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Irene Guijt

The myth of community: ...

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Waking up to Power, Conflict and Process

Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah

“For many, PRA seeks to empower lowers - women, minorities, the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable and to make power reversals real.” (Chambers, 1997:106)

“Gender was hidden [in participatory research] in seemingly inclusive terms: ‘the people’, ‘the oppressed’, ‘the campesinos’, or simply ‘the community’. It was only when comparing ... projects that it became clear that ‘the community’ was all too often the male community.” (Maguire, 1996:29-30)

Introduction

The cutting edge of development practice in the 1990s is described in terms of ‘participation’, ‘community-driven action’, and ‘empowerment’. The broad aim of participatory development is to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised¹ people in decision-making over their own lives. The assumption is that participatory approaches empower local people with the skills and confidence to analyse their situation, reach consensus, make decisions and take action, so as to improve their circumstances. The ultimate goal is more equitable and sustainable development.

Yet in many cases where participation has been pursued something is going wrong. Despite the espoused intentions of social inclusion, it has become clear that many participatory development initiatives do not deal well with the complexity of community differences including age, economic, religious, caste, ethnic, and, in particular, gender. Looking back, it is apparent that ‘community’ has often been viewed naively, or in practice dealt with as a harmonious and internally equitable collective. Too often there has been an inadequate understanding of the internal dynamics and differences, that are so crucial to positive outcomes. This mythical notion of community cohesion continues to permeate much participatory work, hiding a bias that favours the opinions and priorities of those with more power and the ability to voice themselves publicly. In particular, there is a minimal consideration of gender issues and inadequate involvement of women. While a handful of women may sometimes be consulted, rarely does a thorough understanding of the complexity of gender relations help structure the process, the analysis, and any resulting community plans. Some view a gender-neutral participatory approach, at times with pride, as non-intrusive and culturally sensitive. However, it is the theme of this book that the language and practice of ‘participation’ often obscures women’s worlds, needs, and contributions to development, making equitable participatory development an elusive goal.

It is somewhat bewildering that the fields of participatory development and gender have

¹ Marginalised refers to those groups (and individuals) that have less access to and therefore exert less influence over decisions that are made on behalf of the collective good. This type of development is less likely to benefit them.

remained far apart, both in theory and practice, despite their shared goals of social inclusion² and societal transformation. More gender-responsive forms of participatory research and development would have many benefits. Misunderstanding or ignoring women's needs not only affect the women themselves but also, quite obviously, have a negative impact on the immediate family and the wider community. Greater involvement of women and attention to gender-differentiated needs holds the promise of much more effective and equitable processes of participatory development. The outcomes are more likely to be meaningful for all those involved. Furthermore, the process of inclusion, if constructed appropriately, can help raise women's confidence, open up space for their views, and ease oppressive gender relations (Frischmuth³, Bilgi, Kaul Shah, Guijt et al).

Community-based⁴ action remains a powerful and essential vehicle for development, as long as it explicitly addresses gender and other dimensions of social difference. Making false claims to empowerment and inclusion when this is, in fact, not the case, will only undermine the current interest in participation for development (Green; Guijt and Cornwall, 1995).

This book urges those engaged in participatory development to understand gender differences in community and to integrate gender thinking in participatory practice. The contributions have been arranged into three sections: (1) Theoretical Reflections; (2) Sharing Experiences in Research and Action, and (3) Institutional Processes.

This introductory chapter sets the context for the whole book and provides a rationale for each of the three sections. First, the chapter discusses how participatory development has come to pay so little attention to community differences, focusing on the problem of simplistic notions of community, participation, and empowerment. The chapter then describes how development organizations are slowly waking up to the importance of these issues. This chapter summarises the collective insights from the contributors to this book in terms of the three sections mentioned above:

1. improving **conceptual understanding** about community, gender, participation, and empowerment;
2. developing **improved methodologies** that allow for better gender-based analysis and a more meaningful involvement of women;
3. creating **institutional change** that will result in organizational cultures and support structures that promote, enable and implement improved conceptual understanding and methodological development.

² They have even developed very similar methods, such as the 24 Hour Day (Moser, 1993) and the daily routines that are common in PRA-based work.

³ Where authors are cited with no date, this refers to contributions in this volume.

⁴ Despite its limitations, the term 'community' is used widely in this book. Community refers to a geographic collective (as compared to a generic use of community such as in 'the global community', 'the gay community', etc): a group of people who live (full and/or part-time) in a locality and are connected by a web of emotional, economic, and/or relational bonds and a culture, and share a set of values, norms, and meanings. Within the community, there are, of course, social sub-groups who share sub-sets of values, norms, and meanings.

Understanding the Roots of Gender Naivety in Participatory Development

To know how to improve current practice, it is essential to understand how the problems have emerged. This section examines the factors that have contributed to the gender naivety of much participatory development. It is necessary to explain this from both an historical and conceptual perspective. The first two parts of this section reflect on the evolution of participatory development and gender studies and the links - or more to the point, lack of links - between them. This sets a context for discussing the conceptual, definitional and ultimately practical confusion that has beset the use of the terms community, participation and empowerment.

Historical Factors in the Evolution of Participatory Development

Despite the recent explosion of interest in participatory development, it is not a new phenomenon. Early initiatives that stress empowerment and collective local action include among others, the New Deal in India in the 1930s (Eyben and Ladbury, 1995) and community development programmes in Latin America in the 1950's (Huizer, 1979). While important precursors, they did not generate the frenetic levels of global interest that exist today. This has arisen mainly since the 1970s (see Box 1), when government and non-government agencies alike increasingly set out to structure processes to 'help amplify traditionally unacknowledged voices' (Slocum and Thomas-Slayter, 1995). These processes have often explicitly aimed to transfer some degree of control over natural and social resources to those previously without such power. They offer methods and strategies for increasing ownership by 'the community' over its own development.

