

# The Proforest Gender Equality Strategy

2020-2025

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This document sets out Proforest's long-term vision for gender equality and women's rights across the Proforest Group; in the programmes and projects that we carry out, and within our organisation. It describes why gender equality is important, and the rationale for how Proforest can make a difference. It introduces the broad methodologies for achieving our vision.

The operationalisation of this strategy will be laid out in various gender equality implementation plans to be developed on an annual or biennial basis.

# 1. Gender Equality Context and Long-term Vision

## 1.1 Why Gender Equality Matters to Proforest

**Gender equality is a fundamental human right as outlined in numerous international commitments<sup>1</sup> and is key to effective and sustainable development outcomes.** Gender equality has important implications for everyone.

Proforest's mission is to support the transition to agricultural commodity production and sourcing that **delivers positive social and environmental outcomes for people and planet: this includes respecting human rights and the advancement of gender equality.** Proforest recognises that human rights are intrinsic to all. In upholding our mission special measures may be needed to protect vulnerable groups. Proforest acknowledges the existence of more genders than the binary concepts of masculine or feminine and that they all deserve equal rights and opportunities. We also recognise that **women<sup>2</sup>** and **sexual and gender minorities** are groups particularly vulnerable to social inequalities.

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**Women** are among those most vulnerable to the impacts of unsustainable practices because they often have no independent income or land rights. Intersecting factors, such as age, disability, ethnicity, caste, geographical location, income levels and so on can further exacerbate women's and girls' as well as men's and boys' experience of agricultural practices. In some countries, women may be disproportionately affected by changes to access to resources; for example because they may be responsible for the provision of water and food for their families, and if access is restricted they may be forced to travel further and spend more time working for less return or be exposed to gender-based violence.

Gender equality and sustainability issues are closely interconnected not just at the commodity production level but throughout supply chains. There are increasing opportunities for women's employment as employees and women entrepreneurs, however much of this is in informal employment. In these types of arrangements, women (and men) lack protection under legal or regulatory frameworks in terms of wages, working hours, social security, maternity leave and unemployment benefits. Women are often concentrated in the lowest paid, least secure roles across the agri-food sector, providing a reserve of cheap, flexible labour on which modern food supply chains are built.

Deeply entrenched discriminatory gender norms disproportionately affect women at every step of the commodity supply chain in that:

- They are less likely to have a say in decision-making processes or enjoy representation e.g. in trade unions or on corporate boards.
- They often shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work (e.g. cooking, cleaning, washing, collecting water, looking after children and sick relatives) which puts limitations on their paid work options and performance.
- They face discrimination in pay and progression to more senior roles.
- They often face the threat of sexual harassment and violence.

Such discrimination and threats are also faced by sexual minorities and those who identify as non-binary.

<sup>1</sup>See for example: (1) UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women especially Part III: Articles 10-14, which describe the economic and social rights of women, particularly focusing on education, employment, and health. Part III also includes special protections for rural women and the problems they face. (2) UN Sustainable Development Goals especially Goals 1, 2 5, 8, 12, 13 and 15 and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (pg.5).

<sup>2</sup>When we refer to 'women' or 'men' we include female- or male- identifying people, including transgender, cisgender and others who identify themselves within the spectrum of the gender identity of female or male.

## Key Terms

### Gender

**Gender** refers to the expectations, beliefs and norms associated with being male and female and the power relationships between women, men, girls and boys. They are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman, girl, man, or boy in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. When we refer to 'women' or 'men' we include female- or male- identifying people, including transgender, cisgender and others who identify themselves within the spectrum of the gender identity of female or male.

### Non-binary

**Non-binary** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

### Women's and girls' empowerment

**Women's and girls' empowerment** is about the expansion of women's and girls' abilities to make and influence choices that affect their lives. It is a process of transformative changes that are dynamic, iterative, and non-linear. It is about redistributing power between women and girls and boys and men. It is context-specific and driven by women and girls themselves.

