

Enhancing social inclusion through local dialogues on natural resource management (NRM)

The purpose of this tool is to stimulate thinking and offer guidance on a tested approach for **enhancing social inclusion in and through natural resource management (NRM)**. It can be used to accompany processes of community engagement and community - based or - led deliberations on NRM or other topics of local importance. Processes of social exclusion are historically and contextually rooted. Hence, this tool is not meant to be overly prescriptive, but rather to draw attention to the importance of *representation*, *process* as well as *content* in fostering inclusion in NRM or other community affairs.

Below, we take the example of collective management of common property resources (CPR), such as forests, water, or pastures, to propose a facilitated process of community engagement to enhance social inclusion and cohesion, and the prospects of collective action. The elements outlined draw from ‘contact theory’ (Allport 1954), which stipulates that in situations of discrimination or conflict, inter-group contact under a set of predefined conditions can allow groups to better know and understand each other, work through their differences, and create group unity. The approach, which has been tested in different contexts, may also be applied to other fields than NRM.

The approach described below is rooted in dialogue (i.e. dialogic) and represents a *process* of active engagement among participants, accompanied by both women and men facilitators, over time. Given the time and human resources involved, such a process must be adequately planned and budgeted for from its inception.

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Representation

Carefully consider **who is invited to participate in the local dialogues on NRM**.



Identify the main social groups, inter-group dynamics and sources of marginalization in the community. This may be achieved through prior knowledge of a place, observation, and key informant interviews, including informal conversations. Pay attention to **intersectionality** – or how different forms of social difference intersect to create unique social locations. This means that not all ‘women’ or ‘men’ are the same, for example, and that other forms of social differences (e.g. age, socio-economic status, ethnicity) play a role in determining

how processes such as NRM are locally experienced. Bringing different groups together can not only increase the breadth of the knowledge that bears on the discussions and decisions made, but also enable consideration of the priorities and experiences of more marginalized members of the community.

Build rapport with different segments of the community. Building and maintaining good rapport can take time but is essential as it will influence the rest of the process. In rural communities, entry points for easing into new relationships may include discussions over agricultural practices and prices, rains, and positive and negative changes in the village over time.



When working in communities where strong social cleavages or hierarchies exist, substantial effort may be needed to encourage members to participate in mixed (gender, age, caste or otherwise) group meetings. Garner the **support of local people with influence among their social group**, which may require having separate initial interactions with gatekeepers from different social groups. It may be useful to **enlist the collaboration of respected, influential third parties** who are considered 'neutral brokers' to encourage the participation of all social groups or assuring invited participants that these figures endorse the exercise. These third parties may be internal or external to the community. Sharing examples of other communities that have successfully engaged in a similar process can also motivate participation.

When bringing different groups together, try to **balance numbers across groups** to create a more comfortable atmosphere for marginalized members to speak.

Take care in selecting facilitators. They can be internal to the community (e.g. a community resource person) or external (e.g. NGO or CSO staff). In either case, they should have good rapport with different participant groups of the community and be trusted to facilitate in a neutral and fair way. Consider the **social attributes of facilitators**, and whether they will be able to encourage equitable participation among the different groups. Matching the gender of facilitators to that of participants is often recommended to make participants feel more comfortable.

Strengthen capacities of facilitators to recognize their own gender and social biases, and to observe and manage exclusionary norms and unequal power relations.

Process

The process and terms of the dialogue across different social groups is just as important as the themes discussed.

Securing the participation of all will require **meeting times and places that are convenient and that make different participants feel comfortable**. It may be necessary to accommodate special needs in terms of transportation, childcare, etc.

Ensure that the **location and seating arrangements for the meetings set a tone of equality**. For example, the same seats (chairs or the floor) should be made available to all participants, unless their physical requirements differ. Arranging seating in a circle rather than having elites occupy front-row seats can help generate a space for more equitable participation.

Seek the **free, prior and informed consent** of participants at the beginning of the process. This requires clearly explaining the purpose and modalities of the exercise to allow participants to make informed decisions about their participation.

Level power-relations within the contact situation by establishing clear **ground rules that set a tone of inclusion**. These can be determined in a participatory way, with the facilitator guiding the discussion to ensure that key elements are evoked: e.g. respect different opinions, listen actively, encourage less vocal participants to express themselves, make space for everyone to speak. The facilitator is then tasked with ensuring these rules are respected.

Given participants' different levels of experience and comfort speaking in a large group, and the imperative of hearing the perspectives of different participant groups, create **sub-group discussions**. Groups can be formed along gender and/or age, ethnic, or other lines; the idea being to create 'safe' and comfortable spaces for participants to express themselves. Although they are formed along some lines of similarity, smaller groups will also bring together participants from different social groups, e.g. women from different socio-economic classes or men from different ethnic groups. This allows for discussions and comradery to be established across social differences.

Facilitators should encourage all members to actively participate in these small groups.

