



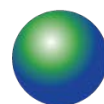
Inclusive participatory approaches: A facilitator's guide

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Inclusive participatory approaches: A facilitator's guide

Haley Zaremba
Marlène Elias
J Tulasi Devi
Pratiti Priyadarshini

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Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)

Headquarters

Via di San Domenico, 1

00153 Rome, Italy

Telephone: (+39) 0661181

Contact Email: marlene.elias@cgiar.org

Website: <https://alliancebioiversityciat.org/>

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About the authors

Haley Zaremba is a gender researcher at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. Her research has focused on the conservation of traditional agricultural systems. She is based in Asheville, North Carolina, USA.

Marlène Elias is the Gender Lead at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. Rooted in a feminist political ecology approach, her research focuses on the gendered dimensions of forest management and restoration, local ecological knowledge(s), and gender norms in agriculture and environmental management, predominantly in West Africa and South Asia. She is based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

J Tulasi Devi is a Senior Programme Manager at Foundation for Ecological Security (FES). She is working as Faculty Member, Prakriti Karyashala, Andhra Pradesh, in in the Capacity Building Vertical of FES. Her work focuses on addressing the capacity building needs of rural communities, village institutions, panchayats, functionaries of government and non-governmental organizations for scaling up of community efforts to secure tenure of commons for ensuring ecological restoration. She is based at Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Pratiti Priyadarshini is a Senior Programme Manager at Foundation for Ecological Security (FES). She coordinates the action research initiatives at FES. Her work focuses on streamlining learning and measurement systems for informed action on the ground, building evidence of the significance of commons, and developing and applying experiential learning methods and tools that can help strengthen collective action for governing commons. She is based in Anand city, Gujarat, India.

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1. Introduction

Local communities are on the front lines of experiencing and responding to global challenges like climate change, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. Too often, however, conservation and restoration initiatives are decided by external actors without the input or meaningful participation of local people. Participatory and inclusive approaches can play an important role in supporting local efforts to build resilient livelihoods and ecosystems by supporting knowledge sharing, collective action, and community self-determination.

Participatory processes enable partnerships with and within local communities, and when skillfully managed, promote communal problem-solving, reflection, and engagement that challenges existing social inequalities. They are based on the idea that those who are most impacted by an issue should be centered in its research, understanding, and solution-building. Local people should thus engage in the process as full and equal partners, and not merely as participants in externally defined initiatives. Those facilitating participatory processes may be community members themselves or external facilitators (e.g. from an NGO, government, or civil society organization).

Either way, and even though they are premised on partnership and inclusive engagement, participatory processes often leave out marginalized groups—which may include women, Indigenous peoples, landless groups, and the poorest individuals and households—who also have important stakes in the issues at hand. Communities are made up of a diversity of people (women, men, older, younger, different socio-economic groups, etc.) with interests, priorities, goals, and knowledges that are sometimes shared and other times different and even conflicting. Yet, these differences and the inequalities that exist among community members are often overlooked in participatory processes, and not all voices are given equal weight. Elite community members (usually elder men from more powerful social groups) are frequently (mistakenly) expected to represent the interests of their entire, diverse community.¹ This poses challenges for fairly and effectively responding to the livelihood and environmental priorities of marginalized community members. It also has other consequences, as processes that are more inclusive to the diverse voices and needs of community members can lead to improved natural resource management and social outcomes, with positive implications for everyone involved.²



To include marginalized and frequently overlooked groups in community engagement processes, facilitators must make intentional efforts and adopt inclusive strategies. Yet, there is a lack of guidance on how to inclusively facilitate participatory processes. Facilitators are therefore often poorly prepared to engage with the power relations that underlie participatory processes, including those between the facilitator and participants and among participants themselves.

This guide addresses this need by presenting strategies that have been shown to enhance the meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in participatory processes. In addition to being well prepared with these strategies, a facilitator should be aware of her or his own position—i.e. as a person with their own beliefs, identity, and an attributed status—relative to participants, and how this position may change over time, in order to form a fair and trusted partnership with the community.



