'Inclusive Language'
and
'Gender Sensitive Communications'
A practical guide for the workplace

What is The Objective of The Handbook?

The aim of the handbook is to promote an understanding of inclusive language and how it can help build an empathetic workforce. The attempt is to encourage curiosity, a learning mindset and sensitivity across the organisation on the impact of words and language. The handbook raises awareness about the importance for both gender-sensitive and gender responsive communications across stakeholder groups.

- To educate and build awareness about the importance of gender sensitive language for all PRADANites, internal and external stakeholders across all channels (written and spoken)

- Provide practical examples of gender biased, gender discriminatory communications and how to avoid it

- Create a glossary of key words; dos & don'ts; exercises; tips

The toolkit is not just for promoting inclusive language for women but for all genders including underrepresented groups.

Staff belief and attitudes

As an organisation PRADAN is committed to promoting equitable & inclusive language and behaviour across the organisation and its stakeholder groups. The hand book is aligned to the work being done by PRADAN to increase representation and visibility of women across levels and geographies. At all times we want employees to ask the question - have we considered the gender norms, roles and inequalities that may exist within the organisation and the broader ecosystem. If yes, have measures been taken to actively address them. And if not, why not. The handbook is an enabler for everyone interested in understanding how to communicate in a more inclusive manner.

What we are trying to do here today is not transactional, it is not about apportioning blame, or about getting it right or wrong - it is mostly about creating a paradigm shift. The more we understand about language, descriptors and their meanings, the more we can be intentional about how we speak and the impact of our words.

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Foreword

I am pleased to present this handbook on Gender Inclusive Communication for PRADAN.

Both verbal and non-verbal communications are key media through which we connect and facilitate our work. The language we use and the way we behave often reflect the widely accepted socio-cultural values, norms, and beliefs that society holds. The way we talk, and the words we choose determine the impact on the receiver. It may nurture an inclusive and encouraging culture, also induce a culture of inequality and anxiety. The constant use of such language and behaviour is determined by the unconscious biases we have and it reinforces assumptions.

However, language can also be used as a powerful tool to help reshape culture and challenge stereotypes. This handbook is an attempt to facilitate the use of inclusive language in PRADAN. This will also communicate strongly our stance and commitment towards the cause of gender equality within the larger society and within the organisation.

The objectives of the handbook are to develop a shared understanding of what Gender Inclusive Language means, the factors such as unconscious biases that determine the language and behaviour, some norms and non-negotiable and some tips about how we can be more mindful and practice inclusiveness in our communication.

Through introducing this handbook we are committing ourselves to make concrete changes to the way we communicate both verbally and non-verbally and I believe that this will help us facilitate PRADAN to be a better place for all to work and it will also stimulate our personal and professional growth.

Saroj Kumar Mahapatra
Executive Director
PRADAN

Acknowledgement

Understanding Bias

What is Bias? "Bias is a prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's considered to be unfair."

E.g. PRADAN Employee 1 to his supervisor: "I don't think Jyoti will add any value to the team. We need young men who will be able to travel to remote villages to meet our communities."

The starting point is to acknowledge and recognise that all human beings have bias. It is our unintentional people preference. And is influenced by family values, our own experiences and the media. Our unconscious biases come from a part of our brains that make quick automatic judgements and assign positive or negative values to people. This is because the human brain has a natural tendency to categorise everything. When these judgements are negative, they can have a significant impact on our relationships with people, can affect how well we work with others and destroy productivity.

At any given time our brain is bombarded with an infinite number of stimuli. Categorising people helps us to navigate our social world more efficiently. Social categorisations provides a sense of order and predictability that we can rely on to guide our interactions with others.

Stereotype (Cognitive): A stereotype is an assumption. How do I categorise or label a person? Assuming that everyone with similar characteristics is the same.

Prejudice (Affective): Prejudice is a belief. How do I feel about a person? What are my attitudes towards him/her/they/them. Making your mind up about someone before getting to know them.

Discrimination (Behavioural): Discrimination is an action based on prejudice. How do I act towards a person? Treating people differently because of your beliefs.

| **Stereotype** (assumption)	**Prejudice** (feeling/belief)	**Discrimination** (action)
'People from Bihar are poorly educated'	'I don't like people from Bihar'	'I don't think we should hire this person because….'

The Relationship Between Language and Culture

Most managerial work happens through talk, discussions, meetings, negotiations, presentations. How we use language to communicate in the workplace depends upon various factors; what you do; your designation; relationship with the person you are communicating with; the background. Race, ethnicity and gender also play a vital role in how we use language to communicate.
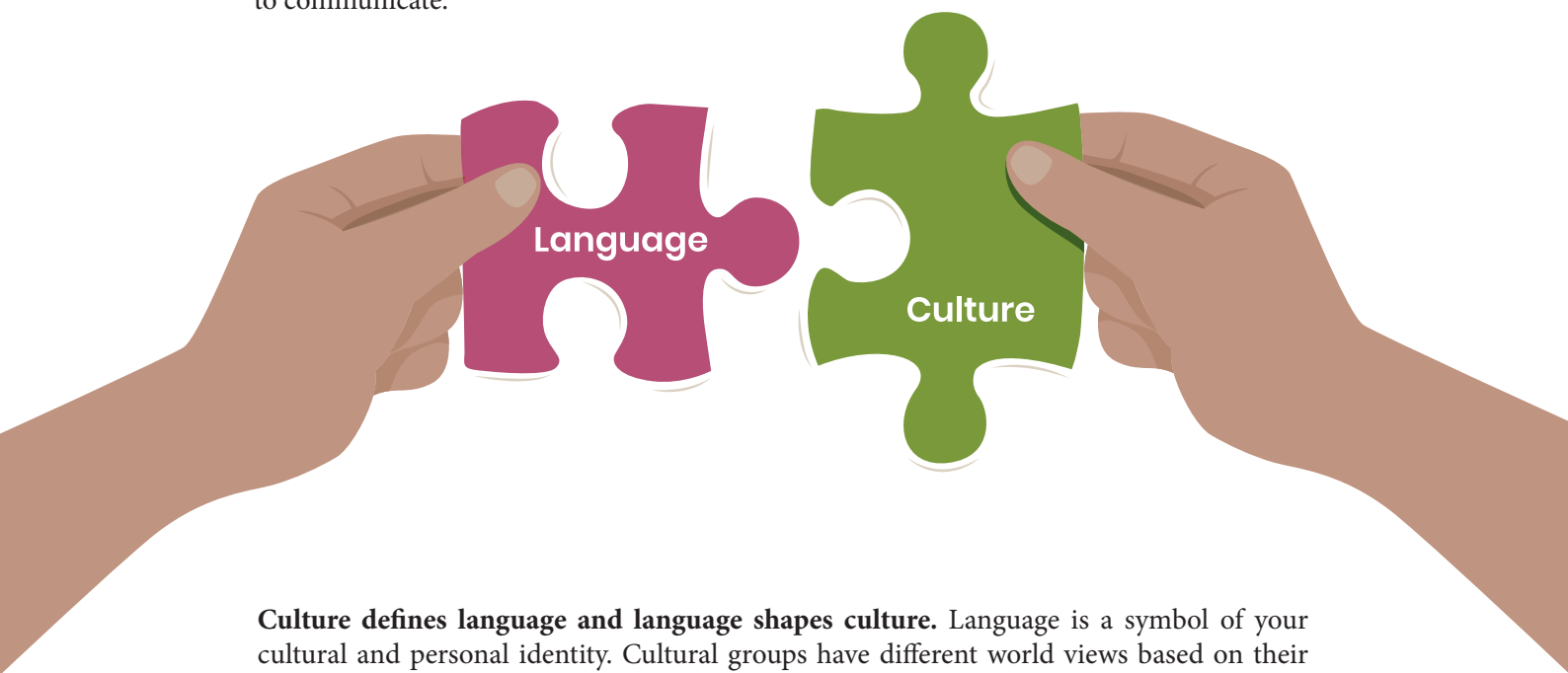
Culture defines language and language shapes culture. Language is a symbol of your cultural and personal identity. Cultural groups have different world views based on their own culture's shared experiences. *Values, basic assumptions, behavioural conventions, beliefs and attitudes shared by a group make up what we call culture.*

