

Developing an NHRI Gender Strategy

A Toolkit for National Human Rights Institutions
in the Asia Pacific Region

Asia Pacific Forum



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Acknowledgements

APF's sincere thanks go to the National Human Rights Institutions and members of two groups who were critical in the development of the toolkit. The Gender Strategy Reference Group contributed to, and reviewed, the draft. The participants of the APF Gender Strategy Blended Learning Programme tested the toolkit during a three-day workshop hosted by SUHAKAM, Malaysia.

This resource follows on from the APF produced toolkit Facilitating an NHRI Gender Audit.

We believe this toolkit will be an essential resource for NHRIs and the APF is most grateful to Dr. Jillian Chrisp, the author, for helping bring it to life. The APF also acknowledges Aishath Fasoha, APF Gender Focal Point (External), for her ongoing commitment to gender equality and for her vision and leadership of this work.

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Concepts, terms and definitions

Gender and language are inextricably tied. Language communicates our attitudes, beliefs and realities and is one of the most powerful ways that gender-based discrimination is perpetuated.

This Toolkit uses the following concepts, terms and definitions.

Related to gender	
Gender	Socially constructed characteristics, particularly norms, roles, behaviours, and expectations that relate to sex categories. Notions of gender vary between and within cultures and over time.
Gender identity	Is a person's internal sense of being female or male, or a third or alternative gender, or a combination of genders or of having no gender. A person's gender identity may not necessarily correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.
Intersectionality	Recognises that people have multiple identities, relationships and are impacted by various social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism.
Gender analysis	Analysis of the situation for different genders, including identifying gender inequalities, which usually results in recommendations to reduce inequalities.
Gender audit	A tool to find out the extent to which gender equality is understood and acted upon in your NHRI.
Gender balance	Refers to the equitable distribution of opportunities and resources among genders.
Gender-disaggregated data	Data collected, analysed and presented separately according to sex and gender identity.
Gender diverse	An umbrella term used to describe gender identities beyond the female / male binary.
Gender mainstreaming	Focuses on integrating a gender perspective across all policies, programmes, and operations so that gender equality is systematically considered in every area of the NHRI's internal and external work.
Gender-sensitive indicators	Indicators that measure gender-related changes over time.
Gender specialisation	Involves having dedicated initiatives, resources, expertise, or programmes that specifically focus on advancing gender equality (e.g., a gender unit, targeted activities, or specialist staff).
Gender strategy	A plan that sets out what you intend to achieve, usually over a three-to-five year period, to progress gender equality internally and externally to your organisation.
Substantive gender equality	Where people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities and outcomes.

Related to Strategic Planning	
Accountability	Understanding who your various stakeholders are in relation to your gender strategy.
Activity	Any action that takes place to reach planned outcomes, such as programmes, projects, processes, publications, events, tools.
Baseline	A starting point before an activity happens, which is used as a comparison to measure change following the activity.
Impact	The change that occurs as a result of activities, outputs and/or outcomes.
Indicators	The measures you will use to track progress towards, or achievement of, planned outputs and outcomes
Inputs	The resources needed to achieve your outputs and outcomes. Inputs can include your NHRI's staff, financial, physical and technical resources
Purpose Statement	Sets out what your NHRI strives to do in order to achieve your vision.
Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)	The process by which you will understand whether your gender strategy is working and/or whether any changes need to be made to your actions, inputs or outputs.
Outcomes	The changes that your NHRI is working towards. They can be short-term, medium-term or long-term
Output	The product or service that you will deliver through the activity
Strategic plan	A document that sets out what you intend to achieve, usually over a three-to-five year period
Strategic priorities	The key gender rights issues that your NHRI will focus on to achieve your vision and purpose
Values	Your guiding principles that set out how you will behave with each other and with stakeholders
Vision	Sets out what you want to achieve in order for there to be equality for all genders

Companion Resources

The main companion resource to this toolkit is:

Asia Pacific Forum for NHRIs (Feb 2021) Facilitating an NHRI Gender Audit: Toolkit for National Human Rights Institutions in the Asia Pacific.

<https://www.asiapacificforum.net/resources/facilitating-a-nhri-gender-audit-toolkit-for-national-human-rights-institutions-in-the-asia-pacific>

Other resources produced by the APF, that you may find useful are:

- APF (Jul 2024) Gender Baseline Assessment of NHRIs. <https://library.asiapacificforum.net/en/entity/klsz202h97g>
- APF (Jan 2021), Monitoring, Evaluating, Accountability and Learning: A Guide for Human Rights Institutions in the Pacific, <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/resources/monitoring-evaluation-accountability-and-learning-guide-national-human-rights-institutions>
- APF (Feb 2020) Guide to Strategic Planning for NHRIs <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/resources/strategic-planning-guide>
- APF (Jul 2019), Guidelines for Mainstreaming the Human Rights of Women and Girls into our Everyday Work, <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/resources/nhri-guidelines-for-mainstreaming-the-human-rights-of-women-and-girls-into-our-everyday-work>
- APF (Apr 2016), Videoseries on Promoting and Protecting the Human Rights of Women and Girls, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRocLBTawJw&list=PLMWlphfUG936ME92wxzAQuunidYgl3yg&index=1&t=106s (from here the other videos are available)



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Introduction to the Toolkit

About the Toolkit

A gender strategy helps a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) strengthen how it works. It is not an “add-on” document. A good gender strategy helps an NHRI:

- Deliver its mandate more effectively
- Improve institutional credibility
- Strengthen leadership and accountability
- Improve internal systems and workplace culture
- Better protect and promote the rights of women, girls and gender diverse people.

This Toolkit provides a practical step-by-step process for developing a gender strategy. It builds on the APF Toolkit: [Facilitating an NHRI Gender Audit: Toolkit for National Human Rights Institutions in the Asia Pacific](#).

From a gender audit to a gender strategy

1. Start with a gender audit

A gender audit tells you:

- Where your NHRI is now
- What is working well
- What needs strengthening
- What is realistic



2. Follow-up with a gender strategy

A gender strategy then sets out:

- Where your NHRI wants to go
- What priorities it will focus on
- How change will happen
- Who is responsible

**The audit shows you the starting point.
The strategy shows the path forward.**

**Audit first.
Strategy next. Stronger impact.**

A gender audit without a strategy can lead to little follow-up.

A strategy without evidence can become unrealistic and disconnected from the real situation.

Who the Toolkit is for

For some this will mean mainstreaming gender considerations in their work. For others it may also include specific gender-focused roles and activities. Gender focal point/s may be appointed, or gender responsibility may be allocated to a person or a team.

However, it is the leaders of NHRIs – Ombudspersons, Chairpersons/Presidents, Commissioners, Senior Executive Officers and Senior Managers – who are the strategic drivers of the NHRI and therefore primarily responsible for initiating and supervising the development of the NHRI's Gender Strategy.

This Toolkit therefore aims at the senior leadership of an NHRI, along with any staff who may be delegated operational responsibility for the development of the NHRI's Gender Strategy.

The development and implementation of a gender strategy involves everyone in the NHRI.

What the Toolkit does

The Toolkit supports NHRIs:

- Develop a practical gender strategy
- Identify realistic priorities
- Improve internal systems and accountability
- Strengthen gender mainstreaming
- Connect gender work to everyday NHRI functions.

Examples throughout the Toolkit relate to:

- Complaints handling
- Investigations
- Detention monitoring
- Legal and policy review
- Education and awareness-raising
- Workplace culture
- Leadership and governance

This Toolkit does NOT:

- Propose a single model for all NHRIs.
- Assume all NHRIs have the same resources or mandate. (Smaller or under-resourced NHRIs in particular should adapt the suggestions in the Toolkit to their context.)
- Replace existing NHRI strategic plans.

The Toolkit recognises that NHRIs work in various political, cultural and institutional contexts, and that strategising their gender response will reflect this.

It also recognises that some NHRIs are just beginning this work. Others already have advanced systems and strategies.

How to use the Toolkit

The Toolkit can be used as a downloadable resource or as a self-facilitated online resource with practical step-by-step guidelines about how to develop a gender strategy in your national human rights institution.

It is divided into four sections.

1 About gender strategies

Defines gender as it is used in the Toolkit, discusses what a gender strategy is and why it is important for an NHRI to have one, introduces a two-pronged approach to gender work, and outlines why it is also important to incorporate gender into the whole-of-organisation NHRI strategic plan.

2 Develop your gender strategy

Takes you through four stages involved in developing an NHRI gender strategy and the steps associated with each. (Fig 1):

1. Prepare your NHRI
 2. Agree your Strategic Framework.
 3. Build your strategy
 4. Put the Strategy into Action
-

3 Tools for developing your gender strategy

Tools for facilitating the development of a gender strategy using focus groups

4 Case Studies from around the region

The Toolkit is accompanied by an online programme which is available on APF's learning platform. At times, the APF will be able to offer programmes for NHRIs to support the development of your gender strategies.

We recognise that NHRIs in the region already have gender strategies and processes in place. The Toolkit is not intended to replace this work. Rather, we hope it offers guidance, tools and resources that will support NHRIs to strengthen their work.

We look forward to building and strengthening the Toolkit with case studies, tools and processes from NHRIs around the region.

Figure 1: Overview of the gender strategy process



A scenario based on a fictional NHRI, the Human Rights Commission of Assuwa¹ (HRCA), is threaded throughout the Toolkit to provide a practical example of the processes discussed.

The Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

The Nation State of Assuwa

Assuwa is an archipelago of many islands, most of which are inhabited. These islands form two main groups – northern and southern – and are surrounded by seas bordering many other countries. Assuwa is known for its varied landscapes, including coastal areas and rugged inland areas. While the mountains reach thousands of meters, the highest areas of some of the smaller islands are not much more than 10 meters.



The Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

In 2025, Assuwa's population was just over 22 million. Inhabitants are diverse, influenced by a complex history of original inhabitation and waves of colonisation. It was most recently occupied by the Spanish but gained independence in 1898.

As a result, Assuwa is a multi-cultural country with several distinct languages and cultural practices. Islam is the dominant religion but others are also followed – Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. It has a developing economy heavily reliant on oil and gas revenues and foreign aid. Tourism is a growing source of income.

The president of Assuwa is both head of state and head of government. Government holds the executive powers. Elections for president are held every six years, while elections for members of the house and all other governing bodies are held every three years.

Historically, a masculine bias has dominated the Assuwan culture. However some progress has been made in recent years. Women have become progressively engaged in political leadership, have better employment prospects and increased educational opportunity. Laws to protect the rights of women, transgender and gender diverse peoples have recently been passed.

However while there have been modest gains for the rights of women, girls and gender diverse people, the overall situation is concerning.

The Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

The Human Rights Commission of Assuwa (HRCA) was established as an independent body in 2005 following several years of protests that broke out after a violent military coup. Pro-democracy demonstrators demanded the formation of an organisation that would promote and protect human rights in the country.

HRCA has spent the first ten years since it was established, developing itself as a credible national human rights institution.

Recognising the concerning issues for women, girls and gender diverse people in Assuwa, the Commission has decided to include the promotion and protection of gender equality as a human rights priority issue in its strategic plan.

1. While the name, Assuwa, has ancient roots in the Asia Pacific Region it does not indicate an existing country.

Section 1: About gender strategies

This section explains what gender means in this Toolkit, what a gender strategy is, why it matters for an NHRI, and how gender can be built into both specialised gender work and the NHRI's broader strategic direction.

Defining gender

'Gender' refers to socially constructed roles of, and power relations among, women, men and gender diverse people.

'Gender equality' is where people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities and outcomes.

Gender refers to the socially shaped roles, expectations and power relations associated with women, men and gender diverse people. These experiences are not the same for everyone. They are influenced by other parts of a person's identity and life experience, including disability, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, class and migration status.

As a result, discrimination and inequality are often experienced differently by different groups of people. This Toolkit approaches gender through this broader human rights and inclusion lens.



What is a gender strategy?

A gender strategy is a long-term plan that supports an NHRI to strengthen gender equality across its work, systems and culture. It usually covers a 3 – 5 year period and outlines the approach that an NHRI will take to improve:

- The extent to which gender equality is understood and acted upon in their work, systems and processes, and
- The integration of gender equality measures into its internal and external work.

