

## **Development and gender *In Brief***

- an update from BRIDGE, raising gender awareness among policy-makers and practitioners

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### **Issue No. 9: Gender and participation**

This issue of *in brief* traces synergies and tensions between gender and participation in development practice. Combining both participatory approaches and gender awareness requires an appreciation of the conflict of interests that may emerge not only between men and women but also amongst men and women. The lead article reminds development practitioners that institutions need to mainstream gender-aware and participatory approaches into their own work to ensure that development is truly equitable. Two case studies then explore innovative ways of dealing with organisational resistance to gender equity and the conflicts of interest that arise during participatory processes in development. As development initiatives are beginning to address national level programmes and policy, a further article of this edition explores the incorporation of gender into the poverty reduction strategies advocated by the World Bank.

#### **Gender and participation: bridging the gap**

Critical voices about participatory initiatives have focused largely on mis-matches between overambitious aims and poor practice. One such breach is that between claimed social inclusiveness and the reality of gender biases (Guijt and Kaul Shah, 1998). Despite the aims of participatory development to involve people in development that affects them directly, surprisingly little attention is paid to understanding who wants to 'participate', what makes their participation possible, and what's in it for them. Often, participatory processes have left women on the sidelines, along with the gender issues that shape their lives. Combining gender awareness and participatory approaches can be used to unlock men and women's voices for gender redistributive change and gender-sensitive programme and policy development.

The fields of participatory development and gender studies have remained far apart despite their shared goals of social inclusion and societal transformation (Chambers, 1997; Kabeer, 1994), though this is hardly surprising if one remembers that participatory approaches emerged in an era that 'centred around male power, perceptions, problems, and experiences' (de Koning and Martin, 1996). The initial emphasis of participatory development work on poverty alleviation rather than gender concerns was compounded by resistance to what some viewed as a western and imposed feminist agenda. Thus women's practical concerns, such as child and maternal health, became an escape route for those keen to avoid the time-consuming and difficult process of negotiating structural changes in the power relationships between women and men (Kaul Shah, 1998). Other development practitioners also focused on practical concerns because they simply did not recognise the structural issues or did not know what to do about them.

Recent years have seen a cautious convergence of gender and participation. Its success appears to hinge on three factors that often require organisational change.

**First**, conceptual clarity lays the basis for practical application, hence the urgent need to use clear and commonly agreed terminology. Several concepts meriting attention include the following:

- The use of simplistic and stereotypical concepts of 'gender' have alienated rather than encouraged men and have done a disservice to the complexity of gender relations (Cornwall, 2000; Kandiyoti, 1998).
- Smoothly used but rarely explained, the term 'empowerment' is seldom accompanied by analysis of the causes of gender-related suffering or of the processes through which it is commonly but erroneously assumed to occur (Crawley, 1998).
- Comparing official definitions of 'participation' with organisational mandates and available resources can reveal conceptual inconsistencies.
- The term 'community' is also problematic with its simple but incorrect image of an undifferentiated and co-operative social group.

**Second**, the inherent limitation of visual methods associated with participatory methodologies and, above all, their application have glossed over gender-differentiated experiences, thus creating the impression of a uniform and static local knowledge (Goebel, 1998). For example, much participatory work relies on mixed group-based discussions or assumes the dominance of a male/female division over other forms of social difference. Thus, insufficient care is taken to understand how gender issues, differences and similarities can emerge, alongside those related to other forms of power, in different types of discussion settings. Where steps are made to engage women more, it cannot be assumed that they wish to express themselves through new methods or in new forums – nor that they have the time and social permission to do so.

'Empowerment'-oriented work requires methods that can make social transformation a principal goal, yet which do not expose or generate conflicts that increase the vulnerability of marginalised groups. This is difficult as even methods that appear gender-neutral can provoke household-level and community-level conflicts, or, conversely, provide descriptions rather than revealing underlying power imbalances rooted in social relations. For example, participatory maps, life histories, and questionnaire surveys can reveal the impact on women of changes in gender-differentiated needs but cannot necessarily explain underlying gender relations. Not everything can be surveyed or visualised, such as psychological well-being and domestic violence. Participatory methods can only address the causes of suffering when embedded in long processes of social change.

**The third** essential change lies within the organisations that seek *equitable* participatory development, as concepts and methods only work if supported by organisations and institutions in which they are nested. Experiences from Uganda, Zambia and India show time horizons of 3 to 8 years to integrate an intra-communal difference perspective into practice. Yet many organisations shirk long-term commitment. The crucial need for time to bring about equitable social change is often diametrically opposed to the speedy disbursement of funds or quick need for data that characterises many development initiatives - hence the need for institutional change at other levels.

