

# Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Training

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An important challenge facing organisations throughout the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is to attract women participants to capacity building activities. Some cultural constraints limit the participation of women in such initiatives, and mechanisms need to be put in place to encourage their participation. In addition, if women do attend, it is important to ensure that their participation is 'active'. In many cases, women are much less vocal than men, and men tend to monopolise discussions. The cultural setting, social structures, and gender relations affect the way women and men participate. Based on ICIMOD's experience in organising capacity building and upscaling activities in the region, this guideline aims to provide some guidance to increase women's participation in training and workshops by making such initiatives more gender sensitive.

## What is a gender sensitive training?

Gender sensitive training entails an understanding of existing gender relations and the obstacles to women's active participation in the training process. It addresses these obstacles by proposing content that addresses both women's and men's interests and needs, and by adopting training and facilitation methods that enhance women's participation. More precisely, gender sensitive training takes into account the needs, priorities, and expectations of both women and men while planning, implementing and evaluating training activities in order to ensure that women and men receive equitable benefits from the learning process.

## Why gender sensitive training?

Women and men have different roles, different responsibilities, and different decision-making power. As a result, they also have different needs and priorities that have to be taken into account when preparing and conducting training.

Gender is an issue of development effectiveness, not just a matter of 'doing something special for women'. Evidence demonstrates that when women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move quickly out of poverty, and the wellbeing of men, women, and children is enhanced (World Bank 2001). Gender sensitive capacity-building initiatives can contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development for improving the wellbeing of mountain communities.

Gender disparities in training programmes are usually present no matter what level is targeted including among managers of development programmes, government representatives, and scientists, as well as at the community level. The belief remains that women are not competent enough or not interested in technical topics, forgetting that they play a key role in livelihood systems, natural resources

management, and in the overall maintenance of their households and communities.

Traditional beliefs, patriarchal systems, time constraints due to multiple roles, social and cultural restrictions, and limited involvement in decision-making processes exclude women from the public sphere, limiting their access to information and capacity building activities.



## Guidelines for gender sensitive training

Gender sensitive training is not training on the gender approach and does not have to even directly mention gender issues or talk about gender equality. Gender sensitive training aims to ensure the equitable participation of women and men during the training process by:

- developing training programmes that cater for both women and men's interests
- ensuring that there is a sufficient number of women among the participants
- using methods that increase the active participation of both women and men, and that address different learning capacities
- ensuring a learning environment suitable for both women and men

- adopting attitudes and behaviours that value differential experiences and perspectives
- ensuring listening and respect for each other's experiences and views
- facilitating good communication practices in which misunderstandings, insults, blaming, and demands are recognised and resolved, and participants are brought back to facts, views, values, and requests

### **Gender sensitive training programme**

A gender-sensitive programme begins with the formulation of aims and objectives that should be technically and environmentally sound and people-relevant, i.e., addressing participants' needs and expectations. To achieve this, it may be important to be aware of the gender roles or differential needs of women and men related to the topic of the training. It may also be useful to consult the potential participants, both women and men, and look at their background and fields of interest. Setting training objectives that take into account the gender perspective not only addresses women's needs, but can more efficiently address the training topic/technical issues, thereby contributing to achieving the overall goal of the training.

### **Gender sensitive content**

Women and men's interests may be different due to their different gender roles and needs. The gender perspective should be an integral part of the training concept in terms of content and approach. Simply adding the 'woman's perspective is not enough. Sometimes the content itself does not address the interests of both women and men, so it is important to have explicit discussions about the issue. The content can also be made gender sensitive by giving explicit examples from both women's and men's experiences and by highlighting the differences and

#### **Different roles, different needs, different interests**

The experience of ICIMOD's People and Resource Dynamics Project suggests that men are usually more interested in issues related to irrigation management of cereal crops, whereas women more interested in topics related to the areas they are responsible for such as fetching water and irrigating vegetable crops grown around the homestead. Considering this fact, the project trained women farmers about water quality and managing irrigation through drip systems, which proved to be highly successful in terms of poverty alleviation of marginalised women in the watershed areas.

similarities, and their implications for the sector of intervention.

### **Gender sensitive trainers**

Whether it is training on a technical topic such as watershed management, disaster risk reduction, value chain development, or even planning and budgeting, trainers must be aware of the gender dimensions of the topic. How women and men may differently use natural resources; how they have different access to technologies; their roles in livelihoods; the social factors that create different vulnerabilities towards natural hazards; how are they going to be affected by a programme's activities; and so forth. These factors should not be considered as 'side' problems, and even less as 'women's issues'; these factors directly affect the problem to be addressed and can make a difference in our capacity to find and implement a viable and realistic solution to the problem.

