



## Gender Issues in Participation

*The full participation of both men and women in policymaking, in economic and sectoral analysis, and in project design and management, may be impeded by cultural and legal constraints which limit women's participation, and by women's relative lack of time and mobility due to their workload and multiple roles. If participatory development is to benefit from women's contributions, and meet the particular needs of women, a range of strategic and practical measures must be taken to overcome these barriers.*

### Why a Pro-active Approach is Needed

Experience in participatory development has made clear that, unless specific steps are taken to ensure the full participation of men and women, that women are very often excluded. As a result, projects fail to benefit from women's contributions and fail to meet the particular needs and interests of women. A World Bank evaluation of 121 rural water supply projects, for example, found that even in a sector where women carried the greater share of responsibility, they appeared to benefit only in the 17% of water projects which had been specifically designed to involve women.

The causes are deeply embedded in social and legal institutions. Men and women play different roles, have different needs and face different constraints in responding to macroeconomic or sectoral policy changes, and to the specific opportunities provided by development projects and programs. Systemic gender biases often exist in the form of:

- laws and customs which impede women's access to property ownership, credit, productive inputs, employment, education, information, or medical care;
- customs, beliefs and attitudes which confine women mostly to the domestic sphere; and

- unpaid domestic and farm workloads which impose severe time burdens on women.

Imbalances in the division of labor between men and women and in access to education and productive resources have important implications, not only for equity, but also for economic output, productivity, food security, fertility and child welfare. And they profoundly affect men's and women's different capacities and incentives to participate in economic and social development.

Overcoming these systemic biases requires a pro-active approach. In the long run, the equal participation of men and women depends on strategic measures, policy and institutional changes, to tackle the root causes of gender inequalities and remove the constraints to women's involvement in public life. Examples of such measures in Bank supported programs include: legal reforms granting women full rights to land tenure and ownership in Honduras (a condition for tranche release under the Agricultural Sector Credit); incentives to encourage the enrolment of more girls in secondary schools in Bangladesh; and efforts to make government agencies more accountable to women in El Salvador. In addition, a variety of practical measures, taking account of existing gender-based constraints, can facilitate the participation of women in specific projects or activities.

This note is based on the paper written by Michael Bamberger, Mark Blackden and Abeba Taddese as a contribution to the Participation Sourcebook. This note was originally published as Environment Department Dissemination Note Number 25 (now out of print). Copies of the Sourcebook are available for sale from the World Bank Publications, Fax: 703-661-1501, Telephone: 703-661-1580, website: <http://www.worldbank.org> and click on publications.

*The views expressed in this note are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the World Bank.*

### **Box 1. Involving Women in Policy Work**

In the Morocco WID Sector Strategy, poor rural and urban women were given the opportunity to articulate their needs and priorities through a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) process which provoked discussion among community members about development and gender issues, and sought their views in formulating national policy objectives.

The women's concerns and priorities differed from those of the men and from those of other stakeholder groups. First and foremost, before progress could be made on other objectives, was the need to reduce women's daily burdens, by improving their access to fuel and water, introducing collective ovens for bread baking, and improving health care. Second were measures to improve their incomes, where women viewed agricultural extension services and access to credit as most important. Third were measures needed to secure the future, including female education and strengthening community based institutions. The group interactions helped men to understand how the constraints on women impact on the family and the village as a whole. The collective solutions which emerged were supported by men as well as women.

The new perspectives gained from the PRA surveys were applied in defining the recommended program of action.

for strengthening women's participation, is to obtain good information—on gender roles, existing institutions, and the constraints operating against women's participation—through a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative social assessments. To be effective, assessments must be designed specifically to elicit the views of women. Often, gender awareness training is needed for facilitators or interviewers.

### **At the Policy Level**

Gender issues are receiving more attention in the Bank's country economic and sector work. However, it is still rare, even in participatory sector operations, for women's participation to be sought explicitly in carrying out this work. The Morocco Women in Development Sector Strategy (box 1) provides a model for involving women in policy work which could well be replicated in other sectors and countries.

Women in Development assessments (which were completed for 40 countries in the five years to 1994), and recent Poverty Assessments which were designed expressly to yield gender-differentiated data (box 2), have usually involved less intense participation by women. Nonetheless, they have produced valuable gender analysis and policy proposals for enhancing women's capacity to contribute to, and participate in, the development process.

