

# PARTICIPATION, GOVERNANCE, POLITICAL SYSTEMS

## b) Participation

### **Participatory processes do not automatically recognise inequalities and differences between women and men**

Experience shows that participatory processes and ‘attempts to involve poor people’ do not automatically include women. Attention to gender differences and inequalities is required if participatory development initiatives are to involve women as well as men. Specific issues include:

**Power imbalances in communities:** Communities are not harmonious groups with a common set of interests and priorities. There are often strong divisions along the lines of age, religion, class, and gender. These power differentials make it difficult for some people to voice opinions that contradict general views. Power differentials may even affect who participates in specific meetings. Outside officials may only invite ‘community leaders’ (generally men) to participate in consultations.

**Intra-household and intra-family relations:** Some women may find it difficult to speak out in front of their husbands or fathers. They may also believe that discussions relating to family matters (even issues relating to workloads) are not for public forums.

**Different constraints to participation:** Men and women have different responsibilities and work loads, with women often having less time to devote to new activities. Attending specific meetings may raise problems for women if they are set for times of the day when women tend to be occupied. Women’s responsibilities for childcare may also make it difficult for women to participate.

**Different abilities to participate:** Given gender biases in education, women and men often have varying literacy levels. Men may also have more experience putting their arguments forward to outsiders and more confidence dealing with new people.

**Perceived benefits of participation:** Women and men may make different calculations about the costs and benefits of their involvement in participatory processes. Given the already high demands on most women’s time, they not see the extra effort required to participate as worthwhile, especially if the benefits are questionable.

### **Gender-sensitive participatory practices challenge development cooperation organisations**

Participatory methods are only as good as the people who use them. It is now clear that there is more to participation than a series of exercises. When they are done well, gender-sensitive participatory processes challenge organisations in many ways.

- **Skills:** Organisations need to develop the skills to do this type of work. Facilitating gender-sensitive participatory processes requires experience, skills and the ability to deal with conflict, if it arises.
- **Time:** Participatory processes can take a long time and may require support over years.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** The selection and sequencing of methods should be based on the specific circumstances. Responding adequately to specific contexts requires flexibility.
- **Support:** Participants (women and men) require support as they explore new issues. It is extremely irresponsible for an outside organisation to encourage people to raise issues of gender inequalities and then not support the consequences.
- **Follow-up:** Can the organization respond to the issues raised? If development cooperation organisations are serious about participatory processes, they must be prepared to act on the priorities identified and issues that emerge.

*Meeting the challenge of equitable participatory development means integrating gender awareness into practice, and not pursuing two approaches with two sets of principles and two series of methods. This much is clear: participation, a loose term to describe a wide variety of practices that aim for more inclusive development, does not automatically include those who were previously left out of such processes. It is only as inclusive as those who are driving the process choose it to be, or as those involved demand it to be...*

*For those who might be tempted to say, ‘Why should we also be looking at gender? We’re already following a participatory approach!’ we hope they will reconsider.*

Source: Guijt & Shah “Waking Up to Power, Conflict and Process” in Guijt & Shah (Eds.) (1998). **The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development.** London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

## Two Examples of Gender-Sensitive Participatory Processes

### Participatory Methods Used to Introduce Gender Equality Issues

Beginning in 1992, GTZ assisted the Zambian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries to integrate a participatory approach into their extension service. Extension officers used participatory methods to assess farmers' priorities, which led them towards a multi-sectoral approach to development. They used seasonal calendars to plan extension activities at times convenient to farmers. They began to involve farmers in monitoring and evaluating the outcome of extension efforts.

However an evaluation revealed that women were not benefiting from the improved participatory approach to extension. The staff began to make concerted efforts to address the problems of women and involve them in the process. As awareness grew, two-three day workshops helped couples to analyse gender relations in their households.

The case study raises several key points:

- Gender is not always the sensitive topic some claim it to be. With the right methods, attitudes and approaches, it is welcomed by local people and staff members.
- Gender is not a foreign, theoretical concept, and it can be addressed by women and men.
- Gender should be inherent in participatory approaches, but is not automatically addressed without specific efforts.

Source: *With a Participatory Approach, Gender is not a Sensitive Issue*. **ID21 Report** (<http://www.id21.org>), 14 April 1998. Based on a case study by C. Firschnuth.

### Participatory Methods Illustrate Different Perceptions of Well-Being

The use of gender-sensitive participatory methods in Darko, Ghana identified differences between women and men in their understanding of poverty. These methods documented people's own perceptions of intra-household relations and provided a far better understanding of the situation and changes underway than would have been possible through data collection on externally-selected indicators.

Men and women prepared separate social maps of the village and carried out wealth and well-being rankings. Differences in the two discussions were analysed:

- Men's criteria of wealth centred around assets like a house, car cattle and type of farm. They considered crops grown by men and not women's crops. Initially they left those with no assets out of the ranking altogether. They then moved on from wealth to a discussion of well-being, using 'god-fearing' as the main criterion.
- Women started with indicators like a house, land and cattle but moved to analyse the basis of agricultural production. Again they considered only 'female' crops and did not mention cocoa or other crops grown by men. Contrary to common perceptions, women focused on marketed crops and not on subsistence food crops.
- Women's criteria for the 'poorest' were related to a state of destitution, and the lack of individual entitlements or health-related deprivation. Men focused on the absence of assets.
- Each group had its own perception of well being. Women tended to identify factors for women, while men focused on men, Neither group looked at the household as a unit for analysing welfare.
- For both women and men, being wealthy did not always mean being better off. In the men's analysis none of the rich were 'god-fearing' and two houses with no assets had 'god-fearing' people. As for the women, the biggest vegetable producers (seen as an indicator of being well off) were not in the richer categories.

Source: M. K. Shah (1998). "Gendered Perceptions of Well-being in Darko, Ghana," in Guijt and Shah (eds.) **The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development**. (cited below)

## Tools and supportive methodologies

**GENDER-SENSITIVE PARTICIPATORY RAPID APPRAISAL (PRA):** PRA methods form the basis of many other participatory 'tool kits'. One definition of PRA is "a family of approaches, methods and behaviours that enable people to express and analyse the realities of their lives and conditions, to plan themselves what action to take, and to monitor and evaluate the results." See: *PRA: The Power of Participation*, **IDS Policy Briefing** Issue 7, August 1997. (<http://www.ids.susx.ac.uk/ids/publicat/briefs/brief7.html>). PRA methods include mapping, seasonal calendars, flow diagrams, and matrices or grids, scored with seeds or other counters to compare things.

Numerous practitioners have warned that PRA methods can be gender blind. Specific efforts are need to ensure that they take gender differences and inequalities into account. See

- ✓ I. Guijt and M. K. Shah (eds.) (1998). **The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development**. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- ✓ **Questions of Difference. The Video: PRA, Gender and Environment** (available in English and Portuguese (PAL/NTSC), French (PAL) Prepared by I. Guijt (1995). Available from the International Institute for Environment and Development, Tel: 44 (171) 872 7308 Fax: 44 (171) 388 2826
- ✓ L. Mayoux (1995). "Beyond Naivety: Women, Gender Inequality and Participatory Development," **Development and Change**. 26(2). pp. 235-258.

Specific methodologies are under development by various organisations. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organisation is promoting the use of **SEAGA** (Socioeconomic and Gender Analysis). For handbooks, reports of applications and background information, see <http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga>.