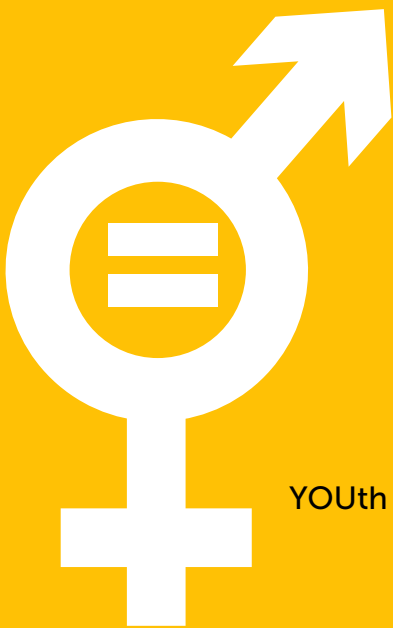


# **GENDER EQUALITY 101: UNPACKING KEY CONCEPTS AND ISSUES**



YOUth Lead: A Toolkit for Transformational Leadership to Support Gender Equality  
by CIWiL and ParlAmericas



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This module is part of the toolkit ***“YOUth Lead: A Toolkit for Transformational Leadership to Support Gender Equality.”***

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# INTRODUCTION

Youth leaders are among some of the most active and visible advocates for gender equality in the Caribbean and around the world. Many other youth advocates working on environmental issues, social development, young participation in decision making processes, education, climate change and other key issues are also interested in the concept of gender equality and want to know more so that they can better ensure that, through their work, they are contributing to positive societal transformations that leave no one behind. Wherever you are in your own journey as a gender equality advocate, the scope of the theme and the way it connects with **all** other issues means it is one on which you can always deepen your learning.

Understanding how gender contributes to different experiences, inequalities, and lived realities for all individuals and in all spheres of life is vital to designing **inclusive** responses to any issue. The practices we employ as leaders can also have an impact on those reached by our work and on the teams we are working with to make change. Putting these analysis and leadership skills into practice, which requires respect, empathy, and recognition for the diversity in society, are also integral components of transformational leadership.

This resource has been designed to provide you as young leaders with access to information and resources to support you in expanding your understanding of gender equality and applying a gender lens in your leadership work. Its content covers:

- Definitions for foundational concepts related to gender and gender equality advocacy
- Prominent feminist issues in the Caribbean region
- Taking an inclusive approach in your leadership efforts



# DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

Before it is possible to adopt a gender approach in your leadership work, it is fundamental to understand the concept of “gender” and related terms, as well as terminology that relates to advocacy within the movement to address inequality. Some key definitions are given below, as well as clarifications on common misconceptions related to these terms.

## SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

### SEX

- **Sex** is a label assigned to individuals at birth based on a set of medical factors like reproductive/sexual anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones.
- Most people are assigned male or female; when someone’s sexual and reproductive anatomy does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male, they may be described as intersex.
- It is also important to remember what sex is not: someone’s sex isn’t anything beyond a label assigned based on biological and physiological characteristics. The sex someone is assigned does not translate into any other information about an individual.
- **The term “sex” is not interchangeable with gender.** These are very different concepts, even if they are often conflated.
- For more information, visit the webpage on [sex and gender identity](#) by Planned Parenthood.

## GENDER

- Gender refers to how one identifies and expresses themselves in relation to conventional associations with “man” and “woman.” While someone may be assigned male or female at birth (sex), their gender is related to the attributes they assume and how these would fall on a spectrum of masculinity and femininity in a given context.
  - **Gender** is therefore **socially constructed**, because the related labels are based on our association to the expectations, standards, and characteristics connected to a particular gender identity. This is in comparison to sex, which, as outlined above, is based on more objective physical, physiological, and biological factors.
- **Gender identity** is about your innermost sense of self; your deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender. It has nothing to do with the sex you were assigned or your sexual orientation, and cannot be assumed based on a person’s appearance, anatomy, social norms, or stereotypes.
  - Cisgender is a term used to define someone whose gender identity aligns with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.
  - Transgender is a term used when an individual’s gender identity differs from the one typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender expression** is about how we present ourselves to the world. Others may interpret our gender identity based on these signals, but remember that gender expression is outward and does not always signal a person’s gender identity, which is internal and more fixed. Gender expression also does not necessarily give clues about a person’s sex or their sexual orientation.
- **Gender is a spectrum, it is not binary.** Not everyone identifies or expresses themselves as a man or a woman, or by the gender that is traditionally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Someone’s sex or sexuality does not determine their gender.
  - **Non-binary**<sup>1</sup> is an umbrella term to refer to groups of people whose gender does not fall within the binary categories of “man” and “woman.” This encompasses persons that experience the absence of gender, multiple genders, partial gender identification, or fluctuations between different genders.

