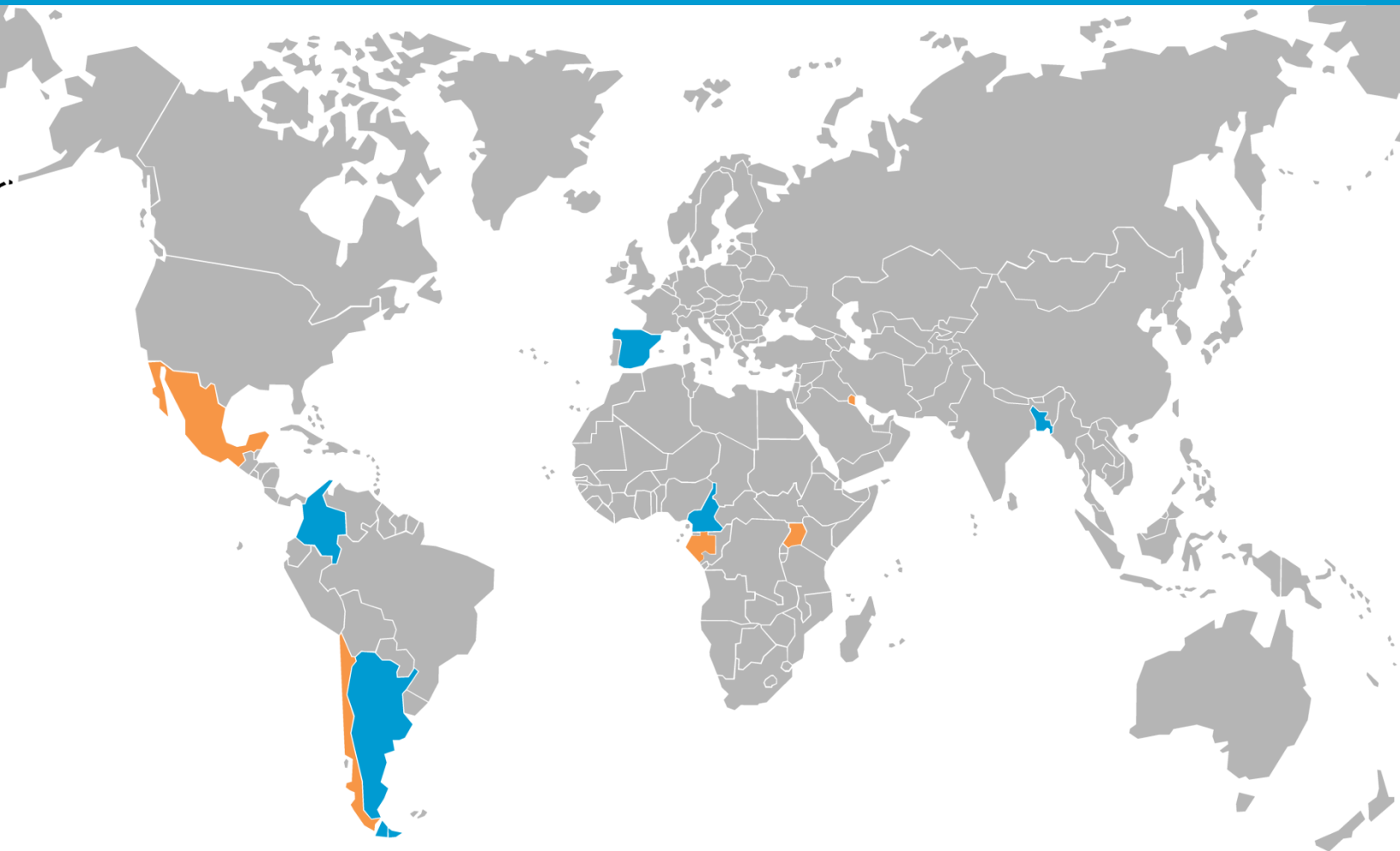


OUR STORIES

CoP Members' Personal Stories of Training for Gender Equality

Training for gender equality has the power to transform lives. We asked members of the UN Women Training Centre's Community of Practice (CoP) to reflect on their training experiences and what training for gender equality means to them. These are their stories.

