

Section 1: Introduction

1. Addressing discrimination against women

Throughout the world, women suffer a greater burden of ill-health than men and are further disadvantaged by inequality of access to health care. During the last three decades, efforts to address this discrimination have formed part of the overall movement to achieve equality for women. Under the broad approach of 'Women in Development', programmes have successively emphasised women's rights to welfare, equity and the alleviation of poverty, the contributions that women can make to development and have called for their empowerment and the integration of their concerns into mainstream activities in all sectors.

The conceptualisation of the problem has been further extended by recognising that gender is not merely a question of biology. Whilst including the physiological aspects of sex, gender is also a social construction in which the roles and attitudes of men and women are conditioned by a multitude of cultural, religious and traditional factors in the society in which the individual develops and lives. This broader perspective not only provides an understanding of the context in which the fight to achieve equality for women must continue; it also encompasses the fact that men, too, are sometimes disadvantaged by the gender biases and stereotypes that prescribe and circumscribe their social behaviour.

The change of emphasis from 'Women in Development' to 'Gender and Development' acknowledges the different life courses and impacts of development policies on men and women. Responding to this broader understanding, it seeks to incorporate gender perspectives into mainstream policies and programmes, recognising that both women and men will ultimately gain from an approach that addresses their concerns in a comprehensive manner.

Accompanying this evolution of approaches to gender issues in general, there has been a developing appreciation of gender factors within

specific sectors, including health. There are many countries where the population, both men and women, suffer ill-health due to poverty, disease, and ignorance. Throughout much of the world, and despite substantial progress in some areas, it is generally true that women continue to have poorer health than men. Analysis suggests that, since many of women's health problems result from or are exacerbated by factors in society, women's health is most effectively promoted through changes in societal structures and societal attitudes towards women.

At the same time, there is evidence from many countries that men suffer ill-health in a number of specific areas such as those associated with reproduction, work and the environment as well as lifestyle-related diseases, which also need to be specifically addressed by alterations in systems and institutions.

Thus, the realisation has been growing that a comprehensive gender perspective is needed, which acknowledges the different health experiences and health care needs of women and men. This has been a prominent feature of a series of world conferences - notably the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the World Conference on Women and Development (Beijing, 1995) - and is reflected in the strategies advanced in the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (1995), the recommendations of the Women and Health programme advocated by the Eleventh Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (1995), and the 5th Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting of the Commonwealth (1996).

The general principles and broad policy statements on gender and health issued by these major international conferences have been endorsed by the overwhelming majority of governments. The challenge that must now be met is to translate these principles into practical activities. These must be aimed at significantly improving the health status of women and men, by fully recognising their different health

perspectives and needs and by instituting in health systems the mechanisms that will comprehensively and equitably address these differences.

1.2 The Need for Gender Training in the Health Sector

Efforts are now increasing to redress the imbalances that discriminate against women's health, through the development and application of gender-sensitive policies, programmes and services throughout the health sector and beyond. This mainstreaming of gender within the health sector has profound implications for the training of workers in all parts of the health sector, whether they are involved in policy formulation, administration, or as front-line health personnel delivering the services. All categories of health workers need to undergo training in how to analyse issues from a gender perspective and how to consult, plan and implement activities that take account of the different health needs and health experiences of women and men.

The task is a major one and requires that, ultimately, all pre-service programmes for the education of doctors, nurses, other health workers and auxiliaries, health promotion specialists, planners and administrators will be permeated by gender-based perspectives on every issue where gender is relevant. In the interim period until this goal is achieved, there is a need for in-service training to assist existing health workers at all levels, to develop the necessary gender perspectives in their fields of practice.

At the present time, there are few, if any, courses available that meet the requirements. A number of educational institutions around the world provide programmes, particularly at the postgraduate level, that address certain issues in women's health. However, such courses usually do not take the broader gender perspective, are accessible only as a part of full-time on-campus programmes and are mainly located in universities in developed countries. The need is for training programmes that are gender-based, cover the whole spectrum of topics in the health field and are accessible to health workers in both developed and developing countries who cannot undertake programmes of full-time study.

1.3 A Curriculum for Training in Gender and Health

The Commonwealth Secretariat has inaugurated a process designed to meet these requirements, by initiating the creation of a gender and health programme that will mainly be delivered by distance education methodologies and will become accessible throughout the Commonwealth.

