

Communications & Gender Checklist:

Things to Consider



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This report was developed and written by Celia Santillan at Value for Women © 2019. Value for Women (VFW) believes that women are key drivers of economic and social growth, and works to identify and test new solutions that foster women's empowerment and gender inclusion while unlocking the powerful economic potential that women hold. For further information, please email valueforwomen@v4w.org or visit www.v4w.org.

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Introduction

This short guide outlines tips for how to apply a gender and inclusion lens while developing and reviewing communications materials. The intention is to provide basic guidance to a group of impact investors working as part of the “Investing in Women” initiative supported by Australian Aid’s DFAT program. It aims to serve as a **starting point** for thinking more deeply and critically about how gender inclusion and gender equality can be embedded into communications products and processes and coupled with gender-lens investing actions and processes that cut across entire operations of investment firms. Far from exhaustive, this guide is intentionally brief and designed to spur further research and inquiry.



What Does Gender Have to Do with Communications?

Gender and communications are intricately linked. On the one hand, communication through language and image sharing often reflects the widely accepted socio-cultural values, norms and beliefs that a society holds, including roles that men and women play. On the other, communication can be used as a tool to help shape culture and challenge stereotypes. Stereotypes can have negative impacts when they limit the potential of human beings or deny them a full range of life options and choices. Word choices can reflect unconscious beliefs we hold (biases) about gender roles and the different abilities and attitudes of women and men.

Culture and language are constantly evolving to reflect new realities. Our choice of words and communication style can further move the needle towards embracing inclusivity and reflect the diversity of our society and the equal value of all people.

While this differs significantly across context, sector and geography, we all have the opportunity to challenge the way we think and talk about women, men and gender; and to increase the visibility of women playing diverse roles within our work. There are many ways to present gender through language and in communications. For the purposes of this brief, the following framework offers a simple way to self-assess whether the communications developed are gender blind, gender biased or positive:

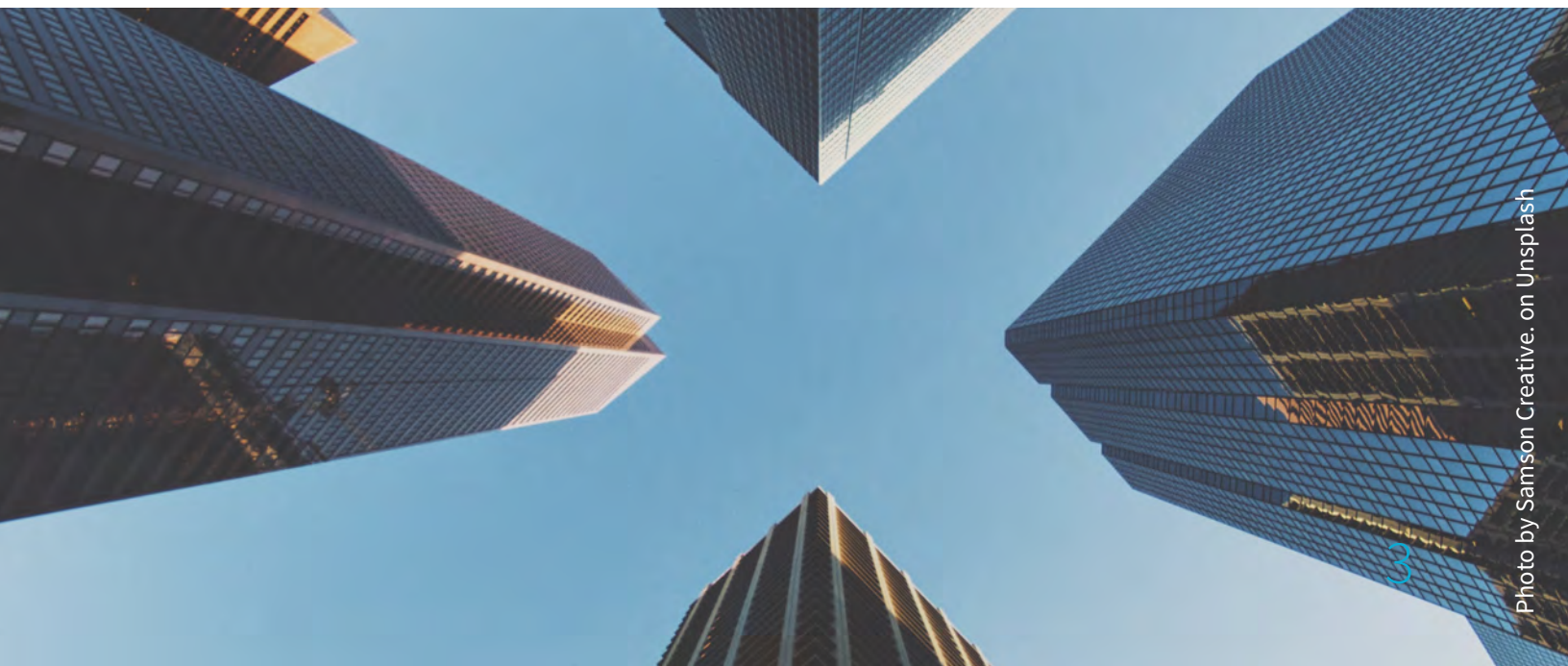
Gender blind, neutral or biased:

