating barriers and expanding opportunities in education

- » Guided by Islamic teachings, IR views education as an opportunity and also an obligation. We aim to eliminate barriers to education and expand opportunities in faith-literate and culturally sensitive ways so that all women, girls, men and boys can fulfil this obligation to acquire knowledge.

In particular, we will strengthen our support for girls' education, ensuring that our programmes promote equal and appropriate access to education for boys and girls.

### Engaging men and boys as partners in programmes targeting women and girls

- » We recognise that the situation of women and girls worldwide can only be improved if men and boys are engaged in and educated about the needs and rights of women and girls. We will ensure that men and boys are partners in the design and implementation of our programmes targeting women and girls. We believe their contributions will lead to improved power relations at the household and community level, decreasing the trigger-points for inter-personal tensions.

### Tackling Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- » We recognise that gender-based violence (GBV) impedes opportunities for human development and violates the rights to protection and security enshrined in Islam. We also recognise that GBV is mainly but not only directed against females, and that GBV includes harmful traditional practices, sexual violence and human trafficking. Our programmes will take full account of GBV in contexts where we identify it as a risk. We will work with others towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women, girls, men and boys, while recognising and addressing the underlying socio-economic root causes of GBV. We will provide physical, emotional and financial security to the survivors. We will also work with boys and men through innovative Islamic faith-inspired programmes for the transformation of harmful cultural norms of masculinity, high-risk behaviours and violent practices.

### Integrating a component of women's rights from a faith-literate perspective

- » We believe that faith plays a positive role in the process of human development as a constructive motivation for personal and social change, especially where the rights and status of women and girls are grossly violated. We aim to integrate a component of women's rights from a faith-literate perspective into our empowerment and capacity-building programmes. We shall facilitate the process of 'empowerment from within' to increase self-esteem for women and men using our faith perspective.

### Engaging religious leaders in our programmes

- » We recognise that, from an Islamic faith perspective, IR is well-positioned to challenge some of the most undignified cultural forms of gender inequities. We aim to engage religious leaders in our programmes, leveraging their status to help dismantle myths and religious/cultural

misinterpretations that support the oppression of women, girls, men and boys, with particular focus on issues including reproductive health, inheritance rights, economic rights, access to health care, early/forced marriage, domestic violence. Also, building upon IR's experience in inter-faith collaboration, we will work with leaders from other faiths in our programmes to ensure the most effective aid delivery to all faith groups.

### Providing comprehensive information and services related to reproductive health

- » We recognise that the health of mothers and their unborn children is often at risk during pregnancy or childbirth, exacerbated by inadequate health care provision, and that this is a major cause of maternal and child mortality. We will provide comprehensive information and services related to reproductive health in communities where appropriate<sup>51</sup>. We respect life affirming voluntary decisions about child bearing and methods of family planning that will enable females and males to meet their maternal, sexual and reproductive health needs through improving the quality and equity of health services.



## Gender advocacy

### Addressing gender inequities through the promotion of knowledge

- » In accordance with our faith values, Islamic Relief commits itself to supporting advocacy initiatives designed to address the prevalence of gender inequities, via promotion of knowledge building at the individual, family, community, and societal levels.

### Representing the voices of women and men of different social groups equitably

- » Recognising the importance of community social mobilisation and empowerment for sustainable outcomes of development processes, IR will work within its capacity to represent the voices of women and men of different social groups equitably. We will continue interfaith collaborations, as well as engaging with secular international development partners. We will build internal capacity to actively involve field offices in advocacy initiatives by equipping staff and beneficiaries alike with the skills necessary to become change makers.

### Developing international advocacy capacity and emphasising the positive role of faith

- » Through the recognition of Islamic Relief's responsibility as one of the world's largest Muslim faith-inspired humanitarian and development organisations, we are actively developing international advocacy capacity to engage with mechanisms of change. This includes gender-related policy discussions and global policy frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through this engagement, the organisation aims to emphasise the positive role that faith can play in creating socially just and balanced societies for women, girls, men and boys.