Training programmes are one small step, but only if gender and participation are presented as integral components and if participants' personal experiences and views on gender are explored. Training-induced change can only be effective if organisational willingness and ability exists on other fronts (Goetz, 1997). For example, internal structures, including the position of female staff, and procedures, such as assessing staff performance in terms of equitable impact, strongly influence final impacts. Gender-focused and –disaggregated monitoring, difficult as it may be, will become critical in determining if changes in women's and men's perspectives alike have been transformed into concrete changes in their lives and livelihoods (Whitehead and Lockwood, 1999).

Meeting the challenge of *equitable* participatory development means integrating what are currently two approaches with their own principles and methods. The need to deal with conflict, inevitable in any social change process, may partly explain the reluctance of

participation advocates to commit to the social transformation goals of gender-aware development. Conflict brings us back full circle – to the importance of a participatory approach to gender-aware development. Stimulating empowerment in ways that women and/or men might not support not only threatens to expose vulnerable people to conflict but will also determine the extent to which they wish to engage in a process that may draw attention to deeply rooted conflicts. Participation is only inclusive of gendered views if those who drive the process want it to be, or if those involved demand it to be. Gender-sensitive and participatory techniques can help translate their intentions into practice.

***Irene Guijt, Consultant, Learning by Design***

### **Putting women in their place? Participation in Indian local governance**

Recent decades have witnessed an international trend towards democratic decentralisation (the shifting of power, functions, responsibility and accountability from national level to grassroots communities) in order to strengthen local governance. A significant contribution of this decentralisation is to provide constitutional status to women in local governments and enhance their political participation. A clear example is the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of India (1993), which transferred power to people in decentralised Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI – local government institutions), with one third reservation of seats for women. This paved the way for women to exercise their political rights in local governance, and is gradually giving a new thrust to more woman-friendly grassroots governance. However, it has not necessarily enabled them to influentially define priorities or address gender issues. The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA - a non-profit development organisation based in New Delhi) has developed innovative approaches to enhance the participation of women.

Women's entry into provincial politics has to a certain extent challenged social stigmas relating to their ability to exercise power, and altered the texture of daily politics by injecting different values, and perspectives, as well as a different atmosphere within Panchayats. Although it is important not to assume that women display more integrity than men, it has been suggested that political administration has improved because women are more accessible to the community than men, more transparent, and more effective in fighting grassroots corruption. They have also drawn attention to education, water, sanitation, fuel and alcohol abuse, issues which are generally not focused on by men (Akerkar, 1998). There are instances where women representatives break barriers, raise their voices and establish themselves as effective leaders. Women's knowledge, confidence and assertiveness within society and their families have been boosted by their new positions. There is also initial evidence that decentralised reservation encourages greater participation of less educated and more disadvantaged women, which otherwise would have been highly unlikely. For example, in the state of Karnataka, 44.3% of elected women only had up to primary education, 83% were married and 44% were under 35 years of age, suggesting that marriage, motherhood and age are not barriers to their political participation (SEARCH, 1998).

Yet women are still ostracised by political parties and crowded out from mainstream democracy on the basis of caste, class and poverty. Representation given to women has only minimally shifted the caste and class hold on power, as experience shows that women are more likely to associate and align with their caste than their gender (Vyasulu and Vyasulu, 1999). Men from scheduled castes and tribes, and poorer men, are also crowded out on this basis, as they too are subjected to the dominance of the upper strata population in decision-making processes. Women face further barriers to participation from indifferent attitudes of the male counterparts, and apathy of government officials towards women elected representatives.

The experience of women in Panchayats has been varied. Some are surrogates for husbands and fathers, and some were put into place by the wealthy and powerful for their malleability (Vyasulu and Vyasulu, 1999). This meant that in the affairs of the Gram Panchayat (institution of village governance), men did all the manoeuvring for their proxy women representatives. Male influence is of such high order that this peculiar power structure of elected women performing their duties under the stewardship of their husbands has thrown up a new tribe of power brokers called *sarpanch patis* (Raghunath, 2000). Reservations introduced from 'the top' which bring women into a predominantly male political system, cannot break traditional patterns of socio-economic and gendered power, nor bring awareness to women and marginalised sections overnight.