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Sara Beatriz
Berumen Acuña
Mexico

“A key issue which I see as important is ‘sorority’ as a means of ending ‘machismo’. The response of women is interesting because they wonder about their own machismo and the treatment of other women within this system. They begin to re-think how to interact with other women without rivalry in terms of gender. This issue is not often addressed, but it merits deep exploration.”

“My work in gender training has been very enriching in two ways. First, because my initial professional training is in psychology, complementary knowledge on gender has allowed me to explore, in detail, how patriarchy can generate a pathological condition in a human being. Much of the patriarchal system implies violence, which tends to be imposed, often in a way that is biased towards women. When detected within clinical work, this signal can help us pinpoint how transmissions [of patriarchy] may be rendered invisible.

Another personal enriching point is that I myself realise the importance of gender equality work and how this issue cuts across the economy, working conditions, education and law. Essentially, all cross-cutting issues that can generate a fairer world, if only all institutions are taken into account and trained. Although there are commissions that are supposed to monitor this process, currently in Mexico the process is slow.”

One of Sara’s Training Exercises

“An exercise I have done in practice is something I have called ‘Women and my generations, in the past and future’. [Participants] reflect on:

- ✓ *What does it mean to be a woman today?*
- ✓ *The personal factors that have influenced [me] to become a woman*
- ✓ *The stories of the women who preceded me*
- ✓ *The transmission of what it means to be a woman to other women who come after me*
- ✓ *In reality, who am I?*

This exercise involves writing, games and group work.”



Alain Philippe
Binyet Bi Mbog
Cameroon

“I have come across the importance of training for gender equality since 2003, as National Coordinator of Social Integration of Mbororos (ISEMBO), and currently as a trainer, consultant, President and Coordinator of the OMEP Gender Mainstreaming project (World Organisation for Early Childhood Education).

What I can affirm is that the importance of training for gender equality is not debatable – we cannot achieve gender equality without training. What we can discuss is how to make this training more effective and efficient. In other terms, how can we enhance quality in gender training? While implementing training, we can notice that some gaps have to be overcome, we see the importance of the professionalism of the training team and also, particularly, the content and the coordination. While delivering training to teachers in Cameroon, we encountered some challenges that we were able to overcome by making the training more operational and also involving also some key leaders in the community.”

“While working with indigenous Mbororo communities in Balepo Takang, Ngong and Tchoffi in Cameroon, and while participating in drafting the Indigenous Curriculum for Children in Africa at IICBA UNESCO, we discovered the importance of caregivers’ qualities and the need for strategies, coordination and adaptation to [different] contexts as the key to a successful training. All this proves that training should take a global, national and local view, with the aim of bringing about positive change in the community. It is also important to insist on the quality of trainers, contents and participatory methodologies.

This is the reason that I have found the UN Women [CoP] website interesting, by giving us the opportunity to enrich our knowledge by exchanging and by participating in different trainings. [...] We will never achieve sustainable development by leaving women behind. Women rights must be defended and promoted everywhere worldwide, as this is the key for more peace, more welfare and a path to sustainable development.”

¹ The UN Women Training Centre’s is grateful to all the CoP members who shared their stories, which are arranged here in alphabetical order.



Shahanoor Akter Chowdhury

Bangladesh

"In June 2006, I received a formal training on Gender and Development at a workshop conducted by Kamla Bhasin. I was then working at UNDP Bangladesh. The workshop covered basic concepts of gender, as well as feminism and patriarchy. It was the first time that I realised patriarchy affects men's lives too, and not in an empowering manner!"

One of the sessions was participatory and conducted among both male and female participants on how gender discrimination takes place since birth. There were male colleagues of mine who presented their personal stories in tears. They realised how their female counterparts (e.g. mother, sisters) had been facing discrimination by them within the same family. This session was truly a transformative one for me. It was only then when I started to consider male perspective in the whole 'gender' discourse. I have been imparting gender sensitisation training for 14 years now.

One of Shahanoor's Training Exercises

"The most effective exercise that I have found is a participatory exercise popularly known as the 'Spider's Web', which opens 'gender as a social determinant of health'. This exercise helps participants to:

- ✓ *Distinguish between factors that affect women's health but are common to both women and men of a specific social group.*
- ✓ *These factors arise from women's biological differences from men, and are related to gender-based differences in roles and norms and access to and control over resources, and the power relations between women and men.*

This exercise is done by reading a story that unravels the intertwining factors contributing to the story's situation."