A gender strategy helps move gender work from ad-hoc activities to a more coordinated and accountable approach. It is not a stand-alone 'gender project' but a tool to strengthen how an NHRI delivers its mandate.

A gender strategy is a public document and also indicates to key external stakeholders what your priorities are and how you are planning to address them. This way you are able to identify collective points of collaboration - or duplication.

Most gender strategies are developed alongside the NHRI's organisation-wide strategic plan and include:

- The context and background of the plan
- 3 – 5 strategic priorities
- A high-level summary
- The strategic plan in detail
- An outcomes framework
- A Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Framework.



Why is it important for an NHRI to have a gender strategy?

A gender strategy supports an NHRI to fulfill its mandate to promote and protect the human rights of all people, with special attention to gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

Across the Asia Pacific region, women, girls and gender diverse people continue to experience discrimination, violence and unequal access to rights, despite legal and policy protections in many countries.² NHRIs therefore need to have an organised and focused strategy to address the gender rights issues of priority in their country.

A gender strategy does not replace the NHRI strategy but applies a gender lens across the NHRI's existing priorities and functions.

The organisational strategy is the umbrella roadmap for the NHRI as a whole. The Gender Strategy ensures that gender equality is embedded across all aspects of that roadmap. In practice, a gender strategy will support an NHRI to:

- Fulfill its mandate to promote and protect the human rights of all people, by paying special attention to gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people.
- Identify its gender priorities, outcomes, activities, allocate adequate resources and build internal capacity to deliver.
- Enable internal and external stakeholders to understand the NHRI's priorities, and to identify potential partnerships and funding opportunities.
- Meet its international reporting obligations and align with international human rights standards.
- Ensure gender is mainstreamed throughout the NHRI's internal governance and operations.
- Establish its reputation for advancing gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and gender diverse people.

2. Amnesty International (2024), The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024, at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/>
Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (2024), Gender Baseline Assessment of National Human Rights Institutions in the Asia Pacific at: <https://library.asiapacificforum.net/en/entity/klsz202h97g?file=1726530467379esy3w2cuuzj.pdf&page=1>
Human Rights Watch (2024), Women's Rights at: <https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights> and LGBT Rights, at: <https://www.hrw.org/topic/lgbt-rights>
UN Women Asia and the Pacific (2023), A Regional Framework Towards Peaceful, Inclusive Societies: Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Inclusive Governance in the Asia-Pacific Region (2023-2027) at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/ap-GPS-Regional-Framework-brief.pdf>

Using a twin-track approach to gender equality

Advancing gender equality in an NHRI requires a ‘twin-track’ approach – involving both *gender mainstreaming* and *gender specialisation* initiatives.

Gender mainstreaming involves embedding a gender perspective across all areas of the NHRI’s work, including policies, practices, planning, data collection, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting. It ensures that the NHRI regularly considers how its actions impact different genders and takes steps to promote equality in every activity. Mainstreaming is about making gender considerations a core responsibility of all staff and units, not a task limited to a specific department or team.

Gender specialisation complements this by focusing activities and resources on issues that affect certain genders, particularly women and gender-diverse people. This may include establishing specific units or focal points for gender, conducting targeted research, initiating projects that directly address gender-based violence or discrimination, or advocating for legal and policy reforms. Specialisation allows for in-depth expertise, sustained focus, and tailored responses to complex gender issues.

These two approaches complement each other.

Incorporating gender in the NHRI’s organisation-wide strategic plan

Many NHRIs have an organisation-wide strategic plan. This may also be called other names such as, a Long-term Plan, or a Statement of Intent. This is the high-level document that outlines an NHRI’s vision, long-term goals, priorities, and the broad approaches it will take to achieve them over a set period – typically three to five years.

In addition to developing a gender strategy, an NHRI should ensure its work advances gender equality by either incorporating gender as a strategic priority in its organisation-wide strategic plan, or mainstreaming gender alongside its other priorities. For example:

- Climate change is the priority: What are the gender dimensions? What is the impact on women, girls and gender diverse people? What would applying a gender lens to climate change mean for an NHRI? What data should be collected / reported?
- Migrant workers is the priority: What is the situation for female migrants? Are there incidences of gender-based violence? What is the situation with regard to access to economic, social and cultural rights? Are there incidences of female worker exploitation? Are gender minorities legally vulnerable?

A gender-responsive strategic plan strengthens an NHRI’s ability to address systemic discrimination by making gender equality a deliberate and visible priority across its mandates.

Example: Why do a Gender Audit? Why do a Gender Strategy?

Why Do a Gender Audit?

- A gender audit provides the evidence base for decision-making, identifying gaps, risks and priorities across NHRI systems and practice.
- It clarifies what resources are actually needed (human, financial, technical) before commitments are made.
- Audits surface institutional blind spots that are difficult to see internally, including power relations and workplace culture.
- External expertise strengthens objectivity, credibility and staff confidence, particularly when sensitive internal issues are raised.
- The audit establishes a baseline against which progress can be measured over time.
- Without an audit, gender strategies risk being aspirational, unfocused or misaligned with institutional reality.

Why Do a Gender Strategy?

- A gender strategy translates audit findings into a clear, prioritised roadmap for action.
- It sets out the NHRI's vision, priorities, roles, accountability and monitoring arrangements in one coherent framework.
- Strategies ensure gender work is institutionally owned, not dependent on individuals or focal points.
- They support consistency and continuity, helping gender commitments withstand leadership or staff turnover.
- A strategy aligns gender equality with core NHRI functions rather than treating it as an add-on.
- Without a strategy, gender actions remain fragmented, reactive and difficult to monitor.

Bottom Line

- The gender audit tells you where you are and what is realistic.
- The gender strategy tells you where you are going and how you will get there.
- One without the other undermines credibility, accountability and impact.

Section 2: Develop Your gender strategy

Section 2 takes you through four stages involved in developing an NHRI gender strategy and the steps associated with each:

1. Prepare your NHRI
2. Agree your Strategic Framework
3. Build your strategy
4. Put the strategy into action

Phase 1: Prepare your NHRI

Identify leadership

Obtain organisational commitment

Establish a Gender Strategy Development Team

Develop an action plan

Understand the current situation

Communicating internally

Mapping, and engaging with, external stakeholders



Without NHRI preparation – leadership support; budget, personnel, resources and systems in place; and early stakeholder buy-in – a strategy will not be successfully implemented

Building a strong base on which to develop a gender strategy assists the NHRI avoid tokenism or symbolic commitments that don't lead to real change. As importantly, unless the gender context and key issues are understood, the priorities and actions built into the strategy will not be adequately informed. If the preparation phase is skipped, or not allocated enough time, the gender strategy risks being unrealistic, unsupported, and poorly implemented - undermining the NHRI's ability to advance gender equality and its national and international credibility.

This section is made up of seven (7) steps that will guide you through this preparation phase. It has a checklist at the end and an example from our fictitious Human Rights Commission of Assuwa.

You may have other activities and tools that you would include in this phase. We are interested to hear about those so they can be included in this developing resource.

Example

The *Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines* conducted a Participatory Gender Audit in 2018, it also uses the Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework (GMEF) tool pursuant to the Magna Carta of Women which looks at Gender Mainstreaming in government agencies by looking at the following areas: Policy, Enabling Environment, People, and Programs and Activities. The self-administration of the checklist allows the Commission to identify the gaps and areas in need of improvement to forward gender mainstreaming.

1.1 Identify NHRI leadership to support the strategy development

A gender strategy affects the NHRI as a whole, so leadership support is essential. Strong leadership helps ensure the strategy is taken seriously, owned by the NHRI, properly resourced and connected to the NHRI's broader priorities and systems.

It is useful to identify designated leaders to guide and support the process. Ideally, this should include a representative of the Board or Commission and a member of the Senior Executive Team.

1.2 Obtain organisational commitment

Once leadership support is identified, organisational endorsement should be obtained. This confirms support for the strategy development process and signals that staff time, funding and other resources may be required.

Each NHRI will have its own governance processes, so approval should follow normal decision-making procedures. At this stage, leadership may provide support in principle and request more detail later. This is standard.

1.3 Establish a Gender Strategy Development Team

While leadership provides direction, a Gender Strategy Development Team (GSDD) will coordinate the development process.

The role of the GSDD is to:

- Coordinate the process
- Manage timelines and inputs
- Ensure participation across the NHRI
- Use evidence to identify priorities

- Develop the strategy framework and actions
- Communicate progress and build buy-in.

The team should include people from across the NHRI, including staff with gender expertise, operational experience and lived experience of gender issues. A Commissioner or senior manager should also be involved to maintain leadership ownership.

The team does not need to be large. Additional expertise, such as communications, HR, finance or monitoring and evaluation, can be brought in when needed.

Tool 1:

Form your Gender Strategy Development Team

Role	Contribution
Commissioner / Ombuds Senior Manager	• Ensure ownership and support at the leadership level of the NHRI
GSDT Lead / Coordinator	• Maintains an overview of the strategy development • Coordinates the GSDT team and ensures it effectively carries out its responsibilities • Regularly communicates on progress to broad audiences • Identifies other personnel that may be needed for specific tasks (e.g. facilitating focus groups, data analysis) • Addresses any challenges or difficulties that may arise
Gender Expert/s	• Supports members of the team to deepen their own understanding and practice of gender equality, if required
Representatives from NHRI divisions, who may also be gender experts. Include those with 'lived experience'	• Ensure diverse 'Division' perspectives strengthen the development of the strategy • Provide the communication link with divisions • Provide a lived experience perspective
Optional - partners working in the gender rights area.	• Provide a lived experience perspective

1.4 Develop an action plan

Once the GSDT has been established, hold planning meetings to map out how the gender strategy will be developed. This should happen before final approval is sought from the Board and/or Senior Leadership.

Developing an action plan early provides a clear roadmap for the process, including key steps, responsibilities and timing. It also helps internal and external stakeholders understand what the NHRI is planning to do. The example below is one approach only. Your NHRI may already have its own planning templates and processes.

Phase / Step	Key Actions	Rationale	Responsible	Resources	Budget	Timing
PHASE 1: PREPARE YOUR NHRI						
1.1 Develop action plan and gain approval	- Set milestones - Identify key actions - Align people & roles - Establish budget / resources required - Decide timing - Identify risks and mitigation strategies Submit action plan to Board/SL for sign-off	To provide a road map and ensure doability, transparency and accountability. Maintain Board / Snr Leadership input and support Ensure allocation of adequate budget and personnel capacity	GSDT - draft Board/ SL - sign-off	GSDT capacity	\$0	Month 1
1.2 Hold staff workshops	Facilitate information workshops across the NHRI, with time for discussion.	To explain the purpose of the gender strategy and to build understanding and buy-in	GSDT	Materials Online capability	\$xxx	Month 1-2
1.3 Understand current situation	- Review findings from previous internal audits or reviews. - Decide whether more information is needed to inform the Strategy. - Undertake a mini review, if required.	To ensure the strategy is built on current information / data	GSDT	Gender audit results – additional data, if required	\$xxx	Depending on whether a mini review is required.
1.4 Map external stakeholders	- Complete the stakeholder engagement map (Tool 3), involving Board, Senior Leadership, and other relevant NHRI personnel - Identify 'Internal relationship holders'	To identify partners, experts, and consultation participants and understand when and how to engage them	GSDT	Network lists Internal information	\$0	Early month 2

Phase / Step	Key Actions	Rationale	Responsible	Resources	Budget	Timing
PHASE 1: PREPARE YOUR NHRI						
1.5 External stakeholder engagement	Various - according to what is appropriate for the stakeholder, such as face-to-face, phone, email. Individual / group etc	To explain the purpose of the gender strategy, flag potential areas for collaboration and to ensure the strategy reflects relevant and diverse perspectives	GSDT Relevant internals - leadership and staff	According to the nature of the engagement	\$xxx	Late month 2
PHASE 2: AGREE YOUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK						
2.1 Draft Strategic Framework	Using evidence from audit and stakeholder engagement, decide: - Vision and Purpose of the Strategic Plan - Strategic Priorities - Long-term outcomes, indicators, inputs, actions, outputs. Develop a 'Strategy on a Page'	To establish the before building the detail	GSDT Relevant others participating	Evidence from gender reviews Any further relevant data	\$0	Early month 3
2.2 Validate and finalise draft Strategic Framework	Submit the draft Framework to the Board and Senior Leadership for discussion and finalisation	To invite leadership input and to gain their approval to move forward	GSDT	Copies of the draft Strategic Framework	\$0	Late month 3
2.3 Internal and external stakeholder engagement	- Communicate the agreed strategic priorities to stakeholders as identified by mapping tool. - Decide whether to hold deeper engagement with stakeholders for whom the selected priorities have particular relevance.	To update stakeholders about the gender strategy and to identify and confirm areas for collaboration with internal and external stakeholders – specifically those identified on the mapping tool as 'Core' and 'Key' Stakeholders.	GSDT 'Internal relationship holders'	Copies of the draft Gender Strategy Framework	\$xxx	Month 4