Muhammad Faridah Aini

1.1 Aim and audience of this guide

The aim of this guide is to equip facilitators with tools to create inclusive community engagement and participatory partnerships. Facilitators who are not familiar with basic concepts around social inclusion and gender equality may want to consult complementary resources, such as UN Women's 'Gender Equality Glossary'³, to deepen their understanding and ability to identify and manage power relations. Ideally, the guide should be part of broader learning involving 'classroom learning', practice, feedback, and self-reflection—with facilitators thinking critically about the strong and weaker points of their practice and how to improve these.

The strategies presented in this guide can be expanded upon and refined based on the specific context. Although it refers to natural resource management, the guide is also applicable to the facilitation of participatory processes focusing on other issues or fields of significance to communities.

1.2 Structure of the guide

The rest of the guide is organized as follows:

Section 2 – What is an inclusive participatory approach? – defines social inclusion and reviews types of participation

Section 3 – Understanding existing power relations and factors of marginalization – highlights the need to understand the structures that disempower and exclude marginalized groups

Section 4 – Supporting inclusive attendance in participatory meetings – provides tactics to enable women and marginalized groups to attend meetings

Section 5 – Strategies for facilitating inclusive participation – offers tactics for creating a safe and enabling space for marginalized groups to speak up and be heard

Section 6 – Inclusive facilitation for empowerment and social transformation – highlights how inclusive participatory processes can enhance social inclusion more broadly in the community

Section 7 – Conclusion

2. What is an inclusive participatory approach?

Social inclusion is “the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity”.⁴ In an inclusive participatory approach, facilitators help guide a process as partners with/within communities, at times taking a step back and assuming the roles of learner and listener.⁵ A diverse representation of community members collaboratively shapes discussions and outcomes, each sharing their own knowledge, priorities, and desires. This requires actively engaging all community members with a stake in and impacted by a (socio-economic and/or environmental) issue or initiative.

All participation is not created equal, however. Simply inviting women or other marginalized community members does not mean that those groups will be able to actively and effectively contribute to dialogues, decision-making and goal-setting. To this point, Agarwal⁶ proposes a tiered typology of participation that can help facilitators and researchers **identify different levels and forms of participation, to support more interactive or “empowering” participation** (Table 1). With this in mind, facilitators can better determine what is needed to support active and empowering forms of participation. This not only allows marginalized groups to speak up, but to do so with a voice that holds influence over the processes at hand.

Table 1. Typology of Participation.

Form of Participation	Characteristic Features
Nominal participation	Membership in the group
Passive participation	Being informed of decisions ex post facto; or attending meetings and listening in on decision-making, without speaking up
Consultative participation	Being asked an opinion in specific matters without guarantee of influencing decisions
Activity-specific participation	Being asked to (or volunteering to) undertake specific tasks
Active participation	Expressing opinions, whether or not solicited, or taking initiatives of other sorts
Interactive (empowering) participation	Having voice and influence in the group’s decisions

Source: Agarwal (2001:1624)

Evans and colleagues have developed tools to allow members of multi-stakeholder platforms to examine how well they are doing in terms of participation and the meaningful inclusion of women and Indigenous Peoples.⁷ They recommend that members of these platforms think carefully about who needs to be included, analyze constraints to their participation, develop clear inclusion goals and an action plan for implementation, and carefully monitor progress, as described in Table 2.



Table 2. Approaches for meaningful and inclusive participation in multi-stakeholders platforms.

Tool 1: Mobilize the structures	Analyze the structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify rights-holders and duty-bearers. • Analyze structures hindering inclusion.
	Operationalize: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set inclusion goals with your stakeholders. • Define and implement specific actions with stakeholders.
	Monitor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress regularly with stakeholders. • Adjust goals and actions as needed.
Tool 2: Unpack the capacities	Analyze the capacity opportunities and gaps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the success factors for ideas. • Make a list of constraints and success factors with stakeholders.
	Make an action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each opportunity or gap, create an action to address it. • Assign: who, when and how will they do it?
	Monitor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress regularly with stakeholders. • Adjust the actions as needed.

