

1996

## Gender Perspectives in Literacy

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# gender

perspectives in literacy

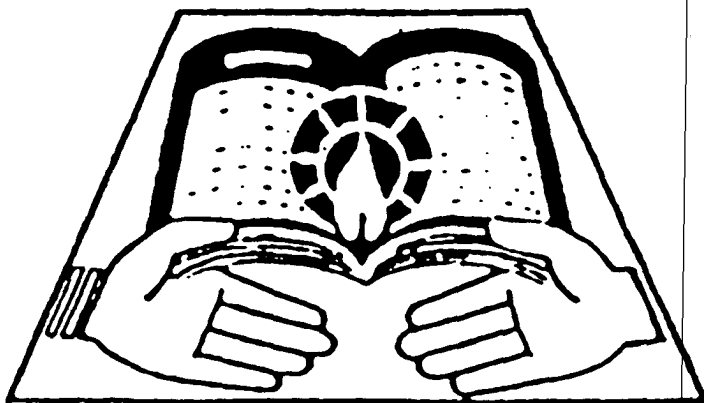
## Action-Learning Manual

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*A Guide for Literacy Practitioners*

by

Sushan Acharya and Joanie Cohen



A Literacy Linkage Series Manual from the  
**Literacy Linkage Program**

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Gender Perspectives in Literacy  
Action-Learning Manual

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*A Guide for Literacy Practitioners*

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The **Literacy Linkage Program**  
The Center for International Education  
Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development

# **The Literacy Linkage Series Manuals**

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**Producing a Newsletter for New Literates**

**Role Play**

**Whole Language: An Integrated Approach to Reading and Writing**

**Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities**

**Assessment**

**Supervision and Facilitator Support**

**Gender Perspectives in Literacy**

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## Foreword

This manual is part of a series of Action-Learning Manuals that was developed to assist community-based practitioners to expand their knowledge of the theory and practice of adult literacy and nonformal education. The purpose of the series is to assist practitioners to develop literacy activities and materials based on local needs, interests and resources.

The series offers the practitioner a wide variety of activities to choose from to meet the diverse needs of community literacy groups. The manuals are designed to complement each other, but can also be used independently. Two of the manuals, *Whole Language: An Integrated Approach to Reading and Writing*, and *Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities*, provide the core concepts for literacy learning. The other five manuals provide creative ideas and techniques for implementing those concepts. It is not imperative that *Whole Language* and *Family Literacy* be read before a practitioner attempts to implement ideas found in the *Role Play Manual*, for example, but it might be helpful.

The *Whole Language* manual introduces basic concepts and strategies for teaching reading and writing skills by involving learners in the creation of lesson activities and learning materials. The *Literacy and Learning* manual introduces basic concepts and strategies that develop locally relevant literacy activities and materials through researching issues and resources in the family and community. The other manuals in the series provide additional information and guidelines for implementing effective local literacy programs.

This manual, *Gender Perspectives in Literacy*, was developed to provide background information on gender issues that affect literacy programs and the education of women and girls in general. It was written by Sushan Acharya and Joanie Cohen of the Center for International Education (CIE). A number of the activities have been tried with women's groups in the U.S., Nepal, and Latin America. The manual was reviewed and edited by staff of the Literacy Support Initiative and CIE.

The Action-Learning Series was developed by the Literacy Linkage Program -- a collaboration between the Center for International Education at the School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA and the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) at Tribhuvan University in Nepal. Send inquiries and correspondence to:

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## Introduction

Literacy programs designed specifically with women in mind can provide women with the guidance and support necessary to help them gain self-confidence and self-dignity. With creativity and commitment, facilitators in literacy classes can expand their program beyond basic reading and writing skills, using activities that will help both men and women improve women's status in the community, their access to community resources, and their overall health and well-being.

**The purpose of this manual:** This manual is designed to provide a self-training process for literacy practitioners who need to understand gender issues. It will help you analyze how customs and assumptions about women in their society may affect their individual development and their ability to contribute to the well-being of their families and communities. While following through this manual, you will have an opportunity to critically examine your local program and materials to see how they reflect the values regarding women's contribution in society. The activities will help you examine the roles that men and women play in your community, and ways to discuss this with both women and men. From what you learn in this manual, you will be able to re-design a program or produce new literacy materials that focus on women's issues and the roles that men and women play in the family and community.

**Who this manual is for:** This manual is intended for practitioners who are interested in starting or enhancing an adult literacy program. The activities are designed for practitioners who want to better understand and incorporate gender issues into their curriculum. The activities in the manual are structured to help you first teach yourself and then design learning activities for literacy learners.

**How this manual is structured:** Section One discusses the connections between literacy, gender and development and how men and women experience literacy differently. Section Two introduces key gender concepts with examples from literacy materials from around the world and suggestions for how to initiate discussions of gender issues in literacy classes. It covers concepts of sexual division of labor, patriarchy, gender subordination, male bias, oppression and gender equality. It also provides guidelines for analyzing local materials and stimulating learner writing. Section Three helps you analyze how men and women are socialized differently for their roles in society, and provides exercises for you and your learners to explore your own socialization process and location in society. While going through the different steps of this manual you will be analyzing communities and literacy materials from a gender perspective. In this section, you will use the activities to first teach yourself and then to prepare learning activities for your literacy class.

