

Ten steps towards integrating gender equality into campaigns

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This is a guide for campaigners and communicators seeking to address gender equality and women's and girls' rights more effectively in their work.

Whether you're planning a campaign on a specific women's and girls' rights challenge or working on a broader issue and want to ensure that your campaign promotes gender equality, the ten steps will suggest how to use a gender equality and women's rights lens at every stage of campaign planning and delivery.

The ten steps

1. Choose an issue that will transform the lives of women and girls
2. Decide on the campaign aim using a gender lens
3. Do a gendered power mapping
4. Set your campaign objectives – strategic steps to fundamental change for women and girls
5. Develop a strategy that reflects gender equality values
6. Frame the message
7. Challenge stereotypes in communications work
8. Language matters
9. Anticipate the risks and be ready for them
10. Undertake gendered monitoring and evaluation

If you're new to campaigning and advocacy, we recommend reading the ten steps document alongside Womankind Worldwide's Advocacy Toolkit.¹ As we work through the different stages of preparing and executing a campaign, we have included references to the relevant sections. If you already have experience, and want to share additional ideas or examples of best practice, we would love to hear from you.

You may also want to use GADN's training pack 'Gender and Campaigning: Why and how to integrate gender equality into your campaigns' which provides materials for a one day training course on planning and developing campaigns. For more information see www.gadnetwork.org and to obtain a copy of the pack please email - info@gadnetwork.org.

1. Choose an issue that will transform the lives of women and girls

The first step to running a campaign that will really advance gender equality and women's rights is in identifying what problem you are seeking to overcome. Most NGOs will use a range of criteria to make this decision – some related to organisational priorities, some about the external environment – one of the first should be whether addressing this issue will **make a significant difference to the lives of marginalised women and girls.**

When considering this question, listen first and foremost to marginalised women and girls themselves, because they know better than anyone else what changes would most transform their lives. For example, when they have a safe space, women and girls will tell you time and time again that **ending violence** against them is key to unlocking other opportunities such as education, employment or even access to family planning and health services. Yet, for many years, eliminating gender-based violence wasn't a goal of international development programmes or campaigns and wasn't on the international agenda. This is starting to change now because women and girls affected by violence have been heard.

Using a gender lens in the choice of campaign topic doesn't necessarily mean choosing an issue explicitly about gender equality; it can mean choosing an issue which is a particular **priority for women and girls.** For example, issues related to care work, whether unpaid care in the home and community or the provision of public services, frequently move up the list of priorities if women and girls are specifically consulted. The provision of clean water and adequate sanitation facilities is another issue that will likely come to the fore if women's voices are heard.²

Gender equality or women's rights?

Some organisations use the concept of gender equality and focus on the processes and structures that reinforce inequalities between women/girls and men/boys. Many see these inequalities as a cost to society as a whole.

Others use a rights based approach recognising that women and girls are denied their human rights because they are women. Specific focus on promoting the rights of women and girls is therefore seen as necessary to redress the balance.

UN Women have some useful definitions on their website.³ The suggestions in this guide are relevant whichever concept your organisation decides to use.

2. Decide on the campaign aim using a gender lens

Once you have chosen the focus issue, you will need to define your ultimate campaign aim or goal. In selecting a solution you'll need to recognise that women and men face different barriers as a result of unequal gender relations, and use gender analysis in identifying what changes are needed.⁴

Whatever problem you're trying to solve, gender relations will certainly shape the outcome and often **gender analysis** will reveal that the root of the problem is unequal power relations between women and men. Gender analysis means looking at the differential impact on women and men, linked to their different roles, responsibilities, status and access to resources, and exploring why women and men experience problems differently. Once again, asking marginalised women what they think needs to change will provide vital insights into what your campaign aim should be.

Even if your organisation has decided on a goal or aim that is not specifically focussed on women or girls, you still need to take a gender perspective from the outset. Education is a priority for both girls and boys, but as efforts to advance Millennium Development Goal Two on universal primary education have shown, increased investment in schools and teachers is not enough. The **specific problems** faced by girls need to be addressed.⁵ These include having to miss lessons to collect water and firewood, the threat of violence on the way to or in school, and the lack of the appropriate sanitation at school premises.

