Introduction

COOPI – Cooperazione Internazionale is a secular and independent humanitarian foundation founded in 1965. During 50 years of activity it has worked in 59 countries, involving thousands of local operators and providing a direct benefit to millions of people. Its mission consists of contributing, through the commitment, motivation, determination and professionalism of its human resources, to the process of poverty reduction and growth of the communities it cooperates with around the world, while intervening in emergency, reconstruction and development contexts in order to achieve a better balance between the North and South of the world, including developed and depressed or developing areas.

The Policy on Gender1 is part of a series of documents which COOPI is adopting in order to position itself with respect to issues that are central to the work of the organization. These documents outline the international theoretical framework COOPI’s approach has been elaborated within and is based on. In addition, along with each policy document, specific guidelines are drafted with the aim of translating the theoretical level into the practice of programs management.

Gender is central to all COOPI’s interventions since the development of a country is strictly connected to an equal participation of men and women in all the economic, social, cultural and political processes. In its humanitarian actions COOPI enhances gender equity2 by fighting the causes of inequality, protecting the victims of gender inequality, promoting change in unbalanced relationships between men and women and within the communities and families. Women capacity building, awareness and participation at a social, economic, political and symbolic level are central to COOPI actions. Finally, sex-specific needs of the various actors and beneficiaries are always taken into account in the programs carried out.

1 This document was approved by the COOPI Board of Directors on the 9th of December 2014
2 For a definition see the following paragraphs
Globally, over the past decades, the living conditions of women have significantly improved, showing progress hardly expectable a few years ago. Unprecedented strides have been made in human rights, education, health and access to employment opportunities and livelihoods, due to the increasing awareness internationally gained on the relevance of the role women have in promoting the development of the communities they are part of. However, in those areas that experienced such advancements for women, disparities remain, relegating women to a condition of weakness which deeply limits their full recognition as key actors of development. In this sense, the education sector is still critical, since about two-thirds of the 774 million illiterate adults are women (UNDESA 2010). The progress made in terms of access to primary and secondary education in many countries, in fact, is characterized by strong gender inequalities still causing girls to be excluded from a service that is expression of a fundamental right: the right to education. This is also the case of health services that remain difficult to access for women in many countries: in addition, such services, particularly those relative to maternal and child health, are generally weak both in terms of coverage and quality, which still results in very high maternal mortality rates. In this regard, recent data from the World Health Organization reported that in 2008 the Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest maternal mortality rate in the world with 640 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, followed by South Asia with 280 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (WHO et al. 2010). Likewise, widespread and deep are the difficulties that women face in accessing fair employment opportunities and resources, as well as in participating in the decision-making processes that govern the life of the communities they are part of. The strong gender inequalities still permeating these areas of concern force women to a state of weakness that makes them vulnerable to the violation of their rights. Of such vulnerability the gender based violence is a very common expression throughout the world in 2009 over 30% of women in Ethiopia3 were victims of physical and/or sexual violence by a family member, whereas in Peru the same phenomenon involved more than 25% of women (UNDESA 2010). It is important to underline that, although data available at global level highlight that women are still discriminated, a central issue, when dealing with gender, is the importance of taking into consideration also men’s needs.

Gender equality between women and men refers to the equal enjoyment by females and males of all ages and regardless of sexual orientation, of rights, socially valued goods. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life chances are not governed or limited by whether they were born female or male. Protecting human rights and promoting gender equality must be seen as central by the humanitarian community when protecting and providing assistance to those affected by emergencies. (IASC 2009). To this extent, COOPI is committed to support both women and men in all its actions, in order for them to be able to exercise their rights of access to equal opportunities and resources, thus ensuring gender equity which is necessary for the full recognition of women’s role in development processes. Therefore, this document depicts the international framework on the theme, followed by the key concepts behind COOPI’s action on gender issues. The final section shows the experience gained by the organization in the operational management and the good practice4 that the application of such key concept consists of.

