

Gender Integration Continuum

Time: 1 hour

Activity Objective:

Understand the IGWG Gender Integration Continuum as a lens for assessing project approaches.

Materials:

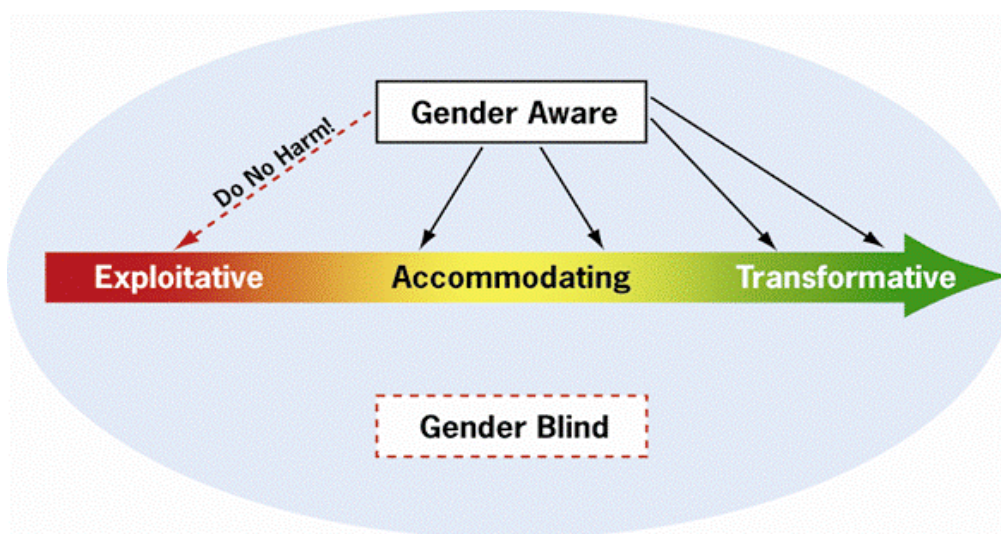
- Printed Flipcharts:
 - IGWG Gender Integration Continuum Graphic
 - Gender Integration Continuum Group Task
 - Continuum Case Studies, color-coded
- Handout: Gender Integration Continuum

Activity:

1. Explain that we have been exploring the importance of understanding how gender can affect our project outcomes. To guide various projects on how to integrate gender, the IGWG has developed a conceptual framework known as the Gender Integration Continuum. This framework categorizes approaches by how they treat gender norms and inequities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of program/policy.¹

The term “gender blind” refers to the absence of any proactive consideration of the larger gender environment and specific gender roles affecting program/policy beneficiaries. Gender blind programs/policies would give no prior consideration for how gender norms and unequal power relations affect the achievement of objectives, or how objectives impact on gender. In contrast, “gender aware” programs/policies deliberately examine and address the anticipated gender-related outcomes during both design and implementation. An important prerequisite for all gender-integrated interventions is to be gender aware.

¹ This framework draws from a range of efforts that have used a continuum of approaches to understanding gender, especially as they relate to HIV/AIDS. See Geeta Rao Gupta, “Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS: The What, The Why and The How” (Plenary Address at the XIII International AIDS Conference), Durban, South Africa: 2000; Geeta Rao Gupta, Daniel Whelan, and Keera Allendorf, “Integrating Gender into HIV/AIDS Programs: Review Paper for Expert Consultation, 3–5 June 2002,” Geneva: World Health Organization 2002; and WHO/ICRW, “Guidelines for Integrating Gender into HIV/AIDS Programmes,” forthcoming.



Talking points to introduce the gender integration continuum

In the continuum graphic, the circle depicts a specific program environment. Since programs are expected to take gender into consideration, the term “gender aware” is enclosed in an unbroken line, while the “gender blind” box is defined by a dotted, weak line. Awareness of the gender context is often a result of a pre-program/policy gender analysis. “Gender aware” contexts allow program staff to consciously address gender constraints and opportunities, and plan their gender objectives.

The gender integration continuum is a tool for designers and implementers to use in planning how to integrate gender into their programs/policies. Under no circumstances should programs take advantage of existing gender inequalities in pursuit of health outcomes (“do no harm!”), which is why, when printed in color, the area surrounding “gender exploitative” is red, and the arrow is dotted.

Gender aware programs/policies are expected to be designed with gender accommodating or transformative intentions, or at other points along that end of the continuum. Programs/policies may have multiple components that fall at various points along the continuum, which is why multiple arrows exist. The ultimate goal of development programs/policies is to achieve health outcomes while transforming gender norms toward greater equality; therefore, the area around “gender transformative” is green (‘proceed forward’), and the arrow extends indefinitely toward greater equality.

Gender exploitative approaches, on the left of the continuum, take advantage of rigid gender norms and existing imbalances in power to achieve the health program objectives. While using a gender exploitative approach may seem expeditious in the short run, it is unlikely to be sustainable and can, in the long run, result in harmful consequences and undermine the program’s intended objective. It is an unacceptable approach for integrating gender.

