

Progress Along the Gender Continuum

PRNA Tool #2

Introduction

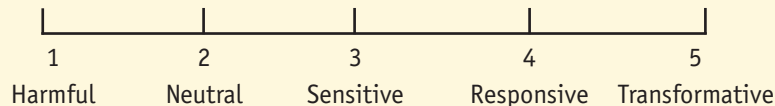
As we begin to see how inequalities of gender and sexuality in society influence people's behavior, we need to honestly ask ourselves whether our programs are currently doing enough to address these inequalities. Some reproductive health or HIV programs actually reinforce gender and sexual stereotypes that are disempowering, while others work hard to empower individuals and ensure that everyone has equal opportunities and rights. This exercise helps define a "continuum" of program approaches regarding gender that go from "harmful" to "transformative." This exercise was designed from an adaptation of Geeta Rao Gupta's "Gender Program Continuum."

Objectives

- To foster critical thinking on gender empowerment approaches.
- To help staff critically analyze their own reproductive health and HIV approaches.

Timeframe: 2 – 2 ½ hours

Materials Needed: flipchart paper, pens or markers. Photocopy enough copies of the Five Stages of the Gender Equity Continuum handout so that each participant gets a copy. In addition, prepare ahead of time about 3 flipchart papers taped up on the wall, end-to-end, and draw the gender continuum on them, as follows:



Ideal Workspace: All participants must be able to see the flip charts, and be able to move about the room freely.

Number of participants: 4-25; The exercise is carried out in smaller groups of up to 5 people each, and each small group is asked to analyze where their own programs fall on the Gender Equity Continuum.

STEP 1

Introduce the exercise by explaining the objectives, and how much time you expect it will take.

Explain the five stages of the Gender Equity Continuum, asking for volunteers to read the definitions of the stages; after each definition, illustrate the concept with examples, as follows:



Sarah Kambou/ICRW

Five Stages of the Gender Equity Continuum

Stage 1: Harmful

Definition: Program approaches reinforce inequitable gender stereotypes, or dis-empower certain people in the process of achieving program goals.

Examples: A poster that shows a person who is HIV-positive as a skeleton, bringing the risk of death to others, will reinforce negative stereotypes and will not empower those who are living with HIV. Showing only virile, strong men in condom advertisements reinforces a common stereotype of masculinity. Another example is a program that reinforces women's role as children's caretakers by making children's health services unfriendly toward fathers, rather than encouraging equality in parenting responsibilities.

Stage 2: Neutral

Definition: Program approaches or activities do not actively address gender stereotypes and discrimination. Gender-neutral programming is a step ahead on the continuum because such approaches at least do no harm. However, they often are less than effective because they fail to respond to gender-specific needs.

Examples: Prevention messages that are not targeted to any one sex, such as "be faithful," make no distinction between the needs of women and men. Also, gender-neutral care and treatment services may fail to recognize that women might prefer female counselors and health care providers to male providers.

Stage 3: Sensitive

Definition: Program approaches or activities recognize and respond to the different needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality. These activities significantly improve women's (or men's) access to protection, treatment, or care. But by themselves they do little to change the larger contextual issues that lie at the root of gender inequities; they are not sufficient to fundamentally alter the balance of power in gender relations.

Examples: Providing women with female condoms recognizes that the male condom is male-controlled, and takes into account the imbalance in power that makes it difficult for women to negotiate condom use. Efforts to integrate STI treatment services with family planning services helps women access such services without fear of stigmatization.

Stage 4: Responsive

Definition: Program approaches or activities help men and women examine societal gender expectations, stereotypes, and discrimination, and their impact on male and female sexual health and relationships.

Examples: Stepping Stones, a well-known life skills training program, addresses HIV/AIDS as well as broader community issues through social change activities that encourage participants to question the reasons why people behave the way that they do. Participants are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and others to promote safer, more productive, behavior in the future. Such projects work with both men and women to redefine gender norms and encourage healthy sexuality for both.

Stage 5: Transformative

Definition: Program approaches or activities actively seek to build equitable social norms and structures in addition to individual gender-equitable behavior.

Examples: Instituto Promundo's Program H and EngenderHealth's Men as Partners Program both encourage groups of people to work together at the grass roots level to foster change. The curricula for these programs use a wide range of activities – games, role plays, and group discussions – to examine gender and sexuality and their impact on male and female sexual health and relationships, as well as to reduce violence against women.

Another example is a project carried out by CARE in Sonagachi, a red-light district in Calcutta, India. Initially designed to reduce the level of STIs and increase condom use among sex workers, the program expanded to empower sex workers by enabling them to control their own lives and solve their own problems, as both a goal in itself and as a way to prevent the spread of HIV. This program became transformative when it began organizing a network of people and agencies in India to proactively engage in political debate about the rights of sex workers.

STEP 2

Ask participants whether they have any questions or need clarification on the differences in the stages.

Ask participants to share verbally where they would place their own project(s) on the continuum and explain why. Encourage debate and dialogue among participants.

When participants are ready, ask them to mark their project's current placement along the continuum, along with examples of why they are placed there.

Use probing questions to ask

- whether the projects are reinforcing gender or sexuality stereotypes
- whether they are addressing gender-based violence (or actively screening for, preventing, or measuring violence)
- whether projects can go backwards along the continuum
- what can be done to take projects to the next level on the continuum.

Notes to the Facilitator:

If the group is bigger than 5 people, form smaller groups of about 4-5 people each. If possible, form the groups so that everyone in a group has a similar level of familiarity with a particular project. It is preferable to form small groups to discuss one project in depth rather than try to analyze several different projects.

This exercise introduces an examination of power differences between men and women in society. In general in most societies, there is an unequal power balance that favors men over women, heterosexual interactions over same-sex interactions, and that values male pleasure over female pleasure. In general, men have greater control than women over when, where, and how sex takes place.

Our programs may unconsciously reinforce such gender stereotypes and thus contribute to the societal norms that make some people more vulnerable than others to poor reproductive health or HIV outcomes. In order to break down stereotypes, however, we must first be able to identify what they are and why they can be harmful.

Also, we may not be consciously thinking about how our programs reinforce the most disturbing form of power abuse – gender-based violence – which contributes both directly and indirectly to vulnerability to poor reproductive health and HIV.

The Introductory Exercises included in this toolkit will help participants to dig deeper and gain a better understanding of issues around gender, sexuality, stereotypes and discrimination.

Responses from CARE Vietnam to the question:

Was the Gender Equity Continuum useful for your work or personal understanding (or both)? If so, how?

"It's useful to know and understand the continuum as it helps me to think where the project is and where it should be along the continuum. Of course, in accordance with project objectives."

"Yes, it's helpful to have better understanding of the gender and sexuality continuum because it helps us to visualize the different stages."

"It helps me to look at myself and know where I am, so that I can recognize whether I have changed."

"I can know where my project is, then I can plan suitable activities."

"The continuum is useful because it helps me to know how much my project deals with gender and sexuality and how it can go further with gender and sexuality."