**Italy Gender Stereotypes: Changing Attitudes towards Violence Against Women**

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All the several forms of violence against women and girls have a common cultural root, that is the historically unequal power relations between men and women. Even though life styles and customs have modified, the perception of men and women’s roles in the society remains unchanged over the time.

It is still widespread the stereotype “men as leaders/breadwinners and women/girls as cares/mothers” or alternatively “women as sexual objects or femme fatale”. The perpetuation of these stereotypes harms women in different ways.

Firstly they degrade women, diminishing their dignity and marginalizing them, debasing women’s competence and hampering an equal participation in the public sphere (in Italy women are 20% of the National Parliament members and are under-represented in most of the sectors and professions).

Secondly these stereotypes restrict women to culturally acceptable roles or behaviors, stigmatizing and punishing those women who fail to conform to such roles or behaviors, making them guilty or responsible for provoking violent acts and reactions by men. In this way violence against women is likely to be widely tolerated and considered a private matter, instead of a pervasive and grave violation of human rights.

So it is essential that any strategy to contrast gender violence starts from the cultural level, working on behaviors and relations between men and women in their daily lives. Girls and boys generally assume those roles and attitudes that fit in the traditional (stereotyped) models transmitted by the school system, the families, the media and the whole social and cultural system, but many times these models do not really correspond to their desires, needs and identities. These are at the same time the causes and consequences of any form of violence against women and making people aware about that is the first important challenge to face.

Focusing on the specificities of the Italian situation, the CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Observations to Italy in 2011 (recalling the previous recommendations formulated in 2005) stated that “it remains deeply concerned about the portrayal of women as sex objects and the stereotyped roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society” and the eradication of gender stereotypes is the priority in the work for the advancement of women’s rights and gender equality in our country. It acknowledged that the political debates and the mass media have played a negative role, continuously reiterating a degrading representation of women, through a sexist language and the revival of stereotypes and gender roles.

Politicians has increasingly used sexist expressions, which stresses the importance of beauty as a success factor for women in politics and in the career development. In many TV shows, women are nearly ornamental presences: almost naked and silent. In the advertisement female naked bodies are used to sell everything. The mass media often fail to adequately and correctly inform about the phenomenon of violence against women. For example feminicide cases are often reported as the result of passion crimes, a sudden and unpredictable action of men victims of "murderous folly", while they actually represent the epilogue of a crescendo of one-sided violence, perpetrated by stereotypes, traditions and culture.

The Italian CS platform “30 years CEDAW: work in progress” – where Pangea is among the promoters and the coordinator - in its CEDAW Shadow Report and in the Convention No More! raised the issues and the need of working at cultural level against gender stereotypes to effectively eradicate gender violence at all levels of the society. The following are the key elements we urge to develop a comprehensive strategy for promoting a cultural change regarding VAW.

The promotion of prevention and awareness raising programs on gender violence is fundamental to deconstruct stereotypes and false myths that justify or minimize any manifestations of violence against women.

It is needed to promote professional trainings on gender violence for all the actors entering into contact with (potential) victims (such as the police, social and health workers, judges, lawyers, school teachers), in order to make adequate and efficient all the network of support services for women.

Since the role of the media is of great importance in raising awareness and sensitiveness to the issue of violence among the public opinion, the training of journalists and all media professionals is extremely significant to facilitate a transformation of those ideas, attitudes and prejudices that lead or justify violence and to overcome the gender stereotypes as well as the portrayal of women as sexual objects.

Moreover, education programs for primary and secondary schools and for universities has to be developed to educate the young generations to gender relations and sexuality, to offer new and positive models and guide them in building new, respectful and more balanced relationships between sexes, based on the respect of the fundamental human rights and dignity of everybody.