



# Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

## 8 Key Gender Concepts

**U**nderstanding gender and the key concepts is critical to being able to clearly articulate gender. It will help you avoid stumbling through concepts when you are talking in front of an audience, writing, debating or being interviewed by the press. If you know what you are talking about, say it with confidence and are able to show you are knowledgeable about it by relating it to a variety of issues, you will be taken seriously.

It's a good idea to go through the gender concepts outlined below regularly. Read again and again and make sure you understand them. Practice by explaining to a friend, colleague or family what the terms mean and have them ask questions to clarify. Their questions will help you see where you need to be more clear. From your knowledge and reading of issues and events, use practical examples to illustrate the concepts.

**PATRIARCHY** is the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance against women and children in families and the extension of this dominance against women in society. Patriarchal sites where men have the power include all relevant institutions of society (legal, economic, religious, family, culture, etc). Patriarchy institutionalizes male privileges in these same major institutions and is based on the control of women's productive and reproductive abilities.

The heterosexual family is the oldest model of patriarchy and is the place that expresses the worst forms of resistance.

**SEXISM** is the ideology of male supremacy. It allows men to believe that they are needed for the existence of women, to protect women and to give them identity.

Cultural sexism leads to exclusionary practices (that keep women from participating in development), i.e. giving preference to boys for education.

The **PUBLIC** is an exclusionary space where men control and distribute the material and social resources (wealth, power, status, commodities) and women are excluded. One method of excluding women from the Public is to make it into a dangerous place where they may face physical or verbal violence, legal exclusion, economic marginalization and humiliation. An example is harassment of women in public places such as public transport terminuses or football stadiums.

The **PRIVATE** is also an exclusionary space where men are considered as the head of the family, due to the privatization of women's bodies, with all decision-making powers conferred upon him and thus the state does not interfere. An example is marital rape which is not acknowledged or legislated against in most countries.

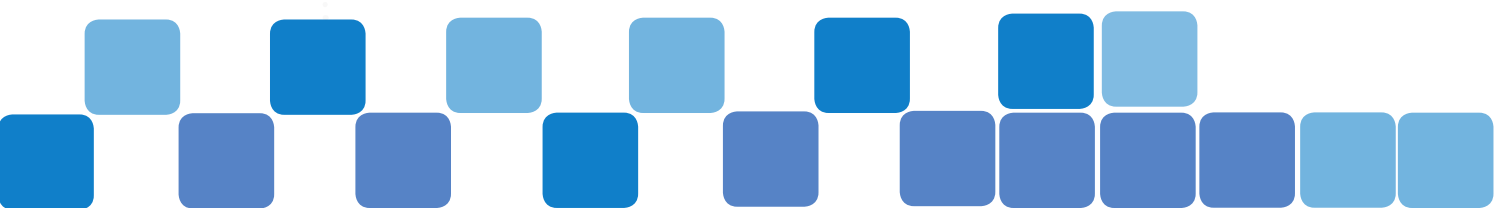
**DEVELOPMENT** is the material AND social redistribution of resources AND power.

A **STEREOTYPE** is a widely held but oversimplified belief, image or idea about a person, race, group, sex or thing. For example, a widely held stereotype is related to the idea of "good" and "bad" women or girls, where a "good woman" may be seen as a married woman while a single mother or divorced woman is considered as a "bad woman". Backlash from society against gender equality often comes in the form of accusations that gender activists "are just bitter divorced women", for example.

**GENDER** is the social construction of men's and women's roles in a given culture or location. Gender roles are distinguished from sex roles, which are biologically determined.

**GENDER EQUALITY** is where all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices.

Gender equality means that the different



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• behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

• **GENDER EQUITY** refers to fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

• In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women. Hence, both gender equity and equality must be pursued in a

complementary manner where gender equality is the ultimate goal. In other words, in order to achieve gender equality, it is often necessary to pursue gender equity measures.

**GENDER MAINSTREAMING** is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION** refers to policies that take into account race, ethnicity, or gender to promote equal opportunity and to redress historical disadvantages resulting from discrimination.