

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace- Work-Fatherland

GUIDE FOR THE INCREASED CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES



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Foreword

Women with disabilities are citizens above all. However, they are often isolated because of their disability and become invisible and excluded from social, political, and community life, as well as decision-making processes. Very often, they have no way of being heard and other people speak on their behalf. Even when it relates to their status as disabled women, other women have the floor. The unions have not included them in their demands. Feminist associations are only just beginning to include them due to their increased mobilisation. Many conditions have yet to be met to fulfil the promise of effective political and civic participation. Through advocacy efforts focusing on access and overlapping issues of gender and disability, society as a whole is challenged.

In this context, this guide, targeting women with disabilities, proposes to:

- raise awareness of international and national legal frameworks promoting and protecting of the rights of women with disabilities,
- build their capacity by providing them with simple and practical information to claim their rights, to influence and demonstrate their civic and political engagement.

By extension, it is aimed at all those who carry out disability-focused interventions in Cameroon: local decision-makers, disabled people's organisations, associations and networks of disabled women's organisations, as well as ordinary citizens.

Enjoy your read!

Definitions and acronyms

Anti-Feminism: A doctrine against the emancipation of women and gender equality

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CRPD: UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

Discrimination: The treatment of an individual or a group with partiality or prejudice

Disability: Resulting from the interaction between people with disabilities and the behavioural and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (UNCRPD, 2006)

DPO: Disabled people's organisation

DSCE: Growth and Employment Strategy Paper

Equality: Principle according to which all persons should be treated alike, with the same dignity, enjoying the same rights and privileges

Equity: Restorative approach to inequalities or natural and social injustices

Gender: A sociological approach based on the consideration and analysis of socially and culturally constructed relationships between women and men.

Gender diversity: The integration of people of both sexes

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

Parity: relative equality in terms of numbers and proportions of women and men

Sexism: Discriminatory behaviour that aims to keep women away from certain spaces (power, decision-making, etc.), using stereotypes, and demeaning characteristics.

Introduction

For a long time, the issue of disability has been addressed without any distinction. During the 80s and 90s, and with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006, the understanding of the relationship between culture and gender helped to promote the gender approach and the intersection between gender and disability. From then on, there was a realisation that disability was not experienced in the same way by men and women. At least three established social facts support this perception: 1) disability is a social construct; 2) disability is a source of discrimination; 3) community and family perceptions and their impact are fundamental. Disability means that women face twice as much discrimination.

In Cameroon, although the democratic society under construction is based on the principle of equality (equality of opportunity, equal treatment, equality before law...), disabled women continue to experience various forms of discrimination.

Four barriers explain the low level of civic and political participation of women with disabilities:

- Low education levels: few women with disabilities have had access to regular schooling or vocational training due to the lack of access to schools and support for learners.
- Lack of access to employment opportunities, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and the challenges of juggling professional and family life.
- Women's low levels of economic and social independence, generating financial dependence, vulnerability and a high risk of violence.
- Poor access to political functions and electoral processes: very low eligibility levels and membership of political organisations.

The issue of discrimination against disabled women is therefore directly related to their place as citizens in general, and their participation the political arena in particular.

I - The founding framework for women's civic and political engagement



A- International Framework

It covers:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted on 10th December 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly, and ratified on 2nd June 1972 by Cameroon.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13th December 2006 by the United Nations General Assembly, and signed by Cameroon on 1st October 2008.
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted on 27th June 1971.
- The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted on 30th January 2007 in Addis Ababa. It supports the political framework in Africa.

While these various texts proclaim equal and inalienable rights for all people 'regardless of race, ethnicity, colour, sex... birth or any other situation', they also promote the rights and inherent dignity of people with disabilities. Specifically, the CRPD defines people with disabilities as **'those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'**.

B- National Framework

It covers:

The constitutional, legal and regulatory framework.

Law n°96/06 dated 18th January 1996, proclaiming that 'human beings, without distinction of race, religion, sex, belief, have inalienable and sacred rights.' It confirms the importance attached to fundamental freedoms:

- All human beings are equal in rights and in duties. The state provides all citizens with the conditions necessary for their development.
- The state ensures the protection of minorities in accordance with the law.

The civic, socio-political and civil society frameworks.

