

Gender Equality: CIDSE's Understanding and Definition

Standing for the equal dignity of women and men

CIDSE discussion paper, December 2014

Introduction

*So God created humankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
Male and female he created them.
Genesis 1:27*

This note aims at providing a definition of the concept of *gender* on the one hand, and of *gender equality*¹ on the other hand, from the perspective of CIDSE and in the context of our development cooperation work. Our thinking is fully inspired by the values of Catholic Social Teaching rooted in the centrality of human dignity, the hopes and experiences of poor communities. Our mission is to promote social justice and global solidarity by challenging global structural injustices and addressing the root causes of poverty and injustice. Our definition leans upon CIDSE Member Organisations' (MOs) understanding, approaches and policy positions and strategies on gender and gender equality. As Catholic development organisations engaged in working with and lobbying international and regional multilateral institutions in alliance with other development organisations - faith-based or secular - we also share and are supportive of some of the language and definitions used in the international arena.

Our foundations

Catholic Social Teaching is founded on respect for the dignity of mankind and the common good. The implementation of these principles requires that men and women have the opportunity to fully exercise all of their human rights. Pope Francis "demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded."² From a development perspective, it is clearly understood that poverty eradication and social justice cannot be achieved without addressing the issues of gender equality and equity, justice and human rights for both women and men³. This equal dignity of woman and man⁴ is endowed with rights that are universal, inviolable, inalienable and indivisible for each person, woman and man, as subjects of these rights⁵.

¹ Concerning the translation into other languages of "gender" and "gender equality", please see section on linguistic considerations.

² *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 104.

³ CIDSE Strategic Framework (SF) 2010-2015.

⁴ On the dignity of the human person, see *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 12 and on equal dignity of woman and man, see GS 29, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁵ See *Pacem in Terris*, www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html.

Dignity is intrinsically related to the human condition. It is brought to light in personal, social and political life. The conditions for the fulfilment of human dignity can be called human rights, and the fulfilment of human rights is an expression of human dignity. However, human dignity is not related merely to the assertion of individual rights, but also to the quest for the common good. In the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching, equal dignity also implies an integral human development that “helps to promote the advancement of all men and of the whole man”⁶ and refers to authentic development as spelled out in *Populorum Progressio* (PP 14) and *Caritas in Veritate* (CV 18).

A CIDSE definition of gender and gender equality

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female;

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-28

It is important to underline that while a *gender approach* opens the doors for a stronger analysis and understanding of the inequalities between women and men that cross cut all development areas (food security, climate change, economy, etc), **this is by no means a concept that attempts to erase or deny the biological differences between women and men**⁷. It rather focuses on the social fabric that produces gender based inequalities and questions the roles and activities seen as “natural” depending on whether one is born male or female. CIDSE and its MOs fully recognize that the biological differences that characterize women and men differentiate them and that they are a manifestation of their complementarity.

For example, according to FAO (2008), women comprise, on average, 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Women own, on average, 19 percent of landholdings, significantly less than men in every region of the world.

In rural areas of developing countries women are less likely than men to work in wage employment. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent.

Ensuring that women have the same access to agricultural resources as their male counterparts could lift 100 to 150 million people out of hunger.

Source: FAO, "Gender Equality", 2008

www.fao.org/docrep/014/am859e/am859e10.pdf

Biologically different and complementary, but equal in dignity and rights

However, these biological differences cannot mean the subordination or discrimination of one sex over the other, as much as they cannot justify the widespread domination of men over women. CIDSE and its MOs strive to re-establish the power balance and justice between women and men.

For CIDSE and its member organisations, the *gender* concept refers to the socially constructed roles, attributes, activities and opportunities that a given society considers appropriate for women and men, learned through socialization processes and institutionalized through education, political and economic systems, as well as legislation, culture, tradition and religion. It relates to the stereotypes that shape and condition the relations between women and men and their roles in society, affecting their access to resources, health, education and decision-making.

⁶ See *Caritas in Veritate* (CV 18), www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.

⁷ CAFOD, “Promoting Gender Equality: CAFOD’s policy and strategy 2010-2013”. Trócaire, “Promoting Gender Equality. Trócaire’s policy and strategy 2009-2014”. Fastenopfer, “gender and gender mainstreaming”, Policy statement. This understanding is also shared by UN Women: “[Gender] Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same” www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm.

