

# GENDER EQUALITY

AKFC GENDER EQUALITY POLICY



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION  
CANADA



With the support of an entrepreneurship and skills-development program in Pakistan, Zehra joined with three other women to open the first electrical repair shop in their village of 750 homes.

Credit: Danial Shah



## Introduction

- This Policy sets out AKFC’s perspective and approach on gender equality.<sup>1</sup> It represents a commitment by the whole organization to support and promote gender equality: a) within its own internal operations in Canada, and b) within its programmatic activities in Canada and internationally.<sup>2</sup>
- This Policy builds on AKFC’s experience in gender equality. AKFC has long recognized the interrelationship between poverty and gender inequality. In its early years, AKFC sought to improve the lives of women by integrating women’s activities in its work. Since the 1990s, AKFC has explored concepts of gender and development in its work, providing technical support to international partners to integrate gender equality activities, and undertaking research on women’s empowerment and related issues.
- This Policy updates the 2006 AKFC Gender Equality Policy and Strategy, and is developed within the framework of the overall AKF Gender Equality Policy. It is specific to AKFC because it addresses AKFC internal operations and AKFC’s role of working with national and international stakeholders and partners to support implementation of programs.
- This Policy seeks to build upon AKFC’s experience in promoting gender equality and serve as a guiding document for its future work in this field. While this Policy is intended for AKFC as an independent organization, it is envisioned that it will be implemented in the spirit of partnership, collective learning and development that characterizes AKFC’s relationships with its partners.

## Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are:

- To articulate AKFC’s values and approach to gender equality, for both internal and external audiences.
- To define AKFC’s strategies, accountability framework, and roles and responsibilities of staff and partners such that the organization can hold itself accountable for the full implementation of the Policy both in its work with external partners in Canada and internationally, and its internal operations.
- To equip AKFC’s management and staff with the tools needed to understand and support gender equality through their attitudes, behaviour and work within the organization and with partners.



<sup>1</sup> See *Definitions* section on page 14 for a full explanation of gender-related terms used in this document.

<sup>2</sup> The AKFC Gender Equality Policy will be reviewed in 2017.

## Vision

- AKFC's vision: Gender equality is achieved wherever AKFC works, both in Canada and the field. Men and women, boys and girls enjoy equal status, perceive themselves as equally valuable human beings, and live free of discrimination based on their gender. They have equal opportunities to realize their full potential, to contribute to the development of their communities and societies, and to benefit from resources and services.
- AKFC works with both women and men, girls and boys, to address the underlying beliefs and practices that create and reinforce gender inequalities; to empower the disadvantaged, whether male or female, to develop confidence and skills and take control over their lives; and to create institutions that facilitate an environment that is supportive to gender equality.
- AKFC's internal operations and culture reflect a concern with issues of gender equality, and an equal valuing of women and men as staff, partners and beneficiaries. AKFC measures its progress and engages in critical reflection with the intention of continuing to improve its performance.

## Rationale

- AKFC considers gender equality inextricable from the Aga Khan Development Network's (AKDN) fundamental principles: dignity and rights of all human beings; individuals making choices for themselves and determining their own path of development; inclusiveness; sound governance based on trust, probity and accountability; and pluralism.<sup>3</sup>
- AKFC sees gender equality as critical to its mission: women, alongside men, are essential participants and contributors to AKFC's work in addressing the root causes of poverty, finding and sharing effective and lasting solutions which improve the quality of life for poor communities. While gender equality and women's empowerment are worthy goals in their own right, there is increasing evidence that they also contribute significantly to overall improved quality of life and opportunities for whole communities.
- AKFC works in many places that have strong norms and traditions around the roles of women and men, and where gender inequalities continue to hinder development. In these contexts it is critical to address gender inequality both indirectly and directly, but to do so in ways that are community-led and responsive to community needs and values. Through building long-term relationships of trust with communities, AKFC and its local partners are enabled to transform gender relations. Acceptable gender empowerment strategies are identified in consultation with communities, by asking women and men for their input, and working collaboratively to identify challenges and responses.

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<sup>3</sup> AKFC is a member of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), along with a number of other development organizations and health and education institutions which were founded by His Highness the Aga Khan.



Visitors gather in the 'Ring of Chairs' at Bridges that Unite, an AKFC exhibition on global development that traveled across Canada.