The framework for exercising civil rights and the rights of association has evolved since December 1990. Three laws were passed by parliament and announced by the President of the Republic. These are:

- The Law governing political parties
- The Law on Social Communication
- The Law on Freedom of Association

C- The civil and political rights of women with disabilities



The right to vote, to stand for office and to have equal access to public office

It exists both in the Constitution and in statute form. By virtue of this right, any disabled woman aged 20 or over has the right to register to vote and to cast her vote. She may stand for office under the conditions provided by law.



Freedom of expression, information and the press

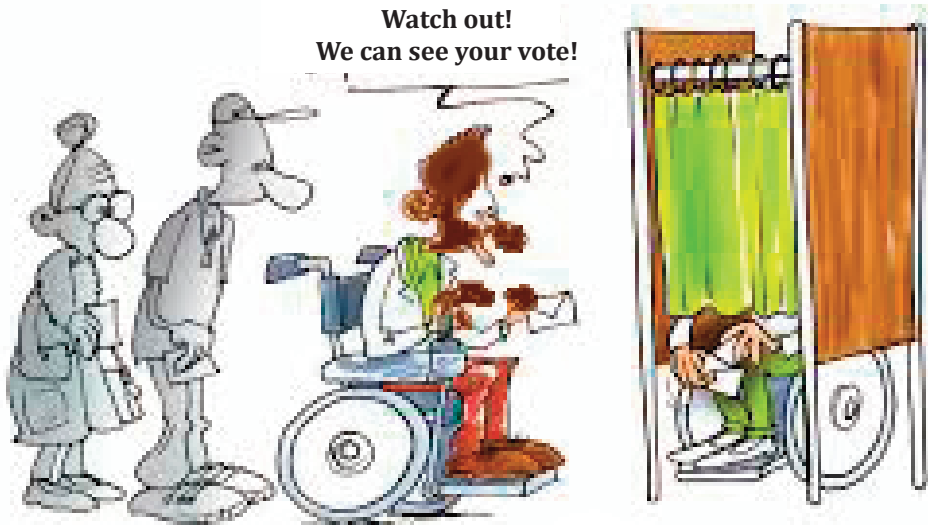
Right to access information held by public bodies. This freedom is inherent in the fundamental right to freedom of expression as recognised by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 59, adopted in 1946.



Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

The right of every individual to internally hold certain thoughts, beliefs, or positions on all matters, personal conviction and the commitment to religion or belief.

II- Strengthening disabled women's civic and political engagement



Civic engagement : involvement in public life and development of links within the community. Partaking in actions that connect a person to other citizens in society.

Political participation : includes voting, involvement in political parties, institutions and organisations. The goal is to influence the strategies, decisions, or public policies of a city or country.

A- Barriers to disabled women's civic and political engagement

All of these barriers exclude women with disabilities from education, community activities and economic opportunities. They contribute to their lack of influence, self-esteem and knowledge of laws/standards that impact on their access to decision-making bodies and services

Physical barriers : characteristics of buildings or premises that limit accessibility of the premises to persons with disabilities.

Attitudinal barriers : Resistance in behaviours and beliefs

EXAMPLE

- narrow corridors and doorways;
- narrow voting booths;
- inadequate lighting;
- door handles difficult to grasp;
- non-existent parking spaces;
- council meeting rooms inaccessible to wheelchair users.

EXAMPLE

- mockery, contempt;
- indifference, disabled person ignored;
- prejudice, unfounded beliefs;
- rejection;
- daily marginalisation of people with disabilities.

Institutional barriers : policies, procedures, governance and activities of an organisation or group that do not consider people with disabilities.

Barriers relating to information and communication

EXAMPLE

- ballots not translated into Braille;
- political messages not translated into sign language on TV;
- small print;
- physical spaces and intellectual debates that are not necessarily open to them;
- information signs are non-existent, unclear or not easy to understand.



B- Solutions



Infrastructure

- Propose adequate financing to make existing infrastructure accessible;
- Ensure new buildings are accessible to people with disabilities;
- Meet people with disabilities in accessible settings or spaces for the purposes of sharing information or consultation.

Changing attitudes

- Raise awareness of disability amongst the general public and local actors by deconstructing prejudices and beliefs;
- Enable women with disabilities to share their stories to demonstrate their know-how and interpersonal skills;
- Respect disabled people's privacy;
- Ensure that women with disabilities take their civic responsibility and respect the differences of others to create an inclusive and friendly environment.

