

# The Participation Forum\*

November 17, 1994

*Topic: Participation and Gender*

At the seventh session of the Participation Forum, three speakers examined the ways in which thinking about gender is basic to thinking about participation, and what can be and has been achieved when gender issues are considered. Margaret Lycette, Director of USAID's Office of Women in Development, drew from her field experience in Pakistan, Zaire, and Morocco to identify four factors that often result in women's exclusion from development efforts. Ken Ellis, Director of the Office of Central American Affairs, shared observations of USAID programs that have performed poorly because women's perspectives were not adequately considered. Michael Bamberger, with the World Bank's Gender Analysis and Policy Group, described features of women's participation in a cooperatives project in El Salvador. Colin Bradford, Assistant Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, opened the program. The discussion, moderated by Margaret Lycette, highlighted the experiences of a number of Forum participants. --Diane La Voy, Senior Policy Advisor for Participatory Development.

## **Multiculturalism, Institutional Bias, and Betting on Women**

*Colin Bradford*

Multiculturalism, it seems to me, is vital to thinking about development. It's not just an academic problem that has to do with what's taught in universities. Think about how important it is to have some reflection of your image in your own culture or to have some resonance of your cultural voice in your surrounding society. Think about the fact that values underlie institutions and that we know from our work in development that institutions systematically discriminate against the disadvantaged, whether they be disadvantaged by gender or by income or by race. One way of thinking about our work in economic development is that we are about correcting the systematic bias of institutions against the disadvantaged. So we are in some sense, as we think about gender and participation, really testing the openness of global society. We're seeing to what extent we're going to be able to correct this

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The Participation Forum is a series of monthly noontime meetings for USAID personnel to explore how to put into practice the Administrator's mandate to "build opportunities for participation into the development processes in which we are involved" ("Statement of Principles on Participatory Development," November 16, 1993). Guest speakers from in and outside of USAID describe their experiences and enter into a general discussion of the theme of the session. A summary of the meeting is disseminated within USAID by E-mail, and readers are encouraged to engage in an E-mail dialogue. E-mail should be directed to Diane La Voy, using either the USAID directory or INTERNET, as DLAVOY@USAID.GOV. Printed copies of the Forum summaries will be distributed to participants and attendees from outside of USAID and others interested in participatory development.

systematic bias against women in development. One of the reasons that we're trying to correct that bias is that women, I think, have been seen to be much more committed to family, to communities, and to the fabric of society than are men. When we have few development dollars to spend, we bet on women.

A question which I raise for you, feeling a certain amount of intimidation, given my own gender and race, is this: have we concluded that men in those disadvantaged communities are irresponsible and unwilling to pay attention to the fabric of family, community, and society? I don't know the answer, but it strikes me as a provocative question. I welcome this discussion.

### **Adjusting Projects to Overcome Constraints on Women**

*Margaret Lycette*

To respond a bit to your question, Colin, we're not saying that men have abrogated responsibility. Rather, what the "women in development" community has focused on is the less-than-full participation of women. Sometimes we called for equity in the distribution of benefits between women and men. Sometimes we proclaimed improvements in women's productivity as the key to increased project effectiveness. Now we speak much more boldly about the need to support women's empowerment. In the end we're talking about participation and acknowledging the important roles that all members of society must play in achieving sustainable development.

#### **Four Factors that Constrain the Full Participation of Women**

#Women have both productive roles in the home and outside the home, as well as reproductive roles. This dual burden, and women's limited control over their reproductive lives, constrains their time and their options for choosing to participate in activities that might interfere with their "double" day.

#Women are poorly educated relative to men. Low rates of female literacy and inequities in girls' access to education persist worldwide. Consequently, high proportions of women cannot obtain information about opportunities in business, employment, and participation in political life.

#Cultural constraints regarding the sexual division of labor and the extent to which women can appropriately interact with men can limit women's participation in virtually all arenas. Restrictions on women's mobility are sometimes cast in the guise of concerns for their safety.

#Women often face legal constraints, such as prohibitions against land ownership, or participation in education or family planning programs without the consent of their husbands or fathers.

The combination of these factors often results in women's exclusion from development efforts.

