LET'S SPEAK GENDER

10 PRINCIPLES OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE COMMUNICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT
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SETTING THE STAGE
Gender-responsive communications is a must-have skill for all development practitioners.

Whether writing reports or emails, speaking to a crowd or interacting with people at the grassroots level, we must be aware of the ways in which language can either enforce or subvert gender inequalities.
Gender equality means more than the equal representation of women and men.

Achieving gender equality means eliminating all gender-based discrimination and gender stereotypes in all areas of life.
Gender-based discrimination in our societies results in women facing many more forms of inequalities.

But to achieve meaningful, long-lasting gender equality, we must challenge and eliminate gender norms and stereotypes associated with both women and men.
GO BEYOND FEATURING WOMEN
Common mistake: Engaging with gender equality issues doesn't mean simply featuring women and their accomplishments.
Gender equality refers to the unequal power relations between women and men the unequal roles that our societies attribute to them.

The accomplishments of individual women are important, but they need to be talked about in the broader context of gender inequalities.

While numbers and statistics are important, avoid counting numbers of women and men as the only reference to gender equality and women's empowerment.
When writing about gender equality issues, you must engage with:

a. differences in the situation of women and men
b. gender discrimination in law and practice
c. gender roles and gender stereotypes
d. women's empowerment and rights
Good practice:
Explore different aspects of gender inequality through the specific experiences of women and men.
Gender equality stories can be about:

a. particular discriminations women experience;
b. women’s empowerment in the context of persistent gender inequalities;
c. challenging deep-rooted gender stereotypes;
d. understanding the impact of gender roles for both women and men.

Show how the results of your interventions address one or more of these structural issues.
Good practice:
Make sure the visual content contributes to the storytelling instead of being an afterthought.
ENSURE FAIR VISIBILITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN
Common mistake: Equal visibility for women and men is not enough. We need to ensure fair visibility.
Fair visibility means that our communication doesn’t perpetuate gender stereotypes and allows men and women to be on equal footing.

Fair visibility can be achieved by presenting a diversity of roles for both women and men.
A story or a photo with equal numbers of women and men in which men are in leadership roles and women are in support roles does not qualify as fair visibility.

A report in which all photos present men as computer scientists or industry workers and all women as nurses and teachers doesn't qualify as fair visibility.
Good practice:
Include perspectives of women in decision-making positions.
Good practice:
Include perspectives of women and men who challenge expected gender roles.
DON'T DIMINISH WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS
Common mistake: We are conditioned to assume that activities dominated by men have more value than those associated with women.
Activities associated with men are rewarded more than activities associated with women:

a. paid work vs. unpaid domestic and care work

b. full-time work vs. part-time work

c. sectors dominated by men (extractive industry, transportation, finance) vs. sectors dominated by women (education, healthcare, services)
The value of these activities is not intrinsic, it is assigned through social norms and values.

There is no reason why childcare and primary education should be less valuable than construction work.

Yet the importance and financial rewards we associate with activities seen as masculine and feminine differ greatly in most countries.
Good practice:
Be mindful of the ways in which gender relations and stereotypes influence the way in which human activities are portrayed.
For example, stating that women in rural areas don’t participate in the economic life of their communities is a biased statement because it erases their contributions in terms of unpaid domestic and care work.

In truth, these contributions grow the economy by enabling other members of the family, mostly men, to participate in the workforce.

Just because women don’t participate in the monetised economy doesn’t mean that their work does not contribute to the economy.
DON'T REINFORCE GENDER STEREOTYPES
Common mistake:
Avoid portraying certain jobs or roles as more appropriate for one gender.
Professions have no gender.

Women can do jobs traditionally associated with men, just as men can do jobs traditionally associated with women.

The division of labour between women and men does not correspond to their innate capacities or preferences.
Good practice:
Portray men and women in diverse roles that challenge gender stereotypes.
Common mistake:
Don't use or reinforce gender stereotypes about the traits, behaviours, activities, and appearance of women and men.
Common mistake:
Avoid stereotyping that affects LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) communities.
Good practice: Use non-stereotypical colours to represent women and men in graphics.
Good practice:
In infographics, try to showcase the diversity of women and men.
PORTRAY DIVERSITY
Common mistake:
Don't assume all women face the same inequalities. Don't assume all men have the same privileges.
Pay attention to how other identities (socio-economic background, ethnicity, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) intersect with gender to form different patterns of disadvantage and exclusion.