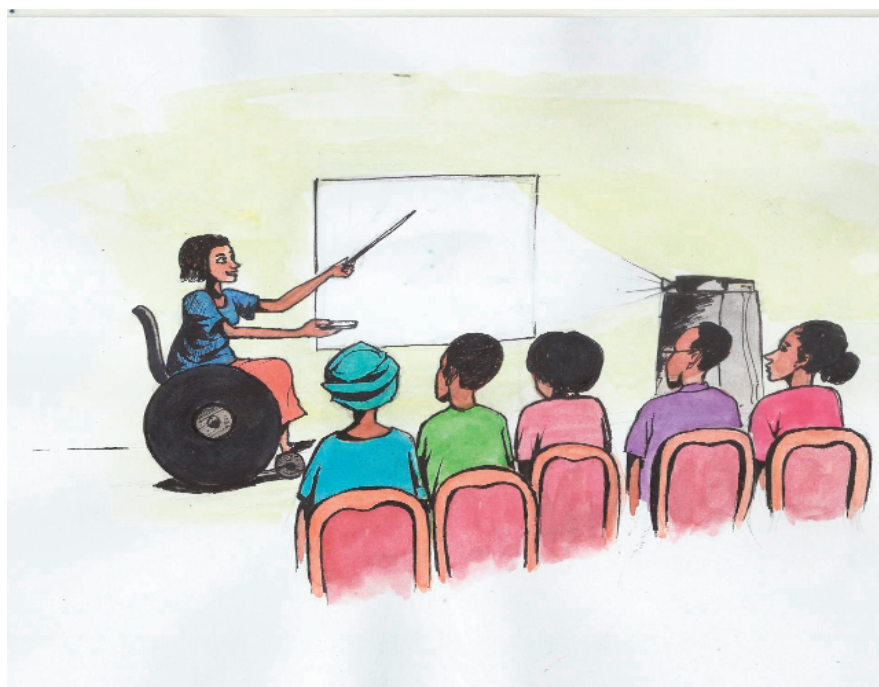
Institutions

- Share information with women with disabilities about joining political parties, community organisations, 'tontines' (community savings system), neighbourhood councils;
- Encourage them to participate in community life and local governance;
- Involve them in the development and implementation of development plans at local, regional and national levels;
- Encourage them to form alliances and partnerships with influential groups;
- Train them in leadership.

Information and communication

- Select and distribute appropriate accessible material in multiple formats;
- Use subtitles and sign language interpreting during televised debates;
- Equip telephones with accessibility devices for a deaf or blind persons;
- Provide signs with illustrations for easier reading;
- Publish documents in large format or in Braille;
- Use simplified language or visual aids for women with learning disabilities.

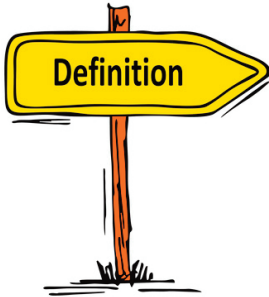
III- Thematic factsheets



Factsheet n ° 1

Women's Leadership





- The ability of a person to influence and federate a group.
- To reach a common goal.
- In a relationship of mutual trust.
- For a specified period.

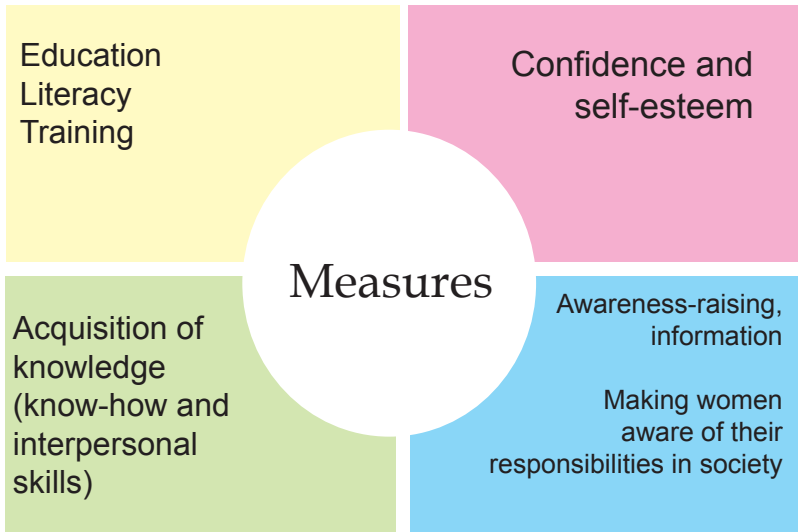
What is women's leadership?