For example, in a large USAID agricultural extension and credit program in Zaire, extension sessions were well attended and loans were being disbursed, but agricultural productivity was not rising. Why? In the region of Zaire where the project was being implemented, women are the agriculturists. Because they are also responsible for the maintenance of the household and for child care, and they face cultural restrictions on their participation in male-dominated public life, they didn't attend the training sessions. In addition, women cannot legally hold title to land and therefore could not participate in the credit program.

Concerns about girls' security and reputations prevented parents in Pakistan's more conservative provinces from enrolling their daughters in new USAID-funded coeducational schools. In a national vocational education program in Morocco, female participation was confined to training in homemaking skills, which led to virtually no increase in employment or even income generation.

**Project Adjustments to Improve Women's Participation.** The good news is that there are approaches that can improve the extent to which women can contribute to and benefit from development, approaches that support women's participation by adjusting project design and implementation to take account of women's particular roles and constraints. In the Zaire project, for example, an extension program was eventually put in place to work with women farmers only.

Training and demonstrations were scheduled to accommodate the women's needs, and their participation was enhanced because they did not feel constrained by the presence of men, to whom culturally they should defer. The result was an improvement in yields and a more effective mix of crops, as well as improved household incomes and nutritional status of children. Men eventually got involved in the program, and they benefited as well.

In Pakistan, the education program involved the local communities in an education needs assessment and secured their involvement in raising funds to support the training and salaries of locally hired female teachers. Where necessary, boundary walls were constructed to segregate girls and boys attending the same school. The result was a major increase in the number of girls enrolled in and attending school. In Morocco, community outreach garnered the participation of parents and businesses and acceptance of the notion that girls should learn marketable skills. Girls learned drafting and electronics skills, got jobs, began to contribute to family income, and gained improved status within their families.

It might be interesting, as we listen to the presentations that follow, to think about which of the four factors that I've mentioned as constraints to women's participation come into play. I think we also want to listen for how solutions were crafted around these constraints to improve both women's participation and project success. We should consider the activities of both men and women and should recognize that addressing the constraints that women face will result in the greater participation of both women and men.

### **Lessons From Projects That Overlooked Women's Input**

*Ken Ellis*

After 20 years of experience working in Latin America and making a lot of mistakes, I think that I've learned some lessons along the way. In my opinion, participation is a lot more than sharing the benefits of a project. Women won't share the benefits until they participate at the project design level. One of the lessons I'd like to pass on is that our solutions, as development specialists coming from a different culture, are often not acceptable to the people that we're trying to work with.

**We Often Misread People's Values.** In Jamaica in the 1970s, USAID and the World Bank set about to reform the marketing sector. The marketing sector in Jamaica is almost the exclusive property of women, who are called higglers. These women sit on street corners, work in local markets, and sell the produce from small farms throughout the island. The idea was to streamline and decentralize the sector to make it a lot more efficient. By setting up modern facilities all over the country, the project would keep these women from having to make a long trip to Kingston every day. But because the idea was met with hostility by many of the women, especially in the countryside, we decided to look more deeply into the marketing system in Jamaica and we hired

a local woman sociologist whose mother happened to be a higgler. Her study found that the Jamaican marketing system is more than just a marketing system, it's a social system, where people talk to one another, where information is exchanged, such as prices and how crops are doing all over the island. Based on this study, we downsized our plans considerably and concentrated on upgrading some of the facilities that already existed. I think it was, in USAID's terms, a successful project.

**Interventions Sometimes Do More Harm than Good.** Sometimes our interventions can actually do damage to the people that we're trying to assist, especially in the case of women. Throughout Central America, we have from time to time pursued the idea of small-farm irrigation, to give an opportunity to raise, market, and sell high-value crops. The problem is that in these semi-nomadic agricultural societies the men plant the staple crops early in the year, and then they go off to pick or plant cotton, cut sugar cane, or harvest coffee. The women are left at home to take care of the children, collect wood, carry water, and, in this case, take care of another crop of high-value cabbage or tomatoes. Instead of assisting these women, we are adding to their already unbearable workloads.