Box 1. Key Phases in Externally-initiated, Structured Participatory Processes in Development

1. Need for Alternatives

During the 1970's, despite some early experimentation with externally-initiated forms of devolved local development, frustration rose over the ineffectiveness of the dominant externally imposed and 'expert' orientated forms of research and planning (Chambers, 1992). One of the main concerns was the lack of incorporation of local people's perspectives, priorities, and skills in development interventions. This trend led to a search for alternative methods for data collection and planning. A second source of methodological rethinking started earlier, in the 1950s and 60s, driven by concerns about 'giving voice to the voiceless' and social transformation (Freire, 1970; Rahman, 1984). This helped to define basic principles to guide people's empowerment in their own development processes. While there was a strong focus on empowerment for poverty alleviation, gender issues were not mentioned explicitly and the poor were largely viewed as a homogenous group.

2. The Participation Boom

The mid 1980s saw great activity, mainly amongst grassroots activists and NGOs, in seeking alternatives to outsider-driven development approaches. There was much experimenting with new research and planning approaches that incorporated the methods and the principles identified earlier on, creating a bewildering array of approaches and acronyms. The focus was on respecting and understanding insider/local knowledge, to balance the dominance of outsider/Western scientific knowledge. Very few of the approaches explicitly addressed the

social relations of gender or identified the need for gender-sensitive methods. Where gender issues were addressed it tended to be through specific projects or components of projects rather than as a core part of participatory planning processes. The 1980s witnessed the first feminist critiques of mainstream participation (Maguire, 1987) and growth of feminist research (Mies, 1983) - but this critique was not taken on by mainstream development practice.

3. The Participation Imperative

The early 1990s witnessed frenzied levels of global interest in participatory methodologies, the new synonym for 'good' or 'sustainable' development. It also marked the beginning of what some critics have called the new methodological 'tyranny' (Bell, 1994). Funding bodies began demanding that 'participatory processes', become a condition for funding. This has continued unabated. The push for participation stimulated the production of countless guides, handbooks, courses, and networks, many contributing in very positive ways to development thinking and practice. However, there was little consensus about what constituted quality work and failures and difficulties were common, provoking considerable and helpful criticism. Criticism about the lack of attention to gender issues (notably Welbourn, 1991) has resulted from the recent growing involvement of gender specialists and feminist thinking in participatory development.

4. The Paradoxes of Participation

The situation today reveals two paradoxes in participatory development. The first involves the standardisation of approaches. This trend contradicts one of the original aims, to move away from the limitations of blueprint planning and implementation towards more flexible and context-specific methodologies. A second, related, paradox lies in the technical, rather than empowerment-oriented, use of 'participatory' methods. A manual and method-oriented mania has led many to claim 'successful' participatory development, despite only a superficial understanding of the underlying empowerment principles that were at the root of much pioneering work.

Source: adapted from Guijt, 1996.

Participatory research and development was mainly pioneered in the field through trial and error. Some of the earlier efforts undoubtedly arose as challenges to the dominant power structures. Yet participatory processes have been increasingly approached as technical, management solutions to what are basically political issues, including the micro-politics of gender. Many of the individuals involved have not realised the implications of gender relations on development. If they have, they have been unable to implement their gender-sensitive intentions because of a methodological hiatus and/or organizational disinterest. It has often been assumed that the presence of women at community gatherings, alongside men, means that women and their issues are being included. This assumption completely ignores the dynamics of gender relations with significant implications for the validity of the participatory process.. Conversely, attempts to work separately with women and women's projects have suffered the fate of not being reintegrated with the dominant decision-making structures within the community, resulting in little change to social relations (Humble; Bilgi; Kaul Shah; Frischmuth; Sarin).

Many entrenched obstacles have hindered addressing even practical gender needs, not to mention the more structural changes needed to redress power imbalances in gender relations. Six factors stand out as particularly important:

- Development was largely driven by a poverty alleviation agenda, and analysis of social difference was limited to those below and those above a theoretical 'poverty line'. Caste and economic differences fitted better in this view of development than gender issues, and efforts focused on creating space for 'the poor' and understanding their issues, notably through wealth ranking (Grandin, 1988).
- The professionals initially involved were mainly male, making communication with women culturally difficult in many areas. Also, as gender theories were not yet widespread in the 1970s, they were generally not exposed to gender analysis. The context in which participatory research emerged "centred around male power, perceptions, problems, and experiences" (de Koning and Martin, 1996).
- Building rapport with women and negotiating changes with the men took courage and time, making gender-inclusiveness an unappealing task (Frischmuth, Kaul Shah). Unacceptability of what was considered, by some, to be a western and imposed feminist agenda created further resistance to the analysis of social relations of gender. Focusing on women's practical concerns was an escape route for field workers from the time-consuming and difficult process of negotiating more structural changes with women and men alike.
- The influence of little and poor quality documentation on participation on perpetuating poor practice should not be underestimated. Many early reports describe one-off training consultancies. Little attention was paid to the complex processes of social change, the depth of conceptual analysis required, and the types of organizational follow-up that make or break these approaches. Too much was claimed of participation too early, without first undertaking intensive and lengthy engagements with communities (Shah and Kaul Shah, 1995). This situation continues.
- Many efforts focused, and continue to do so, on appraisal rather than community-based planning and implementation. The lack of efforts to engage communities in thorough planning processes, when more contentious decisions must be made that reveal stark differences in priorities, means participatory planning has been documented mainly as wishful thinking rather than on the basis of actual experiences. Common statements in the literature about the planning process are 'and then a community plan was identified'. The appraisal focus allowed participatory practice to skirt decision-making conflicts and ignore the need for conflict resolution skills.
- Too much pressure from donors to incorporate gender concerns in projects has resulted in many organizations taking up gender issues in a mechanistic fashion.. they are incorporated in many programmes only to meet a requirement for resource mobilization. This has not allowed organizations to let gender issues evolve in an organic manner as part of pursuing participatory processes. This has also led to resistance from many indigenous organizations as 'gender' is perceived to be an agenda imposed from outside.