In view of the above, and in collaboration with the government and civil society organisations (CSOs), PRIA organised a series of training programmes for elected women representatives by using participatory training methodologies such as group discussions, role plays, simulations, and participatory exercise, with gender issues as a key component. As a result, women representatives were more able and confident to shoulder their political responsibilities and face negative attitudes of male counterparts. To scale up this initiative, 'Training of Trainers' was initiated to spread training more widely for elected representatives at grassroots level. To create greater space for women's participation a process of participatory bottom-up planning was set-up in collaboration with a local NGO, Gram Panchayat and CSOs. Issues were identified and prioritised at the village level and consolidated at the Panchayat level, ensuring women's participation and opportunity to raise gender problems.

In addition PRIA, with partner organisations, launched the Pre-Election Voter's Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) in 16 districts of Rajasthan. The objective was to create an enabling environment for free and fair elections, advocate for women representatives, and to enable gender issues to be raised. To increase effectiveness, a variety of communication methods such as folk theatre, puppet show, slogan writing, participatory videos, audio cassettes, distribution of pamphlets and manuals, a bicycle rally, march, and small group meetings were used (PRIA, 2000). Popular communication methods (pamphlets, posters, and pictures) and group meetings were found to be more effective for reaching women than the mass media, as they have greater access to them. One woman candidate was socially ostracised and abandoned by her husband, but with strong determination won a seat due to moral support from the campaign and villagers (PRIA, 2000). PRIA's practices have enhanced the participation of women in planning and decision-making, facilitating their control and access to processes which shape their own destiny.

Ensuring women's political participation through reservations is a first important step, but more is needed for fundamental changes in society. NGOs, CSOs and women's organisations need to increasingly network and share experiences on working with the government to increase dialogue on gender and quality of women's participation within the PRI system. Systematic and sustained efforts to motivate women to actively participate in local governance need to be accompanied by strong information and knowledge support through training and innovative communication, as well as participatory bottom-up processes. More attention needs to be focused on sensitising men as an integral part of such programmes. Without these, the promise of women's political participation offered by reservation of seats will not be effectively realised.

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## Coping with conflict: the case of Redd Barna Uganda

Differences in status and associated power between women and men, old and young, richer and poorer, make grassroots planning difficult if the aim is to represent the diversity of perspectives and interests in a community. Since 1994, Redd Barna Uganda<sup>1</sup> has acknowledged such differences within communities and adapted participatory approaches to provide innovative ways of incorporating a gendered perspective into community-based planning. Through a process of trial and error Redd Barna has adapted and modified participatory rural appraisal and planning (PRAP) techniques to ensure that gender and age-specific needs are systematically expressed, discussed and resolved. In so doing, it has managed to use participatory methodology to challenge gender and age power relations, which were previously accepted as the norm.

*Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning (PRAP) can be described as 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. (Adapted from Chambers and Blackburn, 1996).*

To ensure space for groups within the community to articulate their different concerns, Redd Barna divides the community into five discussion groups (older and married women, older men, younger men, younger women and children). By having their own separate analysis, groups are enabled to voice their concerns in a comfortable environment without being ridiculed or ignored. At the end of each day's discussion, an 'issues matrix'<sup>2</sup>, which maps each group's priority areas (see table 1), is completed. Each group then analyses the impact of other group-specific concerns on their own group and on the wider community, which guarantees marginalised group access to dominant group audiences (for example, older men). Greater understanding and tolerance of other community members' positions and concerns flows from this process. Facilitators use the matrix to encourage groups to analyse which issues matter for other groups in their community and why. Groups then prioritise possible solutions, and results are compiled and presented at regular community meetings (usually monthly). Eventually, communities devise a final matrix as an aid to feed into a community action plan (CAP) (Mukasa and Mugisha, 1999).

Redd Barna's approach, developed in conjunction with communities and partner organisations, has resulted in significant improvements in community understanding and unity. Issues have been discussed that were previously considered taboo. Marginalised groups have gained confidence by realising that others often share their concerns, and the matrix provides anonymity to women who raise controversial issues, protecting them from potential backlash from male relatives. 'In Oseera village, one elder woman finally plucked up the courage and took advantage of a general community meeting to air women's concerns about AIDS, child marriage and bearing many children' (Mukasa and Mugisha, 1999, p3). The inclusion process also gives attention to age dynamics that often go unnoticed, for example younger men have difficulty getting heard in community meetings dominated by older men. Redd Barna's adaptation of participatory methods has allowed community members to explore vulnerable groups' experiences, and resulting CAPs have led to community solutions which primarily benefit vulnerable groups (for example, easing women's water collection workload).

