



Tools to support community transformation

A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

Tools in this section of *Reveal* provide background information on hidden issues for facilitators. Tools in other sections are designed to be used with communities.

Revealing inequality between men and women: information for facilitators

Questions for a facilitator to consider:

How do men and women relate to each other in your community? Are men and women seen as equal to each other?

How do the opinions and ideas of men and women differ? What is missed when only the voices of men and not women are heard? Is it important to listen to the views of both men and women when making decisions?

Do both men and women own land and property in the community, or only men?

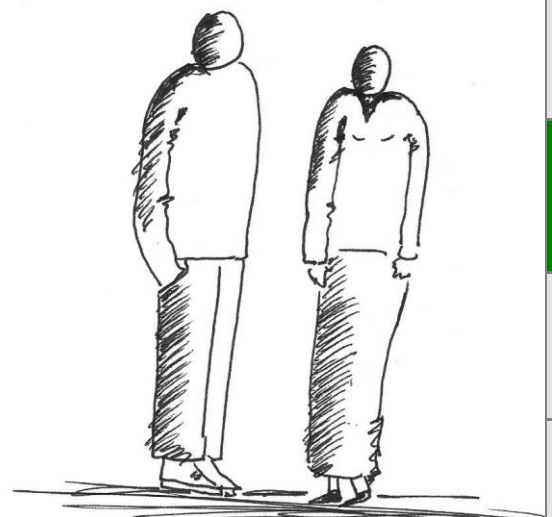
Who makes the decisions within the community – men, women or both together?

How do the roles of men and women differ? Do women have the same livelihood and paid employment opportunities as men?

Who cares for children, the elderly and sick people? Is this important role valued?

Are girls and boys treated equally when it comes to education and healthcare?

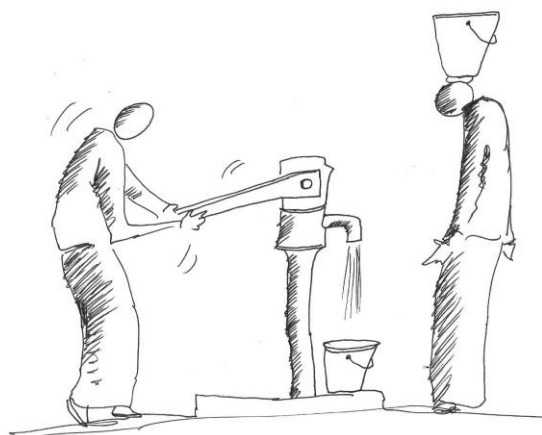
Men and women have been created equal before God, and both sexes together have been made in God's image (Genesis 1). While we are equal, we are also different, often bringing different skills, perspectives and ideas to family and community life. Sadly, in many communities, women do not experience equality with men. Instead there is **inequality** between men and women and **discrimination** – when women are valued differently to men, simply because they are women. Not only is this unfair, it also means that women themselves, **families and communities suffer** and fail to reach their full potential because the valuable opinions and contributions of women are not welcomed. Men and women often have different insights and priorities – together these can combine to ensure that families' and communities' immediate and longer term needs are planned for and met.



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Across the world, women lack access to power, wealth and resources. They do not have equal opportunities to have their voices heard, to make informed choices and to have control over assets. In many places women have little access to education or employment and the work they do is often not valued or recognised economically. At times, inequality and discrimination leads to violence against women and girls (VAWG) – see **Tool A1: Revealing VAWG – information for facilitators**. In many contexts, people do not consider that gender inequality and discrimination are a problem in their own families or community. Or if they are aware, they do not openly talk about it. It can be a hidden issue that needs revealing.



What does the Bible say?

The Bible is clear that God created men and women in his image and therefore they have equal value and dignity before him (Genesis 1:27–28, 31). He created men and women to be in partnership with him and with each other, in the family and wider community, and gave men and women joint responsibility over his creation.

The Bible also explains that the relationship between men and women was broken in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. As a result, selfishness, sin and abuse often dominates this relationship and mars God’s intended design. However, Jesus came to reconcile all that was broken when humanity turned its back on God – including the relationship between men and women.

Sadly, the Bible has often been misinterpreted and used as a tool to justify inequality, discrimination and oppression against women. A passage that is often misinterpreted and used to justify the most terrible abuse of women is Ephesians 5: 21-28, where Paul refers to the husband as the ‘head’ of the wife. However, properly understood, these verses give a picture of Godly marriage that embraces mutual submission and love, respect and honour, with husbands called to love their wives as Christ loved the church. See **Tool B – Men, women, love and submission** to explore this further. Another verse that is often used is 1 Corinthians 11: 3 which says ‘the head of every woman is the man’, but again, read as part of the wider passage, we see that this is not a statement of authority or value, but rather the passage is about the mutual interdependence and equality of man and woman, rooted in God. The word ‘head’ here is a word used to describe the source of a river, not an authoritative leader. It is followed by the very words ‘and the head of Christ is God’. God the Father, Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit are three different but equal parts of the Trinity, as a man and woman are two different but equal parts of a marriage.

