

#LANGUAGE MATTERS

USING WORDS TO PROMOTE GIRLS' RIGHTS



Language is not neutral. It is much more than a simple tool of communication. Language is both a reflection of a society and its worldview, and a tool to shape our perception of reality. Language plays an important role not only in revealing stereotypes (including gender and age stereotypes) and unequal power relations, but also in reinforcing them. In order to break down harmful gender- and age-related social norms and make invisible groups visible in both policy and practice, it is critical to use language in law and policy that is both gender-transformative and age-responsive. This document aims to be a resource for anyone looking to take a gender-transformative and age-responsive approach to the development of national, regional or international law and policy.

THE CHECKLIST

Gender, age and other factors of a person's identity have an important impact on their ability to fully enjoy their rights. In order for law and policy to adequately address the diverse needs of different groups, it is important to ask the following questions:

- ✓ **How is a human rights problem affecting girls, boys, women, men and others differently?**
- ✓ **Are girls differently and disproportionately affected due to their age and gender?**
- ✓ **Why do such differences exist? What are the root causes/drivers of those differences?**
- ✓ **How might other factors of a person's identity and/or context (i.e., ability, ethnicity, income) shape their experience? How can intersectionality be taken into account?**
- ✓ **How can policy measures be tailored to ensure the rights of girls and boys, women and men equally?**

WHY AN AGE PERSPECTIVE?

The discrimination and barriers to rights that children face depend on many factors. These include age, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and ethnicity. To get it right, we must conduct a gender, age and inclusion analysis to identify gaps and gender norms that influence their lives across the life course.

Age is one of the most important factors of a person's identity. At each stage of her or his life, a person experiences different barriers to accessing their rights. Too frequently "women" are treated as one homogeneous group, without specificity given to the particular needs and experiences of young girls, adolescent girls, young women, middle-aged women and older women.

This is why Plan International advocates for a gender *and* age perspective in law and policies, in programmes and practice. This not only allows us to develop both age- and gender-sensitive responses, but also to move towards a discourse of children as rights-holders.



LOOKING FOR STRONG LANGUAGE?

Check out our human rights database, which allows you to easily find and build upon strong agreed language from UN or regional bodies, both legally binding and soft law. The database not only covers documents related to gender, or the rights of children, women, or girls. It covers all human rights issues and can be used broadly, in any human rights negotiation.

Explore the database and take our girls' rights quiz at girlsrightsplatform.org

INGREDIENTS OF A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

Plan International believes that in order to achieve gender equality and a world where girls' rights are realized, we must adopt a gender-transformative approach. But what does that mean?

We see 6 key ingredients to a gender-transformative approach:

LIFE-COURSE

Understand and address gender norms across the life course, at all ages.

AGENCY

Strengthen the agency of individual girls and young women.

POSITIVE MASCULINITIES

Support boys and men to adopt positive masculinities and promote gender equality.

DIVERSITY

Consider girls, boys, young women & young men in all their diversity when responding to their needs, interests and rights.

CONDITION AND POSITION

Improve the conditions (daily needs) and social position (value or status) of girls and young women.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Use a human rights-based approach in strengthening systems, laws, policies and civil society to enable gender equality and inclusion.

GENDER-EMPOWERING LANGUAGE: SOME TIPS

1 USE NON-DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE

Avoid expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes or gendered division of roles.

For example, say, "conference delegates and their spouses", not "conference delegates and their wives".