Language often reflects the widely accepted socio-cultural, values, norms and beliefs that a society holds, including roles that men and women play.

Culture and language are constantly evolving to reflect new realities. Language and how you use it can undermine people in the workplace; making them seem less competent or confident. Language tells not just who we are, but where we have been and where we are now. It builds relationships and helps us forge connections. It can make people feel included, like they fit in or excluded.

Our choice of words can move the needle towards embracing inclusivity, reflect the diversity of our society and treating everyone fairly. It is possible to use language as a tool to help shape culture and challenge stereotypes. And we know that stereotypes can have negative impact when they limit the potential of human beings or deny them a full range of life options and choices.

Definition of Gender Sensitive Communications & Inclusive Language

"Gender Sensitive Communications ensures that women, men and those who do not conform to the binary gender system are treated as persons of equal importance and with dignity"

"Inclusive language is the recognition that words matter and that word choice, can be used intentionally or unintentionally to include or exclude others. Using inclusive language communicates with people in a way that is respectful and brings everyone into the conversation"

LinkedIn definition: "Inclusive language is that which does not exclude or stereotype people based on race, sexual orientation, age, gender identity, ability, socio-economic status or any other characteristic"

Why use gender sensitive language

√ Makes it easier to see important differences between needs of women, men, and non-binary identities

√ Challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society

√ Lay the foundation for greater equality in society

√ Raise awareness of how language affects our behaviour

√ Make people more comfortable with expressing themselves and behaving in ways that were not once considered typical of their gender

"Gender sensitive language aims to apply gender equality to written and spoken language. It is realised when women, men and those who do not conform to the binary gender dichotomy are made visible"

Principles of Inclusive Language

Sexual orientation
Gender Put People First
Be Respectful Avoid idioms
Challenged Don't be ableist Gender Challenged Religion
Don't assume Historical context
Stereotypes Neutral idioms
Differently abled Specially abled
Gender

☞ **Avoid** Sexist/gender discriminatory/gender based language

☞ **Consider carefully** Gender neutral/gender blind language

☞ **Favour** Gender sensitive language

Put People First: Default to person first ahead of their characteristics. People first language keeps the individual as the most essential element; there is more to each of us than our descriptors. Mention characteristics like gender, sexual orientation, religion, racial group or ability only when relevant to the discussion E.g. Instead of "a blind man" or "a female engineer" use "a man who is blind" or "a woman on our engineering team".

Be Respectful: Not everyone wants to share their identity. If you are leading a group or setting the stage in a conversation, create space for people to show up as they are to the extent they wish to. E.g. We need to allow people at the individual level to choose whether they wish to disclose their individual identities.

Avoid idioms, jargons and acronyms: Jargon and acronyms can exclude people who may not have specialised knowledge of a particular subject and impede effective communications as a result. Many idioms don't translate well in different languages or regions e.g. Call a spade a spade.

Don't be ableist: When speaking about disability, avoid phrases that suggest victimhood, e.g. afflicted by, victim of, suffers from, confined to a wheelchair. Also avoid words like challenged, differently abled or specially abled.

Consider the historical context and implications of words and phrases. It can be surprising to learn the origins of seemingly neutral idioms are based on oppression or cultural insensitivity.

If you aren't sure, don't assume, just ask. Strive to include language that reflects people's choice and style in how they talk about themselves.

Do I need to mention gender: If you are unsure, it may be safe to use gender neutral language. But, consider whether it perpetuates stereotypes or does not take perspectives of different groups.

What is Gender Discriminatory Language?

GENDER DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE MANIFESTS ITSELF IN THREE FORMS:

Stereotypes: assigning gender when gender is unknown or irrelevant as a result of stereotypes.

Invisibility and omission: language which casts the male as the generic norm and keeps women from being visible in public life.

Subordination and trivialisation: language which paints one gender, often women, as inferior, or belittles them.

STEREOTYPES

Assigning gender when gender is unknown or irrelevant as a result of stereotypes

How Language Manifests Gender Related Stereotypes

We have spoken about what stereotypes are in the chapter on bias. Stereotypes are generalised images about people within a society. They often manifest in one or two ways.

One assumes all members of a category (such as a profession) share a gender.

E.g 1) All Executive Directors at PRADAN are men and all staff in administration are women.

The other is assuming that all members of a gender share a characteristic.
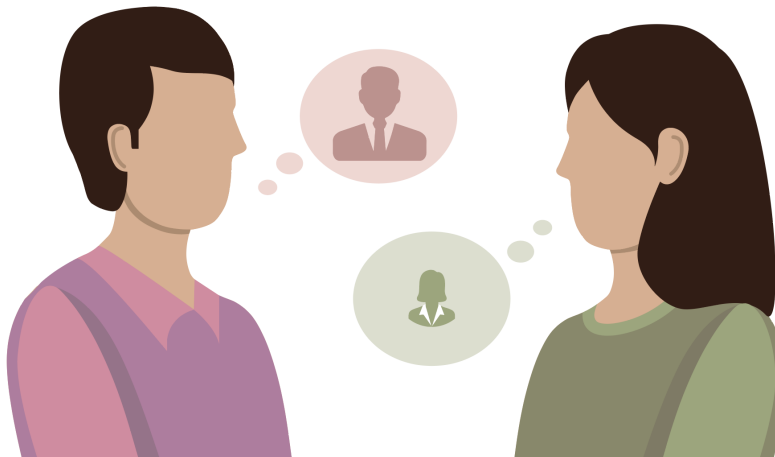
E.g 2) All women at PRADAN prefer to work in office and men like to do field work.

Stereotypes like the above examples negatively impact people of all genders by placing expectations on what people can aspire to be. Repeating stereotypes can reinforce assumptions. At PRADAN we want to dismantle stereotypes that represent certain vocations or roles as only appropriate for, or held by men or women.