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV) campaign

- » From the local to the global, Islamic Relief will seek to actualise its commitments to gender justice from Islamic perspectives through an advocacy campaign seeking to eradicate gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms. This will include domestic violence, early and forced marriages, and FGM/C. It will counter harmful or inadequate legislation as well as promote awareness-raising activities. This will be reinforced through our work on Child Protection.



## Institutional arrangements

### Increasing female representation, participation and engagement

- » We recognise that men and women both bring unique perspectives and important contributions to organisations, and that women are currently under-represented in senior positions within the IR Family. We commit to increasing the level of female representation, participation and engagement in our workplace at all levels, in particular, in management roles at the headquarters, field and partner offices.

### Ensuring an equal appreciation of the roles that both women and men play in the organization

- » We will increase the importance of the role that women play in the organisation, ensuring equal appreciation of the roles that both women and men play in the organisation. We will provide them with the tools to enable them to empower themselves to achieve their full potential. This should include positive approaches to recruit, retain and develop female staff, as well as identifying, supporting and developing the careers of women across the IR family, recognising and rewarding their contributions. This will support us in our aims to:

1. Increase female voices across the organisation.
2. Remove gender disparities.
3. Improve the working lives of women.

### Providing a conducive and safe working environment

- » IR is committed to providing a conducive working environment for its female and male staff, especially those in the field, ensuring safety and protection in hostile and insecure environments.

### Increasing flexibility in the workplace

- » IR will champion increased flexibility in the workplace to accommodate the competing demands of work and home for both women and men.

### Raising gender awareness in the organisation

- » IR will include gender awareness-raising in its induction programme for new employees and develop and implement dedicated gender staff training modules in all offices.

## Procedures and guidelines

The Gender Justice Policy is supplemented by a proposed implementation plan developed in consultation with IR's Global Gender Working Group and selected field offices. Policy toolkits to support implementation will be developed, these will define minimum standards on gender justice in humanitarian and development work. IRW will also develop gender-specific policy briefing papers on selected GBV issues and functional areas.

All IR family members (field offices and partners) are encouraged to further adjust the implementation of the Gender Justice Policy to their diverse contexts, in order to ensure its effective application. The policy should be reviewed and expanded collaboratively by IRW on a regular basis, at least every third year.

The gender justice action plan can be accessed internally on the extranet by all IR staff.



## Related policies

### Reproductive Health Policy

Islamic Relief's policy on reproductive health defines organisational key stances and commitments.<sup>50</sup>

### Child Protection Policy

Islamic Relief Child Protection Policy lays out the framework for child protection and formulates a procedure in case of girl child or boy child abuse.<sup>51</sup>

## Annexes

### Annex 1: The policy development process

Throughout the development of this Gender Justice Policy we have done the following:

- » reflected on current gender inequities
- » investigated the root causes of these problems
- » sought guidance from Islamic sources on key principles

Given that Islam is a diverse religion with 15 centuries of scholarship, and that there is no central theological authority, our policy is focused on a broad core of faith principles on which most Muslims agree. We are commanded: "And hold firmly to the rope of God all together and do not become divided" (Quran, 3:103).

The development of the Gender Policy has involved a holistic four-stage process:

1. The strategy, policy and processes (SPP) team has put significant effort into the consultation and mapping process (see table below) as well as the drafting of Gender Justice Policy working papers (stage 1), to lay foundations for the formation of a Gender Justice Policy and to unite Islamic Relief Worldwide, field offices, IR partners, donors, friends and other external stakeholders by our fundamental Islamic faith values and teachings around gender justice. The mapping and consultation processes involved:

- » Scholars: Cairo scholars conference, IR Scholars Advisory Committee meeting;
- » HQ: Chair, Chief Executive Officer, Monitoring and Evaluation team, Internal Audit manager, International Programmes Department director, Emerging Markets acting director, Human Resources and Organisational Development director, Middle East team, procurement officer, Acting Head of Information and Communication Technology, International Finance Manager, brainstorming session with key managers (Humanitarian Division, Partners and Institutions Unit, Human Resources, Strategy Policy and Processes, Head of Regions), Regional Desk Coordinators;
- » Partners: USA, Sweden, Germany, UK, global programmes working group (with IR partners);

- » Field offices: Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bosnia, Russia, Yemen, Philippines, Indonesia, Malawi;
- » External consultation with gender experts from international organisations.