The crucial next step, which is starting to receive more attention, is integrating the results of this work into the Bank's country assistance strategies. The 1993 Country Economic

## **Addressing Gender Issues**

Surprisingly few developing countries systematically gather and report statistics disaggregated by sex, or carry out systematic gender analysis. The first step towards incorporating gender issues in the policymaking process, and determining appropriate measures

The crucial next step, which is starting to receive more attention, is integrating the results of this work into the Bank's country assistance strategies. The 1993 Country Economic

### **Box 2. Addressing Gender Issues in Poverty Assessments**

Poverty assessments, through quantitative survey methods as well as qualitative methods used in Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), can provide important information on gender differences in labor force participation, coping mechanisms, and how men and women perceive poverty and ways to reduce it. Some of the most recent poverty assessments have been designed explicitly to generate gender-specific data on a wide range of questions.

In the **PPA in Cameroon**, fifty percent of the interviewers and fifty percent of those interviewed were women. The resulting information was fully integrated in the subsequent analysis and recommendations, with strong policy implications. For example, women in Cameroon were found to be shouldering most of the burden of producing and marketing food. One of the specific actions proposed for improving food security was to target small scale women farmers with a "productivity package" of critical agricultural inputs. The PA confirmed the heavy workload of women. As a result, urgent action was recommended to give women access to transport and to time and labor saving technology, to allow them the opportunity to develop their own skills and participate in community projects.

**The Zambia Poverty Assessment** also focused on collecting sex-disaggregated data related to the division of labor and the implications of time constraints on female labor. Most poor households in rural Zambia were found to be male-headed, using traditional technologies, and practicing gender-specific labor allocation which put extreme pressure on women's time, especially in the peak months of planting and harvesting. In modelling rural household behavior, the study estimated that the value of crop production per household member was more than doubled in those households where labor was allocated between tasks on a gender-neutral basis.

Memorandum for Uganda, for example, was combined with the Poverty Assessment and highlighted the economic and social implications of various forms of gender discrimination. The poverty profile was supplemented by the results of a rapid poverty appraisal soliciting the opinions of rural men and women. In response to the problems identified, the Ugandan government is giving priority to reforms, including legal reforms, that will raise the incomes and status of women.

### **At the Institutional Level**

Designing and implementing gender responsive policies depends on developing appropriate institutional capacity, including changes in the responsible public agencies. When sociocultural constraints are severe, promoting separate units within government ministries to provide segregated women's services may be the only workable strategy. However, this tends to result in limited, small scale women's programs which are peripheral to mainstream activities. With sufficient general awareness of gender differences and inequities, it is possible to incorporate gender in mainstream programs, create incentives to support gender responsiveness and make line agencies accountable to both men and women clients.

In El Salvador, for example, public agencies are moving away from a segregated strategy to a more systematic gender approach. The National Center for Agricultural and Forestry Technology (CENTA) eliminated its women's program in 1994. It is taking steps to incorporate gender systematically into planning, monitoring, training, extension and research and has modified its organizational structure to ensure that gender issues are addressed effectively. Since putting these institutional changes into effect, CENTA has been able to increase the participation of women in its extension programs. Other agencies are following CENTA's lead. The government is now supporting an initiative, to be funded by the Bank's Institutional Development Fund, to promote public sector capacity building and accountability in gender.

When public agencies are not responsive to the particular needs of women, and when cultural constraints inhibit women from voicing their opinions freely, women's groups at the community level—and the regional or national NGOs which are supporting them—play a particularly important role. Strengthening the

capacity of these organizations increases women's ability to find ways of meeting their own needs and of contributing to community development. For example, the Poverty Assessment in Kenya highlighted the importance of the many rural women's self-help groups in the coping strategies of the poor. Proposals to strengthen these groups, based on the findings of this assessment, include legal registration, so that groups are eligible for credit; technical and business management training of group members; and the extension of micro-enterprise credit to the groups.

### **At the Project Level**

If both men and women are to participate, gender issues must be addressed from the outset, gender constraints identified, and steps taken to ensure that the perspective and concerns of women are incorporated fully in project design (as in the Togo Urban Development Project described in box 3).