## Section One: Literacy, Gender and Development

In many societies in the world, women have not had the same access to educational opportunities as men. Acquiring simple skills such as reading and writing can give women a better chance to improve their situation. Literacy skills can help women gain access to a world they may never have known before. They can begin to see different opportunities for using the reading and writing skills they and their daughters have acquired to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

**Women in Development** is a term that is frequently used to refer to projects that specifically focus on women, their needs and the role they play in the community development process. The term “women in development” uses feminist theories about women, their needs, strengths and resources to guide the way in which programs for women are designed. Although women in development is an important concept to consider, in many of these projects the focus on women completely overlooks *interactions* between women and men and how they affect men’s and women’s lives differently.

The term **Gender and Development** is a more holistic way of talking about how women and men interact in community life, as well as the role they both play in the development process. Gender and development takes into consideration the roles both men and women play inside and outside the home, and strives to bring more chances for them to use their strengths, knowledge and experiences in their work and home lives to create a more just society.

In this manual, we examine gender issues because we are concerned with the ways in which both men and women are or are not able to contribute to the social, emotional and economic well-being of their families and communities. It is also important to recognize both women’s and men’s informal work, particularly at home.

It has been stated that literacy has the potential to raise awareness regarding the development process and can also provide people with the necessary skills to function in a modern society. Awareness-raising approaches are intended to pose problems related to community development so that groups of learners can discuss the issues and take action to resolve them. However, inside every development problem there is usually a related gender problem. All societies have culturally-based assumptions about divisions of labor and appropriate behaviors for men and women. These assumptions affect how problems are discussed and solutions are created. As a result, literacy programs often impact women differently than they impact men. For this reason, we developed this manual to call attention to **gender perspectives in literacy** and to provide guidelines for discussing and writing about gender issues in literacy classes.

For example, most nutrition problems are posed as women’s problems because women manage food preparation for the family. However, it is



important to examine how men play a role in the nutrition of the family. Oftentimes, money that men earn is not shared with the family, making it less likely that family members have foods they themselves cannot raise. If some of the money men earn could be used for buying occasional meat or fish or expensive oil, family nutrition may improve.

If gender roles are not addressed when the group discusses the problem, the learners may miss a key part of the social problem, or even the underlying root cause of this problem. If this happens, the learners may fail to come up with a solution that truly transforms their community. Awareness-raising approaches add another layer of effectiveness if gender-related questions are posed alongside each development problem.

Modernization approaches to development rely on teaching reading and writing skills in formal schools and literacy classes as a way to introduce the “benefits” of modern society, such as new technologies that might enhance or improve community practices in underdeveloped areas. These programs disseminate information about modern technology in agriculture, health, family planning, etc. This approach often creates dependency on external knowledge, technology, and materials. It also treats women and men differently. Men, who have more access to formal education, gain more of the technical knowledge and skills needed to compete for jobs in the marketplace, the government, and development organizations. Women, who tend to participate in nonformal programs, are limited to smaller scale local opportunities and income-generating activities.

In most developing countries, planners and policy makers currently view rural development as a high priority for achieving the goal of modernization. Education is seen as a key factor for development in rural areas. Within functional literacy programs, women and men usually have different experiences. It is thought that if a man can learn to read, write, and do simple math, he will be able to produce more. If a woman can learn to read, write and compute, she will be able to take care of her family better. Therefore, functional literacy interventions tend to revolve around the narrowest assumptions about the traditional roles that men and women perform in society and in the family. These assumptions reinforce social and cultural norms that limit women’s mobility and community participation.

By understanding the gender issues involved in community development, you will be better informed and better able to create a more just situation for both women and men. By looking closer at what you see everyday, you can gain more understanding about the barriers that prevent women from participating in community and society the way men do. In the next section, you will learn about commonly used phrases to talk about the problems of access, domination and oppression that prevent women from participating in the decision-making in their families and community.

## Section Two: Understanding Gender Issues

### Key Concepts

This section explains some of the key concepts that describe gender issues in society. Although you may feel that some of these concepts are not pertinent to your community, it is important to try and look more closely at the activities and roles of men and women around you. As explained above, by looking closely at an issue in the community, you will often find a corresponding gender issue that may not be exposed or talked about. By listening, observing, and asking questions, you may discover all sorts of gender issues you never knew affected your community and the people you work with. Each of these issues provide excellent starting points for reading, writing, discussion and other activities in the literacy class.

a. The **SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR** refers to how work responsibilities are divided between men and women in society. Every society has different norms for what men and women do. For example, in some ethnic groups, women's work is only inside the home while in other ethnic groups women also do work in the fields or markets. Every act that men and women perform in daily life varies according to the specific cultural practices of their society. A common pattern in many literacy texts is to portray traditional stereotypes about the work that men and women are expected to perform without considering how these roles may vary within the same country. For example, in Nepal, women in the mountain regions do not necessarily follow the same patterns of labor that women in the hilly or low-land regions follow. However, in many literacy texts, the women are portrayed as performing tasks of the dominant group who live in the hilly section.