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<sup>1</sup> Redd Barna Uganda is one of the country programmes of Redd Barna, the Norwegian Save the Children NGO.

<sup>2</sup> The 'issues matrix' is a visualised summary to make it easier to share different issues in the wider community forum and is continually revised as old issues are dealt with and new ones arise.

**Table 1: Extract from the issues matrix of Kyakatebe**

<i>Issues raised initially</i>	C	YW	YM	OW	OM
Lack of clean water	X	X	X	X	X
Orphans	X	X	X	X	X
High level of school drop-outs	X	X	X	X	
HIV/AIDS		X	X	X	X
Land shortage fragmentation	X	X	X		X
Lack of fuelwood		X	X		X
Environmental degradation		X	X		X
Lack of local organization		X	X	X	
Situation of single mothers	X	X			
Punishment at school	X	X			
High rate of teenage pregnancies		X		X	
Taxation					X
Drunken teachers	X				

Notes: C=children; YW=younger women; YM=younger men; OW=older women; OM=older men

Source: Guijt et al, 1995

Although Redd Barna's approach has made large strides, common challenges remain. The interests of younger women and children are still often excluded from the CAPs, despite the fact that they are supposed to reflect priorities of the whole community. As CAPs build on community consensus, contentious issues and those of marginalised groups are generally sidelined. For example, in Kyakatebe the younger women were concerned about family planning, yet it did not appear in the CAP (Guijt et al, 1998), as other more dominant groups did not have the same view. Mukasa and Mugisha observe that young women display a deep lack of self-esteem in relation to other groups in the general community meetings and therefore a failure to consistently pursue their interests (1999). Older women in Makaloke, although they stressed the tangible benefits of community unity and increased freedom of speech, also highlighted increased tensions in household relations with their husbands (Guijt, 1997). There are dangers associated with participatory development and it is important to be sensitive to them rather than launching in with a participatory process and not thinking through potential consequences.

Parallel group action plans (GAPs) are now established alongside CAPs to ensure that groups with less power in the community have a place to deal with their concerns that never gain community consensus. GAPs are alternative models for marginalised groups to seek separate solutions that can be tailored to fit the dynamics of particular situations. Groups working on specific issues may therefore involve men and women working together. Women have expressed that group plans work better for them, as fewer varied opinions make their implementation easier, and more collective issues can still be included in the CAP (Guijt et al, 1998).

Despite the above changes Redd Barna still faces challenges in encouraging the participation of women, particularly young women. Their work has also arguably tended to benefit the better off more than the poorest, therefore greater attention should be paid to economic class as another differentiating factor. Inclusiveness of marginalised groups is an intensive process in terms of time, staff and costs, yet facilitators are under pressure to produce tangible results. This has to be increasingly balanced with the need for sensitive and patient facilitation to build the confidence of vulnerable groups to participate, as well as to change attitudes and hierarchies that hinder the development of women and children.

Ultimate success of participatory inclusiveness will depend on the attitudes and conduct of facilitators, community willingness to embrace changes, and time.

*Emma Bell, BRIDGE*

### **PRSPs: opportunity or barrier for gender?**

It makes sense for poverty alleviation interventions to reflect complex and diverse local experiences of poverty if they are to be credible, relevant and effective. But this does not always happen. With the introduction of government-led Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (PRSPs) the World Bank has acknowledged the importance of civil society in formulating national policy to tackle poverty. PRSPs are supposed to be based on participatory consultation and planning processes. Yet specifically designing these processes to address gender biases that limit the participation of different women (and men) in national policy processes, and to integrate gender analysis into poverty diagnosis poses a major challenge.

**PRSPs** – While many countries have already developed their own poverty reduction strategies the World Bank and the IMF have recently linked access to concessional lending and debt relief to the development of a poverty reduction strategy. This strategy, to be developed by governments in consultation with civil society and other stakeholders, is then to be summarised in a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and presented to the boards of the World Bank and the IMF. Countries that need to access funds quickly can develop an Interim PRSP (IPRSP), which is designed to offer guidance for developing the main PRSP and outline areas to focus on.

