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| THE ART OF LISTENING: making a difference through ‘Enduring Connections’ |
| Practical resource for research planning and implementation |
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**The Art of Listening: Making a Difference through ‘Enduring Connections’**

# **Introduction**

The aim of this document is to inform the Enduring Connections project and ensure it makes a difference to understandings of heritage and climate change and – most importantly – to the people with whom the researchers are working. It sets out some questions that may help guide thinking around the methodological approach, the interpretation of data and the ways in which the people informing your research are represented. It also provides information and ‘food for thought’ around two linked central concerns: ‘why and how should you do participatory research?’ and ‘how do you ensure your work is gender sensitive?’

## **Positioning the research**

A key question posed in the workshop and in this document is ‘what can your unique approach bring to an already well-populated field of work on climate change?’

Responding to this requires an understanding of some practical and ethical questions relating to the research, and a consideration of how the research approach is taking these into account. Questions to ask of your research objectives and approach include:

* What is the role of researchers in the face of challenges such as climate change – what does it mean to be participatory?
* Why is it so important to take a gender-sensitive approach and what does this mean in practice?
* How do you really listen to and hear the voices of the women and men affected by climate change and ensure they are at the centre of your project?
* How do you create an enabling environment for them to explore meanings of climate change for their lives as well as issues around identity, place, heritage and imagined futures?
* How do you amplify the voices of these people on a broader stage?
* How do you represent the women and men you are working with in a faithful, respectful way?

# **Taking a participatory approach**

## **What does it mean to be participatory?**

In 1997 Robert Chambers famously authored a seminal book called ‘Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last’, which exposed the mismatch between the perspectives of many development ‘experts’ and the realities of those living with poverty on a daily basis. The book makes the startling simple yet powerful observation that many poor people from different contexts and countries have a clear understanding of the complex issues facing them and often have vital knowledge for informing effective solutions. The book critiques the linear, often simplistic theories of poverty and change that inform much development thinking, particularly in more technically or numerically-driven fields such as physical science or economics. It argues that the realities and concerns of poor people are contextually situated, complex, diverse and dynamic. It focuses particularly on the ways in which relationships of power determine experiences of poverty. It calls for a ‘reversed’ participatory approach that starts with the needs of those at the bottom of the value chain, who are often considered last, enabling them to analyse and articulate their own views and needs towards the development of meaningful, targeted and appropriate interventions. The overall aim is to improve the wellbeing of the poorest and contribute to their empowerment.

The book has inspired a generation of participatory researchers and practitioners, who have spawned numerous ‘people-centred’ methodologies and development approaches. However, it is not always self-evident what it means to be participatory in practice, so below are some pointers and frequently asked questions.

## **What is Participatory action research (PAR)?**

PAR – also sometimes referred to as PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) – involves communities and other groups of actors as engaged actors form the outset in conducting research enquiries, undertaking analysis, identifying solutions and mapping changes. PAR entails a cycle of critical reflection, learning and action – moving away from the typically linear process taken by many development interventions. Participants make joint decisions about the actions they will take – or recommendations for actions – based on the knowledge they have and data they have gathered. The short-term outcomes of the actions are monitored in an ongoing way and through facilitated reflection the communities identify what is working and what improvements are needed. This cycle continues for the period of the project and – ideally – beyond. However, in PAR the process of engagement is as important as the outcomes.

## **What is reflective practice?**

Reflection is an essential element of any PAR approach. Having the space and time to take a step back and see current realities in depth, or in a different light – is hugely valuable. Being able to imagine a different, or improved situation is the first step to defining strategies towards its realisation. Through reflection participants also gain a clearer understanding of the issues they are facing, the specific context that frames them and the value of the often diverse perspectives and experiences brought by other members of the community.

[Reflective practice](http://www.participatorymethods.org/method/reflective-practice) is a collection of methods for both personal and social development. It supports practitioners and participants in participatory processes to undertake cycles of learning, reflection and action about their own experiences, with the aim of transforming themselves, their relationships within groups, organisations and social systems, and ultimately those systems themselves.

By building the self-awareness and creativity of individuals and strengthening their connections to their values, reflective practice contributes to both personal change and collective development.

(Participatory methods website, April 2017)

## **What is the role of the researcher in participatory approaches?**

There are different schools of thought in terms of how ‘hands off’ those overseeing the project should be but the reality is that in most cases they will have an overall clear idea of the project and the broad direction they would like to go in before the participatory process starts, not least because these are usually conditions of funding. Participation is in essence a ‘bottom up’ approach but it is also a relationship and a process between the NGO, funder or researcher who has initiated the project and those who are participating. The skill of a participatory researcher is to facilitate without dominating, providing the tools and processes that enable participants to share ideas and gain critical awareness of their lives, livelihoods and relationships to people, places and social structures. There are different approaches to facilitation along a continuum from more tightly structured, goal-oriented to a more open-ended approach where empowering group autonomy is key and people are left to make - and learn from - mistakes.

