

## **What is gender mainstreaming?**

*“Mainstreaming a gender perspective 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 in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.”*

**—United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 1997**

Gender mainstreaming addresses gender inequality in a cross-cutting way, so that there is attention to gender perspectives as an integral part of all activities and programmes. It goes far beyond simply having a women’s project or component in programmes. Gender mainstreaming can also change institutional cultures, budgeting and resource allocation. Good gender mainstreaming programmes involve all staff and partners and both women and men to tackle inequalities together. This approach recognises a need to work with men in order to address gender inequality and promote the advancement of women.

## **Why is there often a focus on women?**

This is mainly because gender inequalities are still more often a manifestation of women’s lower status, income, power to make decisions, opportunities, and access to education, services and resources, including land and housing. Activities targeting women and girls can address specific areas where there is persistent discrimination against them. The third Millennium Development Goal addresses gender equality and women’s empowerment together.

## **How are men involved?**

Gender is not only about women. It refers to socially constructed roles of both men and women, the opportunities associated with each, and the relationships between men and women in a given society, at a specific time and place. It also influences expectations on what is allowed and valued in a man or a woman.

Efforts to improve gender equality and reach development goals must involve men as agents of change, for the benefit of whole communities. This is because men play an important role in shaping gender relationships and changing attitudes and behaviour.

For example, the way in which masculinity is defined has an effect on violence against women and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Also, since men still hold more economic, social and political power in most societies, their willingness to share it with women is critical.

Men can be involved in promoting gender equality at all levels—from the home, the community, at work, and as policy makers and decision-makers.

The World Bank has pointed to a correlation between increased economic opportunities for women, and overall economic benefits to families, communities and national development.

Gender equality also helps to create conditions in towns and cities where women and men can live in peace and dignity, where they can grow and develop—not merely survive.