Credit: AKFC

- AKFC recognizes that the way it addresses gender and gender equality within the organization in Canada – through its leadership, structure, policies, working environment, and culture – is inextricably linked to its ability to design and deliver programs that promote gender equality in the societies in which it works. Successful integration of gender equality into AKFC's work with implementing partners is dependent on the extent to which these principles are internalized and owned by the organization and its staff in Canada.

## Principles

- Promoting gender equality is a prerequisite to achieving AKFC's development goals.
- Gender equality concerns the whole organization and is the concern of all staff and volunteers.
- Gender equality as a cross-cutting issue should be systematically integrated into all aspects of AKFC's work and organization.
- AKFC supports the AKDN in integrating gender equality into key organizational policies, systems and practices, including human resources, recruitment, performance appraisal, training, budgeting, resource development, communication and decision-making.
- Performance management and reporting includes the transparent monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality within the organization and its activities, and application of lessons learned to ongoing and future work, in an environment that encourages critical reflection for continuous improvement.
- AKFC supports its staff in building their knowledge and capacity to implement gender equality principles throughout their work.
- It is the role of AKFC to analyze the impact of gender inequality in the places and sectors in which we work, and develop appropriate responses to redress it.
- AKFC's programming addresses the underlying beliefs and cultural attitudes that create and reinforce gender inequalities, and supports the empowerment of women and girls as a key strategy towards achieving gender equality.
- AKFC helps to build the body of knowledge in gender equality through its work and partnerships and communicate that knowledge within the AKDN, in Canada, and with other organizations and partners.



This pre-primary teacher in Uganda improved her teaching skills through a program investing in educators in East Africa.

Credit: Peter Warren



After participating in classes at his local parent resource centre in the Kyrgyz Republic, Abutalip took a more active role in his son Nuramit's development.

Credit: Nance Ackerman



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Dr. Rukhshona tests a blood sample at the diagnostic clinic in Khorog, Tajikistan – a facility providing critical care to residents of this rural region.

Credit: Nance Ackerman



## Strategies

- In order to achieve its gender strategy, AKFC will establish and empower a gender equality task force to examine gender equality within operations and programs and lead action to implement the Policy. The gender equality task force will be chaired by the AKFC Gender Focal Point, and will develop a strategic action plan to implement the Policy.
- AKFC will provide training and support to management and staff so that they have a good understanding of gender equality concepts and practices, support gender equality through their attitudes and behaviour, and have the necessary knowledge and skills to apply gender equality principles to their work in accordance with the needs of their position. Basic gender equality awareness will be incorporated into staff induction processes. AKFC will build the capacity of relevant staff, for gender analysis and planning, including development of tools and resources, and support for training and mentoring opportunities.
- AKFC will strive to incorporate gender equality analysis and considerations into the organizational management and operations of the organization. It will take measures to provide a supportive, open work environment with equal opportunities for professional development and advancement for both women and men. AKFC will identify specific strategies and criteria to work towards achieving a balance of women and men in decision-making roles and ensure that decisions on recruitment, performance appraisal, mentoring, promotion and compensation are based on demonstrated capacity. Internal policies such as leave, working hours, and parental benefits will be examined and changed where necessary to enable and support staff in maintaining an appropriate balance between work, family, and civic life.
- AKFC will take steps to institutionalize the integration of gender equality into all stages of program development, implementation and evaluation. This includes undertaking thorough analysis of the gender implications of all programs and activities and, working with external partners where relevant, systematically integrating gender equality perspectives and outcomes into scoping, design, budgets, monitoring, implementation and reporting. AKFC will perform gender analysis at the design stage of programs, develop interventions to directly address gender inequality in appropriate ways, and establish mechanisms for measuring progress and accountability, in consultation with partners.
- AKFC will adopt accountability measures for gender equality results, including data collection, analysis, monitoring and reporting on the status of gender equality processes and indicators in both internal operations and programming activities. The outcomes of gender equality monitoring will be fed back into organizational and activity planning and implementation.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### **AKFC Senior Management will:**

- Provide leadership and champion gender equality throughout the operation of the organization;
- Support the actions of the Gender Equality Task Force and Gender Focal Point with appropriate time and resource allocations;
- Support the development of staff capacity in gender equality;
- Support the development and release of a human resource policy that reflects the organization's commitments to gender equality; and
- Ensure programmatic and operational management systems are established to monitor and report on the implementation of the Gender Equality Policy to the National Committee.

