**Group activity 2**

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| **Type/title of activity** | Working group + Q & A“Facing biased and stereotyped questions on human rights and disability” |
| **Total duration** | 45 min – 1 hour |
| **Venue(s) requirements** | Meeting room plus three breakout rooms |
| **Equipment needed** | 4 flip charts and markers, one in each breakout room (to prepare strategies) |
| **Other support** | The facilitator should monitor and support working groups activities  |

**Activity objective**

One of the classic dilemmas facing people working in the area of human rights (whether in civil society, intergovernmental organization or Government department) is the need to respond to critical (or even disruptive) questions and statements related to the role of human rights in society. The disability discourse is no exception. Several myths and stereotypes surround persons with disabilities; new approaches that seek openness to diversity, inclusion of marginalized individuals and commitment on behalf of the State can easily result in opposition and scepticism.

The activity aims to prepare people who are or will be working on disability rights to deal with such challenging questions and statements. It does so by picturing situations where professionals and different interlocutors are engaged in hypothetical conversations/meetings.

*Statement and response strategies*

The interlocutor will ask a question or make a statement. The other person will respond. Both the questioner and the respondent will first have prepared their “strategy” supported by their respective working groups.

**Dynamics, roles and time required**

1. The facilitator explains the activity to the audience (purpose, dynamics, etc.) in the main venue, divides the audience into *four working groups* and sends them to their breakout rooms (5 min).
2. The facilitator meet the working groups in the breakout rooms, assign and read the tasks (printed instructions); ensure that they are understood by all; invite groups to nominate a timekeeper and two front persons for the two tasks (5 min or less).
3. Working groups prepare their question & answer strategies, nominate a “front person” who will “question” and “respond to” the other group (15 min).
4. Back in plenary. The two groups that carried out task 1 will present their questions/response to the other two groups. The two groups that carried out task 2 will then present their question/response session. The facilitator will establish the order and the time allowed for each discussion; the facilitator will also balance the time between questions & answers—participants should not use long arguments (10 min; 5 min per discussion).
5. At the end of the “two discussions”, final views, comments aimed to strengthen strategies, wrap-up (10 min).

**Printed instructions for working groups (example)**

Below are examples of printed instructions for four working groups to be developed by the facilitator before the activity (they can be adapted to the context and target group of the course)

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| Task 1 – group 1: You are the leader of a traditional community. Poverty is blatant in the community. Anything that is “different” is perceived as dangerous and disruptive. In your community there are children with mental disabilities; most of them are considered to be witches and stay at home with their mothers. Their fathers are sometimes frustrated husbands. Doctors have come and provided information; however, parents have other children too and they do not have time to take care of all of them. You are talking to a social care worker who came to your village. He says that all people are equal and that the children with mental disabilities should also take part in the community. You know there is good in his words but you also know that there are rules in the community that must continue. Ask a question or make a statement to the officer to support your arguments.  |
| Task 1 – group 2: You are a social care worker and you are meeting the traditional community leader. A medical charity reported that there are children with cerebral palsy and other children traumatized by recent conflict who are kept at home without receiving care. Their situation has worsened instead of improving. The community considers the children as a burden and there have been cases of husbands beating their wives because they were considered responsible. Consider different factors, listen to what the leader has to say and provide an answer. |
| Task 2 – group 1: You are a teacher of a special centre for children with disabilities. You have been working with children with disabilities for 35 years, including children with epilepsy, Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy and teenagers who are bipolar. You know very well what it takes to work with these children and are convinced that all this talk of having children with mental disabilities studying with other children is too idealistic. You do not oppose the principle but think it is impractical. Ask a question or make a statement to the officer to support your arguments. |
| Task 2 – group 2: You are a United Nations staff member and you are meeting a teacher of a special centre for children with disabilities. The teacher has been working with children with disabilities for many years, including with small children with very critical mental disabilities. You do not want to “teach the teacher” what’s best - you do not have that expertise - you are just trying to pass the message that inclusive education is a great opportunity for all children with disabilities to study and play with other children and step into society. Consider different factors, listen to what the teacher has to say and provide an answer. |

**Tips for facilitator**

* Ensure that the working groups have a good balance of experience and background.
* “Front persons” do not have to do it all; the idea is that during the question & answer session the group acts as a “panel”; if need be the front person can invite other members of the group to intervene or respond (the focus is on substance).
* Encourage relevant and concise answers and questions.
* Print instructions with different tasks and share with members of the same working group only.
* Encourage maximum participation of all participants.
* Make clear to participants that the focus of the activity is on content. When discussing the benefits of a new approach to disability with a sceptical interlocutor, it is better to stick to data, experience and potential rather than pointing at “moral” or “legal” obligations. Statements like “to keep persons with disabilities locked up in institutions is immoral”, “the Convention says…” may not be so effective to challenge myths.
* Questions and answers have to be realistic and based on true experience and knowledge; interlocutors will tend to support their arguments with what they “believe” while the other interlocutor will support arguments with what they “know”; but neither should have to “invent” data or information.
* Even if the activity is not intended to assess presentation and/or communication skills, it is expected that Q & A sessions are governed by maximum respect and basic rules of communication, i.e., do not interrupt the questioner or respondent before s/he has finished. If the activity turns into an argument, the benefit of the interaction may to be lost on both sides.