

## Unit 8: Changing Attitudes for Gender Equality

### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Define and understand the nature of attitudes;
- Recognize ways in which attitudes can change;
- Understand the role for attitude changes in creating a more level playing field for women in political life.

### Introduction and Overview

Throughout this learning module we have discussed the need to alter the policies to reflect more gender equity, the need to monitor equality through close networks of all stakeholders and to measure gender equality through educational access and other indicators. However, at the foundation of changing gender behavior is changing attitudes. This unit looks at why attitude change is necessary and how it can come about.

#### Box 29: What's an Attitude?

Attitudes represent an individual's degree of like or dislike, or judgment, for something and usually fall in the spectrum of positive, ambivalent and negative views.

Attitudes are said to develop on the **ABC** model (affect, behavior, and cognition) through experiences and observations. The **affective** response is emotional and expresses an individual's preference. The **behavioral** response indicates the preference verbally or through behavior. The **cognitive** response involves an evaluation on the individual's beliefs about the object. Attitudes change with experiences, through persuasion.

Implicit attitudes, which are often relevant when considering people's attitudes towards gender, women in positions of power, etc., are outside of awareness, but are real and have effects.

## Defining Attitudes

Attitudes involve feelings, beliefs and behaviors that are formed, nurtured and perpetuated by society, institutions, religions and families, among others. They form the basis of one's perception of what is right or wrong, the way men and women relate to each other within the home and in society, reflect the beliefs and behavior they observe as children growing up and receive as instruction at school, in religious organizations or the workplace. Again, the example we used in unit 1, people begin developing attitudes as children when they see the man as the head of the household, entitled to make decisions on behalf of the household, or in the workplace, schools, religious institutions, and public service delivery. It is therefore apparent that attitudes form the basis of gender inequality and any change towards equality will need to focus on changing attitudes that society has about different groups. That is quite a feat! How can a goal like that be achieved?

## How Do Attitudes Change?

If an attitude is comprised of three elements: feelings, beliefs and behavior, then the change can occur at any one or all of the levels. According to psychological theory, feelings and beliefs are much easier to change than behavior. For example, in the popular South African soap opera, *Soul City 3*, where domestic violence was covered as a topic in the show, a veteran actor who played the part of an abusive husband was so moved by the likeness between his *Soul City* character and his own life as an abusive husband, that he left the set sobbing in the middle of a scene. He has since become a public advocate for ending domestic violence. As the *Soul City* and the edutainment model suggests, individuals learn and can change behaviors by watching the choices of people who remind them of themselves.

Another example of attitude change is a conversation with a gentleman who considered himself gender sensitive. In a bid to illustrate the difficulty in changing behavior, even though feelings and beliefs have changed, the gentleman was asked if he would carry his wife's handbag. The response was a definitive "no" because a man cannot be seen carrying a woman's handbag. In trying to persuade the gentleman to accept that he was not as gender sensitive as he thought he was, it was explained that a lady's handbag is so small and presents no inconvenience and

the refusal to carry it was a mere function of our socialization and conditioning. By carrying a woman's handbag, nothing would biologically change and alter the man's features. The gentleman eventually accepted the challenge to carry his wife's handbag, but could not visualize himself actually doing it. This exchange confirms the difficulty in changing behavior, though feelings and beliefs can easily change.

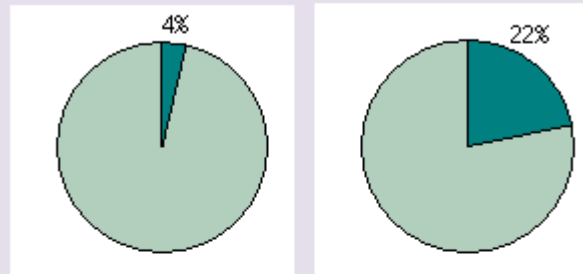
## Box 30: Pew's Economics of Marriage

### The Rise of Wives, 1970 to 2007

Share of Husbands Whose Wives' Income Tops Theirs

1970

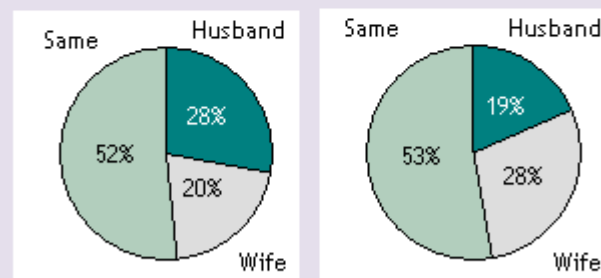
2007



Among Married Women, Which Spouse Has More Education?

