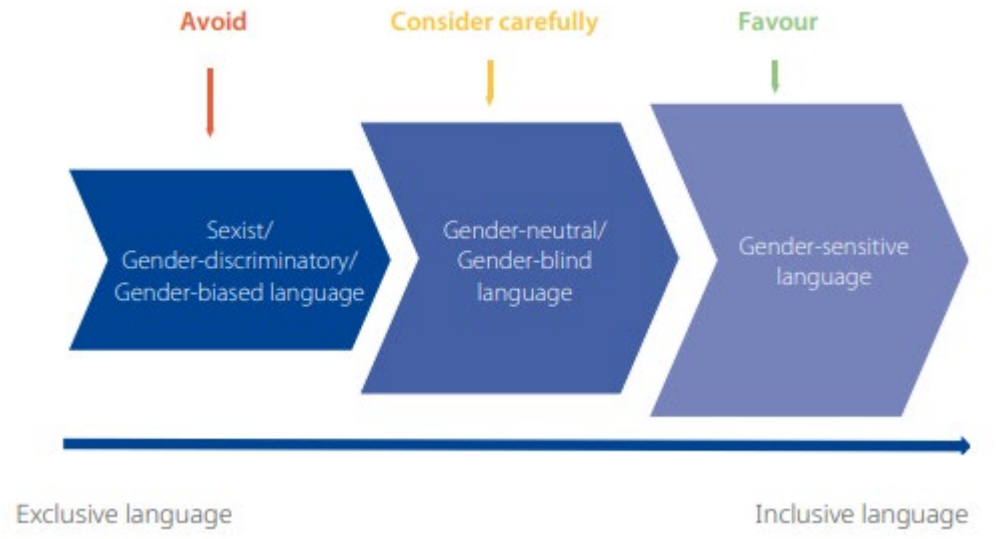
External Communications

Gender and Communication

Gender plays an instrumental role in shaping communications, dictating not only our perception of the world but also influencing societal norms, including the nuanced dynamics of gender relations. Language is a powerful tool that can either foster gender equity, challenge entrenched stereotypes, or inadvertently perpetuate them. It is capable of either promoting harmony and perceived equity between genders or inadvertently bolstering gender stereotypes. As such, it becomes imperative to employ gender-sensitive and inclusive language in all external communications that accurately portrays the relationships between different genders. In general, we should avoid, wherever possible, explicit or implicit reference to a single gender. Practitioners in development must prioritize gender-responsive communication, a vital skill that necessitates portraying all genders - women, men, and others - equitably, respectfully, and fairly in all communications.

Key Terminologies to be Aware of

There are many ways to present gender through language and in communications. Below is the inclusivity scale in language:



Source: European Commission (2019)

Gender-sensitive language is synonymous with promoting gender equity. Achieving gender parity in communication occurs when individuals of all gender identities - including those who do not adhere to the binary gender structure - are recognized and spoken about with equal regard, dignity, and respect. This can be facilitated through various methods, including circumventing language that directly or indirectly singles out one gender, and adopting inclusive alternatives that embody gender-sensitive and inclusive vernacular.

Example: *The Drones for Health program has catalyzed local men and women, including those who identify outside of the binary gender spectrum, to collaboratively innovate and enhance medical deliveries in remote regions, emphasizing equitable participation and leadership opportunities for all.*

Gender-neutral language: This type of language is inclusive, making no distinctions or references to either women or men. It is often referred to as gender-blind language, including all individuals without gender-specific mentions.

Example: *The Drones for Health program has empowered community members to lead the innovation of medical deliveries in remote areas.*

We recommend that you aim to favor the most inclusive form of language: gender-sensitive language. In certain contexts it may also be acceptable to use gender-neutral language. Use gender-sensitive language to accurately reflect and address the distinct roles and experiences of different genders. Only use neutral terms when they are the most appropriate choice for the context, ensuring that the nuances of gender roles and impacts aren't diluted. It's about striking the right balance between inclusivity and specificity.

Gender-biased language is the contrast of gender-sensitive communication. It involves terms, expressions, and other linguistic characteristics that encourage stereotypes, or belittle or overlook individuals of any gender. In its most severe form, it neglects to regard all genders as possessing equal worth, dignity, integrity, and respect.

Example: *The Drones for Health program has enabled local men to take charge and spearhead the advancement of medical deliveries in remote villages.*

Deciding When to Highlight Gender

When deciding to use gender-neutral or gender-sensitive language, consider the following guidelines to ensure appropriate and inclusive communication:

1. Does bringing up gender illuminate critical facets of the topic under discussion? If it does, employ gender-sensitive language; if it doesn't, gender-neutral language may be more fitting.
2. Is your reference directed at the population at large or a specific demographic group? For broader references, gender-neutral language might be appropriate in several instances. However, when discussing a particular group, integrating a gender perspective can be pertinent. Refrain from utilizing gender-specific pronouns like he/she in written content. Such usage can inadvertently omit certain individuals. While "S/he" might be suitable for some communications, it can be challenging for public messages. Hence, it's preferable to sidestep it.
3. Is your goal to inclusively represent individuals with non-binary gender identities? In such cases, you might choose gender-neutral language, often using plural third-person pronouns like "they" and "them". Always be intentional with your choice. If a program targets a particular gender for specific reasons, it's okay to state that. However, it's essential to ensure that such references don't inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes or biases.

Guidelines for Written Communications

- Ensure that women and men are equally represented

- Showcase both men and women equally in examples, testimonials, images, or case studies.
- Feature men and women in unconventional roles, breaking stereotypes and gender norms.

