

## **MODULE 2 BASIC CONCEPTS OF GENDER**

### **Session 3: Gender Bias**

#### **NOTES/ REFERENCES FOR POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS**

**Excerpt from:**

**Learning from the Past**

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#### **The Question of Power**

During the 1960s and '70s, it was thought the solution to women's subordination was to increase women's power. Economic independence, the argument ran, would mean more power for women.

Since money is an important indicator of status (especially in the North), with more money, women would also gain prestige. In the South, income generating projects became popular, and in the North, job-training. It was also thought that more women in key decision-making positions - in business and the professions, legislatures, courts, and universities - would mean better representation and more power for women as a group.

In many countries, women organized (or were organized) to lobby, campaign for anti-discriminatory legislation, educate the public, unionize, and protest for (or against) access to birth control and abortion. Over the past 20 years there has been progress in all these areas (more women in the paid labour force, better legislation, better mobilization and organization of women). Yet major progress toward decreasing women's subordination has yet to be realized. A key element in understanding why this is so is our understanding of power. Most change strategies failed to take into account variations in women's experience of subordination - which differs with class,

race, sexual orientation and age. Those variations are reflected in differences in the importance women may give to gender subordination as a problem.

For example, gender may be less important than class (women in powerful positions may undermine and exploit working-class women and men); race (a white South African housewife and her black housekeeper); or age (the senior wife in a polygamous household in relation to co-wives, children and their spouses). Relations of domination are multiple and interrelated. The assumption that all women always have a single interest is false.

Behind most attempts to increase women's power was the notion that power is a limited quantity: if you have more, I have less. If I have power over you, increasing your power comes at the expense of mine. This power is an either/or relationship of domination/subordination or **power-over**. It is ultimately based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation, invites active and passive resistance, and requires constant vigilance to maintain.

There are alternatives. We can conceive of power as **power-to**, power which is creative and enabling, the essence of the individual aspect of empowerment. Most people describe situations where they felt powerful as those in which they solved a problem, understood how something works or learned a skill.

Collectively, people feel empowered through being organized and united by a common purpose or common understanding. **Power-with** involved a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when the group tackles problems together. Yet another kind of power is **power-within**, the spiritual strength and uniqueness that reside in each of us and make us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. In traditional cultures, shamans, healers and wise elders were felt to have this type of power, and were often called on for advice. Use of the talking stick in North American native councils reflects appreciation of the power-within every speaker.

Power-over requires the creation of simple dualities: good/evil, man/woman, rich/poor, black/white, us/them. There are differences and different groups do have very different interest. But power-within recognizes the strengths and weaknesses that exist in all of us and does not automatically condemn difference, or categorize in either/or terms. Power-within stresses self-acceptance and self-respect, complementarity rather than duality, recognition of aspects of the other in ourselves.

In a gender context, women and men are socialized differently and often function in different spheres of the community, although there is overlap and interdependence. As a result, women and men have different life experiences, knowledge, perspectives and priorities. **One cannot necessarily represent the interest of the other, and neither alone can fully represent their community.** A healthy society will appreciate and value aspects of these differences, and use them for its betterment.

Strategically, **we need to transform our understanding of power and resist power-over creatively.** Gandhi's non-violent resistance is an outstanding example. **We need to explore the concept of power-to, power-with and power-within** and their inter-relationships. In our development work, this means building problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills; strengthening organizations; and building individual and collective skills ad solidarity. **We need to be aware when our actions may increase divisions and conflict and be sure that those who will bear the consequences understand and accept the risk.**

**Excerpts from:  
Summary of World Bank Report  
Engendering Development**

GENDER DISCRIMINATION REMAINS PERVASIVE IN many dimensions of life worldwide. This is so despite considerable advances in gender equality in recent decades. The nature and extent of the discrimination vary considerably across countries and regions. But the patterns are striking. In no region of the developing world are women equal to men in legal, social, and economic rights.

Gender gaps are widespread in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, in power, and political voice. Women and girls bear the largest and most direct cost of these inequalities - but the costs cut more broadly across society, ultimately harming everyone.

## **Despite Progress, Gender Disparities Remain in All Countries**

THE LAST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY SAW GREAT improvement in the absolute status of women and in gender equality in most developing countries.

\*With few exceptions female education levels improved considerably. The primary enrollment rates of girls about doubled in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa, rising faster than boy's enrollment rates. This substantially reduced large gender gaps in schooling.

\*Women's life expectancy increased by 15-20 years in developing countries. With greater investments in girls and women and better access to health care, the expected biological pattern in female and male longevity has emerged in all developing regions; for the first time, in the 1990's women in South Asia are living longer than men, on average.