1970

2007



Notes: Includes only native-born 30- to 44-year-olds.

Source: Decennial Censuses and 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) Integrated Public Use Micro Samples (IPUMS)

PewResearchCenter

- Roles of men and women are changing as women become greater earners with more education than ever before.
- More education = more likely to be married.
- Today a typical man gains another breadwinner in his household when he marries.
- Among U.S.-born 30-44 year-olds, women are the majority of college graduates.
- 75% of 2008 decline in employment among prime-working-age individuals are males.
- Women constitute half of all the employed.
- Married adults have made more economic gains in 40 years than unmarried adults.
- High marriage decline for least educated, esp. men, small for grads, esp. women.
- 69% of adults with a college degree are married versus 56% who do not have a degree.

Source: <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/750/new-economics-of-marriage>

Attitudes can also change due to changing circumstances forcing people to discard old beliefs and behavior, for example if a woman is more easily employable than a man, the man may

assume the domestic duties, even if that is not his original desire (See Box 30 Economics of Marriage). On the other hand, change could occur spontaneously when the benefits of change are made apparent, for example when a girl's education benefits the family of the girl. The change in this case is at all levels: feelings, beliefs and behavior.

### **Box 31: The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women**

As of 1 January 2008, responsibility for servicing the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has been transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva.

CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly to act as an international bill for the rights of women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

Parliamentarians play a role in changing attitudes in gender by exercising their oversight role and in encouraging adoption of conventions such as the CEDAW that most governments have signed and ratified (See box 31). CEDAW would support changing the practice of using a girl child for reparations in murder cases as a form of punishment when there were no law courts. By mandating from the political and legal structure, changes can also occur in behavior and attitudes among the people.

## Why Change Attitudes?

Often women's participation in the development process is hampered by a lack of access to resources. Changing attitudes towards women, not only benefits the individual, but society as a whole by allowing women to capitalize on their strengths.

Attitudes form the basis of our culture. Culture determines who we are and distinguishes one group of people from another. By changing our attitudes we may subsequently change our culture and the question that arises is how beneficial is the change of culture? It is acknowledged that a higher growth rate and lower population rate is a necessary condition for sustainable development, thus a prolonged stay in school for the girl child implies a smaller and more educated family. A smaller family size reduces the potential for maternal health problems while improving the quality of life for both mother and child, thereby reducing the health cost to society. HIV/AIDS is posing a great human resource challenge for some African countries and is affecting more women than men. An educated girl child is better equipped to make informed decisions about self-protection. Mobilization of all social capital, much of which is being lost through HIV/AIDS and poor health, can contribute to greater economic development and hence benefit to the society.

## Who are the Change Agents?

### *Parliamentarians*

As representatives of the people, parliamentarians are the bridge between the electorate and the government. This unique position presents parliamentarians with an opportunity to be change agents through their representational, oversight and legislative roles. Change can be effected through the acquisition and articulation of new information by parliamentarians in the course of their representational duties. Through oversight and recommendations for change, laws can be amended and new bills introduced in order to bring about the desired change. As previously observed, in order to persuade people to change long-held attitudes, well researched and persuasive information may be necessary. Parliamentarians, thus, require the services of

well trained parliamentary staff that are gender sensitized enough to identify gender issues and report on them in a manner, which assists parliamentarians in making convincing arguments for change.

The burden of changing attitudes can only be achieved with the support of male parliamentarians as well as female parliamentarians. Gender sensitivity training is, thus, important for both men and women parliamentarians. An attempt to change attitudes during an election campaign may not be pragmatic since both men and women parliamentarians will be competing for political office. It may be more advisable for parliamentarians to take advantage of the normal constituency meetings and political rallies to promote gender equality issues.

### ***Civil Society***

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), composed of citizen groups, nongovernmental organizations, trade unions, business associations, think tanks, academia, religious organizations and the media, can play a vital role in a nation's efforts at gender equality. Building coalitions between civil society and government can generate and sustain a citizen-government dynamic that will substantially buttress reforms.