Source: Evans et al. (2021:27)



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3. Understanding existing power relations and factors of marginalization

An inclusive facilitator must have a detailed understanding of local power dynamics and inequalities. Women and marginalized groups typically face many barriers and constraints to speaking up and being heard in community dialogues, workshops, and other group settings. Public meetings reflect a community or society's power structures, and pre-existing systems of (dis)empowerment typically play out in a meeting space. As a result, certain participants (such as women) may not be invited to contribute to discussions or may choose not to speak even when given the opportunity because they sense that it is inappropriate or that their opinions will be disregarded. They may additionally feel shy or lack the confidence to speak up due to limited public speaking experience.

Women are not all the same, though, and neither are men. Each person's social position is relative to that of the other participants in the group, so attention to social dynamics within as well as between genders is essential. For example, in a community forestry setting in India, Agarwal⁸ notes that those at the bottom of social hierarchies (such as landless women) "are less constrained by social norms and status considerations, and have more stake in forest access, compelling them to attend and speak up." In fact, in those community

forestry settings, including more landless women in community forums increased overall attendance of women as well as their tendency to speak up.⁹ As another example, elite men who dominate public discussions at a community level may be sidelined in a multi-stakeholder setting that brings together more powerful private sector actors and government representatives.

How social marginalization and exclusions play out in participatory processes should be carefully understood in their cultural context and in relation to the specific issues (e.g. natural resource management) under consideration. A analysis of gender and social relations can reveal hierarchies among social groups and the ways power and disempowerment operate based on multiple, intersecting dimensions of inequality (e.g. on the basis of gender, caste/ethnicity, socio-economic status, age/generation).¹⁰ Depending on which groups of people come together in a participatory process, establishing a broad, systems-level view of these power relations can be important, but so is a localized understanding of gender relations at the community and household levels, to examine the capacity of women and/or other groups to participate fully and equitably in participatory processes.¹¹

Some useful tools for understanding power relations in participatory multi-stakeholder processes:

- **The Four Rs**

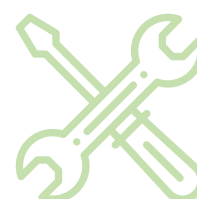
FAO. (2005). Negotiation and mediation techniques for natural resource management. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Rome, Italy: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/a0032e/a0032e0d.htm#bm13.6>

- **Stakeholder Influence Mapping**

Wageningen University & Research. (2012). Stakeholder Analysis: Importance/Influence Matrix. Wageningen, Netherlands: Wageningen University & Research. Available at: <http://www.mspguide.org/tool/stakeholder-analysis-importanceinfluence-matrix>

- **The Powercube**

Powercube. (2011). What is the powercube? Available at: <https://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/what-is-the-powercube/>





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4. Supporting inclusive attendance in participatory meetings

Identifying all the people who should be involved in a participatory process calls for a mapping of all those with stakes in the given issue (i.e. stakeholders) to **identify diverse representatives within the community**. Additional efforts may be needed to reach those who are unaccustomed and/or more difficult to engage in such processes. If facilitators don't already know prospective participants, it is important to **build a trusted relationship ('rapport')** with them to encourage their attendance and address their concerns and priorities. In situations or contexts where there is significant social division and conflict, facilitators may want to **reach out to influential community members and gatekeepers** (such as traditional leaders, caste leaders, religious leaders, opinion leaders, and political leaders) to help bring participants together in a respectful dialogue and avoid potential backlash.^{12 13}

When bringing diverse social groups together, it is advisable to balance the number of participants from different groups to the greatest extent possible to **avoid some groups being largely outnumbered**, particularly those with less social influence.¹⁴ When hosting mixed-gender meetings and dialogues, the proportion of women participants can be crucially important to whether or not the women in attendance speak up. Research shows that a

threshold, or "critical mass", of women present can cause a shift towards women's active and empowered participation.¹⁵ While this number can change depending on the context, Agarwal¹⁶ shows that if women represent at least one third of participants, this "critical mass" can be achieved. To achieve this "critical mass", women must be able and comfortable to attend meetings.