### **Gender Equality Task Force, under the leadership of the Gender Focal Point, will:**

- Implement the approved AKFC gender equality strategic action plan, and uphold the principles of the AKFC Gender Equality Policy;
- Provide input, coordination, and monitoring for the integration of the gender equality agenda across all departments at AKFC, including identifying training needs and coordinating gender learning for staff, developing internal monitoring and reporting systems and procedures;
- Champion gender equality and serve as a leader and resource on gender equality within respective AKFC departments and the organization as a whole;
- Identify strategies and means for communicating AKFC's commitment to gender equality to external audiences;
- Contribute to the identification and development of new priorities and initiatives over time;
- Maintain knowledge, carry out regular research on best practices in organizational policies and monitoring, and distil lessons learned for AKFC; and
- Regularly report back to Senior Management.

Hwida trains her neighbours in Eqlleet, Egypt on home gardening and conservation agriculture, to improve food security in their community.

Credit: Lindsay Crompton





AKFC's International Youth Fellows joined forces to raise money for the World Partnership Walk, in support of AKFC's overseas programs.

Credit: AKFC

**AKFC Staff will:**

- Develop an awareness and understanding of gender equality issues as necessary for the execution of their position;
- Reflect that understanding in attitudes, behaviours, communications, and day-to-day work;
- Ensure that the gender equality policy is reflected in program design and implementation; and
- Support the implementation of the Policy in their work with external stakeholders, including sharing the Policy with external partners and volunteers as appropriate.

**AKFC National Committee will:**

- Receive and review the Gender Equality Policy and support its implementation;
- Receive and review annual reports on the status of implementation of the Gender Equality Policy from AKFC.

**AKFC Volunteers will:**

- Uphold the Gender Equality Policy in their activities, with support from AKFC.



After completing an internship program to build skills and experience, Sabeen was hired as a program officer with an organization promoting girls' education in Pakistan.

Credit: Danial Shah

## Accountability Framework

- AKFC's Gender Equality Task Force will report to AKFC Senior Management on the implementation of the Policy and any related strategies / action plan tasks semi-annually.
- AKFC's Gender Equality Task Force will design and implement a monitoring system which includes the regular collection of data regarding gender equality in operations and programs issues.
- AKFC's Senior Management will report annually to the National Committee on the status of gender equality activities and results.
- The Gender Equality Task Force will review the Gender Equality Policy every three years and revise as required to ensure that it stays relevant and reflects AKFC's current thinking and practice on gender equality. Participatory processes involving the whole organization will be used to inform the review and revision of the Policy.
- AKFC will hold itself and its international program implementing partners accountable to designing, managing, and reporting on programs in line with the principles outlined in this Policy.
- AKFC will approach the issue of gender equality within its operations and programming in a spirit of transparency, self-reflection and continuous improvement, and work collaboratively with staff and partners to continually improve its internal and external practices.

## Definitions

This Policy is based upon AKF's understanding of the concepts of gender, gender equality and gender equity, drawn from widely accepted definitions used by UN agencies and governments.

**Gender** refers to the socially determined roles, attributes, and relationships of women, men, girls and boys. These roles and relationships are learned, can vary widely within and between societies and cultures, and can change over time. Gender determines what is considered appropriate for males and females in a given culture, and the influence, power, and resources that each possess. Gender differs from sex, which describes the biological differences between males and females. Gender-based identities and differences intersect with other variables such as ethnicity, class, age, caste and religion.

**Gender equality** means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same status and opportunities to realise their full potential, to make choices in their lives, to participate as decision makers in shaping the sustainable development of their societies, and to gain access and benefit from resources and services. Gender equality is about society equally valuing the different needs, behaviour, and aspirations of women and men, boys and girls. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

**Gender equity** "refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognizes that women and men have different needs and strengths and that these differences should be identified and addressed to rectify the imbalance between the sexes."<sup>4</sup> Gender equity measures may be a means of achieving gender equality.

**Women's Empowerment** refers to a process of social transformation by which those who have been denied power gain power, in particular the ability to make strategic life choices. It "touches on many different aspects of change in women's lives, each important in themselves, but also in their interrelationships with other aspects. It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities."<sup>5</sup> For this power to come about, three interrelated dimensions are needed: access to and control of resources; agency (the ability to use these resources to bring about new opportunities) and achievements (the attainment of new social outcomes). Empowerment, therefore, is both a process and an end result.<sup>6</sup>

**Gender mainstreaming** is "a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy / dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects."<sup>7</sup>

