



**GENDER
EQUALITY &
COMMUNICATION
POLICY**

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SUMMARY

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are matters of human rights and conditions for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just, and developed society. Empowerment of women and gender equality are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental security among all people. (Beijing Platform for Action, Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995)

Attention to gender equality is essential to sound development practice and at the heart of economic and social progress. Development results can not be maximized and sustained without explicit attention to the different needs and interests of women and men.

The goal of BDRN Gender Equality and Communication Policy is to support the achievement of equality between women and men to ensure sustainable rural development.

This policy expresses the commitment of the BDRN to promote gender equality in all segments of its operations, from the organizational structure of the network and its members to the planning and implementation of operational activities. The policy outlines the Network and its members' direction for gender mainstreaming in all activities, including efforts to analyze and address the specific needs and roles of women and men, appropriate for each intervention.

Gender Equality and Communication Policy is offering an introduction of basic steps for involvement of **Gender sensitive communication** in the work of BDRN as well as designed **ACTION PLAN of BRDN Gender Equality Hub (2020-2022)**

INTRODUCTION

Traditional gender roles and unequal power relations lead to discrimination against and exclusion of certain groups. Gender equality mainstreaming is the process or means by which these unequal conditions are addressed to achieve the goal of gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's, as well as men's concerns and experiences, an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.

Gender mainstreaming goes hand in hand with the promotion and protection of women's human rights and the elimination of discrimination against women. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality in all spheres (political, economic and societal) so that women and men benefit equally, thereby ensuring that inequality is not perpetuated.

The political and socio-economic empowerment of women is a crucial area to be supported, including through the promotion of equality of participation in decision making processes, fostering women's contribution to sustainable rural development.

Applying this principle to its own work, BRDN realized two day training on Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming within Gender Equality Hub to ensure gender mainstreaming as cross cutting strategic priority within BRDN as well as to promote the gender concept among rural population in the Balkan region where BRDN members are active. Activity strengthened the capacity of Gender Equality Hub ensuring a gender lens is applied to all organizational and programmatic activities, including a focus on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls.

Another two-day workshop for introduction of gender analysis tools and preparation of BRDN's Gender Equality and Communication policy leads to preparation of concrete document for BRDN gender mainstreaming policy, programming and activities ensuring the participation of both women and men. Gender analysis was used in the facilitated process of creation of the ACTION PLAN exploring the roles and responsibilities of men and women and the degree to which they have access to and control over resources, benefits and powers. The process of creation of the ACTION PLAN was facilitated through the following steps:

1. Identification of main problems faced by women in the community
2. Identification of main problems faced by men in the community
3. Creating the list of common problems in the community
4. Defining strategic priorities
5. Designing possible activities
6. Making stakeholder analysis

Using participatory approach to create ACTION PLAN of ACTIVITIES, Network's members define concrete entry points and priority areas and actions to address gender equality, outlining the Network

and its members' direction for gender mainstreaming in all activities, including efforts to analyze and address the specific needs and roles of women and men, appropriate for each intervention. Defining activities Network's members focused their efforts on providing rural women with economic and social development opportunities.

This Policy expresses the commitment of the BRDN to promote gender equality in all segments of its operations, from the organizational structure of the Network and its members to the planning and implementation of operational activities.

MAIN PRINCIPLES

a) **Gender equality is integral part of all BRDN policies, programs and projects.**

Addressing gender equality as a crosscutting goal requires that women's views, interests and needs shape the development agenda as much as men's, and that the development agenda support progress toward more equal relations between women and men.

b) **Recognition that every policy, program and project affects women and men differently.**

Women and men have different perspectives, needs, interests, roles and resources - and those differences may be reinforced by class, race, caste, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or age. Policies, programs and projects must address the differences in experiences and situations between and among women and men.

c) **Achieving gender equality does not mean that women become the same as men.**

Equality means that one's rights or opportunities do not depend on being male or female.