Attitude of a woman who impresses, inspires, makes you want to excel yourself, who always gives her best, who becomes a mentor, a model or a leader in society.



Strategies to promote women's leadership

There are no magic strategies, but a set of measures can be considered to promote women's leadership :



What are the predispositions/talents of a woman leader?

- Authenticity/sincerity allowing me to gain the trust, support of those around me and to gain credibility;
- Audacity, leading to creativity;
- Ambition, a taste for performance and success, which motivates me to go beyond my comfort zone and strive for excellence;
- Awareness of the need for personal development.

As a disabled woman, what attributes should I nurture, display or look for to become a true leader?

- Ability to bring people together;
- Role of federator;
- Influential;
- Ability to perceive and express, understand, reason, and regulate emotions in myself and others (emotional intelligence).

How can I be a successful leader and help other women?



To succeed, I need to know how to :

- Surround myself with the right people (personally and professionally);
- Reflect (acquire, challenge);
- Act (communicate, decide, modify, move);
- Recognise each other's merits and skills with modesty.



I must avoid :

- Being overconfident;
- Developing a thirst for power;
- Becoming arrogant and superior (patronising others);
- Fighting continuously against other women.

**Something
to remember**

Healthy self-esteem and respect for others make a true leader.



Factsheet n° 2

Rules for effective communication and advocacy



A- The basic rules of communication



Define your target (s): who do you want to talk to?



Prepare a communication plan : **define the objectives to be achieved, key messages, means of communication and allocated budget.**



Ensure consistent messages : **adopt a different mode and tone depending on the target; always ensure coherent links between positioning and themes.**



Make an impression : **develop your image, in relation to the message or values you want to convey.**



Mobilise yourself personally : **prioritise oral communication and direct contact.**

B- Characteristics of effective communication



Clear : **your audience should not have to read between the lines or make assumptions to understand you! The rule is: one sentence, one idea.**



Concise : **go straight to the facts.**



Factual : **only give details and facts that illustrate your message.**



Appropriate : **adapt your language to suit your audience.**



Coherent : **sentences must follow each other in a logical way and your audience should not feel you are losing track.**



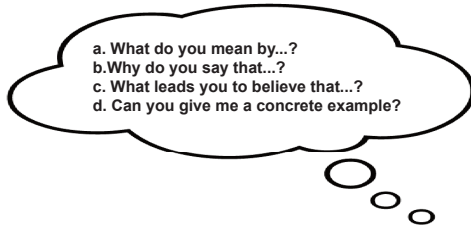
Efficient : **providing all the information required.**



Courteous : **be empathetic, open and sincere. Put yourself in the other people's shoes.**

How to communicate

Ask open-ended questions (encouraging others to give their points of view).



Reformulate the words of others to cement their understanding

- If I understand this well,...
- I believe you think that...
- According to you,...
- In other words, you're telling me that...
 - Ensure consistency between your verbal message and your attitude (non-verbal)
 - Listen patiently to the answer



Avoid closed questions (which lead to yes or no answers).

- Do not judge the opinions of others, but try to understand them
 - Avoid asking questions using the words 'why' or 'how' that can make others feel like they are being judged.
 - Say 'For what reason' and 'In what way' instead.

C- HOW TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY STRATEGY?



Advocacy is...

An act or process to support a cause.



An advocacy campaign is...

A set of targeted actions to support this cause.



Advocacy objectives :

- Foster/build support for a cause;
- Influence others to support a cause;
- Trying to influence or change legislation that affects a cause



Steps for advocacy :

- Identify the cause to advocate for;
- Define the goal and objectives to be achieved;
- Identify the target group/audience;
- Develop a message;
- Identify communication channels;
- Build alliances/create support;
- Identify/mobilise funds;
- Implement.



Targets :

- Key targets (decision makers);
- Secondary targets (do not decide but strongly influence decision makers);
- Primary stakeholders: population affected by issues at stake.



Factsheet n° 3

How to strengthen women's civic engagement and political participation





Engagement : a voluntary decision to participate in a project or action over time, through a personal or collective project, which supports the person's engagement. It can be full or partial.

Political participation : expression of civic engagement, which includes voting, involvement in a political party and/or organisation, active participation in local councils, in order to influence strategies, decisions, or public policies.