**Unforeseen Results Can Be Beneficial.** Despite all of our planning efforts, sometimes the unforeseen results can be the most beneficial. In the Dominican Republic in the mid-1980s, we had some money in a project that the Ministry of Agriculture was not able to spend. We got all of the extension agents together and told them to go out and find good projects in the rural sector, and we would fund them. They zealously pursued bringing in project ideas, mostly in the water sector. When I visited the sites, I found that almost all the people associated with these projects were women. What was really important to them was not that they now had clean water, but that they didn't have to walk two kilometers to get to the water supply. It cut their workload down tremendously. This unplanned activity proved to be very beneficial to them. Again, I'd like to leave you with what I think is the most important lesson—that real participation is more than just sharing the benefits of projects, it's sharing in the design of those projects as well.

### **World Bank Project in El Salvador: Conflicts and Benefits**

*Michael Bamberger*

I was asked to present a case of a World Bank project where women had been actively involved in participatory processes, so I've taken the case of a cooperative in El Salvador, which gives some interesting lessons in what participation is all about.

The Low-Cost Housing Foundation in El Salvador was a participatory program of self-help construction housing projects, with the objective of capacity building at the community level. One of the cooperatives that the Foundation started was a clothing and carpet-making cooperative which had 53 members, of whom 52 were women. The cooperative was relatively effective, in some cases doubling or tripling members' income.

**Participatory Processes.** The idea of being the owners of a cooperative was sometimes a difficult participatory experience for the women. Whenever there were problems, they weren't quite sure who to blame. They still assumed there was a management entity somewhere which was responsible for running the cooperative. A second participatory process was the women's exposure to the outside world. Because all of the women had their lunch together in the cooperative and they listened to the radio, many of them had an opportunity to discuss national and world affairs for the first time. It also exposed them to the trade union movement. During the time when this cooperative was developing, there was a strike, and trade union members asked the cooperative for financial and other support, resulting in a significant debate. A lot of the women said, "We have so many problems, we really can't get involved in other people's problems." Others said, "We're all part of the working class. We need to show some kind of solidarity."

Another process was what I call moving from a paternalistic idea of what a cooperative is to facing the hard realities of the market. It was a difficult lesson to accept that participation means standing on your own feet, facing the competition, and maybe even losing your markets.

**Impacts and Issues.** Women's incomes rose significantly, at least in the short run. It was harder to assess what the total impact was on the household income. Very clearly, the women gained more control over resources, income, and how the income was used. There were many examples of women gaining greater independence, a major issue being to choose one's own clothing and to cut one's hair.

There were quite a lot of conflicts in the families, of men feeling that their role was being threatened. The cooperative got involved in these issues in a number of ways. In more extreme cases, they set up protection for battered wives. Also, they tried to market the idea of the cooperative to the men. There were also some conflicts at the community level, because the cooperative had to close the door to new members in order to maintain a liveable income for its members.

The implications of focusing fairly narrowly on women, which this brings out, are being raised in debates about credit programs for women--the Working Women's Forum in India, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, among others. I think there are a lot of programs that started with a strong feeling that they should just work with women, that men are irresponsible. But there's a lot of concern that this does not really benefit women, because of the conflicts.

The question is, how do you involve men? In El Salvador, the cooperatives for men were much less successful. A lot of men traditionally work independently, and find it difficult to work regularly every day to fill orders for big stores. Many programs now are trying to move to how you can generate credit programs for the household as an economic unit rather than just for the woman.

## **Discussion Session**

### **Managing for Participation and Program Integration**

**Ikufumi Tomimoto:** At JICA, we set up several training courses related to the participation of women in development, inviting many policy-level people, as well as practitioners, from various

countries. Recently we established a special study group for participatory development and governance, and we discussed with our colleagues in USAID how aid agencies can best tackle this issue. One concern is that aid agencies, like USAID, the World Bank, or JICA, have to perhaps slow down the process of project lending or technical assistance because it takes some time to identify what is needed to encourage the participation of the local community. This requires great patience on the part of the donors, so that the people can think about what they really need in their communities.

**Diane La Voy:** Our guest from Japan has raised a very fundamental issue as he points to the management implications of participation. It takes time, especially in the early stages of project development, and we have to accept this, especially as we think of the pressures that we face in obligations for a given fiscal year. That theme has been raised over and over again, but it doesn't have an easy answer.

