Pos+Abilities’ Feminist International Assistance Policy

Pos+Abilities is a program of Global Peace Network, a Canadian registered charity which has been working in East Africa for more than a decade. In collaboration with local governments, local community-based organizations and 2 international children’s charities, SOS Children’s Villages and Villages of Hope - Africa, we are founding members of the Tanzania Rehabilitation Initiative. The purpose of this program is to bring lasting improvements in the provision of rehabilitative care to the most disadvantaged communities in East Africa. In addition, Pos+Abilities has been helping children go to school since 2007, and is now concentrating on higher education and health-related education with a sensitivity to the needs of girls, who historically have been overlooked.

Our *Feminist International Assistance Policy* acknowledges that the best way to foster a more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous world is through supporting gender equality and the empowerment of females. This policy is a first step towards the protection and promotion of the human rights of all vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as increasing their participation in equal decision making. Our purpose is to enable females to have access and control over resources that are needed to achieve social and economic equality. A feminist approach is much more than centring on women and girls; rather, it is the most effective way to focus on the root causes of poverty.

Our priorities will be fortified by work in the following action areas:

1. **Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls** will be highlighted in the work we do. We will support efforts to reduce sexual and gender-based violence, and to improve government’s capacity to provide services to women and girls, and to improve gender-based analyses.
2. **Promotion of** **Human Dignity**, will be prioritized as we aid in the provision of quality health care, and improved access to education and learning resources that address the needs and potential of females.

Women and girls are fierce catalysts of change; they have the power to transform their households, their societies and economies. By amplifying gender equality, we can:

* Produce strong economic growth

Women generate around 40 percent of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) and the potential for further growth led by women is relatively untapped [[1]](#footnote-1)

* Aid in the reduction of extreme poverty

Ensuring that all students, especially females, leave school with basic literacy skills could cut worldwide levels of extreme poverty by 12 percent[[2]](#footnote-2)

* Benefit entire families

Evidence suggests that women tend to spend more of their incomes in ways that directly benefit their children - improving nutrition, health and educational opportunities for the next generation[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Empower all those who face discrimination

Females are not the only group that faces discrimination and inequality. Others face social and/or economic marginalization, including marginalization on the basis of race, ethnicity, colour, religion, sexual orientation, and ability. Through empowering females, we are sending a message that equality is for everyone.

Approach

Our feminist approach is based on the principle that all people must be able to enjoy the same fundamental human rights and be given the same opportunities to succeed.

The idea of women and girls being able to help construct a better world cannot be downplayed – but neither can the harsh realities currently faced by vulnerable populations. These include the continued existence of poverty in many parts of the world, like East Africa, and the social context which limits a female’s ability to succeed. Women and girls face many gender-specific challenges that limit the economic and social opportunities available to them. Some of these challenges include:

* Diminished access to opportunities and resources needed to thrive: Females have limited access to essential services such as education and health care, as well as fewer opportunities to work and earn a wage.
* More family responsibilities and fewer opportunities: Women and girls, in comparison to men and boys, are given fewer resources, and are exposed to higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence, and are more likely to be forced into early marriage.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* Limited control over their own bodies and reproductive choices: An estimated 15 million girls under the age of 18 are forced into marriage every year – 39,000 a day.[[5]](#footnote-5) Every year, 16 million children are born to adolescent girls (ages 15-19), accounting for just over one out of every 10 births worldwide. For girls in developing countries, this makes it harder to stay in school and harder to work – perpetuating the cycle of intergenerational poverty. [[6]](#footnote-6)

Action

To ensure that Pos+Abilities’ assistance exemplifies our vision of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, we will focus our efforts on the following action areas:

* Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls
* Health and Nutrition
* Education

**Action Area 1: Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**

Pos+Abilities commits its assistance to implementing initiatives dedicated to advancing gender equality, and improving women and girls’ quality of life.

This includes initiatives that enable the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. This will be done through our advocacy and work with like-minded organizations in Tanzania. Wider approaches are needed in order to support survivors, and provide them with not only justice, but also health care, education and economic development.

Evidence shows that when girls are given early access to education and are supported in their studies, they are more likely to graduate, improving their future earning potential. Educated girls are empowered girls, and empowered girls are key to making greater gains in sustainable development.

**Action Area 2: Health and Nutrition**

The prevalence of many infectious diseases has declined due to better nutrition, drugs and vaccines.

However, chronic musculoskeletal diseases have overtaken HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis as the single greatest health burden on East African economies, and the single greatest cause of days lost to disability. The problem is especially urgent for children who make up approximately one half of the population of East Africa. It is estimated that 98% of disabled children do not attend school, and yet, according to the WHO, approximately 60% of chronic childhood disabilities are preventable. We address these challenges by bringing care directly to underserviced communities, and we have inaugurated a post-graduate educational program to teach advanced skills in rehabilitation to local health care workers.

We are a founding members of the Tanzania Rehabilitation Initiative, a collaboration that serves children and families affected by disability, and which enables front-line health care workers in rural Tanzania to upgrade their health care education through an innovative clinical training program.

Adolescent girls are particularly at risk for poor health when going through puberty and starting menstruation. Many have an inadequate understanding of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and face sexual and gender-based violence. Through our collaborations with feminist and female-led community-based organizations, we support positive health outcomes for women and girls in East Africa.

**Action Area 3: Education**

Today, the world is home to more young people between 10-24 years of age than at any other time in history. Yet 250 million girls and boys are still unable to read, write or count, even after 4 years of schooling. [[7]](#footnote-7)

Evidence suggests that when girls are given early access to education and are supported in their studies, they are more likely to graduate, improving their future earning potential. The world’s poorest girls are least able to access education as a means to break the poverty cycle. There are a variety of barriers for girls to complete their schooling, such as societal expectations that they should stay home to perform domestic chores. They may also be forced into early marriage and pregnancy, must deal with inadequate infrastructure, and are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence at school. In developing countries, girls who have completed 7 years of schooling will, on average, marry 4 years later and have, on average, two fewer children. Later marriages and smaller families make it easier for women to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Now that the Tanzanian government has made primary education and middle school accessible and free for all children, Pos+Abilities is concentrating on higher education and health-related education with a sensitivity to the needs of girls.

Conclusion

Pos+Abilities’ Feminist International Assistance Policy encapsulates who we are as an organization. It highlights our mission of contributing to a sustainable, hopeful and progressive future for those most impoverished in the world, through the development of healthcare and the provision of education to those who have demonstrated need and commitment. It embodies our vision of a day when every citizen of the world has access to health care and education. And most importantly it shines a light on the fact that women and girls are strong agents of change.

This policy will help address the needs of those living in impoverished communities and those facing inequalities. We want to make a difference and break the cycle of poverty and create a more prosperous and inclusive world.

1. UN Women, 2015, [Facts and figures: Peace and security](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures#sthash.kk7HAqya.dpuf); McKinsey, 2015, [The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add $12 Trillion to Global Growth](http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UNESCO, 2014, [Global Education Monitoring Report](http://gem-report-2016.unesco.org/en/gender-review/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. USAID, 2015, [Gender and Extreme Poverty](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Gender_Extreme_Poverty_Discussion_Paper.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. USAID, 2015, [Gender and Extreme Poverty](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Gender_Extreme_Poverty_Discussion_Paper.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Girls Not Brides, 2017, [About Child Marriage](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. World YWCA, [Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)](http://www.worldywca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SRHR-fact-sheet.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. World Bank, 2017, [Education Overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview) (originally from UNESCO) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Plan International, [Girl’s Education](http://plancanada.ca/girls-education) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)