#### **Facilitation skills: Distinguish between facts and views**

It is not uncommon when discussing the gender dimensions of a specific issue that opinions and beliefs take over facts.

The tension in sensitive debates is often eased when facts and views are clearly distinguished. Facts and views should both be accepted, but in their own right. Statements that are presented to be facts can be checked for their validity and completeness. Statements that are views can be respected, even if others have opposing views. An essential skill of a trainer is to overcome biases and de-escalate sensitivities by noticing and addressing confusions between facts and views, without hurting the feelings of the concerned participants.

Therefore, trainers must have a basic understanding of the gender perspective related to their topic, and this should be stated in their terms of references. Being aware of the gender perspective can help in the design of different training content and methodologies that will make the training and the application of the learning much more effective in terms of solving the issues. Again, it is important to highlight that gender sensitive training does not have to talk about gender equality or discrimination, but is about making visible women and men's roles and contributions, as well as taking into account their differential needs.

The key role of a trainer is to facilitate the training process; this is very different to teaching, directing, or ordering. A good trainer should undertake the following to make the training gender sensitive:

- know and raise some gender dimensions related to the subject, and recognise and integrate gender aspects put forward by the participants
- adapt the training or workshop format and schedule to optimise the meaningful participation of women
- ensure that both women and men express their true opinion, and listen to and respect each other's experiences and views
- create an atmosphere in which women and men feel respected, safe, and encouraged to share their views, and to interact with women and men with diverging views

Gender sensitive trainers should pay heed to the slogan 'lead the content through the process'. In other words, the trainer should not take sides in debates (or half the participants may feel that the trainer is 'against' them), yet influences the outcome of debates (the content) by ensuring a balanced variety of voices are heard. 'Leading through the process' means that the trainer influences the discussion through questions and through deciding who speaks. Needless to say, in many cases the trainer needs to make a special effort to help women speak up and be understood.

Although it is always good practice to have trainers from both sexes and different and complementary backgrounds, it is even more important where the prevalent cultural and social restrictions disapprove of direct interactions between women and men.

### **Gender sensitive training environment**

Most organisations sending participants to events organised by ICIMOD employ more men than women. Even so, the women employed by these organisations often face more challenges in attending training. Strong affirmative action is therefore required to move towards gender equality. Some of these measures relate to how the training is run after the arrival of the participants, but many need to be devised and communicated before the training to ensure that a fair number of women attend. Some logistical aspects of training that can encourage or considerably limit the participation of women are listed below. Here, again, it is important to remember the constraints women may face, notably combining their household and work responsibilities.

- Defining an appropriate schedule is crucial for the active participation of the participants, especially for women. It is important to be aware that extending an afternoon session beyond the time scheduled can eventually have consequences for women who have

familial responsibilities. Some flexibility may be necessary in the morning (starting later) for women to be able to go along with their busy morning schedules.

- It can be useful, in some cases, to organise a temporary care centre for women with young children, or to pay the travel and accommodation costs for infants and an accompanying person to take care of the children.
- In some cases it is relevant to ensure and communicate that at least two women will participate. Knowing that she will not be alone can be decisive in the decision of a woman to participate (and even in obtaining her partner's agreement).
- In cases where ICIMOD invites several participants from one organisation, in the case of paid training, a lower course fee for women may be maintained to encourage their participation.
- The duration of the training should be taken into consideration. It may be difficult for a mother to stay away from her home for a week.
- The venue and transport should also be considered. It should be safe and easily accessible to both women and men. Safe and proper transportation to and from the training venue is a factor that can encourage the participation of women. In some cultures there is a strong restriction on women's mobility, even for professional women, and it may be difficult for them to participate in a training organised abroad or even in a place far from where they live.

### **Gender sensitive training methods**

There are many factors that encourage or inhibit people's participation such as language, experience related to the topic, and experience speaking in public, but also power relations related to people's social and economic position and their hierarchic position in their profession. Age and gender are also among the factors that may affect a person's capacity to be at ease speaking publicly.

