

Introduction

This learning module explains how societies develop when girls and women are enabled to be fully contributing community members and how these challenges are met. We look at the role of culture, family, power, policies and attitudes at preventing women and girls from the same opportunities as men and boys throughout the world. We then discuss effective methods for leveling the playing field for a more gender equitable world. Throughout the learning module we consider parliaments unique opportunity to encourage the kind of equity that benefits everyone.

Unit one discusses the definition of gender by making a distinction between biological differences which determine sex and gender as a social construct, that makes use of biological differences to justify the assignment of different roles to men and women. The definition is essential for critical analysis of the aspects of gender inequality, and for formulation of laws and policies necessary for achievement of gender equality.

Unit two identifies some of the topical gender issues for clarification, including the unequal treatment of some members of society based on the social roles as opposed to their biological differences. The issue of poverty, which affects both sexes, will be discussed at length to illustrate how it affects men and women differently. The diverse sources of poverty and its implications for gender based violence will be analyzed so as to identify appropriate strategies and policies.

Unit three provides an overview of microfinance, which has been widely accepted as an effective strategy for poverty reduction. Lack of access to resources, such as credit facilities necessary for widespread economic activities, poses a challenge for women.

Unit four focuses on security issues, singling out conflict as one of the causes of poverty in Africa. Conflict prompts displacement, collapse of social services, and violation of human rights

resulting in high incidence of HIV/AIDS, which affect the most vulnerable groups - women and children. The unit also talks about consequences of gender based violence.

Unit five addresses the question of poverty from the perspective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with emphasis on the contribution parliament's oversight role can make to achieving gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Unit six focuses on the budget as a mechanism for allocating resources in society. The unit begins with a definition of the budget, followed by a discussion on the budget process with the aim of identifying different policy intervention points and ascertaining ways of measuring the impact of policy changes. The unit concludes with examples of policies that can be implemented in order to achieve gender equality.

Unit seven establishes the link between gender issues and the role of parliamentarians as representatives of the people. The composition and functioning of committees will be discussed for the purpose of illustrating the gender dimension and how it affects the capacity of men and women to function differently in society.

Unit eight examines the origins of attitudes, discusses reasons for change and how such change can be achieved. The unit identifies some of the change agents and discusses the statistical measurement of such change.