Chambers' (1997) summary of the theoretical influences on PRA shed further light on the lack of gender awareness in its practice. He identifies five fields of particular importance to current practice: action-reflection research; agro-ecosystem analysis; applied anthropology; field research on farming systems, and rapid rural appraisal. Despite the rich and varied

contributions of each of these fields, none, except anthropology⁵, were informed significantly by gender studies. Therefore, they could not contribute the much-needed gender awareness that is the focus of this book. More recent methodological inspiration has come from soft systems approaches to problem solving, chaos theories, social sciences (particularly postmodernity), and business management (Chambers, 1997). Again, none of these are striking in their integration of or contribution to gender-aware perspectives on social change. While Chambers refers only to PRA, other participatory approaches (and there are many!⁶) share similar methodological roots. However, at last, gender studies, feminism, and feminist participatory research is beginning to have its impact on participatory development, as testified by the contributions in this book.. However, as now to be discussed criticisms can also be made of the failure of gender studies to address itself to participatory development issues.

The Ambiguous Contribution of Gender Studies

In the 1980s feminist participatory research emerged, aiming to link scholarship and activism to change , rather than simply describe, social reality(Mies, 1983). Yet such feminist approaches have had only a marginal influence on mainstream development to date. The women-in-development and gender and development fields were more influential, but also suffered limitations. The belated entry of gender studies, into the field of participatory development needs to be understood as in part resulting from the nature of gender studies itself.

1. Their focus has largely been conceptual with limited translation⁷, until recently, of ideas into practices applicable to sectors such as participatory development. As Humble (this volume) argues: “Gender and development is a concept in search of a methodology”. The relative unpopularity amongst gender specialists of spending time in the field at the grassroots level as opposed to attending international conferences such as Beijing, sits alongside a tendency to focus on publications and presentations. Where methodological development did occur, it was largely driven by outsiders’ interest in information for

⁵ The contribution of anthropology to development practice has been limited by the chasm between the worlds of academics and practitioners, although this situation is improving slightly.

⁶ AEA: Agroecosystems Analysis; BA: Beneficiary Assessment; DELTA: Development Education Leadership Teams; D&D: Diagnosis and Design; DRP: Diagnostico Rural Participativo; DRPA: Diagnostico Rural Participativo de Agroecosistemas; GRAAP: Groupe de Recherche et d’Appui pour l’Auto-Promotion Paysanne; LLAP: Local Level Adaptive Planning; MARP: Methode Active de Recherche et de Planification Participatif; PALM: Participatory Learning Methods; PAR: Participatory Action Research; PIDA: Participatory Integrated Development Approach; PR: Participatory Research; PRM: Participatory Research Methodology/Participatory Resource Management; PRA: Participatory Rural Appraisal; PRAP: Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning; PTD: Participatory Technology Development; PUA: Participatory Urban Appraisal; Planning for Real; RAAKS: Rapid Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Systems; RAP: Rapid Assessment Procedure; RAT: Rapid Assessment Techniques; RCA: Rapid Catchment Analysis; REA: Rapid Ethnographic Assessment; REFLECT: Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques; RFSA: Rapid Food Security Assessment; RMA: Rapid Multi-Perspective Appraisal; ROA: Rapid Organizational Analysis; RRA: Rapid Rural Appraisal; Samuhik Brahman (joint trek); SSM: Soft Systems Methodology; Theatre for Development; Training for Transformation; VIPP: Visualization in Participatory Programmes; OOPP: Objective-Oriented Participatory Planning

⁷ Only recently have more applied gender analysis and planning approaches been developed for sectors, in particular irrigation, forestry, agriculture, and health.

others to plan more appropriately (for example, Feldstein and Jiggins, 1995; Feldstein and Poats, 1989), rather than local analysis and planning.

2. Inadequate attention has been paid to understanding and changing institutional contexts, with most efforts aimed at clarifying gender roles. While descriptions of who does what can help identify development needs, they fall short of dealing with the institutions and processes that underpin unequal power relations. Shaw (1995) writes: "To be successful, mobilization that is initiated by participatory researchers must be actively supported in the face of opposition", yet time constraints and academic requirements of many gender scholars have often precluded this type of involvement.
3. Facilitators dealing with gender analysis often have a poor understanding of local women's organizations, and work insufficiently with local gender specialists⁸, and rarely consider the positive local experiences with organising women (such as the influential video experiences of SEWA, India; Jumani, 1985). Even feminist participatory researchers have generally failed to break down the dominance of Western researchers over their Southern subjects, despite their explicit attempts to do so (Shaw, 1995). Mohanty (1991) has criticised Western gender specialists for falling into a feminist trap of 'community averages' by conflating Third World women's realities into one type of oppressive experience.

Gender specialists are committed to changing oppressive gender relations. Their radical contributions lie at the very heart of the articles here. Yet all too often, gender, in practice has only meant women. This has provoked resistance from many men and has made a ghetto of the gender agenda. Gender has remained the responsibility and domain of a few women specialists, who have only slowly started transforming the theoretical into practical, in organizational cultures dominated by male management. Training agents of change, rather than local people, has been the main vehicle for this change - a necessary but inadequate condition (Rao et al, 1991; Levy, 1992). Organizational policies on gender equity are also popular. But the limited translation to field practices remains a key constraint to meaningful implementation of new skills and policies.

Simplification of Community

The use of 'community' as the unit of analysis for much work that passes as participatory is problematic and has a long history. Bryson and Mowbray (1981) describe how, well over a century ago, "the ideal of a culturally and politically homogeneous, participatory local social system gained acceptability and currency". Its widespread use today led one early commentator to describe it as: 'the aerosol word of the 1970s because of the hopeful way it is sprayed over deteriorating institutions' (Jones, 1977, cited in Bryson and Mowbray, 1981). It evokes images of meeting people's real needs and widespread participation at the grassroots level, thus creating a normative sense of 'a good thing'. The focus of much participatory work on 'community meetings' as the forum for decision-making, representing perceptions in

⁸ During a 1993 Gender Training of Trainers workshop, participants from Latin America, Asia, and Africa berated the gender trainers from Europe and North America, for failing to call on local gender knowledge when flying in for consultancies and research.

terms of *'the community map'* as if only one view exists, and striving for a single 'community action plan' (or 'village' equivalents) that will somehow meet the needs of the entire community, are signs of this ongoing simplification. Inequalities, oppressive social hierarchies, and discrimination are often overlooked, and enthusiasm generated for the cooperative and harmonious ideal promised by the imagery of 'community'.