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3 The figure refers to rural areas in the province of Butakira.
4 The practices described in this document are just a few examples of the activities that COOPI carried out in the field concerning gender issues. They were selected based on their results, their impact, the potential for replication and consistency with respect to the contents of his policy.
Theoretical framework

Definition of gender

The word *gender*, in its common definition, comes from a debate that started in the 50s and that is getting more and more important thanks to feminist movements and scientific definitions in different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, history and psychology). Gender has entered the common use to indicate the construction of social roles ascribed to men and women based on biological and physical sex characteristics. The idea of gender is a relational concept referred to the social and symbolic construction of masculine and feminine which has taken many shapes throughout different ages and societies. Although this word cannot be used simply as a synonym of woman, as it has been created to highlight relationships between masculine and feminine and, as a consequence, the contradictions and power inequalities, it is often utilized to give voice to the component that has less (symbolical or instrumental) power in the hierarchical relation. Gender is a crucial concept in the construction of a more equal society, because it allows to analyze and face inequalities produced at a local level, taking into account, at the same time, the whole processes within which they are generated. The protection of women, as mothers and wives, means the recognition of their multiple role played within economic, political and cultural mechanisms of the society they belong to. (Scott, 1986, 2013).

Utilizing a gender approach to development – where COOPI intervenes – means focusing attention on power relations between men and women, the latter representing, in general, the weakest and most discriminated component of the relationship.

The following section briefly outlines the various definitions and conceptual approaches that have been debated in the last decades around gender discourse and that constitute the theoretical framework at the base of our reflection on the theme.

The first milestone of this process is the so-called *welfare approach*8, utilized between the 50s and the 60s. All policies and actions referring to this approach were aimed at guaranteeing community welfare from which women would have taken advantages as mothers and wives (Moser, 1989). “Reference is made to Western household based on a strict role division” (Moser, 1993, p. 123). The kind of interventions were, basically, food aid, education, hygiene and vaccination campaigns, due to the fact that women were seen only in their reproductive function9.

The first time women’s role in development dynamics as well as the need for their better integration in the economic system have been recognized, is associated with the introduction of the approach known as *Women in Development (WID)* identified by Moser (1996) as *equity approach*, derived from the observation that the economic development process had a negative impact on the sexual division of labor causing disadvantages to women (Boserup, 1970). The term ‘WID’ remained popular in later years, in particular during and following the Decade for Women6 envisaged by the United Nations (UN) which started after the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 19758. In those years, a gradual institutionalization of the WID approach took place. At the same time, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* of the UN10 was formulated and formally adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. The CEDAW defined what a discrimination against women11 is and proposed an agenda to be implemented at the national level in order to combat any form of discrimination. The signatory states committed themselves to implementing a series of measures such as, amongst others, the acknowledgment and incorporation of the principle of equality between men and women in their legal system, the adoption of appropriate laws prohibiting all forms of discrimination against women (including trafficking of women and their exploitation) and the establishment of tribunals to ensure the effective protection of women against discriminations.

The CEDAW also sanctioned the international commitment for realizing equality between women and men by ensuring women’s equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life as well as education and health.

In line with this perspective, two other approaches have been developed: the *anti-poverty approach* (World Bank) and the *efficiency approach* (World Bank and International Monetary Fund). These approaches focus on income inequalities between men and women. Both -in particular the antipoverty approach- proved to be limited since the focus on the economic issues is not sufficient alone to modify subordination and disparities caused by social, formal and cultural rules.

The next step in the debate on the theme was marked at the beginning of the Eighties, when the approach called *Gender and Development (GAD)* emerged. While adopting the GAD approach, the concept of gender12 was introduced for the first time and, as explained above, it focused on power relations between men and women determined by their identity as well as by the existing social dynamics, and thus extended the attention to the whole sphere of action of women in their own societies.

The recognition of the link between the role assigned to women in their communities and the existing social dynamics was further deepened by the approach focused on *empowerment* that came up in the second half of the Eighties. This term is defined as – and formally acknowledged - the centrality of women as agents of change through the achievement of a greater awareness of their own rights, as well as stronger ability to make them a reality through concerted action aimed at breaking down gender roles, while adopting the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* at the Fourth World Conference on Women14. Such declaration sanctioned the joint commitment of the signatory states - which defined a strategic agenda - to achieve equality, development and peace for women worldwide focusing on twelve critical areas of concern, among which: education and training, health, economy, human rights, violence against women and their access to decision-making processes. Among the key strategies for achieving the set goals, gender mainstreaming was given paramount importance and was thus formally identified as a tool to structure specific interventions to achieve equality for women.