- Groups all people together, does not recognize or disaggregate women's and men's experience and representation (for example: "This investment has an impact on farmers in the Philippines.")
- Includes implicit assumptions about how one human experience represents the lives/ experiences of everyone, which can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes
- Depicting women in traditional or expected roles (for example: photographs showing all women sewing on a factory floor)

Gender positive or gender forward:

- As a first step, involves making women more visible and recognizing this through language that disaggregates by sex (for example: The statement "this investment initiative has impact on women and men farmers in Cambodia" ensures that women and men are equally visible and represented.)
- By representing women and men in a full range of roles and positions, norms and stereotypes are challenged. This includes portraying women in positions of authority and power and showing both women and men in nontraditional roles (for example: images or text portraying a woman as a CEO or driving a tractor, and of men caring for children or performing household tasks).

Gender-forward investors have the opportunity to incorporate thoughtful and inclusive communication that aligns to their values and mission of empowering women. Opportunity also exists to use investment work and the communications of these efforts to present women in positive, empowering ways, which in turn contributes to the transformation of gender roles in leadership. Doing so succinctly, however, can take significant time and creativity, especially for social media platforms. This paper provides guidance for working towards that goal.



Communications and Gender Checklist

The following checklist provides guidance and practical recommendations to promote gender awareness, minimize bias, promote equality and celebrate diversity in communications. While external-facing communications and social media efforts require short and tight presentation (for example, a tweet limited by character space), this can be challenging for inclusive language! The following are meant as tips to help guide the creative process of communications efforts.

Written Communications: Some Tips

Ensure that women and men are equally represented.

Aim for a gender balance across the examples, testimonies, images or case studies used. Present women and men in nontraditional roles. This contributes to deconstructing stereotypes and gender norms.

Use an inclusive approach with pronouns.

Avoid gender-specific pronoun(s) such as “he, him, his, she, her, hers” except when referring to a specific person. Use the pronoun they or them. This also supports the use of nonbinary language in pronouns.

Gender biased:

- Each entrepreneur will present his pitch to the investment committee when he is ready.

Gender positive or gender forward:

- Entrepreneurs will present their pitches to the investment committee when they’re ready.

Be mindful when using generic terms to describe people, jobs and things.

Generics are nouns and pronouns intended to be used for both women and men. Use terms that include women and men.

- Use humanity vs mankind, sales representative vs salesman, spokesperson vs spokesman.

Promote gender equality through titles and forms of address.

Though this might seem obvious, it is important to avoid addressing women by their marital status (as somebody’s wife, widow or mother) unless absolutely necessary, or if this is how individual women prefer to be addressed. An alternative to “Miss” and “Mrs.” when addressing or referring to a woman is “Ms.” (which doesn’t indicate marital status) or, if the term applies, “Professor” or “Dr.”

Avoid representing women and men in a way that reinforces the status quo. Challenge gender stereotypes.

Avoid the use or the representation of certain roles or occupations as only appropriate for, or held by, women and men. For example, businessowners and supervisors are men, caregivers are women, etc.

Gender blind, neutral or biased:

- Juan and Penny both have full-time jobs; he helps her with the housework.
- Business leaders, their wives and children

Gender positive or gender forward:

- Juan and Penny both work in a news agency they own; they share the housework and caring for their children.
- Business leaders, their partners/spouses and children

□ Avoid language that portrays women as passive recipients of aid and craft your message to represent women as agents of change.

- While fundraising for development-oriented efforts, avoid presenting beneficiary populations as disempowered.

Message representing women as passive recipients of aid:

- “Mariam Tamik needed a lot of money and support to grow a cocoa business. With the aid and investment of the Foundation, she was able to increase her income and expand the business.”

→ This style of storytelling represents Mariam, the protagonist of the story, as a disempowered passive subject who receives economic aid from an external entity. The message lacks a geographical, economic and social context of women.

