

Check against delivery

**Panel II: Countering gender discrimination and negative gender stereotypes:
effective policy responses**

**Presentation by Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy
Executive Director of UN Women**

Geneva: 15 July 2011

The 2010 Ministerial Declaration on “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women” identified discriminatory attitudes and gender stereotypes as a persistent and cross-cutting issue that needs to be addressed to accelerate progress in achieving gender equality goals as well as other internationally agreed development goals and commitments including the Millennium Development Goals. The declaration also called for effective policy responses including in the area of education and media.

What are stereotypes?

Stereotypes exist in all societies. How we perceive each other can be determined through over simplified assumptions about people based on particular traits, such as race, sex, age, etc.

They are based on socially constructed norms, practices and beliefs. They are often cultural and religion based and fostered, and reflect underlying power relations.

Stereotypical beliefs can be rigid but they do and have changed over the time and that’s the challenge and the opportunity.

What is the impact?

Stereotypes are not inherently negative always but because they are assumptions that disregard a person’s individual and inherent abilities, opportunities and environment, they tend to be prejudicial.

Negative stereotypes hinder peoples' ability to fulfill their potential by limiting choices and opportunities. They are at the root of overt and covert, direct and indirect and recurrent gender discrimination which adversely affects the de jure and de facto substantive equality that should be guaranteed to women.

They translate into practical policies, laws and practices that cause harm to women on the ground.

The effect of "this on the mental and physical integrity of women is to deprive them of equal knowledge, exercise and enjoyment of rights and fundamental freedoms" (CEDAW Committee recommendation).

Examples include gender pay gap, occupational segregation, denial of promotions to leadership – glass ceiling in different professions, increased casualization of women workers and feminization of poverty, trafficking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, honour killings, violence against women in domestic spheres, work place and public spaces, lower levels of education and work opportunities.

Stereotypes justify gender discrimination more broadly and reinforce and perpetuate historical and structural patterns of discrimination.

Men suffer too because conforming to masculine roles of competitive and ambitious self seeking can put pressure on them and deprive them of joys that can come from parenting and having intimate respectful relationships. Stereotypes and gender discriminations resulting there from have high costs in terms of development impeded, democracy and human rights deny and peace and security endangered.

On the other hand, the benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment in all these areas are acknowledge beyond doubt.

What needs to be done to counter stereotypes?

The phenomenon of gender stereotypes needs to be counter and fought in multiple areas – in languages and vocabulary, laws and practices, mindsets of people, justice system, media and education, in different organizations and public authorities, in enterprises, and in individuals.

Concerted effort is needed to change what a supporter of gender equality Professor Ling White from the United States of America called the cosmography of gender inequality. He pointed out that the "habit of language" implies that "personality is mainly a male attribute and that women are a subhuman, ... subspecies ...men as leader, woman as follower, man as producer, woman as consumer, man as strength, woman as weakness.. this is a cosmography that has brought to us man as aggressor and humanity the victim.

In the domestic family context, at the community, society and national levels, as well as the global level we need to create an enabling environment, specific institutions and systems and individual champions and role model creation are called for.

At the country level, the following policies and measures would be effective:

- Temporary special measures including quotas in parliaments and political parties, judiciary, law enforcement agencies, executive and the corporate sector (Women's empowerment principles to be applied) are to be taken.
- Correct representation of women in media and their proactive role as media persons in changing perceptions. Use the potency and use the potency and easy reach of social media and ICT.
- Participation and leadership of women in religious and faith-based community groups and legal systems is critical in stimulating a gender-sensitive and just interpretation of religious and cultural texts, costumes and norms.
- Rigorous and corrective education curriculum development and imparting education since early childhood to all levels, and considering both boys and girls should be accompanied by educational campaigns for adults. Development of special educational tools at all levels including use of e-learning.
- Encourage women and girls to enter into traditionally male dominated fields of education and professions like armed forces, pilots, sciences, engineering, etc.
- Enact laws that change mindsets like those against domestic violence and other gender-based violence including sexual harassment at the work place and rape. Laws should criminalize such activities and high-rate of convictions and should change the perception of what masculinity means and what is permissible and what is not.
- Promotion of shared domestic responsibilities between women and men, for example on parenting, care giving, etc.
- Promotion of property rights, including land rights and control over financial and economic assets, access to credit and support for entrepreneurship development.
- Allocation of adequate resources for programmes targeting the elimination of gender stereotypes, for example through advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, educational curriculum development.
- Tax and other incentives to enhance women's empowerment including involvement of the private sector, etc. Examples of Nepal with regard to property rights and Norway in promoting gender parity in employment.

Strengthening and implementing international normative and policy framework and action

Gender stereotyping has been clearly identified in the CEDAW as something that impedes the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It asserts that all human beings regardless of sex are covered by this principle and implies that to develop their abilities, pursue a professional career and make their own choices without limitations set by gender stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices.

The Beijing Platform for Action calls on governments and other relevant stakeholders to tackle gender stereotypes in public and private life. The General Assembly has consistently stressed that persisting gender stereotypes constrain progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, and called for actions to eliminate gender-based stereotypes invariably of the forms.

In the 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2010, the persistency of gender stereotypes was raised in relation to women's political participation and decision-making, women's economic empowerment and role in poverty reduction, education and training of women, women's health, women and the media, violence against women and human rights of women. Member States pointed to the need to take a range of strategies to combat stereotypes.

The CEDAW Committee Recommendation is revealing. Traditional attitudes whereby women remain subordinated to men -- or less worthy-- or having stereotypes roles perpetrate wide spread violence and coercion such as: violence and abuse, forced marriage and honour killings, female genital mutilation.

The result is to maintain women in subordinate roles and contribute to low levels of political leadership, voice and participation in work force, leadership and lower levels of education skills and work opportunities

The UNGA and ECOSOC and CSW have been addressing this issue over time and need to continue to keep a vigil and strengthen norms to change the cosmography of gender stereotyping.

At regional and international levels, we need to continue to build norms and standards that chip away gender stereotyped norms, practices and beliefs and ensure that they are translated at the national level into policies and programmes and their implementation.

The UN system organizations must address the problem of stereotyping in their relevant areas of expertise and action and in terms of their policies and programmes, including in the context of gender mainstreaming.

UNWOMEN is committed to support Member States efforts through advocacy, knowledge brokering, strategic partnerships including with CSOs, media and private sector, provision of technical and advisory services to implement, monitor and evaluate programmes on the ground and fostering and promoting global role models and champions and best practices.

Today's panel seeks to:

1. Examine how gender stereotyping impact on the achievement of gender equality in various areas.
2. Bring forward and share successful experiences and good practices to combat gender stereotyping and resulting discrimination and build on positive outcomes.
3. Effective policies and norms at national, regional and international levels to be identified.