2. In support of this process, IR has launched a Global Gender Working Group.
3. IR Gender Justice Policy is the core of this worldwide initiative, but this document is the first of a series of documents concerning the direction of IR's Gender Justice Policy. All documents will be based on key Islamic principles outlined in this document. In parallel, policy briefing papers on GBV are being developed (stage 2)
4. IR will develop Theory of Change on Gender Justice on the same theological basis as IR's Gender Justice Policy, operational policies and action plans in order to engage with priority gender issues in detail. Also, national policy adaptations will be held to translate the policy into practice (stage 3).

As well as the above, other scholarly engagements are planned, these would:

- » inform further policy documents
- » deconstruct certain religious interpretations and misused verses of the Islamic scriptures, this is relevant as gender-based interpretations are so affected by varying cultures around the world.

For practical reasons of policy formation, the Gender Justice Policy offers a broad framework, within which IR field offices can consult local scholars to address the most pressing issues within the context of local conditions and practices. This will aim to bridge the gap between regional and local scholarly consultations.

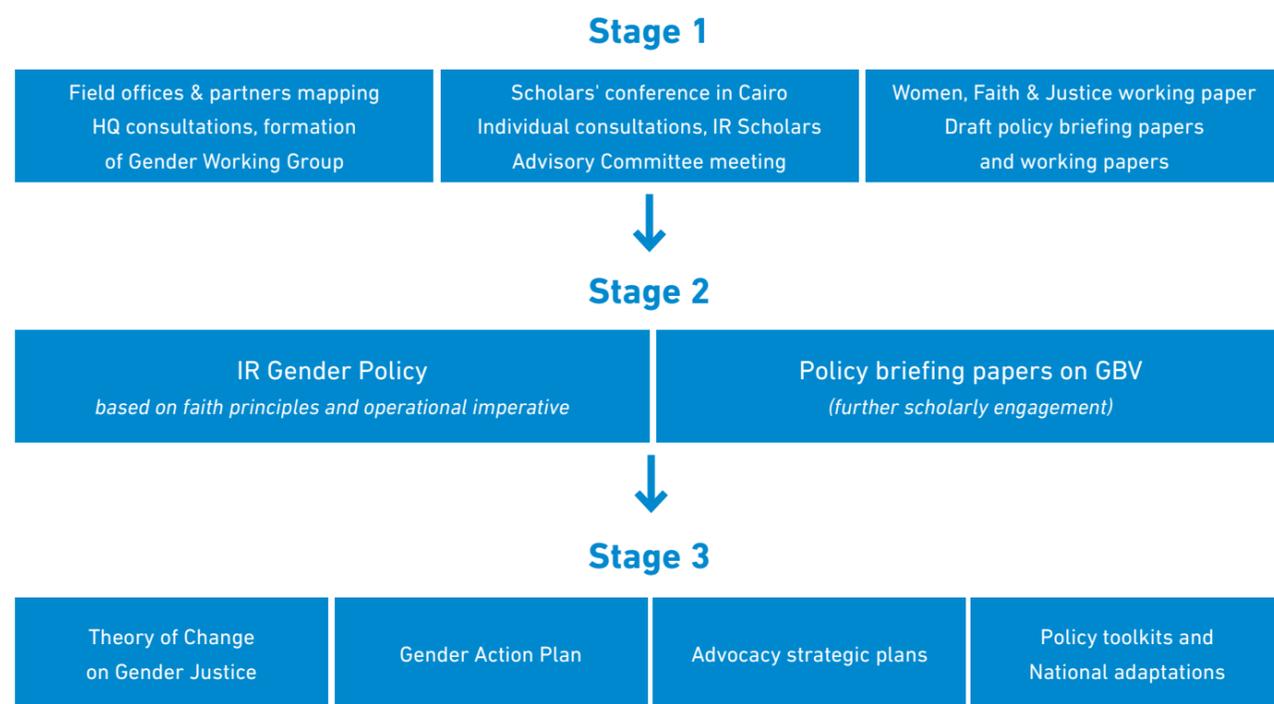


Figure 1 Gender Policy Process

## Annex 2: Examples of Islamic Relief experience on gender in programmes

### Where and how is Islamic Relief already actively working towards the cause of gender justice?

#### Promoting Access (Capabilities and Resources)

Through our programmes, IR has built up a wealth of practical experience in expanding capabilities and promoting equal access to education, income opportunities, resources and the economy. These are especially strong in the areas of educational opportunities, vocational training, access to credit, water, sanitation and hygiene. This means that the ability of communities to challenge gender inequality individually and collectively is strengthened. Examples of such initiatives include:

- » Home education programmes for Afghan women
- » Food for education programmes targeting a) vulnerable children and b) families whose access to services might otherwise be compromised by unmet survival needs
- » Microfinance programmes specifically targeting women, to correct existing imbalances in credit access, for e.g. in Bangladesh and Pakistan

- » Women and child friendly WASH activities in Mali
- » Vocational training programmes for vulnerable women (especially widows), for e.g. in Albania
- » In **Niger**, Islamic Relief is working to improve the living conditions of widows by providing loans for income generating activities.
- » In the occupied **Palestinian territory of Gaza**, Islamic Relief initiated an empowerment programme also for widows, providing financial support for higher learning and micro-finance to start their own business.
- » Islamic Relief worked in **Sudan** on the 'One Safe Community' project in Gabal Awlia and Bahry, Khartoum to raise awareness on health issues, including FGM/C. It involved mass media, group theatre and sports to explore the theme with different communities and explain the health and well-being consequences of the practice
