

# Eritrea Country Office Guidelines

For using gender-sensitive language in communication and  
advocacy



## Introduction

UNDP Eritrea is cautious about the gender equality implications and consequences of its language because this portrays the thoughts of our workforce and shapes the thinking of listeners or readers across different audiences. By using pronouns, nouns, and adjectives that contribute to the subordination and or invisibility of women’s and girls’ roles (e.g. “mankind” as opposed to “humanity”), the organization risks creating an impression that its work on gender equality is outside the realm of communication and advocacy.

The aim of this guideline on gender-responsive language in communication and advocacy is a step towards ensuring that international gender norms and standards are reflected in the UNDP Eritrea Country Office’s language and other forms of Internal and External communication irrespective of the medium or technology being used.

## Whom is this document designed for?

- All UNDP staff
  - Staff in programmes and operations;
  - Colleagues working in communications and knowledge management;
  - Gender Focal Points and members of the UNDP Gender Focal Team;

## Aim of the guideline

- Enable UNDP staff to identify stereotypical and sexist language that may perpetuate gender inequalities and bias;
- Guide inclusive language for any kind of UNDP documents, with a special focus on written communications and visual and audio materials.

## How do you know you are gender-responsive?

Use the gender-responsive assessment scale below (Table 1) to assess the gender responsiveness of your work. You can then adjust the gender responsiveness accordingly. The Country Office aims to deliver gender-transformative programming and reflect this in our communication.

**Table 1: Gender Responsive Assessment Scale<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Gender Negative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perpetuates gender inequality by reinforcing unbalanced norms, roles and relations</li><li>• Privileges men over women (or vice versa)</li><li>• Often leads to one sex enjoying more rights or opportunities than the other</li></ul>
<b>Gender Blind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ignores gender norms, roles and relations</li><li>• Very often reinforces gender-based discrimination</li><li>• Ignores differences in opportunities and resource allocations for women and men</li><li>• Often constructed based on the principle of being “fair” by treating everyone the same</li></ul>

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<sup>1</sup> Gender Mainstreaming Manual for Health Managers: A Practical Approach, (2011). World Health Organization: Geneva.

<b>Gender Sensitive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers gender norms, roles and relations</li> <li>• Does not address inequality generated by unequal norms, roles or relations</li> <li>• Indicates gender awareness, although often no remedial action is developed</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Responsive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers gender norms, roles and relations for women and men and how they affect access to and control over resources</li> <li>• Considers women’s and men’s specific needs</li> <li>• Intentionally targets and benefits a specific group of women or men to achieve certain policy or programme goals or meet certain needs</li> <li>• Makes it easier for women and men to fulfil duties that are ascribed to them based on their gender roles</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Transformative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers gender norms, roles and relations for women and men and that these affect access to and control over resources</li> <li>• Considers women’s and men’s specific needs</li> <li>• Addresses the causes of gender-based health [and other] inequities</li> <li>• Includes ways to transform harmful gender norms, roles and relations</li> <li>• The objective is often to promote gender equality</li> <li>• Includes strategies to foster progressive changes in power relationships between women and men</li> </ul>

## Choice of language

Traditionally, speakers and writers have used many masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to both sexes. However, increasingly, readers do not understand “man” to be synonymous with “people.” As more and more women are represented in decision-making and political arenas, for example, using language that “erases” or “misrepresents” women and contributes to gender inequality is unacceptable.

Below are some more words you might be using that misrepresent gender equality in the workplace;

- ✓ *Check if you are using any of the below nouns and pronouns in your documents, communications-related texts, such as press releases, success stories, news stories for the website, op-eds, opening notes or speeches, or publication and substitute them with gender-sensitive alternatives.*

<b>Biased</b>	<b>Gender-responsive</b>
He	She and he, s/he, they
Man	Person, individual
Mankind	People, human beings, humanity, humankind, human race, we, women and men, society
Manpower	Staff, labor, work force, employees, personnel, workers
Chairman	Chair, chairperson
Policeman	Police officer
Businessman	Business manager, executive, head of agency
Cameraman	Camera operator

Freshman	First-year student
Spokesman	Spokesperson, representative
Fatherland	Native land
Mother tongue	Native tongue
Cleaning lady	Cleaner, housekeeper
Salesman	Shop assistant, sales staff
Dear Sir	Dear Sir or Madam, Dear Editor, To whom it may concern
Miss/Mrs	Ms (does not indicate marital status)

**Examples:**

***All men are created equal – We are all created equal***

***Boys will be boys – Kids will be kids***

Often, without noticing it, we use stereotypes and biases in our communication, e.g. using female pronouns for school teachers and male ones for scientists. These occur when we associate certain qualities or behavior pertinent to women or men only or when we link women and men with certain professions.

There are cases of blunt lack of respect for either of the sexes and grave generalized assumptions about women and men. As our cultures and media productions play an important role in forming and thus changing perceptions about people in a society, it is crucial to promote stereotype-free communication in our daily language use.