Appropriate measures vary depending on the particular social and political context, the exact nature of the constraints operating against women, and the type of activity in which their

#### **Box 3. Gender Awareness in Project Design**

In designing the **Togo Urban Development Project**, gender awareness was explicitly incorporated in the participatory process. Initial studies revealed that women had almost exclusive responsibility at the household level for the sanitary environment, for providing water, managing waste and for family health. They also found that knowledge of the links between health, clean water and hygiene was extremely limited.

During the pre-appraisal mission, the first two meetings with community elders, held in the chief's compound, included no women and the Bank team suggested holding a separate meeting where the women could articulate their priorities and concerns. The following day the chief's wife chaired a meeting attended by about 50 women from the community. The same questions were asked of them as were asked of the men, and a local consultant served as translator and intermediary. The main concerns, which differed from those of the men, were: men's unemployment; the need for market upgrading, including standpipes, latrines and central play space for children; access to drinking water; access to finance and credit; and training in management, hygiene, health and literacy. The women's agenda was incorporated in the final project design which included employment generation through labor intensive public works, and a training program in environmental management geared to the needs of a largely illiterate and mostly female population.

participation is sought. Constraints affecting women more than men may include any combination of legal or cultural obstacles, time constraints, lack of access to information, illiteracy, lack of transport, or lack of access to finance. The following are some examples of the approaches taken to facilitate women's participation in recent Bank supported projects.

When the obstacles to women's participation are severe, there is a case for targeting women's needs and designing projects exclusively for women—as in the Women in Agriculture Project in Nigeria, and the Women in Development Project in Gambia. Integration of the women's activities into mainstream programs can occur once the environment for their participation has been created.

In some cases, the representation of women has been ensured by making it mandatory. Under the Yemen Education Sector Credit, for example, it was specified that at least one third of the workshop participants should be women. Similarly, in the Benin Health Services Project, it was stipulated that each village health committee must include at least one mother.

Working through separate, women-only groups is often the preferred option and, depending on cultural conditions, there may be little alternative. In the Phalombe Rural Development Project in Malawi, women opted for their own women-only farmers' groups instead of mixed sex groups. They felt freer to discuss and develop their ideas with extension workers. Also, having better repayment rates than men, they preferred to obtain credit in women-only clubs. In the Matruh Resource Management Project in Egypt, when no women showed up at the public PRA sessions, parallel women-only sessions were held to ensure that the project design reflected women's views as well as men's.

Whether women meet with men or on their own, their workload often makes it more difficult for them to attend meetings. As their domestic responsibilities often require them to stay close to the home, lack of mobility may be a constraint as well as shortage of time. Various practical measures, from providing childcare facilities to

installing standpipes which reduce the time spent in fetching water, can make it easier for women to attend meetings or training sessions. In particular, the choice of time and place for meetings must take account of women's schedules (see Box 4) and the availability of safe transport.

Similarly, special measures may be needed to ensure that women have equal access to project information and are not prevented from communicating their concerns or participating in decisionmaking by illiteracy or relative lack of education. This may involve, for example, targeting women in promotional campaigns, training project staff in gender awareness, hiring female community workers, ensuring that meetings are conducted in the local dialect, or finding creative ways (akin to the techniques used in PRA) for illiterate women to take responsibility for project monitoring and evaluation.

For instance, after the initial promotional campaign for the pilot phase of Ethiopia's Social Rehabilitation Fund, it was learned that women were not submitting proposals. In the next phase, therefore, promotional activities are targeting more women's groups, community organizers are being sensitized to the important role played by women, and more women are being hired as community organizers. A particularly successful technique for disseminating information in the Gambia WID Project has been to train women in operating video cameras and in documenting their activities, to share and exchange information with other women.

#### **Box 4. Enabling Women to Attend Meetings**

In the **Nigeria Women in Agriculture (WIA) Project**, specific steps were taken to reduce the conflicts in women's schedules and facilitate regular attendance at meetings. Each group meets on the same day at the same time and place; reminders about the meetings are posted at highly visible and accessible locations; and, if the scheduled day conflicts with a market day, the women are consulted in advance and an alternative time agreed. Consequently, women rarely face the problem of not knowing where and when the meetings are held. The meeting site is selected after the WIA agent has introduced herself and explained the purpose of her visit to the village head. He, in turn, informs male household heads who then give their permission for wives to attend meetings.