\*More women have joined the labor force. Since 1970 women's labor force participation has risen on average by 15 percentage points in East Asia and Latin America. This growth was larger than for men, thus narrowing the gender gap in employment. Gender gaps in wages have also narrowed.

Despite the progress significant gender inequalities in rights, resources, and voice persist in all developing countries---and in many areas the progress has been slow and uneven. Moreover, socioeconomic shocks in some countries have brought setbacks, jeopardizing hard-won gains.

## **Rights**

In no region do women and men have equal social, economic, and legal rights. In a number of countries women still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business, or even travel without their husband's consent. In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, women obtain land rights chiefly through their husband as long as the marriage endures, and they often lose those rights when they are divorced or widowed. Gender disparities in rights constrain the sets of choices available to women in many aspects of life---often profoundly limiting their ability to participate in or benefit from development.

## **Resources**

Women continue to have systematically poorer command over a range of productive resources, including education, land, information, and financial resources. In South Asia women have only about half as many years of schooling as men, on average, and girls' enrollment rates at the secondary level are still only two-thirds of boys'. Many women cannot own land, and those who do generally command smaller landholdings than men. And in most developing regions female-run enterprises tend to be undercapitalized, having poorer access to machinery, fertilizer, extension information, and credit than male-run enterprises. Such disparities, whether in education or other productive resources, hurt women's ability to participate in development and to contribute to higher living standards for their families. Those disparities also translate into greater risk and vulnerability in the face of personal or family crises, in old age, and during economic shocks.

Despite recent increases in women's educational attainment, women continue to earn less than men in the labor market---even when they have the same education and years of work experience as men. Women are often limited to certain occupations in developing countries and are largely excluded from management positions in the formal sector. In industrial countries women in the wage sector earn an average of 77 percent of what men earn; in developing countries, 73 percent. And only about a fifth of the wage gap can be explained

by gender differences in education, work experience, or job characteristics.

## **Voice**

Limited access to resources and weaker ability to generate income--- whether in self-employed activities or in wage employment--- constrain women's power to influence resource allocation and investment decisions in the home. Unequal rights and poor socioeconomic status relative to men also limit their ability to influence decisions in their communities and at the national level. Women remain vastly underrepresented in national and local assemblies, accounting for less than 10 percent of the seats in parliament, on average (except in East Asia where the figure is 18-19 percent). And in no developing region do women hold more than 8 percent of ministerial positions. Moreover, progress has been negligible in most regions since the 1970's. And in Eastern Europe female representation has fallen from about 25 to 7 percent since the beginning of economic and political transition there.

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## **Gender Inequalities Harm Well-Being, Hinder Development**

GENDER INEQUALITIES IMPOSE LARGE COSTS ON THE HEALTH and well-being of men, women, and children, and affect their ability to improve their lives. In addition to these personal costs, gender inequalities reduce productivity in farms and enterprises and thus lower prospects for reducing poverty and ensuring economic progress. Gender inequalities also weaken a country's governance--- and thus the effectiveness of its development policies.

## **Well-Being**

Foremost among the costs of gender inequality is its toll on human lives and the quality of those lives. Identifying and measuring the full extent of these costs are difficult---but a wealth of evidence from countries around the world demonstrates that societies with large, persistent gender inequalities pay the price of more poverty, malnutrition, illness, and other deprivations.

\*China, Korea, and South Asia have excessively high female mortality. Why? Social norms that favor sons, plus China's one-child policy, have led to child mortality rates that are higher for girls than for boys. Some estimates indicate that there are 60-100 million fewer women alive today than there would be in the absence of gender discrimination.

\*Mother's illiteracy and lack of schooling directly disadvantage their young children. Low schooling translates into poor quality of care for children and then higher infant and child mortality and malnutrition. Mothers with more education are more likely to adopt appropriate health-promoting behaviors, such as having young children immunized. Supporting these conclusions are careful analyses of household survey data that account for other factors that might improve care practices and related health outcomes.

\*As with mother's schooling, higher household income is associated with higher child survival rates and better nutrition. And putting additional incomes in the hands of women within the household tends to have a larger positive impact than putting that income in the hands of men, as studies of Bangladesh, Brazil, and Cote d'Ivoire show. Unfortunately, rigid social norms about the appropriate gender division of labor and limited paid employment for women restrict women's ability to earn income.

\*Gender inequalities in schooling and urban jobs accelerate the spread of HIV. the AIDS epidemic will spread rapidly over the next decade---until up to one in four women and one in five men become HIV infected, already the case in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

\*While women and girls, especially the poor, often bear the brunt of gender disparities, gender norms and stereotypes impose costs on males, too. In the transition economies of Eastern Europe men have experience absolute declines in life expectancies in recent years. Increases in male mortality rates---the largest registered in peacetime---are associated with growing stress and anxiety due to rapidly worsening unemployment among men.