Phase / Step	Key Actions	Rationale	Responsible	Resources	Budget	Timing
PHASE 3: BUILD YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN						
3.1 Draft Strategic plan	- Working from the Strategic Framework and engaging with internal and external stakeholders draft the gender strategy. It would include: - About your NHRI - Strategic context - Strategy on a page including Vision and Purpose - How you developed the Strategy - Outline of each priority - its context, why it is a priority and what it aims to address - Outcomes framework - Outcome/s, sub-outcome/s, activities, and indicators for each priority. - Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Approach	This is your output	GSDT	Approved Strategic Framework. Stakeholder engagement outcomes.	\$0	Month 5
3.2 Approve draft Strategic Plan	Submit the draft Strategic Plan for Board approval	To formalise commitment	GSDT	Draft Gender Strategy	\$0	
PHASE 4: PUT YOUR STRATEGY INTO ACTION						
4.1 Launch Strategy	Launch event, press release, other appropriate communications	To build awareness of the Strategy	Board / SL	Gender Strategy	\$xxx	Month 6
4.2 Develop Implementation and MEAL Plans	Develop and socialise an action plan for the implementation of the Strategy.	To ensure that the Strategy is sustainably embedded into the NHRI and supported by key external stakeholders	GSDT	Gender Strategy	\$0	Month 6
4.3 Internal and external stakeholder engagement	Check in with stakeholders – levels as identified by mapping tool.	To update 'Core' and 'Key' stakeholders about progress and seek input as required.	GSDT 'Internal relationship holders'	Gender Strategy	\$xxx	Month 6
4.4 Monitor and Report	Using the MEAL Plan, check in on progress toward outcomes, and adjust as required.	To gauge whether progress is being made toward outcomes and respond accordingly.	tbc	Reports from the implementation of the Strategy	\$xxx	The life of the Strategy

1.5 Understand the current situation

Before developing your gender strategy, understand the current situation in order to inform the decisions you make.

If your NHRI has not recently reviewed its gender work, it is recommended that you do so before beginning the strategy development process.

[The APF can discuss this process with you.]

If your NHRI has not recently reviewed its gender work, it is recommended that you do so before developing the strategy. This may be called a gender audit, gender review, gender analysis or gender impact assessment.

You will want to know for example:

- The gender-based issues facing your most vulnerable communities
- What you understand about those issues
- How effectively your NHRI is addressing those issues
- How well your NHRI integrates gender perspectives in all its internal and external activities and where improvements can be made.

This may be called a gender audit, a gender impact assessment, a gender analysis, a gender review or something else. A gender audit of your NHRI will:

- Establish a baseline of information against which progress can be compared
- Identify what your NHRI does well and what it could be doing better
- Recommend strategies and activities to address the gaps
- Share and document good practices across the organisation, and
- Strengthen the capacity of your NHRI to apply a gender perspective to your activities and to your internal policies and practices.

If your last review was more than 12 months ago, it may be useful to do a short update using sources such as complaints data, investigation outcomes, HR information, annual reports and discussions with key external stakeholders.

1.6 Communicating internally

Once leadership support, organisational commitment, the GSDT and the action plan are in place, communicate the strategy process across the NHRI.

Early and regular communication helps staff and leadership understand:

- Why the strategy is being developed
- How it supports the NHRI's mandate
- How they can contribute
- Why gender equality is an organisational priority.

Good communication also strengthens transparency, trust, ownership and ongoing visibility of the strategy across the NHRI.

1.7 Engage with external stakeholders

External stakeholders can help ensure your gender strategy reflects the lived realities of diverse communities, particularly those most affected by gender inequality and rights violations. This may include civil society organisations, women's rights groups, gender-diverse communities, government agencies, researchers and international partners.

Stakeholders should be engaged during the preparation stage, not after priorities have already been decided. Early engagement is more likely to build trust, interest and meaningful participation.

A stakeholder engagement map can help identify who should be involved, their level of influence or interest, and how and when engagement should occur. Your NHRI may already have its own approach or template for this process.



Tool 3: Prepare your Stakeholder Engagement Map

Level of engagement		Examples of stakeholders
Core Stakeholders	Those integral to decision-making and should be engaged throughout the process	NHRI leadership & Commissioners Gender specialists within the NHRI Gender Strategy Development Team Internal HR or policy units Representation from all key units of the NHRI
Key external Stakeholders	Strong collaborators and influencers that shape direction and implementation	Relevant government ministries Gender rights organisations SOGISC organisations National gender equality institutions Donors or UN partners (e.g. UN Women, UNDP)
Consulted Stakeholders	Voices that add diverse perspectives and may be engaged at specific phases	Other civil society organizations Faith-based groups Community leaders Academics and researchers Local activists and networks
Informed Stakeholders	Those that should be kept updated to build awareness, legitimacy, and support	Media and journalists General public Private sector partners Education institutions Parliamentarians and political representatives



End of Phase 1 Checklist

By the time you complete Phase 1, you will be ready to start developing your strategic priorities and outcomes.

The following checklist will help you decide whether you are ready to move onto *Phase 2: Agree your Strategic Framework*.

Tool 4: Phase 1 Checklist

- ☐ Has a designated leader of the NHRI been identified to ensure ownership and support of the gender strategy at Board and/or Senior Leadership level?

- ☐ Have you received endorsement by the Board and/or Senior Leadership to develop the gender strategy?

- ☐ Has a Gender Strategy Development Team (GSDT) been appointed?

- ☐ Does the GSDT include broad representation (as referred to in Tool 1)?

- ☐ Has a Strategy Development Action Plan been developed? Does it include the steps outlined in Tool 2?

- ☐ Have you conducted a recent gender audit and / or updated your audit if it is over 12 months old?

- ☐ Do you have a comprehensive and current understanding of the gender situation in your communities and in your NHRI?

- ☐ Have you notified internal staff, and relevant externals, of the pending development of a gender strategy?

- ☐ Have you developed an internal and external stakeholder engagement plan? Does it include women's rights and gender-diverse groups?

Example: How did the Human Rights Commission Assuwa prepare to develop its gender strategy?

The Human Rights Commission of Assuwa – Phase 1

Ten years after its inauguration, the HRC Assuwa realised that it needed to address the quite concerning issues for women, girls and gender diverse people in the country. Gender equality was included as a human rights priority in its NHRI Strategic Plan (2025 – 2030).

In order to focus on this priority, the Commission planned to develop a gender strategy that would run parallel with the organisation's Strategic Plan. They pulled together a team of expert staff, received sign-off from leadership and began to plan how they would approach it.



Soon into this process they realised that, while they knew anecdotally what the gender priorities were, they didn't have organised and conclusive evidence to guide their thinking.

They paused the strategic planning process and spent 2 months working with external experts to facilitate a participatory gender audit. What initially surprised them was that the audit areas included internal as well as external criteria. However, following discussions they realised that in order to work effectively in their communities they also needed to be sure that gender was mainstreamed through their internal operations also.

The gender audit highlighted areas where HRCA was doing well and areas where they could improve. It also identified the external gender issues that staff and key stakeholders saw as being of serious concern. Overall the audit established a baseline of information that could be used for planning the Commission's gender equality strategy and set a benchmark for future monitoring and evaluation of activity and impact.

The Board and Leadership Team were enthusiastic to continue toward developing their Gender Strategy. Given the Audit had just been completed, they had rich information with which they were able to continue with this process.

A Gender Strategy Development Team, (representative of key people in the HRCA) was pulled together led by Commissioner for Gender Equality and Inclusion, Dr. Leina Maravene. With over 20 years' experience in gender policy and human rights across the Asia-Pacific, Dr. Maravene is a strong promoter of practical, community-driven solutions to advance gender justice.

Over the next two months Dr. Maravene and her team worked internally to prepare the NHRI to begin the process of developing the plan. An action plan was developed. An internal and external stakeholder engagement map identified who need to be involved in the development of the strategy and who need to be kept informed. Much effort was put into communication and structured engagement. They knew that if people came on board early, it was more likely that the strategy would be understood, accepted and owned.

When they felt the NHRI was ready to enter the next phase, the GSDT met to discuss the development of the Strategic Framework.

Phase 2: Agree your Strategic Framework

Form focus groups to draft your Framework

Develop vision and purpose statement

Decide strategic gender priorities

Develop long-term outcomes and indicators

Decide high-level actions

Draft the Framework (Strategy on a Page)

Validate and **finalise** Framework

Socialise Framework with internal and external stakeholders



A Strategic Framework creates a structure from which you can build a practical and doable gender strategy.

The purpose of Phase 2 is to agree the high-level foundation for your gender strategy following broad consultation and input. We call this the Strategic Framework. It may also be referred to as a 'Plan on a Page', 'Blueprint' or 'Roadmap'.

The Framework identifies the strategy's vision, purpose and priorities, and links them to long-term outcomes, actions and indicators of success.

This section includes eight steps to guide the development of your Strategic Framework, followed by a checklist and an example from the fictitious Human Rights Commission of Assuwa.

Your NHRI may use additional tools or activities during this phase. As this Toolkit continues to develop, we welcome examples of approaches used across the region.

Example

The Gender and Development Agenda of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines includes the identification of key gender issue/s, identification of the GAD Outcome/Result statement, indicators, baseline, the responsible unit or officer; and the programs, activities and projects proposed for each year.

2.1 Form focus groups to draft your Strategic Framework

While the GSDT leads and coordinates the development of the Strategic Framework, key stakeholders should also be involved in deciding its main elements. In larger NHRIs, involving all staff directly may not be practical, so it is useful to identify representatives from different areas and levels of the organisation, including people with gender expertise and lived experience of gender issues.

These representatives contribute their own perspectives while also helping communicate between their teams and the strategy development process.

Focus groups are a useful way to support this work. They provide a structured space to discuss ideas, test whether proposed priorities are realistic and relevant, identify potential challenges, and build broader ownership and support for the strategy across the NHRI.



Figure 2: Form your focus groups



When setting up focus groups decide:

1. How many groups you need and how many people should be in each group. In a small NHRI, all staff and Board members may be able to participate. In larger NHRIs, this is unlikely to be practical. The aim is to involve a representative cross-section of the organisation without making the process unmanageable. In most cases, groups of 6–10 participants work well.
2. How you will structure the groups. You may choose mixed groups with participants from across the NHRI, groups based on role or identity, or a combination of both. Try to ensure the groups reflect the diversity of your NHRI and key stakeholders.

It is also important that participants understand their role from the beginning. Focus groups are designed to provide ideas, perspectives and feedback to inform the Strategic Framework. They are not decision-making bodies. Final decisions remain with the Board and Senior Leadership, coordinated by the GSDT. Be clear about this early so expectations remain realistic and constructive.

Figure 3: Role and purpose of focus group participants

Role	Contribution
Promote and advocate for the Gender Strategy within their networks, communicate the views of their colleagues.	Increase likelihood of adoption, support, and active participation.
Share own work-based experience, research, data, about priority gender-based issues.	Ground the framework in real-world realities and diverse perspectives.
Contribute to drafting the Strategic Framework.	Align framework language and focus with community needs and values.
Ensure that the strategic priorities address the most important gender-related challenges.	Ensure the framework addresses what matters most to stakeholders.
Identify potential obstacles and factors that could support implementation.	Inform realistic action planning and risk management.
Review proposed framework.	To align with the context and focus of the NHRI.

Question: How will you ensure focus groups are gender inclusive?

Simply including women or gender-diverse participants does not make a focus group gender inclusive. Participants must be able to contribute safely, equally and meaningfully.