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Men and women are equal in God's eyes. Jesus encouraged and affirmed women throughout his ministry, at a time when society gave women little value. And he made it clear that we should treat all people – both men and women – with love and respect (John 13:34–35). Paul, in his letter to the Galatians affirms equality between males and females, as we are all one in the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28). And there are many women in the Bible who have leadership roles: for example, Deborah (a prophet and judge in Judges 4–5); Huldah (a prophet in 2 Kings 22); Miriam (Micah 6:4), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), Pheobe (Romans 16: 1-2) and Junia (named by Paul as an apostle in Romans 16: 7).

Christians are called to challenge injustice and discrimination wherever we see it. And Christian communities are called to model Godly, loving and respectful relationships between men and women.

For Bible studies on this issue, please see **Section B** of *Reveal*.



Explaining the words we use

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are determined by the society in which we live; it reflects the expectations, opportunities and behaviours expected by society of men, women, girls and boys. Gender roles and expectations differ according to social status. They change over time within a society and they differ from one society to another. This means that inequality does not need to be accepted but that it is possible to work towards equality! Gender is different to sex, which is the biological difference between male and female.

Understanding gender inequality and discrimination

In many societies, men and women have different roles and responsibilities. These often come about because of cultural beliefs and traditions. And in many societies, the cultural beliefs about differences between men and women have led to women facing huge inequality, injustice and discrimination. Not only women are impacted, families and whole communities suffer when the gifts, skills and perspectives of women are ignored.

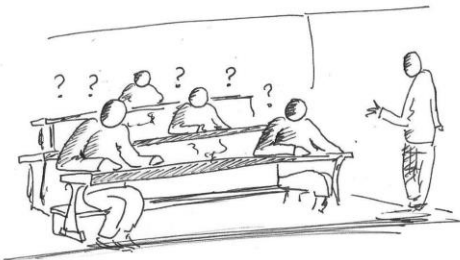
Gender discrimination can happen anywhere – in homes, workplaces, churches and communities. It happens in countries across the world. It starts very early in life, in some places even before birth when female foetuses are aborted simply because they are female. Girls are often denied access to food and health care from birth, with priority given to boys.



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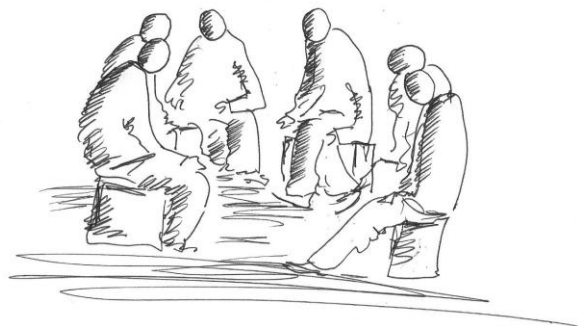
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And as they grow, girls are more likely than boys to be denied education and opportunities to play because it is expected that they carry out chores and earn an income early in life.

In many cultures, when decisions need to be made in the family or in society, they are often made by men: women do not have as much power as men to make decisions. Around the world, women are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes. And women earn less than men even when they do comparable work.



Some women not only suffer because of their gender, but also face discrimination on the basis of their class, disability, race or ethnicity. Often these vulnerabilities and inequalities will need to be tackled together in order for true equality to be realised and for all members of a community to be valued and given the opportunity to thrive and flourish.

Why does gender inequality happen? A view from West Africa ...

“As we develop our understanding of life, most of us believe that what we see all around us in our culture is right, just because it is normal and familiar. We start to believe that 'women are not as valuable as men' and we accept it without questioning.

The main reason why fewer girls attend primary school than boys is that parents believe that boys have more value than girls. Parents think about boys as future family chiefs, who must be prepared for leadership and to earn income for their parents and family. When it comes to deciding who should go to school, parents choose the boy, as he will stay and take care of them later, while the girl will leave the family home to care for her husband and his family. Sometimes, when parents need some of their children to stay away from school to help with domestic chores, look after younger siblings and support the family income, they choose the girls.

We need to challenge the belief that boys are more important than girls and help parents understand that it is equally important to educate girls. Research shows that an educated girl will bring significant benefits to her family, community and country. Every culture has beliefs about what a man is like and what a woman is like and what women and men should do. Sometimes it can be hard to question these beliefs and talk about them.

For men and women to be partners and to make decisions together, both men and women sometimes need to challenge the beliefs they have learnt. If we decide to believe that men and women are equally valuable, we will make different choices. Women will be empowered and decisions will be made that are good for the whole family and for the whole community.”

By Idrissa Ouédraogo. This was first published in Tearfund (2010) *Footsteps 83: Millennium Development Goals*

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How does inequality and discrimination affect people?

