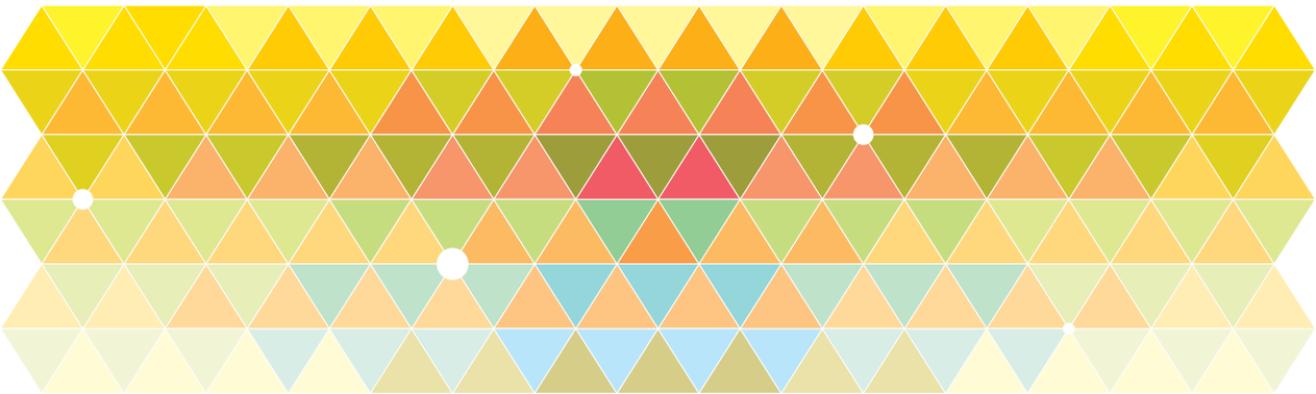


GUIDELINES FOR DEBATE

WHAT IS GENDER PERSPECTIVE?





BY CECILIA GARCÍA

This edition of Guidelines for Debate aims to define what gender perspective is and to provide guidance for its incorporation in the development of public programs and policies. To this end, the paper proposes dynamics for discussion that arise from the revision of the precedents and other elements that conform gender perspective.

A critical ontology of ourselves should not be considered as a theory, a doctrine, nor as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it should be regarded as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is both the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.

Michel Foucault

The aim of the series **GUIDELINES FOR DEBATE is to influence the formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies through guidelines that foster the debate of ideas from a progressive approach. The collection features a cool exchange of data and theoretical and methodological tools for analysis and action aimed at emerging political generations.**



OFF WE GO

In order to fully understand what gender perspective is and how to apply it, it is necessary to know its origins. The concept “gender”, as a category of analysis, is closely related to the feminist movements that began in Europe during the 17th Century. The raise of awareness of women – with many bourgeoisie, philosophers, and writers among them– as a group historically oppressed by a patriarchal system was a turning point of what would be later known as *first-wave feminism*.

During the 18th century, the demands of these women added up to the arguments of the French Enlightenment intellectuals who claimed their right to be treated as free and equal individuals. The influence of both movements expanded rapidly in Europe. Unfortunately, women also had to face their critics, and when the French Revolution came to an end, they realized that such demands had not been considered.¹

Nevertheless, these facts laid the foundations to continue the efforts to vindicate women’s rights; from the access to education and the conquest of civil and political rights, to the recognition and respect of their autonomy and their bodies. All these struggles acquire different shades according to the historical period and context during which they develop. However, all of them aim for the same goal: to put an end to inequality between men and women.

Then, how is it related to gender perspective? As we mentioned before, Feminism, as an ethical-political movement, was born and developed during the 17th and 18th centuries. Later, some other Feminist theories would revisit the concept of gender – understood as a social, cultural and historical construction derived from the meanings attributed to sexual differentiation- to refer to the studies of the movements of women because they considered it to be a neutral and objective term in the pursuit of academic legitimacy.²

The term turned out to be adequate; it made evident the need to understand what happens with men attached to the hegemonic model and how they have responded to such movements. The concept became an analysis tool to understand the causes of feminine subordination and the factors that perpetuate it. Also, it reveals the underlying exercise of power and its consequences in relationships structured upon gender.

Finally, after a series of efforts that led to the creation of instruments to guarantee women's rights,³ *Gender Mainstreaming* was adopted as strategy to improve the life conditions of women and promote the equality of opportunities, taking in consideration the impact of the relation between genders. The Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995, is the event framing the beginning of this principle.⁴

Nowadays, this debate has become a central focus of public policies, academic plans, and social projects. Nonetheless, incorporating gender perspective is not always an easy task, as it requires distancing ourselves from an androcentric⁵ world view, as well as a critical approach to problems concerning both women and men. "Above all, employing gender perspective in politics implies a feminist view as starting point." (Serret, 2008, p. 51)

DYNAMIC 1

Gather a group of **10 to 20** persons interested in knowing what **GENDER PERSPECTIVE** is and how to formulate programs, projects or public policies with a **GENDER FOCUS**.

Prepare in advance a space with **A HUNDRED CARDS** (10cm x 20cm) of at least **THREE DIFFERENT COLORS**, and **BLACK** or **BLUE MARKERS** for all participants.

Choose a color of cards to use **FIRST** and ask the participants to **WRITE INDIVIDUALLY** their own definition of gender **AS A CONCEPT**. It is important that the cards can be read from at least **6 METERS (20 FEET)** away. The definitions should be written clearly on one side of the card with felt-tip markers.

Once all participants have written their definition, the facilitator will **COLLECT** and **POST** the cards on the board with tape, tacks or some other material.