Plan inclusively from the beginning. Think about who is represented, whose voices may be missing, and whether some groups may participate more openly in separate discussions. Make participation accessible and safe by considering venue, timing, transport, childcare, interpretation and confidentiality.

Facilitation also matters. Use inclusive language, establish respectful ground rules, and actively manage power imbalances so all participants can contribute.

When collecting and reporting information, avoid assumptions, protect confidentiality and reflect the diversity of perspectives shared.

Question: What focus group structure will get the best results?

You know your NHRI and participants better than we do. You may decide to develop your own focus group structure and agenda.

For this Toolkit, Figure 3 proposes a simple model based on two sessions per focus group.

Session 1 focuses on the Vision, Purpose, and Strategic Priorities

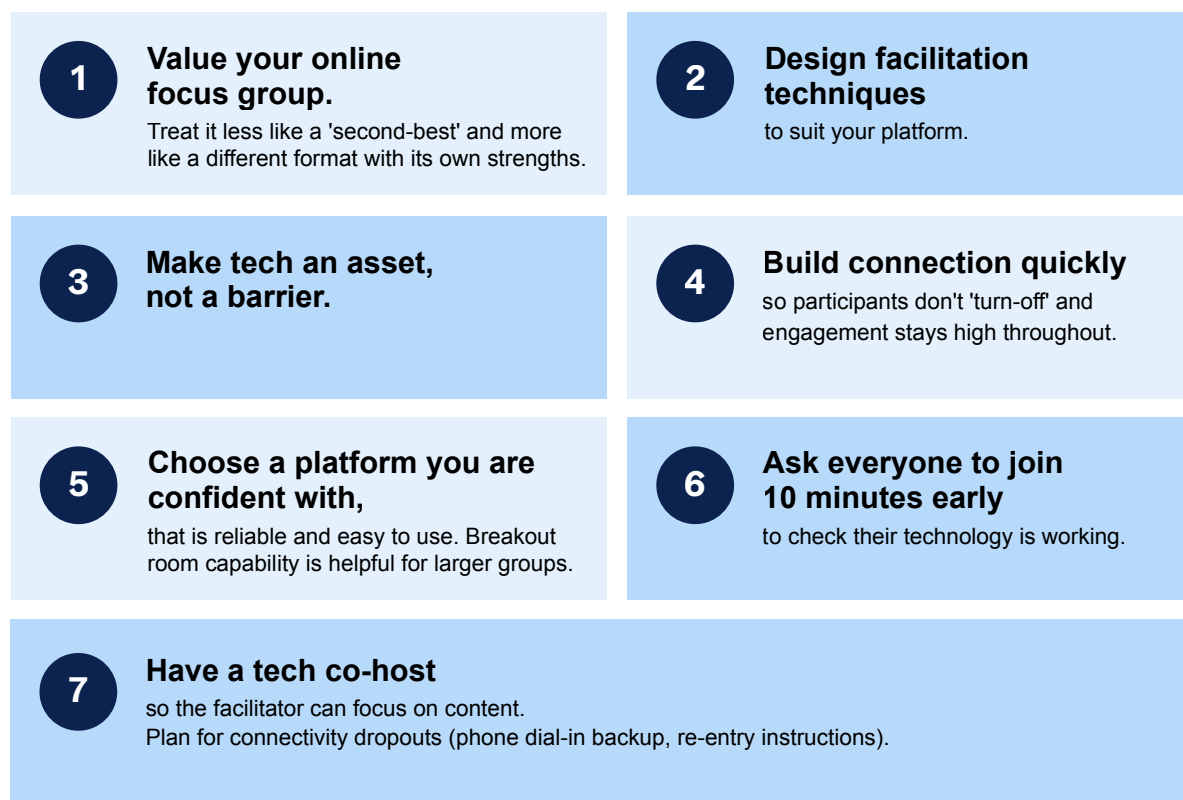
Session 2 focuses on the Long-term Outcomes and Indicators, and High-level Activities

The purpose of having two sessions is to provide participants the opportunity to discuss developments with their colleagues and to invite and include their feedback in the second session. Section 3 of the Toolkit includes an example of a focus group structure and participatory exercises that you may find useful when facilitating the focus groups.

Question: Is it possible to facilitate a focus group online effectively?

There are many platforms and tools to ensure that an online focus group would be as rich and effective as one using a face-to-face mode. It could follow a similar overall structure but use facilitation techniques that are more appropriate for an online medium, such as indicated below in Figure 4

Figure 4: Tips for effective online focus groups



The following four sections of Phase 2 discuss the components of the Strategic Framework:

- Vision and Purpose Statement
- Strategic priorities
- Long-term outcomes and Indicators
- High-level actions.

They are progressed sequentially and follow each of the four sessions that are included in the focus groups programme (Section 3).

Figure 6: Strategic Framework



2.2 Decide Vision and Purpose statements

The *Vision* sets out your long-term aspiration for gender equality
Your *Purpose Statement* is what your NHRI will do in order to achieve your vision.

The *Vision* and *Purpose* of a strategy are usually short statements of no more than one sentence – sometimes part of a sentence. Alignment with your NHRI's vision, purpose, mandate and values is important. That will ensure that your gender strategy is an integral component of your NHRI's work, and in turn it will support your NHRI reach its strategic outcomes. As an NHRI, you will also ensure alignment with your legislative mandate and international human rights standards.

Your Vision Statement

Most NHRIs have a human rights vision. It is good practice to align your vision with that.
For example:

VISION: *“An Asia Pacific where human rights are universally enjoyed and respected.” (APF)*

GENDER VISION: *An Asia Pacific where gender rights are universally enjoyed and respected.*

Your Purpose Statement

Once you have decided your vision, your purpose statement will be related to it. This is a brief overview about what your NHRI will do in order to achieve your vision. It is the NHRI's public statement about the role it will play, the focus of its efforts, and the change it seeks to make toward gender equality. For example:

VISION: *An Asia Pacific where gender rights are universally enjoyed and respected.*

PURPOSE STATEMENT: *To advance, protect, and promote gender rights across Asia and the Pacific.*

Working with your Focus Group

Focus Group Session 1 is aimed at exploring ideas for an appropriate Vision and Purpose.

Toolkit exercise 1 - Develop a collective Vision and Purpose Statement (p65)

2.3 Decide strategic gender priorities

A *Strategic Priority* is a high-level, long-term focus area that sets out where the NHRI will concentrate its efforts to achieve its vision and purpose for gender equality.

This is the core of your gender strategy.

At this stage, you will need to decide which issues are the most important and realistic to focus on during the life of the strategy. These priorities should be based on the evidence gathered during your situation analysis, gender audit, NHRI reporting and engagement with external stakeholders.

Most gender strategies work best with 3 - 5 strategic priorities. Too few may leave important issues unaddressed. Too many can make the strategy difficult to implement, resource and communicate.

A common approach is to include:

- One internal priority focused on strengthening the NHRI's own systems, culture and practice, and
- Two to four external priorities focused on the NHRI's human rights mandate and impact.

This helps ensure the NHRI strengthens its own practice while also delivering meaningful external change.

Working with your Focus Group

Focus Group Session 2 is aimed at exploring and agreeing your strategic priorities.

Exercise 2 – Identify your strategic gender priorities (p67)

Examples

The APF Strategic Plan (2022-2027) has gender equality as one of three human rights priorities which cuts across each of its 4 strategic outcomes.

The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2021–2025) includes 'protection from discrimination based on gender identity and gender based issues' as a strategic priority.

The **Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines** developed its Gender and Development Strategic Framework alongside its NHRI strategic plan. It adopted its Gender and Development Mission, Vision, and Goals and its GAD Agenda covering 2024 to 2030. The GAD Agenda sets out the Commissions directions in mainstreaming gender in its external and internal work.

2.4 Develop long-term outcomes and indicators⁴

A *Long-Term Outcome* is the broad, measurable change that you want to see.

A *High-level Indicator* is the measure you will use to understand whether you are progressing, or not, toward your long-term outcome.

Your Long-term Outcomes

Now that you have identified your 3 – 5 strategic priorities, the areas you wish to focus your efforts over the period of your gender strategy, it is important to understand the change towards which you are working. Outcomes-based planning is different from other planning in that it focuses on results and measuring those results. The focus is not on what your NHRI will do (activity) or produce (output) but what it is aiming to achieve (outcome).

Outcomes define what the situation will be if the gender strategy is successful. They answer the question:

What does 'good' look like? What change/s do you want to see over the time period of the strategy?

Outcomes also provide a target to work toward and a benchmark against which success will be measured. The best outcomes are those that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound and Aligned (Figure 5). Your Strategic Framework includes long-term outcomes which guide your strategic planning and form the core of what your NHRI does.

Smarta Outcomes	
S	SPECIFIC The outcome is clearly defined, focusing on a single result.
M	MEASURABLE There are clear indicators or metrics to track progress and confirm when the outcome is achieved.
A	ACHIEVABLE The outcome is realistic given the available time, resources and capabilities.
R	RELEVANT The outcome aligns with strategic priorities, purpose and broader organisational goals.
T	TIME-BOUND There's a clear timeframe or deadline for achieving the outcome.
A	AGREED / ALIGNED Stakeholders have discussed, endorsed, and committed to the outcome, ensuring shared ownership.

⁴ The APF Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Guide (2021) goes into more detail.

Your high-level indicators

Indicators help your NHRI measure whether it is progressing towards – and achieving – its outcomes over time.

An indicator is a specific measure used to track the change or progress your work is making towards an outcome. Each outcome should have at least one indicator.

Indicators can be:

- Quantitative – expressed in numbers, such as percentages, ratios, totals, or rates of change.
- Qualitative – expressed in words, such as stories, case studies, quotations, or descriptive statements.

A strong outcomes framework uses both quantitative and qualitative indicators. They work together.

Quantitative indicators provide measurable evidence of progress. Qualitative indicators explain what the data means, add context, and help tell the story behind the change.

At this stage of planning, indicators should remain high-level. More detailed indicators, measures, data sources, and reporting processes will be developed later in Stage 3 when you build the full strategy.

Working with your Focus Group

Focus Group Session 3 is aimed at developing your long-term outcomes and indicators.

Exercise 3 – Develop your long-term outcomes and indicators (p69)

2.5 Develop high-level actions

A High-level Action is a broad, strategic step that outlines *what* needs to be done to move toward an outcome, without detailing the specific operational tasks.

The final element in your Strategic Framework is your actions. What will you do to achieve your outcomes and make a lasting and positive impact on your priorities?

It is tempting to have many actions – to try to do everything. However, as with the key message throughout this Toolkit, having a few, sharp, effective and doable actions will produce the best result.

Some considerations when deciding your actions are:

- Relevance – does the action link to the strategic priorities and long-term outcomes?
- Impact – will the action make the changes necessary?
- Feasibility – does the NHRI have the mandate and resources to do this?
- Influence – does the NHRI have the authority and power to make this happen?

Working with your Focus Group

Focus Group Session 4 is aimed at exploring and agreeing your high-level actions.

Exercise 4 – Identify your high-level actions (p70)

2.6 Draft the Strategic Framework (Plan on a Page)

Well done! You have completed the most challenging and time-consuming part of the gender strategy development process – you have agreed, at a high-level, your overall vision, and your role in achieving that vision, what your priorities are for the period of the Gender Strategy, the outcomes you are planning to achieve, the actions you will take to achieve those outcomes and the measures to tell you how well you are doing so.

A Strategy on a Page (Tool 5) is a useful method of laying out this information. It shows at a glance an overview of the gender strategy in a logical and accessible way and will benefit your next steps.

Figure 7: The benefits of a Strategy on a Page

Communication	As a tool for sharing your strategy with key stakeholders
Focus	For keeping attention on the big picture and key priorities rather than getting lost in detail.
Alignment	Helps ensure decisions and actions remain consistent with strategic priorities
Accountability	As a quick reference to track progress against agreed outcomes.
Accessibility	To make the strategy understandable and within easy reach. It can sit on office walls as a reference and be easily available at meetings.
Engagement	Encourages buy-in and ownership by making the strategy more approachable and memorable

2.7 Validate and finalise the Strategic Framework

There are two final actions to complete Phase 2. They involve:

- Gaining approval for the Framework and finalising it.
- Familiarising the Framework with your key stakeholders.

