

## TOOL

# GENDER BOXES

### WHY

In order to understand of roles, expectations and responsibilities for young men and young women, it is important to distinguish between sex and gender.

This exercise can help you to explore the social construct of gender and understand the difference between sex and gender.

### WHEN

This exercise can be useful in the **early stages of planning a project**, as it strengthens your understanding of the gender roles and social norms at play in a specific context. Then you can design your project in a way that works towards gender equal participation and influence.

Also the exercise is useful when working towards a **shared understanding** of the concepts of sex and gender in an organization and the importance of ensuring gender equality.

### HOW

Start by working in groups, then get together for a discussion in plenary.

#### Group work

Step 1) Each group will draw two big boxes on a flip chart paper and write "Woman" on one and "Man" on the other.

Inside each box, write down the messages women and men receive about what a "Woman" or "Man" should be... and the social expectations to men and women: "What keeps women and men in "their boxes"?"

Step 2) Outside of each box, write the words and messages that are used about men and women who are not acting according to what is expected from them.

#### Plenary

Put up the posters on walls and take a look at them together.

- Do you see similarities between the posters related to women? The posters related to men?

- What messages and words relate to the biological sex?
- What relates to the social gender?
- What words are used about women and men when they do not live up to the social norms, expectations and messages you have noted inside the boxes?
- What happens when men and women can't live up to the social norms and expectations – or deliberately step out of their boxes?
- Would you prefer to be a man or a woman outside the box?

Often people experience that they are classified by other people to be either inside or outside of "the box" – in terms of their sexuality, gender identity and/or personal identity. When the "boxes" are seen as the only right way of being a man or a woman in an organization or a society, they become a framework for oppression, sexism, homophobia, power abuse, control and violence.

Source: ACT Alliance



» Hierarchal and patriarchal societies and structures are created and maintained by people. The 'boxes' live in people's attitudes and behaviors – and in order to change oppressive structures, we need to encourage people to change awareness, attitudes and behaviors.

**Sex** refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

**Gender** describes the socially determined characteristics of men and women