d) **Women's empowerment is central to achieving gender equality.**

Through empowerment, women become aware of unequal power relations, gain control over their lives, and acquire a greater voice to overcome inequality in their home, workplace and community.

e) **Promoting the equal participation of women as agents of change in economic, social and political processes is essential to achieving gender equality.**

Equal participation goes beyond numbers. It involves women's equal right to articulate their needs and interests, as well as their vision of society, and to shape the decisions that affect their lives, whatever cultural context they live in.

f) **Gender equality can only be achieved through partnership between women and men.**

Gender equality is an issue that concerns both women and men, and achieving it will involve working with men to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviour, roles and responsibilities at home, in the workplace, in the community, and in national, donor and international institutions.

g) BDRN policies, programs, and projects should contribute to gender equality.

Specific measures must be developed to address the policies, laws, procedures, norms, beliefs, practices and attitudes that maintain gender inequality.

OBJECTIVES

There is evidence that economies with greater gender equality have higher economic growth and offer a better quality of life for all. Gender equality includes equal access to opportunities and to benefits. The challenge is to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to engage in development activities, in terms of opportunity to participate as well as to share in the benefits.

Gender Equality and Communication policy has three strategic objectives:

- Promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and men to participate in and benefit from profitable economic activities.
- Enable women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations.
- Achieve a more equitable balance in workloads and in the sharing of economic and social benefits between women and men

HOW BDRN WILL DELIVER POLICY

- Address gender equality as a cross-cutting theme, including in its policies.
- Take into account differences that exist among women – age, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic category – and the dynamics in gender roles and relations.
- Use gender analysis to understand the different roles, interests and priorities of women and men, and tailor policies, programmes and projects accordingly.
- Implement, when necessary, women-focused activities to address existing imbalances in economic and career opportunities, decision-making and workloads.
- During project identification and design, focus efforts on providing young rural women with economic and social development opportunities.
- Apply continuous learning and analysis based on field experiences to develop more effective approaches and to generate information for evidence-based advocacy and policy dialogue.

GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Language is a reflection of the attitudes, behavior and norms within a society. It also shapes people's attitudes as to what is 'normal' and acceptable. Women play an active role in society, yet – all too often – we use language that ignores or minimises their contribution. Words matter in shaping our worldview. For example the dominance of masculine words for general references can reflect assumptions about gender roles and influence readers.

Gender-sensitive communications mean inclusive use of language and visuals as well as positioning of men and women so that they are equally represented, have equal access to resources and opportunities, enjoy balanced roles and have equal share in decision-making. It requires questioning gender stereotypes, serves and enables mainstreaming gender equality.

Language plays a critical role in how we interpret the world, including how we think and behave. Word choices often reflect unconscious assumptions about values, gender roles and the abilities of women and men. Gendered language is still common place in both the workplace and everyday life. For example, when speaking about a Resident Representative; many colleagues automatically use the male form 'he', not knowing if the person is a woman or a man. It is important to remember that imprecise word choices can be interpreted as discriminatory, demeaning or biased, regardless of how they are intended. Such language hinders efforts to increase women's empowerment, and is not in accordance with BRDNS goals.

Language is a direct reflection of the way of thinking. That's why the easiest and most effective way to achieve gender-neutral language is to consult with others when faced with questions regarding gender equality in proverbs, idioms, phrases, and everyday words used out of habit.

Gender-sensitive communications via print, visual, and social media channels should be developed by taking into consideration the positioning, language, style, and visuals. Within this framework, it is recommended that spokespeople who are in contact with the media be informed and trained about gender equality.

Why use gender-sensitive language?

In order to tackle gender inequality, we must look at the way we communicate. Using gender-sensitive language can:

- ✓ Make it easier to see important differences between the needs of women and men;
- ✓ Challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society;
- ✓ Lay the foundation for greater gender equality throughout society;
- ✓ Raise awareness of how language affects our behaviour;
- ✓ Make people more comfortable with expressing themselves and behaving in ways that were once not considered 'typical' of their gender.

