

PART I : INTRODUCTION

This tutors' manual on Influence Skills for Women was compiled in the course of three regional workshops organised by the Women and Development Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. Participants at each workshop were drawn from government machineries dealing with women's issues and from non-governmental women's organisations.

Although the original tutors' manual was developed to meet a set of specific objectives (see PART III), it became obvious to both tutors and participants that the core sessions, those dealing directly with skills in communication and influencing, could form a valuable part of many other types of courses.

We have therefore begun this manual by identifying these important components and printing them as individual sessions, in the hope that we can encourage their inclusion in a wide variety of courses run by and for women in the Commonwealth and in other organisations. All too often, courses organised specifically for women concentrate on important topics, but give little attention to the need to build up the self-confidence and communication skills of the participants. These ingredients are often critical to the ability of women to influence their peers and decision makers to a point of view which may benefit or further the needs of women.

Role-play techniques help to break down barriers between participants, and to build the kinds of supportive and co-operative approaches which are likely to strengthen efforts to improve the lives and options of women. These techniques are usefully employed in the early stages of a workshop or training course to encourage a trustful and understanding atmosphere. Areas in which these "influence skills" components could be valuable would include training courses for women working in income-generating projects, agricultural extension, and community health and nutrition programmes.

The skill training is not enough on its own to help women to realise the goals they have set to improve women's lives and options, however. As important as learning the skills and practising them is an awareness of the political realities which face women at all levels. Thus PART III of this manual outlines general information sessions covering policies and activities at international, regional and national levels which you may find useful in planning training courses for women.

PART III of the manual also includes documents which demonstrate the objectives, content and methodology of the Women and Development Division's series of regional workshops for women in small island states, as one example of how we fitted the training elements of this workshop into the context of specific training designed to assist women working in national machineries to develop strategies for approaching planners with a view to ensuring that the concerns of women are effectively integrated in national and sectoral planning processes.

TRAINING NOTES

1. Use of training components

The segments on influence skills can be used together as part of a larger workshop, as a short (three to four day) workshop or in their individual parts for short meetings. While it would be preferable to run the segments in the order we have printed them, you can also take individual segments which may be more relevant for your training programme. You can, for example, use the individual workshops in a series of meetings if you are working with a group of women once a week or once a month.

2. Materials and documents

Although some visual aids are mentioned in this manual, they are not essential. We have run the influence skills segments of our workshops without any overhead projectors or other aids. If you have a blackboard or a sheet of paper, it is easy to write the contents of the slide out so that they can be read. If you have no paper or pens, use a stick on the ground. It is the people who are important in these exercises, not the technology.

The papers will be valuable as background reading to the workshops, but again, they are not essential. If you are working with women who can't or don't read, you can cover what is in the papers in your verbal introduction.

3. Tutor/participant ratio :

Any workshop which includes role-play techniques as a method of training requires one tutor to every four or five participants, because of the large amount of coaching involved.

One of the tutors should be the course director who is responsible for the workshop and introduces the sessions.

4. Tutors' meetings :

Tutors should meet before the workshop starts, to work through the proposed agenda and familiarise themselves with the contents. A practice run through one or more of the influence skills workshops is highly recommended.

If you have any visual aids, such as films or slides, you should have a preview with the other tutors and discuss the most effective way to present them, as well as checking that the equipment is working. It is wise not to depend on luck!

The tutors should meet once a day during the workshop to share experiences and feedback on the sessions so that problems can be resolved, support given and the programme re-planned if necessary. Try to hold the meetings at times that suit all the tutors (e.g. not when they are very tired).

5. Training and flexibility

It is important in any training course/seminar/workshop to try to ensure punctuality. This is mainly the responsibility of the course director, but all tutors and participants should be asked to try to be ready to start each session on time. An important factor in ensuring that all groups are keeping approximately the same pace of work will be to have the same number of people in each group and to spread participants with language or other difficulties which may slow groupwork evenly throughout the groups. The participatory approach of this workshop necessitates flexibility, however, and participants should be warned that the timetable may need amendment from time to time.

6. Duration of workshop segments

Experience has shown that the material in this manual requires at least the times given for each segment in the Duration Column if the participants are to benefit fully. It would be preferable to have a separate day for each of the skills workshops if time permits, as this would mean that different complementary exercises could be included, with time for reruns and reinforcement where necessary.

7. Learning reviews

If you are running a workshop of over three days, you may find the inclusion of a learning review useful. In all three Women and Development workshops, we included regular daily learning reviews, at the beginning of the day and at the end. We found them an extremely valuable mechanism, both in helping participants to review what they had done each day and place it in perspective, and in starting each day with a brief recap on the previous day's work. This also was a means of ensuring that any problems or queries which arose were aired and dealt with by tutors and participants.

8. Preparation for workshop

Participants coming to the workshop should be asked to bring with them information (preferably in written form) about their country/organisation, and a copy of other relevant documents, such as material plans/project outlines and work objectives.

9. Extension of workshop

This workshop covers a basic set of influence skills very quickly. In order to help participants to develop these skills, other topics could also be included e.g.

a). Listening skills

How to establish rapport with another person, build their confidence in you, diagnose what is happening under the surface etc.

b). Meeting procedures

How to chair, speak from the floor, questioning skills etc.

c). Diagnosing problems and pinpointing issues

Closely related to b), with the use of the play and games.

d). Making changes stick

How to make sure that a decision is carried out.

10. Introduction to the workshop

For any training session or meeting, the way the organisers start the first working session is very important in setting the tone of the whole meeting. You may have an official opening ceremony at which a national or local dignitary may address participants, or you may be working with a small group of women informally. The notes which follow form a checklist of items which you may find useful reminders for your opening remarks.

a). Welcome participants

b). Introduce yourself/tutor(s)/other speakers

c). Explain that the workshop will be a learning experience for everyone, including totor(s).

d). Set the scene - explain the workshop/meeting's importance (first in a series, first ever in that place/on that topic).

e). Outline aims of the workshop - to make participants' work/impact more effective.

f). Mention cultural realities and the importance of tolerance - learning about each other and different homes/work experience/countries all part of the course.

g). Stress flexibility of the programme and the need for punctuality.

h). Explain transport and accommodation details and money.

i). Show yourself to be willing to help anyone with queries, problems, suggestions etc.