Gender mainstreaming is one of the instruments

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8 ‘Gender’ is referred to as the process of social construction of biological characteristics (sex: definition, representation, promotion of appropriate behaviors associated with social expectations related to the status of men and women (Rupini, 2003, p.9).

9 In this document the classification proposed by Caroline Moser (1996) has been adopted. Notably the following approaches have been referred to: welfare approach, equity approach, anti-poverty approach, efficiency approach and empowerment.


11 First World Conference on Women, Mexico City, 19th of June – 2nd of July 1975.

12 The CEDAW began to be developed in 1976 under the auspices of the Commission on the Status of Women, and continued during the following years: it was strongly encouraged by the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Year on Women, which was adopted following the world conference held in Mexico City in 1975. So far, 184 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention, except: Iran, Palau, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tonga and the United States. The United States and Palau have signed the Convention but have not yet ratified it.

13 Discrimination against women is defined as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the rights, as well as stronger ability to make them a reality through concerted action aimed at breaking down gender roles, while adopting the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* at the Fourth World Conference on Women14. Such declaration sanctioned the joint commitment of the signatory states - which defined a strategic agenda - to achieve equality, development and peace for women worldwide focusing on twelve critical areas of concern, among which: education and training, health, economy, human rights, violence against women and their access to decision-making processes. Among the key strategies for achieving the set goals, gender mainstreaming was given paramount importance and was thus formally identified as a tool to structure specific interventions to achieve equality for women.

Gender mainstreaming is one of the instruments
to reach equity between men and women formally elaborated and strengthened during the Beijing Conference. This instrument is important because it obliges the institutions to reflect and consider the various consequences that policies have on the lives of men and women.

Another important step towards the adoption of a gender perspective in the development processes was the definition of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. In particular, the objectives 3 and 5 were explicitly focused on issues related to gender:

- **MDG 3**, aimed at promoting gender equality and women empowerment, particularly focusing on the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015;
- **MDG 5**, aimed at improving maternal health, while reducing by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio in the period between 1990 to 2015 and ensuring universal access to reproductive health.

Gender equality was also embedded in the second goal (MDG 2), which aimed at ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, are able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The MDGs as a whole have been criticized mainly due to what was considered as a weak inclusion of a gender perspective (Anderson 2004). These criticisms are currently among those considered in the consultation process aimed at the elaboration of the development agenda after 2015, that should bring in more attention to gender in the new Sustainable Development Goals- SDGs.

Afterwards, the year 2003 marked a further step toward the acknowledgment of women’s rights and the need for concrete actions to put them in practice, as the **African Women’s Protocol** was formally adopted. This document, apart from stressing what was previously defined in other documents on women’s rights on a regional scale, was the first example of international law that explicitly recognized the rights of women in sexual and reproductive health, dealing with issues such as the legitimacy of medical abortion and the prohibition of female genital mutilation.

Finally, in 2008, the **Accra Agenda for Action** specifically called for a greater international commitment to ensure the protection of women as well as their participation in development processes, by adopting specific measures as, for instance, the collection and analysis of disaggregated data. It is important to consider a last perspective, in addition to those offered by the International Organisations: the **intersectionality approach**. This approach is one of the major contemporary theoretical contribution to the theme and considers at the same time ethnicity, class and gender (McCall 2005). This theoretical and methodological approach considers the person as a whole with all the assumed identities and takes into account if the characteristics can be source of discrimination (Berger, Guidroz 2010). The combined effect of being a woman, belonging to an ethnic minority and being part of an economic disadvantaged group, for instance, is seen as the sum of the effects of these three demographical variables. The intersectionality approach, considering people in their multipie identities, helps understanding advantages and discriminations to which they are exposed and not simply adding the single discrimination. Therefore, this approach underlines the necessity of analysing the economic, social, political and cultural context in order to derive the existing different forms of oppression and discrimination in a given situation. The starting point is what it is considered relevant for the different groups within a given community.

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12 The term ‘gender’ refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to women and men on a differential basis. It is not biologically pre-determined but refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female in a particular point in time...Gender is also relational, meaning that gender roles and characteristics do not exist in isolation, but are defined in relation to one another (UN-INSTRAW 2004).