When you choose to use existing literacy materials, you should carefully examine how pictures and text depict the social and economic roles of women and men. Materials should not only portray roles commonly seen, they should also address changes that are currently happening in the community and help promote discussion about how community members deal with changing roles.

The following pictures are taken from lessons from Nepali and Peruvian literacy primers. The lesson from the Nepali primer is on *Aalu* (potato). In the lesson, the word *Aalu* is decoded. Several other words are made by using "aa" and "u" vowel sounds. The lesson also has a short story that tells how a boy helped his parents grow potatoes. He later cooked a potato curry which his parents liked very much. In the picture from Peru a husband and wife are working in a vegetable garden. The lesson talks about marriage and the constitutional articles of Peru regarding marriage. This lesson provides an interesting opportunity to discuss changing roles of men and women.



facilitator could encourage learners to talk and write about their own experiences with the sexual division of labor. It is important to raise these questions because migration and modernization are forcing women and men to take on different work responsibilities in the family and community.

b. **PATRIARCHY** refers to the system in most societies where men control decision-making in the family and the community. Because men tend to have more exposure to the outside world — more opportunities to work in offices and more leadership roles in community activities — they have more decision-making roles; yet many men fail to acknowledge this. If literacy program designers and trainers don't question or think about how patriarchy operates in the family and society, and how it affects women and men differently, they may fail to train facilitators to discuss gender issues in their literacy classes.

The following is a picture from a Nepali literacy primer that shows a husband and wife in a health center. In the picture a husband is discussing family planning methods with a male health worker while his wife stands in the background. This is a typical example of a man taking a leadership and decision-making role in the family. Even though the choice of family planning methods has a direct impact on the wife, a patriarchal system does not allow her to be included in making this very important decision that will affect her own health and well-being.



COURTESY OF: WORLD EDUCATION AND  
NEPAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Questions such as the following will help class members discuss and write about the issues of patriarchy.

- Who uses family planning methods most of the time?
- Who decides whether the husband or wife should be using family

planning?

- Why is the husband in the picture discussing the matter with the health worker?
- What role is his wife playing?
- How could men and women share the decision and responsibility equally?

c. **GENDER SUBORDINATION** refers to discrimination against women in the community and society because of the false assumption that they are unable to perform well in the public domain. Literacy programs may fall into the trap of gender subordination when they offer training only in areas that focus on women's role in the home, such as child care, nutrition, family planning and small scale income generation. These strategies, which focus on the "women's domain," strengthen the assumption that women are only competent to perform roles as traditional wives and mothers whose sole responsibility is to take care of the family's health and nutrition. This traditional approach to women's development projects undermines women's knowledge and inherent abilities as human beings. As a result, women are not encouraged to seek opportunities to participate in community projects and other activities outside of the home.

Gender subordination also impacts men because it does not recognize the direct and indirect role that men play in the home and family. It excludes men from the private family domain in the same way that it excludes women from the public community domain.

The following pictures are from a lesson on food and nutrition in a Guatemalan literacy primer. A mother is preparing and serving the food to her family.



You can pose many different types of questions to avoid the trap of promoting gender subordination. For example, you could use the following questions to stimulate discussion and writing activities about the roles of women and men in relation to feeding the family:

- Who manages the food at home?
- Who eats first and why?
- Why are women only in charge of the kitchen?
- What do mothers do besides feeding family members?
- What responsibility do fathers have in making sure the family has good food to eat?

d. **MALE BIAS** means that activities of the family and community are structured in such a way that preference is given to male participation and control of resources. Development programs usually claim to bring change in society, especially in the lives of women. However, most programs do not have a plan or framework to analyze and challenge unjust social structures. Therefore, women have not been able to achieve equity. To deal with the issue of male bias, we need to consider and analyze power relations between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, and a woman's rights and responsibilities in relation to family resources, land ownership, and children.

Literacy programs can work with men and women to help them understand how male bias affects their lives. Programs should also find ways to include men who are not attending the literacy classes to participate in the analysis and discussions. In the following picture from a Peruvian literacy primer, both women and men are participating in educational opportunities.



A picture like this can be used to stimulate a discussion about male bias as it relates to educational opportunities in the community for girls, boys, women and men.

- What is happening in the picture?
- Do you see this kind of thing in your community?
- Who decides about children's education?
- Do girls and boys have equal access to schooling?
- Are the literacy classes convenient for both women and men?
- What kinds of family educational activities can the community promote?

e. Some forms of **OPPRESSION** in the community and society are passed from generation to generation by women themselves as well as by men. Beliefs, values and norms are reinforced by both the community and family members. When women are trained in a submissive pattern of behavior and actions we call this oppression. It is important to recognize that these behaviors can prevent women from gaining educational, health and legal opportunities. These patterns have existed for so many generations that they are often not recognized by women themselves as oppressive. Questioning these practices is often seen as threatening to the stability of the whole community.