Refer 2.2 and 2.3 in your Gender Strategy Action Planning Matrix (Tool 2)

You have a Board member and/or Senior Leader on the GSDT, and they will have been reporting on progress to their colleagues. Senior Members may also have been part of focus group discussions. Now that you have drafted the Strategic Framework, it is important to check-in with your Board and Senior leadership, to seek their approval to move forward. This may be with the Board itself, or it may be delegated to the senior leadership team.

Alongside the framework itself, your submission could include a paper that covers the following:

- 1. Purpose of the submission:** Seeking approval for the draft Strategic Framework and to continue to develop the gender strategy [date to date].
- 2. Background and context:** Why the strategy is needed, the alignment with the NHRI's strategic direction, and alignment with national and international obligations and mandate.
- 3. Summary of development process:** This would include an outline of Phase 1 & 2, and the evidence that informed the decisions you have made.
- 4. Outline of what next:** The steps you will take to develop the strategy in full and embed it into the NHRI.
- 5. Key points for consideration:** Resource (budget and personnel) implications, timeframes, risks, opportunities.
- 6. Your Recommendation:** (e.g.) "That the Board/SLT approve the draft Strategic Framework [with any amendments as discussed], including resource implications, and that development of the gender strategy continue."

2.8 Socialise the Framework with internal and external stakeholders

Once the Framework is approved and you have been given the go-ahead, communicate with your Core Stakeholders (internal) and Key External Stakeholders (Tool 3). This is a fairly light touch engagement, informing them of developments. Along with sharing a copy of the Strategic Framework, your key message is that you are updating your stakeholders on progress. Namely:

- The Framework is developed and has been approved by the [Board].
- Given the strategic priorities identified, there are areas for collaboration with specific internal and external stakeholders.
- The next stage – building the gender strategy – will roll out [time period].
- You will be in contact with relevant people/organisations accordingly during that time.

Tool 5:

Template to structure your Strategic Framework - a 'Gender Strategy on a Page'

Vision Statement	NHRI name / logos Gender Strategy on a Page		Purpose Statement
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES			
The high-level, long-term focus area that sets out where the NHRI will concentrate its efforts to achieve its vision and purpose for gender equality			
Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES			
The broad, measurable change that you want to see relating to each priority			
Long-term Outcome 1	Long-term Outcome 2	Long-term Outcome 3	Long-term Outcome 4
HIGH-LEVEL ACTIONS			
The broad, strategic steps that outline what you will do to move toward each long-term outcome (without detailing the specific operational tasks).			
Actions 1	Actions 2	Actions 3	Actions 4
HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS			
The measures used to understand whether you are progressing, or not, toward each of your long-term outcomes.			
High-level indicators 1	High-level indicators 2	High-level indicators 3	High-level indicators 4



End of Phase 2 Checklist

By the time you complete Phase 2, you will be ready to start working on the detail that sits behind the high-level priorities, outcomes and activities.

The following checklist will help you decide whether you are ready to move onto *Phase 3: Build your Gender Strategy*.

Tool 6: Phase 2 Checklist

- ☐ Does your Vision set out your aspiration for gender equality?

- ☐ Does your Purpose Statement describe what your NHRI will strive to do in order to achieve your vision?

- ☐ Have you identified between three (3) and five (5) Strategic Priorities that establish where you will concentrate your efforts over the period of the gender strategy?

- ☐ Does one of the priorities you have chosen focus on gender equality within your NHRI's culture and operations?

- ☐ Do your Long-term Outcomes articulate the changes you want to make, and impact you want to have?

- ☐ Do your outcomes meet the SMARTA test?

- ☐ Will your high-level indicators effectively measure your progress?

- ☐ Do your High-level Actions identify the steps that need to be taken to progress toward your outcomes?

- ☐ Does your Strategic Framework have a logical progression from vision & purpose to strategic priorities, outcomes, actions and indicators?

- ☐ Have you received approval by the Board and/or Senior Leadership to continue on to the next stage of your strategy development?

- ☐ Have you updated your Core and Key Stakeholders on your progress?

Example

Human Rights Commission of Assuwa Gender Strategy on a Page

Our Vision A society where gender rights are universally enjoyed and respected Gender Strategy on a Page Our Purpose To work toward progressing gender equality into every part of our internal and external activity			
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES			
Promote gender equality in national laws and policies.	Strengthen access to justice and protection mechanisms	Foster public awareness and social change	Embed gender equality outcomes throughout the HRCA
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES			
Gender-responsive laws protect against gender discrimination and actively promote equality for all genders.	Equitable access to justice for all genders and effective protection mechanisms that uphold and protect gender rights.	Society demonstrates increased awareness, positive attitudes, and behaviours that promote gender equality and challenge discrimination.	Gender equality principles and practices are fully integrated into all organisational policies, processes, programmes and culture.
HIGH-LEVEL ACTIONS			
Review and reform national laws and policies to remove discriminatory provisions and ensure alignment with international gender equality and human rights standards. Embed mandatory gender impact assessments in all stages of law and policy development.	Expand and strengthen access to justice services by removing legal, financial, linguistic, and physical barriers. Enhance and monitor protection mechanisms by improving their legal basis, ensuring timely response, and building capacity of law enforcement and service providers.	Implement public education and awareness campaigns on gender equality, human rights, and non-discrimination. Promote positive social norms and behaviours through school curricula, workplace programme and community initiatives.	Embed gender equality into organisational systems - policies, planning, budgeting, performance management, and decision-making processes. Foster an inclusive organisational culture through leadership commitment, staff training, equitable workplace practices and recognition of positive behaviours.
HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS			
- Proportion of national laws and policies reviewed for gender-responsiveness - Integration of proactive gender-equality measures	- Accessibility and use of justice services - Effectiveness of protection mechanisms	- Public awareness of gender equality - Prevalence of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours	- Integration of gender equality in organisational systems - Organisational culture and practice

Phase 3: Build your Gender Strategy

Describe your NHRI

Summarise your strategic context

Describe how you developed the strategy

Describe each strategic priority and why it is a priority for your NHRI

Build your outcomes framework

Develop your Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Approach

Write your Foreword



A gender strategy is a plan that sets out what you intend to achieve, usually over a three-to-five year period, to progress gender equality internally and externally to your NHRI.

Your task in Phase 3 is to build your gender strategy. This phase is more technical than conceptual.

In Phase 2, your NHRI agreed the key elements of the Strategic Framework. In this phase, you develop the detail. This work is usually limited to internal staff who are responsible for, or affected by, the agreed priorities and outcomes. External stakeholders are not usually involved in this part of the process.

This section includes seven (7) steps to guide you through finalising your strategy. It also includes a checklist and an example from the fictitious Human Rights Commission of Assuwa.

There are many ways to structure a gender strategy. Your approach should fit your NHRI and align with your Strategic Plan.

You may also use other tools or activities in this phase. We are interested in hearing about them so they can help strengthen this resource over time.

However you decide to frame your gender strategy, the following are suggested elements:

Figure 8: The elements of a gender strategy

Foreword	Message from the Board Chair introducing and endorsing the Gender Strategy
About Us	An overview of your NHRI
Our Strategic Context	An overview of the environment and drivers that explain why a gender strategy is needed.
Gender Strategy on a Page	(As per Tool 5)
How the Gender Strategy was developed	An overview of how you developed your Gender Strategy
Strategic Priorities	A list of each of your priorities with a brief explanation about why they have been chosen
Outcomes Framework	A breakdown of each long-term outcome with sub-outcomes, activities and indicators.
Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning	An explanation about the approach you will take to check and report on progress and achievement and how you will maintain accountability to your stakeholders.

3.1 Describe your NHRI

This section, “About Us”, provides a short overview of your NHRI as it relates to the Gender Strategy. You may include:

Identity – Your official name, year established, legal foundation, and GANHRI accreditation status if relevant (for example, “A-status NHRI”).

Mandate and role – Your role in promoting and protecting human rights, your independence from government, and your role in advancing gender equality. This may include monitoring discrimination, reviewing laws, and engaging with international human rights mechanisms.

National and international context – Your alignment with international human rights commitments such as CEDAW, ICCPR and ICESCR, and your contribution to national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on Gender Equality.

Purpose of the Gender Strategy - Why your NHRI is developing a Gender Strategy and how it strengthens your human rights mandate.

Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

Established in 2005 as an independent constitutional body, the HRC Assuwa has a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights in line with the Paris Principles. Accredited with ‘A’ status by GANHRI, the HRCA acts as a bridge between the state and civil society, providing oversight, advice, and advocacy on human rights issues.



The work of the HRCA involves monitoring, complaint-handling, law reform, policy review, and capacity-building, with a focus on eliminating discrimination and advancing equality.

Recognising that gender equality is central to the realisation of human rights, and in line with national priorities and international commitments such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals, the HRCA has developed this Gender Strategy to embed gender equality across its mandate and to lead by example in advancing equality for all.

3.2 Summarise your strategic context

This section provides the background to your Gender Strategy. It explains the environment, issues and conditions that shaped the Strategy and why it is needed. It should also show how the Strategy connects to your NHRI's wider priorities and obligations.

You could include:

- The current state of gender equality in your country.
- Key national laws, policies and priorities related to gender equality.
- Economic, social, cultural, civil and political factors that influence gender equality.
- Challenges of advancing gender equality in your context.

Most of this information will have been gathered during your situation analysis before developing the Strategy (refer s1.5). This section is a short summary of that information.

Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

Assuwa has taken important steps towards gender equality, with constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination and policy reforms aligned to international human rights standards. Progress is visible in education access, women's political participation, and the growth of civil society organisations advocating for women's rights and LGBTQI+ inclusion. Yet persistent gaps remain between commitments and lived realities.

Implementation and enforcement of laws are uneven, and critical services – such as shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support – remain limited. Gender-based violence continues at high levels, while harmful norms and practices restrict equal participation in social and economic life. Women and gender-diverse people face significant barriers to decent work, experience a gender pay gap, and carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care responsibilities. Rural communities, persons with disabilities, and minority groups are particularly disadvantaged.

Access to health and education is improving, but comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive health services are not consistently available, and stigma deters many from seeking care. Emerging challenges, including online harassment and the gendered impacts of climate change, further exacerbate vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, representation of women and gender-diverse people in leadership roles is growing but remains well below parity.

In this context, the NHRI has a critical role in bridging protection gaps, monitoring state compliance with international obligations, and advocating for structural change. Equally, it must lead by example – embedding gender equality in its own policies, practices, and culture – so that all people in Assuwa can enjoy their rights equally and fully.



Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa (Continued)

Against this backdrop, the Human Rights Commission of Assuwa has a pivotal role. It can monitor compliance with international standards; advise on law reform; promote survivor-centred, trauma-informed responses to violence; and strengthen institutional accountability across government. The NHRI is also committed to leading by example – mainstreaming gender equality in its own policies, processes, programmes, staffing, data practices, and culture.

This Strategy builds on national progress while addressing implementation gaps, structural barriers, and data limitations, to ensure that people of every gender in Assuwa can enjoy their rights equally and fully.



3.3 Outline how the Gender Strategy has been developed

This section summarises the work completed during Phases 1 and 2. It helps build confidence in the Strategy by showing that it is based on research, engagement and collaboration.

You could include:

- Confirmation that NHRI leadership approved the development of the Strategy and endorsed the Strategic Framework
- Who was involved in developing the Strategy, including leadership, staff, external stakeholders and the Gender Strategy Development Team
- The methods used to develop and validate the Strategy, such as stakeholder engagement, consultations and focus groups
- Confirmation that priorities, outcomes and actions were informed by rigorous and gender-disaggregated data collection and prioritisation processes.

Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

The Assuwa Gender Strategy was developed through a structured, participatory process designed to build institutional ownership and incorporate broad stakeholder insight. Phase one established governance: leadership was identified to champion the work, NHRI commitment was secured, and a Gender Strategy Development Team was formed. In phase two, the team convened focus groups with internal staff to surface priorities and evidence. These consultations informed agreement on the Strategy's Vision, Purpose, Strategic Priorities, Outcomes, Actions, and Indicators, ensuring alignment with human rights obligations and the lived realities of diverse groups.