**Elise Smith:** A lot of us on the NGO side see that rural women's NGOs have mechanisms to make the participatory process work well, but that donor agencies still haven't fully taken this experience into account. If there could be real dialogue between donors and women's NGO movements in the countries, cross-sectorally, I think we could have much stronger development programs.

**Elise Storck:** Margaret, I appreciate your sense of how women's multiple roles can help in program integration across sectors. To what extent can more intentional emphasis on gender help us design more appropriately integrated programs? I'm thinking in particular of the so-called population and environment debate, where the gender impact on environment has typically been characterized by women's reproductive behavior.

**Margaret Lycette:** I think that's a very interesting question. It's very appealing to think that because women have such strong reproductive roles, household production roles, and productive roles outside the home, that a focus on women would be a way to integrate several issues. I think that we have to be cautious. We have to listen to what Ken said about how we may unintentionally add to women's burdens. There's a tendency to funnel through attention to women all the problems and issues that we should have faced all along in thinking about how programs affect people. There is room for synergy, but in the environment area, I think that we have to take a look at all of the agricultural and economic policies and market failures that actually have a much greater impact on environmental degradation than does the woman who is fetching wood each day.

### **Prescriptions for the Participation of Men**

**Elise Smith:** I think we need to look for innovative ways to work for men's involvement. People are realizing now that if you do not engage men from the very beginning in whatever kind of program you're trying to support, you're not going to reach the maximum impact. Male focus groups is one approach I've seen that's worked in six African countries. Where males are brought in early, they can play a continuing, ongoing role. Perhaps what's needed is a task force to determine what's working and what's not working in terms of men's involvement.

**Mayra Buvinic:** I think today we have been talking of two different things, which perhaps we can expand on in another forum. One is grassroots participatory approaches and the other is women's participation in development projects.

I'm going to disagree with Elise a bit on a prescription for the participation of men. I would encourage the participation of men in projects in those sectors where women have traditionally been included, namely population, health, and nutrition. By all means, give men information on family planning and include them in the family planning and health decisions within their families. In the productive sectors, including credit, enterprise, and agricultural extension, when you're benefiting women, I really see very little reason for, and even a difficulty with, including men. I hope we can discuss this further at a future forum.

**Charles Stephenson:** I would like to pass along a comment from Perdita Houston from the Peace Corps, who recently spoke at USAID. When asked whether men are one of the constraints to women's development and participation, she responded that in some situations they may be. How do you address that? First of all, she suggested, you pay attention to them. If you are having a difficulty, you pay attention.

### **Avoiding Pitfalls--Lessons from Sierra Leone and Zaire**

**Ann Hudock:** There is a palm oil processing project in Sierra Leone in which the women seemed to be participating very well. I attended a meeting where there were a large number of very enthusiastic women. As I left, I remarked, "This is a great example of women's participation." My boss at the NGO looked at me and said, "You just didn't understand any of that. The elderly woman in the back who said what a great project this is, was saying how wonderful it was to be working on a water project. But, of course, they were doing palm oil processing. The chief had gathered together a lot of the women in the community, had dictated that they be there, and quite a few of these women were his wives anyway." I think that this example underscores the ignorance of outsiders. When we ask for the participation of women, we should be very careful about not using it as something which can actually exploit them in the end.

**Diane Russell:** I want to bring up the example of Zaire again because I was one of the people who worked on the extension project there that Margaret mentioned. One of the mistakes that was made was getting women involved in maize production projects where they weren't the initial maize producers. In fact, their labor on maize took them away from their labor on other crops that were essential to both good nutrition and their income. What we tried to do was to focus on women's crops, on the crops that women actually produce both for their families' consumption and to sell. I think that getting women involved in activities where they are going to be taken away from their primary sources of income and nutritional well-being for the family can be a big mistake, and that it is important to support them in their primary activities.

**Pat Martin:** A mid-term evaluation of an agricultural and environmental protection project in Honduras that had a large gender component found that it had actually reinforced gender segregation. They then redesigned the project to train both men and women extension agents to

work with the entire family, and to get women extension agents not just as home economics type workers, but as agronomists, so they could work with the men too.