- » In the rural areas of **North Sudan** we worked toward gender empowerment through the eradication of extreme poverty. This project helped more than 12,000 individuals in the following ways:

1. It supported sustainable development initiatives helping women, orphans and vulnerable children.
2. It provided microfinance services, improved primary education and associated infrastructure.
3. It supplied healthcare.
4. It set up income generation activities, resulting in significant, positive and long-term impact on gender rights.

#### Promoting Participation in Decision Making (Voice and Leadership)

IR acknowledges that gender justice requires the correction of structural imbalances in power that go well beyond access to resources, services and opportunities. IR also believes in the importance of empowering the participation of all people in social, public, and private life.

Our wide array of programmes addressing women's economic participation range from sustainable livelihoods projects to advocating in favour of women's inheritance rights in Mali. IR also has experience in promoting female participation in decision-making, especially in project-related governance structures.

- » An example of this is our track record in facilitating the inclusion of women in water committees throughout its water, sanitation and hygiene programming as well as in school parent committees and the reconciliation committee of a conflict resolution project in Sudan.

#### Promoting Protection (GBV awareness and GBV response)

IR employs a multi-layered approach to protection, this encompasses social, economic, political, and religious dimensions. By gaining internal approval for our anti-GBV campaign, we have already taken the early steps necessary to ensure that ending GBV gains greater organisational focus.

IR has some experience with this type of intervention already, mainly from the wide usage of our toolkit called Child Protection in Islam. This toolkit has already been used to train field staff, it aims to increase protection against all forms of violence for children.

- » We have incorporated anti-GBV components into a number of projects. For example, 'Women's Access to Life' programme in **Iraq** educated over 1,000 illiterate women on their rights in relation to GBV. The project educated also men on the moral and Islamic legal position prohibiting violence against women.

- » In **Yemen**, while managing Al Mazrak camp, located in the Governorate of Hajjah, and providing services to refugees, we set up a community center to provide protection monitoring and community services in the camp. In addition, legal, social and SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) counselling was provided in Amran City and a local Islamic scholar ran classes and counselled parents on the harm of early marriage and parental obligations to fulfil the rights of the child.
- » IR partner offices have actively supported anti-GBV initiatives in their own countries, including IR USA.

While this area requires further development, from programmes themselves as well as in external advocacy, IR has committed itself to ending GBV as an advocacy, policy, and programmatic priority.



## Annex 3: Muslim women in history

The role played by women during the times of the early Muslim community provided a shining example for the emerging Islamic civilization.

