



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

# LET'S SPEAK GENDER

**10 PRINCIPLES OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE  
COMMUNICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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## **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**

1



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**

2



# 50

# 50

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**

3



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.



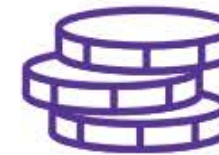
For example, stating that women in rural areas don't participate in the economic life of their communities is a biased statement because it erases their contributions in terms of unpaid domestic and care work.

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**

**4**



Education

Health

Tourism

Security

Finance

Transportation

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.



*feminine*



**masculine**

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.



green

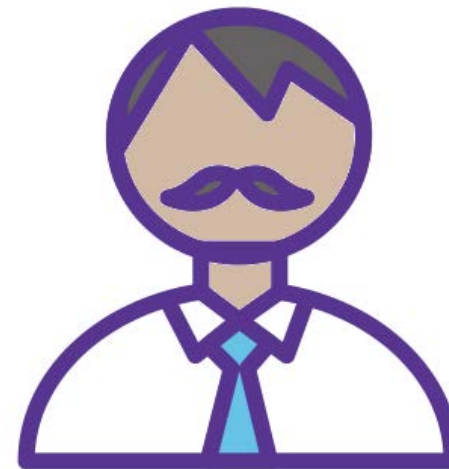
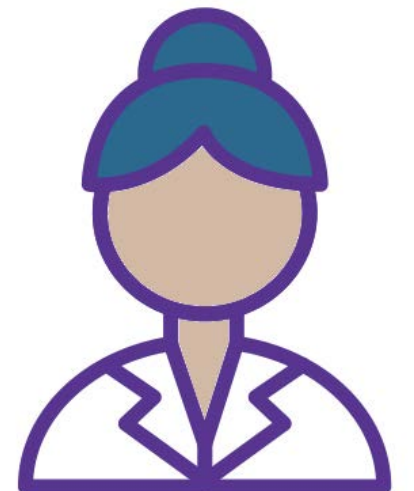
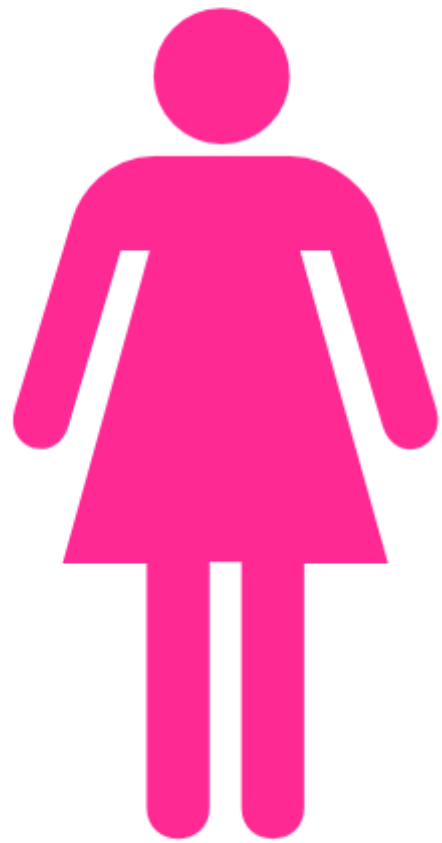
turquoise

purple

orange

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**

5



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.