Parliamentarians can benefit largely from closer interaction with civil society groups that normally work at the grassroots level who are in direct contact with the people who parliamentarians represent. The role of parliamentarians is often hampered by inadequate financial resources and support staff. Therefore, collaboration with civil society is crucial and can help to overcome those shortcomings. Some proposed changes may be met with resistance due to a difference of perception between the policy makers and the people. Due to their position, civil society organizations can clarify these misconceptions since they are in direct contact with people both at the grassroots level and at the level of policy development. Although not all civil society organizations enjoy the confidence of the people at the grassroots level, most are trusted and considered more knowledgeable about the people in the communities in which they operate and hence have a greater probability of changing people's attitudes.

### ***Civil Servants***

As first line policy developers and implementers, the attitudes of civil servants can determine the success or failure of any changes proposed by the parliament. Often, there is a power struggle between civil servants and parliamentarians; the latter claim to be the legitimate representative of the people, while the former have a perception of superiority, which derives from being the policy implementing arm of the government. Without interaction and understanding between parliament and the civil service, policies or laws introduced as part of the parliament's oversight role can be met with resistance from those tasked with implementing the legislation. If gender equality is to be promoted through the various roles of parliamentarians, civil servants are undoubtedly some of the first candidates for gender sensitivity training (See the UNESCO booklet on the subject [here](#)).

The budget is a crucial tool for achieving gender equality as illustrated earlier, the formulation and implementation is the responsibility of the government through civil servants. Unless parliamentarians have a mechanism for intervening during the budget formulation process, the demand for change after the process is completed and the estimates are tabled in parliament is often resisted by civil servants since it implies poor planning on their part. Even when changes are made to the budget, unless the civil servants are convinced about these changes they might not be put into effect. Therefore, dialogue between civil servants and parliamentarians is crucial if attitude change is to be effective.

### ***Law Enforcement Agents***

### **Box 32: Law Enforcement Sensitivity Training: The Case of Hartford, USA**

Cultural-sensitivity training was ordered for all Hartford, Conn., police supervisors following a complaint from an officer who claimed his lieutenant had issued him racially-charged instructions during a roll-call. The two-hour training organized by a local CSO included diversity training and is being referred to as "cultural competency". During the training they do a belief systems exercise where they consider the nature of their beliefs, gender differences, etc, as well as skills-building including reading non verbal cues and communication, and cultural awareness work. Without a combination of all three elements -- self-awareness, skills building and cultural knowledge -- a training program will not be effective.

While the focus of this particular case involves race more than gender, the program itself provides a good model for sensitivity training of police. The program involves a facilitated discussion between members of the community and the department, is led by a POST-certified instructor in conflict management, and involves small group work for deeper discussion and problem solving.

*Source: Law Enforcement News, December 2004*

Laws, on their own, are insufficient for effective change. The essence of international agreements is often enacted into law by parliament, however, discrimination against women continues. In particular, the role of law enforcement agents is an integral part of the larger struggle to achieve gender equality. For the law enforcement agents to execute their role in a manner that achieves gender equality, knowledge about gender issues is essential and hence gender sensitivity should be part of their training.

### **Box 33: Gender insensitive enforcement of the law**

Human trafficking is a problem often associated with women who are exported or imported against their will. When smuggled women are caught by authorities for entering a country without relevant documents, they are prosecuted for such a crime, although they are the victims, without the authorities investigating the circumstances surrounding the alleged crime. Gender sensitivity training can persuade law enforcement agents to investigate the human traffickers who are the real criminals and not the women.

### ***The Media***

Of all the change agents, the media is probably the most powerful and effective due to its ability to reach a wide audience. Since journalists have been born and raised in the same

socializing institutions as everyone else, the media coverage of women often reflects those attitudes. A gender sensitized journalist can ensure that media coverage portrays stories involving women in a way that is not sexist.

By failing to give voice to women, the media denies women the right to citizenship. Women parliamentarians, who often struggle to retain or increase their level of representation in parliament, cite unfair media coverage as one of the reasons for their inadequate visibility, even if they are quite visible within their communities, they tend not to receive the same media coverage as men.