Some fundamental issues of oppression apply to all women no matter which class, race or region they represent. Such issues include equal rights related to inheritance, divorce, marriage, citizenship and adoption laws of the state. The literacy class can be a place to learn about constitutional and legal rights that have been legislated by government. The following is a picture from a literacy primer used in Bangladesh. It is a picture of a husband and wife. The picture can be used to stimulate discussion and writing activities. You can pose questions such as the following to explore the issues of oppression and equality of legal rights:

- What does it mean to get married?
- What do women and men obtain by getting married?
- What is expected from a married woman?
- What is expected from a married man?
- What are the traditional rules about a woman's rights and responsibilities?
- What are the laws of the state about a woman's rights and responsibilities?



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BANGLADESH

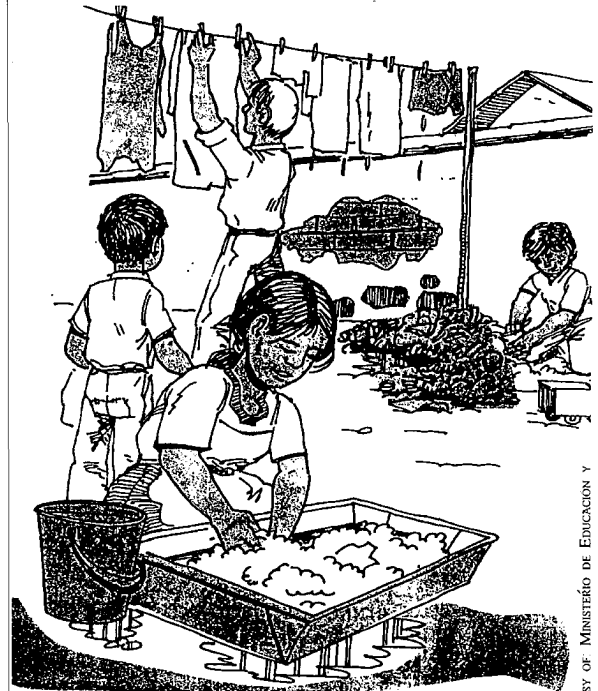
f. **GENDER EQUALITY** means equal power relations between men and women. On the one hand, many men feel threatened by such equality. On the other hand, some women may not be prepared to accept gender equality because they have been socialized to obey and take care of others rather than to share power and have equal standing with men. The logic behind this assumption might be as Paulo Freire says, 'the oppressed are afraid to embrace freedom; the oppressors are afraid of losing the freedom to oppress' (Freire 1972, p. 31). The following pictures are from a literacy primer from Bolivia. In the pictures women are involved in multiple roles. In one of the pictures a husband and wife are sharing the washing. You can pose questions such as the following to stimulate writing and discussion about the issue of gender equality in your learner's community:

COURTESY OF MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN Y CULTURA BOLIVIA (SEN/ALEP)



- What is happening in the picture?
- Are any of the scenes familiar?
- What do you feel about a woman getting involved in activities outside home?
- What do you think about your daughters getting involved in activities outside the home?

- How do you feel about a husband sharing the household chores with his wife?
- Do you think sons should learn to do household work?
- How would you feel if your daughter's husband helped her with household chores?
- How can you help your sons and daughters learn to share the work both inside and outside the home?



Lavamos la ropa

COURTESY OF MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN Y CULTURA BOLIVIA (SEN/ALEP)



## **Literacy Activity**

### **Discussing and Writing About Gender Issues in a Literacy Class**

Introducing gender issues in a literacy class can provide interesting discussions and motivation for many types of reading and writing activities. A literacy class with a gender perspective is made up of four kinds of activities: discussion, writing, reading and action. There are three steps involved in preparing for a literacy lesson on gender that includes all of these activities: 1) find a way to introduce the issue, 2) create a list of questions to stimulate discussion, and 3) plan an appropriate writing activity.

#### **1. Find a way to introduce the issue.**

The easiest way to introduce gender issues is to bring them up as part of the literacy lesson. Most literacy materials have pictures and stories of women that can be used to begin the discussion. Look closely at locally available literacy materials and observe men and women in your community. What activities are women and men performing? What roles are the literacy materials promoting for women and men? Do any of the literacy materials directly address the gender issues that are relevant for your local community? Can you find indirect examples of the gender issues contained in the pictures or written text? Which lessons in the literacy materials could be modified to include discussions and writing activities on gender issues?

People often complain that traditional or negative images of women are portrayed in literacy materials. However, if pictures always showed women in empowered and non-traditional roles, the learners may not relate to the women in the pictures and stories. They also may not recognize the existing gender imbalances in their community. It is important to realize that materials with negative gender messages can be very effective as a problem-posing activity and a good stimulus for discussion. When you want to stimulate a gender discussion, you can begin with examples that either illustrate a problem or propose a solution.