Generic Examples: Women: Teachers/Nurses **Men:** Farmer/Doctor

PRADAN Example: Men: Management Committee Members **Women:** Administrative/HR Roles

E.g.s Gender Stereotypes in Language

- By using gendered pronouns
- Adding irrelevant information about gender in a description of an individual
- Assigning gender to inanimate objects
- Using gender stereotypes to describe objects or events
- Describing people of different genders using different adjectives (descriptive words)
- Perpetuating stereotypes in non-verbal communication, such as images and symbols

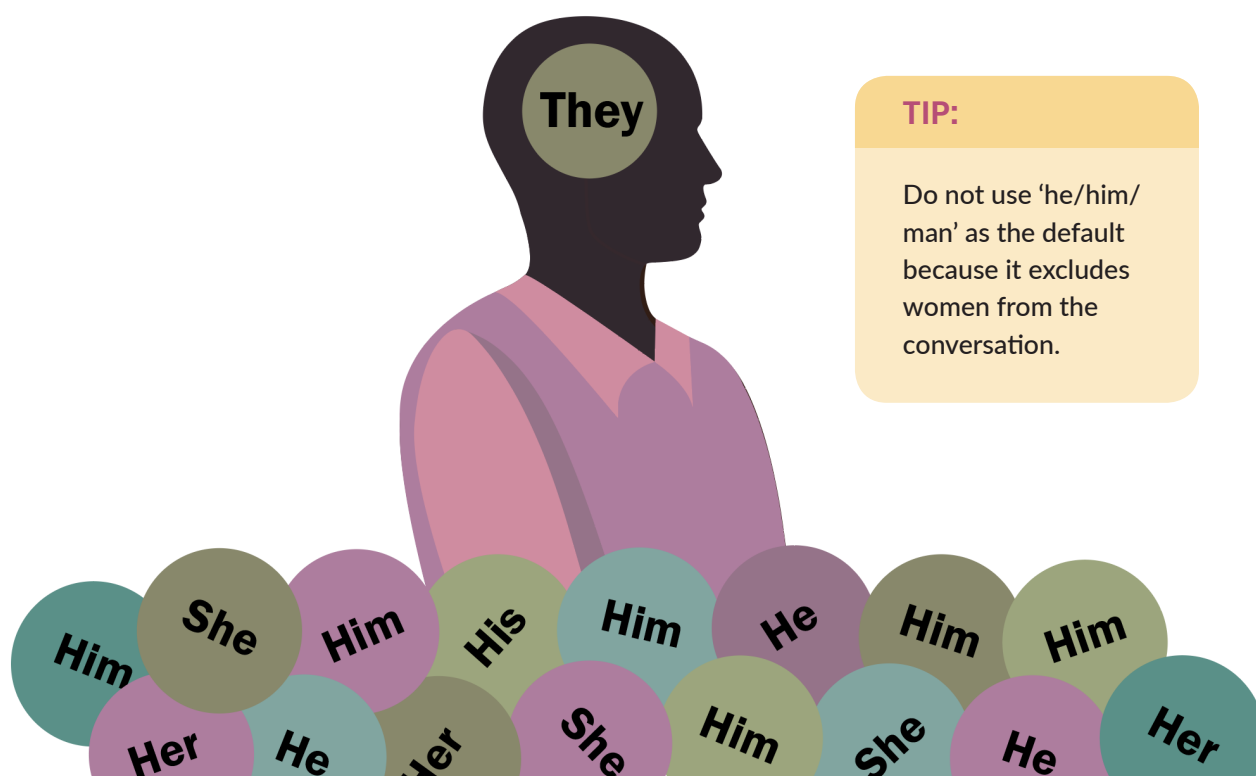# Avoid Gendered Pronouns When a Person's Gender is Unknown

Often people use gendered pronouns even when they do not know the gender of the person/ group they are talking. Using gendered pronouns reinforces gender stereotypes and assumptions about women and men. Doing so reinforces gender stereotyping by repeating commonly held expectations about the gender of people in certain roles.

IMPORTANT: Avoid using gendered pronouns when you don't know the gender

Only use gendered pronouns when you are sure. Be consistent when using pronouns in spoken and written language so as to not create confusion. Stick to one pronoun, use the plural or eliminate the use of pronouns altogether by rewording the sentence.

Examples

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** How long a PRADAN Apprentice takes to become proficient in the local language will depend upon where he is from.

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** How long a PRADAN Apprentice takes to become proficient in the local language will depend upon where they are from.

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** The community leader is expected to manage the finances of his group.

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** The community leader is expected to manage the finances of their group.

They

TIP:

Do not use 'he/him/man' as the default because it excludes women from the conversation.

Him She Him His Him He Him Him

Her He ...er She Him She He Her

Avoiding Irrelevant Information About Gender

Titles for people and occupations often reflect inequitable assumptions about men and women. It strengthens stereotypes that the normal of a particular profession or occupation is gendered. Therefore, when speaking or writing about professions/occupations it is better to avoid any irrelevant information about gender. Example: 'Female engineer' implies that engineers are normally male. **Instead simply use the occupation title with no gender description.**

Another common way that gender is included in writing about people when it is not relevant is through using gendered nouns. These are nouns that imply the gender or a person e.g. policeman and police woman. Avoid using the nouns and use something neutral e.g. police officer

Examples

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** Sanjana is a career woman (the word career woman is un- necessary and the extra information suggests that it is unusual for a woman to be focused on her career. One never hears of a 'career man')

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Sanjana is focused on her career

"The term career woman is gender- discriminatory and should never be used. It carries extra information that suggests it is unusual for a woman to be career-focussed and is insulting to women – one never hears of a 'career man'. "

We tend to assign gender stereotypes of different kinds of work. Be conscious to avoid them

Avoid Gendered Stereotypes as Descriptive Terms

In all cultures and workplaces the usage of certain words with gender connotations is prevalent and use either to make fun of or insult people. These expressions normally paint the feminine as the negative, weak or ineffective. Using language in this way is sexist. Therefore, it is important to avoid gender stereotypes to describe the way something is or the way the action is done.

Examples

❌ **Gender discriminatory language e.g.** 'Abhinav's lady-like shy personality did not impress his manager, who believes field workers need to be confident and assertive'

✅ **Gender Sensitive language e.g.** 'Abhinav's shy personality did not impress his manager who believes field workers need to be confident and assertive'

❌ **Gender discriminatory language e.g.** "Daljeet believes that it is dangerous for Richa to be riding a motorcycle like a man to visit far flung communities'

✅ **Gender Sensitive language e.g.** 'Daljeet believes it is dangerous for Richa to be riding a motorcycle to visit villages at night'

There is wide spread prevalence of the usage of the phrase 'like a girl' in English and vernacular languages to imply weakness or attributes that are not male. E.g. Abhishek spends too much time talking to the villagers like a girl . Campaigners across the world are trying to reclaim this phrase to show the positive side of being 'like a girl!'

