

# Introduction to Gender and Women's Rights



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# Definition

**M**any of us confuse the words “gender” and “sex”. It is therefore important to distinguish the difference between the two words.

Sex is the biological feature of a human being which is determined at birth. That is, a person is born either male or female. There is nothing we can do about sex as it is predetermined at conception.

Gender on the other hand, refers to the roles, attitudes, perceptions, behaviour and responsibilities assigned by the society to the female and male sex thus making them girls or boys, women or men. Gender is therefore socially constructed and can be learnt and unlearned.

For instance, according to African traditions, gender division of labour has the man as the bread winner and the woman as the home maker. That is, the woman is expected to take care of the household and perform almost all house chores while the husband is expected to work and provide for all the family needs, including security.

Today however, responsibilities are shared



within the home and at work. In both the developing and developed societies, both men and women work in order to provide for the needs of their families, and take turns to share house chores.

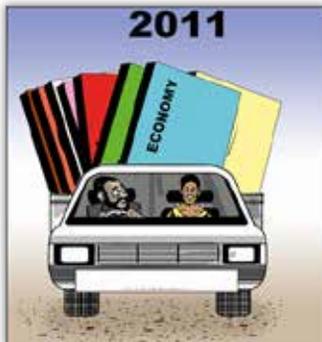
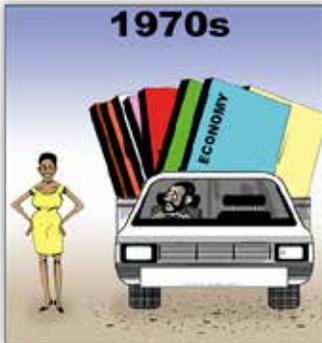
Roles change as the ideologies of society change. Therefore, it is safe to say that gender is dynamic and changes over time.



# Introduction to Women's Rights

**W**omen's rights are entitlements owed to female human beings and are meant specifically to protect women as a marginalised group.

The question then is, are women not human beings and why have they been given special attention in the human rights agenda? This is because historically, they have been seen as the “weaker sex” and have been in the backseat of the development



process in most, if not all societies across the world.

However, women remain to be key players in the social, economic and political development of all societies across the world. Therefore, there is need to recognise them and involve them as equal partners to men.

In order to achieve gender parity, specifically protecting women's freedoms and rights is key in enabling them exploit their potential in what remains to be a patriarchal society. Their exclusion becomes an impediment to social, economic and political development. It therefore becomes important to address women's rights specifically.

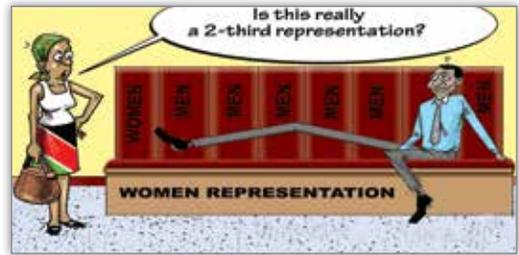
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# Affirmative Action

**A**ffirmative action refers to either a policy or program that provides special advantages for a minority or marginalized groups who have traditionally been discriminated against with the aim of creating a more equal society.

In order to involve women in development processes, affirmative action was taken to try and bridge the gap between men and women in all spheres of life.

In Kenya affirmative action has been incorporated into the Constitution of Kenya 2010 as well as policies in different government sectors. For instance, in education, the cut-off points for girls to either



join high schools or universities has been lowered to ensure more girls receive higher education and pursue their desired careers in order to better their lives.

Other forms of affirmative action include the requirement by law for a two-thirds representation of either sex in all elective and appointive public positions. This means that women can either be a third or two thirds of the representation in leadership positions.

Moreover, the creation of women representative seats in parliament for women from all 47 counties is a form of affirmative action.

**Kenya has made great strides in protecting women's rights. Over the years, women in Kenya have become more visible and contributed to the development agenda of the country. They have become key actors across all sectors.**

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