If the available literacy materials do not contain pictures or stories to help you introduce gender issues, you can also create your own materials. See if you can find examples of the gender issues by observing daily life, listening to local stories, songs and proverbs or looking at local advertisements and print media. In addition to pictures, you can also stimulate discussion about the various gender issues by one of the following methods:

- telling a story based on the experiences of local women
- reciting proverbs that describe women's roles and relationships in society
- singing songs or sharing poems about women's lives, work, feelings, etc.
- enacting a scene from women's lives through a role play.

## **2. Create a list of questions to stimulate discussion.**

The questions you choose will depend on your local situation and the method you are using to introduce the gender issue. You can use the questions in this manual as examples to help you write your questions. As you write your questions, remember the following pointers:

- Do not ask questions that can be answered with a yes or no. The question is answered with one word and no discussion is stimulated.
- Explore all aspects of the issue by using the different question words: who, what, why, how, where, when, etc.
- Ask questions that invite people to share their opinions or personal experiences.

## **3. Help learners write about the things they discussed.**

You can choose a writing activity that is appropriate for the skill level of the learners. If they are beginners, they may draw pictures or write lists of words to summarize their discussion. If they are more advanced, they will be able to write independently. Use one of the five strategies listed below, or a combination of the strategies.

- a. Drawing - Make posters or drawings about the gender issues discussion. Help the learners write appropriate words and phrases to explain their drawings. For example, make posters illustrating women's contributions to the local community.
- b. Listing - Have the learners help make a list of key words from the discussion. For example, list personal efforts and/or achievements women in the class have made in getting an education.
- c. Timeline - List events in chronological order to document historical changes or events. For example, make a timeline showing how women's legal status has changed over the last 100 years during a discussion of gender equality.
- d. Chart - Categorize and compare information by listing examples from people's experiences. For example, make a chart comparing men's work with women's work to summarize a discussion on the sexual division of labor.
- e. Responses - Ask each person to tell or write what they learned from the discussion. Make a list of each person's responses. Read the list together. Have the learners copy the list. If they are beginners, they can just copy their own response. For example, after a discussion of

patriarchy, learners can write about how they reacted to the discussion.

f. Stories - Invite everyone to tell or write about personal experiences. For example, learners can write about experiences they have had related to the issue being discussed.

When you conduct the literacy class, you will stimulate **discussion** with the method you choose to introduce the gender issue and with the questions you ask. After the discussion, you help the learners **write** down their ideas. You can do this as a whole group with you acting as scribe, or you can divide the learners into small groups or pairs to do their own writing. After all the learners have finished writing about the gender issues, you can practice **reading** the materials that everyone helped write. You will want to help the learners practice their reading skills. But even more important, you will want to talk with them about the importance of the things they have written. The information and ideas contained in their writing can be used to stimulate more discussion about how to solve the problems they face in their own families and community. The discussion of their own ideas and writing will help you all figure out what kind of **action** you will want to take to solve local problems.

## **Section Three: Understanding and Analyzing Roles and Positions of Men and Women**

People who work in adult literacy programs, specifically women's literacy programs, should be well aware of the social and cultural issues related to gender that exist in the learners' communities. People's attitudes and capabilities are formed by what goes on in their lives from the time of their birth until the present. Men as well as women are trained for their roles in life, not only by their parents, but also by other family members, community members and institutions in their community.

As a person moves through life, he or she learns to behave in certain ways through examples set by family and community members: a mother, father, siblings, a peer group, religious groups and others in the community. This learning is reinforced. Learning by example is strengthened by an individual's attitudes and beliefs.

The orientation and training that a woman gets from family members and society shapes both how she understands her role as well as her behavior from a very early age. As a result, once she is grown it is very hard for her to imagine alternatives to her socialized behavior. Often, she expects the same behavior from her daughters and granddaughters and may not accept them playing roles in the family and community with which she is unfamiliar. Women do not do this intentionally to restrict their daughters' opportunities in life. But, because of their own orientation and understanding of how they should live their lives, it may be difficult for them to understand changing roles and behaviors in their family and community. This difficulty in understanding changing roles and behaviors in society prevents both men and women from accepting that their roles are not determined at birth, but rather are shaped by a social system. The notion of "internalized oppression" describes how some women impose restrictions on other women because of what they believe women ought to do based on their own experiences.

We usually do not pay attention to how work and status are divided in our own culture. Because there is a dominant pattern for the ways in which men and women do things, we tend to assume that pattern to be the preferred way to organize a society. To understand more about the gender issues defined in Section One, we must look at how societies differ. We must forget our assumptions and beliefs while analyzing the situation.

In recent years, many people have been trying to reorganize their communities so that all people are treated more fairly. In order to do this, they must first understand how the community is currently constructed so they can take it apart and put it together again in a more just way. Many people do this through research. By examining their lives, asking questions they have never thought to ask before, analyzing the situation, and proposing social action they seek to change an unjust situation.