Etzioni (1996), makes five points of criticism about community as a unit of analysis and intervention (before refuting them):

- 'community' is poorly defined, leading to confusion and a lack of focus for action;
- the normative use of community feeds political conservatism by conveniently ignoring 'the darker side of traditional communities';
- communities never existed in the way people romanticise them today;
- due to the focus on majority rule in community processes, minority groups may lose out;
- a community focus may be culturally oppressive if members experience social pressure to abide by cultural norms and rules that are not truly shared.

Clearly, communities are neither homogenous in composition and concerns, nor necessarily harmonious in their relations. Participatory approaches have ignored these simple social realities. Alice Welbourn has wryly described PRA⁹ as suffering from 'HBS' - the 'homogenous blob syndrome' (IIED/IDS, 1993). As mentioned above, many approaches have been successful to varying degrees about discerning who is better-off and worse-off, partly facilitated by the method of wealth ranking (Grandin, 1988). As for gender issues, less commitment and a lack of easy methods has led many organizations and professionals to fall into the trap of community averages (Guijt and Kaul Shah, 1993). Any gender differences¹⁰ that might appear in fieldwork usually disappears into the melting pot of an 'average community plan'.

Another, practical, problem appears when attempting to describe the boundaries of a community. As the general mobility of society worldwide intensifies, it becomes increasingly difficult to know who belongs where. Some countries do not have clear settlement patterns, like communities or villages, around which people organise their lives and with which they identify (Guijt and Sidersky, forthcoming). In others, out-migration (periodic or long-term) has stretched community boundaries and created 'part-time insiders'. Those who receive an education outside the community and return with a new way of thinking can find themselves neither one nor the other. Dynamic community boundaries and composition highlights the limited value of using the notion of a united community with one set of priority needs.

Nevertheless, while some critics may see the focus on 'community' as a strategy to further conservative politics and reduce government spending, 'community' is still important. Community-based or community-level development has, for example helped and empowered people, improved services, enhanced self-confidence, harnessed energies for the collective

⁹ Though this criticism is by no means exclusive to PRA.

¹⁰ Clearly, differences between women and between men are equally significant (Cornwall, Sarin, Guijt et al).

good, influenced policy directions, and led to more appropriate research. But it cannot be expected to be the only or even major vehicle for social change. Assumptions about homogeneity or harmony need to be replaced with greater recognition of conflicting interests within communities and the methodological implications of such differences. Professionals must be astute and self-critical enough to recognise when community interventions become “part of the legitimisation process which ultimately supports existing social relations” and hence further entrench community level inequality and powerlessness (Bryson and Mowbray, 1981).

Inadequate Clarity about Participation¹¹

Common use of the term ‘participation’ conceals divergent views about its aims and practice. In many projects and programmes, participation is ill-defined and meaningless when it comes to implementation. It has often been used in a normative sense, whereby anything participatory is assumed to be synonymous with ‘good’ and ‘empowering’. Participation has often been used to describe very rudimentary levels of consultation between agency staff and community members. Some critics have also likened it to a Trojan horse that can hide manipulation and even coercion under a cloak of social palatability (Slocum and Thomas-Slayter, 1995).

Although developed in 1971 Arnstein’s typology of participation, that was so influential in other fields, did not spark a critical debate in the development field where the concept was still embryonic. Debates about participation since the early 1990s have been more successful at challenging simplified and normative uses of the term. One helpful distinction is that of participation as a means or an end (Goulet, 1989; Nelson and Wright, 1995). An instrumental approach views participation as a means to achieving better cost-effectiveness, living standards, etc, while an empowerment approach values the process of increasing participation as an important end in itself

A recent spate of more elaborate typologies have helped to further break down misconceptions (Biggs, 1989; Oakley, 1991; Guijt, 1991; Adnan et al; 1992; Hart, 1992; Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994; Pretty, 1994; Cornwall, 1995; Selener, 1997). Generally, these typologies identify types of participation in terms of varying degrees of control over development decisions and resources between the supposed ‘beneficiaries (farmers, women, etc) and the ‘initiators’ (project staff, planners, researchers, etc).

Yet despite their conceptual contribution, these typologies still harbour the seeds of continued simplification in four ways (Guijt, 1997):

1. *Wrong assumption of a static picture.* By classifying a certain intervention as a certain type of participation, it implies that this describes the entire life cycle of initiative. Yet in most cases, women and men people will participate in different ways at different moments. A common pattern is a high level of participation early on, with extensive community consultation, which is followed by a period of less participation when decisions are made. The implementation phase often sees high levels of participation again, when local labour is drawn in or ‘contributed’, etc but

¹¹ Nelson and Wright (Chapter 1, 1995) provide an excellent introduction into the development of diverse interpretations of participation and the links to empowerment.

the devolution of responsibility for financial management is often strikingly absent (Guijt, 1991).

2. *Simplifying difference in terms of 'insider and outsider'*. Most typologies describe a sliding scale of shifting responsibility between insiders, or community members, and outsiders, or project/government staff. The focus in the participation literature on differences between 'insider', or 'the community', and 'outsider', or 'development professional' simplifies a vastly more complex reality (Cornwall et al, 1993; Scoones and Thompson, 1993; Chambers, 1997). Viewing all local people as insiders clearly perpetuates a simplification of intra-communal differences, and hides the reality of high levels of participation by some groups and none by others. It has detracted from discussions of differences among 'insiders' and among 'outsiders'.
3. *Normative assumption of an 'ideal' form of participation*. Most typologies are presented as some kind of continuum, such as 'ladders'. They are also often couched in normative terms - moving from coercion to autonomy. Thus they imply that it is possible, desirable, and necessary to move across this continuum to the most intense form of participation - a kind of participation nirvana in which everyone gaily commits themselves to what can be quite conflictual and tedious processes of local analysis and planning. The feasibility of 100% local participation is a myth. The local political context will strongly influence what is a feasible intensity and form of participation.
4. *Ignoring diversity*. Clustering the myriad forms of participation into four or seven categories can hinder innovation, particularly if the typologies are being used in a prescriptive manner. Participation in a research context will be different from an action context. What is more important than finding one's place on a particular continuum, is describing how different players are participating and why those forms have been chosen.