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## **Productivity and Economic Growth**

The toll on human lives is a toll on development---since improving the quality of people's lives is development's ultimate goal. But gender inequalities also impose costs on productivity, efficiency, and economic progress. By hindering the accumulation of human capital in the home and the labor market, and by systematically excluding women or men from access to resources, public services, or productive activities, gender discrimination diminishes an economy's capacity to grow and to raise living standards.

\*Losses in output result from inefficiencies in the allocation of productive resources between men and women within households. In households in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Kenya more equal control of inputs and farm income by women and men could raise farm yields by as much as a fifth of current output.

\*Low investment in female education also reduces a country's overall output. One study estimates that if the countries in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa had started with the gender gap in average years of schooling that East Asia had in 1960 and had closed that gender gap at the rate achieved by East Asia from 1960 to 1992, their income per capita could have grown by 0.5-0.9 percentage point higher per year---substantial increases over actual growth rates. Another study estimates that even for middle- and high-income countries with higher initial education levels, an increase of 1 percentage point in the share of women with secondary education is associated with an increase in per capita income of 0.3 percentage point. Both studies control for other variables commonly found in the growth literature.

## **Governance**

\*Greater women's rights and more equal participation in public life by women and men are associated with cleaner business and government and better governance. Where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower. This holds even when comparing countries with the same income, civil liberties, education, and legal institutions. Although still only suggestive, these findings lend additional support for having more women in the labor

force and in politics---since women can be an effective force for rule of law and good government.

Women in business are less likely to pay bribes to government officials, perhaps because women have higher standards of ethical behavior or greater risk aversion. A study of 350 firms in the republic of Georgia concludes that firms owned or managed by men are 10 percent more likely to make unofficial payments to government officials than those owned or managed by women. This result holds regardless of the characteristics of the firm, such as the sector in which it operates and firm size, and the characteristics of the owner or manager, such as education. Without controlling for these factors, firms managed by men are twice as likely to pay bribes.

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## **Why Do Gender Disparities Persist?**

IF GENDER INEQUALITIES HARM PEOPLE'S WELL-BEING AND A country's prospects for development, why do harmful gender disparities persist in so many countries? Why are some gender inequalities much more difficult to eliminate than others? For example, improvements have been rapid in such dimensions as health and access to schooling, but much slower in political participation and equal rights to property. What factors stand in the way of transforming gender relations and eliminating gender inequalities? Institutions, households, and the economy.

**Societal institutions**---social norms, customs, rights, laws---as well as economic institutions, such as markets, shape roles and relationships between men and women and influence what resources women and men have access to, what activities they can or cannot undertake, and in what forms they can participate in the economy and in society.

They embody incentives that can encourage or discourage prejudice. Even when formal and informal institutions do not distinguish explicitly between males and females, they are generally informed (either explicitly or implicitly) by social norms relating to appropriate gender roles. These societal institutions have their own inertia and can be slow and difficult to change---but they are far from static.

**Like institutions, households play a fundamental role** in shaping gender relations from early in life and in transmitting these from one generation to the next. People make many of life's most basic decisions within their households---about having and raising children, engaging in work and leisure, and investing in the future. How tasks and productive resources are allocated among sons and daughters, how much autonomy they are given, whether expectations differ among them---all this creates, reinforces, or mitigates gender disparities. But families do not make decisions in a vacuum. They make them in the context of communities and in ways that reflect the influence of incentives established by the larger institutional and policy environment.

**And because the economy determines many of the opportunities people have to improve their standard of living, economic policy and development critically affect gender inequality.** Higher incomes mean fewer resource constraints within the household that force parents to choose between investing in sons or in daughters. But how precisely women and men are affected by economic development depends on what income-generating activities are available, how they are organized, how effort and skills are rewarded, and whether women and men are equally able to participate.

Indeed, even apparently gender-neutral development policies can have gender-differentiated outcomes---in part because of the ways in which institutions and household decisions combine to shape gender roles and relations. The gender division of labor in the home, social norms and prejudice, and unequal resources prevent women and men from taking equal advantage of economic opportunities---or from coping equally with risk or economic shocks. Failure to recognize these gender-differentiated constraints when designing policies can compromise the effectiveness of those policies, both from equity and efficiency perspectives.

So, societal institutions, households, and the broader economy together determine people's opportunities and life prospects, by gender. They also represent important entry points for public policy to address persistent gender inequalities.