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF GENDER RESPONSIVE COMMUNICATION

Bias free-language is important because language reflects on the attitude in communication. Words and audiovisual selection have also a critical role in achieving greater gender equality. Therefore, messages should be carefully examined based on the six following principles:

1- Ensure that women and men are represented

Both genders have equal responsibilities in eliminating gender inequalities and harmful gender stereotypes, especially in thematic areas. This principle aims to represent both genders equally in all internal and external message formulation, corporate media, and corporate representation. In this sense, panels and moderation of official meetings, conferences, and workshops should be gender balanced.

2- Challenge gender stereotype

Our use of language often reinforces gender stereotypes and assumptions about women and men are often formed through such gender stereotypes. It is important to avoid using these, as gender stereotypes limit and trivialize both women and men, presenting inaccurate images. Avoid using phrases that stereotype women’s or men’s behavior or thought processes.

3- Avoid exclusionary forms

Exclusionary forms consist in using “he or she” when referring to women or men. By using “they”, gendered pronouns can be avoided. It is therefore important to select words carefully to avoid assumptions about values, functions, roles, and capacities. As such, it is always better not to confuse the audience by using “she” “he”.

X Gender biased	✓ Gender sensitive
Each employee will do better if he has a voice in the decision.	Employees will do better if they have a voice in the decision.
Listen to the employee as he uses his short, simple sentences to communicate.	Listen to the employee who is using short, simple sentences to communicate
Dear Mothers, please ensure that your children wash their hands after using the bathroom.	Dear Families, please ensure that your children wash their hands after using the bathroom
The employer will address the situation when he is ready.	The employer will address the situation when ready.
Everyone must do his part.	Everyone must do their part.

4- Use equal forms of address

Addressing women by their marital status is an old practice dating back to the 1700s. Women were often called by their husband’s full name, for example: ‘Mrs. John Smith.’ Nowadays however, this practice is no longer appropriate. In the same way, women are often referred to as someone’s partner, instead of an individual in their own right. Clearly, this creates an imbalance in who is deemed important in public life. It is good practice to avoid referring to women as somebody’s wife, widow or mother unless absolutely necessary. Overall, however, it is important to be mindful and respectful of how individual women prefer to be addressed.

5- Create a gender balance

For gender fairness and visibility, it is important to be careful of the use of generic terms. Generics are nouns and pronouns used for both women and men. For instance, with terms such as “Manpower”, “Mankind” or “Motherland”. These words can give the impression that one gender is superior to the other. It is hence better to avoid these generics to create a balanced and inclusive gender language. Similarly, word order can often give the assumption that one sex is superior to the other, or that the latter sex is an afterthought. For example, using the phrases *men and women*, or *ladies and gentlemen*, may give this impression. Instead, it is better to address groups of people with generic terms. For example, addressing a group as *colleagues* or *members of the delegation* avoids using any gender bias. (*The examples describing the principal is referring to English language. Nevertheless, the same principal and the context should be implemented in the native languages of Network’s members)

6- Promote gender equity through titles

Titles for people and occupations often reflect inequitable assumptions about males and females; gender-sensitive language promotes more inclusive and equitable representations for both females and males. Gender-sensitive. Language should be used for more inclusive and equitable representations of both genders. For instance, some suffixes can reinforce the notion that women are subordinate or leading different jobs than men. As such, some words and suffixes should be avoided to perceive men and women equally. (*The examples describing the principal is referring to English language. Nevertheless, the same principal and the context should be implemented in the native languages of Network’s members)

X Gender biased language	✓ Gender responsive language
Motherland	Homeland
Mother tongue	First Language
Mankind	Humanity, human beings, people
Manpower	Workforce, labor force, workers

AVOIDING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION

First, it is important to properly plan when preparing press releases, stories, reports and publications. These materials should highlight examples of both women and men to break down gender inequalities and stereotypes. A gender component should be mainstreamed in all materials, especially in reports. Whenever possible, data should be disaggregated by gender.