The word ‘facipulation’ is quite often used in participatory research circles – meaning to both facilitate and manipulate. Even though it seems to run counter to the concept of participation the notion of facipulation acknowledges that projects are time-bound and that there is an expectation of results by funders. It also recognises that researchers often come with a wider view of how the project fits within a national, regional or global context, and particular knowledge that can be of help to the group. However there is a fine line between facipulation and steering research as an ‘all-knowing expert.’ A high level of reflexivity is therefore important for any participatory facilitator, to ensure that the researcher is able to recognise and address any assumptions s/he may bring, and sees him or herself as a co-participant in a collaborative process – open to learning and showing a willingness to be flexible as the project progresses.

**Resources**

Chambers, R., 1997, Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last, ITDG Publishing

Reeler, D. et. al., 2009, Barefoot Guide to Working with Organisations and Social Change, Barefoot Collective, http://www.barefootguide.org/uploads/1/1/1/6/111664/barefoot\_guide\_to\_organisations\_whole\_book.pdf

VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V., 2002, A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: the Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation, Practical Action Publishing

<http://www.participatorymethods.org/>

# **Taking a Gender-Sensitive Approach**

## **What do we mean by ‘gender’?**

Gender is a relational term, describing the ways in which the social and cultural context into which girls and boys are born shape ideas of who they are, how they should behave and what they should strive for in life. Gender imbues biological characteristics of the male and female ‘sex’ with social meanings that are usually underpinned by differentials in power and status. These are reinforced through cultural practices, legal frameworks, state institutions and other social structures such as education systems, organised religion, and the media.

**Gender**

The social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between men and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are **socially constructed** and are learned through socialisation processes.

Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.

(UN Women)

Thinking in terms of ‘gender’ is useful in that it moves us away from thinking about men and women as separate, radically different and determined by their biological make-up. Rather than seeing women and men as binary opposites the notion of gender sees masculinity and femininity as being part of a dynamic continuum. A gender lens contains the possibility of challenging and changing gendered social norms through processes of reflection and understanding that engage both women and men.

### **Some facts about gender inequality in Kiribati**

**Women and the Law**

Kiribati’s constitution affords women formal equality before the law but stops short of affording them all the benefits and outcomes [required by Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_117331.pdf). While these constitutional anti-discrimination provisions exist, they do not include sex as a protected ground. This means that discrimination against women is [technically legal in Kiribati](http://www.undppc.org.fj/_resources/article/files/TCL_Executive%20Summary1.pdf) and laws which discriminate against women cannot be declared unconstitutional.

Abortion is illegal in Kiribati with a limited exemption where the life of the mother is in danger.

Kiribati provides for an equal minimum marriage age of [18 for both men and women](http://www.law.unimelb.edu.au/files/dmfile/download6d621.pdf). Fault-based divorce is practised in Kiribati, and property division following matrimonial breakdown does [not take into account non-financial contributions to the marriage](http://www.law.unimelb.edu.au/files/dmfile/download6d621.pdf). Unmarried mothers automatically lose custody of their children once the child turns two ([providing the father acknowledges paternity and wishes to retain custody](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_117331.pdf)).

The customs and traditions of the people of I-Kiribati have constitutional protection. This means there is often no or little legal recourse for women when customary laws [infringe on the enjoyment of their rights and freedom](http://www.undppc.org.fj/_resources/article/files/TCL_Executive%20Summary1.pdf).

**Violence against Women**

Overall 73% of women reported experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence. Around one in five women (18%) aged 15-49 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a non-partner. At least 68% of women between the ages of 15-49 reported experiencing either physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner. Around 90% of women reported experiencing some form of controlling behaviour, [31.4% of women had experienced rape involving physical force, and 41.1% had had sex with a partner because they were afraid](http://www.spc.int/hdp/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=211&Itemid=4).

Around one in five women aged 15-49 reported being sexually abused before the age of 15. Of these women, approximately [two-thirds reported that the abuser was someone known to them](http://www.undp.org.fj/pdf/unp/evaw.pdf).

**Women and the Economy**

Kiribati has a subsistence economy with a small labour workforce. The government is the largest employer and revenue is earned from remittances from temporary labour, from fishing fees and from international aid. Since 2007 women have comprised more than 50% of the workforce but only slightly more than a third of those are in paid employment. Girls currently outnumber boys in secondary and tertiary education, however, they are still under-represented at all levels of decision-making.

Unemployment among women was at 6.6% in the 2005 Census, as [compared to 5.6% among men](http://www.spc.int/prism/country/ki/stats/census2005/reports/kir%20report%202005%20-%20volume%20ii%20-%20final.pdf).  Women’s participation in the non-agricultural sector was at [36.6% in 2012](http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2011%20Pacific%20Regional%20MDGs%20Tracking%20Report_FINAL.pdf).