When scoping their campaign on hunger, ActionAid discovered that women farmers were often unable to benefit from agricultural support programmes because they were too busy with other domestic duties or lacked money to travel to towns where support was being provided. This led the organisation to focus their campaign on increasing investment in small-holder women farmers, and to addressing the specific challenges that women farmers faced.⁶

3. Do a gendered power mapping

In all campaigns, mapping the way in which power will be used to hinder, or advance, your goals is vital. Your campaign should be based on a strong understanding of **who or what may get in the way**, without this you could fail to bring about real change. Power mapping is especially important for gender equality and women's rights campaigns, since gender is one of the key ways in which power is distributed in all societies, often based on 'accepted' gender roles.⁷

How power is exercised

Campaigns often focus on formal power, such as laws, public policies and resource allocations, but taking a women's rights perspective reminds us that **power isn't always visible**. Values, beliefs, attitudes and cultural norms can be immensely influential in maintaining the status quo, even causing people to accept their own powerlessness, or to blame themselves. For example, the payment of dowry from a bride's family to a bridegroom's has been illegal in India since 1963. However, **social norms** in favour of dowry payment are so strong – from politicians and judges who do not believe that it is in their interests to enforce the law, to families and individual women who continue to accept the practice – that more than fifty years later it remains widespread.

Where power is exercised

Campaigns tend to be about power exercised in public spaces – government offices, parliaments or the workplace. Bring in a gender analysis and it often becomes clear that power is also exercised within **the household and family**, and through sexual relationships. For example, women's entry into the labour market in South and East Asia has not necessarily led to their economic empowerment in cases where enduring unequal family power dynamics mean that women still have little or no control over how their income is spent.

Creating power

Power mapping also demonstrates the need to **create political space** for advocacy on gender equality and women's rights by putting the issues more firmly on national and international political agendas, and calling for greater accountability of governments and international institutions. Power mapping may also highlight the importance of what is sometimes referred to as 'the power within'. **Women's own sense of power** can be vital and is something that your campaign could aim to support, whether directly, by using your own resources, or indirectly by including in your campaign a call for governments to increase funding for women's rights organisations.⁸

4. Set your campaign objectives – strategic steps to fundamental change for women and girls

Achieving the overall campaign aim will take time, objectives are smaller stepping stones along the right path. Your power mapping will have identified the **obstacles** that could prevent progress towards your goals, and your objectives should seek to break these down, ensuring that the changes you call for really will bring about fundamental changes to women's and girls' lives if they are achieved.⁹

For example, if attitudes and **social norms** are going to be a major barrier, then your objectives should look, at least in part, at ways to change attitudes or to increase marginalised women's own sense of power. Addressing these barriers and carving out political space in which to raise gender equality and women's rights issues may be just as important as objectives that focus on changing laws, influencing public policy or increasing resource allocations.

In identifying objectives you may want to ensure that you meet women's **strategic interests** – bringing about long term change, as well as meeting more practical, immediate, needs. For example, international agencies have sought to reduce high levels of HIV infection among women in Africa by calling for HIV prevention technologies which women can use without relying on the co-operation of men, such as female condoms and microbicides. Increasing access to these commodities will be of great practical value to women at risk of HIV infection. However the most impactful and transformative campaigns will be those that tackle the unequal power relations which limit women's choices about when and how they have sex. The global Women Can't Wait campaign sought to persuade governments and donor agencies to address violence against women as an essential component of their HIV responses.¹⁰

Finally, sometimes NGOs run 'communications campaigns' to raise brand awareness or to align themselves with donor agendas. These campaigns generally tell a woman's or girl's story in order to highlight a wider problem, but don't tend to have a specific change goal. They can still be important in building support for gender equality and women's rights, but are generally **about women rather than for them** and can divert attention from other more challenging campaigns. They therefore require additional scrutiny to ensure that they are leading to long term change, rather than just using women's personal stories for other ends.