1. [Nonbinary Fact Sheet](#), The Society For The Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity

- Non-binary is also a gender identity term that someone may use if they do not identify exclusively with the binary terms of “woman” or “man” but rather as both, somewhere in between, or outside of these categories.<sup>2,3</sup>
- For additional information, visit the Human Rights Campaign’s [glossary of terms](#).
- An individual’s gender often shapes social expectations of their specific interests, careers, household responsibilities, and characteristics. These expectations reflect historical patterns that have reinforced particular roles in society and have led to the gender norms and stereotypes that continue to shape our daily lives. Power is an inherent component of gender relations and how these norms and patterns are defined.
- “Gender” is not a shorthand form for “women,” nor should it only surface as relevant in conversations about women and non-binary individuals. To only use gender to refer to these groups of individuals is an oversimplification and masks that the life experiences of all individuals are impacted by gender and stereotypes.
- For more information, visit the webpages on [understanding gender identity](#) and [“What are gender roles and stereotypes?”](#) by Planned Parenthood.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- **Sexual orientation** is about who you are romantically / sexually attracted to. One’s sexual orientation is a natural part of who they are and not something that is chosen. Your sexual orientation is also not influenced by your sex or gender
- **Sexual orientation identity labels** describe the relationship between your gender and the gender(s) you are attracted to, and there are a wide variety of related terms:
  - **Heterosexual/straight** terminology is used to refer to individuals who experience sexual or romantic attraction to individuals of another gender.
  - **Homosexual/gay, lesbian** are terms individuals may use to describe themselves if they experience sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to people of the same or a similar gender.
  - **Bisexual** is a term someone may use to describe themselves if they experience sexual-romantic attraction to people of more than one gender.

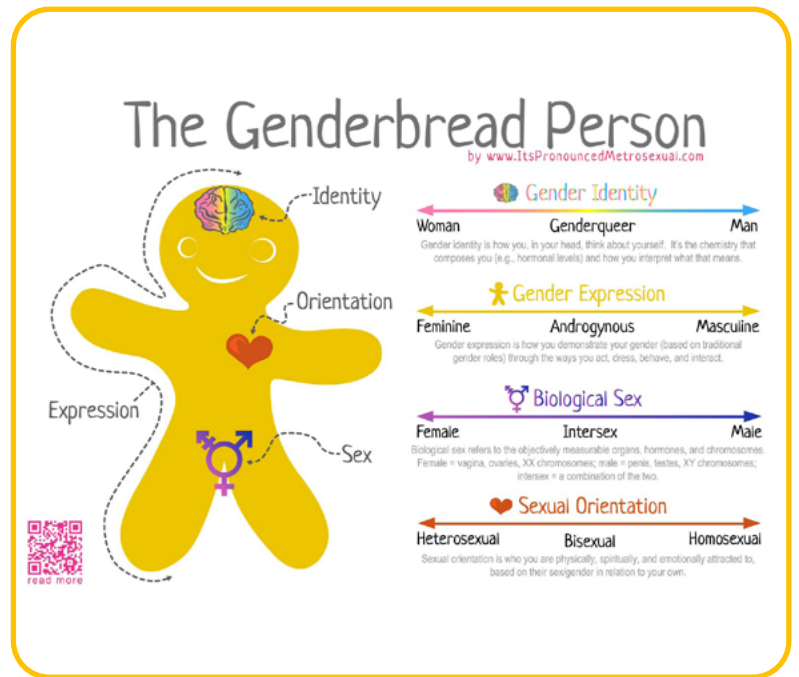
2. Transgender and Non-Binary People FAQ, Human Rights Campaign, webpage

3. It is important to note that non-binary is not the only gender identity term used by individuals who do not exclusively identify as a woman or man, so if someone shares that they have a different gender than any mentioned here, please use the one that they have indicated is correct. There are also other umbrella terms used beyond “non-binary,” such as “gender-diverse.” You can also continue your learning on this topic through the other resources linked throughout this tool.

- **Asexual** may be used as a sexual orientation identifier by those who do not experience sexual-romantic attraction.

- **Pansexual** may be used as an identifier by people who experience attraction towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity.

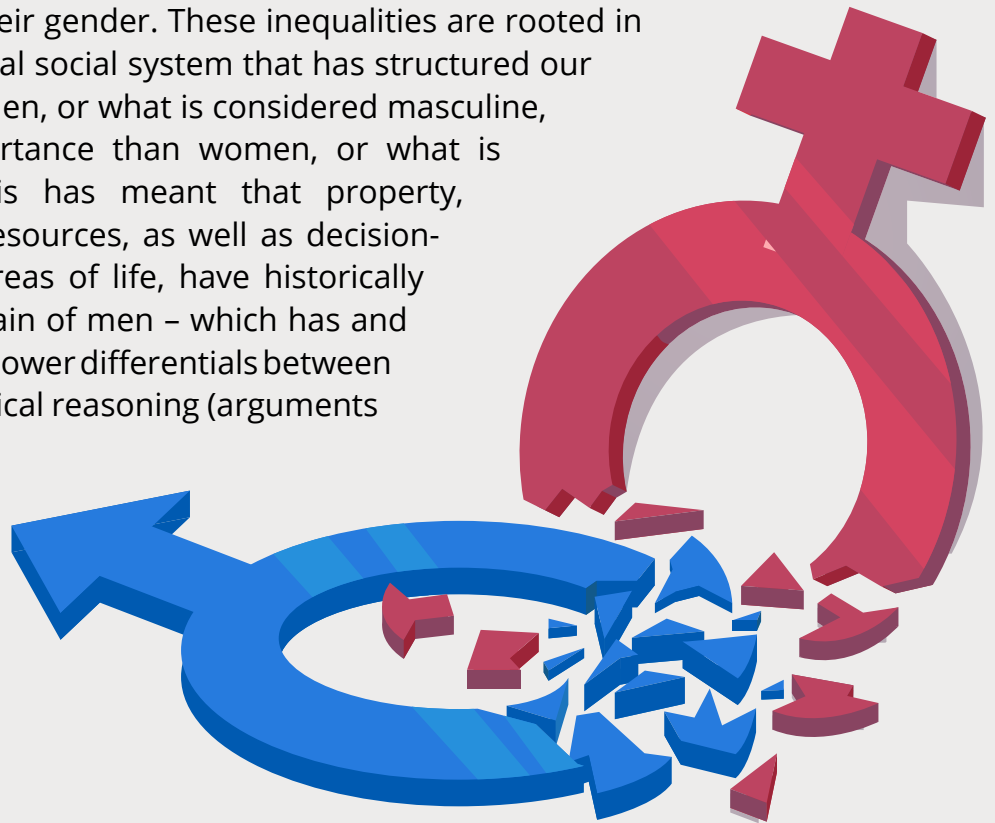
- For more information, visit the webpage on [sexual orientation](#) by Planned Parenthood.