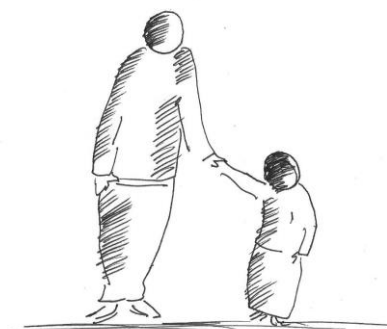
Gender inequality and discrimination affects women and girls in many ways. The challenges that women and girls face will look different in different contexts, but here are some examples of the impacts of inequality and discrimination:

- Gender discrimination makes people poorer: in every country in the world, women and girls are still disproportionately represented amongst the poorest and most marginalised.



Every day, approximately 800 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.¹

- At least one in every three women will be abused either physically or sexually at some time in her life. See **Tool A1: Revealing violence against women and girls: information for facilitators.**
- Women are often paid less than men doing comparable work. In some contexts women also suffer sexual harassment at work.



Caring for children, older people and sick people is a vital part of family and community life. However, despite its importance, it is rarely given the value, recognition and respect it deserves. And it is mostly done by women. Women are also often responsible for domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing and fetching water. Again, these often lack value, recognition and gratitude.

- Women are almost entirely absent from peace negotiations.²

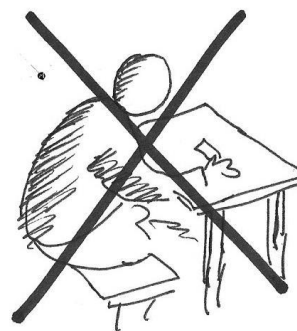
¹ World Health Organisation - <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/>

² UN Women (2012) Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections Between Presence and Influence. New York: UN Women, available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/media/publications/en/03awomenpeaceneg.pdf>

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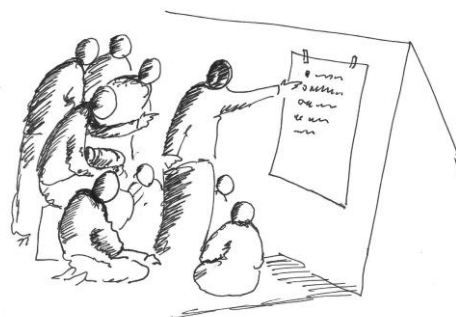
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- Many girls are unable to complete their education due to caring responsibilities, violence, early and forced marriage and lack of sanitary facilities in schools. (See **Tool A1: Revealing the need to protect children: information for facilitators** for more on early/child marriage.) This in turn impacts their livelihood and employment opportunities.



Sadly gender discrimination is also very common in churches. In some churches, women are treated as second-class citizens – made to sit on the floor while men sit on chairs and benches.

- Women are often not given the opportunity to read, study or teach the Bible. This may be based on the male leaders' understanding of the bible is that only men have authority to hear from and preach the word of God.
- Women are often unable to participate fully in community decision-making and activities. Some of the reasons are practical – women may simply not be able to attend meetings or activities because of other responsibilities. The time may not be convenient or they simply might be too busy. If they do attend they may be looking after small children which makes full engagement in meetings or activities very difficult. Other reasons may relate to low self-esteem and confidence amongst women – which are often a result of inequality and discrimination. In some contexts and communities, women may feel intimidated to speak in front of men and are unable to engage in discussions and actions which could benefit the community as a whole. Projects which try to achieve equality simply by inviting women to be part of activities, without considering these other factors (workload, timing, other responsibilities, intimidation), will fail to achieve their goal and may serve to increase the burden on women.
- Ultimately, whole communities are negatively affected by inequality and discrimination against women. Many women's gifting and skills – which could benefit communities and countries – is never realised because of the barriers in the way of them reaching their God-given potential.



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Women and men were created by God as partners in all the processes of life. That means they should share rights as well as responsibilities within the family, and in the whole community and society.

Restored relationships between men and women means:

- Partnership
- Harmony, not conflict
- Healthy relationships
- Mutual respect and equal value
- No one having power or control over the other

Using *Reveal*

Reveal includes tools to help you raise the issue of gender inequality and discrimination. You can find these in **Section A2**. You can find Bible studies to explore what God thinks about this issue in **Section B**.



Finding out more

Related tools:

- A1 – Revealing violence against women and girls – information for facilitators [*A1: Gender & sexual violence-1*]
- A1 – Revealing female genital mutilation – information for facilitators [*A1: Gender & sexual violence-2*]
- A2 – Understanding how men and women use their time [*A2: Gender & sexual violence-1*]
- A2 – Exploring men and women’s control over resources [*A2: Gender & sexual violence-2*]
- A2 – Exploring gender and power [*A2: Gender & sexual violence-5*]
- A2 – Men and women: listening to one another [*A2: Gender & sexual violence-6*]
- B – Gender and restoring relationships (Bible study) [*B: Gender & sexual violence-1*]
- B – God’s view of women (Bible study) [*B: Gender & sexual violence-3*]
- B – God’s view of men (Bible study) [*B: Gender & sexual violence-4*]

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