### Gender mainstreaming

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

## 1.2 Vision and Commitments

Proforest believes that forest and agricultural commodity production and sourcing can and should deliver positive social and environmental outcomes for the people and places where commodities are produced. This means the production and sourcing of agricultural commodities and forest products which respect the **human rights** of all individuals, and remedies negative human rights impacts. This includes the rights of women and girls.

Our specific vision for gender equality is that our workplaces and our projects and programmes promote equal opportunities and benefits for people of all genders, uphold the rights of women and men, and of those that do not identify as either, and support the empowerment of women and others who may be disadvantaged.

### We are committed to:

1. **Protecting women and men and those who do not identify as either from discrimination, sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation, violence, intimidation, retaliation and other denial of their basic human rights due to their sex, their gender identity or their sexual orientation.**
2. **Building awareness both internally and externally about the need for gender equality in natural resources management and sourcing.**
3. **As a minimum, building gender sensitive strategies and approaches into our projects and programmes: from design through implementation and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). Where possible, including gender transformative approaches to our work.**
4. **Engaging and coordinating with partners, governments, clients and other stakeholders to promote and support effective and impactful ways to promote gender equality.**
5. **Promoting balanced gender representation at all levels and all entities in the Proforest Group; supporting women and sexual and gender minorities into senior decision-making roles, given the disproportionate number of women in more junior roles in the sector.**
6. **Monitoring, recording and sharing our experiences, outcomes and impacts in relation to gender equality mainstreaming. We will seek to communicate internally and externally on examples of our work.**

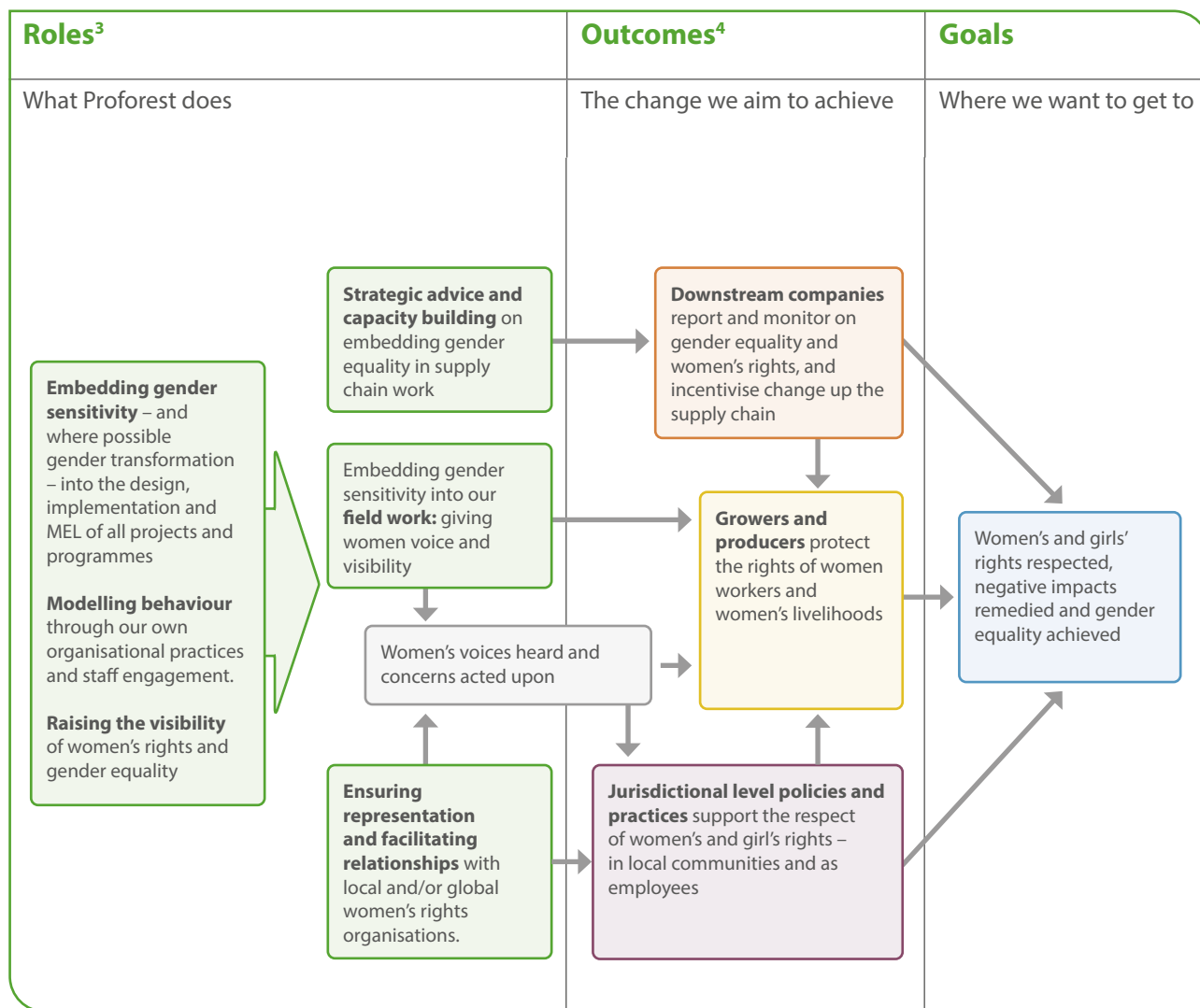
**Gender Sensitive** approaches are those which challenge gender stereotypes, expose gender discrimination and promote gender equality.