## TERMS RELATED TO ADVOCACY AND WORK ON GENDER THEMES

### GENDER INEQUALITY

- **Gender inequality** refers to the discrimination and disadvantages faced by individuals based on their gender. These inequalities are rooted in the patriarchy or patriarchal social system that has structured our societies, through which men, or what is considered masculine, are accorded more importance than women, or what is considered feminine. This has meant that property, residence, descent, and resources, as well as decision-making regarding most areas of life, have historically most often been the domain of men – which has and continues to contribute to power differentials between genders. Appeals to biological reasoning (arguments that “women are more naturally suited to be caregivers” or that “men are more naturally suited to leadership” for example) are often used as justification for this.





- **Gender inequality** is pervasive and harms all members of society, with particularly detrimental effects for women and non-binary individuals. Biases and stereotypes that subordinate women, for example, contribute to the following issues (among many others): unequal access to the labour market and lower pay than men for the same work, unfair division of household responsibilities and care work, and alarming rates of gender-based violence. For more examples and further information, view the ParlAmericas handout, [Debunking Gender Equality Myths: A Cheat Sheet](#).
- Some other relevant concepts:
  - **Discrimination:** The act of treating someone or a group of persons differently or unjustly based upon an inherent trait or characteristic.
  - **Power:** The ability to decide who will access resources; the capacity to direct or influence the behavior of others, oneself, and/or the course of events.
  - **Privilege:** Unearned access to resources only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership.

## GENDER EQUALITY / GENDER EQUITY / GENDER JUSTICE

- These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but each has a unique meaning:
  - **Gender equality** refers to a condition in which all people have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. This does not mean that all individuals are the same, but that they have equal value, should be accorded equal treatment, and should not experience discrimination or privilege on the basis of gender.
  - **Gender equity** refers to a process in which all individuals are provided the unique and differentiated support they need to correct for inequalities. This concept acknowledges that, although equality may be the goal, it cannot be achieved by providing everyone with the same resources and types of support, because everyone is starting from a different place. This approach can be criticised as being unfair or providing an advantage to specific groups of people – like through the introduction of quotas and other affirmative actions – but its goal is to take historical and systemic disadvantages into consideration and to compensate for this with proactive, specialised measures.
  - **Gender justice** is often used to describe efforts that focus on transforming harmful gender and power relations, uprooting the systemic causes of gender inequality and discrimination. The goal, as outlined by Professor Eudine Barriteau, is achieving “a societal condition in which there are no asymmetries of access to, or allocation of, status, power and material resources in a society, or in the control over and capacity to benefit from these resources.”<sup>4</sup> [Intersect](#), [Oxfam](#), and the [Global Fund for Women](#) are examples of organisations that use this term to describe their work; their webpages provide further detail on their approaches.

4. “Issues and Challenges of Caribbean Feminism,” in Agenda. Empowering Women for Gender Equity, Eudine Barriteau, 2003

- Many organisations and activists employing one of the terms above will intentionally select the one that best describes their approach and goals.<sup>5</sup>
  - Whichever term used, achieving the goals outlined by these terms requires the efforts of all members of society – it cannot and should not only be the work of women and non-binary individuals.
- Learn more on the United Nations Population Fund’s (UNFPA) webpage on [frequently asked questions about gender equality](#).

## GENDER-SENSITIVE / GENDER-RESPONSIVE / GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE / GENDER LENS

- These terms are adjectives that describe the extent to which actions and approaches take gender into consideration and seek to address inequalities:
  - **Gender-sensitive** actions are designed with an understanding/awareness of how they could impact individuals of different genders, but do not necessarily seek to actively address any inequalities.
  - **Gender-responsive** actions demonstrate an understanding of gendered realities and seek to respond to these by ensuring that their design provides what is needed by beneficiaries of different genders, thereby addressing (or at least not exacerbating) inequalities.
  - **Gender-transformative** actions are designed with the core purpose of changing harmful gender norms and relations, and redistributing power by confronting the root causes of inequality.
  - **Applying a gender lens/gender perspective** to an issue or action means analysing it to understand how gender comes into play: how individuals of different genders are or will be affected, and/or how it could be approached in a way that contributes to addressing gender inequality.

5. *Gender equality* is used in this publication because this term tends to be the best understood and most commonly used in society, and because it accurately expresses the condition we are working to achieve through our efforts. However, we believe in the importance of an equity-based approach that ensures all individuals have what they need, and in addressing the systemic causes and consequences of inequality.