Gendering Inanimate Objects

Assigning a gender to an inanimate object by using gendered pronouns to discuss it, applies cultural connotations to characteristics. These connotations are related to gender stereotypes and help to perpetuate them.

You should use the pronoun 'it' to talk about inanimate objects.

In written and oral communications, it is important to be mindful of gender implications of generic terms. Generics are nouns and pronouns intended to be used for both men and women.

E.g. The terms 'fatherland' or 'mankind' describes concepts that include men and women but both terms are evidently male-dominated (male-specific generics). Tend to call up primarily male images for readers and listeners. It is best to avoid such generics

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** Attendees can speak in their mother tongue, since we are providing translators

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Attendees can speak in their native languages, since we are providing translators

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** Man's search for knowledge has led him to impressive scientific discoveries

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** The search for knowledge has led us/human beings to impressive scientific discoveries.

Germany as Fatherland

India as Bharat Mata

Avoiding Different Adjectives For Women And Men

In our daily vocabulary there are many adjectives in English and other languages that are used to describe the same feature in women and men. Some words which – despite not having an explicit gender – have strong connotations that are strongly associated with only women or men.

It is because of cultural stereotypes that certain character traits, such as being outspoken, are considered to be attractive in men but negative in women.

It may be difficult to spot when adjectives are promoting gender stereotypes. The examples in the table below show some words to look out for and to avoid using to describe women

When describing a characteristic of a woman, ask yourself, 'would I ever use this word to describe a man' (and vice versa). If not, then look for a term without gender connotations.

Adjectives with gender connotations to avoid:

Semantic non-equivalence

These are words in English that are supposed to be equivalent, but actually the female versions of the words have gained negative connotations over the years. Think carefully about the connotations of the words before using them. For e.g. consider:

- **Governor:** Governess
- **Master:** Mistress
- **Sir:** Madam
- **Bachelor:** Spinster
- **Host:** Hostess

Commonly used terms for women (derogatory)	Better language
Bossy or pushy	Assertive
Loose	No male equivalent
Emotional or hormonal	Passionate, enthusiastic
Shrill	High pitched, grating voice

Avoid Using Stereotypical Images

Visuals can contribute to reinforce the message of a welcoming and inclusive organisation. It can contribute to overcoming gender stereotypes and reinforcing the visibility of the less represented categories.

It is important that women in visuals represent the institutional activities of the organisation e.g. research, on field meeting. They should not be chosen as merely decorative content or to tick a box. And no visuals should ever reinforce gender stereotypes.

The depiction of women and men should attempt to break notions of gender roles that perpetuate inequalities. Women should be depicted as being able to leverage opportunities or having equal opportunities. Also be mindful of subtle messages about gender norms. E.g. it is recommended to choose images in which postures, expressions, gestures and clothing convey equal status and authority.

Emojis: Over the past couple of years people have become accustomed to using emojis to express themselves when communicating on their phone, on social media and even emails. Many of these emojis repeat stereotypes by putting men in active roles (sports people, professionals) and including women in stereotypical roles (cutting hair or dancing). So, when using emojis remember this is also a way to communicate in an inclusive way

TIP:

Colours are often arbitrarily connected to one gender, such as pink for women and blue for men. When designing communication materials, check the colours you have used and don't use colour as a shorthand for gender.

WHAT NOT TO USE

NON–STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES OF WOMEN IN RURAL INDIA

AVOIDING INVISIBILITY OR OMISSION

Language which casts the male as the generic norm and keeps women from being visible in the workplace

Do Not Use Man As a Neutral Term

There is a saying that history is written by the victors. Similarly discourse in any society tends to be dominated by the powerful majority view in any given situation. General discourse in most societies tends to centre on the experience of those who are heterosexual and male, setting up this experience as the norm and everything else as the exception.

The term **man** is sometimes used to describe the experience of all human beings. However this practice ignores the experience of women and other marginalised groups as equal members of the human race and contributes to their omission from public life. This can impact on the lives and potential of women, especially if the generic man is used at all times to showcase role models or successful people.

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:**
Fire is man's greatest invention

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Fire is humanity's greatest invention

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:**
Under Indian laws, all men are equal

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Under Indian laws, all people are equal

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Under Indian laws, all women, men and non-binary people are equal

'Man' is often used as the generic, therefore try rewording them to make them applicable to everyone

Gender discriminatory language	Better language
Mankind	Humankind
Every man for himself	Everyone for themselves

Do Not Use 'He' To Refer To Unknown People

When we use 'man' generally to mean everyone, it perpetuates the invisibility and absence of women and other marginalised groups in workplaces. Similarly using 'he' to represent any given individual does the same.

"Each applicant must submit his resume"

"Hmmm, I guess it's not for me."

Avoid using 'he' when referring to the generic experience of all people as this removes women from the common experience.

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** The responsible farmer uses organic fertilisers in his fields

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** The responsible farmer uses organic fertilisers in his/her/their field

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** Each apprentice must be well versed in the principles he has learned during his stint in the village

✅ **Gender neutral language:** Each apprentice must be well versed in the principles she/he/ they have learned during their stint in the village

Do Not Use Gender Biased Nouns to Refer to Groups of People

Gendered nouns and adjectives used to denote generic experiences encourage us to view the world as mainly having relevance to men. The word 'policeman' equates the word as a generic for all police. Similarly the term 'salesman' suggests all sales people are men. In a gender-equal society it is important to use language that recognises that these posts can be held by women or men.

Gendered nouns and adjectives should be avoided and replaced with gender neutral terms.

Examples:

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** Manmade fabrics can actually require less manpower to produce than natural fabrics

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Synthetic fabrics can actually require fewer human resources to produce than natural fabrics

❌ **Gender neutral language:** Our forefathers used the same methods of agriculture that we continue to use today

✅ **Gender Sensitive language:** Our ancestors used the same methods of agriculture that we continue to use today

Gender discriminatory language	Better language
Policeman or Policewoman	Police Officer
Business man or woman	Business Executive
Steward/Stewardess	Flight attendant

TIP:

Avoid referring to groups of people as 'guys' because it assumes the male as a generic for the whole group.
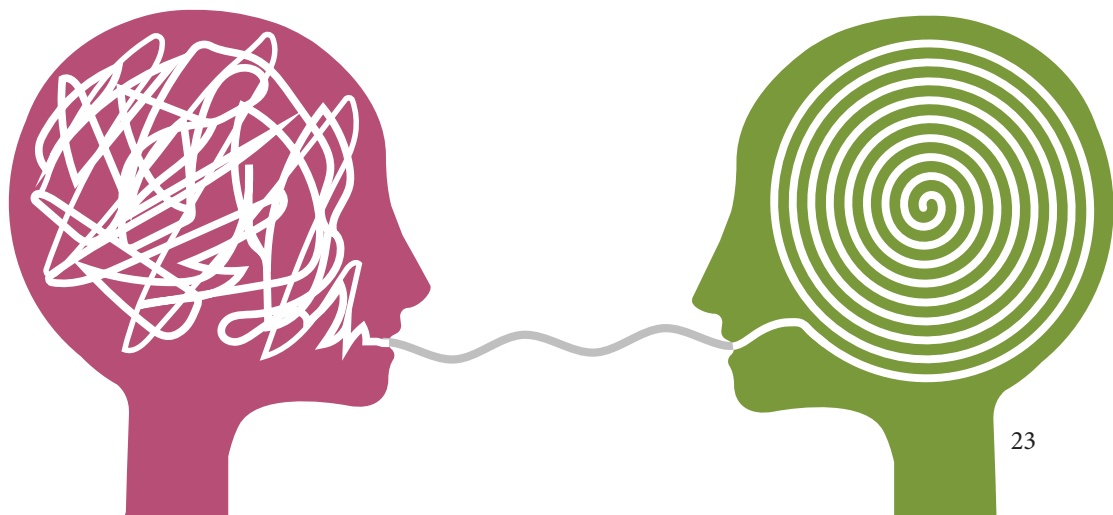
Greetings and Other Forms of Inclusive Communications

What can you do to ensure that all your communications content is inclusive, representative and addresses all genders not just men or women.