A key stage in the development of the programme was widespread consultation, which included Commonwealth Ministries of Health, experts in teaching and research in women's health and gender issues, and NGOs active in the field. Opinions and ideas about priority subjects for inclusion were widely canvassed in order to ensure a broad perspective from a range of Commonwealth countries, both developed and developing.

As a result of this survey, a list of health topics was generated for which a gendered approach was seen as a high priority. Experts in the teaching of these topics were then identified and were brought together in a Commonwealth workshop, held in Malta in March 1998. The workshop was organised with the collaboration of COMNET-IT, a Commonwealth organisation that provides assistance to countries to develop their use of information and communication technologies; and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), which assists countries in the use of open learning and distance education.

During the Malta workshop this coalition of experts in gender and health teaching and distance education technologies and methodologies brought its force to bear on the design and construction of a bold new curriculum, in which each priority topic that had been identified was scrutinised, deconstructed and subjected to a critical gender analysis.

The result was a draft of a set of curriculum outlines for teaching gender and health. Subsequently, the draft was further refined by a small curriculum co-ordination committee which carefully checked the material in each topic to ensure gender sensitivity and a balance of perspectives that reflect the diversity of the Commonwealth.

1.4 Nature and Content of the Curriculum Outlines

Fifteen curriculum outlines are presented in this publication. Each outline provides details of a complete course in the particular subject and is intended to be of sufficient length and weight that the accumulation of credits for 6-8 such courses would satisfy the requirements for a diploma or masters degree, depending on the level at which it is taught.

For each course, the outline states the overall aims and then defines the learning objectives for the learner. It is stressed that, in each case, the focus of the aims and objectives is not to provide a basic foundation course in the subject for someone who has never studied it before. Rather, the emphasis is on recognition and understanding of the gender dimensions of the topic and acquiring sensitivity and skills in the analysis of gender issues.

An indication of assessment methods and targets is given for each course. The assessment methods vary somewhat between courses and, to a degree, reflect the particular preferences of each of the outline authors. It is stressed, however, that a common principle underpins all the assessments and should be borne in mind if adaptations are made. This principle is that the subject of gender and health is not simply concerned with learning facts that can be memorised and regurgitated in a standard written examination. Rather, it is about acquiring a broad understanding of human relations and developing skills both in the analysis of situations and in the practical application of principles. These need to be assessed through a variety of methodologies that demonstrate each learner's capabilities. For these reasons, all the authors have placed an emphasis on continuous coursework assessment, essay writing and individual assignments in which the learner must collect, analyse and interpret information that is locally available.

Each course is divided into a number of segments, depending on the nature of the topic. A synopsis of the course segments is provided and it is hoped that there is sufficient detail to provide a solid basis on which the educator can build a sound and comprehensive teaching course at the appropriate level.

The list of references for each course is not intended to be exhaustive, but to be illustrative of texts that deal in a suitable way with the material and to provide immediate entry points both for the educator developing the course and for the learner who is taking it.

It is envisaged that, at one extreme, any one of the courses described could be taken on a stand-alone basis. This would provide a worker in the health sector, whether engaged in policy formulation, administration or service delivery, with an enhanced understanding of gender issues, a clear appreciation of the ways in which gender biases can be identified and tools that will be of value in working for their eradication. The award of a certificate of satisfactory achievement (not merely attendance) on the course will, it is hoped, become an important badge of attainment in gender training that will be increasingly recognised as an essential qualification for higher levels of responsibility.

At the other end of the spectrum, learners may accumulate sufficient credits for courses completed to satisfy the institutional requirements for an undergraduate or postgraduate diploma or masters degree.

Although, as indicated, the units may be taken individually, the experts responsible for the development of these curricula are firmly of the view that the first two - *Gender, Health and Society* and *Gender and Health Care* - are particularly crucial to the understanding of the whole field and should preferably be regarded as core courses to be taken first before any of the others are attempted.

The remainder of the courses may be taken in any combination, order and number to suit the interests of the learner and the requirements of the delivering institution. They are presented here in what is felt to be a logical thematic order, with the more general and cross-cutting topics first, followed by more specific and specialist ones. Wherever possible, topics which are considered to be related follow one another, as in the case of health promotion and health at work; mental health and violence; reproductive health and midlife and the menopause. The last course in this series focuses on how people might be helped to learn about gender and health and therefore has an education focus for teachers and trainers.