## FEMINISM AND WOMANISM

- These terms are both used to describe a movement or ethos that guides someone's activism around women's rights and gender equality,<sup>6</sup> but both have unique meanings:
  - Feminism is a movement working towards equal rights, opportunities, and access for individuals of all genders.
  - Though feminism seeks to achieve positive impacts across all of society, using the term "feminism" (as opposed to a word like "humanism") helps to centre women's experiences, correct for the fact that women as a group have largely been invisible in the public sphere, and call attention to the structural inequalities that have disadvantaged more than half of the population (with negative repercussions across society). It further honours the strong women-led movements behind advancements for women and marginalised groups over the past centuries. Learn more about the impacts of Caribbean feminist organisers in the *Learning to Lead* module of this toolkit.
- The feminist movement has a long and globe-spanning history (see this [timeline](#) by [UN Women](#),<sup>7</sup> for example) and it continues to evolve as activists have sought to address exclusion, marginalisation, and inequality within the movement's demands and spaces. There are also specific characteristics to the feminist movements prominent in different contexts. For example, scholars like Dr. Rawwida Baksh point out that questions of race and class are often central to Caribbean feminism in challenge to colonialism and imperialism.<sup>8</sup> More information on the history of Caribbean feminism is provided in this [video by WE-Change Jamaica](#).
- Alice Walker introduced the concept of 'womanism' in her book, "In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose." The terminology reflects the expansion of the women's movement in the 1970s beyond the scope of concerns of white middle-class women to include the intersectional issues of Black women. Although "womanism" emerged from Black feminist theorising, it is sometimes used as an identifier by feminists of colour in general and in literature to describe the multi-ethnic Caribbean women's rights movement.

6. In this toolkit, we use the term "feminism" or "feminist" as this tends to be more commonly used terminology. Whichever term you identify with, we encourage you in your leadership to reflect on the efforts of all members of society and apply an intersectional approach to your work.

7. [Timeline: Women of the World, Unite!](#), UN Women

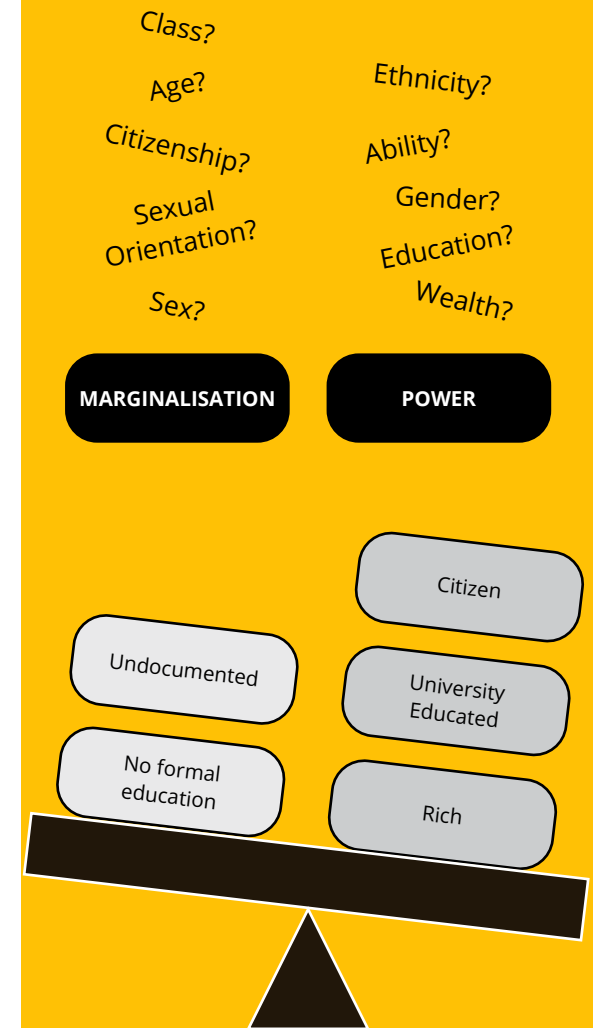
8. [Issues of difference in contemporary Caribbean feminism](#), R. Baksh-Soodeen, 1998

## INTERSECTIONALITY

- Intersectionality is a tool for analysis, advocacy, and policy development that addresses multiple discriminations and helps us understand how different sets of identities have an impact on access to rights and opportunities.<sup>9</sup>
- Individuals are not just one element of their identity at any given time – a woman, a migrant, a youth, a mother, an urban dweller, etc. – but rather all of these at once. This unique collection of characteristics can result in an individual having an entirely different set of (dis)advantages, needs, and experiences in relation to a policy issue when compared to those who may share one or more of the elements of their identity.<sup>10</sup>
  - Taking an intersectional approach to analysing an issue, or in general in your work, then means taking into consideration not only gender, but also how other identity characteristics contribute to individuals' experiences of inequality and what their unique needs are when formulating an action or response.
- "Intersectionality" as a term was coined in 1989 by U.S. law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. Learn more about the term and its origins through the video "[The Big Idea | Kimberle Crenshaw on Intersectionality](#)," posted by The Institute of Art and Ideas.
- Feminist scholarship and activism in the region seeks to explain, analyse and transform multiple, interrelated inequalities (such as sexism and heterosexism, racism, ableism, ageism) that arise from reinforcing systems of domination such as patriarchy, neocolonialism and neoliberalism, which are tied to the region's 'developing' status and its colonial history.

## REFLECTION PROMPT:

Why is it important to be as precise as possible in our use of terms related to gender and gender equality? Are there any other related terms or concepts you want to learn more about?