13 For the full definition see the glossary.

When dealing with gender, COOPI focuses also on gender-based violence (GBV) since it is originated by disparities in power relations between men and women. This phenomenon is endemic within all the communities around the world and affects all nationalities, ages, religions, and social classes. According to a recent WHO report, indeed, around the world almost 30% of women in a relationship have suffered forms of physical or sexual violence by their own partner (WHO 2013).

In fact, COOPI not only aims at protecting and defending women’s and men’s physical integrity, but also actively promotes changes in unbalanced (symbolical, cultural, and economic) relations between men and women, starting from their families. In addition, the Organisation enhances women’s awareness of their rights and promotes non-violent relationships models.

Since women and girls are the vast majority of victims of gender-based violence (UNFPA 2009), the main steps to frame this issue are closely related to the commitments of the international community in the recognition and elimination of violence against women. Amongst these, particularly relevant are:

- the CEDAW (1979);
- the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in 1993. This declaration proposed the commonly used definition of violence against women and led to the institution in 1999 of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women;
- the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995);
- the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), which is the first international treaty to consider the crimes against women as crimes against humanity, war crimes and, in some cases, genocide;
- Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council (2000), which considered the role of women in armed conflicts, recognizing on the one hand their greater vulnerability to the impacts of these and, on the other, their contribution to conflict prevention and resolution;
- Resolution 1820 UN Security Council (2008), which condemned the acts of sexual violence against civilians by all forces involved in armed conflict. In order to prevent such acts from being committed, the Security Council of the UN declared to be ready to intervene.

It is important to underline that both men and women are victims of violence and that consequently COOPI fosters protection and the promotion of rights for whoever may suffer from it.

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18 Gender based violence is defined as any violence that occurs as a result of the expectations associated with the role of men and women, determined by unequal relations of power between these in the context of a particular society (Bloom 2008).
19 Violence against women refers to ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’ (UN 1993).
20 See the previous paragraph.
21 See the previous paragraph.
22 This document is the international treaty establishing the International Criminal Court in the Hague in the Netherlands. It defines the basic principles, jurisdiction, composition and functions of the organs of such international organization, as well as the relationships with the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations, international and non-governmental organizations, the establishment and functions of the Assembly of States Parties.
COOPI deems gender issues as central to the consolidation of the development processes of the communities it cooperates with. These, in fact, may originate the disparities in the attribution of roles, responsibilities, rights and power relations between men and women that determine the inequalities women are subjected to.

COOPI promotes gender equity, seen as the possibility to exercise and enjoy equal rights and opportunities by men and women, both in accessing and controlling the resources and in the participation into decisional processes. Central to gender equity is women empowerment, i.e. the acquisition of the control over their choices and their own lives. COOPI supports women in reaching access to information, resources, capacities and opportunities. COOPI adopts a gender mainstreaming strategy in all its interventions. This means undertaking programs with a specific attention to all the consequences of the activities promoted on men and women’s lives within the beneficiary communities.

Each action, social phenomenon, process or policy analyzed on the basis of the differences in terms of power relations between men and women. This perspective allows the identification of possible discriminations and/or consequences on immediate needs and medium-term development processes.

Thus women are considered within a complex system of relations and are actively involved in the promotion and respect of their rights. Through capacity building and empowerment processes, COOPI always takes into account gender relations and, as a consequence, the involvement of men in developing its actions and in promoting rights awareness. In this perspective, private organisations, authorities and institutions have to be involved actively (at a local, regional and/or national level) in order to foster the full recognition of women’s rights, the promotion of equal opportunities and a reflection on gender relations.

Every action implemented promotes changes in the social dynamics these inequalities are based on. With an intersectional approach, the attention is focused on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged categories (disabled people, belonging to marginalized communities and/or previously associated to armed groups). This approach for COOPI forms a precondition to reach gender equality. To better clarify this approach, some of the key gender-related concepts guiding our programmes and interventions are hereunder recalled.

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**Gender for COOPI: Key concepts**

**PROTECTION**

Women’s protection, the heart of a gender approach, is defined as protection from all kind of violence (gender or sexual, physical, psychological or symbolic) and threats to security. Notably protection refers also to enforcing women's dignity and people's dignity in general – in order to guarantee the person’s physical and moral integrity, and his/her identity.

COOPI ensures protection to women by providing services such as medical assistance, psychological support or intervention in educational programs. The existence of functional and accessible services helps not only their immediate protection (in response to the violence they are exposed to), but also on the medium-long term.