The first Muslim to bear witness to divine unity was a woman. So was the first martyr. Many women migrated for the sake of religion during the time of early oppression of believers<sup>52</sup>. In the Sunna and in accounts about the female companions of the Prophet (PBUH), we find many examples of women who were active in community and political affairs. Women actively participated in:

- » income generating activities, such as preparing food, producing water containers from leather.
- » in education, including teaching, studying literature, rhetoric, an example is Aisha bint Abu Bakr
- » in jurisprudence or law making, including in binding fatwa judgments (an Islamic legal pronouncement), correcting judges as jurists.
- » in military and political affairs, women were active participants in battle and cared for wounded, an example is Nusayba bint Ka'b al-Ansariyya.
- » in community work, distributing food to the poor.
- » in health care and medicine.
- » in religious life.

Most wives of the Prophet (PBUH) were involved in income-generating activities to support the maintenance of the family, as well as extensive charitable acts. Women of the early Islamic period played a significant role in collecting and recording the revelations, and were entrusted with highly guarded secrets, such as the location of Muhammed's hiding place at the time of his persecution).

They were also consulted in important strategic decisions regarding developments in the community, including who should take over leadership after the Prophet (PBUH). Unfortunately, as time moved on for the newly-formed Muslim community, cultural norms began to reassert themselves over the original values propagated by the Prophet (PBUH) and women's participation in public life became progressively reduced.

The Qur'an provides us with beautiful stories and examples of the exalted status of women:

**Mary**, mother of the Prophet Jesus or **Maryam bint Imran** is recognised for her high ethics and purity<sup>53</sup>, she was a sign of God and today she is a spiritual role model for men and women. She is mentioned 16 times and Chapter 19 of the Qur'an is named after her.

**Bilqīs**, the Queen of Sheba was a prominent and powerful female leader of Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen, who was trusted with strategic decision making and political representation by her country and advisors (Qur'an 27:32).

*"She said, 'Counsellors, give me your counsel in the matter I now face: I only ever decide on matters in your presence. They replied, 'We possess great force and power in war, but you are in command, so consider what orders to give us.'" [Qur'an 27:32]*

**Asiya** or **Asia bint Muzahim** was known for her intellectual and religious independency, never lost faith in God under the oppressive regime of her husband (Pharaoh) and acted as a witness in court to testify to the miracles of Moses.

**Ayesha bint Abu Bakr** was well known for her political and juristic skills. She reported a significant part of Islamic jurisprudence of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and is considered as one of the main scholars in early Islamic history. Her lectures were attended by hundreds of scholars from different regions. She is also known for her political participation as a leader of the opposition in the time of the succession of the fourth Caliph.

**Khadija bint Khuwailid** is well known for her economic independence.

**Fatima bint Muhammed** is known for her strong character.

A number of Qur'anic Suras (a chapter of the Qur'an) and Ayas (a verse of the Qur'an) cover the specific provision of the protection of women.

For example, the fabricated affair of Ayesha bint Abu Bakr, told in the Qur'an 24:15, questioned her integrity. When she left behind the caravan in search of her necklace and was then escorted by a man who found her. She acknowledged that her protestations did not bear weight and said that she would bear the accusation patiently. But God moved to vindicate her through revelation: "When you took it up with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths things you did not know [to be true], you thought it was trivial but to God it was very serious" [Qur'an 24:22]. This demonstrates that the voices of women should be respected equally to men,

and that the misrepresentation of women's affairs in God's eyes is taken seriously.

Also, the verses 58:1-4<sup>54</sup> told of the complaint of a woman to the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) about her dispute with her husband. The woman's just cause was favoured and subsequently God urged men who unjustly wanted to leave their wives, showing that married women deserve recognition and realisation of their rights.

Throughout history, we learn about a multitude of women who provided leadership in various domains, including the high arts of education, jurisprudence and medicine.<sup>55</sup> For example, the eldest existing educational institution is the University of al-Qarawiyyin or al-Karaouine in Fez, Morocco. It was founded by Fatima Al Fihri in 859 AD.