1.5 The Purpose of the Curriculum Outlines

We offer these curriculum outlines as a contribution to the teaching of gender and health. We hope that they will provide clear guidance to all those who are engaged in programme delivery and who are striving to produce courses that will increase awareness of gender issues in the health field and encourage practitioners to take a carefully balanced and sensitive approach to gender-dependent aspects of health.

The curriculum outlines presented can be used to develop courses either for conventional classroom delivery, or for distance education. We very strongly encourage institutions to adopt the latter approach wherever possible, in order to make the courses accessible to as many people as possible across the Commonwealth and beyond. It is especially important that these courses be available to workers in the health sector, in both developed and developing countries, who for a wide variety of reasons are not able to suspend their work in order to engage in full-time study. For these people, it is vital to provide an opportunity to study part-time whilst remaining in their employment. Distance education - whether restricted to a basic paper format, or with additional options for supplementing and extending the learning process through audio and video materials and broadcasts, computer diskettes, interactive CD roms and on-line Internet sessions - has enormous capabilities to satisfy this need.

Whilst the curriculum outlines are a product in themselves, they are also a beginning of a new venture. The Commonwealth Secretariat will continue to work with its network of collaborators in educational institutions, encouraging the development of full programmes of study based on the outlines and seeking to assist the collaborators to identify and mobilise resources for programme delivery.

With its partners in COL and COMNET-IT, the Secretariat will promote and facilitate the development and delivery of these programmes by distance education methodologies - in paper format as a baseline medium that is accessible to all, complemented by electronic formats, including broadcast and computer-based media and with CD-ROM and Internet options for

those who have access to the appropriate technologies.

At the present time, two of the programmes are already being taught and at least one collaborating centre in the network is investing in the development of a gender and health programme that will be largely delivered through the Internet.

We invite all those with an interest in the teaching of gender and health topics to examine these curriculum outlines and to see how they may be used to enhance the gender dimensions of their programmes. We will be delighted to obtain feedback on these outlines and to hear from any teachers or institutions that wish to adopt or adapt them.

The fifteen courses in this volume are not intended to be exclusive. There are other topics that would benefit from this approach, such as:

- Gender and Traditional Health Systems
- Gender and the Development and Expression of Sexuality
- Gender and Sex-specific Disease Management
- Gender Management Systems in the Health Sector
- The Critical Impact of Multi-sectoral Activities on Gender and Health
- Gender, Politics and Health
- Gender, Physical Activity, Sport and Health
- Gender, Health and the Environment
- Gender and Development

We would like to hear from academics who are teaching, or who are interested in teaching, other related courses which could become part of this programme and be included in subsequent publications. (Please use tear-out sheet at the end of the document.)

1.6 General Reading

For those who are new to this field or who would like to engage in some reading which provides an overview we suggest the following titles:

Doyal, L (1995) *What Makes Women Sick: Gender and the Political Economy of Health*, London: Macmillan.

An overview of the social causes of ill-health and illness in women in a range of different societies. This readable book provides an introduction to recent writings on women and health from a number of different disciplines.

Sabo, D and Gordon, G (1993) *Men's Health and Illness: Gender and the Body*, London: Sage.

One of the first attempts to explore the relationship between gender and the health of men. Although most of the discussion is about the United States of America, this book provides a valuable introduction to some of the key issues in thinking about men's health.

Sargent, C and Brettell, C (1996) *Gender and Health: an International Perspective*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

An anthropological contribution to the debate about women and health. This collection of articles explores a number of dimensions of women's health across different societies and discusses their relationship to broader cultural concerns.

Sen, G, Germaine, A and Chen, L (1994). *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment, and Rights*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

A rigorous and comprehensive introduction to the gender aspects of reproduction. This collection offers a feminist perspective on a number of issues relating to sexuality and reproduction and places them in the broader

context of social control and reproductive rights.

WHO (1998) *Gender and Health: Technical Paper* WHO Geneva.

A succinct summary of a range of issues relating to gender and health. Though it focuses mainly on women this document also explores the relationship between gender and men's health and concludes with a discussion of gender-sensitive health planning and service delivery.

Also:

A web-site from BRIDGE (the UK-based gender and development information and analysis service)

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge>

Take a look at and download Issue 7 "Gender, Health and Well-being"

Alternatively, contact:

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The Commonwealth Secretariat's Health Website will also carry these curriculum outlines and related materials:

www.health-at-commonwealth.org