### **Adding Women's Voices to Policy Dialogue**

**Carol Yost:** Fortunately, I think there is increasing attention being paid to the need to get women's voices into the policy-making process at all levels. Women often are the ones working in agriculture and microenterprise development, and yet there are inadequate channels for them to get their views heard about what changes need to be made. With the trend toward democracy and pluralism worldwide, I think there are a lot of opportunities now for women to share ideas and resources about how women can have a voice in the policy-making processes.

**Pat Martin:** We need to focus not only on working around the constraints that women face, but also on actually removing them. In the Policy Reform Project in Honduras, one of the efforts underway was to change the agrarian reform law. The law was over 20 years old and had proved unworkable in numerous ways. The USAID Mission got the peasant women's organization in Honduras involved in this dialogue. The law precluded women from owning agrarian-reform land, because this law was passed during the conflict with El Salvador in the 1960s, when it was feared that Salvadorians would come over and marry Honduran women and take Honduran land. The peasant women's cooperative succeeded in getting the law changed to remove that provision, as well as breaking the logjam on a lot of other issues through this initial dialogue.

### **Research and Resources**

**Nagat El-Sanabary:** I want to note that the Asia and Near East Bureau has been supporting research by local women in four Middle Eastern countries--Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Yemen--to examine these legal and regulatory constraints, and will host a regional conference in Tunisia where approximately 40 women from USAID-assisted countries will discuss how they can overcome them.

**Gretchen Bloom:** I'd like to speak on behalf of Barbara Thomas-Slayter with the ECOGEN Project, which is funded through USAID's WID office. ECOGEN has produced three valuable documents:

1. "Tools of Gender Analysis; A Guide to Field Methods for Bringing Gender into Sustainable Management," uses a variety of different tools for doing gender analysis at the grassroots level.
2. "Managing Resources in a Nepalese Village: Changing Dynamics of Gender, Caste, and Ethnicity," examines an intervention at the village level from a gender perspective to understand who participates and what the outcomes are.
3. "Engendering Resource Management" is written by a Filipino student of the ECOGEN Project, who applied the tools of gender analysis in the Philippines through a technique called PRAGEN (Participatory Rural Appraisal and Gender). To order these resources, call 508-793-7201.

## Communications from the E-mail Bag

The following are excerpts from this month's e-mail messages.

### **The Broader Context: Men, Families, Economic and Political Systems**

**Monique Cohen:** "Men should be introduced into projects targeted at women in the context of ensuring that they are STAKEHOLDERS in the advancement of women. The objective should be to get men to buy-in to women improving their lot and gaining access to resources. Only a few programs, such as in Tunisia, have given attention to demonstrating to men the benefits that will accrue to their families and them through the increased participation of women in the economy.

"There is increasing discussion of the triple role of women, the third role being that of community management. In many cities women play a key role, often on a volunteer basis, in ensuring the delivery of local services, such as infrastructure provision and garbage collection in squatter settlements. These activities are important vehicles for women's entry into and participation in the larger political process.

"Much of the discussion focused on providing women with the tools/skills to participate fully in the economy. The next step is to address the structural constraints within the political and economic system that impede women's fuller participation. No amount of loans or education will assist women in the process of asset building if they lack the legal right to acquire those assets."

**Diane Russell:** "Any time there is a shift in access to resources, which is inherent in the development process, there is the potential for conflict. I would argue that in the vast majority of cases, the shift is operating on a wider social scale than that of a development project or program. For example, in Africa when cash crop prices decline on the world market, crops that women grow, process, or sell may bring in an increasing share of household revenue. This phenomenon changes household dynamics and increases stress on both men and women. But 'dysfunctional' household dynamics are the symptom and not the cause of the problem.

"In southern Cameroon in the late 1980s-early 1990s, cocoa farmers (largely but not exclusively men) were coping with devastating price declines and the bankruptcy of the cocoa parastatal. Increasingly, women's revenue from food crop production and processing was called upon to meet necessities such as school fees and house construction. This trend gave women more economic and social clout.

"A project that focused solely on women's income generating activities could have exacerbated gender conflict, while one that tried to assist men would not have been effective until problems of leadership and trust had been dealt with at the community level. What interventions might be helpful? First, the wider problems of the decline of the cocoa economy could be addressed by increasing the diversity of high value sustainably harvested crops such as nuts, vines (rattan), bark, wines and oils that are collected, processed, and sold by both men and women.