*"Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust in Him" [Qur'an 3:160]*

# References

1. Islamic Relief, "Gender Analysis in Programme Design", [http://www.islamic-relief.com/InDepth/2-16-gender-analysis-in-programme-design.aspx] (accessed 15 March 2012).
2. All English Qur'anic citations are from Haleem, Abdel M.A.S., 2005, The Quran. Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, New York.
3. See the discussion on equality on page 4 (last paragraph).
4. WHO, 2013, 'Factsheet: Female genital mutilation', [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/], (accessed 17 February 2015)
5. The following are some examples of gender characteristics:
  - » In Ethiopia women's and girls' role is to fetch water and collect firewood.
  - » Men are expected to be the breadwinners in most of traditional societies.
  - » In some communities girls are expected to marry early and pull out of schools.
6. The following are some examples of sex characteristics:
  - » Women can breastfeed, while men cannot.
  - » Men's voice change with puberty, while women's voice remains the same.
7. 'Peace be upon him' (PBUH) used as an expression of respect and remembrance of the Prophets
8. The Prophet (PBUH) was struck by the realities of pre-Islamic Arabia and questioned the huge extent of inequalities of that time. He contemplated and analyzed the existing problems, looking for answers, before receiving divine revelation which inspired him to challenge many societal and economic injustices in human dealings and evil practices against women. He restored the dignity of all, especially raising the status of women and girls.
9. For example HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership), Sphere and INGO Accountability Charter standards
10. Fitzgibbon, Aminu-Kano, 2014, "Introducing Islamic Relief Worldwide's integrated sustainable development programme", IRW Working Paper, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Birmingham, UK.
11. Islamic Relief, "Gender Analysis in Programme Design", [http://www.islamic-relief.com/InDepth/2-16-gender-analysis-in-programme-design.aspx] (accessed 15 March 2012).
12. To compound the problem, Gender and Development approaches on equality and equity have developed a number of approaches and tools to engage with gender dynamics in communities. However, yet the major evidence of their effectiveness is to come. Before that, Women in Development and Women and Development approaches, particularly those focused on anti-poverty and efficiency, seemed to prioritise women's transition from traditional to productive roles, following the paradigm of the modernization for the economic growth. We increasingly observe that work on gender justice needs to involve both women and men. This will ensure that gender relations and empowerment at the family and community level is balanced.
13. Quran, Surah Aal 'Imraan 3, Verse 104
14. Nafs in English means lower self, soul, ego.
15. "Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know." [Qur'an 36:36]
16. "He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance..." [Qur'an 55:7]
17. "No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab, have any superiority over an Arab. Nor does a white man have any superiority over a black man or the black man any superiority over the white man. You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from clay" [Al-Bayhaqi and al-Bazzaz]
18. This is one of the ninety nine names of God (Allah in Arabic)
19. Islamic ethics and law (literally 'the way')
20. "I have not created men [mankind] except that they should serve Me" [Qur'an, 51:56]
21. "We will set up scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection so that no one can be wronged in the least, and if there should be even the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it out- We take excellent account". [Qur'an 21:47]. "And those who annoy believing men and women undeservedly, they bear (on themselves) the crime of slander and plain sin". [Qur'an 33:38]
22. Aminu-Kano, M., 2014, "Human Development in Islam", IRW Working Paper Islamic Relief Worldwide, Birmingham, UK.
23. Higher purposes (or objectives)
24. "...help one another to do what is right and good..." [Qur'an 5:2]
25. For example; Al-Aswad bin Yazid reported: Aishah was asked "What did Messenger of Allah used to do inside his house?" She answered: "He used to keep himself busy helping members of his family, and when it was the time for Salat (the prayer), he would get up for prayer." [Al-Bukhari Riyad al Saliheen, Chapter 71, 606]
26. Even though they are both entitled to a share, in the majority of cases where the heirs are male and female, the male inherits twice as much as the female. This is done with the consideration of the variant financial responsibilities of males and females; where men are financially responsible for their family is; his wife and children have financial rights over him, effectively his share is to fulfil not only his but other dependents' needs. Whilst a woman may inherit less, she is entitled legally to keep it all, not to spend it on her own needs, but use it for investment or charity. If a man is not providing for his female dependants, family members individually or collectively may decide on another way to distribute wealth. Qur'anic recommendations also act as a guide for situations where no will was recorded.