Also, COOPI sets up mediation activities to promote family and social reintegration of women who have suffered from violence. It encourages community participation through awareness raising campaigns and social mobilization of associations, family members and communities to whom they belonged, in order to create safety nets able to identify violence victims and offer adequate support. Furthermore, for COOPI the role of the Institutions is essential to ensure protection to women, since they are responsible for the adoption of specific laws promoting their rights. Acknowledging the role of Institutions as central to create a safe society to women, COOPI supports their action at a local and national level.

**PROVISION**

Assuring educational and health services provision and access to resources (natural and economic) to women allows to create a positive environment to carry out significant changes in favor of women within the community.

This is why COOPI is committed to ensuring the availability of and access to all women in need. Such services include medical care, psycho-social support, access to education and/or training and the creation of crèche facilities for children of women in work. In these areas of concern, COOPI’s action mainly focuses on: i) the rehabilitation and/or construction of facilities that provide specific services; ii) capacity building of local staff; iii) raising communities (including their leaders and local authorities) awareness about providing these services with continuity. In addition, it is important to work for reaching an equal access and control over resources and salaries between men and women. This can be fully achieved when women are free to make decisions, to access resources and opportunities and to control their own life.

**PARTICIPATION**

The acknowledgment of the role of women in their own societies, as well as its strengthening, is closely
linked to their full participation in decision-making and development processes within public institutions and private organisations. Women participation at decision-making level in local and national institutions can lead to more equal choices in terms of gender and also define a political agenda responsive to women specific needs. At the same time, the presence of women (at high levels) within associations and private organisations becomes crucial to an equal resources management between men and women. Active participation into community processes is necessary to resources control and management (natural, economic or human) and allows women to contribute to the development of their own communities.

Therefore COOPI encourages women participation in all the phases of its intervention and recognizes it as the foundation of their empowerment. COOPI promotes the participation of women first of all through their sensitzation, because being informed is the first step for them to become aware of their own rights. COOPI involves women within decision-making processes of its programs, both in the assessment phase and during the implementation, promoting their leadership. The role played by the associations (in particular women’s ones), organisations and local institutions is also central and they are strengthened in the contexts in which we operate.

The definiton of the key concepts provided above is meant to provide a theoretical background to our work, yet we are conscious that all the terms and areas of intervention described are deeply connected to one another. Only in long-term processes, working for structural and cultural changes addressing the causes of inequalities, it is possible to achieve relevant and long-lasting results.
COOPI in the operational management

Given the cross-cutting nature of the gender issue and the attention paid to it, over the years COOPI has carried out a wide range of actions in this context. To better clarify the conceptual and theoretical framework previously illustrated, a few examples of COOPI’s most relevant experiences in different intervention areas (prevention, promotion, provision and participation) are provided. In some cases, the programs focus on one of the areas of interventions, in some others they involve different ones.

**FIGHT GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

Gender based violence (GBV) is still a widespread phenomenon that affects mainly - but not exclusively - women and children in many of the countries where COOPI works. In such contexts, characterized by prevailing patriarchal systems derived from deeply rooted traditions, extreme poverty and weak institutions, gender inequalities tend to be very marked. Furthermore, the lack of systems to prevent and respond to GBV strongly limits the possibility to significantly reduce the incidence of such violence and adequately address its consequences. With the aim of countering these issues, COOPI has been working for many years in countries as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone and Uganda on the prevention and response to GBV in order to ensure medical assistance as well as psychological and social support to victims.

In light of this, the organization provides medical assistance to victims within 72 hours from the violence, through targeted treatments and hospitalization if needed. These actions are carried out based on local structures that are supported both in terms of equipment and provision of medications, and training of medical personnel. Great attention is given to the psychosocial support of victims of gender based violence: COOPI, in fact, supports and follows the creation of centers or mobile teams where victims can be assisted by skilled personnel through individual counseling sessions and group therapy. In addition, in order to reduce social exclusion often experienced by victims of violence, COOPI promotes their rapprochement to the community, both by mediating meetings with families and promoting their socio-economic reintegration. To this extent, income-generating activities are promoted and sustained through specific training, provision of equipment and the creation of local associations for savings and credit.