These roles and stereotypes vary between and within societies and cultures, and over time and history. In utilizing a gender approach the focus is not on individual women and men but on the system which determines gender roles/responsibilities, particularly in relation to access to and control over resources, opportunities and decision making potentials.⁸ The purpose of this approach is to end inequalities between men and women based on discrimination and social injustice.

Gender equality engages women as well as men

Gender equality refers to the equal enjoyment by women and men, girls and boys of rights, responsibilities, opportunities and resources. *Gender equity* means fairness of and equal treatment for women and men according to their respective needs considered as equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. It is a means to achieve the goal of equality.

Gender equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female⁹. *Gender equality* is not a women's issue only: it should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development. Equality can only be achieved if it addresses areas such as the care economy¹⁰, the economic system, social policies, international development cooperation, etc. In adopting the 1948 Universal Human Rights Declaration, States have committed to ensure equality.

Centrality of a gender equality approach in CIDSE's work for development and social justice

As a network of Catholic organisations inspired by Christian faith, our commitment to work for and in partnership with the communities we serve is based and motivated by our option for the poor and our strong commitment to social justice as enshrined in the Second Vatican Council.

In that sense, evidence shows that **poverty is not gender blind**¹¹. The *feminization of poverty* has multiple reasons that range from historical, cultural and institutional causes to the political and economic ones. For example, our *economic system based on GDP growth* does not recognize the productive and reproductive work¹² of women that is often hidden but nonetheless has a share in contributing to the development and reproduction of our societies. The *transmission of HIV* affects a higher percentage of women and it is acknowledged and evidenced that sexual and gender based violence is both a driver and a consequence of HIV among women. *Domestic violence against women* is the most prevalent form of gender based violence but is not often recognized as a human right abuse.

Gender equality is essential for women and men to realize their fundamental human rights and their human dignity. **Promoting women's rights and gender equality is a pre-requisite for poverty alleviation, human development, human well being, justice and dignity, and requires a commitment to challenging and transformative approaches.**

⁸ UN Women, "Important concepts underlying gender mainstreaming", www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf.

⁹ See references in footnote 3.

¹⁰ « Across the world, it is a cultural given that women are the primary care-givers, yet the value and moral imperatives of care work are undervalued, unrecorded and invisible in most societies.», Center of Concern, www.coc.org/care-economy.

¹¹ In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis denounces "Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights" (n°212).

¹² Reproductive work refers to the care and maintenance of the household and its members - including bearing and caring for children, preparing food, collecting water and fuel, shopping, housekeeping and family health care. Although reproductive work is crucial to human survival, it is seldom considered 'real work'. In poor communities, reproductive work is usually labour intensive and time consuming. It is almost always the responsibility of women and girls, www.greenstone.org/greenstone3/nzdl;jsessionid=153115D4AC&hellip.

In empowering women and men with our work, both women and men empower themselves individually and collectively to assert their rights, to secure their basic needs, to fight against unjust power structures and to participate actively in political, cultural and economic life in the pursuit of the common good.

Conclusion

“An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.”¹³ We believe that by adopting a common and clear language, not only are we contributing to addressing one of the most, if not *the* most, unjust of inequalities and its consequences, we are also preserving and strengthening our political space and capacity to influence local, national, regional and international arenas, as well as our credibility to bring our Catholic specific views. In our common quest for human development and human dignity for all, we also have an added value to share in the way we address gender equality and other key development issues.

¹³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 183.

Linguistic considerations

We increasingly witness recognition in the secular world that faith-based organisations have a special role to play in development work. Our long standing work and commitment with our partners define our work on the ground and ensure that we can take locally appropriate and informed approaches to promote gender equality.

As a network of Catholic organizations our work on gender equality reflects Catholic Social Teaching values. Justice being at the core of our work, our rights based approach enables us to address discriminatory policies, structures and systems that contribute to all kinds of inequalities.

We recognize that the polysemy of the term “gender” raises difficulties and its usage is subject of debate: it can refer to a political objective, to a field of research in social sciences (scientific approach) or to a methodology in the area of development aiming at analysing the power relations between women and men. We support the usage of the term “gender” mainly as a methodology that contributes to the political objective of achieving social justice, and therefore social transformation, and of “gender equality” as it refers to women and men enjoying the same rights, opportunities, responsibilities, access to resources and equal participation in decision making at all levels because they are equal in dignity.