### Kimberlé Crenshaw:

"Intersectionality<sup>11</sup> is simply about how certain aspects of who you are will increase your access to the good things or your exposure to the bad things in life."

9. [Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice](#), AWID, 2004

10. [Gender Sensitivity in Legislation](#), ParlAmericas and Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

11. [She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What It Means to Her Today.](#)

# PROMINENT FEMINIST ISSUES IN THE REGION

In the Caribbean region, there are a number of topics that are the focus of current work by feminist and gender equality advocates. Learning more about this ongoing work can help to demonstrate what it means to apply a gender lens to understanding an issue and could also inspire your own action on a theme of importance to you. Awareness of other advocacy efforts in your country and region is also valuable so you can connect with like-minded partners and build on or complement each others' efforts. The list of topics presented below, the approaches to these issues discussed, and the examples of advocates and activists shared are not exhaustive but rather meant to provide an introduction that will inspire further research.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTERS

Climate change has disproportionate impacts on women and girls, amplifying existing gender inequalities and posing unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety. Differentiated needs must be taken into account in disaster preparedness, resilience, response, and recovery planning.<sup>12</sup> In efforts to mitigate and adapt to the growing climate crisis, there are avenues that can be explored to promote awareness-raising, education, and technical capacity building so that gender inequalities are lessened in the experience of climate change impacts, and so that women and girls are an integral part of the solutions advanced.

### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

GirlsCARE (Climate Action for Resilience and Empowerment) was co-founded by Jamaican climate scholar activists Ayesha Constable and Jhannel Tomlinson to empower young women and girls to advocate for gender justice in climate action by increasing awareness and technical capacity through mentorship and training. GirlsCARE also partners with other feminist and climate justice activists and organisations to share and exchange knowledge.



12. [Primer on Gender-Responsive Disaster and Crisis Planning for the Caribbean](#), ParlAmericas and UN Women, 2021

## Key international agreements and frameworks

- [Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (Escazú Agreement)
- [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) and the related [Gender Action Plan](#)
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section K: Women and the Environment](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Feminist Action for Climate Justice](#)



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Gender-based violence affects a [significant percentage](#)<sup>13</sup> of women and girls in the Caribbean and, because of the many ways this infringes on human rights, safety, and well-being, this is a critical area of action for advocates across the region. The provision of high-quality services for survivors of GBV, effective prevention measures, education and awareness-raising on GBV and its impacts, and advocacy for strengthened legal provisions to enhance protections are all prominent components of action on this issue.

### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

UNESCO, in collaboration with the [Institute for Gender and Development Studies](#), launched “Orange the World: Sheroes Youth Action to End Gender-based Violence in the Caribbean,” a campaign to raise awareness and share knowledge about the importance of ending gender-based violence now and forever. In 2021, 30 young human rights and gender activists participated



13. [Caribbean Women Count: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub](#), UN Women, CARICOM and Caribbean Development Bank, webpage

in the [Caribbean Heroines Summer School on Gender Equality, Advocacy, and Development](#) and shared their work and advocacy during the 16 Days of Activism on social media.

Key international agreements and frameworks

- [A Framework to Underpin Action to Prevent Violence against Women](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
- [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women \(Convention of Belém do Pará\)](#)
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section D: Violence Against Women](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Gender-Based Violence](#)



IWDTT2023 Women's Rights March  
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## LGBTQI+ RIGHTS

Active advocacy to promote an end to discrimination and exclusion based on gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation is vibrant across the Caribbean region. Though progress has been made in recent years through judicial review processes, discriminatory laws remain in place in some countries and members of the LGBTQI+ community continue to face violence and other harms.<sup>14</sup> Changing legal frameworks, and promoting greater overall acceptance and recognition of human rights, are key features of action in this area.

14. [“I Have to Leave to Be Me” Discriminatory Laws against LGBT People in the Eastern Caribbean](#), Amy Braunschweiger for Human Rights Watch, 2017



### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

[The Silver Lining Foundation](#) (SLFTT) is a leading national organisation providing youth-led research, training, and advocacy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth in Trinidad and Tobago offering free counselling services, peer mentorship and research via publications on LGBTQI+ issues.

Key international agreements and frameworks:

- [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#)
- [International Human Rights Law & Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity](#)



## ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension and communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS pose an alarming threat to the health and well-being of citizens in the region. According to the [Caribbean Public Health Agency](#), non-communicable diseases account for 76.8% of deaths in non-Latin Caribbean islands. The [Pan American Health Organisation](#) has also reported that 2.5 million people in the Latin American and Caribbean live with HIV, with an estimated 14,000 new cases per year in the Caribbean (2021). Access to health services, particularly those related to sexual and reproductive health, can also be limited, as is access to relevant knowledge and supports - including for menstruation. The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed weaknesses and inequalities in health systems related to vaccine access. In each of these areas, youth play an integral role in advocacy and action to raise awareness of various health issues and equalities, and to broaden access to needed information, services, and other support.

### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

[Dr. Kizanne James](#) of Jamaica developed a mobile app and website to assist people in accessing contraception as part of her [World Contraception Day Ambassador project](#). The website and app provide accurate and up-to-date information about the various types of contraception available, as well as where to get them, including the exact location of 16 health centres that offer them for free.

