**Question: What is Gender Inequality?**

**Answer:** Gender inequality is primarily an issue of unequal power relations between men and women. It violates human rights, constrains choice and agency, and has negative impacts upon people’s ability to participate in, contribute to and benefit from social, political and economic development. Gender inequality is the opposite of gender equality. Gender equality refers to a world where everybody, women and men, boys and girls are valued equally, and are able to share equitably in the distribution of power, knowledge and resources. In a gender-equal society, all people are free from cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression, and from violence and repression based on gender. Therefore gender equality is indispensable for development, poverty reduction, and is crucial to achieving human progress. Realizing it includes sharing of power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace, and in the wider national and international communities.

The impacts of gender inequality are experienced most severely by women and girls.  During the past century, despite tremendous advancements in society, women are still not treated equally and are not afforded same opportunities. They are still at the peripheries of economic, political, social and cultural rights. They may face discrimination at home and in the work place. They make up the overwhelming majority of the world’s poor. Women suffer heavily in times of war and conflict but are significantly under-represented at peace tables and in governance structures. They remain vastly under-represented in democratic institutions globally; women represent less than 10 percent of parliaments in a third of the world countries. Cultural constraints may hinder women’s movements and access to health care. The valuing of boys over girls leads to female foeticide and infanticide. Millions of girls and women are affected by early and forced marriage and violence based on gender. In post disaster and conflict settings, women often suffer from lack of security and are excluded from decision making processes in economic, social, and political spheres.

Gender inequality can also place unnecessary demands upon men and boys. It is increasingly hard for men to live up to the traditional gendered expectations that most societies place on them. Gender equality brings greater freedom and increased well-being to all.

Gender equality is closely linked to the concept of gender justice. Gender justice, justice between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender justice means that the different behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender justice means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

Gender equality and women's rights are therefore central to transforming the lives of women, families, and communities. Strengthening women's agency and space is an essential factor in achieving gender equality as well as political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security. Gender Justice is necessary for the growth of economies, sustainable food security and in some cases political stability.