Steps

- Agree to engage in a process of political socialisation;
- Integrate into community/society.



Objectives

- Increase awareness and understanding of the needs and hopes of women with disabilities;
- Promote the ideas and interests of women with disabilities;
- Contribute to raising awareness of the potential of women with disabilities;
- Enable society as a whole to benefit from the invaluable contribution of women with disabilities for the future.



Means

- New information and communication technologies to mobilise and inform women;
- Existence and availability of participation spaces that facilitate the involvement of women with disabilities.



Some recommendations for policy makers

- Encourage women with disabilities to engage in their communities;
- Encourage women with disabilities to exercise their right to vote;
- Create environments where women with disabilities are heard and where they know their contribution will have an impact;
- Develop civic participation projects and projects that enable women with disabilities to acquire leadership skills;
- Publish census data and official reports on disability;
- Make information about voter cards available via the internet/telephone or other accessible formats;
- Involve women with disabilities in making decisions that affect them;
- Involve women with disabilities in the development of programs, projects and policies integrating gender and disability.



The political participation of women with disabilities promotes personal responsibility, as well as responsibility towards others and wider society!

Factsheet n° 4

How to form an alliance with influential feminist groups?



How to optimise partnerships for small organisations?



Building partnerships is important for organisations, as it enables them to meet two distinct objectives: providing financial support and enhancing their brand image.

Groundwork required:

- Define the type of partnerships: exchange of visibility, offer of services, financial support, etc.
 - Alignment with the values of the target organisations;
 - Set up a project to present to potential partners, with a draft budget and a communication plan;
- When this preliminary work is finished, the search for partners can begin!

Partner search:

- Study your network, get in touch with your members, question them, perhaps they have useful contacts or know influential groups you would not have thought of.
- Attend events with other organisations where potential partners are present. This will give you the opportunity to meet them in person and initiate contact.
- Give your partners the opportunity to meet your members and participate in your events. In general, try to offer more than just a logo on a poster: real visibility with added value.
- Ensure the success of your partnership: monitor your partnership's impact in terms of image and reach, ensure your organisation's visibility by producing a report and holding an annual meeting.

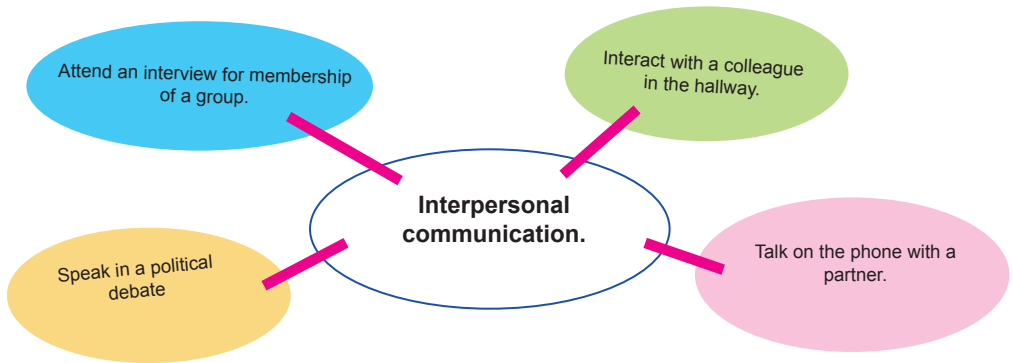


Factsheet n° 5

How to participate in political debates?



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS?



How to start engaging in the political debate without arguing with others?



What to do

Rules to observe



Speaking time

- Respect the time limit



The Right to speak

- Respecting others' opinions and listening to others speak



Ethics

- To be well prepared and knowledgeable about the subject in order to put forward an accurate, correct and honest argument.
- To be courteous to your opponent.



Code of conduct

- Watch the facilitator, judge or audience according to agreed regulations.
- Speak loudly and clearly to be heard by other participants and the audience.
- Stay focused in order to reflect on the arguments of others.
- Shake hands with opponents at the end of the debate.



What not to do:

Attitudes and behaviours to avoid



- Avoid showing your agreement or disagreement by means other than speech, such as: laughing, sneering, winking, exaggerated reaction of incredulity or astonishment, condescending smiles, angry expressions,....



- Avoid interrupting others while they speak.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

Five levels of participation

From the lowest level of participation to the highest level of participation :



Indifference

Action is taken, independently of participants.