However, it is not always possible to select a homogeneous group of participants. Therefore, the trainers' role is not only to provide technical knowledge, but also to create an environment conducive to discussion, sharing of experiences, and questions. Even in a group of professionals and academics, women are less inclined to express their opinion, share their experience, and ask questions, while men show more confidence in their knowledge and some tend to present and impose their views as being the opinions of the overall group. To correct and balance such situations, the trainer has to especially ensure that shy persons speak and that deviating opinions are expressed and considered.

To encourage women's active involvement in the training, the trainer may wish to select some topics on which women have more experience or knowledge. The trainer may also directly ask some women participants to share their experience with the group by highlighting their findings – this is a way to value their experience.

### **Anonymity**

Any written assignment (meta cards, ranking, voting, questionnaires or writing on flips) can be done anonymously, with the advantage that people feel freer to express deviating and critical views. Realise that once you have promised anonymity, you can no longer make statements like 'who says that?' or even 'what does that mean?'

Using participatory methods such as meta cards and small group work encourages more people to be involved. In some cases, it could even be useful to organise separate women and men's groups: this not only helps women to feel more comfortable to discuss and contribute, but can also contribute to finding out the different perspectives of women and men and to reveal the complementarities between the different visions.

Finally, experience shows that when the group of trainers is mixed, women are more predisposed to express their views.

Besides the content of the training, the training methods and tools are just as important in enhancing people's participation and, thus, their capacity to retain the learning.

- Emphasis should be placed on the composition and use of small groups. In some cultural contexts, women may feel more comfortable to share their point of view among other women; mixed groups could be an opportunity for participants to discuss and learn about the differential perspectives that women and men may have on a particular issue. Trainers have a role to play to facilitate this awareness during the work, asking women to share their experience and knowledge and requesting the men to listen carefully and learn.
- When requested to record and report small group work conclusions, it is not uncommon for men to ask a woman in their group to do so, not because they want to promote her (even if they justify their decision for that reason), but mainly because men do not enjoy this task.

### **Working with communities: Adapting to people's capacities**

ICIMOD's experience suggests that village-based training is more suitable and effective for women whose mobility is usually reduced by social norms, time constraints, and motherhood. We need to follow different approaches and methods to address different constraints including low literacy and difficulty speaking in mixed groups. Participatory and visual methods like role-plays, drawing, mapping, songs, and games can be excellent methods of addressing groups with low levels of literacy. When this is essential for the participation of women, trainers may have to adapt to a setting in which babies and infants are present during the programme. Despite social constraints and practical difficulties, a total of 588 women beekeepers were trained by ICIMOD on beekeeping over a period of 5 years in village-based training sessions. As a result, their involvement in beekeeping activities contributed to increasing their family incomes up to 30 per cent. Their contribution has not only benefited their families, it also contributed to enhancing economic activity in their villages and increased the yield of entomophilous crops.

- Requesting the participants to make a small presentation of their experience during the workshop could contribute to increasing women's participation; if only some participants can make a presentation due to time constraints, make sure there is an equal number of women and men among the speakers.
- Men are usually more at ease in speaking publicly and often tend to monopolise discussions. The 'pop corn approach' (where the trainer asks questions and takes the answer from whoever reacts first) is, therefore, biased towards men. When asking the participants what their opinion or experience is, trainers may find it useful to alternate between men and women for the answers. Also, it is important to take into account that women tend to wait for men to finish voicing their opinion before expressing theirs and, sometimes, the time allocated for discussion is over before they have time to do it. To involve all participants, trainers can consider going round the full circle of participants. Other options are to appoint a particular person or group to answer a question ('heart attack' method) or encouraging the same by making statements like "I would particularly like to hear from those who have not spoken yet".

## Checklist for gender sensitive training

1. Define training objectives that reflect women's and men's needs, interests, and capabilities.
2. Build a team of good trainers who possess knowledge about the gender perspective related to their sector/training topic.
3. Consult both women and men to understand their needs and capacities.
4. Provide equal opportunity to participate for both women and men through affirmative action (or positive discrimination).
5. Use gender-sensitive participatory training methods.
6. Be aware of bias, culture, prejudices, and assumptions of both participants and trainers.
7. Make training schedules and arrangements flexible enough to suit women participants.
8. Create an enabling training environment for both women and men participants.
9. Consider gender differences and interests.
10. Use gender disaggregated data and experiences from both women and men.
11. Use gender sensitive language during the training.
12. Display pictures, diagrams, or illustrations that show both women and men as key players in the sector.
13. Define gender sensitive outputs and indicators for training follow up and monitoring purposes.

## Additional reading

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