

A GUIDE TO USING TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Conservation, Livelihoods and Governance Programme
Tools for participatory approaches

February 2013

These notes accompany the participatory tools that FFI's Conservation, Livelihoods and Governance team has drawn from a variety of sources and adapted for use by FFI and partner organisations. The tools provide guidance on exercises that are intended to facilitate discussion and analysis, by and with local participants, on a variety of issues.

This document is not a comprehensive guide to participatory approaches and facilitation, but is intended to give some tips on what to consider and how to prepare for and implement the exercises. Further information can be found in the references on the final page.

Participatory approaches - two-way analysis, learning and action

- More important than the participatory tools is the **process** for which they are used i.e. a two-way process of exploration, questioning, analysis and learning, rather than a 'one off' or extractive data collection process.
- Participatory processes establish a basis for **dialogue** through which information is shared and in which there is an explicit recognition that 'outsiders' need to learn as much as, if not more than, the 'insiders'.
- The tools are **simple** to use, relying mostly on oral and visual techniques, such as discussion groups and mapping and diagramming. Even in communities where literacy rates are low, the tools can be used by everyone, including children.
- The emphasis of the exercises is **not about scientific rigour**, but a lot can be learnt from them as they can be used to reveal a great deal of information and to support detailed analysis and planning processes.
- Participatory tools and processes result in better **relationships** and can be **empowering** for local participants. Outsiders have the role of listeners and facilitators, and can become catalysts for local participants to analyse their own problems and opportunities and to take action.

Preparation and practicalities

Plan carefully

- The approach outlined in each tool is a general guide that should be adapted to suit the local context, views of local participants, and the objectives of the exercise. This could include the use of imaginative techniques such as role play, story-telling, puppetry, photography and video.
- Consider the composition of the facilitating team and how this could affect participation (for example, women may only be comfortable discussing certain issues with female facilitators). Good facilitation skills are essential to ensure that different perspectives are voiced and noted.

- Ensure that each member of the facilitating team is familiar with the objectives and how each exercise will be facilitated. Discuss and agree how specific terms can be explained and translated. Allocate roles and make sure that all team members are happy with their role. This should include, at the least, a main facilitator and an observer/note-taker to observe and record the discussion and make a copy of the outputs if necessary.
- Ensure that everything needed is available, including refreshments for participants. Most of the exercises require large sheets of paper and pens although many of the diagrams can be drawn on the ground as an alternative. Some may require additional materials (e.g. stones, seeds).
- Anticipate and be prepared for questions that participants may have that are not directly related to the exercise (e.g. about future project plans).

Selecting local participants

- Participants should be selected according to the objectives of the exercise and depth of information required. Whilst it is useful and often necessary to rely on local contacts to gather participants, bear in mind that this may lead to bias in the selection and representation of participants.
- Groups of around ten enable a good level of discussion and analysis whilst reflecting some social divisions. The total number of different groups with which to undertake each exercise depends on the scope of the overall study.
- It is important that both women's and men's perceptions are included, as they have different knowledge and experiences. It is advisable to carry out at least some of the group discussions in separate groups, e.g. all female groups, all male groups. This could be carried out concurrently and the results compared in a discussion. It might be necessary to break down the population into further categories (such as ethnicity, age, or socio-economic group) in order to ensure representation of these groups.

Starting and ending the exercise

- The facilitator and observer/note-taker should begin by introducing themselves and explaining carefully and clearly the objectives of the discussion.
- Check that the local participants understand and feel comfortable with what will be discussed.
- Agree a time limit for the exercise with participants.
- Check again at the end of the discussion that the participants know how the information will be used.
- Ensure that the outputs (or a copy) of the exercise are made available to participants.
- Answer any questions the participants may have.
- Thank them for their time and effort.

How to encourage participation

- It is important to ensure that participatory processes include both women and men, younger and older, richer and poorer, and powerful and disadvantaged. All too easily the process is dominated by a few individuals, usually the most powerful, most vocal, or most wealthy - all of whom are usually men (see Box 1).
- Contributions from members of disadvantaged groups may need to be especially sought. Some possible methods to encourage their participation include the following:
 - Choose a place that is accessible to everybody. For women who suffer mobility constraints, it may be best if the location is close to home. For disadvantaged socio-economic groups, it is important to avoid places that are restricted to them or in which they may feel uncomfortable (such as the holy site of the predominant religious group). Public places enjoyed by everyone, such as the school or sports field, may be best.
 - Activities should be scheduled for when people have time to participate. This means avoiding both the seasonal and daily periods of peak labour demands, such as times of harvest and meal preparation. It may even be necessary, for example, to work with men

in the morning and women in the afternoon, or with market vendors at mid-day and landless labourers in the evening.

- Ensure that every group has a chance to present their own views. One way to do this is to form separate focus groups by gender, socio-economic group, age, etc. to make their own maps or diagrams or charts. The findings of the different groups can be contrasted to provide useful information about each group's perceptions and priorities.
- Involve the quiet observers. If there are persons hanging back, not saying anything, give them a stick or other object and ask them to indicate something they would like to see on the map or diagram, or discreetly ask them whether or not they think the placement of a particular feature is accurate. If they disagree with the placement, invite them to indicate its proper position.
- Ask a particularly dominant participant specific questions about the community. By engaging this person in conversation away from the group, his or her influence over the process can be lessened.