5. Develop a strategy that reflects gender equality values

When you have a clear sense of your problem, aim and objectives, the next step is to develop the strategy.¹¹ Remembering that deeply entrenched power relations lie behind gender inequality, your strategy should reflect and promote strong women's and girls' rights values. Here are some suggestions for how to align your values with the way you work:

- Ensure that your aims and objectives are genuinely **rooted in the views** of women and girls who will be affected by your campaign outcomes. Meaningfully engage these women and girls in your work, check they approve of your campaign, be accountable to them and protect them against any backlash that your campaign may cause.

- **Support and empower** marginalised women and girls and women's groups to speak for themselves. Invest in women campaigners and encourage them to take leading roles.
- If you have **access to power**, share it. Create opportunities for others to use your access by speaking at meetings, and distribute any information you gather with other women's rights campaigners.
- Include as a campaign objective **creating more political spaces** for gender equality and women's rights and ensuring broader access to power for civil society, especially women's groups.
- In **research**, recognise that the household is not a single unit and be aware that women may need space from men in order to talk freely, especially if discussing violence or family planning issues.¹²
- Discussing gender issues can be sensitive, especially around violence. **Protect participants** from retaliation and from trauma as a result of revisiting past experiences.¹³
- Work in **alliance** to increase your impact, and that of your partners.
- Root your campaign messages in work done by global women's rights movements and in **international and regional women's rights agreements** such as CEDAW.¹⁴

6. Frame the message

How you present your message is always important¹⁵, but particularly so when you are challenging ideology as well as specific policies, as the concepts you use can reinforce the status quo instead of challenging it.¹⁶ Of course it's important to start where your audience is at – but it's just as important to take them somewhere!

Some organisations use an '**instrumentalist**' frame – arguing that gender equality is desirable because it will promote economic growth, or that investing in women and girls is important as it will benefit the whole community. This strategy has certainly worked in terms of increasing the political constituency for gender equality, but it can be dangerous because it excludes the aspects of gender equality that don't contribute to economic growth or community development. Justice and rights arguments may seem harder to make, but without them campaigns can fail to win real converts to the cause. It is important that decision makers support women's equality as a matter of fundamental human rights, above and beyond what a woman might do for her community.

There are some common and predictable arguments against gender equality so it's worth **anticipating opposition**.¹⁷ For example, you may face accusations that by raising gender concerns, your organisation is inappropriately interfering in local

customs and norms. It's extremely powerful if you can point to national or international campaigns which are led by women activists from the Global South.¹⁸ Framing your campaign messages around regional and international agreements will also help, particularly around CEDAW¹⁹ which covers most areas of gender equality and women's rights and has been agreed by most countries.

When framing messages, it's useful to remember that campaigners move along an **advocacy continuum**²⁰ from ignored-opposed-misunderstood-absorbed-heard, then finally to acted-upon. Where you are on that continuum should influence your strategy and messaging. In the UK for example gender equality and women's rights advocates are at a difficult stage between absorbed and heard, where decision makers, and many NGOs, frequently talk about women and girls but don't always understand gender relations or what really needs to be done. Gender equality and women's rights are firmly on the agenda and UK NGOs have to acknowledge this, while at the same time pushing for a deeper understanding of what is needed.

7. Challenge stereotypes in communications work

Many agencies now use women and girls in the majority of their case studies, but in itself this is not enough to challenge the status quo and sometimes it can reinforce stereotypes. What matters is **how** women and girls are represented and the way that you use their personal stories and images.²¹

Ensuring women's participation on panels and other public events makes a statement, demonstrating that women are capable of senior roles and revealing, by contrast, how often they are excluded. Also, women can often (although not always) bring a different perspective to the discussion. It is essential that women representatives are strong speakers, engaging and knowledgeable on the subject, or their involvement can appear tokenistic. Even more important is to think about how to facilitate marginalised women to **speak for themselves**. This is a valuable way to advance your objectives around increasing political spaces or empowering marginalised women, but your speakers must be well prepared and briefed or the experience can be disempowering.