Keeping in mind the following:

Choice of photographs/ drawings/images: While using images keep in mind that you do not want to repeat gender stereotypical roles or not have just one gender or the other

Choice of voice-over artist: Do you know the percentage of men and women in your audio and video assets? Is there a tendency to use men and their voices? This helps to strengthen stereotypes. Always aim for a balance - have a mix of male/female and non-binary voices and monitor for accountability

Gender of individuals given in examples. Be flexible, creative and ensure that all genders are represented in non-traditional roles most of the times. E.g. Women are not shown cooking or caring for children and Men in positions of power

SUBORDINATION AND TRIVIALISATION

How not to use language that reinforces the image of women as inferior or weaker sex

How Language can Reinforce the Subjugation of Women

Subordination and trivialisation are ways of using language that reinforce men's traditional dominance over women or belittle or insult women. In Indian society, culture and politics women do not share equal power, prestige, status to men. It is deeply embedded in our society to accept them in 'supportive roles' e.g. at home, within the family network, society etc. What this does is limit their participation in decision making process and ability to undertake non-traditional roles.
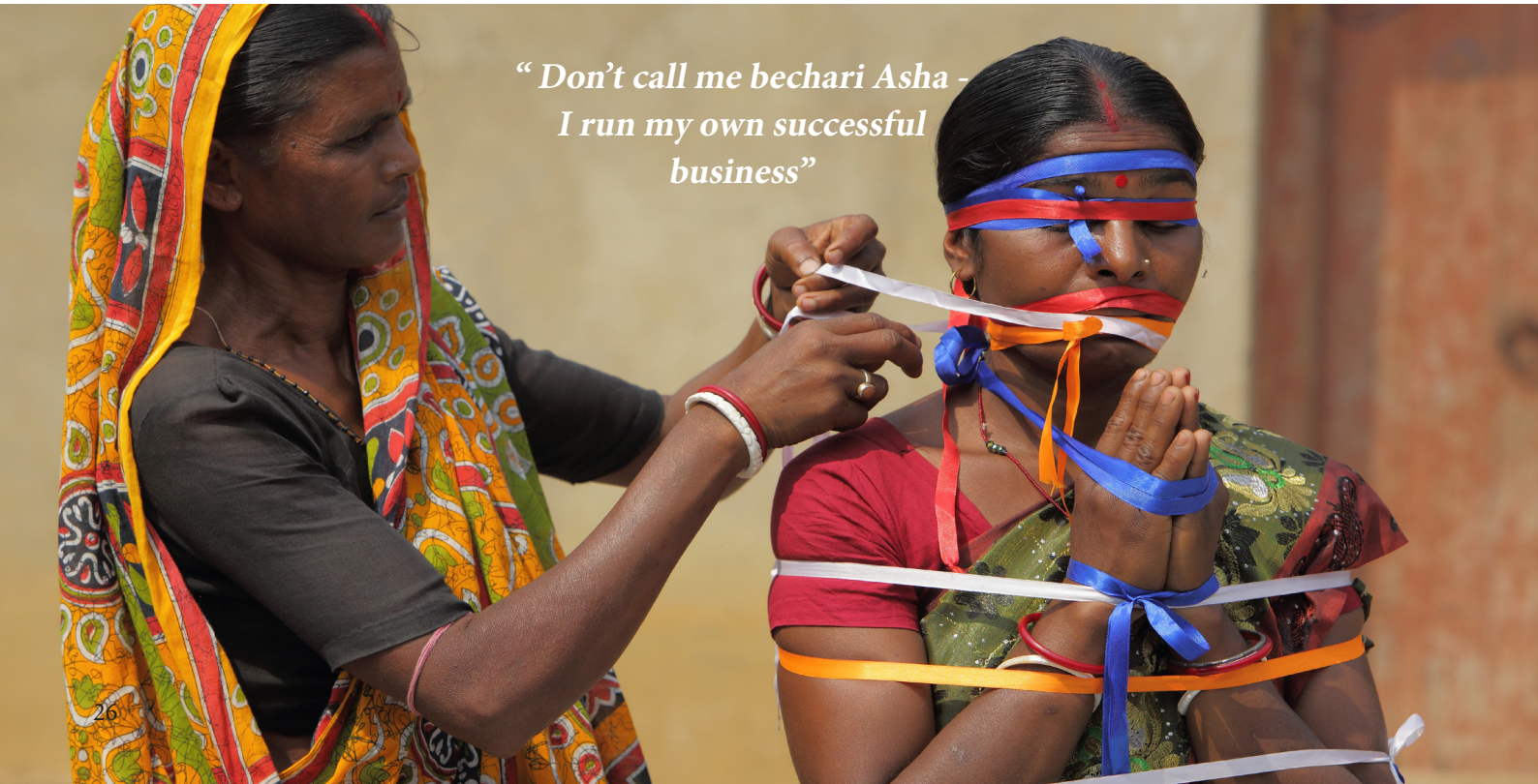
Trivialisation: To make something less important than it really is. It is related to subordination.

The manner in which we use language while referring to women can also undermine and trivialises them and their abilities. E.g. Cute, sweet, doll. They may appear non-malicious, but can have the effect of reinforcing women's inferior position in the workplace and society.

Take care that your language actively promotes gender equality by not trivialising or subordinating women.

Some key aspects of language to watch out for are:
- Naming conventions, titles and how to refer to people
- Word or phrase hierarchy
- Diminutive affixes
- Terms for women

" Don't call me bechari Asha - I run my own successful business"

Naming Conventions

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 e.g. Mrs Asha Chakravarty.

Nowadays however, this practice is no longer appropriate. While the address 'Mrs' implies that the women is married, 'Ms' emerged as an alternative in the 1940s. Today, the 'Ms' form is universally accepted and a good practice to adopt.

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. For e.g. if a women refers to herself as 'Mrs' or adopts her husbands name in correspondence, it is important to respect this choice and subsequently refer to her with the name of her choosing.