In order to access debt relief several countries have already advanced in the PRSP process. According to Tony Burdon, Policy Adviser with Oxfam “in the 14 PRSPs completed, gender as a cross-cutting issue has been addressed in variable ways, and generally in a weak manner” (Links, 2000). [For an up-to-date total of completed PRSPs and IPRSPs check the World Bank web site at <http://www1.worldbank.org/prsp/>]. Major decisions continue to be made by the IMF, World Bank and governments, whereas the voices of civil society actors have generally been marginalised (NGO PRSP meeting 10 April 2000 <http://www.worldbank.org/participation/ngo10apr.htm>). However, according to the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD), in some countries the PRSP process has resulted in higher levels of civil society–government interaction than in the past (2000).

Although there has been limited success so far, the PRSP process does provide entry points for participation by a range of civil society actors, including women’s organisations, at each stage of its development. The PRSP gender guidelines (World Bank web site) advise on gender-sensitive participatory approaches at the poverty diagnostic stage and in developing responsive, gender-based policy interventions. They also provide guidelines for participatory monitoring of indicators and tracking gender-differentiated impact of PRSP actions. Yet no mechanism currently exists within the World Bank, or within most national governments, to ensure that these guidelines or other gender-related criteria are adhered to. Therefore, it is critical that stakeholders such as NGOs, donors, the international community, trade unions, and women’s groups advocate for incorporation of gender-sensitive participatory methods. In Kenya, the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development successfully lobbied for the participation of gender advocates in the national stakeholder dialogue. This led to the inclusion of many of their demands in the IPRSP and subsequent budgetary commitment 2000/2001 (Shiverenge, 2000).

Aside from some success with improving dialogue between civil society and governments, there are few best practice examples to guide the incorporation of gender-aware participatory research methods into the PRSP process. However, valuable insights on how to achieve this aim can be gained from the experience of previous efforts to bridge the gap between participatory research on poverty and the policy agenda. Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), for example, are described as 'a programme of participatory research – and in some cases other activities - which aims to bring the voices of the poor into policy dialogue about poverty and measures to reduce it' (McGee with Norton, 2000, p27).

It is important not to ignore possible divergences between the voices of the poor that PPAs supposedly elicit at the poverty diagnostic stage, and the voices of civil society organisations (CSOs) with a feminist agenda. At the same time, it should not be assumed that PPAs offer an accurate representation of a gendered experience of poverty (Cornwall, pers. comm.). PPAs, if they include an awareness of gender at all, generally produce sex-specific findings that portray men and women as isolated from the web of social relationships that condition their vulnerability to poverty and ill-being. This can result in masking other areas of social and economic difference such as age and ethnicity (Cornwall, 2000). Moreover, in their study of six Poverty Assessments (PAs), Whitehead and Lockwood (1999) conclude that even where PPAs were used to inform the Poverty Assessments, gender-related findings had almost disappeared by the time the final policy sections were reached. Similarly, the PRSP process in Uganda reveals that the potential for gender-disaggregated data to challenge gender-blind policies on poverty is generally 'lost' during the extremely political and complex process of policy formulation and implementation (Burdon, 2000).

The South African and Jamaican PPAs went further than any previous ones to illuminate women's experience within heterosexual relationships. The team included feminist researchers and NGO workers who ensured that women's interests stayed on the agenda throughout synthesis, policy analysis and writing and invited the engagement of actors who were able to make this happen (Cornwall, 2000). Nevertheless, as they failed to include the experiences of men, they resembled a women-focused rather than a balanced gender perspective.

If PRSPs are to fulfil their potential to integrate gender aware participatory approaches, the following is recommended for bilateral and multilateral donors, international NGOs, national governments and CSOs: -

- Establish standards by which to measure the quality of gender-aware participation and participatory gender analysis, and develop projects to monitor them.
- Build government capacity and commitment to using participatory approaches for the PRSP process and to effectively respond to gender concerns.
- Support the development of advocacy skills of local groups committed to gender equality to engage effectively with the PRSP process.
- Ensure that approaches to participatory research and policy dialogue address the gender biases that currently limit the participation of marginalised groups.
- Integrate and use feminist participatory research and analysis on the local poverty situation to inform priorities for action.

**Emma Bell, BRIDGE**



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Coming soon – Cutting Edge Knowledge Pack on gender and participation. This pack includes:

- a report outlining the main issues, examples of good practice and recommendations; and
- supporting resource collection (contact details of relevant organisations and summaries of key texts, case studies, tools, and online resources).

BRIDGE (development-gender) is an information analysis service specialising in gender and development issues. BRIDGE's aim is to assist development professionals in government and non-government organisations to integrate gender concerns into their work. Based at the Institute of Development Studies, in the UK, BRIDGE was set up with financial assistance from OECD-DAC agencies. Thank you to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) who funded this issue of *in brief*.

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