In written communication, terms should be selected carefully and in a sensitive way. For example, women who face gender-based violence should not be addressed as victims but as survivors. As such and for more accurate stories, it is important to emphasize on the capacities of these women and be cautious not to invade the privacy of the person. Moreover, it is crucial to focus on the quantitative aspect.

In audiovisual communication, stereotypes should be challenged with images, since women and men must be represented and portrayed equally. This could be done by breaking with notions of traditional gender functions and characteristics. It is important to ensure equal coverage of men and women by equal representation of interests, capacities, characteristics, and vulnerabilities.

Therefore, it is crucial to select carefully the suitable communication language that can lead to gender equality, as well as diminish gender stereotypes. As such, communication materials must exclude discriminatory words to promote gender equality.

In order to avoid gender stereotypes in media communication the following suggestions should be incorporated in the processes of preparation and implementation of media communication strategies and activities:

- ✓ *Gender stereotypes should be avoided in the spokesperson's speeches, press bulletins, and social media messages.*
- ✓ *The sequence of speakers at a press conference should be planned according to gender equality.*
- ✓ *Women should not be limited to the roles of presenter or moderator.*
- ✓ *Quotations should be distributed equally between men and women.*
- ✓ *When selecting images and photos for print, visual, and social media, they should be carefully selected to ensure that women and men are represented equally.*
- ✓ *Men and women should not be depicted in traditional roles in photo layouts and visuals.*

CREATION OF ACTION PLAN OF BRDN GENDER EQUALITY HUB

Proposed Action plan is created on two-day workshop ensuring the participation of both women and men. Representatives of Gender Equality Hub within BRDN have had an opportunity to brainstorm main problems faced by women and man in the rural communities. Through participatory approach, participants at the workshop were involved into practical exercise of:

1) creating of list of common problems;

2) defining strategic priorities;

3) designing possible activities and

4) making stakeholder analysis as basic steps towards creation of Action Plan.

Women's perspectives are not always adequately represented in decision-making processes at the household, local or national level, resulting in decisions which do not equally benefit men and women. Representation of women in decision making processes in rural areas is not on a satisfactory level, even though there is lack of comprehensive analyzes and available data for participation of women in decision making processes in rural areas. The dominant stereotypical opinion of gender roles in the society prevents women's involvement in decision making processes in rural areas.

Women face difficulties in accessing information important to economic opportunity, such as on legal rights (employment, inheritance, etc), value chain opportunities, and local infrastructure planning & delivery because their behaviour patterns/ information preferences are not taken into account

Lack of kindergartens and other infrastructure and social services in rural areas prevent the full development of women's potential and contribution to sustainable rural development making women more vulnerable, economically dependent and susceptible to gender discrimination.

Inefficiency of the system to protect women survivors of gender based violence, especially domestic violence, as most present form of GBV in the rural areas, limits their ability to pursuit justice, achieve independence and obtain gender equality.

Interactions between legal and social norms impact on women's abilities to exercise their autonomy and make important decisions about their lives for themselves; pursue economic and other opportunities; and, have their voices heard in all spheres, including in the family, community and society. This directly underpins many of the inequalities identified above.

Listed problems were grouped **into four priority areas**. Participants had discussed brainstormed problems and prioritized the most significant problems affecting gender equality in all spheres of socio-economic life in rural areas in order to be addressed and included into **ACTION PLAN of BRDN Gender Equality Hub**. The priority areas seek to address the complexity of gender-responsive change

through a range of proposed activities to shift policies, attitudes, mindsets and behaviors. The priority areas relate to concrete actions that will be taken to achieve them.