- ✓ ***Review your article/speech/release/publication/report/analysis to avoid reinforcing one-sided stereotypes about women and men and their societal roles. Try to rephrase and be proactive and open-minded in your language.***

<b>Biased</b>	<b>Bias-free</b>
Lady	Woman
Ladylike	Courteous, cultured
Maiden name	Birth name
Manly	Strong, mature
Motherly	Loving, warm, nurturing
Weak half of humanity	Women, the opposite sex
The better half of humanity	Women, the opposite sex
A strong half of humanity	Men, the opposite sex

### Frequent biases about role of women in media and patronizing women in media

- Primary role of women as mothers, wives, carers, housekeepers
- Women as sex objects
- Women as irrational, weak, soft, and male dependent
- Women as victims
- Women are not as free agents with needs, opinions, and interests

In selecting your communications channel, consider the communication channels carefully using the guidelines as per table 2 below.

**Table 2: Selecting Communication Channels**

<b>Communication Channels</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Gender Considerations</b>
<b>Mass Media</b>	Reach and visibility Credible source of information Aspirational	Expensive Difficult to tailor messages or target certain groups Not interactive	Access and ownership Literacy and language skills Time of broadcast must be suitable
<b>Interpersonal or Group Communication</b>	Dialogic Creates a local buzz	Resource heavy Time-consuming, Difficult to control	Interest and availability given women's multiple responsibilities Women's mobility and

	Influential  Complements mass media Promotes reflection	accuracy of messages	safety  May need to be age and gender-segregated Some topics may be sensitive to discuss
<b>Folk or Local Media and Community Events (fairs, screenings, declarations)</b>	Locally adaptable Popular Participatory Dialogic	Resource heavy (time, costs, skills to integrate messages)  Limited reach  Everyone may not participate.	Women and girls may not be allowed to participate in or attend public performances. Topics may be sensitive and difficult to portray
<b>Digital Media and Interactive Technologies</b>	Increasing in reach Rapid dissemination and feedback	Some segments of the population may be left out	Access and ownership Literacy

### Textual Communication, Print, and voice messages

As our beneficiaries include both women and men, they both should be seen and heard, and treated equally in our speeches and voice recording products. While working on your article, speech, OPED, report, press release, publication, or photographs choice, think about the messages you are trying to convey.

In addition to your central message related to your sector, you could easily, without extra effort, contribute to gender equality. It is often the case that women and women’s voices are less represented or not at all in important policy documents and high-level meeting press releases. When Public Service Announcements/videos, scripts, and other similar products are developed, use more female characters in traditionally male roles and vice versa (e.g. representing more women in the traditionally male arena, promoting women’s leadership, portraying equal division of labor, man cooking, woman chairing a meeting). These visual and written messages can have a positive impact on people’s consciousness over time.

As you prepare your report, publication, photographs, press release, or article, please think about these key questions;

- *Are both women and men sources of your report, analysis, and review?*
- *Are there opportunities to engage more women as experts and heros in your media products?*
- *Have you interviewed female and male experts and commentators for your quote in a press release or article?*
- *Have you chosen photographs that have both women and men in them?*

- *Have you avoided portraying women and men in stereotypical occupations or associated with specific characteristics?*
- *Is there an opportunity to highlight an achievement made by a woman? Can women's empowerment be specifically noted?*

## Digital images

Challenge gender stereotypes with images in the same way as written materials, the depiction of women and men should attempt to break with notions of gender roles that perpetuate gender inequalities. Women and men should be portrayed as equals rather than having roles and characteristics traditionally assigned based on dominant gender norms.

Women should be depicted as being able to leverage opportunities and equal opportunities, being in positions of power and in professions that are not usually linked to women, such as professors, doctors, or heads of state. In addition to choosing images that show women in non-traditional and non-stereotypical roles and professions and ensuring equal numbers of women and men in our image selection, it is important to be mindful of subliminal messages about gender norms. For example, it is recommended to choose images in which postures, expressions, gestures, and clothing convey equal status and authority.

## How to avoid all-male panels (manels)

Manels are usually enabled by insufficient efforts to look at the world outside of familiar circles, limited understanding of the importance of diversity for the quality of the conversation, and unconscious bias. Regarding the representation of UNDP in any event and/or communication product, it is important to avoid the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in those avenues of information.

Panel discussions can be an essential source of raising awareness and disseminating information and eliminating or minimizing the voice of women can lead to further inequalities and the skewing of the information presented. The lack of inclusion of women on expert panels reflects how few women are in leadership positions in various fields.

When organizing or taking part in a panel discussion, you can:

- Ask who is in the panel and whether it is gender balanced
- Nominate a female leader and/or encourage women to take part in the panel
- Set a gender-balanced panel as an expectation for taking part
- Ensure women are visible & represented in the media/communications products

## References and additional reading material

1. [4 Tips for Ethical Communications on Violence against Women](#)
2. [Principles of Gender-Sensitive Communication- UNDP Gender Equality Seal initiative](#)
3. <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>
4. [Guidance for Avoiding All Male Panels](#)