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** Mr and Mrs Ajay Sinha will be inaugurating the new water conservation scheme

✅ **Gender sensitive language:** Anita Sinha and Ajay Sinha will be inaugurating the new water conservation scheme

TIP:

The terms 'maiden name' and 'married name' reflect the tradition of a woman changing her name to match her husband's and make relationship status an integral part of a woman's name. Instead just refer to someone's 'last name'

Word Phrase Hierarchy

Some pairs of words and phrases are habitually used in a fixed order, usually with the male version appearing first. This reflects and reinforces the cultural value assigned to each. You should try to avoid repeating these word pairings in the order that they are heard.

These example phrases are not always gender-discriminatory but because they are always said this way they have become so.

You should be aware of the word order of your phrases and make sure that you are not always putting the male version first.

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** The husband and wife team established the charity themselves. The man and woman, both affected by the issue, decided to do something to help others

✅ **Gender sensitive language:** The wife and husband team established the charity themselves. The man and woman, both affected by the issue, decided to do something to help others.

Phrases to look out for

King and Queen

Men and Women

Ladies and Gentlemen

PATRONISING LANGUAGE:
Stay away from gendered terms of endearment

Language which refers to people known/unknown to you in terms of endearment ('My dear', 'Darling', 'Love', and 'Dear' when used in speech) is patronising, condescending and promotes trivialisation. Most women are not comfortable with these terms but are scared to challenge the user. In other instances women accept it as their lot to bear. Both of these situations should be unacceptable in workplaces today. The usage of these words should be actively discouraged in the workplace.

Another common way of trivialising women is to refer to adult women as 'girls'. This is patronising and should be avoided.

As well as avoiding obvious terms that are derogatory, everyone in the workplace should make an effort to learn and not use words that are likely to cause discomfort to women or other marginalised groups

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** The stewardess helped me to adjust the child seat

✅ **Gender sensitive language:** The steward helped me to adjust the child seat

❌ **Gender discriminatory language:** I will get one of the girls from my office to help me move the boxes

✅ **Gender sensitive language:** I will get one of the women from my office to help me move the boxes

CHALLENGING EXCLUSIONARY LANGUAGE IN THE WORKPLACE

How can you challenge exclusionary language and behaviour in the workplace?

👉 What do we need to do when we hear language and banter that is negative?

👉 Do we need to do anything?

👉 Do you find challenging people easy or difficult?

👉 When should we challenge? (For example, early, in a public forum or quietly to one side)

👉 How would you challenge me? What would you say?

👉 How would you challenge each other? What would you say?

👉 Would you feel comfortable challenging another member of this group?

Respond to inappropriate and non-inclusive behaviour

- Act proactively to defuse or prevent potential issues.
- Address unspoken tensions or negative feelings.
- Hold people accountable for their behaviour and its potential consequences.
- Address issues in a sustainable way.
- Encourage, support, include and protect people.
- Recognise incidents of inappropriate or non-inclusive behaviour.
- Act in accordance with your role or organisation's policy.
- Report incidents in accordance with organisation policy, rules, regulations and laws.

From being gender blind to gender transformative: let the journey begin…..

Communications interventions can play a key role in promoting gender equality by challenging and transforming norms, attitudes and behaviours that create and maintain gender inequality and discrimination. They can also build confidence and skills to recognise and demand equal rights and access to resources and opportunities. In addition, gender equality is a key determinant of the realisation of other rights and opportunities and is a pre-requisite to solving a range of problems.

- ☑ Ensure that gender is included in context analysis, formulation of objectives, identification of target audiences

- ☑ Ensure that gender is also considered when designing messages and choosing channels of communications

- ☑ Ensure that women, men and non binary people are represented and are visible

- ☑ Challenge gender stereotypes and avoid depicting men and women in exclusively stereotypical, disempowering or traditional ways

- ☑ Be sensitive to diversity in gender identification and sexual orientation

- ☑ Ensure that gender is integrated into monitoring and evaluation processes and collect and include sex disaggregated data whenever available and relevant

Start your journey
LEARN: PAUSE: THINK: ACT

👉 Take ownership, educate yourself

👉 Slow it down - be mindful and intentional

👉 Question and challenge your thinking

👉 Practice active listening

👉 Recognise and challenge stereotypes

👉 Be inclusive and avoid omission and making others invisible

👉 Be respectful and avoid trivialisation and subordination

👉 And if you make a mistake, apologise, learn from it and move on

Remember the key principles for inclusive language use

- Recognise and challenge stereotypes.
- Be inclusive and avoid omission and making others invisible.
- Be respectful and avoid trivialisation and subordination.

If you have made it this far, you are ready to get started on your journey to gender sensitive communications! Don't get overwhelmed, if you do just go back to the checklist for any guidance, discuss with your facilitators or drop me a line at sudhasingh@thepurposeroom.org

All the best!

PRACTICAL TOOLS
(TIPS/CHECKLISTS)

Tips to using inclusive language when talking about key characteristics:

AGE

Instead of

The Elderly	👉	**Mature Individual**
The Old	👉	**Older People**
The Young	👉	**Young/Younger people**

WHY?

- These gender terms imply that people of certain ages are a standardised group

- At which point is someone old or young

- How would you feel if someone defined you as old or young?

DISABILITY

Instead of

The disabled	👉	**Person with a disability**
The handicapped	👉	**People with disabilities**
Wheel chair bound	👉	**Person who uses a wheelchair**
Cancer victims	👉	**People living with cancer or dementia**

WHY?

- Always put the person before the disability, they may not want to be defined by it

- The word handicapped has a number of problematic connotations; the word implies inherent inability, not being able to function

- Some people with disabilities may identify with terms like 'disabled'. This is their decision and should be respected

- Avoid negative terms that overextend the severity of a disability

GENDER

Instead of

Man, Mankind	☞	**Humans, Human kind**
Man made	☞	**Human made**
Welcome ladies/ gentleman	☞	**Welcome friends/ colleagues/everyone**
Transgender	☞	**Transpeople/ Transpersons**

WHY?

- Use gender neutral terms
- They are more representative of the world we live in
- Use gender neutral pronouns and expressions that don't exclude certain groups
- Use person centred language
- Avoid assuming someone's gender based on their appearance, or name. As some people may not identify as a man or a woman but would prefer to choose their pronouns – he, she, they……

SEXUALITY

Instead of

Sexual preference	☞	**Sexual orientation**
Lesbians, gays, bisexuals	☞	**Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, queer people**
Invite your boy-friend/husband/ girlfriend/wife	☞	**Invite your spouse or partner**
Mother/Father	☞	**Parents; care givers**

WHY?

- Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice when this is not the case
- Use person centred language
- Use this language if someone has told you so, you shouldn't assume otherwise. In some instances, a person could be in a same sex relationship but not identify as gay or lesbian
- Use language that does not assume heterosexuality as the norm
- Recognise diverse family formations

CASTE, ETHNICITY, RELIGION

Instead of

Biharis	☞	**People from Bihar**
Referring to people from North East India as Chinese	☞	**IT IS OFFENSIVE! DON'T SAY IT**
People from lower caste	☞	**JUST DON'T SAY IT**
Minority groups	☞	**Underrepresented groups; marginalized identity groups.**
She, her, hers, he, him, his	☞	**They, them, theirs**

WHY?