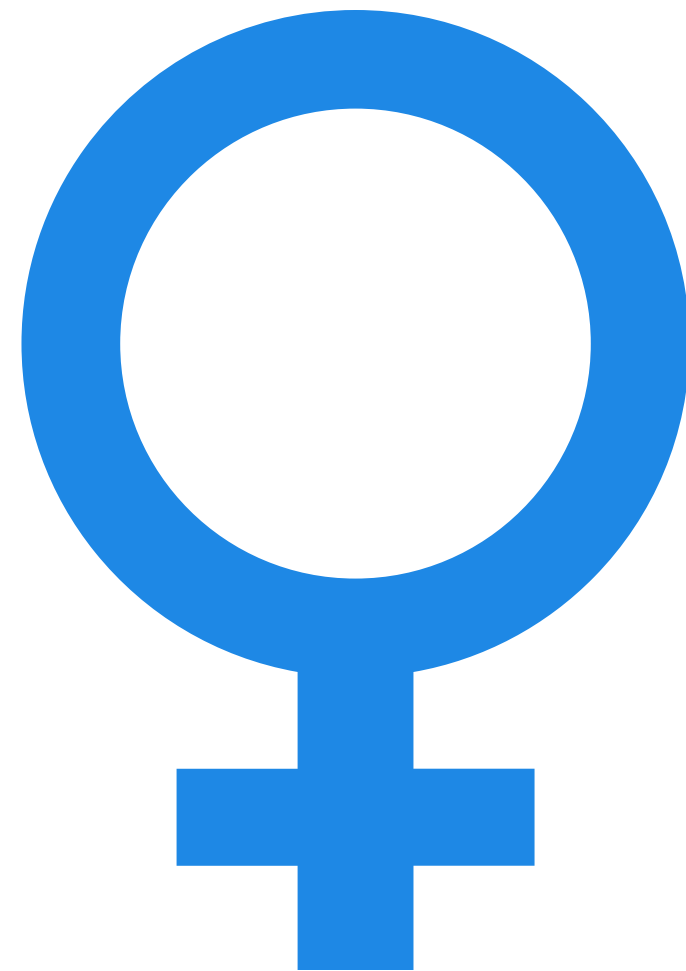
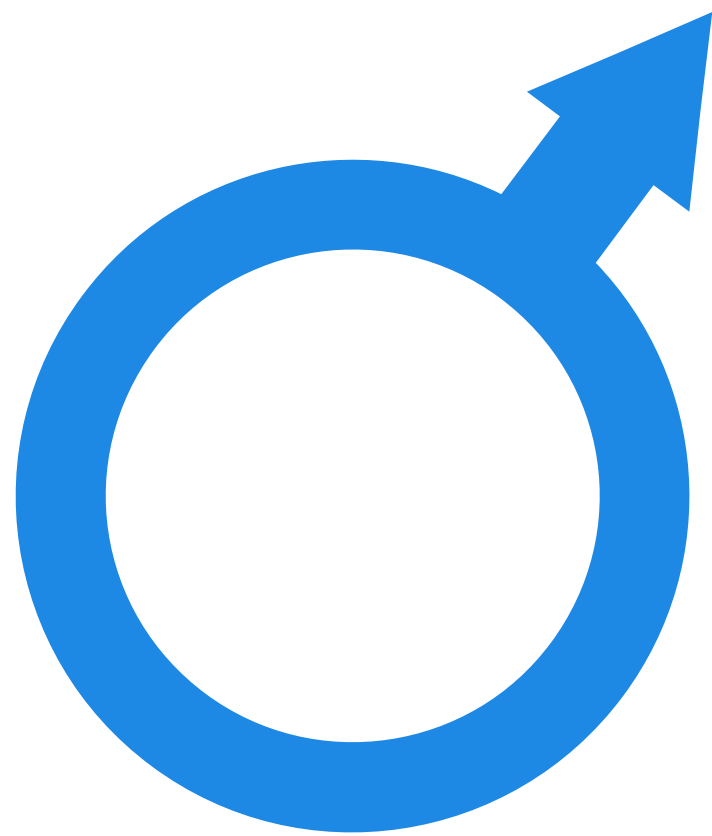




Good practice:  
Remember that any kind of discrimination  
has a gender dimension.

# USE GENDER- RESPONSIVE LANGUAGE

6



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



male  
parliamentarians

female  
farmers

male labour  
participation rate

the youngest  
woman to be a  
winemaker



men  
in parliament

women  
farmers

labour participation  
rate of men

brotherhood fatherland  
**motherland**  
mankind mother tongue

Common mistake:  
Do not use gendered generic terms.

mankind



humankind



fatherland

native land

mother tongue

native tongue

brotherhood

community, kinship

maternity leave  
paternity leave

parental leave

motherly

loving, nurturing



Good practice:  
Professions and job titles should be gender  
inclusive.

