

Gender Staff Core Competencies: Food Security Programs

Gender and Youth Activity (GAYA)

Background

In Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs), Gender Leads are typically known as Gender Advisors, Specialists, or Managers, and often share responsibilities between gender and youth under a Gender, Youth, and Social Dynamics (GYSD) Lead title. These positions provide guidance to other technical leads and senior management on designing and/or modifying activities to better integrate a gender lens in program activities. They also assist in monitoring activities and outcomes, paying particular attention to unintended negative impacts on different social groups (e.g., men, women, children, marginalized groups).

These positions take into account contextually relevant considerations such as socioeconomic conditions, religion/faith/spirituality, language, and the physical, environmental, political, and cultural environments, as well as social and power dynamics which perpetuate systemic inequality. Gender Leads must possess effective communication, collaboration, coordination, inclusivity, and soft skills to effectively integrate gender concepts into programs.

The gender staff core competencies areas are:

1. Gender concepts
2. Gender training
3. Gender analysis, thematic studies, formative research
4. Implementation and integration of gender strategies and activities
5. Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting



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Purpose

This document, and the accompanying self-rating tool, are designed to help Gender Leads identify any gaps in their technical skill set. Throughout the document, there are links to key resources Gender Leads can use to help address any identified gaps and strengthen their capacity. Additionally, senior management can use this document to build position descriptions at the beginning of a program or during the proposal development stage. Similarly, leadership can use these core competencies to develop interview questions for Gender Leads and staff.

The Gender and Youth Activity (GAYA) created this document as a partial update of the [TOPS Program and FSN Network Core Competency Series Booklet](#) which was published in 2017. A recently created version of the [Youth Staff Core Competencies](#) is also available to support RFSAs in their work.

Gender Staff self-rating tool

As mentioned above, a [GYSD staff self-rating tool](#) is available as a downloadable Excel file to enable Gender Leads and staff rate their knowledge around gender integration. Within this file, there are tabs for both gender and youth assessments. RFSAs senior management should request all staff focused on gender take the gender assessment at the beginning of their assignment, and then periodically to monitor their progress. Gender Leads should use the many resources contained in this document to strengthen their understanding around gender integration.

Undertaking a Gender Self-Rating Exercise at the Level of the RFSAs

In addition to the self-rating tool for Gender staff, all program staff can complete a [wider program-staff version of the self-rating tool](#). Program staff not focused on gender can complete this assessment to identify their baseline capacity around gender integration. This can help the Gender Lead and senior management identify opportunities for team-wide capacity strengthening training that would benefit the activity objectives. In the tool, there are instructions for completing the self-assessment, as well as suggestions for follow-up activities to strengthen the team's overall gender capacities.

Gender Staff Core Competencies

1. Gender Concepts	
1.1	Understand key gender concepts, including: gender equality, equity, and integration and women's empowerment.
1.2	Understand key concepts, frameworks, and approaches outlined within the following USAID policy documents: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2023 Policy , and ADS 205 .

1. Gender Concepts

1.3 Apply, tailor, and contextualize the following domains¹ that form the cornerstones of USAID'S approach to gender-responsive programming, and specifically to gender analysis within the program context:

- 1.3.1 Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices that influence the context in which men, women, and gender-diverse individuals act and make decisions
- 1.3.2 Cultural norms and beliefs
- 1.3.3 Distribution of gender roles, responsibilities, and time use
- 1.3.4 Access to and control over assets and resources for women and men, including the [Youth and Gender Analysis Toolkit – Tools for Economic Growth Activities](#)
- 1.3.5 Patterns of power and decision-making

1.4 Demonstrate knowledge and application of gender integration in the key programmatic areas of food security, which could include: food access and incomes through agriculture and other livelihoods initiatives; enhancing ecosystem services through natural resources management; and combating under-nutrition, especially for children under 2 and pregnant and lactating women.

1.5 Demonstrate knowledge and application of gender integration strategies, including the [Gender Marker](#) and [Gender Integration Continuum](#), when working with individuals, [households](#), communities, women's groups, community-based organizations, change agents, local leaders, and local government.

2. Gender Training

2.1 Design and deliver *context-specific* [training on gender](#) topics relevant to programmatic components, based on understanding of staff needs (using the [wider program-staff version of the self-rating tool](#)), both core and local partner staff.

2.2 Use and promote gender resources and tools to support gender integration, and understanding of [intersectionality and social inclusion](#), and address [gender and social power dynamics](#) that perpetuate inequalities within the program and activities.

2.3 Train core staff, local partner staff, and relevant stakeholders to engage with sensitive gender topics (e.g., gender-based violence, child marriage) in a way that mitigates unintended negative impacts and promotes actions context-specific engagement.

2.4 Identify and train a cadre of staff to serve as gender trainers. This could include other gender staff or specialists/managers within the program interested in becoming a trainer on gender integration.

2.5 Support management to incorporate gender core competencies into the position descriptions of all team members, and ensure these are used as part of recruitment and performance evaluation processes.

¹ Many implementing partners (IPs) have adapted or added to the ADS 205 domains with: Safety, Dignity & Well Being, GBV, Time, Decision Making & Influence, etc. It is important to acknowledge various iterations of gender domains exist. The key is understanding how structures work together and at different levels to support or hinder gender equality.