The confusion about what is good and bad practice, what is and is not effective participation, continues. Academics accuse practitioners of raising false hopes of empowerment, who in turn retaliate by referring to 'ivory tower purism', neither party clarifying sufficiently what, in fact, they mean (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995). Discussions of 'who' participates have been few and far between - other than in terms of the local versus external people. The moral superiority which accompanies the word 'participation' has allowed a way out of discussing and addressing the more controversial and radical notions of gender relations and women's oppression (Mayoux, 1995). While some experiences may mention women, men, and maybe even gender issues explicitly, many others do not for, after all, they reason: 'there is no need to look at gender issues separately - these are automatically taken care of through participation'.

Welbourn (1991) suggests that participatory development means the equal inclusion of all sections of a typical, stratified community: women, men, older, younger, better -off and worse-off. Yet this is easier said than done and what is 'equal inclusion'? Each person experiences a unique combination of social, economic and physical constraints and opportunities that influences their willingness and capacity to participate in development processes. Understanding how these circumstances affect people's motivation to be involved in an externally-initiated participatory process needs far greater attention than it has been

given to date.

The Forgetting of Power and Empowerment

The ideal of empowering the marginalised has, in theory, been a driving force for many participatory projects (Nelson and Wright, 1995). The thinking was that by enabling the poor to analyse their own realities and thus influence development priorities, they would have a greater ability (more confidence and skills) to continue acting in their own interests. But closer examination reveals that many participatory approaches often focus on using consultation to relieve the symptoms of oppression, such as inadequate material well-being, rather than its causes. As de Koning (1995) describes, “for PRA to live up to its aim, it must be part of this longer term process [of challenging inequalities] and go beyond the moments of data collection, visual documentation and instant analysis”. The shift away from an empowerment focus to one which views empowerment more as ‘management of power when in the hands of the powerful’ (Leal, 1997) has contributed to one of the paradoxes of participatory development: mechanical solutions for political aims (see Box 1).

As discussed above, generalising words like ‘participation’ and ‘community’ provide a smokescreen for professionals to avoid intra-communal struggles, notably the micro-politics of gender relations¹². Many of the problems with participatory development arise when methods “are treated uncritically as a one-off cheap option, facilitated by inexperienced researchers mainly as a tool for mobilization *without a clear strategy for negotiating conflicting interests* which arise between participants, and between participants and development agencies” (Mayoux, 1997, emphasis added). The emphasis on techniques of participation have detracted from a need to understand the causes of disempowerment.

Empowerment is complex and carries an inherent contradiction - the notion that “some can act on others to give them power or enable them to realize their own potential” (Nelson and Wright, 1995). If power is essentially about the ‘transformative capacity’ of people or groups (Giddens, 1984), then empowerment involves increasing people’s capacity to transform their lives. It is more than inviting people to partake in needs assessment or a decision-making process. Offering the marginalised opportunities for consultation, without following this through with analysis about causes of oppression and feasible action to redress the causes, is unlikely to be empowering (Crowley). For a process to be empowering, it also requires the development of iterative sequences that emphasise different discussions and skills at different points in time. To integrate other skills such as group organization, conflict resolution, management, and small enterprise development requires appropriate support and institutional flexibility. The lack of resources needed for such follow-up has led some to comment on the disempowering nature of participation (Woodhill, 1996; Nelson and Wright, 1995).

The ease with which issues of power have been obscured and empowerment simplified has gone hand in hand with the language of ‘facilitation’. External ‘facilitators’ have become part and parcel of most participatory approaches (Pretty et al, 1995). Many of these facilitators and the organizations for which they work have assumed that it is possible to act in non-partisan

¹² F. Thompson (as cited in Bryson and Mowbray, 1981:257) expresses a rather cynical view, by saying that community is a convenient panacea that supplants the need for revolution or reform.

ways. However, people's positions in a community, even if temporary, influences what information others are willing to share and analyse in the group processes that are so common to participatory approaches (Scoones and Thompson, 1994). Because tensions, disputes and conflicts are inevitable in development processes, engaging in participatory development inevitably means taking sides or taking a mediating or negotiating role, all of which are political acts (Scoones, 1995). Ignoring the political nature of such actions is likely to be counter-productive and destructive to the development process (Shah and Kaul Shah, 1995).

Simplistic views on the speed of social change has also compromised the empowering potential of participatory development. If empowerment entails redressing power imbalances by increasing the 'transformative capacity' of the relatively marginalised, then time is needed (Thompson, 1995). It takes time for people and groups to decide what they want to see changed, and why, and then to act. It is difficult to anticipate which conflicts such processes of change may provoke or reveal. Real consensus is not reached in a two week planning exercise (as described by some PRA practitioners, cf Ford, 1992; Schubert, 1994). Given the entrenched nature of hierarchical structures and relationships, it is not possible to expect far-reaching changes with every intervention. This begs the question of what can be expected from externally-determined participatory research and planning processes when they are driven by speedy disbursement of funds (Chambers, 1997).

Bridging the Gap between Participation and Gender

The 1990s have marked a steady growth in attempts to integrate theories of gender with the practices of participatory development. This has occurred in several contexts:

- training: to sensitise field workers to gender as a key factor in community differences and how this influences the development aspirations and opportunities of women and men (cf Welbourn, 1991; Guijt et al, 1992; Guijt 1994; Kaul Shah, 1993, 1995)
- research: to improve the quality of research in general and of gender analysis in particular (cf Ashby, 1990; Lightfoot et al, 1991; Tolley and Bentley, 1992; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992; Feldstein and Jiggins, 1994; Rocheleau et al, 1991, 1995; Kaul Shah and Bourararch, 1995; Cornwall, 1996; IIED/HNWCP, 1997);
- community development: to support the empowerment of women and/or for gender-balanced development through local level analysis and planning (cf Srinivasan, 1990; Grady et al, 1991; MYRADA, 1992; Redd Barna, 1993; Mosse, 1994; Kaul Shah and Shah, 1995; Kaul Shah, 1995; Guijt et al, 1995; Guijt, 1996; Frischmuth, 1996).