The facilitator should **READ OUT LOUD** the ideas for the participants who will try to integrate all the contributions into **ONE** single group definition.

ON WE GO

It is important that, by the end of the dynamic, the participants understand that gender is a historical and cultural construction that has been transformed through time, that it is learned and interiorized through social contact, which establishes the attributes assigned to men and women. Therefore, it determines a series of roles, attitudes and behaviors based on sexual differences as well as structuring relationships of power.

One of the reasons why we must clarify this concept is to avoid the misconception that gender is a synonym for women, and that gender perspective only deals with designing programs for this segment of the population.

DYNAMIC 2

Pick a **DIFFERENT** card color for this dynamic.

The facilitator must ask the participants to **THINK** about the **CONSEQUENCES** of building relations inside a patriarchal system that has established a hierarchy between genders, maintaining and **LEGITIMIZING** the **ALLEGED** male supremacy.

Each card must contain **ONLY ONE IDEA**, although participants may **USE AS MANY** cards as they need.

The group's answers **MAY VARY** according to its characteristics. The facilitator should group the ideas in **CATEGORIES** which may be narrowed down according to the context that will be analyzed: education, work, politics, family, community, health, and others. For example, if one of the consequences of **TRADITIONAL** gender relations is the **INEQUALITY** of access to management positions in a company, this idea should be grouped in the work category. The facilitator can create **AS MANY CATEGORIES** as the group wants.

The thoughts generated by this dynamic are relevant for the political debate because they are the same issues that we have attempted to address from this space. Therefore, they are salient on the public agenda.

This has moved governments, private assistance institutions, non-profit organizations and other social forces to develop programs aimed at these issues. However, these programs are not always designed and implemented from a gender perspective.

DYNAMIC 3

The person facilitating the discussion should ask the participants to gather in groups of **4 OR 5 PEOPLE**. Ideally, there should be as many **GROUPS** as **CATEGORIES** created in the previous dynamic. If the group is small, the participants will choose the contexts that will be discussed (**2 or 3**).

Each team should make a proposal of a **PROGRAM** or **POLICY** that attempts to solve a specific issue from the contexts previously chosen. Participants can also analyze **A PREEXISTING PROGRAM OR POLICY** in order to determine if it was created from a **GENDER PERSPECTIVE**.

The facilitator will formulate a series of questions^{6,7} that will aid the teams to complete this activity using the category “gender” as a tool of analysis. You can **WRITE** the questions on **A BOARD** or prepare **A DOCUMENT** that contains them and give a copy to **EACH** team.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| GENDER PRESENCE | - What are the gender relations established between the women and men involved in the proposed program or policy? |
| GENDER DATA | - Is the analysis of the problem taking into account the data disaggregated by sex? |
| GENDER EQUALITY/INEQUALITY | - Does the program seek to transform the institutions that perpetuate gender inequality? - Does the program or policy explicitly promote gender equality? |
| GENDER IMPACT | - Has the potential negative impact of the project or policy been considered (e.g. potential increased burden on women or social isolation of men)? - Is the compatibility between work and family being considered for both men and women? |
| GENDER RESULTS | - Does the planned objective reflect the needs of both men and women? - Does it take into account the problems and the gender gap, and does it address the needs of both women and men? |
| GENDER PARTICIPATION | - Will both men and women participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of the program or policy? If not, specify why. |
| GENDER DIFFERENCES | - Have indicators been developed to measure progress towards the fulfillment of each objective? Are indicators disaggregated by sex? |
| GENDER IN CONTEXT | - Have stereotypes or structural barriers that hamper full participation of women or men in the activities been considered? |

At the end of this activity, ask the group to share their reflections and provide feedback.

WHAT WERE THE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN?

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THEY FIND TO PRESENT THEIR PROPOSAL WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE?

WHAT STRUCTURAL CHANGES ARE REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THEIR PROGRAM OR POLICY?

Now that we know what gender perspective is and how to incorporate it in the formulation of projects, policies and programs, it is important that we apply it and share what we have learnt. After all, it is an art that takes practice to master.^{8,9}

1. Serret, Estela (2008). "¿Qué es la perspectiva de género?" in *Qué es y para qué sirve la perspectiva de género*. Textbook for the *Perspectiva de género en la educación superior* class at the Instituto de la Mujer Oaxaqueña, Oaxaca.
2. Scott, Joan (1996). "El género, una categoría útil para el análisis histórico" in Marta Lamas compiler *El género: la construcción de la diferencia sexual*. PUEG, México.
3. Among them, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
4. Stiegler, Barbara (2003). "Qué es el *gender mainstreaming*" in *Democracia de género una propuesta inclusiva*, Fundación Heinrich Böll, El Salvador.
5. Vision that sets the parameters for interpreting all human experience from an exclusively masculine approach.
6. Adapted from the manual published by the Regional Gender Programme of the Regional Bureau of Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP RBEC), Astrida Neimanis, 2002. Available at: http://www.undp.org/women/docs/RBEC_GM_manual.pdf
7. By incorporating two or three of these guidelines in the analysis and/or design, implementation and evaluation of any program or public policy we are applying a gender perspective.
8. More information on key concepts related to gender may be found in: *Equidad de género y prevención de la violencia en preescolar* (2009). Secretaría de Educación Pública, México.
9. If you wish, you can send us your group discussion results to ideas@espolea.org

The views expressed in the text, as well as the analyses and interpretations contained therein, have not been subjected to editorial review and are the sole responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views and stance of Espolea A.C.

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