In the case of girls victims of violence, often associated with their forced inclusion in armed groups, great importance is then given to their reintegration into education programs. Moreover, where communities and local institutions show weaknesses in the adoption of appropriate mechanisms for prevention and protection of SGBV victims, COOPI realizes awareness campaigns aimed at youth, community leaders, representatives of women’s and men’s associations and institutions, in order to increase the knowledge and awareness on the issue.

Finally, with respect to the legal prosecution of violence perpetrators, the organization supports victims by increasing the awareness of their legal rights. Likewise, it works closely with local authorities raising their awareness on the need to ensure adequate protection and assistance to victims while identifying the culprits.

**GBV is a common phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where it is not only associated with the long going conflict, but also rooted in society and exacerbated by deep poverty and weakness of local institutions. In this context, COOPI has been active for years in different areas of the country to give support to the victims of violence - particularly women who make up the great majority of them - and reintegrate them in their communities. As part of this project, carried out between 2008 and 2012 as part of a larger program that COOPI has conducted in Eastern DRC since 2003, an integrated approach was developed: medical assistance, psychological support as well as socio-economic and legal aspects were included as they contribute to the full recovery of GBV victims. According to this approach, 60 health centers in the District of Ituri and Maniema Province were supported and provided medical assistance to more than 10,000 victims of GBV; over 25,000 victims of violence benefited from psychosocial support at community centers; about 12,000 people received socio-economic assistance to start or strengthen income-generating activities; more than 1,600,000 people were involved in sensitization and mobilization activities to develop a greater awareness on the issue of GBV.

Also, specific actions have been carried out in favor of men; notably: sensitization of male community leaders aiming at fostering a change in their attitudes, campaigns and trainings for couples aimed at creating new spaces for dialogue and for sharing views/opinions; finally, training sessions with parents to improve the interrelationship dialogue.**

24 The Village Saving Loan Associations
25 The most utilised tools are: organisation of sports events, dance, music, theatre
ENSURE ACCESS TO EDUCATION
COOPI stands for women so that their right to education is fully respected. Indeed, the organization acknowledges its relevance in promoting women’s and men’s empowerment. Failure to achieve good levels of education, in fact, precludes—most of the time women—the opportunity to have a voice, take on roles of responsibility and actively participate in community life. In order to fight discriminations in access to education—which are one of the most common outcomes of gender inequalities—COOPI intervenes both in formal and informal contexts, from primary to secondary level, including also professional training. The organization therefore supports the school enrolment of girls by promoting an intense awareness of families and communities: the importance of their education for the development of their communities is emphasized in order to reduce the general and female (usually very high), school dropout rate. Particular attention is given to the inclusion (or reintegration) of GBV victims, as well as of children formerly associated with armed forces. With regard to this, teachers training and the development of appropriate educational programs are planned in order to create a safe and secure environment that fosters the reworking of the traumatic experience, as well as the culture of dialogue. Thus, COOPI promotes the formation of support groups and the performance of recreational activities. In addition, particularly relevant for those who have experienced violence, is the professional training to enhance their employment opportunities, which is part of the path to recover their dignity. A significant part of COOPI’s commitment in support of the right to education also takes shape in the dialogue and awareness rising of local institutions that should be guarantors of such rights by implementing gender sensitive policies.

ENSURE MATERNAL HEALTH
COOPI, historically engaged in the health sector, has been working for years in order to reduce the limitations—first of all the weakness of the health care system and gender inequalities—that prevent women from accessing quality health services. For this reason, the organization gives special attention to reproductive health in its programs both in Africa and in Latin America. In this contexts COOPI’s interventions aim at improving the quality of health services to reduce both maternal28 and infant mortality. The political instability in the Central African Republic (CAR) following the wave of violence by LRA27 in 2008 destabilized the already fragile education system in the Eastern part of the country where the prefecture of Haut Momou is located. The climate of violence had a heavier impact on girls that, apart from experiencing more difficulties in access to educational services traditionally, are more vulnerable to GBV. To address these widespread issues, COOPI, that has been active in CAR for years in the sector of education, realized this project in 2011 focusing on two complementary aspects: on the one hand, the support of the schooling system to ensure access to education and, on the other, the prevention and protection of victims of GBV in the towns of Obo, Mboki and Zemio. During this initiative, approximately 6,500 children including indigenous, disabled, displaced persons, refugees and adolescents previously associated with armed groups, had access to primary education whose quality was significantly improved due to the distribution of school equipment and the training of more than 100 teaching parents and 50 preschool educators. The communities of the towns of Obo, Mboki and Zemio were sensitized on gender based violence (with particular concern on sexual violence) and actively involved in its monitoring and prevention. Aiming at strengthening protection and psychosocial support to victims of violence, also men were actively involved in every step of the programme. Also specific activities, such as training session and counselling groups were introduced. The value of this intervention was indeed the acknowledgment of the link existing between a safe environment and the access for boys and girls to the essential service of education.