- Use adjectives rather than nouns when it is necessary to refer to someone's caste or ethnicity

- Avoid stereotyping e.g. making positive or negative generalisations about caste, ethnicity or religion

- Minority is sometimes used as a blanket term for people from underrepresented groups. So, think about what you want to say

Quick reminder on the 6 principles of gender sensitive communications
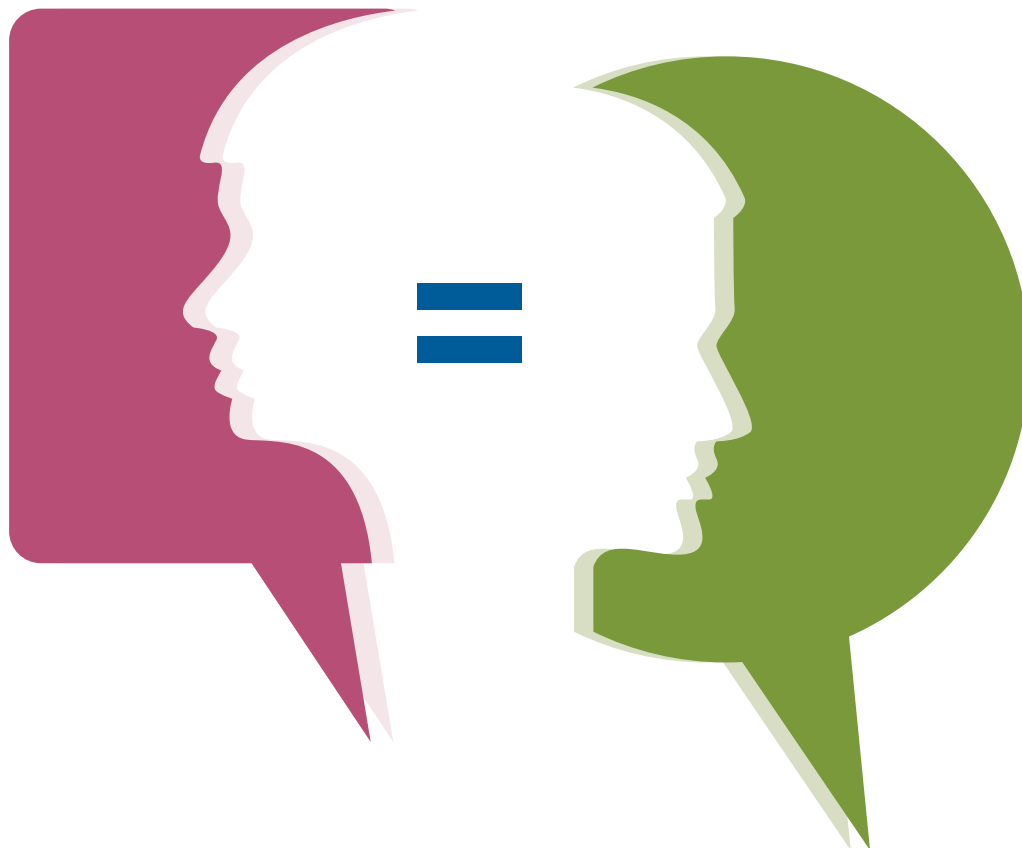
1. Ensure that women and men are represented equally

- Aim for a gender balance across teams; on projects; at conferences; in meetings; on websites; case studies; annual reports etc

- E.g. As PRADAN's partners are women and men, both should be seen, heard and treated equally in corporate media collaterals and messages

2. Challenge gender stereotypes

- Is the language reinforcing gender stereotypes?

- Does the language portray people living in marginalised conditions as victims? Does the visual representation conform to traditional roles

- Do the images objictify women? Are they diverse?

3. Use Equal Forms of Address

- Is the writer mindful and respectful how women prefer to be addressed?

As such stereotypes should be avoided even if they have a positive connotation:

- E.g. Women are more sensitive and emotional and therefore they can contribute more to peace building

- E.g.Women are more transparent and less corrupt

- E.g. Men are more competitive while women are more cooperative

4. Avoid exclusionary forms

- Is the usage of gender specific pronoun necessary in the context?

- Are you assigning gender when gender is unknown or is irrelevant as a result of stereotypes?

- E.g. **Gender biased language**: Each employee will perform better if he tracks his time allocation by a task **Gender responsive language**: Employees will do better if they track time allocation by a task or Each employee will perform better if she/he tracks her/his time allocation by a task

- E.g. **Gender biased language**: Dear mothers, please ensure that your children are included in the seasonal influenza vaccine process **Gender responsive language**: Dear parents/families, please ensure that your children are included in the seasonal influenza process
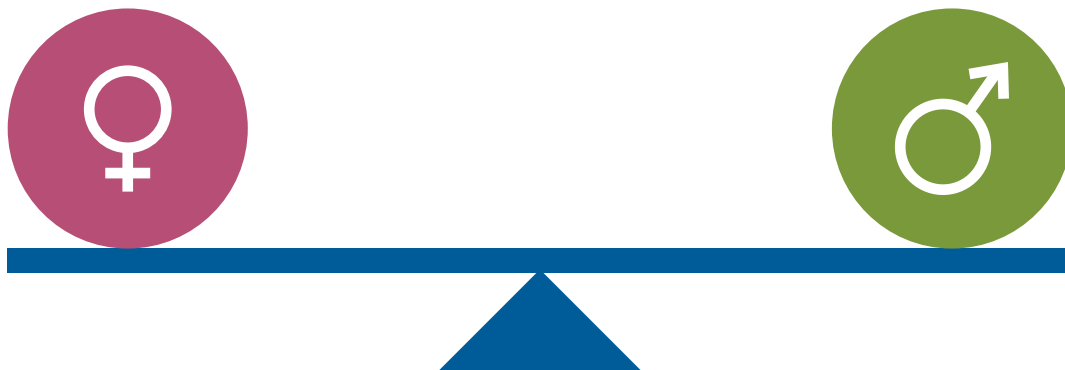
5. Create a gender balance

