

# A GUIDE TO GENDER-SENSITIVE ORGANISING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Draft developed by the COVID-19 Civil Society Coalition Gender and GBV Working Group.

We all live and work in societies that are permeated by gender inequalities that shape the way that decisions are made, resources are allocated, and how people interact with the world. A coalition that does not internally reflect the values of equality, freedom and dignity cannot effectively promote those values in the work that it does. How can we ensure that the organising we do and the solutions we work toward do not perpetuate those same inequalities?

## HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT DOING A POWER ANALYSIS?

Before developing action plans, working groups can reflect on the culture they are cultivating within their group by carrying out a power analysis.

Power can be understood as the ability to do something and to influence others to act in a certain way. Often the way power is exercised is invisible. For example, a man may exercise power over a womxn<sup>1</sup> in a visible way by talking over her persistently in a meeting, and invalidating her ideas. However, even if he doesn't interrupt the womxn or invalidate her ideas, he can exercise power over her invisibly. If he provides input, there is a good chance that his ideas will be taken more seriously than hers. While the man might not do anything intentionally to put himself above the womxn, the unearned power that comes with being a man is still at work, ensuring that his ideas are given more consideration. The rest of the people in that meeting likely will not even realise that they are paying more attention to the man. This is because we have all been taught, without even realising it, that men's ideas are more important. How did this process of socialisation<sup>2</sup> happen? In the movies we watch, in our schools, in our home, and in our places of worship – everywhere we look we see men in decision-making positions. Slowly, subconsciously, we start to believe that men are better suited to lead in decision-making processes. The participants in our hypothetical meeting are not even aware that this belief is impacting their choice of whose idea they like best, but it is!

Of course, the meeting may play out differently if the womxn was white and the man Black. If the man was also blind. If the womxn was also transgender.

In the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, we have seen Black people being beaten by SANDF members for disobeying lockdown orders whereas white people, caught doing the same, have been approached calmly and asked to return to their house. Here, we see the ideology of white supremacy at play: the soldiers presume white people are more rational, more likely to listen to instructions, or perhaps just more worthy of an exception being made for them. The white people in this example didn't have to do much to benefit from the unearned power that being white gave them.

We cannot escape these unequal power relations just by deciding to ignore them, because we live in a world in which oppressive ideologies<sup>3</sup> are weaved into every part of our cultures and institutions. However, being aware of power inequalities allows us to work against them in everything we do.

Doing a power analysis allows groups to identify and explore the multiple power dimensions that affect a given situation, so they can understand why relations of inequality persist.

A power analysis requires that we ask:

*Whose voice, experience and leadership is being heard, and why?*

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<sup>1</sup> Explain why we've used this

<sup>2</sup> Define

<sup>3</sup> Define and provide examples. Or provide examples in body of text.

*Whose is being excluded?*

To counter power inequalities within your working group:

1. **Be aware of when your power in a given situation is unearned** (people are listening to you because you are white, or a cisgender<sup>4</sup>man, or you speak English with a twang).
2. **Amplify the voices, experiences, leadership and solutions of those whose opinions society sees as less relevant to everyone / only relevant to their group** (because they are disabled, because they are transgender,<sup>5</sup> because they are foreign).
3. **Take the time to build trust and work from that base.** Think about why, in an unequal and divided society like our own, people from marginalised groups may mistrust the intentions of people from oppressor groups. Acknowledge that conflict will arise, but aim to preserve relationships as you negotiate conflict.
4. **Take on roles that are not usually assigned to people in one of your identity groups**, thus breaking down the norms and expectations assigned to different groups.
5. **Recognise that “where you stand depends on where you sit.”** Your position on a specific issue is heavily informed by your position in society. Do not judge others’ position on an issue, because you do not understand what it is like to be in their position in society.
6. **Always get consent.** When you have power, it is easy to coerce others into agreeing and call it consent. Get consent to share photos, details of people’s experiences, and contacts. Apply this concept to how you make decisions and think about the safety of others.
7. **This moment calls for solidarity not charity.** Be honest about why and how you have what you have, and why others do not. Prioritise those actions that post a fundamental threat to structural inequality.
8. **Think deeply about context.** Think about how the Covid-19 Pandemic affects different people differently; think about the multiple oppressions many face that combine to create a unique set of needs.
9. **Do not make decisions on behalf of others.** Even if your idea is great, it may not make any sense in another’s context. Not only do you not know whether your idea is possible in a different context, you cannot ensure that it is sustainable. Facilitate input, make your suggestions briefly (if you must) and then step back to listen. Do not speak on behalf of others, create space for them to speak for themselves.
10. **Think about what story your actions are telling.** Are they challenging racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic stereotypes or confirming them? What reality do you want to portray through your actions? Who will be made unsafe by sharing this information?

Power relations are not static, they shift as situations change. Thus the questions that a power analysis requires us to ask need to be answered repeatedly as dynamics change.

## **HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT DOING A GENDER ANALYSIS?**

A group that, internally, strives for equality and recognises the dignity and freedom of its members will be better placed to plan actions that are sensitive to the particular needs of different groups.

A gender analysis allows us to understand how a situation, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, affects men, womxn, boys and girls differently due to their relative distribution of resources, opportunities,

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<sup>4</sup> Define

<sup>5</sup> Not sure if we should define this? Depends on the make-up of the group

constraints and power in a given context. A gender analysis allows us to plan actions that are better suited to remedy gender-based inequalities and meet the needs of different population groups.

Things to consider in a gender analysis:

**1. Think about the different impact that the Covid-19 impact has on womxn, men, girls and boys.**

When you are collecting data or other community-wide information, try to get specific data for womxn and specific data for men. E.g. If we are told that 60% of womxn 40% of men who work as informal traders in an area are facing food insecurity due to a loss of income, we will better be able to see that there is a gender dimension to the issue.

**2. Consider how the gender division of labour and patterns of decision-making affects your work/project, and how your work/project affects the gender division of labour and decision making.** Who normally does what? Has that changed in the context of Covid-19? Will your work/project entrench or disrupt the gender division of labour? .

**3. Understand differences in needs and strengths.** What are womxn's, men's, girls', and boys' strategic and practical needs, and how can we address those needs? What are womxn's, men's, girls', boy's strengths, capacities and vulnerabilities? How can we build on existing strengths?

**4. Consider who has access to and control over resources and benefits, including the benefits from your work/project.** Are there barriers preventing womxn and men from benefitting equally from your project? Develop strategies to address those barriers.

**5. Develop gender-sensitive indicators to monitor your work.** Gender sensitive performance indicators are essential for monitoring the impact of activities on womxn and men, and on changes in gender relations.

**6. Apply the above information and analysis throughout the program/project cycle**

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