"The root causes of social tension were not household-level revenue issues, however, but lack of transparent and representative government. As neither men nor women could effectively participate in regional development efforts to address the decline of the cocoa economy, gender and generational conflict increased within the community. To understand these patterns and dynamics and address community needs, a long-term participatory research approach, such as ethnographic participant observation, is called for."

**Leroy Jackson:** "The countries within ENI pose an interesting and vivid example of how ethnic intolerance or prejudice can transform itself into incredible hatred and horrible acts of inhumanity. Against this backdrop it seems to me that FAMILY UNITY is far more important than an emphasis on equal rights, per se. In Macedonia, the Gypsies and the Albanians are two despised minority groups. In the face of discrimination from which they cannot escape, the groups' greatest strength, in my view, lies in their ability to work together, pool their resources, and protect each other. If Albanian women cannot inherit land because land is divided among the sons, I would hesitate to rush in and right this particular 'wrong' unless we are sure that this is something Albanian women themselves feel a need to change and the end result will not be a weakened family structure more vulnerable to attacks from the larger society.

"To put it another way, equal rights for women in our client countries may be the right and politically correct thing to do, but in the end we also have to be sure the people can survive with the consequences of such changes promoted from outside their societies."

**Thomas Huggard:** "This past spring, I traveled to Africa and was struck by two situations apropos of this subject. In South Africa, the USAID mission was experiencing personnel difficulties apparently due in part to placing women in positions of authority over men; this, in a society whose norm did not respect this form of relationship, even though it is the 'American way'. In Mali, I visited a village which was experimenting with a birth control/AIDS control program. Again, the focus of the program was on women. What appears to be lacking in some of our programs may be a strong push to educate the men to values and viewpoints contrary to their historical ways."

**John Magistro:** "In five years, we may find ourselves focusing more closely on the roles of youth, and in ten years, we may finally start talking about the critical roles of children in the domestic unit. The point is that everyone in the unit has specifically defined and rapidly changing roles in production, income generation, etc., that are circumscribed by inequitable power relations among all members. Thus, I hope we will eventually transcend debates on feminism and gender and move to more comprehensive models in which the entire domestic unit (intra- as well as extra-familial) will be understood in global terms. Obviously, starting with WID and moving on to GAD (Gender and Development) is a good shift forward. I hope we will soon move beyond."

## **Engaging the Poor in Solutions to Environmental Problems**

**Felipe Manteiga:** "Thank you for keeping us in USAID/India in the loop. A subject of concern to me is the interaction between the poor and the environment. The key problem in India is that population density might generate an enormous environmental problem. What can we do in our environmental work to avoid falling into a high tech loop and to engage the problem-solving powers of the poor?"

**Glenn Prickett:** "I wanted to respond with a few general thoughts from my perspective as Chief Environmental Advisor. We believe that participation is the right approach, and we've learned that it's often the most effective. Our years of work in the water and sanitation area, for example, have taught us this. *Strategies for Sustainable Development* states, 'USAID will promote the involvement of citizens in identifying problem areas, suggesting and designing solutions, overseeing implementation, and evaluating results.' USAID/W will review country strategic plans and action plans closely to ensure that this guidance is implemented.

"USAID needs to do what it can on the population front. But we cannot ignore technology if we are to reach our sustainable development goals. For example, one of the leading environmental problems facing poor populations in India and elsewhere is dirty air. We need to work with industry to promote the use of cleaner technologies in order to solve this problem. I believe that USAID/India's environmental program is a model in this regard.

"I think we can all agree that the participation of all stakeholders, including the poor, is critical to making sound judgements."

## **Sharing Experience and Expertise**

**Eluned Schweitzer:** "I am working on identifying useful approaches to the measurement of participatory activities in Bank-funded education projects, and wondered if there were members of the Forum willing to share their experiences and expertise in this regard."

(Readers are urged to respond by e-mail to "Eluned Schweitzer ESP 33644 <EROBERTSSCHWEITZ@WORLDBANK.ORG>" and to copy your response to Diane La Voy via USAID e-mail or "DLAVOY@USAID.GOV.")