



SETTING UP AND STRENGTHENING GENDER COMMITTEES IN THE PALM OIL SECTOR

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What is a Gender Committee?

A Gender committee at the workplace can be referred to with various terms such as a women committee, anti-sexual harassment taskforce, etc. The definition of a gender committee as according to the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower are as follows;

	RSPO Principles & Criteria 2018, 6.5.1	Ministerial Decree Number 88/2023 on the Guideline on Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence at the Workplace, issued by the Indonesia Ministry of Manpower
Definition	(C) A gender committee is in place specifically to raise awareness, identify and address issues of concern, as well as opportunities and improvements for women	A Task Force on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Prevention is established to plan and implement a company’s policy (to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace).
Team composition	Representatives from all areas of work, male and female	The Task Force members must be an odd number, with at least 3 people. They consist of a chairperson, secretary, and at least one member, who represent employers and workers or the Trade Union. If the LKS Bipartite exist in the company, the Task Force is part of the structure of the LKS Bipartite.
Roles	Education for women and awareness of the workforce, which includes violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, training on women’s rights, counselling for women affected by violence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To receive complaints promptly and without discrimination; 2. To record complaints in an order and accurate manner; 3. To collect information as part of the complaints handling. 4. To provide considerations to the victims e.g. to submit the case to the police and/or companies so that the company can put sanctions in place to the perpetrator. 5. To provide assistance to the victims.



The principles of the Gender Committee

In the Siak-Pelalawan Landscape Program (SPLP), CNV Internationaal alongside Proforest and Daemeter encourages and assists the implementation of gender committees on palm oil plantations.

Trust building: It is important for gender committees to function as a safe space for women to share their concerns. It is important there is mutual respect and trust within the gender committee. Social activities may be organised in order to increase the trust and encourage women to express their concerns. Yet the main objective of the gender committee is to make sure that the vulnerable position of women workers on the plantation is being improved. That the gender committee meets regularly, is being taken serious by the company management and that improvements are felt by the workers.

Making connections: It is important that the work and concerns expressed within the gender committee and the company policy on the prevention of gender based violence are also disseminated to men on the plantation, so they can also signal cases, support women faced with gender based violence and be supportive of its prevention. It is also important to connect the gender committee to the labour union at the company level, this way improving labour conditions of women, can be an integral part of the social dialogue and collective bargaining processes.



Why is it important to establish a gender committee on palm oil plantations?

1. Women workers provide for a significant contribution to the palm oil sector as they take on different roles on the plantation such as:

- Trees care or maintenance
- Seedling
- Fertilizer spraying
- Applying herbicide and pesticide

However, many women workers, work as daily or seasonal workers with minimum or no access to paid leave (including maternity leave), social security, severance payment, and other rights enjoyed by permanent workers. Due to their casual employment status, women workers may receive lower wages which has a direct impact on the welfare of the children, particularly families with a single breadwinner. The gender committee is not a tick box as part of the audit.

It needs to be a well-functioning and impactful effort for women workers and their families.

Due to the double burden of women works, because of their domestic/ family care roles, women workers have less time to be active in a trade union. This means that their voices are underrepresented at the negotiation table between trade unions and management.

Due to these circumstances, women workers are at a higher risk compared to men of being:

- Exploited
- Discriminated
- Harassed
- Unprotected, including their sexual and reproductive rights

2. It is good for business, which means:

- It demonstrates a commitment towards sustainability and responsible business conduct.
- It increases retention rates which contribute to higher productivity.
- It creates a more safe and healthy workplace.
- It reduces business risks of human rights violations.
- It is part of compliance to RSPO standards and national legislation.

Box 1. Types of Sexual Harassment and Violence

Sexual harassment includes any unwanted sexual advances, comments, or gestures. This can include unwanted sexual propositions, comments about a person's appearance, and touching or grabbing. It can also include nonverbal behaviours such as leering or staring. Harassment can take place either offline but also online.

Sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes also reproductive coercion, forced sterilization, forced marriage, sexual exploitation.





How can a Gender Committee be set up?

- Develop or improve the company policies towards gender equality and the rights of women workers. The policies should be incorporated into Company Regulations, the Collective Bargaining Agreement, the Code of Conduct, and Contract or Work Agreement that apply to all workers, consultants, interns, sub-contractors, and suppliers.
- Develop a concept note on the Gender Committee. Reference can be obtained from the latest regulations, standards and good practices. Human resources, budget, and facilities need to be provided for the Committee. The time dedicated to the Committee shall be considered as working hours, rather than additional work.
- Conduct an internal or independent assessments about the risk that directly or indirectly contributes to the social and economic condition of women workers. A worker's survey is recommended to obtain first-hand data.
- Engage an independent party or gender expert to review internal company policies and suggest improvements.
- Include the topic of gender equality and the rights of women into the induction program for new employees, as well as education and training program for all staff. Those topics can be disseminated in the special occasions, e.g Women's Day, Occupational, Health and Safety Day, May Day, etc.
- Provide or improve adequate working facilities and infrastructure to prevent sexual harassment such as good lighting, camera/CCTV, gender-separated toilets and housing.

How to support the victims?

The victims of sexual violence and harassment tend to not report the cases. In many cases, the victims may be blaming themselves, feel embarrassed or scared of potential retaliation, or do not have information and trust towards the available complaints system. In addition to improving the internal complaints system, the company can do the following:

1. Ensure that there is a strict confidentiality in handling the cases.
2. To make sure the victim is protected from retaliation by the perpetrator, particularly if there is a power relation between perpetrator and victim.
3. Ensure victims do not lose their job or career turbulence such as demotion, postponed promotion, reduced employment benefits, etc.
4. Provide adequate leave which allows the victim to process the cases, for example to go to the police, hospital, and other supporting organizations.

Box 2. Sanctions for the Perpetrator of Sexual Violence and Harassment

The sanctions that can be applied at the workplace are:

1. Written warning letter;
2. Transfer of the perpetrator or assignment to other divisions;
3. Reduce or remove the level of authority;
4. Suspension;
5. Dismissal.

5. Grant additional sick leave if the victim requires counselling.
6. Provide compensation for the victims, such as medical expenses.
7. Remove negative appraisal in employment records due to sexual assault.
8. Rehire the victim if previously improperly terminated.



Workers in PT Mitra Unggul Pusaka in front of the banner informed about the types of sexual harassment



Box 3: Good Practices

Since 2023 as part of the Siak Pelalawan Landscape Program 4 new Gender Committees were set up, and 8 companies have strengthened their Gender Committee. These gender Committee members have attended trainings and improved their knowledge of the crucial role they can play in preventing gender based violence, sexual harassment and improve the working conditions on the palm oil plantations. Companies have set clear policies, and have disseminated their policies towards the workers. Several cases of sexual harassment have been successfully addressed and will hopefully be prevented in the future.

About SPLP

SPLP is a private sector led initiative in the districts of Siak and Pelalawan in Riau province, Indonesia. SPLP believes that collaborative efforts between local governments and stakeholders can be more effective in achieving positive palm oil production for forests and people at the district level, rather than acting alone or only through a company supply chain.

Coalition members (Cargill, L'oreal, Musim Mas, Neste, Pepsico, Unilever) and supporters (Danone, Consumer Good Forum, dan Sinarmas) jointly form the SPLP Platform, which is facilitated by the Consortium of Resource Experts (CORE), formed of Daemeter and Proforest: two leading organisations in the area of responsible sourcing and production of agricultural commodities with strong technical and practical expertise in developing landscape programmes.

Within the social dialogue working group, SPLP supports the establishment and improvement of Gender Committees of several palm oil companies in Siak and Pelalawan through training and technical assistance. In its implementation CNV Internationaal is taking the lead and cooperates with the District Governments, namely the Office of Transmigration and Manpower and the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Birth Control, as well as trade unions.

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