

# Resource: **Defining Gender Terms**

## Contact Us:

Common Ground Consulting LLC  
1936 First Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

t 202.744.2567

f 202.330.5888

[craig@commongroundconsulting.org](mailto:craig@commongroundconsulting.org)

[www.commongroundconsulting.org](http://www.commongroundconsulting.org)

## **SEX:** *Biology defined by nature.*

Sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia.

## **GENDER:** *Cultural norms and socialization.*

Gender, as opposed to sex, refers to the ways that we are socialized to behave as men and women; it is the way these roles are taught, reinforced, and internalized. People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what the appropriate behavior and attitudes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people. This learned behavior is what shapes the social roles and practices of men and women in a society. Gender roles can vary greatly from one culture to another and from one social, political, and economic group to another within the same culture.

## **SEXUALITY:** *An expression of our desires.*

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human and encompasses sex, gender identity and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, sexual pleasure, and intimacy and reproduction, as we experience these things throughout our lives. Sexuality is expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethnic, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors.

**GENDER MAINSTREAMING:** *Incorporating a gender equality perspective into our work.*

Gender Mainstreaming is the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. Gender mainstreaming cannot replace specific policies which aim to redress situations resulting from gender inequality. Specific gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming are dual and complementary strategies and must go hand in hand to reach the goal of gender equality.

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**GENDER EQUALITY:** *Policies that ensure the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female.*

Gender Equality refers to the equal responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities should be equitable and should not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality means that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration—recognizing the diversity of different groups of men and women. Gender equality is not only a “women's issue” but should concern and fully engage men as well. Equality between women and men is a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.