Kiribati women traditionally can own and inherit property. However, they often have more limited access to resources. [Women are often responsible for producing goods needed to meet traditional social obligations](http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Kiribati_Sitan.pdf), as well as standard housekeeping and childcare responsibilities.

- See more at: http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/co/kiribati#sthash.XQFH72Q0.dpuf

## **Why is Gender relevant for Climate Change?**

In 2008 Action Aid produced a report about the human impacts of climate change in the Ganga basin area of South Asia. The report was based on participatory research that had been carried out with women farmers from rural areas of Bangladesh, Nepal and India. The report was entitled ‘we know what we need: Women speak out on climate change adaptation.’ Drawing on the women’s own words the report reflects the specific challenges they face in coping with the effects of climate change, but it also shows the ways in which they were already adapting to the changes - for example by planting different, more hardy varieties of local rice, planting seeds in more resilient ways and diversifying their produce.

The women also had a clear idea of what was needed to increase their resilience - their priorities included safe, flood resistant places to live and store their harvest; better irrigation systems; and access to training and information.

The report was ground breaking for one key reason – it gave a face and a voice to the poor, rural women who had hitherto been either absent from any discussions of climate change - or had been portrayed as one-dimensional passive victims. The report argued that women are often more vulnerable to climate change because of culturally and socially engrained systems of poverty and inequality but it also revealed them as engaged, knowledgeable actors.

The report also reminds us that climate change primarily affects people – often living in the developing countries of the South, such as Kiribati[[1]](#footnote-1) – who have the lowest carbon emissions per capita. In particular climate change affects those who are the poorest because they are most reliant on scarce natural resources, less able to diversify their livelihoods and more susceptible to climate-related shocks. And because over 70 per cent of the world’s poor people are women and girls, they are disproportionately affected.

Yet these people are largely missing from the vast majority of climate-related work. Huge amounts of money being spent on scientific research and technical solutions such as green technologies and carbon trading and offsetting. However, efforts to learn from local experiences or to consult with local communities about their needs and concerns are very rare or perfunctory. When consultation happens, it is often through pre-determined questionnaires and frameworks, and Western concepts and ideas about climate change, leaving little space to understand how women and men experience its effects, how their identities are affected by these rapid changes and what they want for their futures.

The result is often poorly designed, inappropriate projects that reflect well on governments and donors but have little sustainability and low impacts for women and men. What we need instead are **people-centred solutions**, informed by a deep understanding of local culture and social norms and – significantly – of gender. There is a growing body of evidence on the specific implications of climate change for women in countries of Africa and Asia but little published information for Kiribati in this regard.

## **What are risks of not taking a gender-sensitive approach?**

Without being gender sensitive there are some risks:

1. That we don’t respond to the specific challenges faced by women and men in the face of climate change.

Climate change has the effect of magnifying existing unequal gender power relations. Women may already be expected to spend a significant portion of their days in unpaid work such as fetching water and wood, caring for small children and undertaking social responsibilities. The social responsibilities and obligations of women in a Kiribati village include meeting the *buknibwai* or ‘village shares’, composed of sharing portions of ‘food, money and entertainment-related activities’ to other villagers, and producing the traditional goods that are the currency of the local economy (UNICEF 2005). The increasing scarcity of natural commodities such as food and water means more and more time and effort spent on these activities for many women. This not only affects quality of life, but also means women are less able to participate in wage-earning activities or in decision-making spaces such as local councils or organisations.

Climate change can also bring new gender-specific risks; evidence shows that in climate-related disasters such as floods and landslides women and girls are most likely to be directly affected because they are not taught practical skills such as swimming or climbing – and because of cultural practices that limit their public mobility.

Men are also affected by climate change in very specific ways. For example there is evidence that food scarcity and other effects of climate change can have a deep psychological impact on men, whose identities are often bound up with the notion of being a provider for their families. Masculine norms also mean that men are more likely to take life threatening risks in the face of climate-related disasters such as tidal waves and flooding.

1. That responses to climate change may deepen existing inequalities and disempower women

For example REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) enables industrialised countries to “offset‟ their carbon emissions by paying governments for the conservation of forests, often in the developing South, to promote climate mitigation by preserving carbon stored in trees. This commercialisation of previously free natural resources has been shown to lead to the further exclusion of poor and landless people, often women, who depend on products from the forests for their livelihoods but rarely benefit from the economic incentives.