Gender accommodating approaches, in the middle of the continuum, acknowledge the role of gender norms and inequities and seek to develop actions that adjust to and often

compensate for them. While such projects do not actively seek to change the norms and inequities, they strive to limit any harmful impact on gender relations. A gender accommodating approach may be considered a missed opportunity because it does not deliberately contribute to increased gender equity, nor does it address the underlying structures and norms that perpetuate gender inequities. However, in situations where gender inequities are deeply entrenched and pervasive in a society, gender accommodating approaches often provide a sensible first step to gender integration. As unequal power dynamics and rigid gender norms are recognized and addressed through programs, a gradual shift toward challenging such inequities may take place.

Gender transformative approaches, at the right end of the continuum, actively strive to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalance of power as a means of reaching health as well as gender equity objectives. Gender transformative approaches encourage critical awareness among men and women of gender roles and norms; promote the position of women; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and/or address the power relationships between women and others in the community, such as service providers and traditional leaders.

Program/policy planners should keep in mind that a particular project may not fall neatly under one type of approach, and may include, for example, both accommodating and transformative elements. It is also important to note that while the continuum focuses on gender integration goals in the design/planning phase, it can also be used to monitor and evaluate gender and health outcomes, with the understanding that sometimes programs result in unintended consequences. For instance, an accommodating approach may contribute to a transformative outcome, even if that was not the explicit objective. Conversely, a transformative approach may produce a reaction that, at least temporarily, exacerbates gender inequities. Monitoring and evaluating gender outcomes against the continuum allows for revision of interventions where needed.

Most importantly, program/policy planners and managers should follow two gender integration principles:

First, **under no circumstances should programs/policies adopt an exploitative approach** since one of the fundamental principles of development is to “do no harm.”

Second, **the overall objective of gender integration is to move toward gender transformative programs/policies**, thus gradually challenging existing gender inequities and promoting positive changes in gender roles, norms, and power dynamics.

2. Ask the group to count off by five to create five small groups of three people. The ideal size for the small groups is three people each to enable in-depth discussion.
3. Explain that you will distribute two project examples to each small group and ask them to complete the following task (printed on flipchart). Give them 15 minutes to work on the task.

Continuum Group Task:

- Read your assigned project/activity examples and determine as a group where you would locate the project approach along the gender continuum: exploitative, accommodating, or transformative. Paste the project example accordingly on the wall under the category titles.
- If you feel that the project was designed without taking gender into account whatsoever, place the example near “gender blind.”
- Focus on the intention or design of the project rather than outcomes, as outcomes are influenced by many factors outside the control of the project team.

Facilitator’s Note: *You will need to provide at least one project description for each of the three categories—exploitative, accommodating and transformative. When distributing examples to small groups, ensure that each group works with examples of two different categories.*

Facilitation Alternative: *Some trainers prefer to give a common project example to two groups and find that sometimes the groups classify the examples differently. This can result in an interesting debate.*

After the small groups have placed their project description cards along the continuum, ask a representative from each group to come forward, read the project description, and explain the group’s reasoning. Entertain reactions or questions from the other groups.

IGWG trainers note that the richness of this exercise comes in the processing. The IGWG has classified the various project examples according to continuum category. That category appears on the project description template as a reference for the facilitator. The IGWG’s advice to the facilitator is to foster an in-depth debate and provide the “IGWG answer” *only if* it’s helpful to the group.

In most cases, there is no “correct” answer for these examples, as participants will have alternate contexts or scenarios that influence their interpretation of the project’s intention or design and therefore place the example in different locations on the continuum. Encourage diversity in this exercise, letting people explain their placements and any assumptions they made to arrive at their decision.

4. Debrief the activity by highlighting the following points:

For the examples categorized as **gender blind**, **exploitative**, and/or **accommodating**, ask participants what steps can be taken to move those project designs toward the **transformative** end of the continuum.

At a minimum, health and development projects should strive to “do no harm” in terms of gender norms and relations. From the IGWG’s perspective, there is no viable rationale for designing a project that deliberately exploits gender inequality (gender exploitative projects). All USAID-supported projects are required to avoid doing harm from a gender standpoint.

When a project team fails to look at gender issues in a project design, they are missing an opportunity. In the case of some gender **accommodating** examples, project managers have opted to conform to existing gender norms in order to enhance programmatic/health out-comes. Other times, a project may accommodate gender norms as an interim step in response to an identified gender issue. Gender accommodating strategies can be a reasonable way to “buy time” while the project figures out how to best address a gender issue in a way that transforms gender relations and promotes gender equity. The IGWG’s position is that transforming gender relations in favor of equity provides a win-win situation in terms of health outcomes, addressing both short-term project objectives and long-term sustainability.

The IGWG’s goal is to challenge project managers to promote projects/activities that transform gender relations. In some cases, a project will be based on a transformative intention, but the outcomes fall short. Usually, this calls for re-design work.

5. Ask the group to consider their existing projects and activities and how they would classify them along the gender continuum. (In an extended workshop, participants will have the chance to apply the gender continuum directly to their own projects.)