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## Training Option 4 – Gender Perceptions and Expectations<sup>18</sup>

**Learner Objectives** By the end of the session, participants will be able to

1. Identify their beliefs and perceptions about men and women
2. Examine how myths, stories, proverbs, sayings, and other social or religious institutions create, maintain, and reinforce gender stereotypes
3. Identify ways in which perceptions and assumptions of masculine and feminine attributes can restrict the experiences and options of both men and women
4. Identify strategies for challenging and changing gender role stereotypes

**Time** 2 hours, 15 minutes

### Session Overview

- A. Perceptions of Women and Men ..... 30 minutes
- B. Cultural Basis of Gender Stereotyping ..... 1 hour
- C. Strategies for Challenging and Eliminating Gender Stereotypes and Barriers ..... 45 minutes

**Materials** Large ball

**Handouts** 3A Common Gender Stereotypes

### PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

This session explores the basis of individual perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes. The activities are designed to allow participants to become aware of their own perceptions about women and men. It shows how these perceptions shape our definitions of appropriate male and female behavior.

This session allows for an in-depth examination of the concepts and ideas brought out in Session Two. If trainers feel that these concepts were explored sufficiently, they may omit this session or omit sections of this session.

#### A. Perceptions of Women and Men (45 minutes)

**Step 1** Ask participants to stand in a circle with one person in the center, holding a ball. The player in the center begins the game by calling out "Women are..." and at the same time throwing the ball to someone in the ring.

**Step 2** The person who catches the ball immediately calls out a word which

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<sup>18</sup> Source: CEDPA Gender and Development Training Manual

defines women. She/he should answer spontaneously, without stopping to think, throw the ball back to the center, then step out of the ring.

**Step 3** The caller in the center then calls out "Men are..." and the player who catches the ball answers spontaneously. The leader continues to call out "Women are...", "Men are..." at random, as the ball is thrown.

**Step 4** As the responses are called out, a volunteer writes them on a flipchart in two columns with the headings "Women are..." and "Men are..."

**Step 5** Post the completed flipchart page. Distribute Handout 2A, Common Gender Stereotypes. Have participants spend a few minutes comparing this list with the responses they gave during the game.

*Point out that the words in the handout and on the flipchart are so much a part of the way we perceive ourselves that we tend not to think about them, or about their power to mold and shape our attitudes and opinions about what is female and what is male.*

**Step 6** Ask participants questions such as:

- Do these words and expressions describe roles and characteristics that everyone considers "normal" or "natural"?
- Do they describe what society has decided female and male persons should or should not be?
- Do women and men behave as if these stereotypes were true?
- What are some of the consequences of these stereotypes for women and men?

*Possible answers: They diminish women as a group. They create unrealistic and artificial expectations of both sexes. They limit options and life choices.*

## **B. Cultural Basis of Gender Stereotyping (45 minutes)**

**Step 1** Divide participants into four groups and assign the following task:

### **TASK #1**

1. Identify myths, proverbs, stories, sayings, songs, etc. which attribute certain behaviors, characteristics, and roles to women or to men.
2. Discuss the stereotypes that are perpetuated by these cultural expressions.
3. Discuss how these stereotypes act as barriers to both men and women in limiting life choices and options.

**Time: 20 minutes**



**Step 2**

Allow each group to report on its discussion. Facilitate a large group discussion using the following questions:

- Besides myths, stories, proverbs, cultural and religious beliefs, and popular sayings, what other forces or agents in society create ideas and affect attitudes about women and men?

*Possible answers: the media, advertising, films, television, newspapers and magazines, jokes, cartoons, popular songs, books.*

- What are some of the messages these myths, stories, etc., send about women and men?
- How do they influence your feelings about yourself?
- How do they influence your feelings toward women and men?
- What are some results of the social and cultural barriers caused by stereotypes?
- Do women and men experience these barriers equally or differently? How do these barriers affect their relationships?

**C. Strategies for Challenging and Eliminating Gender Stereotypes and Barriers (45 minutes)**

**Step 1**

- What assumptions and values related to being female or male in your society are you most proud of, and make you feel valued? Why?
- What assumptions and values related to being female or male in your society do you most dislike, and make you feel undervalued? Why?
- Which of these would you most like to change? Why?
- Discuss one way in which you have already challenged or changed one assumption or value related to being male or female.

Divide participants into groups of three to discuss the following questions:

**Step 2**

Ask participants to brainstorm other stereotypes they might want to challenge and change. List them on the flipchart.

**Step 3**

Ask participants to identify strategies to break away from cultural norms and values related to masculinity and femininity, and how this might affect their personal, home, and work lives.

**Step 4**

Have participants discuss what they have learned and summarize.

*Point out that challenging stereotypes which are consistently reinforced will take extra effort. It will be even more difficult to change personal beliefs which have been internalized throughout one's life.*