policeman  
policewoman



police officer



chairman  
chairwoman

chairperson

actor  
actress

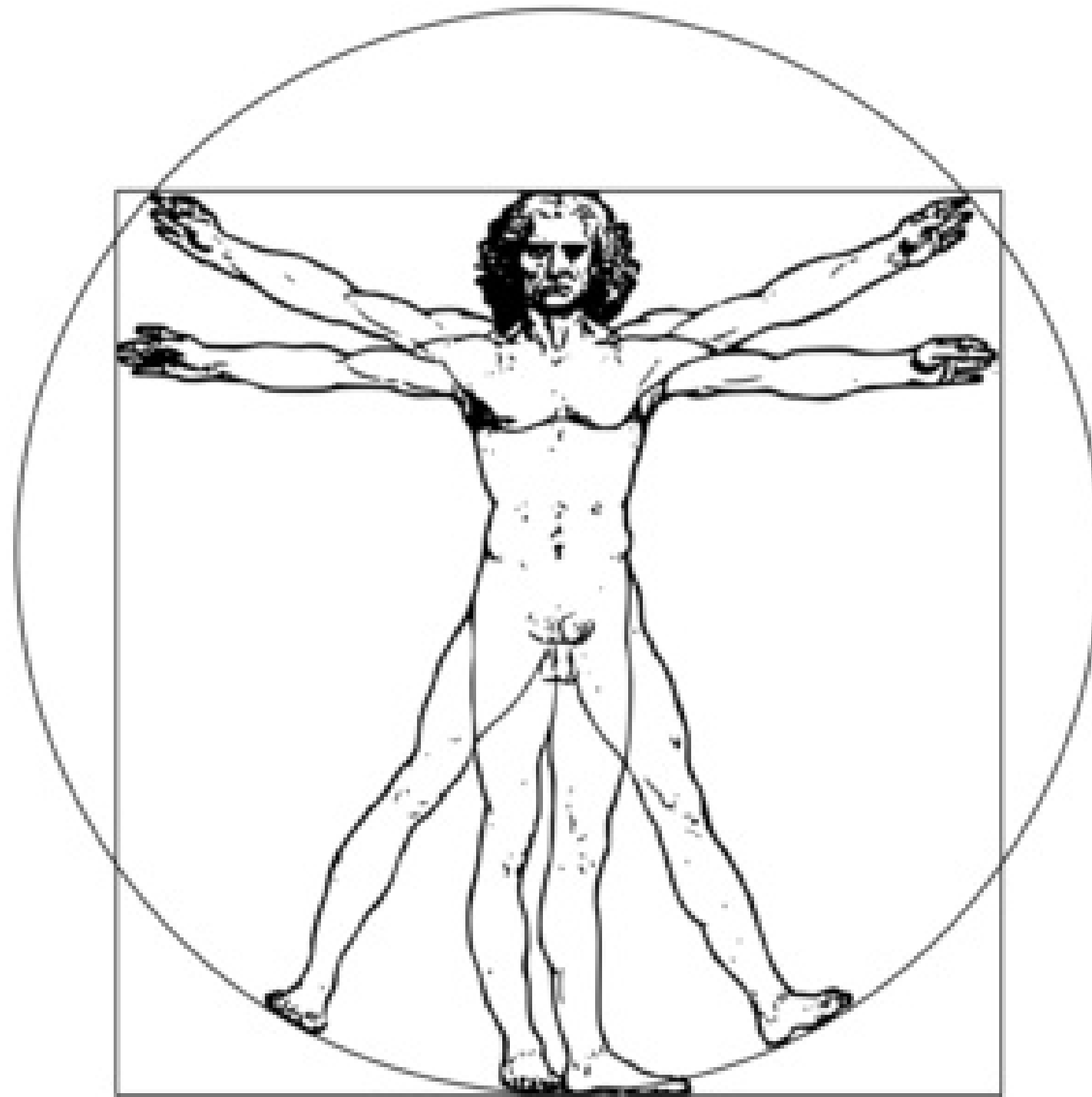
actor

cleaning lady

cleaner

male nurse

nurse



Good practice:  
Use singular 'they' instead of masculine  
pronouns to express neutrality.