2 USE GENDER NEUTRAL TERMINOLOGY

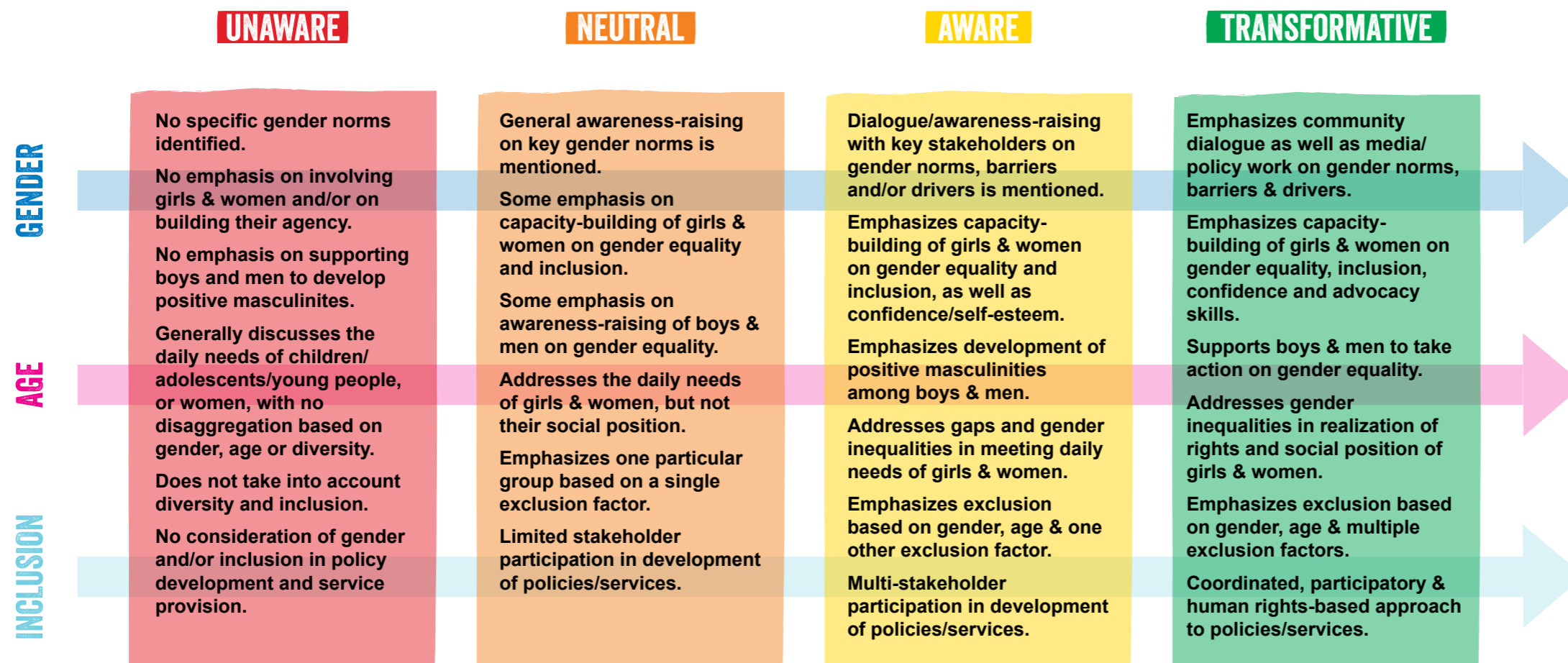
Avoid using masculine words as generic.

For example, use "humankind", not "mankind".

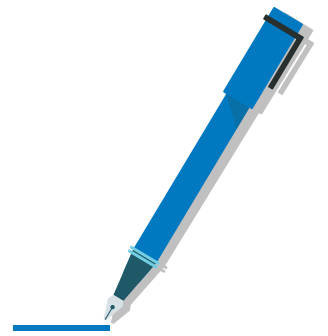
3 USE TERMINOLOGY THAT COMBATS STEREOTYPES

Avoid associating men and women with certain professions.

For example, say "business managers" instead of "businessman". Use "chairperson" instead of "chairman".



GIRLS' RIGHTS LANGUAGE IN PRACTICE



AVOID

Using vague language, such as “all women” and “adolescents and youth”, that does not specifically grant rights to girls.

Merely acknowledging the “specific needs” or “particular vulnerabilities” of the girl child.

Using weak terminology such as “impairs” or “has a negative effect on” the rights of girls.

The assumption that all girls face the same obstacles on account of their age and gender. There is no “one size fits all”.

Simply mentioning “girls” as an add-on to women.

Relegating “girls” to certain topics, such as education or violence.

DO

Single out girls if in reality they are differently and/or disproportionately affected.

Fully explain what the “vulnerabilities” or “needs” of girls consist of.

Call out using strong language that certain phenomena amount to violations of girls’ rights.

Consider intersectionality and multifaceted identities, and how these can lead to a heightened disadvantage.

Ensure that measures are tailored to protecting and fulfilling girls’ rights.

Acknowledge the full range of girls’ rights, including participation, agency and sexual and reproductive rights.

FOR EXAMPLE

“...early marriage leads to early pregnancy and early childbearing, which...exposes young married girls to a greater risk of domestic violence...”

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) “Eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women”. 2012, PP 16.

In order to realise the right to education, girls need, “full access to separate, adequate and safe water and sanitation services, properly equipped with hygiene kits.”

Human Rights Council (HRC), “Realizing the Equal Enjoyment of the Right to Education by Every Girl”. 2016, OP 2C.

“...[C]hild, early and forced marriage is a harmful practice that violates, abuses and impairs human rights...”

Human Rights Council (HRC), “Consequences of child, early and forced marriage”. 2019, PP13.

“Recognises that a considerable number of girl children are particularly vulnerable, including orphans, children living on the street, internally displaced and refugee children...”

UN General Assembly (UNGA), “The girl child”. 2007, OP17.

“Gravely concerned by...forms of sexual violence such as sexual slavery, particularly targeting girls...”

UN Security Council (UNSC), “Children and armed conflict”. 2015, PP13.

“...the full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls includes their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality...”

Human Rights Council (HRC), “Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls”. 2019, PP10.