

# Gender equality



**Background Briefs**  
Development issues and efforts

## The issue

In much of the world, women have fewer rights, less education, poorer health and less income than men. They also have less access to resources and decision making. This is true in spite of the fact that women play a critical role in producing food, raising children and adding to family income. Because women produce food, they are also careful managers of natural resources. Yet gender equality is still beyond the reach of most women worldwide.

Gender equality is more than just being fair to men and women. Gender equality means that men and women have the same status. They have equal opportunity to reach their full potential to contribute to all aspects of their culture and to benefit equally from the results. They have equal rights to contribute politically and economically. There are no barriers based on a person's gender. When either men or women face restrictions based only on their gender, we say that there is a gender gap.

In most countries where a gender gap exists, it works against girls. In some countries, however, it works against boys. In India, most girls can expect to spend three years less in school than boys of the same age. Girls in rural areas are at an even greater disadvantage. Girls in rural areas of India are three times more likely to drop out of school than boys. On the other hand, in Jamaica, boys often drop out of school earlier than girls. Those boys often have to go to work to help bring money into the family.

Gender equality is possible only when both men and women have the same status and opportunities.

## The road to gender equality

Canada, along with the international community, has made important commitments to women's rights and equality between women and men. It has promoted the equal participation of women and men in decision making. It has supported women and girls so they can exercise their rights. It has also worked to reduce the gap between women's and men's access to and control of resources and the benefits of development.

At first, aid agencies, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), tried to achieve gender equality by giving women and men the same opportunities. That did not always produce equal results. Gender equality values both the similarities and differences between men and women. It also values the different roles each plays. CIDA realizes that women and men may sometimes require different treatment to get equal results.

CIDA knows that each of its programs and projects affects men and women differently. Men and women have different perspectives, needs, interests, roles and resources. Class, race, caste, ethnicity or age may strengthen those differences. But gender equality is an issue that concerns both women and men.



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Only a real partnership between women and men will achieve gender equality. The way to gender equality involves working with men to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviour, roles and responsibilities at home, in the workplace and in the community. All society benefits when both men and women have more choices.

## Projects for gender equality

World leaders at the G8 Summit in 2002 introduced the Africa Action Plan. The goals were to promote economic growth, strengthen African institutions and improve the well-being of future generations. Efforts focus on countries that demonstrate a commitment to democracy, good governance and human rights. Canada established a \$500 million Canada Fund for Africa (CFA) as its contribution to the plan. CIDA has been in charge of overseeing the CFA-supported projects.

CIDA works with others around the world to promote gender equality. Some of the projects have been completed; others are still in progress. Following is a list of some of CIDA-supervised projects.

**Women in government:** A CFA project focuses on increasing the ability of women in government to influence decision making and address gender issues. CFA worked with the parliament and ordinary citizens in Niger to produce a handbook on how to conduct an effective campaign for possible female candidates in a national election. The result was great gains in gender equality. The number of women parliamentarians increased from 1 to 14. Six women were appointed to ministerial positions.

**Voter registration:** In Pakistan, another CFA project organized and supported women voters and female councillor candidates during the

2005 local elections. Throughout the project, workers assisted 39 000 women in obtaining the identity cards required to vote. They registered 31 000 female voters. Female candidates were encouraged to run for office and, with the support of this project, more female candidates ran for office. As a result, the number of uncontested seats fell from 25 percent in the 2001 election to 15 percent in the 2005 election.

**Employment for women:** CIDA is currently working with the Government of the Netherlands to strengthen women's empowerment in Bolivia. The project, which began in 2010 and ends in 2016, helps women gain access to markets, property, credit and technology. It will strengthen women's role in decision making. The project will provide training and support services for women.

**Gender equality training:** In Colombia, women's political participation and leadership at local and state levels increased because of gender equality training; 7200 women took training on gender issues, public administration and citizenship and 1150 of these women won elections in various levels of government. More than 800 men also participated in the training.

Find further information about:

- CIDA's work in gender equality at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/equality>
- More of CIDA's work in gender equality at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/acdi-cida.nsf/eng/REN-218125542-Q37>
- Canada's commitment to gender equality at <http://www.international.gc.ca/rights-droits/women-femmes/equality-egalite.aspx>
- the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and its commitment to promote human rights at <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/>.



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