

# Fishbowl

by GILL GORDON

A group of teachers in Zambia on a workshop to develop sexuality and life-skills lessons and materials with their students



Photo: Vincent Mwale, PPAZ

## Introduction

This activity enables people from different groups to ask questions of each other and get listened to in a safe way. Each group thinks of all the questions they always wanted to ask the other group on a certain topic. The groups discuss the questions from the other group. One group then sits in the middle facing inwards and answers the

questions whilst the other group sits around the outside and listens to the answers without speaking. The groups then change over.

We have used this activity with male and female teachers and pupils in relation to sexuality in rural Zambia and it helped people to understand each other's feelings, thoughts, hopes and fears more deeply and with more empathy.

Groups only explored thoughts and feelings about the opposite sex because it was early on in the project and the facilitators thought that more time was needed to talk about feelings for the same sex safely.

The activity generated a lot of questions from men and women on what they would like to know about the opposite sex.

**How the fishbowl works**

- Divide participants into separate men and women's groups.
- Ask participants to individually think of all the questions they always wanted to ask the opposite sex about their sexuality, feelings, experiences, behaviour, concerns and preferences.
- Write all the questions down or give them to the facilitator who can write them down.
- If the participants can read easily, give the men the women's questions and the women the men's questions. Otherwise the facilitator can read the questions out one by one to each group separately, giving each person one question to remember. With the groups, remove duplicate questions, merge similar questions and remove

any that the group are not prepared to answer.

- Give the groups time to discuss the questions in separate groups.
- Form a circle or **fishbowl**, with the women in one circle, sitting in the middle facing inwards in a group, and the men in another circle sitting on the outside.
- Ask the women to give their answers to the men's questions while the men listen silently. The men are not allowed to interrupt or ask questions, only to listen.
- Repeat with the men in the middle answering the women's questions.
- Bring the groups together and ask what they have learnt from the discussion and how they will apply that learning in their lives. Ask what issues,

topics or questions they would like to discuss further and learn more about.

- The facilitator adds issues that he or she feels need to be discussed further or challenged.
- Record the questions and the answers and make a note of issues that need follow-up.

The fishbowl activity can be used with other sensitive topics or to generate dialogue between groups on any topic.

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