Paloma Lafuente Gómez

Spain



"For me, training for gender equality means not only having the opportunity to transmit knowledge or share experiences, but also to create a space for mutual and collective meeting and learning – opening the door to new ways of understanding and perceiving reality through a critical vision that raises questions and allows us to feed the spirit.

During my visit to Paraguay in 2014, I undertook a training process on gender and political participation for training staff at the Information, Documentation and Electoral Education Centre of Paraguay (CIDEE), an institution that is part of the Superior Electoral Tribunal. It was a very beautiful experience in which I could see the desire of many men and women to become trained on gender issues: 'No one ever tried to lecture me, to enrich my opinion or make me change into something,' they told me.

This is a methodology that I recommend and that, personally, helped me to obtain good results is, from the observation and identification of strengths and weaknesses of each component of the workshop – that the trainer does not act as a mere driver of the process, but rather aims to create empathy with the participants through real [personal] examples given from a first-hand perspective, where they reflect on and recognise their own vulnerabilities. This is what allows us to dismantle learned concepts and beliefs. [After all] we [as trainers] are the mirrors through whom others identify their own fears, limitations or deficiencies."



Roxana Molinelli

Argentina

"I believe that training for gender equality means, above all, the construction of interpersonal space, for both the trainer and the learner. It questions the frameworks of inequality, which implies a theory, objectives and concrete tools of change, which lead to action. Thus, training must take into account the inequalities that we know are transversal across social scenarios on a global scale. At the same time, it must be attentive to the particularities of each local context. That is why the methodology for constructing training [for gender equality] should be one of reflection-action, in order to respond to the possibility of concrete transformation in accordance with the historical needs and possibilities of different people and societies. I believe that a true instance of training for gender equality always expresses the possibility of change, whether at the micro- or the macro-level.

One transformative experience I have had as a trainer was in workshops for grassroots-level trade union delegates. There, we discussed the inclusion/exclusion of "gender clauses" (e.g. the extension of paternity leave, family care in the event of illness, child care spaces, support for training) in the regulations governing labour relations in [different] areas of activity. Interactive-expressive techniques were very effective in these trainings. The emotional involvement of [participants'] bodies and their consciousness proved an extremely effective way of mainstreaming a gender perspective. These tools allowed us not only to teach a way of seeing, but also to present theoretical-practical experiential learning oriented towards change."

Carolina Munoz Rojas

Chile



"What does training for gender equality mean to me? Undoubtedly, the answer is transformation. Training for gender equality for me is transformation – it is the possibility of changing our world, to make it more just, democratic and inclusive. It is the possibility of learning together with others, of all being part of a learning and transformation process."

"I discovered gender issues during my college education. Since then, something in me and in my life changed forever. I felt like the training I received removed an invisible (but very effective) cover on my eyes. Ever since, I have strived to be an active part of this change: to continue to remove invisible covers from the eyes of others so that they may also see. Thus, teaching about gender issues became my vocation, a vocation that have I built on, day by day, for over a decade. I teach on gender, equality and public policies to those who study the 'state' in their pre- and postgraduate studies at the university where I also studied (and where I now work). I also teach those working for the state through training programmes that integrate a gender perspective in Chile's public sector.

For me, to teach on gender is to face a permanent challenge – again and again, I find myself confronted with cultural resistances, biases and barriers that I must confront and transform. My strategy has been to make this process friendly, conciliatory and respectful of differences, even when resistance is at its strongest. This has meant being aware of the learning process and the possibility of including everyone who is on the challenging path of change and transformation – to change and transform their institutions and the society in which they are framed."

One of Carolina's Training Exercises

My favorite educational exercise is "investing reality":

- ✓ *This shows the meaninglessness of many barriers, biases, resistances, simply by turning them 'upside down', i.e. by changing roles in stories or jokes that discriminate. Reversing situations demonstrates that they no longer make sense and are no longer funny.*
- ✓ *It also demonstrates that the same argument or situation is invalidated when transplanted to another role, context or situation.*



Nadege M.
Mavoungou
Gabon

"I think that collective awareness for gender equality should start with teaching students about its importance in the development of countries, and the world.

As a teacher, training has really prepared me to professionally play that role in my classrooms and outside."