That said, it is often unrealistic for all relevant participants to attend all meetings. For example, time and security constraints can limit the participation of women or other groups that have heavy labor responsibilities and must travel far to participate. Organizing meetings that cater to their needs and enable their safe attendance is crucial. Some specific tactics to enable women's attendance are outlined in Box 1. Nonetheless, because not all community members can always attend the same meetings, smaller group meetings and focus group discussions held in advance of the larger meetings can be helpful. The points raised in these smaller groups can then be communicated to the larger group by appointed representatives. Smaller meetings among women only can also help build their confidence if they are unaccustomed to public speaking, and give them experience that will enable them to then participate more effectively in mixed groups.

Tactics to foster the attendance of marginalized groups in participatory meetings

Identify stakeholders and establish trusted relationships:

- Identify a diverse array of community representatives
- Build rapport and trust
- Reach out to community influencers and gatekeepers
- Make plans to achieve a “critical mass” of women or other marginalized stakeholders

Invitations:

- Extend invitations in local language(s)
- Account for the literacy rates of invited participants, and extend verbal or image-based invitations where necessary
- Explicitly indicate that the input of diverse members of the community and/or all family members is sought¹⁷

Scheduling:

- Reflect times (seasons, days, and hours) that are convenient and safe for all participants to attend, which do not interfere with participants’ other activities and time commitments, and which consider cultural norms – e.g. around night-time/overnight activities^{18 19}
- Repeat activities or host smaller group activities if needed to allow diverse stakeholders to participate²⁰

Organization:

- Provide security at the meeting or to escort women to the meeting if needed²¹
- Fund or organize transportation, and consider the appropriateness of compensation for time spent participating²²
- Ensure that meeting catering does not limit women’s participation (e.g. if women participants cater an event they may attend to the food rather than the meeting)²³
- Fund or organize childcare, and/or allow children to attend the meeting and accept the change in meeting dynamics this may entail (‘going with the flow’)²⁴



5. Strategies for facilitating inclusive participation

To achieve inclusive and empowered participation at meetings, facilitators must look beyond simply encouraging the attendance of women or marginalized groups. Facilitators can help uplift marginalized voices, just as they can contribute to silencing them. It is the role of the facilitator to understand group dynamics as well as the way their own identity and facilitation approach contribute to shaping existing power structures; and to use this knowledge to create an equitable and inclusive meeting space.

5.1 Roles of the facilitator

Inclusive facilitation is an art form that requires an open, patient, and creative mindset. It also requires building a specific and rigorous skill set including, but not limited to, intimate knowledge of the local culture, clear (and culturally appropriate) communication practices, active listening, organizing, listening, training, leadership and conflict resolution. It is advisable for facilitators to participate in training to **strengthen their capacities to manage conflict, exclusionary**

norms, and recognize existing inequities, as well as their own social biases and position in relation to participants.²⁷ This involves reflecting on how their own identity (gender, ethnicity or caste, age, social status) influences how they perceive, interact with, and are perceived by the world.

Creating inclusive spaces for discussion and reflection requires a facilitator who will put all participants at ease. In this regard, **the facilitator's own social attributes (gender, age, etc.) can impact group dynamics** and encourage or discourage the participation of different social groups. It is often recommended to **match the gender (and other social attributes, when possible) of the facilitator with the gender of the targeted group**, when possible, to create grounds on which participants can connect with the facilitator.²⁵ This should involve putting women and members of historically sidelined groups in leadership roles. In mixed groups with more than one facilitator, facilitators should likewise reflect the diversity of the group.²⁶



Manon Koningstein/CIAT

The facilitator plays an important role during meetings to keep the dialogue active, equitable, and productive. The specifics of this role may change, **and the role of the facilitator may evolve** over different moments of a participatory process and in different contexts, such as moving from a leadership role in guiding a dialogue or managing conflict to a more passive listening role in breakout groups.²⁸ Ultimately, the facilitator should make sure that they are not manipulating or influencing the discussion, and that participants are discussing and communicating their own priorities and knowledge, as well as setting their own goals.

