



This quick-read guide provides practical suggestions on how to mainstream gender issues into the development of print and digital content in conflict and stabilisation contexts.

This guidance applies to:

- content where the primary objective is to promote gender equality; and
- content where promoting gender equality is not the main purpose.

Dos and don'ts on mainstreaming gender into communications content development⁶⁸

Strategy and approach

- 1. Do challenge gender discrimination, negative gender stereotypes and harmful social norms.** For example, show women as experts on non-traditional topics (e.g. economics, security), decision-makers, role models and community leaders and show them as overcoming challenges (see **Box 19**). Show men being concerned about women's and children's health, sharing household tasks and speaking up against violence against women.
- 2. Do design disinformation messages that expose and debunk gendered disinformation** (e.g. false statistics about sexual violence by immigrants, myths about Western policies on gender equality, fake online images of high-profile women aimed at undermining their credibility) and provide **alternative narratives on gender issues** in line with the UK Government's gender equality commitments (see **Quick read guide: countering disinformation**) (page 65).
- 3. Do counter violent extremist narratives** by highlighting **disparities and hypocrisies between their narratives and the reality on gender issues** (e.g. female Daesh recruiters offered women the prospect of a comfortable life by posting on Facebook of how rent is not paid and monthly allowances are provided, which are in stark contrast to the daily realities of a war-zone in Syria) (see **Quick read guide: countering violent extremism**) (page 74).
- 4. When addressing sensitive gender issues** (e.g. gender-based violence, abortion), **do:**
 - seek advice from experts to understand the issues and the context and to avoid doing harm;
 - provide information about relevant helplines and support;
 - protect the safety and well-being of contributors to your programme.
- 5. Do make positive stories about women's empowerment** that show how things can change (see **Box 19** for a case study)
- 6. Do show men/boys engaged in promoting gender equality** and women's empowerment.
- 7. Do involve people with gender expertise or women's rights organisations** to advise on content. Build enough time for this into your production timelines.
- 8. Do consider including stories on sexual and gender minorities (SMGs)**, tailored to the local context. In doing so, consult SGM advocates and ensure that strategic communications approaches and messaging are based on their advice. In addition, take steps to avoid an anti-SGM backlash and ensure the security of SGM people at all times⁷² (see **Box 20**).



Dos and don'ts on mainstreaming gender into communications content development (continued)

Message delivery

9. **Do amplify credible women's voices** that counter disinformation and promote social cohesion.
10. **Do use both women and men as interviewers**, interviewees, experts or speakers at events, panels.
11. **Do ensure good representation of women in audience-led debates.** For example, in Afghanistan, as of March 2017, just under half (47%) of the *Open Jirga's*⁷³ TV studio audience members were women. Midline qualitative research conducted in 2015 found that most of Open Jirga's listeners and viewers reported that such female participation was unique and a salient characteristic of the programme.
12. **Do ensure that the time allocated** to women compared to men is fair in interviews, on panels etc.
13. **Do ensure that the voiceover** is delivered by women as well as men.
14. **Do translate/interpret** everyone's contribution regardless of gender.
15. **Don't reinforce gender stereotypes** through language chosen (e.g. 'woman' instead of 'lady').

Monitoring and evaluation

16. **Do disaggregate data by sex**, age and other relevant dimensions in order to measure differences between women/girls and men/boys and track gender-related trends (e.g. on audience analysis, beneficiary feedback, digital analytics, polling and survey data).

Team skills

17. **Do discuss with the production and editorial team** whether they need **training** to better identify gender issues and understand how to promote gender equality and/or women's empowerment. **If so, do include the costs in budgets.**

**Box 19. Portraying strong female characters and raising sensitive gender issues**

Between 2015 and 2017 BBC Media Action broadcast 150 episodes of the radio drama Hay el Matar (Airport District). Following the lives of a range of residents in a fictional Damascus suburb, it is part of a broader project aiming to **build an open and inclusive society in Syria**.⁷⁰

The drama included **strong female characters who reflect changing social norms** as their country experiences conflict. For example, Nour overcomes opposition to launch her own business, and Wajid finds herself pregnant and struggles to decide whether to have the baby.

An evaluation found that listeners felt that the drama's **strong female characters** mirrored those in everyday conflict-ridden Syrian life. Listeners saw them as **empowering role models** and were prompted to reflect on changes in women's roles in Syrian societies as a result of the conflict. The drama also **provided a channel to raise sensitive issues** such as child-marriage and sexual violence, which resonated with listeners' experiences.⁷¹

Box 20. Stories on SGM experiences

In 2015, the British Council launched its annual 'Five Films 4 Freedom' campaign, in collaboration with the British Film Institute's LGBT+ film festival, BFI Flare. To champion diversity, SGMs and human rights, they shared five short films about SGM experiences around the world. This included countries that criminalise same-sex relationships, or that have the death penalty. Local staff choose the approach that best suited their country. The films were unbranded so they could be promoted independently of the British Council, thus avoiding the perception that SGM rights are a 'Western-led' agenda.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Based on: IOM (2015) *Gender and Communications Toolkit*. <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/about-iom/gender/IOM-Gender-and-Communications-Toolkit-2015.pdf> [Accessed on 25/10/2019]; UK Government (2015) *CSSF Guidance Note 4: Integrating Gender Issues into Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) Programming*; BBC Media Action (December 2016). *BBC Media Action. Approach: preventing violence against women and girls*. <http://genderandmedia.bbcmediaaction.org/resources/> [Accessed on 25/10/2019]; and BBC Media Action. *Editorial Team Checklist for developing gender sensitive and gender transformative programmes*. <http://genderandmedia.bbcmediaaction.org/resources/> [Accessed on 25/10/2019].

⁶⁹ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/inside-the-online-world-of-the-women-of-isis>

^{70, 71} BBC Media Action (2018). *What role can drama play in conflict? A radio drama for Syria – qualitative findings*. BBC Media Action. <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/research/syria-drama.pdf> [Accessed on 25/10/2019]

⁷² For further guidance, see: Stonewall (2018). *Engaging with LGBT+ Advocates: A Guide for UK Officials Working Abroad*.

⁷³ This multimedia audience-led debate programme aimed to provide a platform for the Afghan public and decision makers to interact and discuss issues of national importance, and for citizens to directly question their leaders. See: Godfrey A., Page, G. and Sharifzai, T. (2017). *Strengthening accountability through media in Afghanistan: Final evaluation*. BBC Media Action.

⁷⁴ Source: Stonewall (2018). *Engaging with LGBT+ Advocates: A Guide for UK Officials Working Abroad*