Hold additional gender-segregated meetings **when needed** to ensure that everyone has and understands relevant information and that sub-groups have time to process, discuss and come up with a shared position on issues at hand. This is especially important when there are important and complex decisions to be made.

The facilitator should adopt **strategies to strengthen collaboration, teamwork, and relations within the smaller group**. For example, facilitators can make a game out of seeing which groups know more about certain issues – and the outcomes of the game are likely to surprise everyone!

Following discussions in small groups, the **groups can come together** in plenary to present their ideas to each other. One or more representative from each group can present to the larger group. Pairing up the presenters can give them more confidence to present, particularly when they are not used to speaking in public in front of some of their fellow community members (e.g. young women may not be used to speaking in front of male elders).

Following the presentations, groups are asked to **reflect on the process**: How did they feel working in their smaller group? How did they feel presenting in front of the larger group? How did they feel listening to the other groups present? Did anything surprise them? What did they learn from the discussions?

Redressing historical power imbalances, discrimination and exclusions is a long-term process. **Repeating these meetings and discussions at a regular frequency over time** is essential to create inter-group friendships, understanding, and appreciation, and to generate a common vision for collective action.

Each session begins by **recapping the activities of the previous session** and any decisions taken, which allows participants to see how activities build on each other. If materials (e.g. flipcharts, drawings, text or photos) are available from previous sessions, these can be brought to bring everyone on the same page, and support the dialogue moving forward.

Content

In this example, the content focuses on sustainable and equitable NRM. **The manner and sequence in which participants discuss relevant topics are important to work through differences and support constructive discussions.**

When discussing sensitive and potentially divisive issues, **begin by introducing more benign topics** to create an atmosphere of comfort and common understanding. For example, the first topic with respect to NRM may be about the species that different groups depend on and value. Whatever the specific topic, the first exercise may draw attention to **socially differentiated knowledge**. Reflecting on the existence of different knowledge systems, and the fact that different groups bring different pieces of knowledge to bear on the issue at hand, helps participants to recognize the value of having these groups at the table during NRM-related deliberations and decisions.

Related to diverse knowledge systems, discussions can move to the **specific needs and priorities of different groups** with respect to NRM. Discussions on livelihood systems help participants empathize with different resource use strategies (and dependence on natural resources).

To explore the main problems, challenges, barriers to sustainable and equitable NRM and the contribution of different actors to these problems, it is important to go beyond proximate causes to the **deeper roots of unsustainable and inequitable resource use** and management. Taking a **historical perspective** and identifying key turning points in resource management strategies can be valuable. The **focus is on the entire (social, institutional, ecological, economic) ecosystem** that shapes resource use strategies. Several tools can be employed to explicitly discuss social relations and gender roles at this time*. Careful facilitation is required to avoid blaming and shaming particular groups, and to **contextualize resource use strategies within larger opportunity structures and livelihood strategies**. The discussion ends with

different groups recognizing the roles they and others play in NRM, and the constraints that must be lifted to establish more sustainable and equitable strategies.

The ground is now ripe for **common visioning** and a future-looking discussion for improved and more equitable NRM. An **action plan**, with roles for different segments of the community and extra-community actors, can be developed. **Emphasis on equity and social, economic, and environmental sustainability** is to run through the discussions; so is attention to **monitoring** and learning from putting discussions into action.

* Examples of tools and manuals for gender and social analysis include:

Assefa, B. and de Roo, N. 2005. Manual on gender analysis tools. CASCAPE, Available at: https://agriprofocus.com/upload/CASCAPE_Manual_Gender_Analysis_Tools_FINAL1456840468.pdf

Carloni, A. 2005. Rapid guide for missions: Analyzing local institutions and livelihoods. Rome: UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a0273e/a0273e00.htm>

Leder, S., Das, D., Reckers, A., and Karki, E. 2016. Participatory gender training for community groups. Colombo: CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems, Available at: <https://wle.cgiar.org/solutions/participatory-gender-training-community-groups>

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www.cgiar.org

Additional readings

Allport GW. 1954. The nature of prejudice. New York (NY): Perseus Books.

Burnley C and Ziegenhagen K. 2014. Supporting gender-inclusive dialogue over natural resource management. Policy Brief. Collaborating for Resilience.

Elias M. 2013 *Practical tips for conducting gender-responsive data collection*. Rome: Bioversity International.

Elias M and Micheletti G. 2019. Practical strategies for enhancing gender equality and social inclusion in Innovation Platforms on agriculture and natural resource management. International Water Management Institute (IWMI). Brief. CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE). Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Hegde N, Elias M, Lamers HA, Hegde M. 2017. Engaging local communities in social learning for inclusive management of native fruit trees in the Central Western Ghats, India. *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods* 26(1): 65-83. DOI: 10.1080/14728028.2016.1257398.

Ratner BD and Smith WE. 2014. Collaborating for Resilience: A practitioner's guide. Manual. Collaborating for Resilience.

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