PRIORITY AREAS	IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS
<p>PRIORITY AREA 1: Increasing participation of women in decision making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No participation of women in planing and decision making -Lack of trust in local/central government -Passive citizenship -Lack of monitoring mechansams in public institutions -Lack of social activities -Lack of inclusion of women in debates/discussion/analysis
<p>PRIORITY AREA 2: Empowering rural women. Increasing awareness for gender equality in rural areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of awareness for the importance of gender equality - Low level of women education/selfesteem /self realization -Bad perception of gender roles -Cultural/traditional stereotyping of women and men roles and behavior - Lack of information and awareness for the importance of Property/Ownership for women (Inheritance issues) -Women workload at home -Women discrimination and bias -Stereotype opinion about house work -Social pressure for men to be bread winner in the family
<p>PRIORITY AREA 3: Increasing employment opportunities of women in rural areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of HR policies at work -Lack of employment opportunities for women -Lower salaries for women
<p>PRIORITY AREA 4: Improving infrastructure to provide support to gender equality in rural areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of shelters for abused women -Lack of kindergartens

According to defined priority areas and identified problems, taking into consideration participatory approach of the Gender Equality Hab members, the following ACTION PLAN of BRDN Gender Equality Hub (2020-2022) has been developed:

Action plan of BRDN Gender Equality Hub

2020-2022

PRIORITY AREA 1: Increasing participation of women in decision making				
Objective	Proposed activities	Desired outcomes	Stakeholders	Resources
1..1 To increase participation of women in decision making processes on national/local level	1.1.1 Lobbying activities at already established events in the region 1.1.2. Organizing special events for gender related challenges in rural areas for the international Rural women day 1.1.3 Media campaign with inspiring public figures from the region for importance of participation of women in decision making processes in rural areas	Increased participation of women in decision-making processes in rural areas (National/local, household) Greater awareness by women and girls of their economic, social, civil, political, and cultural rights, and greater support for these rights by men and boys	Central Government Local Government Relevant ministries CSO Business sector Community leaders BRDN members Media	Human resources Financial resources
PRIORITY AREA 2: Empowering rural women. Increasing awareness for gender equality in rural areas				
Objective	Proposed activities	Desired outcomes	Stakeholders	Resources
2.1 To work towards changing traditional gender stereotypes in rural areas	2.1.1 Comprehensive media campaign (TV, newspapers, social media, on line forums) 2.1.2 Promotion of successful stories from the Region (Sharing good examples through organized media campaign to raise awareness) 2.1.3 Organizing supporting events/activities (grass root) for rising awareness (direct	Increased access to and control over productive assets (especially land, capital and credit), processing and marketing for women. Increased decision-making power for women regarding expenditures in the household. Increased sharing of household	Educational institutions CSO Business sector Community leaders BRDN Members Media	Human resources Financial resources

	meetings, debates, focus group)	responsibilities between women and men.		
PRIORITY AREA 3: Increasing employment opportunities of women in rural areas				
Objective	Proposed activities	Desired outcomes	Stakeholders	Resources
3.1 To increase employability of women in rural areas	3.1.1 Improving capacities of women about different skills 3.1.2. Organizing motivational events to rise awareness for rural entrepreneurship 3.1.3 Active participation in advocacy and lobbying activities in the Region	Improved access to employment services, employment skills, and finance Increased entrepreneurial opportunities for women in rural areas Increased skills training and capacity development opportunities, as well as on-the-job training and management opportunities for women	Syndicates Ministry of Labour Ministry of social welfare Employment Agencies Local authorities CSO Business sector Community leaders BRDN Members Media	Human resources Financial resources
PRIORITY AREA 4: Enhancing advocacy and lobbying to provide support to gender equality in rural areas				
Objective	Proposed activities	Desired outcomes	Stakeholders	Resources
4.1 To advocate for improving the infrastructure in rural areas to support women practical needs and strategic priorities towards achieving gender equality	4.1.1 Prepare policy briefs to support increased number of kindergartens in rural areas 4.1.2. Prepare policy briefs to improve the system to protect women survivors of gender based violence, especially domestic violence in rural areas	Increased access to and control over basic services (especially primary and reproductive health, child care, shelter for survivors of domestic violence). Increased options for child-care.	Relevant Ministries Local authorities CSO Business sector Community leaders BRDN Members Media Donors	Human resources Financial resources