In terms of **images and case studies**, women are too often pitied as victims or alternatively idealised as heroes. Both are problematic. Presenting mothers as heroes can be particularly difficult as it undermines women's rights by suggesting that they are happy with their load. Try to present a more honest and rounded picture. Stereotypes of women as carers are also presented again and again. Be creative - you could try some images of men in non-traditional roles and may find that this is inspirational to your audience. Also think about how you describe women and particularly about whether you're using gendered adjectives (dainty and bossy are just two, but there are

lots!). Remember too to avoid descriptions which unnecessarily focus on a woman's physical appearance, how she dresses or the way that she keeps her home.

How you **collect case studies** is also important. A story belongs to someone – treat it with respect rather than as a commodity for your campaign. Try to get people's informed permission, particularly around use of their image and names. Where possible, you should always share the final product with those whose stories you have collected, and should communicate what impact the campaign which features their story has had. Ideally you should have an organisational policy which includes this as part of your sign-off procedure.

8. Language matters

Language is also a powerful tool and one that all too often embodies dominant ideologies. For example, while often used in materials about women, the term “female headed households” actually implies that men are normally the head of the household.

Campaigners can **challenge gender norms** through the words and expressions that they use in their publications and materials. For example, by saying “women and men” instead of “men and women”, you are confronting conceptions of men as natural leaders. You can also make a statement by reclaiming gendered terms like “mankind” and by substituting words and expressions which disassociate women from working – man hours, manning the desk, chairman, craftsmen, – with more neutral language (staff hours or chairperson) or with terms like craftswoman or women at work that explicitly acknowledge women's contribution. Avoid titles that are patronising or diminishing, such as “lady doctor”, “lady lawyer”.

Language can also be important when referring to or **describing relationships**. When we talk about “a farmer and his wife” we are reinforcing conceptions of the male as the dominant actor, and negating any work that women may do. Remember that not long ago it was still acceptable to use ‘he’ to mean ‘he and she’, and it was normal for a woman married to a man named Peter Jones to be referred to as ‘Mrs Peter Jones’. By being challenging in the terms that you use, you can help to ensure that sexist language from this era, and the ideas that underpin it, will be unacceptable in twenty years' time.

When discussing **violence against women and girls**, the words and expressions we use can take on a particularly political quality. For example the term “human rights defender” gives a particular gravitas to the work of women's rights activists. Campaigners are also becoming increasingly determined to talk about “sexual harassment” when describing behaviours which are often dismissed as harmless but which in fact are used to assert male dominance. The term “survivor”, rather than

victim, can be an empowering one when referring to women or girls who have experienced violence.

9. Anticipate the risks and be ready for them

When an organisation decides to campaign on women's rights and gender equality, it is committing not just to a single campaign but to a new way of thinking, which recognises women and men as equals and actively challenges longstanding power relations. Naturally, taking this step comes with risks – both for those on the frontline of your campaign and for your organisation.

Activists and members of women's rights campaigns may be exposed to violence or to other abuse as a result of backlash from their opponents. In the worst cases, for example in Afghanistan, women human rights defenders have been murdered. In many other settings, they are continually threatened and harassed. In the UK women activists are increasingly on the receiving end of vitriol, sexist insults and even rape and murder threats from online trolls. NGOs should **assess these risks** before they go public on women's rights and gender equality, and prepare for them by putting appropriate security measures in place.

Critically, organisations must **anticipate any backlash** against campaign partners or beneficiaries in the global south. Guaranteeing anonymity for women or girls whose personal stories appear in your campaign materials is vital, especially today in the digital age where these could be viewed from anywhere in the world. As a rule, never campaign about a specific organisation or group of women without their full consent, and maintain regular contact.

Alongside security risks, organisations which decide to work on women's rights and gender equality can also face reputational threats if they do not 'walk the talk' themselves. Undertaking a **gender audit** can be a useful step before you start campaigning in order to ensure that your organisational practices reflect the values your campaign promotes. Developing and implementing strong policies on gender discrimination is important, as are adopting approaches that support parents and carers, and foster women's leadership. Having balanced gender representation in senior posts won't necessarily help women's rights work, but having mostly male decision makers sends a strong adverse message.

While your campaigns or research may communicate gender issues thoughtfully, this could be undermined by images used by another part of the organisation, for example in fundraising materials. **Consistency** is important and to deliver this, ensuring strong support for women's rights across your organisation, including at senior management level, is key. One danger is that gender equality is supposedly 'mainstreamed' throughout an organisation but with nobody fully responsible or resourced to support it.

