

Session 3

Gender Roles, Relations and Life Choices

Time: 2 hours

Preparation

Purpose of the Session

In this session participants are expected to examine gender roles and responsibilities – the activities assigned to women and men on the basis of perceived gender differences. The gender division of labour and the implications of this division for both men and women are explored in the context of power and life choices. Participants develop strategies for achieving equitable gender relationships. Women's triple role – reproductive, productive, and community – are explored. This session is based broadly on the manual 'Gender and Development' prepared by the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA 1996), and on MOWCS (2003).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session the participants will be able to

- identify the roles, activities, and responsibilities of men and women in their communities
- discuss the effect of these different roles, activities, and tasks on relationships between men and women and the life choices of men and women
- analyse the productive, reproductive, and community roles of women

Session Content

- A. Work mostly performed by men and women in the family
- B. Gender roles and power relationships
- C. Productive, reproductive, and community roles of women

Materials

Flipcharts, markers, coloured pens, masking tape

Handouts

- 3A Worksheet – Work Mostly Performed by Men/Women
- 3B Worksheet – Gender Roles and Relationships Matrix
- 3C Different Types of Work
- 3D Gender Roles

Trainer's Preparations

Collect together the materials and handouts for the session.

Activities

A. Work Mostly Performed by Women and Men in the Family

Step 1

- Divide participants into 3 to 4 groups of 6 to 7 persons
- If participants represent socially heterogeneous groups then make each of the smaller groups as socially homogeneous (wealth, ethnicity, caste and so on) as possible
- Ask each small group to discuss and make a list of the work mostly performed by women, by men, and by both women and men in their community. Ask them to use the chart in Handout 3A to record their ideas.

Step 2

- Ask the participants to reassemble in the plenary group and present their outcomes.
- The following questions can be asked.
 - Who is doing what kind of work and which is given more importance and why? Who has more work?
 - What do people say if the work performed by women is done by men and vice versa? What is the social prestige associated with the work performed by a particular gender?
 - How can we encourage a change in people's attitudes? Ask participants to make notes on how attitudes can be changed.

Trainer's Notes

Work mostly performed by women

Work mostly performed by women is unseen. Women in the rural subsistence farming system work from dawn to late in the night, often 12-16 hours a day, but their work is not considered work because it is not paid. Participants should understand the following points.

- Men and women perform different types of work and this work is not shared.
- Women work more hours than men.
- Women's work is time-consuming and is not seen as work since they do not get direct cash in hand.
- Women's work is mostly looked down upon even by women themselves; household work is not paid for and hence is seen as worth nothing.
- Because women work longer hours without rest and without taking care of their health they are more prone to falling sick than men

The 'triple burden' on women was first pointed out by Caroline Moser in 1993. She made it clear that when women were brought into development work they carried a triple burden of productive, reproductive, and income generation or community management roles. She suggested that if women were to be brought into development work their triple burden must be taken care of. Without providing support services to lessen women's domestic productive and reproductive work, women cannot not take part in development activities. She made the point that the development programmes (WID) were giving women another burden rather than benefiting them. The triple role of women is explained in Handout 3D.

B. Gender Roles and Power Relationships

Step 1

- Divide participants into two single sex groups. Distribute Handout 3B, 'Gender Roles and Relationships Matrix'. Give the women's matrix to the members of the women's group and the men's matrix to the members of the men's group. Ask each group to complete a single matrix.

Step 2

- Ask the participants to reassemble in the plenary group and present their group's findings. After the presentations, lead a discussion using the following questions.
 - What differences were found between men's and women's roles?
 - What was the difference in the relationships between men and women in terms of power?
 - What is the impact of these roles and relationships on their life choices?

Step 3

- Ask the participants to return to the two single sex groups and do the following.
 - List the specific points you have in your matrix under the headings 'roles' and 'relationships' which need to be changed in order to achieve equity in gender relationships.
 - Suggest strategies for the effective implementation of these changes.

Step 4

- Ask each group to present its findings. After the presentations ask each individual to identify one change that they would like to make in their own life, and insist on them making a note of it.

C. Productive, Reproductive, and Community Roles of Women

Step 1

- Distribute Handout 3C on different types of work and ask the participants to list the different work activities written down at the start of the section under the three headings: Reproductive, Productive and Community.
- After the participants have filled in the chart of men's and women's work, distribute Handout 3D on 'Gender Roles' and initiate a discussion about who is playing what kind of role and why. Explain how social values and prejudices have influenced the roles taken on by men and women in society.

Trainer's Notes

Cite the work performed by men and women in the water and energy sectors (take examples from the UNEP/ICIMOD or other project). Explain that most of the household work is done by women. If men do this work they are given insulting labels (e.g. in Nepal such men are called 'joitingre'). But if women do men's work they are appreciated as outstanding or brave. How can we bring about a change in attitude and make men help women in the household work so that women also take an equal part in work outside the home? Women will have no problem handling work outside the home in the absence of men.

Handout

3A: Worksheet – Work Mostly Performed by Men/Women

Work mostly performed by women	Work mostly performed by men	Work performed by both men and women

3B: Worksheet – Gender Roles and Relationships Matrix

WOMEN	Roles	Relationship		
		Equal	Power Over	Powerless/No authority
Home				
Community				
Organisation				

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MEN	Roles	Relationship		
		Equal	Power Over	Powerless/No authority
Home				
Community				
Organisation				

3C: Different Types of Work

Reproductive	Productive	Community
Domestic or household work Producing and caring for children Working to sustain the family	Production of goods for consumption Income through work in or outside the home	Tasks and responsibilities carried out for the benefit of the community

3D: Gender Roles

The biological differences between men and women do not normally change: people are either male or female. However, the characteristics they are perceived to have, and the roles and responsibilities assigned to them, differ between societies, cultures, and historical periods. Gender roles are the activities ascribed to men and women on the basis of perceived differences. ‘Division of labour’ is a term used in gender literature to mean the roles and tasks assigned to women and men on the basis of perceived gender characteristics and attributes, instead of ability and skills.

Men’s Roles

Today, in the world’s more industrialised countries, there are few lines of demarcation between men’s and women’s occupations. However, in many less industrialised societies men have more visible and recognised roles than women, largely because men are paid for their productive work and women are not. In these societies, men’s roles usually involve jobs, which are assessed and counted in national censuses and accounting systems. Men do not usually perform domestic or household tasks. If they have community management roles, these tend to involve political organisation and leadership. Women handle community organisation and ‘hands-on’ activities.

Women’s Triple Role

Women’s roles in most societies fall into three categories: productive (relating to the production of goods for consumption or income through work in or outside the home); reproductive (relating to domestic or household tasks associated with creating and sustaining children and the family); and community (relating to tasks and responsibilities carried out for the benefit of the community). Women must balance the demands of these three different roles and should be recognised for their contribution.

The tasks women usually perform in carrying out their different roles do not generally earn them an income. Women are often defined exclusively in terms of their reproductive roles, which largely concern activities associated with their reproductive functions. These reproductive roles, together with their community management roles, are perceived as ‘natural’. And because these roles do not earn an income, they are not recognised and valued as economically productive. Women’s contributions to national economic development are, therefore, often not quantified and remain invisible.

In many societies, women also carry out productive activities such as maintaining smallholder agricultural plots in farming systems. These tasks are often not considered work and are often unpaid. Women may also perform many roles which attract wages in both the formal and informal economic sectors. But women’s economically productive roles, in contrast to men’s, are often undervalued or given relatively little recognition.