Building on this foundation, a "Strategy on a Page" and the full Strategy document were produced. Both were validated through further review by NHRI staff and external partners, ensuring the Strategy was inclusive, realistic, and aligned with human rights standards.

Finally, the Strategy was communicated and socialised across the NHRI and with partners and communities, laying the groundwork for collaborative implementation and ongoing engagement with external stakeholders throughout delivery and monitoring.



3.4 Describe each strategic priority and why it is a priority for your NHRI

This section provides more detail about each strategic priority. It helps people who were not involved in developing the Strategy understand why these priorities were chosen.

The previous section explained that the priorities were identified through a rigorous prioritisation process. In this section, you can briefly explain:

- What each priority means
- Why it is important for your NHRI
- The key issues or evidence that informed it
- How the priority supports gender equality and the NHRI mandate.

You can also note that priorities will be reviewed during implementation of the Strategy to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

PRIORITY 1: Promote gender equality in national laws and policies.

Why is this a priority?

Laws and policies shape the framework through which rights are protected and discrimination is prevented. Ensuring that national legislation reflects international human rights

standards addresses systemic barriers faced by women and gender-diverse people, while also creating a foundation for equal participation across society. By focusing on this area, the Commission aims to ensure that the legal framework of Assuwa reflects international human rights standards, protects against gender-based discrimination, and sets a clear standard for state institutions, employers, and communities. It is a priority that aligns with Assuwa's obligations under global human rights treaties and provides a concrete pathway to address systemic barriers faced by women, men, and gender-diverse people.

PRIORITY 4: Embed gender equality outcomes throughout the HRCA.

Why is this a priority?

The Commission recognises that to be a credible champion of equality externally, it must lead by example internally. Mainstreaming gender equality into its policies, processes, culture, and day-to-day operations will ensure that the organisation reflects the values it promotes.

This priority strengthens institutional integrity, ensures the equitable treatment of all genders within the Commission, builds staff capacity and confidence to integrate gender perspectives in their work, and ensures that all programmes and services are responsive and inclusive. By embedding gender equality throughout the organisation, the HRCA sets a standard for accountability and demonstrates its commitment to living its mandate in practice, not just in principle.



3.5 Build your outcomes framework

This is an important part of your Gender Strategy. It sets out what your NHRI expects to achieve over the life of the Strategy and provides a framework for monitoring and evaluating progress.

Like your Gender Strategy on a Page (Tool 5), the Outcomes Framework includes outcomes, activities and indicators. However, it provides more detail by breaking long-term outcomes into sub-outcomes, with more detailed activities and indicators.

This detail helps guide decisions about:

- Strategic focus and effort
- Roles and responsibilities
- Organisational culture and values
- Resource allocation
- Human resource policies and practices
- Staff capability development
- External priorities and activities
- Who the NHRI engages with externally.

Tool 7: Outcomes Framework Template

Priority 1: [NAME]		
Outcome 1: [NAME]		
Sub-Outcomes	Activities	Indicators
1.1		
1.2		
1.3		
Priority 2: [NAME]		
Outcome 2: [NAME]		
Sub-Outcomes	Activities	Indicators
2.1		
2.2		
2.3		
Priority 3: [NAME]		
Outcome 3: [NAME]		
Sub-Outcomes	Activities	Indicators
3.1		
3.2		
3.3		

Example

Human Rights Commission of Assuwa - Outcomes Framework for Priority 4

Priority 4: Embed gender equality outcomes throughout the HRCA		
Outcome 4: Gender equality principles and practices are fully integrated into all organisational policies, processes, programmes, and culture.		
Sub-Outcomes	Activities	Indicators
4.1 Policies and processes are gender-responsive	• Conduct a gender audit of existing policies and processes • Establish and apply a gender mainstreaming checklist for all new/ revised policies (including a gender-responsive budgeting policy). • Train staff on integrating gender analysis into policy development. • Designate gender focal points or review committees to ensure compliance.	• % of NHRI policies and processes reviewed for gender-responsiveness. • Existence of a gender mainstreaming checklist/tool applied consistently. • Proportion of staff who report confidence in applying gender equality standards.
4.2 Programmes and services advance gender equality	• Build staff capacity to use a gender lens in programme and project design. • Develop gender-responsive guidelines for programme managers. • Build staff capacity and practice in collecting and using sex- and gender-disaggregated data. • Pilot and showcase programmes that promote gender equality outcomes.	• % of programmes / projects that evidence the inclusion of a gender lens. • Extent to which programme outcomes demonstrate positive gender equality impact. • % of monitoring and evaluation frameworks that include gender-sensitive indicators.
4.3 NHRI culture and practices foster gender inclusion and equitable outcomes	• Deliver mandatory NHRI-wide gender equality and inclusion training. • Establish mentoring and leadership opportunities for under-represented genders. • Introduce accountability and reporting mechanisms for discrimination / harassment. • Embed gender equality performance measures into staff appraisals. • Run internal campaigns / events promoting diversity and inclusion	• Staff perception survey results on inclusivity, respect, and gender equality in the workplace. • % of staff (including leadership) completing gender equality and inclusion training. • Number of gender-related grievances / complaints reported and resolved.

3.6 Develop your Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Approach

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) considerations are integrated into a gender strategy from the beginning.

While your MEAL Plan itself is a separate document, it needs to be developed alongside the Strategy and become operational immediately.⁵

This section of your Gender Strategy will indicate how you will check and report on progress and achievement and how you will maintain accountability to your stakeholders.

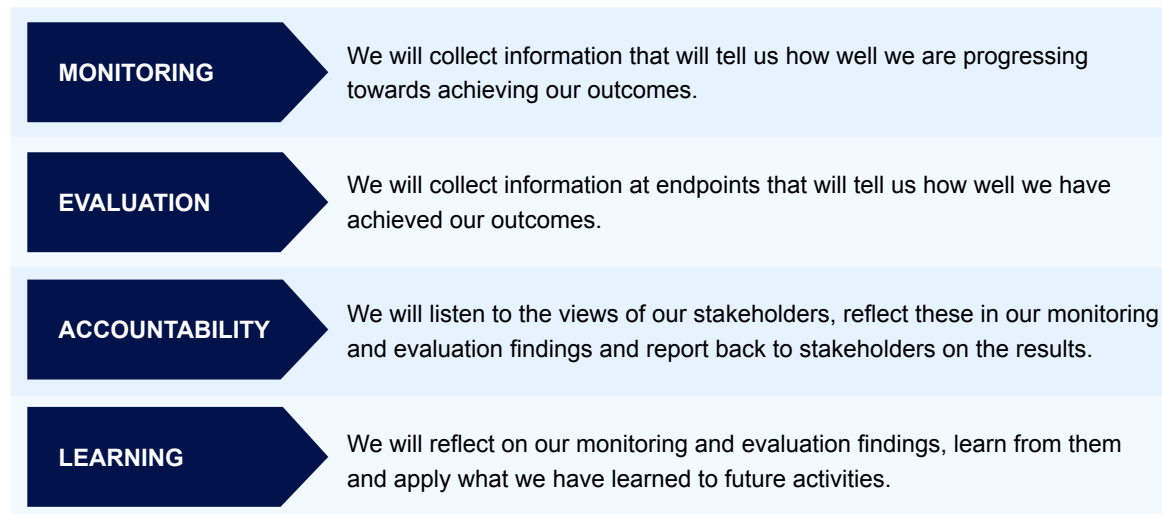
Figure 9 is an excerpt from the South East Asian NHRI Forum's (SEANF) Strategic Plan of 2022 – 2026 and is an excellent example of how these NHRIs planned to approach their MEAL activity.

Figure 9: MEAL excerpt from the SEANF Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026)

The success of this Strategic Plan is reliant on our ability to know how well we are achieving, or have achieved, our outcomes. The Outcomes Framework identifies our short, medium and long-term outcomes, the related high-level activities and indicators to measure progress.

An Annual Plan will be developed for each year of the Strategic Plan, which will include the details of how activities will be monitored and evaluated.

A Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) approach will guide our monitoring and evaluation process.



To support your work, we have produced an example of a MEAL Plan in Tool 8, below. To repeat, this is not part of your Gender Strategy document itself. However, it is an important document and will be part of your plan to implement your Gender Strategy.

⁵ The APF has developed a comprehensive guide Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Guide (2021) to support NHRIs understand how effectively activities are reaching, or have reached, planned outcomes. This is a downloadable resource and provides practical step-by-step guidelines, tools and resources, aspects of which may be useful for the development of the MEAL part of your Gender Strategy.

Tool 8: MEAL Plan template (with examples from the HRC Assuwa Gender Strategy)

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Plan	
Priority	Embed gender equality outcomes throughout the HRCA
Outcome 4	Gender equality principles and practices are fully integrated into all organisational policies, processes, programmes, and culture.
Sub-Outcomes (from your Gender Strategy Outcomes Framework)	4.1 Policies and processes are gender-responsive 4.2 Programmes and services advance gender equality 4.3 NHRI culture and practices foster gender inclusion and equitable outcomes
Activity/ies (from your Gender Strategy Outcomes Framework)	Conduct a gender audit of existing policies and processes / Establish and apply a gender mainstreaming checklist for all new/revised policies / Train staff on integrating gender analysis into policy development / Designate gender focal points or review committees to ensure compliance Build staff capacity to use a gender lens in programme and project design Develop gender-responsive guidelines for programme managers Build staff capacity and practice in collecting and using sex- and gender-disaggregated data Pilot and showcase programmes that promote gender equality outcomes. Deliver mandatory NHRI-wide gender equality and inclusion training / Establish mentoring and leadership opportunities for under-represented genders/ Introduce accountability and reporting mechanisms for discrimination / harassment / Embed gender equality performance measures into staff appraisals / Run internal campaigns / events promoting diversity and inclusion.

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Data Source	Data Method	Responsibility	Time	Reporting
<i>What will tell you how well you are progressing toward your outcome?</i>	<i>Current Situation</i>	<i>To be achieved over 5 years of the strategy</i>	<i>Where will you get your MEAL data?</i>	<i>How will you collect your data?</i>	<i>Who is responsible for the indicator.</i>	<i>When will you monitor / evaluate?</i>	<i>Who will report, when to whom?</i>
Outcome 4.1: Policies and processes are gender-responsive							
% of NHRI policies and processes reviewed for gender-responsiveness	May be included in your Gender Audit data / or 0%	33% reviewed each year until Yr 3 – 100%	Human Resource Team	Review of policy review documents	Human Resource Manager	Monitor – every 6 months Evaluate - annually	HRM to Gender Focal Point 6 monthly
Existence of a gender mainstreaming checklist / tool applied consistently.	May be included in your Gender Audit data // or No checklist	Yr 1 – tool developed Yr 2 – capacity development on use Yr 3 – used consistently	Staff attending capacity develop Usage reports from HODs / Spot checks	Collate data from capacity develop & usage reports and spot checks.	Gender Focal Point	Monitor – every 6 months Evaluate - annually	GFP to Board / SLT, Annual Gender Strat Report
Proportion of staff who report confidence in applying gender equality standards	May be included in your Gender Audit data // or No baseline set	Yr 1 – baseline established Yr 2 – 40% increase on baseline Yr 3 – 60% increase on baseline	Staff	Survey Selected staff qualitative feedback	Gender Focal Point	Monitor – every 6 months Evaluate - annually	GFP to Board / SLT, Annual Gender Strategy Report
Outcome 4.2: Programmes and services advance gender equality							
% of programmes / projects that evidence the inclusion of a gender lens.							
Extent to which programme outcomes demonstrate positive gender equality impact.							
% of monitoring and evaluation frameworks that include gender-sensitive indicators							
Outcome 4.3: NHRI culture and practices foster gender inclusion and equitable outcomes							
Staff perception survey results on inclusivity, respect, and gender equality in the workplace.							
% of staff (including leadership) completing gender equality and inclusion training							
Number of gender-related complaints and % resolved							

3.7 Write your Foreword

As noted earlier, although the Foreword appears at the beginning of the Strategy, it is usually written once the Strategy has been completed. The Foreword provides a short introduction to the Strategy and signals its importance. It also demonstrates leadership commitment and gives the Strategy authority internally and externally.

A Foreword may also encourage others to support the successful implementation of the Strategy and achievement of its outcomes.

The Foreword is usually signed by the head of the NHRI, such as the Board Chair or Ombuds. In some cases, it may also be co-signed by Board members or the Secretary of the NHRI.

Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa

Foreword

On behalf of the Board of the Human Rights Commission of Assuwa, I am proud to present our Gender Strategy. Gender equality is at the heart of human rights, and as the national human rights institution, we have both the mandate and the responsibility to lead by example.



This Strategy aligns closely with our wider Strategic Plan and supports Assuwa's obligations under national, regional, and international human rights frameworks. It provides us with a clear pathway to embed gender equality principles across everything we do — in our policies, programmes, organisation culture, and in our external work and partnerships. It reflects our determination to ensure that for people of all genders in Assuwa, equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities are a reality.

The development of this Strategy has been a collaborative process, shaped by the insights and experiences of our staff, civil society and government partners, rights-holders, and other key stakeholders. Their voices are at the centre of this work, and their contributions have strengthened our approach. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed.

We recognise that gender inequality limits opportunities, restricts participation, and perpetuates discrimination. Addressing these challenges requires sustained commitment and action. It also requires collective responsibility.

As Chair of the Board, I affirm our commitment to ensuring that this Strategy is not just a document but a living guide to action. Its success depends on all of us — Board members, our leadership and staff, our partners and the communities we serve.

[signed]

Board Chair and Members

End of Phase 3 Checklist

☐ Have you completed all the elements of your gender strategy:

- Foreword,
 - Description of your NHRI,
 - Strategic context,
 - Gender Strategy on a Page,
 - How you developed the Gender Strategy,
 - Description of your strategic priorities,
 - Outcomes framework, and
 - MEAL Approach.
-

☐ Does your description of your NHRI include its legal identity, mandate, national and international drivers and why it is developing a gender strategy?

☐ Does your summary of the strategic context include how it has informed the decisions made in your Gender Strategy?

☐ Have you included your Gender Strategy on a Page from Phase 2?

☐ Have you explained how you developed your Gender Strategy?

☐ Have you included in your description of your strategic priorities, why they have been identified as most important?

☐ Have you built your Outcomes Framework to include sub-outcomes, activities and indicators?

☐ Have you indicated what your MEAL approach will be and its link to the allied MEAL Plan?

If you can tick all these boxes - you've done it! Great work!! Put all the elements together, and you have built your Gender Strategy - now to put it to work.

The final step is to submit the draft Gender Strategy to the Board to seek their feedback and final approval (refer s2.7). As the GSDT will have been communicating with the Board during the development period, there should be no surprises for members, and you shouldn't need to make too many adjustments.

For Example: Human Rights Commission of Assuwa Gender Strategy (2026 – 2029)



Foreword

About us

Our Strategic Context

Our Gender Strategy on a Page

How we developed the Gender Strategy

Our Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Promote gender equality in national laws and policies [description of why a priority]

Priority 2: Strengthen access to justice and protection mechanisms [description of why a priority]

Priority 3: Foster public awareness and social change [description of why a priority]

Priority 4: Embed gender equality outcomes throughout the HRCA [description of why a priority]

Our Outcomes Framework

Outcome 1: National laws and policies are gender-responsive, protect against discrimination, and actively promote equality for all genders.

Sub-outcomes

Activities

Indicators

Outcome 2: People of all genders report equitable access to justice and effective protection mechanisms that uphold their rights and safety.

Sub-outcomes

Activities

Indicators

Outcome 3: Society demonstrates increased awareness, positive attitudes, and behaviours that promote gender equality and challenge discrimination.

Sub-outcomes

Activities

Indicators

Outcome 4: Gender equality principles and practices are fully integrated into all organisational policies, processes, programmes and culture.

Sub-outcomes

Activities

Indicators

Our MEAL Approach

Phase 4: Put your Strategy into action

Communicate the strategy and put it into action

By this stage, you and others across the NHRI have invested significant time and effort into developing a robust, focused and integrated Gender Strategy. The next challenge is ensuring the Strategy is actively used, implemented and monitored – not filed away and forgotten.

Embedding the Gender Strategy across the NHRI is critical. Gender equality cannot sit as a separate or optional area of work. It must become part of the NHRI's systems, structures, culture, decision-making and everyday practice.

A stand-alone Gender Strategy that is disconnected from organisational planning and operations can quickly lose momentum when leadership, priorities or funding change. In contrast, when gender equality is embedded across the organisation, the NHRI:

- Models the change it promotes externally
- Strengthens its own policies, systems and practices so they do not reinforce gender inequality or discrimination
- Builds credibility and trust with rights-holders and stakeholders
- Improves the quality and impact of its human rights work
- Is more likely to achieve sustainable, long-term change.

This final phase focuses on integration and implementation. It is about ensuring that staff, leadership and key external stakeholders understand the Strategy, know how it will be implemented, and are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

The next step is to translate the Strategy into operational action. This Toolkit does not cover operational planning in detail, as each NHRI will already have its own planning and reporting systems. These may include business plans, operational plans, work plans or performance plans.

Below are some of the steps your NHRI may take once the Strategy is finalised and ready to be embedded across the organisation.



Below are some of the steps your NHRI may take once the Strategy is finalised and ready to be embedded across the organisation.

Tool 9: Gender Strategy Implementation Matrix (example)

Step	Key Actions	Responsibility	Timing
4.1 Launch Strategy	Hold internal all-staff briefings Officially announce strategy via website, media, and newsletters Share key messages and summaries	Board / SLT GSDT	Month 6
4.2 Develop Gender Action Plan	To include (but not limited to): - Deciding a mechanism for driving the implementation across the NHRI (e.g. cross-NHRI Gender Group) - Actions to meet outcomes / who responsible for which - Resource requirements / sources - How success will be measured and reported / who responsible for which. (MEAL Plan)	SLT GSDT	Month 6
4.3 Internal stakeholder engagement	- Hold Strategy familiarisation sessions - Clarify roles for all staff	SLT GSDT	
4.4 External stakeholder engagement	- Share Strategy with key stakeholders - Build partnerships to align efforts	Board / SLT GSDT	
4.5 Monitor and Report	As per MEAL Plan (which will include regular reviews)	As per MEAL Plan	Month 12 Ongoing



Section 3: Tools for focus group sessions

This section provides a set of tools that can be used in your focus groups during Phase 2 when you are seeking input for your Strategic Framework.

Each focus group meets twice for two (2) hours, during which time you will facilitate four sessions as follows:

Focus Group 1

Session 1: Develop a collective Vision and Purpose Statement

Session 2: Identify your strategic gender priorities

Focus Group 2

Session 3: Develop your long-term outcomes and indicators

Session 4: Identify your high-level actions



Example of a focus group structure

Focus Group	Forming the NHRIs Gender Equality Strategic Framework		
Outcome	Participant input will contribute to the drafting of a Strategic Framework. Specifically – vision, purpose, strategic priorities, long-term outcomes, activities and indicators of success.		
Facilitator/s	List name/s		
Recorder/s	List name/s		
Participants	List names		
Initial preparatory material	Results of the Gender Audit and any additional material sourced in Phase 1. Explanation of the role, responsibilities and expectations of the focus group.		
Programme	Activity	Who	Resources
Day 1: Date, time, venue			
0.00 – 0.15	Welcome and introductions Overview of the role and responsibilities of the Focus Group Background and set the scene	Facilitator/s	Preparatory information Workshop materials
0.15 – 0.45	Session 1: Vision & Purpose	Facilitator/s	Workshop materials
0.45 – 1.45	Session 2: Strategic Priorities	Participants Recorder/s	
3.30 - 4.00	Summarise and wrap up		
Day 2: Date, time, venue			
0.00 – 0.15	Recap and refocus Present proposed strategic priorities developed from the first set of focus groups	Facilitator/s	Summary of FG 1 Vision, Purpose and Strategic Priorities
0.15 – 1.00	Session 3: Outcomes and indicators	Facilitator/s Participants	Workshop materials
1.00 – 1.45	Session 4: Activities	Recorder/s	
1.45 – 2.00	Summarise, wrap up and next steps.		

Focus Group Tool

Develop a Vision and Purpose Statement for an NHRI gender strategy

When to use	Focus Group 1, Session 1
Purpose	To develop ideas that will inform an NHRI's gender strategy vision and purpose statement.
Time	30 mins
Resources	Large sheets of paper or whiteboard, Sticky notes (two colours), markers pens, pre-prepared questions

Timing	Activity
5 minutes	Setting the scene Explain the purpose of the exercise - to develop ideas that will inform the NHRI's gender strategy vision and purpose statement. Overview the following definitions: • The Vision sets out what you want to achieve in order for there to be equality for all genders. • Your purpose statement is what your NHRI strives to do in order to achieve your vision. Questions: 1. <i>What does gender equality in our NHRI and society look like in the future? (Vision)</i> 2. <i>Why is it important that our NHRI works towards gender equality? (purpose statement)</i>
5 minutes	Individual reflection Participants reflect (individually) on the two questions. Give each person two different-coloured sticky notes: • One colour for vision ideas • One colour for purpose statement ideas Participants write one idea on each sticky note.

Timing	Activity
10 minutes	Clustering In groups of 2 or 3, participants: • Share their ideas with each other. • Group similar ideas together. • Select their top two vision ideas and top two purpose statement ideas to bring forward
7 minutes	Collating Ideas On a large board or wall, create two columns: <i>VISION</i> and <i>PURPOSE STATEMENT</i> Each small group posts their sticky notes in the relevant column. Facilitator reads out examples. Group highlights together emerging themes
3 minutes	Wrap-up Summarise the key themes that emerged for both the vision and purpose statement. Explain how participants' input will feed into drafting the gender strategy's vision and purpose statements. If there is more than one focus group, they will be collated with other group results.



Focus Group Tool

Identify strategic priorities

When to use	Focus Group 1, Session 2
Purpose	To identify, discuss, and prioritise key strategic priorities for the NHRI's gender strategy.
Time	60 mins
Resources	Large sheets of paper or whiteboard, Sticky notes (three colours), marker pens, voting dots or stickers, pre-prepared question. Outcomes of the Gender Audit and other relevant data.

Timing	Activity
10 minutes	Setting the scene Explain the purpose of the exercise - to identify the NHRI's strategic gender priorities. Overview the definition of a <i>Strategic Priority</i>: • A high-level, long-term focus area that sets out where the NHRI will concentrate its efforts to achieve its vision and purpose for gender equality. Facilitator/s: • Summarise the outcomes of the Gender Audit • Share examples of strategic gender priorities as a guide. Question: <i>What must our NHRI focus on over the next 3–5 years to advance gender equality?</i>
10 minutes	Brainstorming Give each participant three sticky notes (one colour). Ask them to write <i>one potential priority per sticky note</i>. Encourage concise, action-oriented statements (e.g. Integrate gender equality into all organisational policies).
15 minutes	Clustering In groups of 3–4, participants • Share their sticky notes. • Discuss overlapping ideas. • Cluster similar priorities together. • Agree on their <i>top three priorities</i> to share back with the larger group.

Timing	Activity
15 minutes	Prioritising Each group presents their top three priorities. (These are captured on a flipchart or board.) Combine duplicates and group similar ideas into themes. Give each participant three 'dots' or 'stickers'. Ask them to place their dots next to the priorities they believe are most important. They can put more than one 'vote' on a priority they think is extra important. Highlight the top 5 strategic priorities that emerge.
15 minutes	Discussion Summarise the selected priorities. • Do these top priorities reflect our shared vision? • Are any critical gaps missing? Record the results of this discussion for GSDT deliberations. Explain how these priorities will inform the draft gender strategy. (If there is more than one focus group, they will be collated with other group results.)



