



Social Analysis Systems²

Concepts and Tools for
Collaborative Research and Social Engagement

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Title	Competing Project Priorities of Men and Women in Mehi, West Bengal.
Key Words	<i>Competing Goals</i> , Priorities, Ranking, Livelihoods, Environment, West Bengal, India.
Reference and Acknowledgement	Buckles, D. 2006. Competing Project Priorities of Men and Women in Mehi, West Bengal. SAS ² Technique Report #15, 4 pp. Retrieved from: http://idl-bnc.idrc.ca/dspace/handle/123456789/26952 . The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Soma Paul, Niladri Chakraborty, Sujit Mitra and Rajeev Khedkar who helped to design and facilitate the diagnosis.
Context	Mehi is a village some 336 kilometres from Kolkata in the district of Purulia, West Bengal. The non-governmental organization Development, Research, Communication and Services Centre (DRCSC) is active with two tribal groups in Mehi that are usually not helped by development projects. DRCSC was planning to renew its support for certain project activities in the village and was also planning to extend these activities to other nearby villages.
Purpose	To assess gender-based differences in project priorities in the village.
Process Summary	DRCSC convened a meeting in the home of one of the villagers in Mehi. About 20 people attended; many were married couples. Before the meeting, DRCSC had made a list of activities to be discussed during the diagnosis based on its current village program and projects of other organizations in the village. The group was asked to rank these activities from the most beneficial to the least. The ranking was done separately by the men and by the women. In the men's group, participants drew pictures representing each

activity and identified from them the one that was most beneficial to them. The selected picture was turned over and the most beneficial activity from the remaining pictures was identified, a process that continued until all pictures were ranked. In the women's group, the activities were ranked by making paired comparisons of pictures drawn by the facilitator to represent each activity. One-to-one ranking choices were made by the women. The number of times each activity was selected most beneficial was then recorded in a table. The sum of these numbers gave the final rank for each activity. Using two methods to do the ranking reflected the preferences of the two facilitators.

Once both groups had finished ranking the activities they were asked to guess the ranking the other group might have made. The rankings of the two groups were then compared by forming two lines of people (men and women) holding the pictures of the activities in the priority they had indicated. After a discussion of differences, the order was shuffled to show how each group guessed the priorities of the other group. This led to a discussion of misunderstandings between the two groups. The participants were aware that the result would form part of the reporting and decision making procedures of DRCSC, and agreed to share their information.

Analysis

The six activities on the list were: mixed cropping, fisheries, grain bank, road building, children's nursery, and the kitchen garden (Table 1). Road construction and the children's nursery are government projects in the village, while the other four project activities are run by DRCSC. Both kinds of activities had been in place for a number of years.

The way men and women ranked priorities showed a high level of disagreement (8/18 or 45% disagreement in priorities) due to major differences in the ranking of three activities. The fisheries project, ranked as most beneficial by the men, was ranked fourth by the women. The children's nursery and the grain bank, ranked highest by the women, received a much lower priority among the men. There was little disagreement on other activities.

The level of misunderstanding was also high for both groups, with men showing a slightly poorer understanding of women's priorities than women did of men's priorities (12/18 or 67% level of men's misunderstanding of the women's priorities, and 10/18 or 56% level of women's misunderstanding of the men's priorities). The comparison showed the men that they had overestimated the benefits women see in the kitchen garden project and that they had greatly underestimated the benefits women see in the children's nursery project. The fact that the fisheries project was important to the men was clear to the women, but the women had not expected the men's lack of interest in the road building project.

Table 1: Competing project priorities of men and women in Mehi, West Bengal.

Activities	Men	Women	Disagreement	Ranking by women for men	Women's mis-understanding	Ranking by men for women	Men's mis-understanding
Mixed cropping	2	3	1	3	1	5	2
Fisheries	1	4	3	2	1	2	2
Grain Bank	4	2	2	4	0	3	1
Road Construction*	6	6	0	1	5	6	0
Children's nursery*	3	1	2	5	2	4	3
Kitchen Garden	5	5	0	6	1	1	4
			8/18		10/18		12/18

* Projects initiated by government agencies.

Interpretation

The disagreement between men and women regarding priority project activities reflects a gender-based division of labour within the village. Men are active in fisheries while women have greater responsibility for child care and storing seeds. The high level of misunderstanding when it comes to the priorities of the other gender points to a communication gap between men and women. Men's greater power in the household and the village may have limited discussion of competing priorities in

the past.

Action

Several of the men remarked on the communication gap and said they planned to discuss priorities with their wives more often. DRCSC decided to reassess the role of the kitchen garden in the village project, an activity they had assumed was a high priority for women. They also decided to continue support for the grain bank and explore ways to strengthen the children's nursery run by the government. Furthermore, DRCSC decided to convene priority-setting meetings among women and men separately, and to design their program based on negotiated priorities.

Observations on the Process

The use of two different ways of ranking the activities was confusing for some participants. This was resolved by having people stand up with a picture in hand in the order of priority for their group. This active way of presenting the rankings meant there was no need to create a summary table or list. People were able to see the conclusions right in front of them. The participants said that the different perspectives on priorities made sense to them and that the exercise was very useful to their own discussions not only with DRCSC but also government organizations with programs in the village.