**Gender Transformative** approaches aim to move beyond individual self-improvement among women and toward transforming the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities.

## 2. Our Theory of Change

The diagram and boxes below show a high-level Theory of Change for Proforest’s work on gender equality.

It describes the changes we aim to achieve in the key actors and institutions that we work with, and the way that our workstreams and our own organisational practices can contribute to these changes. Further details can be found in our [Gender Equality Guidance Papers](#) and in future implementation plans.



<sup>3</sup>By **roles** we mean the way Proforest interacts with different actors to change behaviour or practices; how we add value; how we leverage change.

<sup>4</sup>By **outcome** we mean a change in the behaviour of an organisation or person that represents progress towards of the achievement of Proforest’s goals. I.e. **They do something new or significantly different** as a result – at least in part – of our work.



The **roles** that Proforest can play in addressing gender inequality and respecting women's and girls' rights are centred around the following:

**Ensuring representation and facilitating relationships:** Supporting our clients to engage with local and/or global organisations with expertise in gender equality; ensuring that women's voices are heard, and their concerns acted upon; and that representation for women's rights organisations is part of multi-stakeholder processes.

**Awareness raising:** Raising the visibility of women's rights and gender equality within a framework of respect for human rights in all of our work, and ensuring its visibility in analysis and reporting.

**Strategic advice and capacity building:** Supporting downstream clients on how to embed their global commitments to gender equality into their supply chain work. Building the capacity of our production clients and partners to mainstream gender equality into their production and monitor progress.

**Modelling behaviour:** The attitudes and practices of staff and management in our own organisation contribute to the positive change we want to see in organisations we work with. We have an influence through the way we talk about inclusivity and gender equality; creating respectful spaces when we run meetings; challenging stereotypes; calling out prejudice, discrimination or harassment where we see it; implementing gender equality into our own policies, procedures and practices and raising awareness among our staff on issues of gender equality.

**Embedding gender sensitivity and wherever possible gender transformation into the design, implementation, monitoring and learning of all our own projects and programmes.**

**Embedding gender sensitivity into our field work:** Ensuring that the scope of our visit, our methodologies, results presentation, partner selection, and follow up actions contribute to changes in gender equality, upholding of women's rights, the rights of sexual and gender minorities, giving of visibility and voice, and progression toward gender equality.