Focus Group Tool

Develop long-term outcomes and indicators

When to use	Focus Group 2, Session 3
Purpose	To develop long-term outcomes and identify related indicators linked to the strategic gender priorities identified in the previous focus group session.
Time	45 mins
Resources	Large sheets of paper, marker pens, pre-prepared definitions of outcomes/indicators. Gender Strategy Priorities

Timing	Activity
5 minutes	Setting the scene Explain the purpose of the exercise - to develop long-term outcomes and indicators for the strategic gender priorities. Overview the following definitions: • Long-term outcomes describe the change you want to see. • Indicators are how you measure progress toward that change. Present the selected strategic gender priorities.
20 minutes	World Café Each strategic gender priority is written on a big sheet of paper. Participants, in groups of 2 or 3 participants, spend two minutes at each sheet of paper writing what they think 'good would look like' for the priority. At 10 minutes (when four rounds are completed), each group reviews what is on the sheet of paper in front of them and drafts a long-term outcome.
4 minutes	Long-term outcomes are shared
10 minutes	The same group then reflects on the outcome and develops no more than 3 indicators
4 minutes	Indicators are read out
2 minutes	Explain how these outcomes/indicators will inform the draft gender strategy (If there is more than one focus group, they will be collated with other group results)

Focus Group Tool

Identify high-level actions

When to use	Focus Group 2, Session 4
Purpose	To develop a shortlist of high-level actions that will achieve the long-term outcomes developed in Session 3, recognising the natural constraints for an NHRI – capacity, resources including budget and political context.
Time	45 mins
Resources	Large sheets of paper or whiteboard, Sticky notes, marker pens, pre-prepared definition of high-level actions

Timing	Activity
5 minutes	Setting the scene Explain the purpose of the exercise - to develop high-level actions that will achieve the long-term outcomes established in the previous session. Overview the definition of a high-level action: • A broad, strategic step that outlines what needs to be done to move toward an outcome.
10 minutes	Small group brainstorm Divide participants into groups – one group per long-term outcome. Ask them to brainstorm (on sticky notes) high-level actions needed to achieve that outcome. Emphasise that actions should be strategic, realistic, within the NHRI's influence and recognised constraints such as: • Limited staff capacity • Lack of budget • Political context Write one action per sticky note. Questions for groups: • What actions will get us closer to this outcome? • What does success look like, and how do we get there? • What must change — internally or externally — to achieve this? • Are there others working in this space we can collaborate with?

Timing	Activity
15 minutes	Small group clustering / Prioritising In the same groups, cluster/prioritise the actions so that there are around three (3) per outcome. Write these actions on a big sheet of paper under the outcome heading.
10 minutes	Peer review Each small group shares their actions with the whole group. Check for double-ups, gaps, lack of clarity.
5 minutes	Explain how these actions will inform the draft gender strategy. (If there is more than one focus group, they will be collated with other group results.)



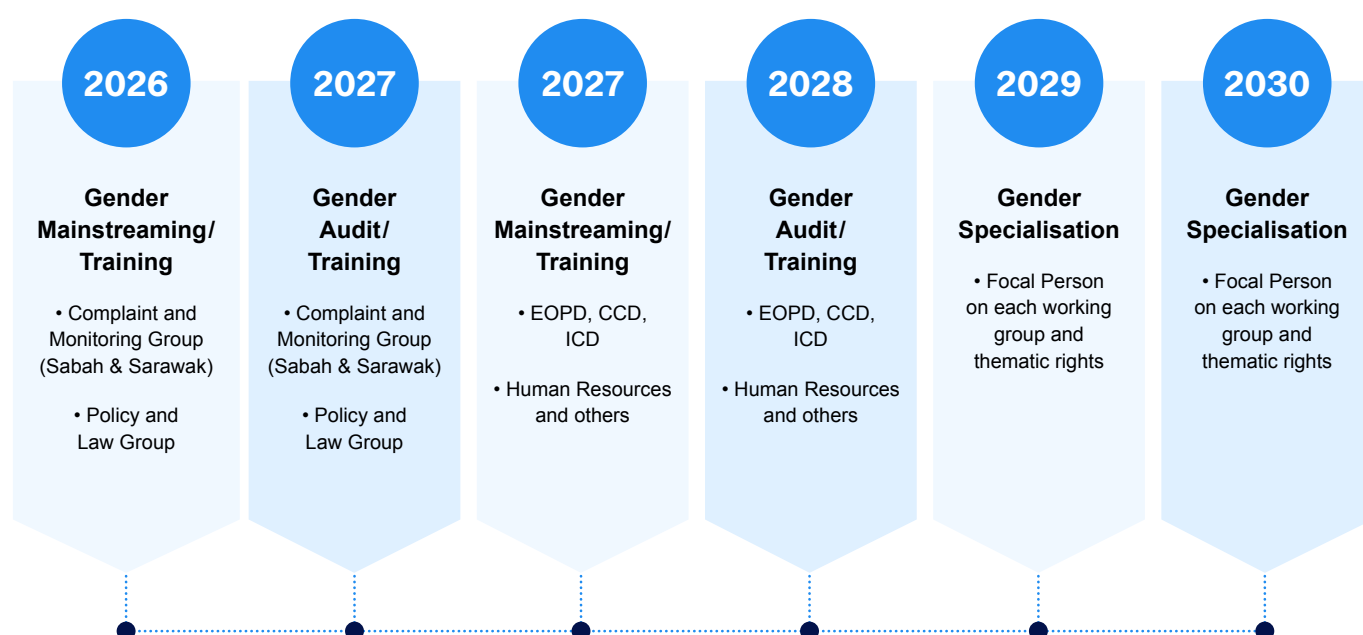
Case Studies from around the region

Case Study: The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) began developing its Gender Strategy by first obtaining Commissioner approval. Once gained a Gender Strategy Development Team (GSDT) was formed to facilitate the process. The GSDT is made up of leadership, management and staff representatives with specific roles assigned to each.

Recognising that organisational change takes time, a key feature of the Commission's approach is its staged roadmap working with specific divisions of the Commission over a 5-year period.

Preliminary Conceptual Framework of Gender Mainstreaming and Specialising 5 year-strategy Roadmap within Suhakam



SUHAKAM has identified the following steps to develop its gender strategy:

1. Hold 'TehTarik' sessions with all staff introducing the concept of a gender strategy, building capability and gaining support from across the organisation.
2. Conduct a needs assessment to understand and respond to the current situation and responding to the outcomes.
3. Map and engage with external stakeholders to collect their feedback.
4. Develop a Gender Strategy Handbook.

Key lessons from SUHAKAM

1. Secure leadership endorsement early.
2. Establish a dedicated team with clear roles and responsibilities.
3. Build staff understanding and ownership from the beginning.
4. Use needs assessments and baseline analysis to inform priorities.
5. Engage external stakeholders and partners early.
6. Treat gender mainstreaming as a long-term organisational process, not a one-off activity.
7. Link the Strategy to practical implementation, resourcing and accountability processes.



Case Study: The National Human Rights Commission Nepal (NHRC Nepal)

The National Human Rights Commission Nepal (NHRC Nepal) strengthened its approach to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) through a staged process linked to its broader human rights mandate. Operating in line with the Paris Principles, the Commission progressively integrated GESI into its policies, structures, staffing and organisational systems.

The process began with gender assessments and a gender audit, which informed the inclusion of women's rights and marginalised groups within the Commission's Strategic Plan 2021–2026. NHRC Nepal also developed a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy to guide implementation.

To support this work, the Commission established a GESI Division, gender focal officers and grievance handling mechanisms. It introduced practical workplace reforms including inclusive recruitment, internship programmes, flexible work arrangements, maternity and paternity leave provisions, childcare facilities and inclusive staff transfer policies.

NHRC Nepal also strengthened partnerships with the National Women Commission, civil society organisations and UN reporting processes. Staff capability development was treated as an ongoing priority through gender sensitisation and specialist training on issues such as SRHR, GBV, CEDAW and unconscious bias.

In 2024, NHRC Nepal hosted the International Conference on Gender Inclusion in NHRIs in Kathmandu, resulting in the Kathmandu Declaration and Plan of Action. The Commission identified the development of a formal Gender Strategy and Action Plan as the next step in strengthening and coordinating its institutional GESI work.

Key lessons from NHRC Nepal

1. Institutional change is strengthened when gender equality is approached as a staged organisational process rather than a stand-alone activity.
2. Gender assessments and audits provide an evidence base for planning and prioritisation.
3. Dedicated structures, focal points and grievance mechanisms help strengthen coordination and accountability.
4. Practical workplace reforms are important for embedding inclusion into organisational culture and practice.
5. Ongoing staff capability development supports sustained gender mainstreaming.
6. Partnerships with external institutions, civil society and regional networks strengthen implementation and learning.
7. Gender equality work should be progressively integrated into broader strategic planning and institutional systems.

Case Study: Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Palestine

The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) in Palestine integrated gender equality into its broader organisational and human rights work rather than treating it as a separate programme area. Working in an extremely unstable and conflict-affected environment across Gaza and the West Bank, ICHR recognised that its strategic and operational planning needed to remain flexible and responsive to rapidly changing realities.

ICHR began its institutional gender work with a participatory gender audit in 2018, using an approach aligned with International Labour Organization (ILO) methodology. External gender experts reviewed the organisation's policies, systems, structures and practices and developed recommendations for institutional reform. These recommendations were incorporated into a monitoring matrix and reviewed every six months to track progress and accountability. ICHR reported that by January 2026, around 90% of the recommendations had been fully implemented.

In 2020, ICHR developed a Gender Action Plan choosing to mainstream gender equality, disability inclusion and the rights of marginalised groups across all NHRI priorities and thematic work.

The Commission introduced several practical reforms following the audit. These included appointing a gender focal point, strengthening staff gender training, developing a comprehensive sexual harassment policy, extending maternity and paternity leave provisions, and improving data collection through sex, disability and age disaggregation. The proportion of women in leadership and across the organisation also increased over time.

ICHR also integrated gender considerations into its external human rights work, including documentation and advocacy relating to Palestinian women during the conflict in Gaza. This included submissions to UN Special Rapporteurs, research on violence against women detainees, and advocacy on reproductive rights violations during conflict.

A second gender audit was later initiated to measure the ICHR's progress. Future priorities included strengthening gender planning, gender budgeting, monitoring and accountability systems across the organisation.

Key lessons from ICHR Palestine

1. Gender equality can be mainstreamed across all NHRI priorities rather than treated as a separate programme area.
2. A participatory gender audit provides a strong foundation for NHRI reform.
3. External expertise can strengthen analysis, credibility and follow-through.
4. Regular monitoring of audit recommendations helps maintain accountability and momentum.
5. A dedicated gender focal point can strengthen coordination and leadership, but ownership must remain organisation-wide.
6. Staff training and broad institutional involvement are essential for building ownership and cultural change.
7. Gender equality work must remain adaptable in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Staff wellbeing and psychological support are important components of NHRI sustainability.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL)

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) used a gender audit as the foundation for developing a structured and evidence-based Gender Strategy. The audit was conducted between February and April 2025 with technical support from the Asia Pacific Forum (APF). It examined governance, organisational culture, human resource systems, staff capability and institutional practices related to gender equality. The process included document reviews, staff surveys, interviews and focus group discussions.

The audit identified both institutional strengths and important gaps. HRCSL leadership showed strong commitment to gender equality, and the organisation already had credibility in external work on women's rights, GBV and SOGI issues. Some gender-responsive systems and structures were already in place, including Gender and SOGI Sub-Committees and divisional Gender Focal Points.

The audit also found inconsistent gender mainstreaming across divisions, limited accountability and monitoring systems, gaps in gender-responsive HR policies, and uneven staff understanding and capability. The findings highlighted that gender equality could not rely on isolated initiatives or individual staff commitment alone. It required coordinated institutional change.

In response, HRCSL formally endorsed the audit findings and committed to developing a five-year Gender Strategy (2025–2029). The Strategy was designed as a phased roadmap for institutional reform, grounded in substantive equality, intersectionality and accountability. The Strategy included four key objectives:

- Building a gender-sensitive and inclusive organisational culture
- Strengthening gender-responsive HR systems and policies
- Increasing staff capability in gender analysis and mainstreaming
- Improving accountability, monitoring and reporting systems.

Implementation activities included staff awareness programmes, gender-responsive HR reforms, unconscious bias training, workplace accessibility improvements, gender-responsive budgeting, internal reporting and a follow-up gender audit to measure progress over time.



Key lessons from HRCSL

1. A gender audit provides an evidence base for institutional reform.
2. Leadership endorsement is critical for organisational change.
3. Gender equality must be treated as an institution-wide responsibility.
4. Existing strengths and structures can provide a strong starting point.
5. Gender strategies should be phased, realistic and linked to implementation.
6. Monitoring, review and follow-up audits are important for accountability and learning.
7. Gender equality work is strengthened when linked to wider organisational strengthening processes



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