## **What changes could a gender-sensitive approach contribute to?**

1. Responses could contribute to shifts in unequal gender norms

In India a small community-based organisation in the Himalayas called the Community Awareness Centre was pioneering in its use of participatory methodologies to raise awareness of climate change - causes and effects – among groups of men and women. Many of the women were illiterate and this was their only source of information on the issues. There was a focus on the impacts of deforestation and of the value of preserving the forest, not using it for fire wood etc.

Capacity building was combined with empowerment and leadership training for both women and men. This inspired one of the participants, a woman in her 50s, to run for forest local governance committee – the first time a woman had ever done so. She was elected, and was able to continue promoting environmentally sound practices. She has also inspired other women to take up leadership roles. Also some indications that men are more prepared to share unpaid care work in the community.

1. The specific knowledge of women and girls would inform more effective responses

While women and girls are often more vulnerable in the face of climate change it is vital to remember that they are also agents, with a huge amount of knowledge and capacity in adaptation and resilience. The strong role of women in developing locally-relevant climate responses is very clear in the case of Kiribati. Their commitment to protecting local resources in ways that respect culture and heritage is notable, and highlights their deep understanding of the issues and of what responses are needed. However, care is needed to avoid reinforcing the gender stereotype of women’s innate closeness to nature and ‘natural’ roles as custodians of the earth.

## **A growing awareness of gender in the context of climate change**

Climate change policies and responses have made significant strides in terms of recognising the need to be gender sensitive. In particular there have been efforts to address the low representation of women in climate change decision making at global and national levels. For example, a report is published every year which tracks the gender composition of UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) discussions and processes and a ‘Gender day’ is held during each UNFCCC Annual Community of Parties (COP). However the increase in the number of women delegates at the COP has been negligible, rising from 30 per cent in 2010 to 36 per cent in 2014 (see UNFCCC 2015); while at COP 21 in 2015 only 26 per cent of heads of delegations were female.

However there are still major blind spots, particularly at the highest level of global policy. At the Paris climate conference (COP21) in December 2015, 195 countries adopted the first ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The agreement sets out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C. It includes measures to reduce global carbon emissions and to support people in developing countries, who have been affected by climate change. However the agreement falls down in its lack of attention to gender equality, paying only perfunctory attention to the complex issues and seeing gender only in terms of women’s vulnerability.

## **What does it mean to take a gender-sensitive approach in research?**

At a minimum gender sensitivity means taking gender differences into account in research planning, processes of implementation and evaluations. It is important to be constantly mindful that issues often affect women and men (and boys and girls) differently and that they will have specific experiences and perspectives. These should be taken into account as far as possible both to ensure your work is representative, and because they will yield a much deeper, richer picture of the communities where you are working. This means ensuring you gather (gender disaggregated) information from and about women and men, using existing data sets as well as participatory or other methodologies.

You may, however, see your project as an opportunity to enable reflection on gender issues and identities within the communities, which could contribute to shifts in inequitable practices and norms. Decisions on the gender-specific objectives you set and the questions you ask will depend on the overall goals of your research. In the context of Kiribati for example, participatory methodologies could be used to understand the daily realities of women’s and girls’ (and men and boys’) lives - what challenges do they face and in what ways are they adapting to these challenges? What changes would they like to see?

You may ask questions about how gender affects the ways in which local history and sense of place are shaped. For example, to what extent do local heritage and oral histories enable women’s roles and influence to be recorded and remembered in ways that counter the gender blindness and exclusionary nature often associated with ‘formal’ state-endorsed national historical narratives? What does place and heritage mean for women and men in the context of a changing climate?

**Resources**

Aguilar, L., 2009, ‘Women and climate change: Vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities.’ State of the World 2009: Climate Connections. WorldWatch Institute. New York: WW Norton & Co. Available at: http://www.worldwatch.org/files/pdf/SOW09\_ CC\_women.pd

BRIDGE, 2011, Gender and Climate Change Cutting Edge Pack, IDS: UK, http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/bridge-publications/cutting-edge-packs/gender-and-climate-change

Gurung, D.D. and Bisht, S., 2014, Women’s Empowerment on the Frontline of Adaptation: Emerging Issues, Adaptive Practices and Priorities in Nepal, ICIMOD Working Paper, <http://lib.icimod.org/record/29811/files/WE_14.pdf>

Mitchell, T., Tanner, T. and Lussier, K., 2007, We know what we need: South Asian Women Speak Out on Climate Change Adaptation, Action Aid <http://www.actionaid.org/publications/we-know-what-we-need-south-asian-women-speak-out-climate-change-adaptation>

Oxfam Gender Training Manual, 1995, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-oxfam-gender-training-manual-141359>

Government of Kiribati and UNICEF, 2005, Kiribati: A Situational Analysis of Children, Women and Youth, https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Kiribati\_Sitan.pdf

1. Kiribati is ranked 121st out of 185 countries in human development index - nearly a quarter of the population are classified as extremely poor, and there is high unemployment. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)