



The Gender Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on gender equality in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

Gender equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys, have equal rights, life prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

## [ BRIEF ]

# Hot issue: Gender Equality and Gender Equity

**As long as the struggle for gender equality has existed, there have also been discussions and debates about what the concept gender equality mean and how it should be used. What is the goal, how do we reach this and who are included? Sometimes, similar concepts are used interchangeably – be it for lack of knowledge or by purpose. A concept that is relatively often used as an alternative to gender equality is gender equity. The aim of this brief is to clarify the difference between gender equality and gender equity, and to explain why Sida uses gender equality.**

### GENDER EQUALITY: NON-DISCRIMINATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The concept gender equality is since long established as the preferred wording for equal rights, life prospects, opportunities and power for women and men, girls and boys. It is used in all key international agreements, from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

On the international arena as well as in national contexts gender equality is a concept that is closely connected to the human rights agenda. It is also used to label the goal in the struggle for women's rights lead by the women's movement all over the world.

Gender equality is a concept with transformative conno-

tations, covering women's empowerment, non-discrimination and equal rights regardless of gender. It embraces a multi-dimensional and intersectional view on inequalities between women and men, girls and boys. It points towards change of gender-based power relations in all sectors of society, private as well as public.

### GENDER EQUITY: FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE REGARDING BENEFITS AND NEEDS

Gender equity puts the focus on fairness and justice regarding benefits and needs for women and men, girls and boys. Equity is used for example within the education, health and humanitarian sectors referring to the equal distribution of resources based on the needs of different groups of people. Gender equity in this context refers to the fact that a gender analysis of these needs is necessary, as they in many respects may be different for women and men, boys and girls.

However the concept gender equity is also used to detach gender equality from the human rights agenda and avoid talking about women and girls' human rights. It has been picked up by conservative actors who emphasize the complementarity of women and men, talk about "separate but equal" and go far in arguing for biologically given roles and obligations for women and men in society.

When used in this way the concept gender equity has opened up for a definition that only embraces part of the gender equality agenda. Thus it leaves the transformative

and challenging aspects of gender equality out and makes it possible to avoid the necessary contestation of power relations and unequal social, economic, and political structures.

## RECOMMENDATION

Sida's position is that the preferred concept to use is gender equality. Gender equality should always be used in dialogue, and if necessary we should argue for why we do not use gender equity. The specificity of a context and differences in the use of concepts must of course always be taken into account and exceptions may be necessary.

The arguments for Sida's use of gender equality as the preferred concept are the following:

### **Gender equality is a right's based concept**

A pillar in Swedish development cooperation is human rights, and the concepts we use should correspond with this. It should also correspond with international (women's) human rights declarations and agreements.

### **Gender equality includes all aspects of gender equity**

Gender equity is sometimes used in a "neutral" form to mark that the different interests and needs of women and men, girls and boys must be taken into consideration. But the concept gender equality always includes fairness and justice with regards to interests and needs. Therefore, gender equity is an unnecessary concept as it does not add any missing aspect of gender equality.

### **Gender equality does not support conservatism**

When gender equity or other concepts that are given the same content (e.g. sometimes gender justice) is used in a "non-neutral" way it is not only unnecessary but may be a backlash for gender equality and women and girls' rights. Gender equity and other similar concepts may open up for actors that want to move away from the women's human rights agenda. It is important to keep in mind that the use of these concepts may be an indirect support to conservative and repressive actors.

### **Turkey: gender equality is "against nature"**

During the last years Turkey has rapidly moved towards growing conservatism and repression, away from democracy in all fields of society. Part of this process has been a questioning of the concept gender equality. The president himself has stated that gender equality is "against nature" arguing that women need to be "equivalent", not equal.<sup>1</sup> He and others arguing against gender equality refer to Islam and emphasize complementarity between women and men primarily based on women's role as mothers. They see gender equality as detaching women from their femininity and define gender equality as a concept imposed by Western forces. The concept that they instead suggest is gender justice, characterized by "equity, balance, a higher understanding of fair treatment, and liabilities between men and women".<sup>2</sup>

### **Tunisia: equal citizens, not a complement**

When the Tunisian government in 2012 suggested a change in the wording of the constitution's definition of women's rights – from "equality" to "complementarity" – the Tunisian women took to the streets en masse.<sup>3</sup> They were protesting against an article that stated "the protection of women's rights...under the principle of complementarity to man". Even though the legal rights of women were not changed per se, the Tunisian women argued that the language used was a backlash: If women are defined in relation to men they are not considered equal citizens. The protesters were heard, and the final wording of the article was "all citizens, male and female alike, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without discrimination".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-womens-equality-with-men-against-nature.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74726&NewsCatID=338>

<sup>2</sup> E. Sare Aydin Yilmaz: "A New Momentum: Gender Justice in the Women's Movement" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. Winter 2015 (<http://turkishpolicy.com/article/719/a-new-momentum-gender-justice-in-the-womens-movement-winter-2015>)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rt.com/news/tunisia-women-rights-rally-609/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/01/tunisia-women-small-victory-constitution.html#ixzz4GSUoLrjm>