In 1993, the first workshop on 'PRA and Gender' was held at IDS¹³, in Brighton. It was also the first workshop held by IIED and IDS at which issues around conflict, power and ethics of PRA were discussed at length, in sharp contrast to previous workshops that had largely dealt with the mechanics of methods. In 1994, gender awareness entered into discussions about the

¹³ See Guijt and Kaul Shah, 1993. Several of the papers in this volume were presented there: Kaul Shah, Green, and Bilgi.

ethics and basic skills of PRA practitioners (Absalom et al, 1994).

The gist of the discussions then and in this book is that *equitable* participatory development requires explicit attention to gender relations. This in turn can only be effective if based on a sound understanding of the dynamics of power, the nature of conflicts and conflict resolution, and the process of social change. Gender-responsive forms of participatory development can be effective at dealing with gender-based oppression. But the experiences here suggest this is only possible if attention is paid to three areas: conceptual clarity, appropriate methods and methodologies, and supportive organizations and institutions.

Conceptual Clarity

Many concepts that underpin participatory approaches are plagued by non-committal use, vagueness, and normative connotations. Think about the assumptions we make when using terms like 'empowerment', 'gender', 'participation', 'change', or 'conflict'. The confusion this has led to has provoked much justified criticism. Conceptual clarity lays the basis for practical application and organizational support. Discussion amongst those involved in a participatory initiative about the key concepts they use can increase awareness of the different interpretations that inevitably exist. This can reduce the making of false claims, the raising or dashing of expectations, and contradictions during the implementation that can jeopardise everyone's efforts. Some factors to consider include:

1. *Clarify what gender means, in all its diverse local forms and as interpreted by researchers and professionals.* Cornwall urges facilitators to be cautious in using simplistic and (Western) stereotypical concepts of gender that alienate rather than bring men on board. Making assumptions about gender issues can be wrong, as Vlaar and Ahlers describe.
2. *Clarify what empowerment means to different people.* Crawley throws out a challenge to proponents of participatory development "Can [they] say, with certainty, that it has been the PRA process which has led to 'empowerment'?" She argues that avoiding analysis of the source of oppression will perpetuate false claims to empowerment, and that indicators to judge empowerment will vary. Don't jeopardise vulnerable local groups/people in the interests of academic or professional gain (Green) by imposing a degree or form of empowerment that local women (or men) might not support.
3. *Be explicit about the likely depth and scope of participation, given the organization's mandate, local politics, time available, etc.* Clarify whether participation is pursued more as a means or an end in itself. What assumptions are being made of local women's and men's willingness to participate? The extent to which they will benefit from a concrete output will no doubt determine, at least in part, the extent to which they wish to engage in the process (Green).
4. *Identify what constitutes 'a community' locally.* What term is most appropriate, acceptable, and feasible as a focus for analysis and action? What are the main differences that divide a particular community - is it gender or is it age, ethnicity, caste, religion, etc? (Degnan Kambou et al; Vlaar and Ahlers; Murthy) As so much participatory work is

based on group analysis, Cornwall urges for clear understanding of which differences matter locally and the dynamics of single-sex and mixed-sex groups.

5. *Accept the inevitability of dealing with conflict.* Explore what participants consider to be positive forms of conflict or tension and which ones are considered antagonistic. Cousins draws attention to the centrality of conflict in social change and, therefore, the need to allow conflicts to emerge in a training context. 'Looking inside ourselves at what we ask of others' is essential to prepare for the emotional and confrontational moments of participatory development. When conflicts arise, assess whether they are latent (inherent to the local context) or emergent (resulting from the process and, therefore, avoidable). Take care not to expose or generate conflicts that increase the vulnerability of marginalised groups (Green; Greene-Roesel and Hinton).
6. *Clarify the role of outsiders in participatory development initiatives.* Green warns practitioners of the ease with which well-meaning facilitation can become patronising manipulation and the limits of acting as 'a legitimate adjudicator'. Murthy's haunting account of a workshop on female infanticide in Bihar also highlights how the caste of the facilitators made it impossible to bridge the distance with the midwives. Humble urges for reflexivity as crucial for ensuring that external agents of change are self-critical. She also urges facilitators to vest authority to design how analysis is to take place with the women involved, which will enhance the chance that local priorities prevail over project priorities.
7. *Clarity includes more explicit statements about how participants view the process of organizational change and local institutional development.* Equitable participatory development means including women alongside men, which in many cases requires examining gender relations and changing entrenched forms of social organization. This means being clear about what assumptions participants are making about the local social and political processes through which they think 'empowerment' takes place (Crawley).

Appropriate and Consistent Methodology

The second section of the book describes ten experiences that demonstrate the power of participatory approaches when they are consciously informed by equity and an understanding of gender relations. They offer many ideas on how methodologies can be made more inclusive of women and more focused on gender issues, for example:

1. *Ensure gender-appropriate forums and spaces by asking women and men where they feel at ease.* As opportunities for participation are culturally defined, this will influence the nature, format, and type of forum. Much participatory work relies on group-based analysis, so care needs to be taken in deciding how to work with groups, and understanding the composition and dynamics of groups even if single-sex (Degan Kambou et al). Although men tend to dominate proceedings in mixed group discussions, single-sex groups are not necessarily the best (Sarin; Kindon; Cornwall; Guijt et al). Women will not always be more at ease with strangers without their menfolk (Rocheleau et al) and organising a women-only meeting can be difficult as their free time is not always synchronised (Debrabandere and Desmet; Murthy).