3. Gender Analysis, Thematic Studies, Formative Research

3.1 Serve as the key point of contact for the research team conducting the [gender analysis to inform program design](#). The Gender Lead should be involved in the following activities, but their level of engagement may vary between awards:

3.1.1 Develop the Scope of Work for the gender analysis activities, including the purpose, objectives, key gender research questions, and stakeholder involvement.

3.1.2 Identify relevant secondary data for the research team, based on desk review; discern when secondary data is sufficient and/or primary data required.

3.2 Coordinate and deconflict with organizations collecting gender specific data in close proximity to avoid duplication.

3.3 Contribute to the development of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools.

3.4 Support or assist with data collection activities, such as conducting interviews, facilitating focus group discussions, or conducting surveys.

3.5 Support with safety plans for collecting data safely, including how enumerators should talk to marginalized populations ([LGBTQI+](#), people living with disabilities (PWD), ethnic minorities) on sensitive topics, as well as the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse ([PSEA](#)).

3.6 Contribute to the development of data analysis tools that will allow gender inequalities to be identified—sex and age qualitative matrices at a minimum, but ideally disaggregated further to include [PWD](#) and particularly marginalized populations, based on the context.

3.7 Reflect on positionality, from data scoping to data analysis; provide participatory methods of data collection that shift power from the researchers to the respondents.

3.8 Provide assistance with the interpretation of data including the development of recommendations across programmatic sectors.

3.9 Review and provide feedback on draft copies of the gender analysis and facilitate the development of the [gender action plan](#).

3.10 In coordination with the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team and senior management, incorporate gender findings in the project theory of change and adaptation of project activities and indicators

3.11 Determine when additional gender research, [analysis](#), [rapid gender analysis](#), or [assessments](#) are needed as gaps are identified.

4. Implementation of Gender Strategies and Activities

4.1 Advise on and revise proposed strategies and activities as needed, and when required (e.g., program start-up and after the gender analysis), including budget and monitoring implications.

4.2 Lead or actively engage in implementing the [gender action plan](#), and conduct regular reviews of the plan.

4.3 Based on formal and informal feedback from the communities in implementing areas, update strategies to address key gender targets as needed.

4.4 Influence and coordinate with key program staff, including managers and technical specialists, to ensure the implementation of gender strategies and gender integration into program activities.

4. Implementation of Gender Strategies and Activities

4.5 Foster internal and external relationships for coordination and collaboration, particularly with organizations working to advance gender equality. This includes, but is not limited to, program partners and international and local organizations doing similar work, including governmental entities at local, district, and national levels.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting

5.1 Actively support the design of M&E data collection tools that are able to inform gender indicators and monitor negative impacts.

5.2 Coordinate with the M&E team to guide annual and routine data collection, ensure findings from the gender analysis are adapted at the activity level with appropriate indicators developed.

5.3 Interpret results and present findings, recommendations, lessons learned, and promising practices to colleagues to further learning through communities of practice, online communities, webinars, conference presentations, training sessions and other knowledge sharing mechanisms.

5.4 During annual review of program Theory of Change (TOC), apply the gender analysis findings and modify the TOC as needed.

5.5 Use gender analysis findings to make recommendations on how the project can modify activities or mitigate negative impacts or unintended consequences.

5.6 Provide input for reports to the donor as requested which may include providing case studies or examples of program successes or challenges related to gender integration.

Notes on Program Implementation

Gender constitutes a cross-cutting technical area within RFSA's. The lack of buy-in or knowledge from management and technical sector experts around gender integration can be a key barrier to change at the organizational level². GAYA recommends enlisting senior management, and a range of technical sector leads as champions of gender equality. Prioritization of gender within the core team of a RFSA is key to successful program integration. Team configuration and structures should be built to ensure gender leads can escalate gender issues to senior leadership and team discussions.

It is also important that RFSA's demonstrate their gender commitment by championing gender equality, even though sex-ratios of personnel should be determined by the need to reach participants of different sexes where the sex of the extensionist, volunteer, or field staff may be crucial to achieving project outcomes (e.g., Health/Nutrition behavioral change communication among men, or providing goods, services, or training to women in many conservative cultures).

² Gender and Youth Activity (GAYA), March 2023, *Gender and Youth Insights for Integration & Implementation: An Evidence-Based Guide to Action*. Retrieved March 30, 2023 <https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource/gender-and-youth-insights-integration-implementation-evidence-based-guide-action>

Concluding Note

As a cross-cutting area, gender integration covers a lot of ground and it may seem overwhelming at first. It is important to keep in mind that gender staff do not need to be specialized in every sector covered by the RFSA but need to be able to support sectoral staff in adjusting their technical approaches to enhance gender integration, understand intersectionality and social inclusion, and address gender and social power dynamics that perpetuate inequalities within the program and activities. Gender staff are not alone and can always benefit from identifying allies who will champion better gender integration across the RFSA team.

About the Gender and Youth Activity

The [Gender and Youth Activity \(GAYA\)](#), funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), works to improve the quality and impact of emergency and non-emergency food security and resilience activities by addressing the barriers and challenges implementing partners face when integrating gender and youth within their work.

Disclaimer

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