

Equality and diversity

Preparation:

- In Part 1 of this factsheet, the members will learn an important principle of human rights: equality. After this section, they should understand that human society is diverse and all human beings are equal.
- In Part 2 of this factsheet, special attention is given to equality between men and women. After this section, the members should understand that even though men and women are different, they are equal. There is a factsheet related to gender, "Domestic violence" that can be used in another meeting.
- The VAG leader may want to use a flipchart in the exercises.
- The VAG leader should read through the factsheet and make sure that he/ she understands the content.

Part 1: Awareness of diversity and equality.

Our society is made up of different people. Can we mention differences between people?

Let the members discuss about differences between people within the community, but also outside of it. Below are some examples. Make sure that all kinds of differences are mentioned. You may list them on a flipchart.

- Physical appearance: men/ women, age, height, race, colour, etc.
- Personality: every person has his/ her own personality.
- Behaviour: culture, traditions, religion, language, eating habits, clothing styles, etc.
- Economic differences: jobs, like farmer, teacher, businessman, etc. Some people are richer, others are poor.
- Social differences: we are all part of a group of people, like our family, our age group, the Village Action Group, the women/ men, etc. And some people within groups and in the community have authority over others.

Why are there differences between people in our society?

Possible answers:

- It is the way things are, we are born that way.
- Every person is unique.
- Children are brought up differently by their parents.
- People are educated differently.
- There are different opportunities for each of us.
- We all make different decisions in our lives.

Do these differences mean that some people are better than others?

The answer is no. All human beings are equal.

Why is it important to have differences between people in our society?

- It is how we move forward: human society can be developed because everyone has different talents and potentials.
- We can operate as a whole: everyone can contribute to different functions of the family and the community.

What to do

- *Make sure that people have understood that despite all the differences between people in our community, we should all be treated equally and with respect.*
- *Plan for actions that promote equality in the community. Let the members discuss freely about any actions they want to take. Write the actions down in the action list in the VAG meeting report.*

Possible actions:

- We can encourage people's knowledge of human rights.
- We can treat each other as equal human beings, for example by giving a fair share, by being respectful towards people who are different from us, etc.
- We can try to make sure that everyone can fully develop his/her potential, for example by sending all our children to school.
- We can try to make sure that everyone gets help when they need it, for example medical help.

Similarities outweigh differences.

Explain that this means that similarities weigh heavier than differences: the fact that we are all equal human beings, is more important than the fact that we are different.

Part 2: Gender awareness.**Exercise: Differences between women and men.**

Ask for a man to volunteer to come forward. This man will imitate the behaviours of a woman. The other members will guess, what he is doing. If he can't come up with anything, you may give suggestions, like "How does a woman dress herself?" Then, the members don't have to guess, but they can help with/ make suggestions for the imitations. Let them have fun with it!

Examples:

- Cooking
- Breastfeeding
- Getting dressed (dress, headscarf)
- Women's work on the field
- Speaking with a high voice, etc.

Now do the same with a woman imitating the behaviours of a man.

Examples:

- Smoking
- Getting dressed (trousers)
- Men's work on the field
- Driving a car/ moped
- Speaking with a low voice, etc.

Which differences between men and women are biological?

Explain that "biological" means that we are born with it and it cannot be changed.

- The sex organs.
- Women bear children.
- A boy's voice breaks at puberty, so men have a lower voice than women.

- Women are usually shorter than men, etc.

Which differences between men and women are social?

Explain that “social” means that we are taught by our parents and by our society to behave differently. Encourage the members to come up with all kinds of examples.

- Men and women have different duties: in the family, the household, on the field, in the community.
- There are different kinds of behaviour that show that you are a man or a woman: in clothing, hairstyle, dancing, etc.
- There are different traditions and customs for men and women.

The social differences between men and women are often called gender roles. A gender role has developed because of what it means in our society to be a man, or to be a woman.

What does it mean to be a man, and what does it mean to be a woman?

Let them discuss their views freely.

So, men and women are different in a biological sense and in a gender sense. Do these differences mean that one sex is better than the other?

The answer is no. Men and women are different, but they are equal human beings.

Optional exercise: How do you feel if you were the other sex?

You can do this exercise if there is time and if the members want to. Ask the members to list six advantages and six disadvantages of being a woman/ man. You may use a flipchart. You can divide the paper into “man” and “woman” and list the advantages and disadvantages underneath. There are no right or wrong answers here!

What to do

- *Make sure that the members have understood that although men and women are different, they are equal human beings.*
- *Plan actions on how to reach a better understanding of this in our community. Let the members discuss freely about any actions they want to take. Write the actions down in the action list in the VAG meeting report.*

Possible actions:

- We can encourage men and women in the community to treat each other with respect, and give the good example ourselves.
- We can encourage men and women to take an interest in each other, to gain understanding.
- We can encourage men and women to try to help each other out, even if it means doing something you (your sex) normally wouldn't do.

Key information.

- Society is made up of different people. This diversity is important for development and for the functioning of society as a whole.
- Despite the differences between them, all people are equal and deserve to be treated equally and respectfully.

- The differences between women and men can be biological or social, but men and women are equal human beings.

Concluding notes.

- *Remind the members about the action points they have decided on.*
- *Ask if there are any further questions.*
- *Agree on the date, time, place and topic of the next meeting.*
- *Close the meeting.*