The translation of the English word “gender” into French, Spanish, Italian and German is a subject of conceptual and linguistic debate. Yet we recognise the currency of its usage and its unquestioned value to convey an agenda centred on the respect of human dignity and the fight against poverty and inequality. When using the term in our advocacy work at the international and national levels and in the civil society community¹⁴ we understand it as **defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court that refers to “the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society.”**¹⁵

The above demonstrates that each language offers more or less flexibility for an accurate translation of the concept of “gender”. It also indicates that there is a practical dimension that encourages different cultures to adapt to the signs of times and adopt new terms, integrate new concepts.¹⁶ CIDSE will use this concept in accordance with Catholic Social Teaching and Gospel's message.

¹⁴ The increased use in the context of development work shows that three terms are being used in French: “égalité des genres”, “égalité des sexes” or “égalité entre hommes et femmes”. For example, UNESCO indiscriminately uses the first two ones (www.unesco.org/new/fr/unesco/themes/gender-equality/about-us/). As for the European Union, it uses the last two in its "European Pact for equality between men and women" (www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/fr/lisa/119629.pdf). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) uses three terms in its page on "gender equality" (ilo.org/global/topics/equality-and-discrimination/gender-equality/lang--fr/index.htm).

¹⁵ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Art. 7 §3; this is a binding document for States that have ratified it, www.preventgenocide.org/law/icc/statute/part-a.htm. See also Annex IV: Statement by the President of the Conference on the Commonly Understood Meaning of the Term “Gender”, in 218 Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September, 1995. Full transcript available in www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a-20a1.en, and Holy See’s Final Statement at Women’s Conference in Beijing, September 1995. Full transcript available in: www.its.caltech.edu/~nmcenter/women-cp/beijing3.html.

¹⁶ For example, the Spanish language accepts the word “género”, as a translation of “gender”, allowing combinations such as “igualdad de género”, “justicia de género” as equivalents for “gender equality” and “gender justice”. Italian will use “parità di genere” or “uguaglianza di genere” for “gender equality”. The latter is officially translated into French by “égalité des sexes” or “égalité entre les hommes et les femmes” and in German by “Gleichstellung der Geschlechter”. However, as mentioned in footnote N°14, we won’t object in the context of our work the usage of e.g. “genre” as an equivalent of “sexe”, or of such expressions as “égalité des genres”, “le concept genre” or “l’approche genre” in French, nor the German expressions like “Gender Gerechtigkeit”, “Gender Ansatz”, “Gender Konzept“ (see e.g. Deutsche Kommission Justitia et Pax, Geschlechtergerechtigkeit und weltkirchliches Handeln, 2004, www.justitia-et-pax.de/de/shop/img/Heft_104_-_Dritte_Auflage.doc.pdf).

ANNEX I

THE POSITIVE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ADDRESSING AND SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ISSUES

Recognition of women's role in the care economy

The Church recognizes women as playing an essential role in the provisioning of social reproduction through their traditional role of unpaid family and community work. This represents the significant foundation for the functioning of the economy and of supporting human well being¹⁷. In most countries in the world, women are caregivers who take care of their children and ensure their education; they care for the elderly and of those who suffer from diseases. Women take usually care of household food production and small care cultivation. They bear the responsibility to secure water, food and energy for cooking and heating, often at the expense of their security.

The Church community, including official Catholic institutions and the Holy Father, acknowledges the important roles played by women and has played both an advocacy and implementing role in calling for the enhancement of the "...social status of women in the poor countries, by providing them with greater access to health care, vocational training and credit. This will enable women to make their full contribution in increasing production, fostering development, and in the economic and political evolution of their countries."¹⁸

Supporting education

Traditionally the Church has always been strong in providing **education for both girls and boys**. Quality education for girls and boys at primary, secondary and tertiary levels is an important contribution to development. In spite of major weaknesses in implementing gender equality in education, it is in this area that the Catholic Church has a strong record, skills and level of commitment¹⁹.