Key international agreements and frameworks

- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 12: Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health](#)
- [International Conference on Population and Development \(ICPD\) Programme of Action](#)
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section C: Women and Health](#)

- [Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#)

## MENTAL HEALTH

The rising recognition of mental health needs in the Caribbean Region is a public health concern. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat has launched a [Regional Mental Health Survey](#) to assess the psychological well-being of young people ages 10 to 29 years. Increasing access to and awareness of support/services - including for survivors of GBV, ending the stigma around mental illness, education programmes, and projects to bolster youth and women and girls' mental health - are all areas of attention within advocacy on this issue.

### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

[Girls of A Feather](#) was founded by Saint Lucian, Chelsea Foster, in 2014 as a non-profit mentorship organisation helping to shift the narrative about girls whose lives are shaped by societal and systemic failures depriving them of opportunities to live safe and fulfilling lives. The organization has also launched a [Telehealth](#) platform to offer virtual and free trauma-informed counselling for women and girls that are survivors of abuse.

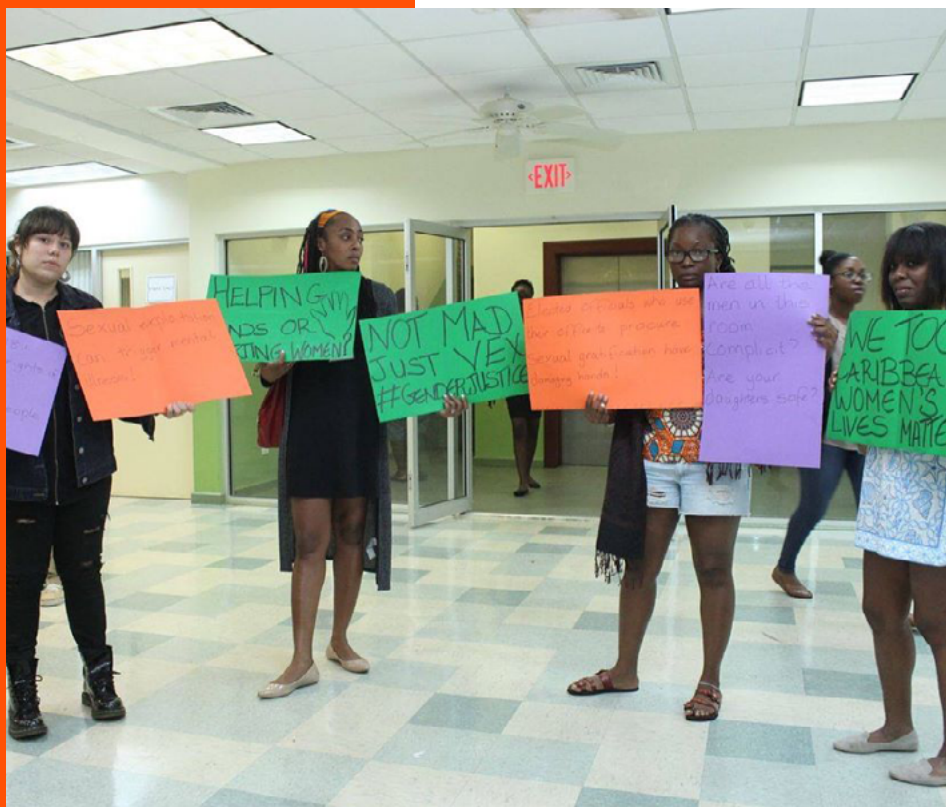
Key international agreements and frameworks

- [WHO Mental Health Action Plan](#)
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section C: Women and Health](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being](#)



## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice is recognised by international standards as both a fundamental human right and a means of protecting other universally recognised human rights. Even when rights exist on paper, enforcement of these standards is often weak. In the Caribbean region, youth advocacy focuses on ending crime and gender-based violence; promoting legal reform and the protection of human rights for all; and providing support for survivors and strengthening pathways for justice when instances of crime and discrimination do occur.



### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

Ronelle King, founder of the hashtag and organisation [#LifeInLeggings](#) in Barbados, created as a safe space for women who had experienced sexual harassment and sexual assault. Women, encouraged by solidarity, were empowered to speak out on their social media platforms about their experiences. Her organisation, [Life In Leggings: Caribbean Alliance Against Gender-based Violence](#), undertakes victim advocacy, crisis intervention, and referral services for access to justice.

Key international agreements and frameworks

- [Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Gender-based Violence](#)

## EDUCATION

Despite numerous strides in the Caribbean educational sector, there are prominent issues that limit the full achievement and actualization of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Education. Quality education is geared towards ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, the educational sector is plagued with problems such as functional illiteracy, high dropout rates, male underachievement and the persistent disproportionate gender composition in school enrolment, completion and educational attainment, the digital divide, and lack of sex education, among other issues.

### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

[Survival Scholars](#) is a social enterprise that empowers and equips students through the arts and storytelling with quality education in social and emotional skills. Dawsher Charles of Trinidad and Tobago, known as the “Resilient Warrior,” and her team empower students to build their resilience to positively cope with school and life’s changes and challenges so they can maintain positive mental health and wellbeing as they manage their studies and school journey to become success stories.

Key international agreements and frameworks

- [The Education 2030 Framework for Action](#)
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section B: Education and Training of Women](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality](#)





## POVERTY REDUCTION AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Gender inequality, economic inequality, and poverty are often deeply interconnected phenomena in the Caribbean. According to the [UNDP Regional Human Development Report 2021](#),<sup>15</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean region is the second most unequal in the world, and countries in LAC exhibit higher income inequality than those in other regions at similar development levels. Women are disproportionately impacted by poverty because of unequal power relations and participation in decision-making. Youth and young women leaders play crucial roles in the fight against poverty, gender inequality, and economic inequality via advocacy, activism, and action, working both to ensure that communities have their immediate needs met and to address the root causes of inequality.



### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

Phylcia Alexander is the Founder and Director of [Red Root SVG](#) and has been working on the ground to support persons with socio-economic constraints in her community. During the 2021 volcanic eruptions in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, she witnessed the scarcity of basic needs such as water, housing, food, baby formula, and sanitary napkins. This motivated her to take action by raising funds and gathering supplies of food and clothing for 3000 households.

15. [Trapped? Inequality and Economic Growth in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), UNDP, 2021

- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section A: Women and Poverty](#)
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section F: Women and the Economy](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 1: No Poverty](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Economic Justice and Rights](#)

## ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING SPACES

Fostering greater inclusion of youth, women, and marginalised groups in decision-making spaces at all levels and in all spheres is essential to ensuring the outputs of such spaces are informed by and responsive to their unique perspectives. According to the [Council of Europe](#),<sup>16</sup> “Young people are particularly vulnerable to gender-based discrimination; they are less likely to be consulted or taken seriously.” Recognising the underrepresentation of youth voices in formal spaces but the important contributions youth offer, there is active advocacy in the region to expand upon existing avenues or create new spaces for women and girls to engage with decision-makers in different branches and levels of government.

### Example of young leaders taking action on this issue

[Young Women in Leadership](#) is a series of national-level initiatives implemented across the Caribbean by CIWiL and ParlAmericas, in partnership with national legislatures, to foster young women’s interest in public leadership. The programme is designed to



16. [Gender Mainstreaming in Thematic Areas: Gender Equality and Youth](#), Council of Europe

support participants in building knowledge, skills, and networks necessary for their work as current and future changemakers. The program comprises transformational leadership workshops; exchanges with peers, members of parliament, and experts on women's leadership and gender equality; orientation on parliamentary procedures; and participation in a [special YWiL sitting in parliament](#).

Key international agreements and frameworks

- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Section G: Women in Power and Decision-Making](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions](#)
- [Generation Equality Action Coalition Blueprint on Feminist Movements and Leadership](#)

### REFLECTION PROMPT:

What social issues am I most passionate about? How does gender play into individuals' diverse experiences in relation to these issues? What organisations can I look to to learn more about the gendered dimensions of these issues?

### TAKE ACTION:

Continue your education on these topics and collect information to inform your work by drawing on varied sources, including data and research, country reports related to international frameworks, organisations' websites, blogs, and social media.



## SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES:

Social media is a great tool for building your knowledge about women's rights and gender equality, and to learn about upcoming events and webinars. Some examples of Instagram accounts to follow are below - but please note that this list is not exhaustive and there are many other voices and perspectives to be taken in. It is also important to not only individually reflect on gender - but also to interact, start and/or be a part of the online conversations and learn from others with different experiences and identities from your own. With accounts you follow, respectfully engage with, support, and promote the content you are consuming; many times this work is being done on a voluntary basis.

- [@unwomencaribbean](#)
- [@CaribbeanGirlsCollective](#)
- [@FEMINITT](#)
- [@intersect.anu](#)
- [@CaribbeanFeminist](#)
- [@wechangeja](#)
- [@herstoire](#)
- [@girlsofateatherslu](#)
- [@equality242](#)
- [@officiallifeinleggings](#)
- [@thebreadfruitcollective](#)
- [@\\_ciwil](#)
- [@ciwilab](#)
- [@ciwilbah](#)
- [@ciwilbze](#)
- [@ciwilgnd](#)
- [@ciwiljam](#)
- [@ciwilskn](#)
- [@ciwillslu](#)
- [@ciwil\\_svg](#)
- [@ciwiltt](#)

Also think about following your favourite authors and journalists who write on gender equality themes; the minister/ministry with responsibility for gender, and/or the national gender machinery in your country if they have accounts; other organisations and activists in your country, the region, or globally that are dedicated to inclusion.

Remember that social media only provides snapshots most times, so complement your learning in this space with other reading, viewing, and critical thinking - including through some of the sources below.





## WEBSITES

- [Caribbean Women in Leadership](#)
- UWI IGDS units: [St. Augustine, Nita Barrow Unit at Cave Hill, Mona](#), and the [Regional Coordinating Office](#); as well as the Women and Development Unit of the [UWI Open Campus](#)
- [Caribbean Review of Gender Studies](#)
- [Caribbean Institute in Gender and Development](#) (CIGAD)
- [Intersect](#)
- [Caribbean Feminisms: A Reading List](#) (compiled by Nana Afua Y. Brantuo and Dr. Andrea N. Baldwin, Black Women Radicals)
- [Women's Voice and Leadership - Caribbean](#)
- [UN Women Caribbean publications webpage](#)

## NATIONAL REPORTS

- [Country reports on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of this framework in 2020
- [Country Gender Assessment reports](#) prepared by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)
- [Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) reports](#) prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- [CEDAW State Parties' Reports](#) (can be filtered by country)

# INCORPORATING A GENDER LENS IN YOUR LEADERSHIP WORK

Applying a gender lens in your leadership work means drawing on your knowledge of gender inequality and acting on your commitment to addressing barriers across all of your efforts, as illustrated in the examples shared earlier. It is also about how you lead. We have discussed in this tool how the patriarchal nature of our societies has led to the inequalities and power differentials we are seeking to uproot. This societal structure was put in place through colonisation and other nation-building processes, and its harms can be reproduced – whether consciously or unconsciously – when we continue to model traditional forms and practices of leadership.