2. *Ensure gender-appropriate timing of opportunities for participation.* Communication and social change takes time (Debrabandere and Desmet; Bilgi; Sarin; Kindon) and not everyone has it, least of all women. For women to sacrifice precious time, they need to be convinced that they will be better off for having been involved (Green; Sarin). To gain men's support for women to spend time in meetings, seeking the approval of local leaders can be essential.
3. *Be clear which women are and are not involved.* Debrabandere and Desmet, as do Murthy and Sarin, urge caution when setting up processes which favour a select group of women. It is easy to listen only to those who are more vocal due to a higher status and/or more experience with public speaking - and incorrect to assume that these are representative of larger groups (Rocheleau et al).
4. *Find methods that are inclusive and can analyse gender issues.* Most methods are gender-neutral in terms of the issues they raise, with few gender ameliorative or gender transformative methods (Murthy). Seek research and planning methods that are culturally appropriate and go beyond gender neutrality, particularly those that can explore and alter the ideological basis of gender relations (Murthy; Kaul Shah; Debrabandere and Desmet; Sarin; Frischmuth). This also means finding methods that can sensitise men and male staff in non-threatening ways (Debrabandere and Desmet; Protz; Cornwall). Bilgi offers a clever innovation: gaining men's support for change by asking them to analyse women's realities and how they think women's lives can be made less difficult.
5. *Seek methodological complementarity and effective sequences of methods.* Not everything can be surveyed or visualised, such as psychological well-being and domestic violence (Murthy). If necessary seek other methods for expressing these, such as video or theatre (Protz, Welbourn). Ensure that knowledge is built up systematically and sensitively by thinking carefully of the sequence of methods (Murthy; Rocheleau et al; Sarin). Kindon offers us insights about how gender misconceptions in Bali were unravelled through a series of participatory techniques, as do Vlaar and Ahlers in Cambodia. Welbourn provides an inspiring and sobering reflection on the potential of community drama and PRA to deal with the pain and threat of HIV and AIDS in Uganda. Against the backdrop of the Dominican Republic, Rocheleau, Ross, Morrobel and Hernandez used maps, life histories, and a questionnaire survey to understand the impact on women of changes in forested landscapes. But, as Protz cautions, the power of any methodology, including that of moving pictures, to understand and challenge gender images and relations, only appears if based on an awareness of the potential pitfalls.
6. *Ensure that issues are of interest to women or that these issues can arise.* Before starting, try and identify whether a particular topic is best investigated by asking women or men, the young or the old. This can also help if difficulties are encountered in getting the active participation of certain groups. Generally speaking, women are not as used as men to talking with outsiders, especially if these are men. They might experience inhibitions about certain topics and techniques (Debrabandere and Desmet; Murthy; Sarin). Discussing the questions that will be broached beforehand can help women to formulate their ideas and seek the support of others (Kaul Shah). In Zambia, the use of participatory methods for exploring adolescent sexual health with girls and boys is described by

Degnan Kambou, Kaul Shah and Nkhama.

7. *Support women to make use of the new opportunities for expression.* Do not assume that women are able, willing or even interested in taking the space that has been created for them in participatory processes (Crawley; Murthy; Welbourn; Frischmuth). In participatory development, active effort may be needed to include and encourage the more inhibited to express their concerns in ways with which they feel comfortable. However, Kindon highlights how participatory methods themselves can actually break through societal misconceptions about women's supposed reluctance to engage in public discussions and social analysis.
8. *Understand the practical conditions that can make or break women's involvement.* Even if women are willing to participate, they may be hindered by the need for child care, husband's permission, etc (Guijt et al; Frischmuth; Murthy; Kindon). Desmet and Debrabandere describe a planning process in Zimbabwe in which women's involvement was ensured through a series of practical considerations, unrelated to the participatory methodology itself.
9. *Learn to recognize and handle conflicts.* What is the basis of gender-related conflicts, and what conflict resolution processes are beneficial for women and men alike? Even methods that appear gender-neutral can be the cause of household-level and community-level conflicts, as in Protz's example of using video in the Caribbean. Personal attitudes and feelings around the conflicts likely to emerge in fieldwork need to be explored in training if personal and community change is to take place (Cornwall, Cousins). Know where the limits of staff lie in terms of dealing with conflicts, and be aware that these are just as likely to occur within the organization as in the field (Greene-Roesel and Hinton).
10. *Use methods not only to describe gender-differentiated needs but also to analyse and change the causes of needs.* This requires being explicit about the social transformative goals of participatory processes (Crawley; Humble; Cornwall; Murthy; Guijt et al; Welbourn; Protz; Degnan Kambou et al; Sarin). The successful use of methods for cause-effect analysis requires complementary skills in communication, facilitation, gender analysis, and conflict negotiation. Anyone can make a map or list priority needs but this does not mean that local learning or change takes place. Sarin describes how hasty PRA workshops in India intended to improve Joint Forest Management efforts focused on diagrams rather than more crucial and sensitive issues of personal and institutional processes. More positively, Protz describes how video reports proved to be effective for repeated and ever-deepening analysis of women's concerns, the causes, and alternative solutions. Welbourn's experiences with drama and PRA methods are powerful for helping people change how they behave on sensitive issues of sex and death.

Organizational Support and Institutional Consistency

Past attempts at participatory research and planning show that any positive impacts will only be sustained if they are supported by consistent organizational procedures and wider institutional norms. Support is needed to encourage development practitioners to explore key concepts in non-threatening ways and to use participatory methods in critical and creative

ways. Sufficient resources and time must be allocated and political commitment needs to be sincere if staff and local women and men are to remain motivated to work through analysis, conflict and change. Training in participatory approaches and in gender is essential but change requires more than just training. The final section of this chapter, and the book, discusses the complexity of organizational and institutional change that is needed if positive experiences are to be sustained and spread.