## **Measuring Results - Statistics and their Significance**

The goal of changing attitudes with respect to women is ultimately achieving gender equality. An empirical evaluation of the impact of initiatives on attitudinal change is essential for deciding on the most appropriate policies. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of gender sensitive policies is often hampered by unavailable statistics and analysis of implementation successes. For effective use in decision-making, statistics have to be translated into indicators, for instance percentages and averages. Such indicators are used to analyze the impact of change which can serve as comparisons between different sexes, countries or different age groups. (For more, see the World Bank data on Gender [here](#).) For instance, women's representation in the parliament is referred to as a certain percentage. An assessment of the progress towards equity in parliamentary representation for women depends on some criteria or benchmark, such as a 30% quota for women. A country like Rwanda, with 48 percent female representation in parliament, is considered progressive in terms of gender equality. It is important to understand the circumstances as well as the statistics, though. For instance, the high representation of women in Rwanda's parliament does not necessarily translate into greater gender sensitivity because the result could be a reflection of other factors, such as the genocide, which pushed women into previously male dominated areas.

In order to determine whether or not progress is being made towards achievement of the objective, gender-disaggregated statistics are necessary. The disaggregation identifies the

beneficiaries of the services and the gap. Policies are then designed to bridge the gap. For designing gender equality policies, the data has to be disaggregated by sex since policies have a different impact on men and women. Sex disaggregated statistics for Mali, set out below illustrates the gender disparities for a number of issues, which can be used to form better policy choices. For instance, the industry labor force is only made up of 29 percent women, which suggests policies and actions are needed to increase women participation in the industry workforce.

### **Mali Country Statistics: 26**

**Population:** 11,626,219

**Women in Parliament:** 15 out of 147 MPs

**Percentage of population aged 15–64:** 49.8%(male: 2,771,532 female: 3,017,348)

**Primary School Enrolment rate:** 25% females, 38% males (1996 statistics)

**Secondary school enrolment:** 8% females, 17% males

**Agricultural labor force:** 88% females, 84% males

**Industry labor force:** 29% females, 71% males

**Percentage of population with HIV/AIDS:** 35% females, 29.5% males (aged 30-39)

The disaggregation by age can identify the age group with the greatest demand for certain services and the resources needed; for example, in the table above the percentage of population aged 30-39 living with HIV/AIDS in Mali are broken down between men and women. In this example, it is clear a high proportion of women aged 30 to 39 are living with HIV and resources and policies should be targeted, not just to women, but specifically to women in this age bracket. Women are considered the poorest of the poor, but they are not a homogenous group and disaggregation by socio-economic groups identifies the real poor women requiring specific poverty reduction policies.

While corruption in administration and the sustainability of microfinance are cited as the reasons for failure of finance to reach the real poor, the skewed proportion of beneficiaries can also be a result of the absence of statistics indicating who the real poor are. Even with

availability of such statistics, the lack of disaggregated statistics would still distort the supply of microfinance due to demand among women for certain services being underestimated.

### Unit 8 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. Dissect an example of attitude development you have experienced or witnessed using the ABC model explained in this module. What, if anything, is missing from this model?
2. Describe an attitude change you have witnessed and what inspired it to occur.
3. How does girl's educational attainment impact attitudes about girls' and women's capacity outside of the classroom?
4. How do conventions like CEDAW play a role in changing attitudes about women?
5. How have you seen the following change agents begin to impact attitudes about women and girls: Parliamentarians; Civil Society; Civil Servants; and the Media?

### Select Bibliography

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### Internet Resources

The World Bank GenderStats <http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/>

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<http://www.sabc.co.za/default.asp>

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17. Wilton Park. December 2005. Millennium Development Goals: Ensuring Achievability and Accountability. Wilton Park Report.

## Useful Websites

### **African Parliamentary Network on Poverty Reduction**

[http://www.parlcent.ca/africa/prnetwork/pr\\_network\\_e.php](http://www.parlcent.ca/africa/prnetwork/pr_network_e.php)

### **Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)**

<http://www.afppd.org>

### **Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie**

<http://apf.francophonie.org>

### **Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP)**

<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org>

### **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**

<http://www.cpahq.org>

### **Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption**

<http://www.gopacnetwork.org>

### **The Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum on Peace**

<http://www.amaniforum.org>

### **Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)**

<http://www.e-fipa.org>

### **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

<http://www.ipu.org>

### **Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas**

<http://www.feminamericas.org>

### **The Parliamentary Centre**

<http://www.parlcent.ca>

### **Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)**

<http://www.pgaction.org>

### **The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB)**

<http://www.pnowb.org>

**Southern African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum**

<http://www.sadcpf.org>

**Forum for African Parliamentarians for Education**

<http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php->

[URL ID=31056&URL DO=DO TOPIC&URL SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31056&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

**World Bank – Parliaments**

<http://www.worldbank.org/parliaments>

**World Bank Gender and Development**

<http://www.worldbank.org/gender>