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27 Lord Resistance Army
28 Maternal morbidity is defined as the condition in which a woman who nearly died survived a complication that occurred during pregnancy, childbirth or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy. Statistically it is referred to as the number of survivors of severe complications for number of total born or born alive (WHO et al. 2010).
Resilience is the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards, to adapt by resisting or changing. For more details, see COOPI Policy on Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction, COOPI, Milan, 2013.

COOPI believes that attention to gender in humanitarian crisis contexts (socio-political or related to natural origins) is crucial and promotes a gender approach also in high level disaster risk contexts. COOPI directly addresses to sex-specific needs in socio-political crisis contexts, ensuring protection and provision of services. Furthermore, the organisation focuses on possible side effects which can lead to gender violence, worsening of sexual and reproductive health, job loss, trafficking* and denial of education rights. In areas vulnerable to natural risks, even at a pre-crisis stage, COOPI sets up processes to prevent the risk of rights violation, through the strengthening of institutional and community mechanisms of empowerment, protection and provision of services, functional also to the effective management of the crisis.

In order to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structures. Such capacity is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organizing itself to increase its capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures (UN / ISDR 2004).

In 2005 and 2006 aimed at strengthening the local health care system particularly focusing on reproductive health, by promoting an intercultural approach that integrated the official medicine with the traditional one, in order to offer the local communities quality health services specifically structured to meet their own traditions. In this context, 16 people part of the personnel in 6 health centers of the Municipality of Tinquipaya were trained to increase their knowledge on traditional medicine; 142 traditional midwives were trained to identify pregnancy and childbirth related complications; an intercultural hospital was built, equipped and started up in Tinquipaya, giving value to local traditions while organizing the delivery rooms for relatives coming with pregnant women; moreover, an organization grouping traditional doctors and midwives was created and legally recognized.

COOPI acknowledges the fundamental role of women in achieving food security, recognizing their contribution both to the production of the majority of food resources globally, and to their distribution and use at the household and community level. In order to value such role, the or-

- COMETRAT - Consejo de Médicos Tradicionales del Municipio de Tinquipaya
- BOLIVIA
- For more details, see COOPI Policy on Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction, COOPI, Milan, 2013.
- Human being trafficking
- This approach considers also other vulnerable groups like minorities, disabled, refugees/IDPs, and HIV/AIDS affected people.
- Resilience is the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards, to adapt by resisting or changing
COOPI IN THE OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

COOPI adopts a gender perspective in all food security programs across the countries where it works, by tackling the main issues women suffer from: severe restrictions in access to and control over resources (both production inputs and technologies), lack of proper training and fair employment conditions. In this framework are thus included actions aimed at promoting the right to ownership of land and its acknowledgment in national policies; the access to quality inputs such as improved seeds and agricultural tools, as well as to technologies (e.g. energy saving stoves and irrigation systems); the inclusion in technical training sessions. The organization also promotes the participation in decision-making processes as both the control of resources and the strengthening of women production organizations strongly depend on it. Likewise, the attention paid by COOPI to natural resources conservation fits into this context, given the dependence of women on these due to the type of activities they usually carry out for the livelihood of their community.

COOPI also recognizes that women’s access to education and health services significantly improves the nutritional status of both households and communities they are part of. In light of this, it actively involves them in nutrition education activities. In addition, the organization aims at enhancing women’s contribution to food security also indirectly, by guaranteeing them the access to quality services in order for them to fully play their role to their communities’ benefit.