1. *Participatory development needs enough time.* While some methods associated with participatory approaches can be quick at stimulating discussion and initial analysis, the process of social change that unfolds is slow and difficult. Many organizations claim to seek gender-balanced, participatory development but they often lack long-term commitment. Redd Barna Uganda has taken three years, Siavonga Agricultural Development Programme in Zambia four years, and Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in India eight years - so far, and their methodologies are still evolving and improving. Fieldwork takes place over months, not days, and organizations need to make commitments that span years, not months (Guijt et al, Kaul Shah, Frischmuth). This crucial need is often diametrically opposed to the speedy disbursement of funds or quick need for data that characterises so many development initiatives.
2. *Training must be context-specific.* A common response to new ideas is to train everyone in their use. Gender-sensitive participatory training must be constructed to suit the structure and objectives of specific organizations. Also care must be taken that training does not overemphasise methods and appraisal, to the detriment of processes, principles, and planning. Training programmes need to integrate the analysis of intra-communal difference into participatory practice (Guijt et al, Murthy, Sarin). As people's attitudes drive their actions, personal experiences are central to training (Frischmuth, Cousins, Murthy). But it is also crucial to be realistic about what training can achieve (Levy). It is only the beginning, and can only be effective in organizations that are willing and able to change in other ways.
3. *Assess and ensure gender/participation capacity of organization and consistency.* The challenge of integrating gender and participation means dealing with a closely knit 'web' of societal and organizational elements, not just innovative field methods or staff training (Levy). Gender-aware participatory methodologies are needed for project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. What staff and community incentives exist? Is money being set aside for research on gender needs and locally appropriate forms of participation? Other conditions range from allocation of sufficient resources to ensuring that women have ways to exert pressure on informal and informal political processes (Levy). Greene-Roesel and Hinton's comparison of three NGOs working in Bhutanese refugee camps highlights that the structure and procedures of organizations strongly influence the equitable and participatory nature of the outcomes.
4. *Stimulate continual critical reflection and innovation.* Continual organizational self-reflection drove the process described by Frischmuth in Zambia. This led women and men alike to change their attitudes, behaviour and values over a three year period with the support of agricultural extension officers. Similarly, in India, Kaul Shah describes significant reflective moments in the life of AKRSP that have allowed it to make

fundamental changes to its participatory approach and make the outcome more equitable. Bi-monthly review meetings of all field staff in Redd Barna Uganda and bi-annual external reviews are the basis of continual and thorough adaptation that now pervades the fieldwork (Guijt et al).

5. *Anticipate the consequences of equitable participation, and the organizational capacity to respond.* An empowerment process can mean an initial focus on women's practical needs and then moving towards more structural discussions and changes (Green; Bilgi; Kaul Shah; Guijt et al; Frischmuth). Staff must be prepared to deal with these consequences (and they will need enough time). Therefore, it is essential that organizations make a commitment to pursue whatever follow-up is required, and not just the activities that might have been proposed in initial project or programme plans. Organizational capacity is also strongly determined by its internal dynamics, as is highlighted by Greene-Roesel and Hinton. They suggest that keeping track of how an organization functions internally, where women are employed, how participatory decisions are made, etc can be a significant indication of how gender-sensitive and participatory the work in the field is likely to be.
6. *Motivate those involved.* Participation can be a hard slog. Incentives are needed for all those involved - community members and staff alike (Guijt et al; Frischmuth). Ensuring that women are included on field teams, however few, can make a crucial difference to the topics broached and the willingness of local women to participate, especially where socio-cultural circumstances limit access to village women by outside men (Cousins, Guijt et al). A supportive system for team work and feedback, and a clear field methodology was crucial in the Zambian experience (Frischmuth).
7. *Gender-focused and -disaggregated monitoring is essential.* How do we know if women's and men's perspectives alike have been heard and incorporated into plans? Did it make a difference in the type of information gathered or the process of the discussion, if men or women or both were involved? How do we know if empowerment is occurring? A participatory evaluation was the turning point for the Zambian work, not only because gender issues and equity was on the agenda but because women and men were consulted equally (Frischmuth). Kaul Shah describes how monitoring has become an essential organizational tool in AKRSP to ensure equitable development. For example, micro-planning is no longer complete until women are also involved. Greene-Roesel and Hinton describe how gender-disaggregated assessment of the nature of participation can prove valuable for assessing the extent to which the empowerment claims of much participatory work are, in fact, met.

Integrating Participation and Gender

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. Furthermore, if gender relations

are explicitly addressed through the use of participatory research or development, then conflicts are bound to emerge.

For those keen to improve the quality of their participatory work - this book should provide a wealth of ideas. 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.

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Guest writer for Wake Up World. Let's say conflict arises when you're with someone. It could be anyone - a friend, your spouse, your child, your boss, a stranger in line at the grocery store, your employee. Something happens, and you are triggered. Regardless of the story, what's important to begin this process is the awareness that you are triggered, so you can initiate the following practice instead of reacting unconsciously at the moment of the trigger. Nobody has ever triggered me more than my gay best friend Dennis, who psychics and shamans tell me is my "twin flame." Dennis and I adore each other, but the nature of our relationship is that we tend to inadvertently stick needles into each other's core wounds. This is both healing and painful.

1. Waking up to power, conflict and process. Chapter. Jan 1998. I.M. Guijt. Meera Shah. View. Dynamics of space, temporariness, development and rights in Palestine refugees' camps. In highlighting processes of broker selection, and the client preferences that undergird them, we underscore the centrality of clients in shaping local brokerage environments. Read more. Chapter. Gender and the Holocaust. January 2001. S. Lillian Kremer.
1. Waking up to power, conflict and process. Irene Guijt, Meera Kaul Shah. Published: 1 January 1998. Examples of conflicts and possible solutions. They send you seemingly urgent requests when you're sleeping or just waking up, and you're sick of being bombarded with 11 requests before you've even sat down at your desk. You get the vibe they don't like you very much and you don't know how to approach them. Proposed Solution. Sharon suggests going up to the person and owning it. Tell them that you know it's an uncomfortable situation and that you'd like to continue the relationship. These situations are tough, but radical candor is important - learn more about how to practice it in the workplace here. A conflict is a clash of interest. The basis of conflict may vary but it is always a part of society. Basis of conflict may be personal, racial, class, caste, political and international. Conflict in groups often follows a specific course. Routine group interaction is first disrupted by an initial conflict, often caused by differences of opinion, disagreements between members, or scarcity of resources. At this point, the group is no longer united, and may split into coalitions. This period of conflict