Message representing women as agents of change:

- “Mariam Tamik is the General Manager of a small cocoa business in Mali. Through a grant of USD 10,000 and by attending a business training from the Foundation, she is now reinvesting her profits and giving employment to five more women from her community. With their earnings, they are able to send their children to school and pay for their healthcare.”

□ Think about intersectionality.

Consider how gender intersects with class, race, ethnicity, ability, age and other factors. It is important to represent women and men from all areas where activities take place. Example: Represent a diversity of women and men of varying ethnicities and ages, include images of people with disabilities.

□ Avoid sexualizing or objectifying women through images.

□ Avoid language that victimizes people who live in marginalized conditions, including women and others.

Gender blind, neutral or biased:

- “Martha has become a very successful

businesswoman even though her parents are uneducated indigenous people from Peru.”

Gender positive or gender forward:

- “Martha, an indigenous woman from Peru, is a very successful businesswoman.”

Avoid using adjectives to describe people by the conditions in which they live (i.e. marginalized women).

- Instead, describe the conditions in which they live (i.e. “women living in marginalized conditions”).

□ Avoid patronizing statements about women or statements that may make it seem like women are at fault for their material or educational deprivations they have experienced.

Gender biased:

- “Women need to be educated about their rights to improve their self-esteem.”

Gender blind, neutral or biased:

- “An enterprise in Cambodia succeeded despite being led by women.”; “The business is led by an indigenous woman, but it is doing really well.”

Gender positive or gender forward:

- “When women receive education about their rights, they improve their self-esteem.”
- “An enterprise in Cambodia succeeded despite the fact that the women leading it faced many obstacles and discrimination in accessing finance.”

□ Demonstrate your impact through storytelling to show what gender-lens investing is about.

- Present successful stories of your investees that resonate with your audience and show the impact of your work in their lives, not only at an individual level but also within their families, communities and businesses.

□ Include quotes from women and men as experts and authorities.

Audiovisual Representation: Some Tips

Acknowledging the limited amount of stock photos and visual assets often available for international development and nonprofits, as well as the common struggle to find images that represent women, men and families in more empowering ways and in non-stereotypical roles, we offer the following recommendations for preparing banners, photos, videos or any other graphic materials:

- Represent both women and men actively participating in diverse aspects of public and private life (at home, school, the workplace, in public and family life, and in the community).
- Choose images that show women and men in nontraditional and non-stereotypical roles and professions, such as women as businessowners and community leaders or men as caregivers.
- Ensure equal numbers of women and men in your image selection.
- Portray diversity: Make sure to include and balance the representation of women and men from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, cultural identities and men and women with disabilities. When showcasing the work of your investees, include images of women and men that represent the local context of the country where your investees are geographically based.
- Present women in positions of authority and power.
- Consider posture, expressions, gestures, positioning and clothing within a picture or image to convey balance, equal status and authority. For example, avoid portraying men behind desks and women standing to the side, or a man explaining something to a women's-only group.
- Ensure people's clothing/attire/appearance is appropriate for the context. For example, do not use stock images of fashion models if the text is referring to the workplace or agricultural markets, etc. Try not to reinforce traditional/dominant ideologies of beauty – focus on the roles of the people in the images rather than their appearance.
- Be mindful of people's many complementary identities at work and in the home. For example, a businesswoman can also be a caregiver, and a caregiver can also be businesswoman. Additionally, a businesswoman without a family may be just as capable and motivated as one with a family, and vice versa.

Not meant to be exhaustive, this short introduction is designed to inspire further reading and reflection. Some organizations may seek support in developing and reviewing communications by an gender expert.

Since language and communications are constantly evolving, we consider this tool a living document and welcome any feedback.

For further information on gendered approaches to communications, the following resources used as references for this document may serve as a helpful starting point:

- Principles of Gender-Sensitive Communication, UNDP Gender Equality Seal initiative: <http://www.jm.undp.org/content/dam/jamaica/docs/gender/JM-AUG-29-UNDP%20Gender%20Seal-Principles%20of%20gender-sensitive%20communications.pdf>
- United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW): <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/data/view.php?d=38&page=62&lang=en>
- United Nations. Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English: <http://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>
- 2018. United Nations Development Program Lebanon. Guide Note to Gender Sensitive Communication: http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/GenderSensitiveCommunicationGuidelines.html
- 2007. International Labour Organization. ABC of women workers' rights and gender equality", 2nd Ed. (ILO, Geneva): https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_087314.pdf

