Gender Equity and Gender Equality
A brief overview of these issues and their application within NGOs

Introduction
‘Gender equity’ and ‘gender equality’ move away from a women in development (WID) attitude, to encompass a gender and development (GAD) approach and understanding. GAD recognises that gender inequity is not an issue that exclusively disadvantages women, but is relevant to people of all gender identities and sexualities.

Distinctions and controversy over terms
Gender equity: This refers to the treatment of people according to their respective needs to ensure equal rights, obligations and opportunities. It recognises that people are born with different strengths and weaknesses and demands that development practitioners adopt different actions accordingly. A limitation to this term is society’s subjective comprehension of what people’s ‘needs’ are and what action should be taken towards equity.

The term was first proposed in 1995 for the Beijing Platform for Action by Islamic fundamentalists and Vatican followers who sought to allow parents to divide their property between their children according to their respective ‘needs’ in their gender-specific roles. In this way ‘gender equity’ is a problematic term as it may inspire legislation that further encourages a person to fill a predetermined gender-defined role, and perpetuate gender inequality. Consequently, it is necessary to focus the outcome goal on equity toward equality.

Gender equality: Indicates that people are free to make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and that their various contributions and needs are valued equally.

‘Gender equality’ is the term used in human rights treaties such as The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). A sector-wide switch to the use of the term ‘gender equity’ risks invalidating existing gender rights agreements and voiding claims against human rights violations. This term is also limited as it may imply that equality can be achieved by treating all people the same.

How NGOs can promote gender equity and equality in their work

Rights Based Approach: Endorse human rights treaties, such as CEDAW, which promote gender equity and gender equality. Conduct the organisation’s work in harmony with the Treaty principles.

Gender Mainstreaming: Consider the gender-specific implications of all the organisation’s policy and work. Always review and respond to external policy from a gender sensitive perspective. Through this, gender sensitive analysis should become standard practice beyond just the development sector.

Communicate: Cooperate with other NGOs, parliamentary bodies and grassroots organisations working in the same region. Encourage all to adopt a gender equity focussed lens and work in coordination toward gender equality.

Terminology: Avoid the use of language which reinforces gender stereotypes.

Affirmative action: Assist governments in offering support and advancement to disadvantaged people while being sensitive to what their needs are for success in their role.

Legislation: Promote full citizenship rights to all regardless of gender. Offer support to people of under-represented gender identities who adopt or wish to adopt policy-making positions.

Peace and Conflict: Women have proven to be effective at peace building. Nurture women’s involvement in conflict resolution accordingly. Grassroots: Learn from and offer support to gender based local organisations as they will better understand their own needs.
Conclusion
Gender equity is a mechanism through which gender equality may be achieved. A consideration of both gender equity and gender equality is integral to good development practice. The aim of a development practitioner should be equity for equality.

Grassroots: Learn from and offer support to gender based local organisations as they will better understand their own needs.

Educate: Offer education opportunities so people, particularly women and girls, may understand their legal rights, accessibility of health care and medical advice and opportunities for participation in education, business, leadership and political roles.

Society: Involve wider society in cooperation and discussion around gender issues, so all people may understand their own role in facilitating gender equity and equality.

Recommended resources
- Equity or equality for women? Understanding CEDAW's equality principles
- UNESCO: Gender equality and equity accomplishments
- Youth employment: Breaking gender barriers for young women and men
- Enforcing rights and correcting wrongs: Overcoming gender barriers in legal systems
- Promoting gender equity in the Pacific

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