Berta Polo
Spain

"I have had the pleasure of developing the first Comprehensive Equality Plan in the cross-cutting tourism sector of the province of Valencia 2020 [...] with a fantastic multidisciplinary team of academics, professionals and activists in the field of gender equality, training and tourism. Training is one of the main actions to be implemented [to catalyse gender mainstreaming]."



Beatriz Ramírez David
Colombia

"[Training is a part of my] extensive experience as a facilitator and consultant on gender, women's empowerment, equal rights, social inclusion, and social work with vulnerable communities [...] Training for gender equality is an important strategy as it empowers the people we work with, giving us tools to ensure that our work rests on a solid foundation.

As a transformative experience, I can say that as a learner with the UN Women Training Centre, I have been given tools and strategies with which I can multiply in the training I offer to different institutions that require my services as facilitator or consultant. The training exercises that I consider effective are those [that seek to] understand the experiences of other learners and allow us to contextualise ourselves with women's global situation."

Adebayo Tajudeen Sanni
Uganda



"Training for gender equality training gives me opportunity to bridge the gap of inequality in various aspects of our development. Gender equality also means transformation in development through women's empowerment, using affirmative action.

I started as a trainer in Muzanze, Rwanda, where I conducted a training programme on the gender issues in farming for members of staff of the DERN project, in September 2011. The training programme was successful and effective.

As a trainee, I have attended the 'International Five-Day Gender Analysis Training Workshop for Social Science Researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa', jointly organised by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) of the University of Ghana, Legon and the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada in April 2014. Currently, I have submitted a project proposal on 'Mentoring Youth (Women And Men) To Be Champions of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Kigezi Region, Southern Uganda' to the African Union."



Sahar Shawa

Kuwait

“As the GFP [Gender Focal Point], I worked for Kuwaiti women’s political empowerment with UNDP, UNIFEM, NGOs and the [national] women’s machinery. Kuwaiti women had been fighting for their rights for the past 40 years and when they obtained it, they didn’t know what to do with it. They needed all kinds of political empowerment as candidates and voters, as well as an overall advocacy campaign for the public to accept the idea and get everybody on board. Also, there was the issue of working with UNDP, as we were accused of trying to push a western agenda. We had to tackle this sensitive issue with a lot of wisdom.”

“Building on available UN agencies’ expertise was another strategy. We joined UNIFEM in the ‘Arab Women Parliamentarians’ project, which was implemented in 11 Arab countries and involved capacity building skills. At the level of the country, development efforts pay off! Mind sets were changed from the rejection of the idea of women political rights to the point where they are seeking their votes. The personal transformation for me was the learning experience I went through on the political empowerment process, skills and techniques.”

Gisela Thornton

Argentina

“I started working exactly 20 years ago, when I was finishing my university studies. Throughout my professional career, I have had the opportunity to meet different people, who awakened in me the need to speak out in favour of gender equality. The person who inspired me most, and whom I admire greatly for her manner of being and professional capacity, is Anna Tudela. Anna is VP, Diversity, Regulatory Affairs and Corporate Secretary of Goldcorp, a mining company where I worked for five years, until last December. There, I had the opportunity to take my first steps in training for gender equality in the entrepreneurial sphere.



Anna set-up Creando Oportunidades (Creating Choices), a training initiative exclusively for women at Goldcorp, which enjoys strong support from the management and male leaders at the company. Goldcorp is an excellent example of commitment: they have increased their number of women staff, there are possibilities of job growth and we all had the possibility to express ourselves. During my time in the company, I also had the opportunity to be part of, and to lead, the Committee of Women Working in Mining of FUNDAMIN (the Foundation for the Development of Argentine Mining). The Committee is a unique space in the Argentine mining industry that brings women together, promotes their inclusion, and champions the cause of gender equity in this predominantly male sector. In order to champion our work, we developed a Forum – the Forum of Women Working in Mining.

Since 2010, this initiative of FUNDAMIN’s has created occasions and platforms through which to re-assess the role of women in society. A Women’s Committee was created within the Foundation, which organises a meeting each year. Over time, it has managed to bring together the positions of companies, unions and state bodies to enhance the role of women within the mining industry. Joint work always contributes positively to bringing these positions closer. The more actors and different spaces that join the cause, the greater our impact.”