

As part of our efforts to fully realise gender mainstreaming at all levels we have developed “Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Materials and Advocacy” to be used in all WABA’s programmes and publications as well as to encourage its use by WABA’s partners, endorsers and breastfeeding advocates in general in their work on breastfeeding protection and promotion.

WABA Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Materials, Advocacy and Communications

1. Statements/recommendations should be broad to cover all women, whenever relevant. Use the term “woman” rather “mother”, unless the context is specific to a mother. Eg. All women are entitled to good nutrition. Unless you want to make a specific point that pregnant and breastfeeding mothers in particular need additional nutrition and support.
2. Use gender neutral terms like “humankind” or “humanity” rather than “mankind.” Avoid references to his. Use s/he, for example. This point is even more relevant in Latin based languages as most nouns are gendered, masculine and feminine. Use the plural form when it is ungendered.
3. The content should always respect women’s basic rights to food, health, security, development, personal integrity, informed decisions and other rights spelt out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international instruments. There can be cultural sensitivities to issues around women’s right to sexuality and reproductive rights, although WABA’s Gender WG stand is that all women’s rights in CEDAW, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and Beijing Platform of Action should be protected and supported.
4. Consider the woman’s situation (context, background) when “making demands on her” –eg. avoid using words like “should”, “must”, “ought to”. General remarks like “Women should breastfeed” can be seen as insensitive if their situation, which prevents them from breastfeeding, is not considered. Rather talk about supporting women to breastfeed.
5. Avoid stereotypical portrayal of men and women in terms of social beliefs, norms of expected behaviour, sexual division of labour, access and control to resources decision making and power differentials. Note this especially in illustrations (images, photographs, etc).
6. Are the messages in the materials directed only to women or also to men? Where relevant, ensure that the messages also address men as a means to ensure their involvement and to recognize their rights and responsibilities. Being gender sensitive means that you recognize the entitlements, roles and responsibilities of both men and women.
7. Ensure that we don’t only talk about the father when we refer to men’s role in child care and domestic work. With changing family structures, the men involved can be a partner, friend, brother, etc. and not just the husband or father of the child.



The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are IBFAN, LLLI, ILCA, Wellstart International and ABM. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

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Please see the Guidelines and let us know when and how you use the Guidelines in your work. Do let us know if you have any questions regarding their application. To contact us please write to us at waba@streamyx.com