## Literacy Activities

In this section, you will learn some literacy activities to help you better understand the gender issues in your community. You will examine situations that affect women and men's daily lives. What appears to be oppression in one situation may not be considered oppression in another. The challenge of the activities is to make visible the gender bias that is woven through the social structures in your community and to identify the unspoken cultural assumptions that divide labor between men and women in such a way that women are excluded from certain activities and decisions.

### ACTIVITY #1: MAPPING YOUR LOCATION

Location is a term used to describe where people see themselves in their family, community and society, and how their lives have been influenced by their situation. Individuals, communities and institutions all influence who we are and how we perceive events in our lives.

For women, location is very telling to determine their ability to interact with community institutions such as schools, community organizations, religious institutions, health services, job opportunities and legal systems. Because of the way society tends to view women, things that most men take for granted are sometimes completely off limits to women. By examining and understanding the issue of "location," you can develop strategies to help women overcome barriers to interaction with larger community institutions.

This mapping activity will help you analyze your own location in your community. To teach yourself how to do this activity, find a big piece of paper. You will begin by drawing a picture of yourself and then make a map or diagram showing how you stand in relation to your household and community. Think about and draw pictures to represent people you interact with and places you regularly go. Show where you are comfortable and what is beyond your reach. Draw pictures or write a few sentences describing what you do inside and outside of your home. After you complete this visual interpretation of your own location, think how you can use this activity in a literacy class to write about and discuss gender perspectives.

#### *Suggestions for using the mapping activity in a literacy class:*

- 1. Preparation:** Provide big pieces of paper and writing materials to the learners and explain the assignment to them. You may want to show them your own map as an example.
- 2. Sharing:** After everyone has mapped their location, invite each learner to describe their map to the group.

**3. Discussion:** Help the learners discuss the insights they gained from making and sharing their maps. You can ask the following questions to help your learners discuss the issue:

- What things do women usually do inside and outside home?
- What things do men usually do inside and outside home?
- What do your pictures tell about women and men in your society?

**4. Writing:** Have the learners write about what they learned from the activity. Advanced learners can write independently. Intermediate learners can work in pairs or small groups to help each other write. You or some of the advanced learners can act as scribes to help the beginners write what they want to say.

**5. Reading:** Invite the learners to read each others' writing or to read their own piece out loud to the group.

**6. Action:** Discuss what everyone wrote about and decide if there are things you can do to take action to improve the situations of the learners.

#### **ACTIVITY #2: LOCATION FRAMEWORK**

As mentioned in Activity #1, location is a term used to describe where people see themselves in their family, community, and society, and how their lives have been influenced by their situation. Individuals, communities and institutions all influence who we are and how we perceive events in our lives.

In this activity you will compare the roles that women and men play in the community and the family, and note the differences between what they do and where they can go. To teach yourself how to do this activity, review the location map you made for Activity #1 and think about the different things that men and women, boys and girls do in your household. Add a few more pictures or words to describe the work that various family members do in the household and in the community. Next see if you can use this information to fill out the chart on the following page comparing the different things men and women do inside and outside the home.

Section 1 on the chart refers to the activities of men and women inside the family. Think about male and female family members and record in the appropriate boxes 1) what work they do, 2) the roles they play, and 3) the places they have access to. Section 2 on the chart refers to the activities of men and women in community institutions. Again, think about male and female family members and record in the appropriate boxes 1) what work they do, 2) the roles they play, and 3) the places they have access to. After you have filled out and analyzed your chart, think about how to adapt this activity to the literacy classroom.

## Location Framework Chart

|                  | <b>[1] Inside the Family</b> |      | <b>[2] In Community Institutions</b><br>(health centers, schools, banks, NGOs, government offices, etc.) |      |
|------------------|------------------------------|------|--|------|
|                  | Female                       | Male | Female   | Male |
| Work They Do     |                              |      |  |      |
| Roles They Play  |                              |      |  |      |
| Access They Have |                              |      |  |      |

### ACTIVITY #3: INTERVIEWS

This activity uses interviews to collect information that will help literacy learners to compare and contrast the lives of men and women in the community where they live. To teach yourself how to do this activity, see if you can answer the questions in the life story outline below. Look at your answers and think about what you could learn about the different experiences of men and women by asking other people to answer the same questions. Identify one man and one woman from the community where you work and ask if you can interview them to find out about their roles and location in the community. Through these interviews you will begin to see the social practices of both men and women more clearly. You will also be able to note differences between the roles men and women play in the community. The two interviews will also help you understand different perspectives that men and women hold with regard to gender roles in their community.

1. Use the life story outline to plan your interviews.
2. Your interview will be more effective if you approach it as an informal conversation rather than a formal question-answer session. Encourage the person you are interviewing to tell stories about their life and the people who influenced them.
3. After each interview, write down a summary of the person's answers. You may want to write out some of the experiences they tell in story form. Go back and share the written notes and stories with the person to make sure what you wrote is accurate.
4. Compare the woman's and the man's stories. Identify their similarities and differences. Think about what you could discuss and learn by doing this activity in the literacy class.