27. See Annex 1 for the definition and section 5 for more detailed explanation.
28. This hadith (Abu Dawood 234) is classified as sahih which means a genuine/authentic/sound narration.
29. This also included a reminder about the duty of nafaqa (the responsibility upon a man to provide for his family and the right of a woman to receive provision on a basis of partnership) and mutual kind treatment of women and men as partners and helpers in the 7th century Arabia; "O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers."
30. As per the first constitution - the Constitution of Medina (7th century), which established the first Islamic state, guaranteed specifically the security of women.
31. World Bank, 2015, [http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview], (accessed 17 February 2015)
32. Women Deliver, Facts and Figures, [http://www.womendeliver.org/knowledge-center/facts-figures/] (accessed 10 October 2014).
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. UN, Unite to End Violence Against Women [http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf] (accessed 8 October 2014)
37. UN Women, Statistics - Laws on violence against women, [http://progress.unwomen.org/statistical-index/] accessed 15 October 2015-04-16
38. Even if religious law may recognise such a right, the customary and statutory laws may deny it. We recognise that the violations of women's entitlements to share of assets, land and inheritance has serious implications on men's affairs in the afterlife, who as perpetrators deny women's rights and may unjustly overtake women's share, often due to a limited faith literacy.
39. For example, women in some regions (in particular sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia) do not have control over household spending (including received micro-loans). This has implications on upholding women's and girl's agency (the ability to take one's own decision and determine one's choices) and 'power within' to be in control of one's life and equally participate in family and community affairs.
40. Women's income is usually more equitably distributed to children and family needs, while the income earned by men tends to be distributed according to the man's choice and is less likely to benefit the entire family in certain development contexts.
41. In less developed regions, girls are usually married according to the will of the wider family, so it is assumed that they do not need education as their husbands will provide for them. In some cases, girls and women tend to have little control over their lives and have limited choices.
42. Within these constraints, families will decide what is acceptable for a girl and a boy to do, in order that family honour and reputation is maintained.
43. Perceptions of domestic violence [http://progress.unwomen.org/perceptions-of-domestic-violence/] (accessed 27 September 2014)
44. Often the perpetrators of violence against women are their intimate partners.
45. As a result, for example, some girls cannot attend school due to insecurity or some women will not collect firewood in the forests due to a risk of sexual assault.
46. Amnesty USA [http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/women-s-rights/women-peace-and-security] (accessed 12 October 2014)
47. For fear of not being able to provide for their daughters and in the hope that they might have a better future
48. The problem is due to insufficient medical training for females, who may not have permission, time or capital to study.
49. For example, women gained the right to retain ownership of their own money, business and property as well as gaining rights of inheritance within Islam. Furthermore, the Prophet (PBUH) emphasized the value of daughters, encouraging their education and banning such practices as female infanticide.
50. IR Reproductive Health Policy, Islamic Relief, 2008, "Reproductive Health Policy" [http://policy.islamic-relief.com/portfolio/reproductive-health-policy/] (accessed 11 December 2014).
51. See the policy on our website: policy.islamic-relief.com
52. Sumayyah, who as one of the first Muslims was cruelly persecuted.
53. "Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women" (Qur'an 3:42)
54. These verses disallow a specific pagan divorce practice: the Sura takes its title from the dispute referred to in verse 1 between a wife who had been divorced in this manner and the Prophet. The Sura supports women's rights and recognition.
55. Nadwi M.A., 2013, al-Muhaddithat, the women scholars in Islam, Interface Publications, Oxford, UK.



Islamic Relief Worldwide  
19 Rea Street South  
Birmingham  
B5 6LB  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 121 605 5555  
Fax: +44 121 622 5003

[irw@irworldwide.org](mailto:irw@irworldwide.org)  
[www.islamic-relief.org](http://www.islamic-relief.org)

Registered charity no. 328158  
Registered company no. 02365572