an author and  
his audience



each doctor must  
take the test  
himself

the policeman  
will ask you to  
show him your ID

an author and  
their audience



each doctor must  
take the test  
themselves

the police officer  
will ask you to  
show them your ID

**DON'T VICTIMISE**

7

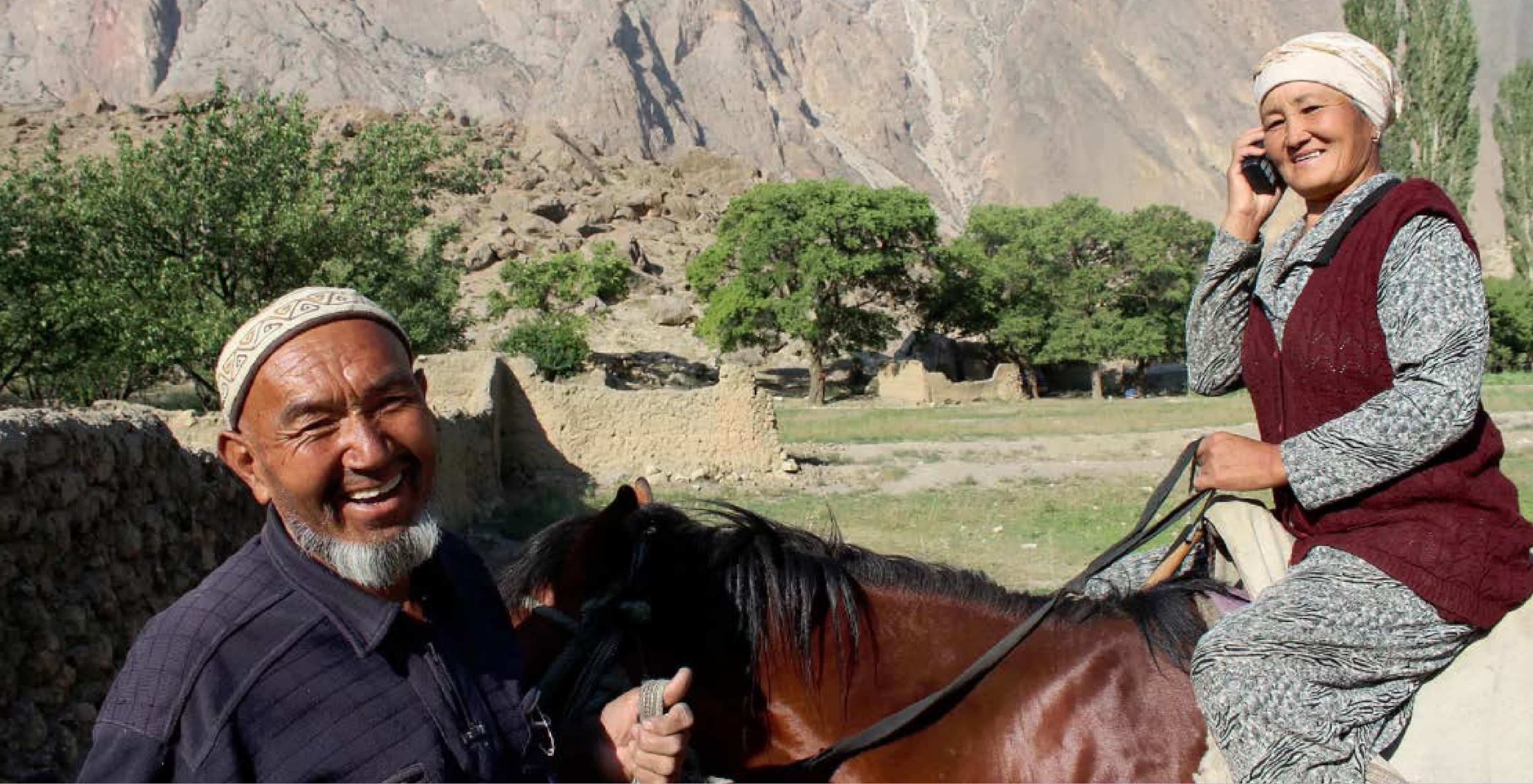


Common mistake:  
Don't erase people's abilities and power to  
find solutions to improve their lives.

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**

10



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**

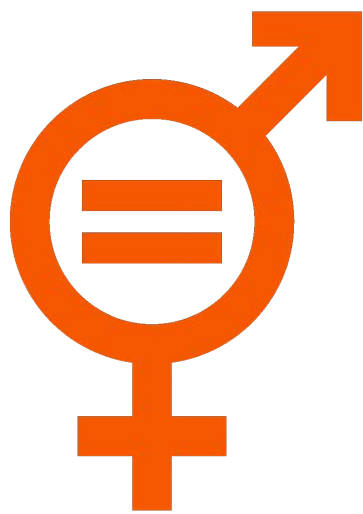
**9. PRESENT FACTS, NOT  
JUDGEMENTS**

**10. BE OPEN**

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