

Why Gender and Development?

Of 1.3 billion global citizens living in poverty, a large percentage are women. While statisticians, theoreticians, multi-lateral organisations, NGOs and academics study this phenomenon, the women themselves – whose daily lives form the tapestry of this reality – have little time or strength for abstract debates regarding their condition. But these women know its many faces: the 18-hour day, the high risk of maternal death, the constant and consistent discrimination, the stretching of dollar-a-day incomes to feed and clothe their families, the bartering of their existence to survive one more day.

It has been said, “Women hold up half the sky.” For millions of women locked in poverty, responsibility for their families’ and communities’ well-being does not end just because they encounter unequal access to resources in health, nutrition, education and economic structures. In their ongoing responsibility, the women themselves, their families and their entire communities pay a steep price for constraints and injustices encountered in attempting to provide for basic human needs.

Men and women, girls and boys all have a role in working to transform this picture, so that both genders thrive in partnership and in living productive lives. This is the challenge addressed in the Gender Training Toolkit.

The road to transformed gender relations Historically, as agencies pioneered development efforts, they overlooked the importance of transformed gender relations and failed to recognise the contributions of both genders. Those designing projects and programmes were often unaware of the impact of the development process on the daily lives of the women and men, boys and girls in the communities in which their organisations worked. When this issue was identified, development researchers began documenting women’s and men’s contributions as well as constraints. The importance of working towards transformed gender relations emerged as a key competency.

Further, both grassroots and academic research began to demonstrate how gender interactions impact the development process. GAD (Gender and Development) became the internationally recognised term for a progressive approach to development that emphasises transformed gender relations and intentionally includes perspectives and experiences of women, men, girls and boys. GAD focuses on ways to ensure that unequal relationships do not prevent equitable and sustainable development. The development research demonstrates that development programmes, policies and projects affect women, men, boys and girls differently and that GAD programmes provide *long-lasting effective transformation of communities only when women and men in the communities engage as co-decision makers*.

“When they hear words such as “gender equity” or “gender issues”, most people immediately assume this is “women’s stuff”. It is important that we recognise that gender is about relations—between men and women, women and women, also between men and men and boys and girls. It is about who we are as men and women and how we are developing all our potential given by God regardless of our sex.

Comment By Luis Armenta, Director of Communications, WV Mexico in Volume I, Issue 2 of *La Esperanza*

Christian organisations have a great responsibility to provide leadership in this arena. The highest standards for justice, equity, human dignity and transformed relationships embedded in our faith continually challenge us to improve our efforts and illumine the path for others. As Christians, we believe that female and male are created equally in the image of God. Jesus’ life and works underscored this reality, as he challenged constraints and cultural restrictions women faced in New Testament times in order to honour and empower both men and women. He continues to do so today.