- Use inclusive pronouns
  - Avoid gender-specific pronouns unless referencing a specific individual.
  - Prefer 'they' or 'them' to promote nonbinary language usage.

Gender biased	Gender sensitive
When a nurse arrives at the village, she should start by organizing a community meeting.	When healthcare professionals arrive at the village, they should start by organizing a community meeting.
Mothers should take care of their children's health.	Parents or Families should take care of their children's health.

- Be conscious of the use of generic terms
  - Opt for inclusive terms that embrace both genders, e.g., "humanity" instead of "mankind".

Dated language	Modern term
businessman, business woman	business executive, office worker
chairman, chairwoman	chair, chairperson
the common/ordinary man	the average person
Dear Mrs. Smith, Dear Miss Smith,	Dear Ms. Smith, (Mrs. = married woman; Miss = unmarried woman; Ms. = married or unmarried; it's irrelevant.)
Dear Sir, (for an unknown recipient)	Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Editor, Dear Human Resources Officer, To whom it may concern,
fireman	fire fighter
to man the phones, to man the helpdesk	to answer the phones, to staff the helpdesk
manageress, authoress, air hostess, actress	manager (neutral term for both men and women), author, flight attendant, actor
mankind, womankind	humankind, humanity, human race

Source: UN Today

- Promote gender equity through titles and forms of address
  - Use neutral titles like "Ms.", "Professor", or "Dr." to respectfully address or reference women.
  - Steer clear of defining women by their marital status, unless explicitly preferred.
- Challenge Gender Stereotypes

- Disregard representations that pigeonhole genders into specific roles or occupations.

Gender biased	Gender sensitive
In the rural communities we serve, most women can't aspire to be more than caregivers and lack the training to take on technical roles in the health sector.	In the communities VillageReach serves, we are empowering individuals, including women, with the training and resources to excel in technical roles within the health sector, breaking traditional gender roles and nurturing a new wave of diverse healthcare professionals.
VillageReach's new initiative focuses on mothers, as they are primarily responsible for the healthcare of their children.	VillageReach's new initiative encourages both fathers and mothers to actively participate in the healthcare decisions for their children, fostering a more inclusive and collaborative approach to family health and well-being.

- Avoid language that portrays women as passive recipients of aid and craft your message to represent women as agents of change
    - Craft stories highlighting active roles and significant contributions of women in their communities.
    - *Before: When scaled nationally, Health Centre by Phone has the opportunity to make a more significant difference in the lives of women and children in rural areas in Malawi and help the country reach its maternal and child health goals.*
    - *After: When scaled nationally, Health Centre by Phone empowers women in rural Malawi to actively contribute to and steer improvements in maternal and child health, aiding the country in achieving its health objectives for mothers and children.*
- Consider intersectionality
    - Recognize the intersections of gender with factors like race, ethnicity, and age in your content.
- Avoid patronizing statements and sexualizing or objectifying women through images
    - Eliminate language that indirectly blames women for the challenges they encounter.
    - Avoid images that objectify or sexualize women, and refrain from using victimizing language.

Gender biased	Gender sensitive
In our latest project, we are trying to educate rural women, who typically lack awareness about health and hygiene practices.	Through our latest project, we are empowering rural communities by facilitating access to health and hygiene education, fostering informed and conscious choices for women and their families.

- Use impactful Storytelling
    - Use narratives that resonate with your audience, showing the positive impacts on communities.

Why Storytelling Matters

Nothing is perhaps more powerful and moving than a compelling story. Stories have the power to activate:

EMPATHY →
Stories activate empathy and action. Scientific research shows that stories help stimulate neurological centers that help us intuit other people's thoughts and feelings.

COOPERATION →
Stories bring us together and foster cooperation. Hearing a character-driven story allows us to see the ways our lives are similar to each other and encourages us to work together.

CONNECTION →
Stories can draw your audiences into the work in ways that nothing else will. For example, talking about the impact of social injustices on young people of color and proposing specific policy solutions will be more powerful when we hear about the impact and influence directly from you.

SHOWING (NOT TELLING) →
Stories allow you to show what you do, what challenges you face and what actions need to be taken to build healthy, thriving communities. Stories help you convey the details of your efforts in a way that draws in your audiences and holds their attention.

CLARITY →
Stories help cut through the noise to get at the heart of an issue. By bringing community voices and experiences to life, stories clarify how you approach problems and work toward solutions.

MEMORABLE RESONANCE →
Stories help us remember. When we hear powerful stories, instead of only data or statistics, we are more likely to remember what we hear.



Source: APHA

- Include quotes from women and men
    - Incorporate quotes from both women and men as authorities and experts in your stories.



Source: UNDP

Audiovisual Representation

- Depict both women and men actively engaged in various facets of community life – be it at home, within educational institutions, at workplaces, or during community gatherings.
- Select visuals where women and men are embracing roles and professions that defy traditional norms - spotlight women steering business ventures and spearheading community initiatives, or men nurturing families and contributing to community care.
- In composing these narratives, emphasize intersectionality, ensuring stories capture the confluence of multiple identities — from racial and ethnic backgrounds to cultural nuances and abilities. Ensure the representation of individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, cultural identities, and abilities. As you highlight the narratives of your beneficiaries, incorporate visuals that genuinely represent the local ambiance and community fabric where VillageReach operates.
- Consistently feature women taking up authoritative and influential positions, steering conversations and leading initiatives.
- Ensure that the depicted clothing and appearance align with the respective contexts.
- Pay attention to the subtle details such as posture, facial expressions, gestures, and positioning within visuals to communicate a message of balance, equal stature, and authority. Steer clear of imagery that situates men in dominant positions or restricts women to passive roles.

Sources

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