

# Session 2

## Understanding Gender

**Time: 2 hours**

### Preparation

#### Purpose of the Session

This session provides a broad introduction to the basic concept of gender, which is constructed socially and is specific to time and place. The exercises in this session will help participants to understand the basic differences between sex and gender and the impact of the concept of gender in society. This section is mostly adapted from the manual 'Gender and Development' prepared by the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA 1996).

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this session participants will be able to

- analyse the concept of gender prevailing in society
- define gender, which is contextual and differs from culture to culture
- distinguish between sex and gender
- describe how institutions and systems in their culture create and maintain gender stereotypes

#### Session Content

- A. Gender perception and expectations
- B. Defining gender
- C. Difference between sex and gender
- D. Social and institutional influences maintaining gender stereotypes

#### Materials

Flipcharts, marker pens, masking tape, pictures and flip chart drawings that distinguish between sex and gender

#### Handouts

- 2A Worksheet – Matrix for Recording Perceptions of Men and Women  
2B Sex and Gender

#### Trainer's Preparations

Collect together the materials and handouts for the session. Collect pictures and drawings that help show the difference between sex and gender. Draw the chart 'Sex and Gender' (shown in Handout 2B) on flipchart paper.

## Activities

### A. Gender Perception and Expectations

#### Step 1

- Explain the objectives of the session to the whole group and ask them to share their own personal experiences of being male or female in their respective societies.
- For a mixed group, ask men to depict male stances or postures and women to depict female stances or postures that depict how men and women are perceived in their society. In a homogeneous group ask all the participants to depict first male postures and then female postures.

#### Step 2

- Ask each participant to describe what his or her posture shows or describes about society's perceptions of men and women.
- Divide the participants into two groups: men and women. Distribute one copy of Handout 2A to each group and ask them to discuss their perceptions of being male or female and write the main points on a flipchart in two columns using the matrix shown in the handout.

#### Step 3

- Ask the participants to compare their perceptions – men's perceptions about men and women, and women's perceptions about men and women. Discuss the differences in their perceptions of their own sex and the perception of the other sex about them. Typical perceptions might be, 'men are powerful, women are weak' and so on.

### B. Defining Gender

#### Step 1

- Ask the participants to recall what they have so far understood and learned from the exercise about gender, and to make their own definitions of gender.

#### Step 2

- Write the participants' definitions of gender on flipchart paper and refine them to create one operational definition. Enlarge the participants' understanding using the points below.

#### Trainer's Notes

Make sure that the participants are clear on the following points.

- Gender values are taught from childhood in the family itself by the dress, behaviour, assigned responsibilities, and expressions of a particular sex.
- Gender values are transferred from powerful people and through various institutions – family, school, religious institutions, the community, and peer groups.
- Both women and men are equally responsible for transferring gender values to young children, and those who are in power (men or women) exert this power over the subordinate groups.
- Most societies have assigned different values and responsibilities to men and women where men and boys are placed in a better position than women and girls. These differences in values and responsibilities are the basis of gender discrimination in every society which distinguishes between the powerful and the powerless, this type of discrimination may also be based on caste, race, religion, and others.

### C. Difference Between Sex and Gender

#### Step 1

- Ask the participants what they understand by 'sex' and 'gender'
- Write their answers on flipchart paper listed in two columns: 'Sex' and 'Gender'.

## Step 2

- Present the 'Sex and Gender' chart already prepared by the trainer and compare it with the one prepared by the participants.

## Step 3

- Distribute Handout 2B, on Sex and Gender and ask one of the participants to read it out for the whole group. Make sure everybody understands the definition of gender. Use the prepared pictures to illustrate the points.

### Trainer's Notes

Provide points that illustrate the difference between sex and gender. Ask participants to list which point is related to 'sex' and which to 'gender', for example,

- women give birth to children and breastfeed
- women do cooking and bring water and firewood, men build houses
- men have moustaches
- women wear saris and cover their heads
- men wear pants
- women have a soft voice

Make about 10 to 12 points relevant to the local area and ask participants to list them in the category of 'sex' or 'gender' as per the table in Step 1.

## D. Social and Institutional Influences Maintaining Gender Stereotypes

### Step 1

- Ask participants to brainstorm about the institutions and systems that create and maintain gender stereotypes. Use the points that reflect 'gender' as per the analysis on sex and gender above and ask the participants what the institutions are that support and maintain such gender stereotypes.

Typical responses might include: family, religion, government, the media, the education system, and other institutions

### Step 2

- Divide participants into groups of 3 to 4 and instruct each group to analyse one of the institutions listed in Step 1. Encourage them to analyse their own working institution or organisation if applicable.
- Ask each group to discuss certain points: how does that particular institution or system create and maintain gender stereotypical behaviour practices and policies? What changes or progress have they observed in the institution or system that reflects a gender-equitable society or institution?

### Step 3

- Ask each group to present its findings.

### Step 4

- Ask participants to explain what they have understood in this session, especially regarding gender stereotypes and a gender equitable society. 'Gender stereotype' refers to the expected role and behaviour of men and women and the way they are appreciated as a result of being male or female. Explain more from Handout 2B about gender differences. A 'gender equitable society' describes a condition in which women and men participate as equals, have equal access to resources, and enjoy equal opportunities to exert control over resources.

## Handout

### 2A: Worksheet – Matrix for Recording Perceptions of Men and Women

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<b>Perception of Men</b>	<b>Perception of Women</b>
Men are:	Women are:
Men are:	Women are:

## 2B: Sex and Gender

**'Sex'** refers to the biological differences between women and men, which is universal and cannot be changed. This difference is the same in men and women all over the world. This sex difference is what makes women capable of giving birth to children and men capable of producing the sperm that decide whether the child will be a girl or a boy.

It is only the physical difference between the sexes that makes men and women different from each other. But this basic sex difference has been made a major point of social difference in many cultures. This social difference is not the same as the physical difference between the sexes and can be changed (and is changing) over time.

**'Gender'** refers to the socially constructed perceptions about women and men in a given culture and location. Each society has different perceptions and responsibilities assigned to men and women – e.g. dress, work, customs and traditions, religion, and others. These can be changed. These roles and responsibilities are divided to suit particular cultures, religions, the geography of a place, and the political situation. In some places a patriarchal system is in place, while elsewhere there is a matriarchal system. Some societies are polygamous and some are polyandrous. As the patriarchal system is the most common type of society we see male domination in almost all societies, cultures, and religions.

### In summary

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Biological Born with Cannot be changed	Socially constructed Not born with Can be changed

### Some of the areas that show gender differences can be explained as follows

• Social	Difference in the perception of women's and men's social roles: where men are mostly seen as the 'head of the household' and 'chief bread-winners' while women are seen as the nurturers, household workers, and care-givers or protectors.
• Political	Differences in the ways in which women and men assume and share power and authority: men are mostly involved in national and higher-level politics, while women are mostly involved at the local level in activities linked to their domestic roles.
• Educational	Differences in educational opportunities and expectations of girls and boys: boys are given opportunities for higher level and better education than girls, who are often streamed into less challenging academic careers.
• Economic	Differences in women's and men's opportunities for employment and control over financial and other productive resources, such as credit and loans, land ownership, and lucrative careers.
<i>Source: CEDPA 1996</i>	

