

Penang's Gender Inclusiveness: Anyone can be anything

Recently I watched the 2016 Disney animated film Zootopia with my family. The Oscar winning Best Animated Feature Film of the Year was about Zootopia - a world where multi-species predator and prey live side by side in the city. The film carried important messages of inclusiveness and non-discrimination, with the tag line '**Anyone can be anything**'. It highlighted the importance of equality and inclusiveness, in which anyone, from a tiny mouse, to a gigantic lion could pursue their dreams to hold any position including legal and enforcement, in the city.

In one scene in Zootopia it showed a juice bar designed for mammals of different heights and it reminds us that different facilities are designed for different groups considering our different physical and psychological states. It is a splendid demonstration of '**different people (animals), different needs**'.



Pick up Juice Bar for mammals with different heights
Source: Disney, See *Zootopia*, 11:07

Indeed, Zootopia took place in an imagined world. Nonetheless, it reflected an utopia which everyone desired - an inclusive and non-discriminatory society. Penang is a cosmopolitan modern city with diverse population and culture. It is important for Penang to transform into an universally accepted society in which everyone's rights

and needs are respected. The state government has taken the initiative to adopt its first Gender Inclusiveness Policy as a commitment to build an inclusive society while promoting substantive gender equality.

What is Gender Inclusiveness and Why?

The term Gender Inclusiveness is inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030. It refers to an environment where everyone’s diverse needs and rights are equally accepted, respected and understood. The concept of inclusiveness encompasses all spheres of life, including our home, national growth and development, workplace, public services, public spaces and educational institutions. In other words, everyone will have equal opportunities and rights to access public spaces and resources, while also ensuring that their rights in their homes and workplaces are respected.

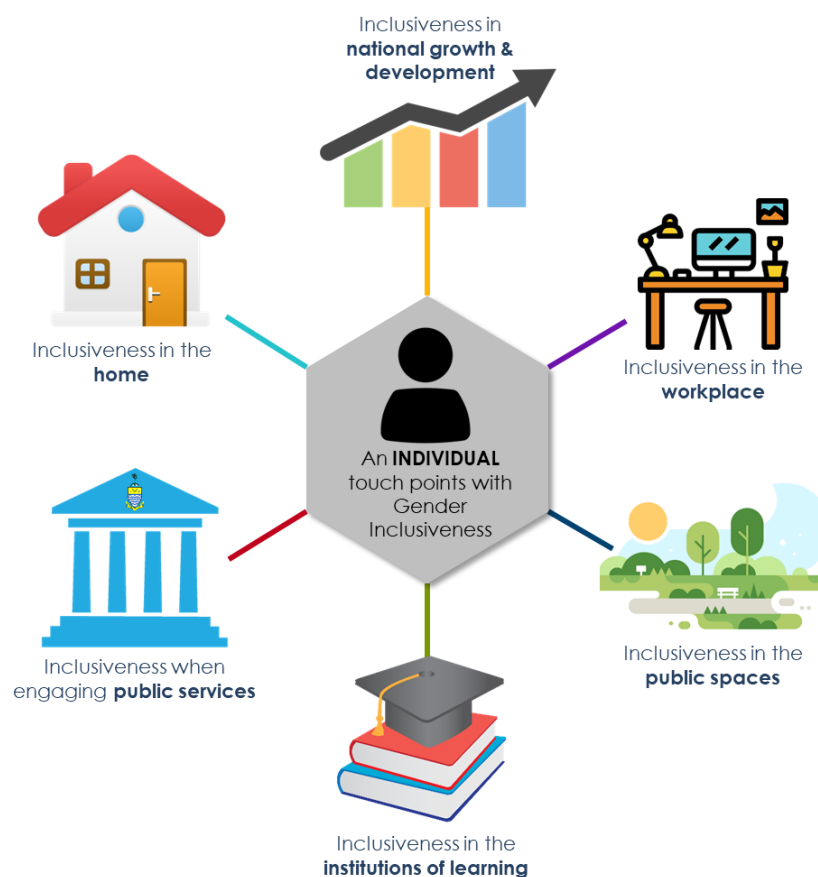


Diagram of Gender Inclusiveness

Although the concept of inclusiveness embraces everyone in society, there is a need to understand that it must not generalise everyone's need. Instead, different people's requirements should be considered when designing public and private facilities. A scene from *Zootopia* showed a train designed with three different sized doors for a reindeer; a brown bear and a rodent, instead of assuming that every mammal could use the medium sized door. This is very important since according to a 2013 report from the *Asian Development Bank and Asia Pacific CoP-MfDR (Community of Practice on Management of Development Results)*, more than 90% of facilities found in public spaces globally have generalised the needs of everyone, thus resulting in the neglect of citizens with special needs.



Different train doors catered for different size mammals
Source: from Disney, see *Zootopia*, 08:18

Nevertheless, attempts to provide facilities and services for different people with different needs in Penang are gradually improving. Pedestrian crossings are more preferred than an overhead bridge because the former is friendlier to the physically challenged disabled and old folks. In places with overhead pedestrian bridges, lifts and escalators are built to cater for these segments of society.

The state government practices a responsive process through Gender Responsive Participatory Budget (GRPB) to engage the community when deciding the spending of public money to reflect the needs of people at every level of society. The approach

includes focus group discussions and local surveys, and providing space for the community to participate in decision making on public expenditure issues. Gender inclusiveness starts with me and you by being motivated to participate actively in civic, social and economic activities. Tolerance and appreciation of cultural diversity are much needed especially in a diverse society as ours. With diversity in opinions and viewpoints, society will be able to come up with solutions and ideas that are inclusive. In a nutshell, Gender Inclusiveness strives to leave nobody behind, and finally citing from Zootopia, ***“We can only solve it together”***.

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