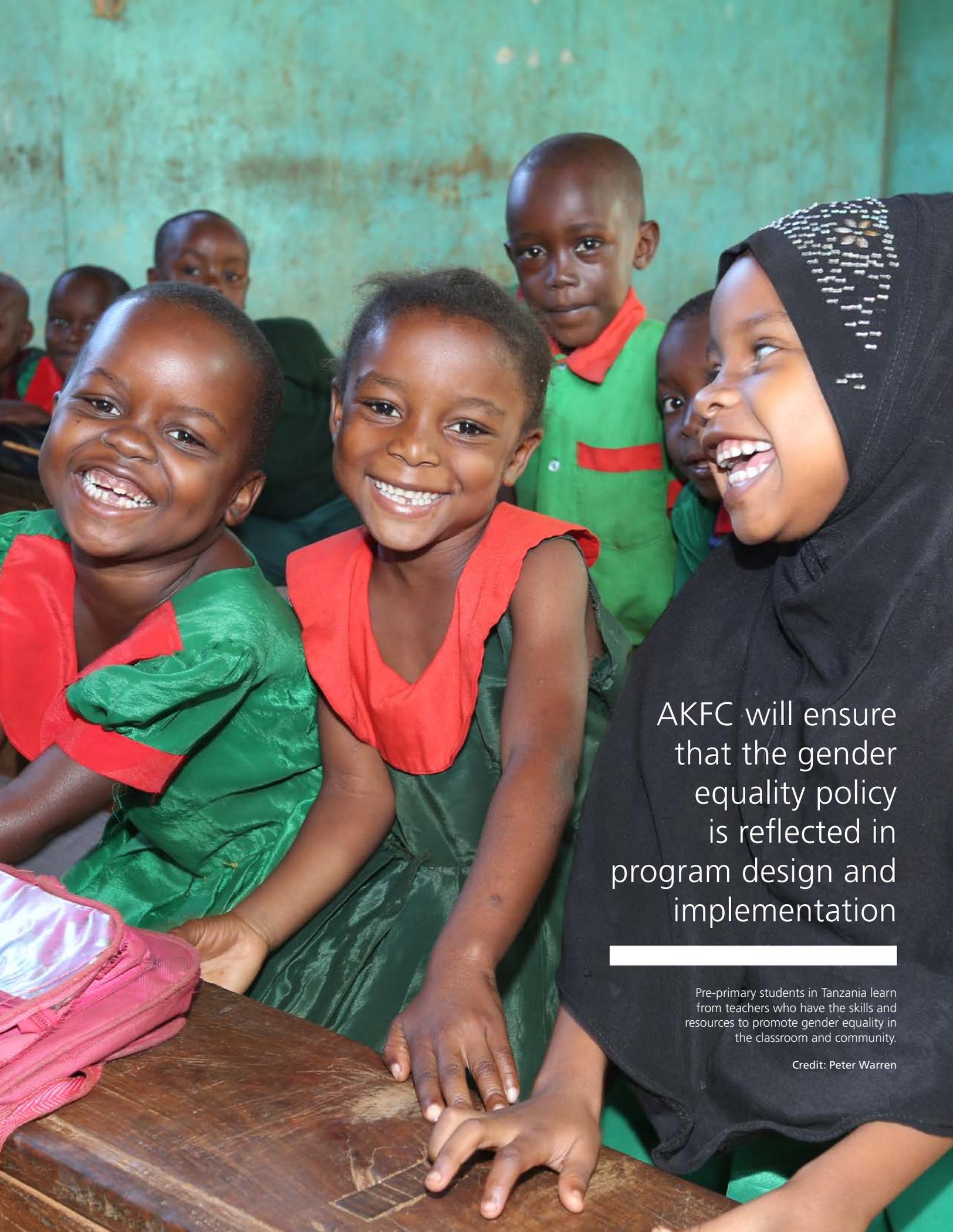


4 World Health Organization (2012) *Gender Mainstreaming Strategy*, accessed at <http://www.who.int/gender/mainstreaming/strategy/en/index.html>

5 Kabeer, N. (2008) Paid Work, *Women's Empowerment and Gender Justice: Critical Pathways of Social Change*, Pathways Working Paper 3, accessed at <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Wp375.pdf>

6 Adapted from Kabeer, N. (1999) "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," *Development and Change*, Volume 30, Number 3, July 1999. Blackwell Publishing, accessed at <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpl/dech/1999/00000030/00000003/art00125>

7 UN Women (2012) "Gender Mainstreaming," accessed at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>



AKFC will ensure  
that the gender  
equality policy  
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implementation

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Pre-primary students in Tanzania learn from teachers who have the skills and resources to promote gender equality in the classroom and community.

Credit: Peter Warren



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