COOPI IN THE OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LITERACY AND LAND PROPERTY (SIERRA LEONE)

In Sierra Leone, women are still subjected to heavy discriminations: lack of recognition of literacy and property rights. COOPI’s program, realized between 2010 and 2013, involved three different levels of recognition and promotion of these rights: improvement of women’s rights awareness and promotion (individual level); creation of conditions that allow women to participate into decision making (community and local authorities level); formal acknowledgment and guarantee of women’s land property within National Land Policy (national level). Among the main results:

- 8,109 community members, including 5,137 women and 126 leaders have increased their awareness of women’s property rights and their relation with education rights;
- 338 women leaders have improved their educational levels, increased their management and advocacy capacities and carried out women’s rights promotion (education and property);
- 112 women have been trained to lead literacy courses in their own communities;
- 3 women’s organisations and associations networks have been strengthened at a national level;
- The National Land Policy, currently being processed, has formally included the discussion of various aspects related to the recognition of women’s rights of access to land.
SUPPORT WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The access to and control over resources and opportunities is for COOPI a pivotal component of women’s empowerment and gender equity. In this sense, the development of entrepreneurial activities is particularly relevant as, in addition to giving women the opportunity to assume a productive role in the community, it enhances the awareness of their skills as well as their social status. Therefore, the organization promotes the professional integration of women and supports their personal initiative in starting up production and commercial activities. Great importance is given to training, based on the close collaboration with local institutions. In this context, after performing participatory needs assessments, COOPI provides technical and management training courses and consultancy focused on production diversification and commercialization of products. In addition, special attention is given to the creation of facilities and support services for women to combine work with family care (such as promotion and building of community nurseries). All the interventions mentioned are characterized by the strong involvement of the different actors related to the world of entrepreneurship, i.e. local institutions, corporations, agencies, civil society and women’s associations, with the aim of facilitating dialogue among them and opening up institutionalized opportunities for exchange.

ENHANCEMENT OF SERVICES TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: CRÈCHE FACILITIES FOR WORKING MOTHERS (SENÉGAL)

In the region of Casamance, after a long period of political instability, the early 2000s saw a weak recovery of the economic activities where the small business ventures and the hand-craft sectors, female intensive, had an important role. COOPI’s intervention in the town of Ziguinchor, carried out between 2006 and 2009 as part of a larger project to support women’s entrepreneurship, was focused on the enhancement of services for children care in order to allow working women to actively engage in their activities. Along with a difficult access to financing and a weak technical and managerial background, women engaging in professional activities used to experience difficulties in combining these with their domestic responsibilities, especially child care. Thus, two crèche facilities were then realized and properly equipped, thanks to which more than 60 women benefited from care services for 80 children between 2 and 6 years old provided by specialized personnel. Hence, the value of this experience lay in the integrated support given to women that enhanced their dual role as mothers and workers.
**Gender**: the term gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles, relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to women and men on a differential basis. It is not biologically predetermined but refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female in a particular point in time. Gender is also relational, meaning that gender roles and characteristics do not exist in isolation, but are defined in relation to one another (UN-INSTRAW 2004).

**Sex**: sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male (UN-INSTRAW 2004).

**Gender equality**: gender equality is referred to as the condition where ‘women have equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic, and cultural development, and equal voice in civil and political life’ (DFID 2000).

**Gender equity**: gender equity is referred to as the condition where ‘the exercise of equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic, and cultural development, and equal voice in civil and political life’ (ECOSOC 1997).

**Gender perspective**: gender perspective refers to ‘with respect to any social phenomenon, policy or process, exposing gender-based differences in status and power, and considering how such discrimination shapes the immediate needs, as well as the long-term interests, of women and men’ (UNIFEM 1995).

**Gender mainstreaming**: gender mainstreaming is defined as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men can benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (ECOSOC 1997).

**Women’s empowerment**: women’s empowerment has five components: women’s self-confidence; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the household, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (UNIFEM 1995).

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**Women’s role in economic development**: London. Earthscan Publications.

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List of acronyms

CEDAW  Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
COMETRAT  Consejo de Médicos Tradicionales del Municipio de Tinguipaya
CONAMUNE  Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras del Ecuador
DFID  Department for International Development
ECOSOC  United Nations Economic and Social Council
FAO  Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GBV  Gender Based Violence
LRA  Lord Resistance Army
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
NGO  Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD  Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs  Sustainable Development Goals
UN  United Nations
UNDESA  United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNFPA  United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF  United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM  United Nations Development Fund for Women
UN-INSTRAW  United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
WHO  World Health Organization
WID  Women in Development


Together we can make the World a better place.