Information

Participants receive information. Even if they ask questions or make comments, the goal is not to get their point of view, but to convey information to them.



Consultation

Participants are asked for their opinion on non-strategic issues. Their opinion may or may not be taken into account, but the decision does not belong to them.



Dialogue, negotiation

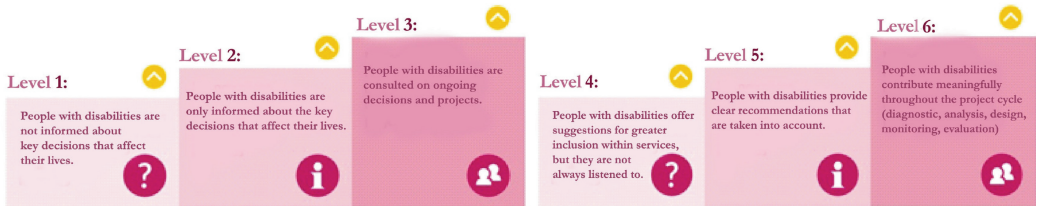
A debate is created around an issue. The goal is to work together to come up with proposals and/or compromises. But the final decision does not belong to the participants.



Deciding together

Participants are decision-makers.

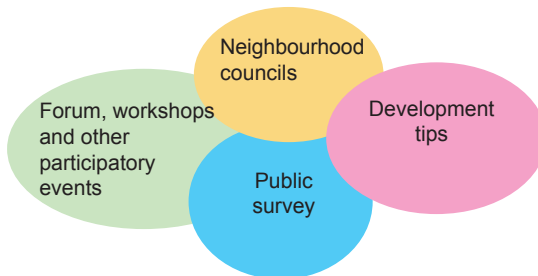
Measuring the influence and participation of people with disabilities.
Active and meaningful participation



How to organise your own participation?

- Carry out a literature review on the topic of discussion.
- Prepare to respect your allocated speaking time.

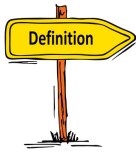
Some tools for active participation



Factsheet n° 6

How to influence gender and disability equity in focus groups and projects?

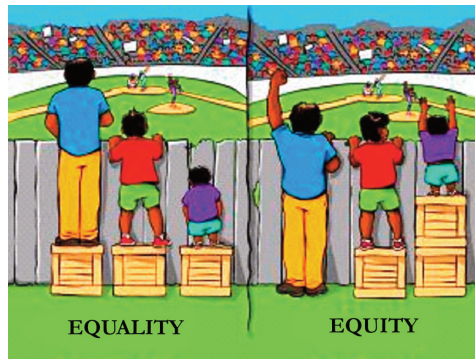









Gender equity = differential treatment between women and men to redress entrenched inequalities and to achieve 'equality'.

Disability equity = aims to ensure disability mainstreaming throughout the project development cycle (development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and the meaningful participation of women with disabilities in development processes and policies.

Disability compensation = aims to make up for a disadvantage, rather than conferring an advantage. Compensation does not remove disability. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness, especially in the case of hidden disability, so that compensation is not seen as favouritism, but as a response to a specific need that allows for equity and equal opportunities.



How will women with disabilities influence gender and disability equity in projects?

-  Gain knowledge: researching, accessing and obtaining the right information.
-  Attend training: capacity building for personal development, learning from pairs.
-  Get involved: engage and participate in political and community life, by joining political parties or local organisations/councils, having mentors, being co-opted.
-  Advocate/lobby for a particularly cause.
-  Look for partnerships, alliances.

Recommendations



For decision makers :

- Integrate women with disabilities in decision-making bodies and in development policies, projects and programmes;
- Integrate a gender and disability approach for greater civic and political participation;
- Create an enabling environment for the empowerment and full development of women with disabilities;
- Promote the expertise of women with disabilities so that they can contribute to society.



For other women with disabilities :

- Participate in the organisation of awareness campaigns on their rights;
- Build their capacity in various fields;
- Overcome their disability for greater integration into society.

Conclusion

If you are a disabled woman living in a rural or urban area, this guide offers you practical tips to engage in civic and political life. It is a tool that aims to help you play an active part in public life so that you can take your rightful place in your community, in organisations and in society as a whole. Use all the simple, complete and practical information in this guide to take action on topics that are important to you. You have the capacity to engage, to get involved in society. Get started now and change the way others look at you, break down prejudice, obstacles and become effective citizens in your own right.

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