The goal of our leadership must be transformation – and we can start with our own habits. Some important strategies for taking a gender approach through your leadership work are outlined below:

Examine issues from an intersectional gender lens

- Feminist and gender-responsive advocacy can be undertaken on any theme, as there is a gender angle to all issues. In practice, this looks like gaining understanding of the ways in which individuals of different genders and backgrounds are impacted by an issue, what inequalities exist in experiences with a specific area, and how these inequalities can be rectified to ensure that women, girls, and marginalised groups are not at a disadvantage.
- Remember that redressing unequal power relations and strengthening the rights and protections – and access to these – of women, girls, and marginalised populations must be a central feature of this form of leadership work. Doing so requires an awareness of one's own potential biases and a commitment

## TAKE ACTION:

Taking an inclusive approach to decision-making and leadership calls for intersectionality and open-mindedness. You can apply a four step method to increase your 'VIEW' and better your understanding an issue or perspective:

- V - Value the opinions, options, and other realities that can exist before making a decision
- I - Identify when you are viewing a topic from a place of privilege
- E - Educate yourself on topics you are not familiar with to broaden your point of view
- W - Ask yourself who, what, where when, and why to help you understand other perspectives

to understanding the lived realities and challenges experienced by different groups and individuals - preferably through focused and ongoing engagement with these individuals - in order to respond effectively.

- It is also important to remember that not everyone of a specific gender has the same experience. Your analysis must also be nuanced to consider the impacts of race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, migration status, health, location, etc. and the ways in which a person belonging to or identifying as part of specific groups can also result in (dis)advantages that must be carefully considered in your work as a transformational young leader.

#### **REFLECTION PROMPT:**

How can I incorporate a practice of understanding unique points of view on different issues into my thinking and leadership? What other ways can I ensure my leadership approach is inclusive?

#### Practice inclusive decision-making

- Be aware that knowledge is not value-free or neutral but rather shaped by the social influences and experiences of the knowledge holders/creators. Therefore, whether you are gathering information, conducting research, or working with others to make decisions, remain attuned to how different standpoints on an issue tend to be informed by various degrees of power and privilege, and in turn, how the knowledge produced from these standpoints can hold implicit biases and assumptions. Seek to amplify views and perspectives that have been traditionally excluded from mainstream knowledge production and decision-making processes.
- Identify the diverse persons, groups, communities, and/or organisations that will be affected by decisions you take on a particular issue and meaningfully involve those stakeholders or incorporate their perspectives in the decision-making process. Partner with these individuals, as well as other actors and organisations with a similar mission to yours, in the implementation so you can draw on each others' strengths and ensure effective action.
- Actively invite and seek out contributions from everyone at the decision-making table, while taking into account that you may have to work harder or more creatively to sensitively extract contributions from some persons due to factors such as cultural and language differences, their levels of confidence, and introversion.

## Create inclusive and productive spaces for exchange

- How individuals participate in meetings are also shaped by gender norms and imbalances, so how you lead the spaces you convene can help to address this. Be aware of social dynamics during meetings and collectively set expectations for inclusive behaviour in the team such as active listening, while modelling those behaviours yourself. Other [strategies for chairing gender-inclusive meetings](#)<sup>17</sup> can also be employed.
- Foster environments that are conducive to independent thought and free from pressure to conform to make these spaces feel safe, encouraging, and empowering for women, girls, less senior team members, and other diverse members of your team to each share their unique perspectives, even if those perspectives are not aligned with the popular one. One way to do this could be by setting community agreements for meetings and events you lead that encourage respect and sharing of ideas.
- Practice using language that is respectful of all people, acknowledges gender diversity, and is sensitive to differences through tools like these [guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English](#).

### OTHER RESOURCES:

- **[RISE UP! GUIDE FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP](#)**

Rise Up! empowers young women to make decisions and take control of their own rights and destiny by teaching and developing revolutionary leadership qualities in them.

- **[TEACH A GIRL TO LEAD: APPLYING A GENDER LENS](#)**

This tool by the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics can help you apply a gender lens to civic engagement programmes and materials that you may develop.

- **[GENDER SENSITIVITY IN LEGISLATION](#)**

This tool by ParlAmericas can help you concretely apply a gender lens in analyzing an issue, with a specific focus placed on practicing gender sensitivity in drafting and the review of legislation.

- **[LEARNING TO LEAD](#)**

This toolkit is part of the series "*YOUth Lead: A Toolkit for Transformational Leadership to Support Gender Equality*." prepared by Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL) and ParlAmericas and it focuses on sharing skills, good practices, and tools for transformational leadership.

17. [Strategies for Chairing Gender-Inclusive Meetings](#), ParlGenderTools

This tool, *“Gender Equality 101: Unpacking Key Concepts and Issues”* was one module of the toolkit, *“YOUth Lead: A Toolkit for Transformational Leadership to Support Gender Equality.”*

Find the other modules here:

- [Learning to Lead: Laying the Foundations for Transformational Leadership](#)
- [Leading by Doing: Taking up Space and Driving Change](#)
- [Being Your Best Self: Protecting your Mental Wealth](#)