Many NGOs have found that a combination of ‘standalone’ teams and mainstreaming works best in advocacy work. You can find more information on how to ‘mainstream’ gender effectively on the GADN website.²²

Gender expertise is critical, alongside commitment. Just because someone is interested in feminism doesn’t mean they are experienced in gender and development work. Agencies need to make sure they have sufficient experts on gender analysis and that staff working on gender are senior enough to make a difference. In turn you may then need to provide tools, resources and examples to your colleagues, rather than just berating them if they get things wrong. GADN’s training pack ‘Gender and Campaigning: Why and how to integrate gender equality into your campaigns’ can be useful in doing so.²³

10. Undertake gendered monitoring and evaluation

Using a gender lens is just as important in monitoring and evaluation as in planning.²⁴ A good starting point for all NGOs is to disaggregate data by sex when measuring their impact. Further tips include:

- As with other research, ensure that interviews and data collection do not take place within mixed households or groups, especially if they relate to sensitive or taboo issues.
- Include gender equality and women’s rights outcomes and indicators in performance monitoring frameworks and consider the different positive and negative impacts of progress on women and men.
- The terms of reference for any evaluation should include considering the impact of your advocacy on women and men, in terms of both process and outcomes.
- Ensure teams carrying out monitoring and evaluation have gender expertise, or know how to fill the gap.

Campaigns that target gender relations and challenge invisible power and social norms can be particularly difficult to monitor and evaluate. This should not deter you; remember that indicators should follow, not lead, your objectives. After all, not everything that counts can be counted.²⁵

And finally...

Be ready – because if your campaign does effectively challenge the basis of power you will be resisted. Don’t back down. See this as a sign of success and hold your nerve!

Good luck

¹ Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit* is available at:

<http://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-resources/womens-rights-advocacy-toolkit/>

² Disaggregation by gender of responses to the My World survey revealed this difference:

<http://www.dataset.myworld2015.org/>

³ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

⁴ See p.29 'Planning advocacy' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit* *op cit*

⁵ Global Campaign for Education and Results Education Fund (2011). *Make it right: Ending the crisis in girls' education* http://www.campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/makeitright/MakeItRight_Report_07.pdf.

⁶ ActionAid (2011). *What women farmers need: a blueprint for action*

http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/the_blue_print_for_women_farmers.pdf

⁷ See p.13 'Understanding power' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*.

⁸ See p.106 'Implementation' *ibid*.

⁹ See p.43 in 'Planning advocacy' *ibid*

¹⁰ Women Won't Wait (2007). *Show us the money: is violence against women on the HIV&AIDS donor agenda?* Available at: <http://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=31436&type=Document>.

¹¹ See p.67 'Strategy and Planning' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*.

¹² See p.87 'Implementation' *ibid*

¹³ For more information, see chapter two 'Ethical considerations for researching violence against women' in *A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*, WHO, available at:

http://www.path.org/publications/files/GBV_rvaw_ch2.pdf

¹⁴ Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

¹⁵ See p.69 'Strategy and Planning' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*.

¹⁶ A recent Bond paper highlighted the importance of this. See *Finding Frames: New ways to engage the UK public in global poverty*, available at:

<http://www.findingframes.org/Finding%20Frames%20New%20ways%20to%20engage%20the%20UK%20public%20in%20global%20poverty%20Bond%202011.pdf>

¹⁷ See p..71 'Strategy and Planning' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*.

¹⁸ For information on current campaigns see <http://www.awid.org/>

¹⁹ See p.131 in 'International Processes and Institutions' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*.

²⁰ See p.61 'Strategy and Planning' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*

²¹ See p.90 'Implementation' *ibid*

²² See www.gadnetwork.org

²³ See www.gadnetwork.org or contact info@gadnetwork.org.

²⁴ See p.80 in 'Strategy and Planning' in Womankind Worldwide's *Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit*, *op cit*

²⁵ The Overseas Development Institute demonstrated that measuring changes in attitudes is feasible. See for example: <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/8257-measuring-womens-empowerment-social-transformation-post-2015-agenda>

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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