Some of the **assumptions** in our Theory of Change:

- There is continued internal political will to drive this work forward at Proforest.
- The donor community continues to support and prioritise gender equality work, which provides us with resources to embed changes in our work.
- The private sector will prioritise gender equality and women's rights more in the future, as part of their commitments to human rights.

# 3. Our Approach

Since 2016 Proforest has been using a gender mainstreaming approach to implement its gender equality commitments: applying attention to gender equality throughout the organisation and its functions, including human resources, support functions, communications, resource allocation and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

Our experience shows that a number of elements are important to deliver on our mainstreaming strategy:

- 1. Gender sensitisation of all staff:** Gender mainstreaming as the normalisation of a gender perspective through all working practices, processes and structures ultimately requires the commitment of all staff. Gendered attitudes stem from the social and cultural norms at the level of the individual. Staff require skills, knowledge and commitment to create change and for change to be sustainable.
- 2. Will, commitment and support from the top level of management authority:** This is required so that the process does not become marginalised. While the gender coordination staff and focal points may take a lead in implementing the mainstreaming the staff require management support time and resources and the ability to influence decision-making in order to be effective.
- 3. An internal group with responsibilities for gender mainstreaming:** The gender coordination team and focal points (our 'gender structure') support and promote gender-related skills and approaches and over time are able to act as internal resources and external spokespeople. Each regional office shall have a gender equality focal point who supports the implementation of the strategy. The gender equality focal points report to the Director for Social Responsibility and Human Rights.
- 4. Resourcing the strategy:** Will and support and enthusiastic staff are not enough. Allocating adequate resources including ring-fenced time for gender coordination and focal point team members, resources for training, communication, tool development and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) are needed.
- 5. Accountability:** Embedding clear reporting lines and responsibilities embeds this work in Proforest's structures. It helps to safeguard the gender equality work, even if key individuals change roles. Progress on the delivery of the strategy and the implementation plans shall be reported annually to the Executive Directors Group (EDG) and to the Proforest Initiative trustees.
- 6. Knowledge management and tool/resource development:** It is important to create practical guidance about how to include gender sensitivity in our work, and to make these resources easily accessible, and embedded in our project and programme design tools, as well as in our standard approaches to staff recruitment and employment systems. Online training is available on Proforest Academy.
- 7. Active engagement of staff in developing tools and approaches:** While the gender development group plays an important role, for change to be meaningful it must be owned by all staff. Engaging as many staff as possible in activities such as gender reviews and gender guidance paper development is a proven way to increase awareness and capacity. Cross-organisational learning and exchange spaces, and embedding awareness raising and discussion about gender equality approaches into regular planning and capacity building activities are important.

- 8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL):** We are committed to seeking resources to allow effective, light-touch monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of our projects and programmes, and our internal strategies in delivering on our commitments to gender equality and women's rights for all individuals affected by natural resource production and sourcing, and for our staff. This includes a recognition of the value of sharing examples and stories of work done, as well as sharing the best indicators and data for monitoring and reporting on progress. A 2017 staff survey was extremely useful to generate information about the extent to which gender equality was being addressed in Proforest's work, and in our organisation. This serves as a benchmark against which to gauge progress.
- 9. External support:** We recognise the value of learning from the expertise of organisations and individuals with experience in gender equality mainstreaming, as a cost-effective strategy to build our own capacity and learn from the achievements and mistakes of others. We are committed to using a mixture of techniques to guide our work, including consultancy support, membership of networks, discussion with peers, or the invitation of experts to our governance structures, advisory panels or discussion panels. For example, we have a gender equality expert in our Proforest Initiative board of trustees (currently Ines Smyth).
- 10. Communication:** We recognise the importance that our internal and external communications can play in delivering our gender equality goals. These include, but are not limited to the way we represent women, men and sexual and gender minorities in publications, reports and social media; the visibility of our commitments, strategies and tools to our staff and stakeholders; and spaces given to everybody's voices and experiences. Furthermore, sharing tangible examples of the transformative nature of successful gender equality work is recognised as important in promoting greater engagement both internally and externally.