Women as drivers for change

Inspired by the values of the Christian faith, the Church is challenged to participate in the process of advancing a more just and equal society, where opportunities, possibilities and obligations are equally shared by women and men.

For the African Synod, "the specific contribution of women, not only in the home as wife and mother but also in the social sphere should be more generally acknowledged and promoted. The Synod recommends to our local Churches to go beyond the general statement of EIA, and put in place **concrete structures to ensure real participation of women.**"²⁰

While it is recognized that the **transmission of HIV** is linked to gender inequalities and poverty, the epidemic has also galvanised the capacity of women to organize themselves and take leadership. Catholic Nigerian Theologian, A Orobator SJ., says that "Women have pioneered and still run, arguably, the most innovative and successful prevention, care and behaviour- changing initiatives in East Africa. In light of this fact, it helps to remember that in the time of AIDS, whether in church or in

¹⁷ Center of Concern, *Seeing the World Anew*, May 2010.

¹⁸ Pontifical Council Cor Unum, "World hunger, a Challenge for all: development in Solidarity" – 36, October 1996, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/corunum/documents/rc_pc_corunum_doc_04101996_world-hunger_en.html.

¹⁹ According to UNESCO, in spite of the global expansion of primary education, too many women and girls still remain excluded from learning. 28 countries had not achieved gender parity in 2010. The challenges of getting all girls into school include advocacy, legal provisions, curricula, teacher training, literacy and lifelong learning.

²⁰ SECAM, Final message of African Synod in www.zenit.org/rssenglish-27314.

the sphere of public morality and policies, women's voices do not echo merely testimonies of victimhood but speak as architects of a new ethics of compassion and solidarity in times of crisis”²¹

The Church and the recognition of women's human rights

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are among the most basic tenets in the human rights framework. They recognize that all individuals, women or men, are equal as human beings and by virtue of their inherent dignity.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (**CEDAW**)²² is the internationally agreed framework of the United Nations that promotes women's rights.

Although the Holy See/Vatican City has not acceded to CEDAW, it recognizes that “[i]t is of the utmost importance that States establish mechanisms for the protection of women from discriminatory practices and perceptions in law and in practice in order to uphold human rights.

The Holy See acknowledges the unfortunate reality of discrimination and violence against women and recalls the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women, where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women.... Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women, in law and in concrete reality.”²³

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has developed a strong Gender Policy that aims at addressing the concerns of women, who are doubly marginalized and oppressed. They seek to “join hands with the Central and State governments, civil society organizations, and other religious groups to safeguard the rights and freedom of all, especially women, irrespective of cast, creed, and vocational. We desire to strengthen institutional mechanisms with adequate personnel and finances at all levels of the Church to inspire, motivate, coordinate and monitor the process and results of execution of the gender policy.”²⁴

Regarding the **Beijing Platform for Action** that proclaimed that women's rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of the universal human rights, the Holy See Permanent Observer to the UN, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, said that “This is key not only to understanding the inherent dignity of women and girls but also to making this a concrete reality around the world. The Holy See reaffirms its commitment for improving the condition of women.”²⁵

²¹ Quoted by CAFOD's note on “What does the Catholic Church on Gender Equality?”.

²² The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm.

²³ Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva, Geneva, 26 June 2012, 20th Session of the Human Rights Council (18 June-6 July), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2012/documents/rc_seg-st_20120626_donne_en.html. Quote from Benedict XVI's speech to participants in the international convention on the Theme “Woman and Man, the *Humanum* in its Entirety”, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080209_donna-uomo_en.html.

²⁴ Gender policy of the Catholic Church of India, CBCI Commission for Women, 2010, www.cbcsite.com/Gender_Policy.pdf.

²⁵ Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, Monday, 8 March 2010, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2010/documents/rc_seg-st_20100308_status-women_en.html.

ANNEX II

EXAMPLES WHERE OUR MEMBER ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

CAFOD: The majority of the world's poorest people are women

Globally, women are less likely to be involved in decision-making, to own land or property or to have access to education and employment than men. Violence against women is one of the most widespread abuses of human rights globally. Confronted with this reality and with a mission to serve the poorest and most disadvantaged, CAFOD has prioritised its work with women and girls.

Our vision is of a world where women are safe and respected and where women and men share equally in shaping their societies.