- Be conscious of gender implications of generic terms. e.g. Fatherland; mankind

- Promote gender equity through titles, labels and names

6. Ensure that language promotes equity through correct usage of titles, labels and names
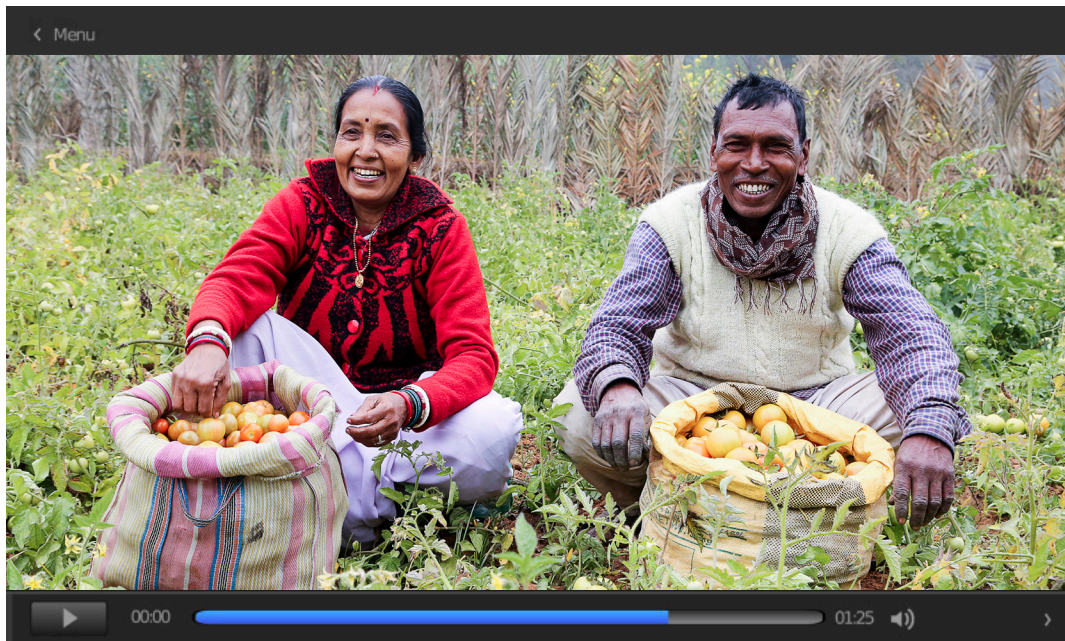
E.g. Salesman/saleswoman: Sales person

E.g. Spokesman: Spokesperson

E.g. Policeman: Police Officer

E.g. Career Woman: Professional/Businessperson E.g. Chairman: Chairperson

E.g Cameraman: Camera operator/photographer/videographer

Principles of Gender Sensitive Communications: audio-visual medium, media and social media

Audio visual medium

- Do you ensure women and men are represented equally?

- Are you challenging gender-stereotypes with images?

- Are you using appropriate infographics?

- How do you protect women from being sexualised or objectified through images?

- Do you ensure equal numbers of women and men in your image selection?

- How do you 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

- Do you consider posture, expressions, gestures, positioning and clothing within a picture or image to convey status. E.g. Avoid portraying men behind desks and women standing to the side, or a man explaining something to a women's- only group.

- Do you use colour as a shorthand for gender? Colours are often arbitrarily connected to one gender, such as pink for women and blue for men

Social media channels

- Is the language gender neutral

- Are their multiple voices and perspectives

- Are the stock photos and icons diverse and representative

- Do you choose the emojis with inclusion in mind e.g. colours

- Do you remove offensive comments immediately from your platforms o How do you address people? By their names?

- Are the forms on your website/social media inclusive forms

- Are their clear and established guidelines for posting

Media Relations

- Are you ensuring a balanced representation on who has visibility in press releases and media outlets?

- Do you ensure that the tone and messaging convey equal status and authority when representing male and female voices?

- In choosing pictures and visuals that accompany the releases, have you checked that the position and attitude of the people represented do not reproduce gender stereotypes?

- How do you avoid stereotypical and patronising expressions?

- In writing institutional news or press releases, are you mindful of avoiding mentioning marital status and family care duties only to women? For instance, do not specify that a female director has children.

Solutions for how to use gender sensitive language (From EU)

Gendered Pronouns (he or she):

- He/she; she/he; or he or she; she or he; s/he
- His/her; her/his; his or her; her or his
- Use the third person plural (they)
- Use gender-neutral pronouns, such as ze/they/them/there
- Rephrase to omit pronoun
- Replace with definite article (the) or indefinite article (a)

Information about gender/gendered nouns ("female lawyer")

- Do not provide irrelevant information about people's gender
- Avoid using gendered pronouns. Use gender - neutral descriptions instead (e.g. Police officer)
- Simply use the occupation title with no gender description

Gendering inanimate objects

- Use pronoun 'it' to talk about inanimate objects

Stereotypical images

- Make sure that the images you choose to use in communication materials do not reinforce gender stereotypes. Include a wide mix of people in different environments

Invisibility or omission

- Do not use 'man' or 'he' to refer to the experiences of all people
- Make clear that you are referring to men and women by naming each

Subordination and trivialisation

- Ensure that your language actively promotes gender equality by not trivialising or subordinating women
- When referring to women you should use the term Ms which does not denote marital status
- Always use the same naming conventions for men and women when referencing
- You should be aware of the word order of your phrases and make sure that you are not always putting the male version first
- Avoid patronising women

Examples of common adjectives that carry a gender connotation and alternatives

Gendered adjectives	Alternatives
❌ Bossy or pushy	✅ Assertive
❌ Emotional or hormonal	✅ Passionate, enthusiastic, empathetic
❌ Ditsy	✅ Silly
❌ Shrill	✅ High pitched
❌ Hysterical	✅ Irrational
❌ Mumsy	✅ Old fashioned
❌ Virile	✅ Strong, energetic

Phrases that exclude women

Gendered discriminatory	Better
❌ Master of ceremonies	✅ Host
❌ Best man for the job	✅ Best candidate for the job; best person for the job
❌ Gentleman's agreement	✅ Informal arrangement
❌ Workmanship	✅ Handiwork; expertise
❌ Mastermind	✅ Create/Creator
❌ Brotherhood	✅ Kinship/community
❌ Masterplan	✅ Grand plan

Breaking down ableist language: Language that is offensive to people with disabilities

Ablesit word	Alternatives
❌ Disabled	✅ Person with disability
❌ Confined to a wheelchair	✅ Wheelchair user
❌ Crazy	✅ Person with mental health issues
❌ Blindspot	✅ Unconscious bias
❌ Tone deaf	✅ Insensitive, out of context
❌ Brotherhood	✅ Kinship/community
❌ Masterplan	✅ Grand plan

If you are conducting face to face interactions with groups

Here is a list of questions to get you started

Questions for group discussions:

1. Would you like to share any personal examples regarding communications at the workplace that involved the inclusion or exclusion of a gender?

2. Have you ever noticed yourself using non-inclusive language regarding gender? Can you give examples

3. Have there been instances when you had a question relating to gender inclusive language? Do you remember the question? And how did you deal with the problem?

4. Do you know what discriminatory language looks like?

5. Have you ever corrected a colleagues language when it is gender discriminatory? How did you handle the situation

6. Do different languages treat gender differently? In what ways? Can you give examples from your language

7. When would you make gender visible and in which cases you would it be better to not make gender visible?

8. Are there any initiatives at PRADAN that create an enabling work environment for all staff regardless of their gender?

9. Do you believe that using gender inclusive language will have a positive impact in the work environment

10. You have a colleague who could benefit from training in gender-inclusive language: how do you approach him/her/they/them? What resources do you provide?

GET STARTED ON YOUR LEARNING JOURNEY!

All the best!