Meaningful gender equality will not be achieved unless we understand and respond to the different experiences and needs of women and men belonging to different groups.
Good practice:
Look at the variety of experiences and needs of men and women of different backgrounds.
Good practice:
Remember that any kind of discrimination has a gender dimension.
Common mistake: Avoid using ‘male’ and ‘female’.
‘Male’ and ‘female’ define biological distinctions used in the fields of medicine and biology.

‘Man’ and ‘woman’ define human beings and are the correct way to indicate personhood.

Using ‘male’ and ‘female’ to describe men and women reduces them to their reproductive abilities and enforces the differences between men and women as grounded in biology, instead of socially-constructed roles.
Good practice:
Use ‘man’ and ‘woman’, ‘boy’ and ‘girl’, even when you need an adjective.
the youngest female winemaker → the youngest woman to be a winemaker

male parliamentarians → men in parliament

female farmers → women farmers

male labour participation rate → labour participation rate of men
Common mistake:
Do not use gendered generic terms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Green</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mankind</td>
<td>humankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fatherland</td>
<td>native land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother tongue</td>
<td>native tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brotherhood</td>
<td>community, kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maternity leave</td>
<td>parental leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paternity leave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motherly</td>
<td>loving, nurturing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Good practice: Professions and job titles should be gender inclusive.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorrect Term</th>
<th>Correct Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>policeman</td>
<td>police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policewoman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chairman</td>
<td>chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chairwoman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>actor</td>
<td>actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>actress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleaning lady</td>
<td>cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male nurse</td>
<td>nurse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Good practice:
Use singular 'they' instead of masculine pronouns to express neutrality.
an author and his audience

an author and their audience

each doctor must take the test himself

each doctor must take the test themself

the policeman will ask you to show him your ID

the police officer will ask you to show them your ID
DON'T VICTIMISE
Common mistake:
Don’t erase people’s abilities and power to find solutions to improve their lives.
Avoid the particular ways in which women are usually portrayed:

- as victims of sexual and domestic violence
- as mothers who sacrifice for their children
- as unable to escape poverty
- as being vulnerable and powerless
- as passive beneficiaries

Even if they are struggling, give them credit for the ways in which they have dealt with the issues they face and highlight how you are building on their efforts.
Good practice:
Show women and men as active participants to development instead of passive beneficiaries.
Common mistake:
In visual content, avoid portraying people in victimising ways.
Good practice: Portray people in dignified ways as part of their daily routine.
DON'T PATRONISE
Common mistake: Be mindful of differences in cultural background and socio-economic status that can lead to patronising statements.
Avoid the particular ways in which women are patronised:

- women need to be educated about their rights
- women need to improve their self-esteem
- women need to be motivated to participate in public life

We can’t talk about issues that affect women’s lives without taking into account the systematic material and educational deprivations that they experience in many places around the world.
Good practice: Portray women accomplishing great results in spite of structural gender inequalities, not in spite of their gender.
PRESENT FACTS, NOT JUDGEMENTS
Common mistake: Avoid making judgements about gender relations based on personal experience and anecdotal evidence.
Most people have strong opinions about gender relations and gender equality because gender shapes our lives and identities in many ways.

Justifications for why all societies have historically refused women the same rights as men can still hold significant discursive power and influence the way people approach gender equality issues.

Be aware that we all have a context and a background that influences our opinions.
Don’t infer societal trends about gender equality based on personal experience and anecdotes.

Analyse the information you have and ask an expert if unsure.

Focus on presenting the facts.

Try to always convey nuance rather than categorical answers.
“It was an arranged marriage. Every day I prayed that he would change. I endured years of physical, psychological and sexual violence because I wanted to cling to my dream of having a real family. But the violence never stopped.”

Good practice:
When writing about traumatic situations, focus on presenting the facts and use quotes to personalise the story.
BE OPEN
Good practice: Be open to listening, learning and improving.
Applying a gender-responsive lens to our communications is a process and it takes time.

There is a learning curve. Don’t expect that you will necessarily get everything right the first time.

Read about it, discuss with other colleagues and ask for advice from people that might know more about the topic.
SUMMARY
1. Go beyond stories featuring women

2. Ensure fair visibility for men and women

3. Don't diminish women's contributions

4. Don't reinforce gender stereotypes

5. Portray diversity
6. USE GENDER-RESPONSIVE LANGUAGE

7. DON'T VICTIMISE

8. DON'T PATRONISE

9. PRESENT FACTS, NOT JUDGEMENTS

10. BE OPEN
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