Tackling gender inequality is not just an issue for women - everyone suffers when so many people are prevented from realising their full potential. Equality is essential to tackle poverty, and both men and women need to be part of the solution.

Alongside our partner organisations, we address gender inequality in many ways, including:

- } Taking action on violence against women: CAFOD supports the international 16 days of activism campaign and we work with like-minded organisations to speak out on violence against women, on the ground our partners are providing medical help and counselling for survivors of violence and supporting local structures such as gender and peace networks.
- } Challenging economic, political and social barrier which stop women reaching their full potential. Our partners are supporting women to access local markets, ensuring that girls affected by HIV can continue to receive an education and providing training so that women can start their own businesses.
- } Transforming unequal power relations between men and women, by promoting their voices, decision-making power and access to leadership roles in their communities.

Source: www.cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Get-clued-up/Gender

TRÓCAIRE

Globally, women represent 70 percent of the world's poor, while six out of ten women face abuse in their lifetime.

Why work on Gender Equality? It's about unlocking the potential of women around the world. Supporting women whose rights are being violated strengthens communities, helps families to overcome poverty, improves the health and education of children and builds a more solid future for everyone.

Support in Action: In Uganda 25,000 churches across 19 dioceses rolled out a programme with Trócaire to prevent domestic violence. In Sierra Leone 2,500 women become more independent through 144 savings and loans groups. In the Democratic Republic of Congo local women's groups are taking a stand through peaceful marches against sexual violence and striking against illegal taxation.

Source: www.trocaire.org/supportingwomen

CORDAID: Colombia: security for women leaders

In recent years, life has become increasingly dangerous for women human rights defenders (WHRD) in Colombia. These women, often community leaders, have little means to protect themselves. The NGO Sisma Mujer and Urgent Action Fund support WHRD by teaching them how to guard against the risks that come with the job. They facilitated training on concrete security measures, with special attention for security risk analysis in the drawing up of local security plans. A social safety net for women leaders who face acute security threats and their families was set up. And, finally, they developed a mental health programme that on the one hand helps WHRD to cope with the daily stress of the work and on the other hand provides psycho-social care to women who have suffered from security incidents.

Source: www.cordaid.nl/site_content/brochure.pdf

CCFD-Terre Solidaire

En Jordanie, le CCFD-Terre Solidaire soutient l'association Beqaa Women Cooperative Society, une association de promotion féminine qui concentre ses actions dans le nouveau camp de réfugiés à une trentaine de kms d'Amman (capitale jordanienne). Ce camp est l'extension, suite à l'évolution démographique, du camp de Beqaa qui a accueilli les réfugiés palestiniens de 1967. Ce nouveau camp, peuplé de plus de 50 000 habitants, déborde les capacités en services de base (éducation, santé...) de l'UNRWA, l'agence des Nations-Unies pour l'administration des camps de réfugiés palestiniens. La Jordanie, qui connaît depuis la guerre du Golfe une longue crise économique, a déjà fort à faire avec la paupérisation croissante dans ses villes et campagnes pour s'occuper en plus des camps de réfugiés palestiniens. Les femmes palestiniennes des camps sont les victimes des homes.

La vingtaine d'associations qui œuvre dans le camp de Beqaa réservent une petite partie de leurs activités spécifiquement aux femmes. L'association Beqaa est la seule association créée et gérée par des femmes du camp avec une forte ouverture vers le monde extérieur.

Objectifs :

- } Promotion du statut et du leadership féminin pour l'amélioration des conditions de vie dans le camp de réfugiés de Beqaa.
- } Encourager l'autonomie des femmes pour la défense de leur statut et pour libérer leurs énergies au service de la communauté.
- } Lutter contre les violences faites aux femmes dans la société patriarcale palestinienne et jordanienne.
- } Rechercher et diversifier les opportunités de promotion professionnelle et d'accès à l'emploi des femmes diplômées.

Source: ccfd-terresolidaire.org/emb_pages/p/partenaire_1807.php



CIDSE members



CIDSE is an international alliance of Catholic development agencies. Its members share a common strategy in their efforts to eradicate poverty and establish global justice. CIDSE’s advocacy work covers global governance; resources for development; climate justice; food, agriculture & sustainable trade; and business & human rights. www.cidse.org.

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