***Suggestions for using the Location Framework Chart in a literacy class:***

**1. Preparation:** Create a large location framework chart that can be seen by all class members and hang it on a wall or chalkboard. You may want to have the learners help you fill out the chart in two different sessions to make the discussion easier.

**2. Discussion:** Help the learners consider the following questions to generate a discussion that compares the roles of women and men:

- What do men and women do inside and outside the home?
- Which areas and activities in the home are accessible to men? to women?
- Which areas and activities in the community are accessible to women? to men?

**3. Group Writing:** Once they have begun discussing these questions, have them help you fill out the chart.

**4. Action:** When the location chart is completed, help the learners analyze the information by drawing their attention to the positions of men and women in the home and the community. Ask the following questions to stimulate a discussion of ideas for action. Write the learners' responses and suggestions on the blackboard.

- Are there great differences between men and women? What are the reasons for these differences?
- Do the positions of the women and men in the community and family need to be changed? How might you do that? What would happen if they changed?
- Can we do things differently with our daughters and sons that would help alter the future positions of women and men in your community and family? Are there ways we can teach our children differently to encourage these changes?

**5. Individual Writing:** Have the learners write about what they learned from the discussion. They can choose to write their own ideas, or they can copy information from the chart or blackboard into their own notebooks.

You can create additional reading, writing, discussion and action activities to follow up on the ideas generated by the discussion of location. The charts, questions and answers generated by this activity can all be used as text and discussion material for many literacy class sessions.



***Suggestions for using interviews in a literacy class:***

The interviewing activity which you tried above can be a valuable learning experience for literacy learners. Through interviewing, they can learn more about the gender issues faced by men and women in their community. They can also use and develop their literacy skills through planning and writing questions as well as taking notes and recording and analyzing answers. The following suggestions will help you prepare your learners to conduct the interviews:

1. Begin by having the class members interview each other in pairs.
2. Have the learners use the same questions you used, and have them make some notes to help them remember their answers. Their notes will vary depending on their literacy skills. Beginning learners can write one or two words. More advanced learners can write phrases and sentences. Acknowledge that the learners already have very good memories, but explain that writing can be used as a tool to remember exact words and to support our natural abilities to remember details and stories.
3. Have the pairs of learners make a list of what was the same and what was different in their life stories and experiences.
4. Bring the group together and invite each pair to report on some of the things that were same and different in their life stories.
5. Ask each learner or pair of learners to interview a friend or family member about that person's life story.
6. When they complete the interviews, invite the learners to report what they learned from their interviews. List the topics of stories, issues, problems, accomplishments or other information that they collected in the interviews.
7. Ask the learners to choose topics or stories that they would like to write about. They can work individually or in small groups to do their writing projects. Help them to work together to write down stories, experiences, memories, problems, ideas and summaries from the collection of interviews. (If the learners are motivated and you have some resources, you can develop this activity into a class publication. See the manuals *Whole Language* and *Newsletters* for more detailed information on teaching learners to write their own materials.)

**ACTIVITY #4: DEALING WITH PROBLEMS**

This activity will help you analyze and find solutions for some of the problems or concerns that may have come up in the interviews, maps and charts you have been making and discussing with the learners. The activity involves identifying a problem that people want to work on, analyzing the problem by listing barriers, and finding a way to solve the problem by listing strengths and resources.

For example, literacy class participants might decide they are concerned about the problem of girls not being able to attend school. They would begin by making a list of the barriers that prevent women and girls from participating in educational activities. Next, they would make another list of strengths and abilities they or other members of the community have that would help them overcome the barriers. Finally, they would make a list of available resources that could be used to reduce the barriers and influence new possibilities. This method will help you analyze the problem and find possible solutions to deal with it. The following chart gives an example of possible things a literacy class could list about this problem.

**Problem: The girls in the community are not going to school.**

| <b>BARRIERS</b>                             | <b>STRENGTHS</b>                                     | <b>RESOURCES</b>                         |
|---|--|--|
| * school is far                             | * mothers are willing to do something about it       | * a teacher lives near by                |
| * girls need to look after younger siblings | * the teacher is willing to hold a class in her home | * the district education office can help |
| * girls have lots of work to do at home     |  | * the district education office can help |

By listing the barriers, strengths and resources, members of the literacy class will be able to get a clearer perspective on the problem so that they can discuss possible solutions. For example, they might be able to discuss ways to organize child-care so that someone else can look after younger children while the girls are in school. Some of the women who have completed the literacy class might be willing to teach the girls reading and writing, or the local teacher might be willing to organize a learning group for girls at a convenient time. This simple activity will help the learners organize their thinking and discussion so that they can find local solutions to their problems.

To teach yourself about this process, choose one of the problems you have identified in your community and see if you can fill out a barriers, strengths and resources chart. The following steps will help you complete this activity:

1. Write down a problem you want to address.
2. Think about and write down the barriers that prevent the problem from being solved.
3. Think about and write down skills, knowledge and attitudes that local people have that could help to reduce or prevent the barriers.
4. Think about and make a list of some locally available resources that could be used to reduce the barriers or increase the strengths to solve the problem.
5. Now, think about how you can use the resources and the strengths to overcome the barriers you identified.