Box 1: Who do we listen to?

A basic principle of participatory approaches is that all views count. The reality is that disadvantaged people, including women, are least likely to be heard.

Communities are not homogeneous groups of people. Within each community there are differences of gender and age, and these combine with differences of wealth, ethnic background, caste, and so on. Each of these different groups has different experiences, perspectives, interests and needs. Poorer people have different experiences and interests than richer people, women have different experiences and interests than men, and the young often have ambitions that differ from those of their elders. However, poverty, age or gender differences cannot be considered entirely in isolation from each other. The experiences and interests of a poor woman are different from those of a rich woman. The experiences and interests of a youth of a pastoralist ethnic group may be different to those of a youth of an ethnic group with an agrarian tradition.

The answer to "who do we listen to" is rarely straightforward. But what is clear is that it is important to hear a variety of opinions and to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised are active participants and are able to have a 'voice'.

Managing conflict

It is not always the case that participatory processes lead to consensus; indeed it may expose differences and conflict among various groups. The process can also be seen as a challenge and threat by the more powerful groups because of its emphasis on ensuring that women and disadvantaged groups participate fully. However, the process of sharing and debating ideas is a step in the process of achieving agreement and action. Participatory exercises can provide a neutral space in which to explore tensions and causes and help to keep the focus on issues rather than personalities.

How to ask questions

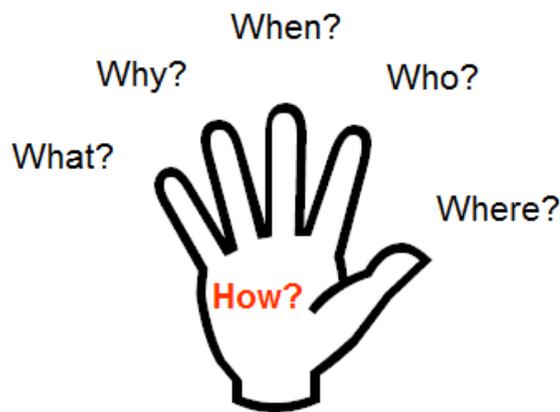
The best questions are short, simple and have a single focus, but there are different types of questions which have different purposes.

- **Closed questions** invite people to say only "yes" or "no" e.g. *Do you graze your animals in the nature reserve?*
- **Leading questions** tend to make people answer with the response they think you are expecting e.g. *You don't graze your animals in the reserve, do you?*

- **Ambiguous questions** are vague and confusing so the person can't really understand what is being asked e.g. *According to regulations there is restricted access to the reserve, ok?*
- **Open ended questions** encourage people to describe their reality e.g. *Where do you graze your animals at this time of year?*
- **Probing questions** seek to discover more about what lies behind the initial replies e.g. *What issues do you face in finding fodder for your animals?*

Open and probing questions often begin with one of the 6 'helpers' (Box 2)

Box 2: The six helpers



Triangulation

Triangulation is a way to cross-check information for accuracy, by looking at any issue or piece of information from as many perspectives as possible but at least three. Triangulation helps to minimise bias, verify data, distinguish fact from fiction, and enables deeper analysis of an issue. It can be achieved in a number of ways, including the following.

- △ Using different tools to gather information on the same issue (e.g. maps, transects, and trend lines to examine environmental changes), and using different methods (e.g. interviewing, observing, discussing, using secondary data).
- △ Listening to different people with different points of view about the same topic (e.g. women/men, young/old, wealthy/poor about food production).
- △ Looking for alternative views and checking for consensus during each exercise.
- △ Repeating exercises in different communities and locations to check whether the information has specific or generic relevance.

The art of facilitation

- Participation and empowerment cannot be created by the tools alone – **attitude** and **behaviour** must be supportive of participatory approaches.
- Participation relies on an environment of **trust**, in which all participants feel able to share their views, and it is the role of the facilitator to create this environment.
- A **transparent** approach will aid trust and cooperation – be open with your agenda and communicate information clearly.
- A good facilitator focuses on the process and **group dynamics** rather than the task or the outcome, to ensure that participation is active rather than passive.

- Respect local culture but be aware of ‘cultural smokescreens’ that can protect the power of **dominant groups**.
- **Seek to understand** before being understood.
- **Prioritise learning** through the eyes of local people.
- Balance your **dynamic** and **receptive** qualities – be dynamic to enable the voices of the less powerful to be heard and receptive to enable the participants to lead.
- **Adapt, not adopt** – methods, tools, setting and facilitation style need to be appropriate to the issue under discussion and to the group the facilitator is working with.

For further information

Bradley, D and Schneider, H (2004) *Participatory Approaches: A facilitator’s guide* VSO
<http://community.eldis.org/.59c6ec19/>

CARE (2009) *Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis Handbook*
<http://www.careclimatechange.org/tools>

DFID (2010) *Participatory Tools and Techniques for Assessing Climatic Change Impacts and Exploring Adaptation Options*
www.forestrynepal.org/images/publications

FAO (2001) *Field Level Handbook (Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis Programme)*
http://www.fao.org/sd/SEAGA/1_en.htm

FAO Participation website
<http://www.fao.org/Participation>

World Bank (2005) *Poverty and Social Impact Analysis Sourcebook*
<http://go.worldbank.org/ZGZHJEDBZO>



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