***Suggestions for using barriers, strengths and resource charts in a literacy class:***

- 1. Discussion:** Discuss the various problems women confront in their family or community and decide on one problem they would like to deal with in this activity.
- 2. Writing:** Use a chalkboard or a big piece of paper and write the problem your group has identified at the top of the board or paper.
- 3. Prepare Chart:** Draw three columns as shown in the sample chart and label them for barriers, strengths and resources.
- 4. Fill in Chart:** Have the learners discuss what the barriers are. Make a list of barriers in the first column. Then, have them think of strengths that might help overcome the barriers identified. List strengths in the second column. After you identify the barriers and the strengths, help the learners identify locally available resources that can be used to overcome the barriers. Write the resources in the last column. Help the learners copy the chart into their own notebooks.
- 5. Problem-solving:** Now, have the group discuss how they can use the resources and strengths to eliminate or decrease the barriers. Divide the learners into small groups to discuss their situation and brainstorm ideas to solve the problem. Have them write down their strategies to eliminate the barriers.
- 6. Sharing:** Invite someone from each small group to read and explain the ideas their group developed. Discuss the options and develop a plan which the whole group can work on together.
- 7. Action:** Help the group make a plan of action for solving the problem. Be sure to include who will be responsible for organizing and carrying out specific activities. Also include times when you want to have activities completed. Write the plan on a large piece of paper to post on the wall of the classroom. Have the learners copy the plan into their notebooks.

## Conclusion

We hope that the activities in this manual have helped you learn about gender issues in the community where you work. Remember that each of the activities has the potential to be used in many different ways. When you involve the learners in interviews and discussions, they will be able to contribute ideas and information to the development of the literacy class curriculum. As you use reading, writing, discussion and action activities to explore each gender issue, you will find that you and the learners will become skilled at developing your own literacy lessons.

Continue to try out and modify the activities in this manual. Use a small notebook to write down notes about ideas that work well or problems you encounter when you try to do an activity. The notebook will help you continue to teach yourself how to analyze gender issues in your community. You can also use it to help you plan and evaluate the literacy lessons you create together with the learners.

If you would like further information on teaching literacy, you can refer to the other manuals in the Action Learning Series listed at the beginning of this manual.

## Additional Resources

For additional readings and resources about gender issues, literacy and development, contact the following organizations and ask to be put on their mailing lists. Because this is not a complete list, you may wish to check with other relevant organizations you know.

### Available from WOMEN, INK.:

WOMEN, INK.  
777 United Nations Plaza  
New York, New York 10017  
USA

Ballara, Marcela (1992). *Women and Literacy*. Zed Books.

Bhasin, Kamla (1993). *What is Patriarchy?* Kali for Women.

Harcourt, Wendy (ed.) (1994). *Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development: Shifting Knowledge Boundaries*. Zed Book with Society for International Development.

Moser, Caroline O. N. (1993). *Gender Planning and Development Theory, Practice and Training*. Routledge.

Rao, Aruna, Anderson, Mary B., and Overhalt, Catherine A. (eds.) (1991). *Gender Analysis in Development Planning*. Kumarian Press.

Parker, A. Rani (1993). *Another Point of View: A Gender Analysis Training Manual for Grassroots Workers*. UNIFEM.

Sohoni, Neera Kukreja (1995). *The Burden of Girlhood: A Global Inquiry into the Status of Girls*. Third Party Publishing Company.

IWTC (1988). *Woman: The Password is Action*.

### Available from PACT Publications:

PACT Publications  
777 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017  
USA

(1991). *A Handbook for the Development of Savings Groups and Women's Business Skills*. Save the Children.



A. Lawrence Chickering and Salahdine, Mohamed (eds.) (1991). *The Silent Revolution: The Informal Sector in Five Asian and Near Eastern Countries*. ICEG.

Kamara, Siapha and Denkabe, Aloysius (1993). *Handbook on Participatory Approach to Training. V. I: Project Planning, Management, and Animation. V. II: Gender in Development*. Freedom Publications.

**Available from UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE):**

UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), Hamburg  
Feldbrunnenstrabe 58  
P.O. Box 13 10 23  
20110 Hamburg  
GERMANY

Medel-Anonuevo, Carolyn (ed.) (1995). *Women's Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy*. UIE.

**Available from CHETNA:**

CHETNA  
Lilavatiben Lalbhai's Bungalow  
Civil Camp Road, Shanibaug  
Ahmedabad - 380 004, Gujarat  
INDIA

*Report: Gender Sensitive Development Model*. CHETNA/Chaitanya. This is an unpublished report of a workshop.

In addition to the resources and organizations mentioned above, the following organizations also publish useful materials on women, gender, literacy, and development. Please contact them directly for their publications lists.

ODA  
94 Victoria Street  
London SW1E 5JL  
GREATBRITAIN

ActionAid  
Hamlyn House  
Archway, London N19 5PG  
GREATBRITAIN

The **Literacy Linkage Program** is a collaborative effort of the  
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