Wright²⁹ lists some of the many roles a facilitator can perform. While his synthesis is based on research on online forums, these roles are applicable in many facilitation contexts:

- **“Greeter:** making people feel welcome
- **Conversation Stimulator:** posing new questions and topics, playing devil’s advocate in existing conversations
- **Conflict Resolver:** mediating conflicts towards collective agreements (or agreeing to disagree)
- **Summarizer of debates**
- **Problem Solver:** directing questions to relevant people for response
- **Supporter:** bringing in external information to enrich debates, support arguments
- **Welcomer:** bringing in new participants, either citizens or politicians/civil servants.”



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5.2 Inclusive facilitation strategies

An inclusive facilitator is responsible for creating a space in which all stakeholders are comfortable speaking up as well as listening, and in which all voices are heard and valued equally. This will often require a break from cultural norms that silence certain groups in public settings. Strategies to create a level playing field for participation are collected in this section and broken down into four subsections: creating an environment of trust; supporting equitable and active participation; strengthening capacities and confidence to participate; and post-dialogue strategies.

5.2.1 Creating an environment of trust

Before engaging in a participatory process, participants must have a clear sense of the proposed process, and if the process is brought in from external actors, participants should provide their **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**.³⁰ FPIC is an internationally recognized human rights standard intended to safeguard the rights of local and indigenous peoples “to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect them or their territories [...and] negotiate the conditions under which the project will be designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated”.³¹ This consent, if and when granted, can be withdrawn at any time on any basis that the community deems reasonable. Such consent should be sought from all potential participants once they have the relevant information, rather than only from community leaders or gatekeepers.



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Facilitators will then need to use many strategies to foster inclusive participation. In order to overcome the lack of confidence, feelings of shyness, and general reticence to speak up that some women and other groups may experience, the facilitator will have to create an environment of trust and non-judgement. For instance, **establishing personal connections with participants** by making a special effort to learn their names if the facilitator is not from the community, speaking to them in a personal and casual manner about topics that they are knowledgeable about, and visiting them outside of formal facilitation contexts, if appropriate, can contribute to building trust.³² In addition, the facilitator may want to **reach out to influential community members and gatekeepers** to discuss and reinforce why it is important to include a diversity of voices in meetings and decision-making, and to bring these influential community members on board.³³ Inviting participants to **establish principles or ground rules related to respectful and equitable interactions** at the beginning of a participatory process also sets a tone for inclusion.

Once these diverse participants are brought together, practitioners are responsible for **arranging a physical space that communicates equality**. For instance, all participants should have access to similar seating arrangements (chairs or the floor), unless their physical requirements differ. Arranging seating in a circle formation typically sets a tone for more equitable participation than having front and back seats.

Box 2 Tactics for creating an environment of trust

- Seek FPIC
- Call participants by their names
- Speak with women and marginalized groups personally and in informal contexts
- Work with gatekeepers to establish an understanding of why inclusion is important
- Establish ground rules that set a tone for inclusion
- Set up a physical meeting space that sets a tone of equality



5.2.2 Supporting equitable and active participation

Within an established environment of trust, the facilitator is then responsible for fostering inclusive, equitable, and interactive (“empowering”) participation. Facilitators should actively **direct questions to women** and other groups that have not spoken or have spoken less than dominant groups. Making sure that these questions pertain to these marginalized groups’ interests, knowledge, and strengths can further enhance their participation. The order in which participants speak is also important. In various contexts,³⁴ **women are more likely to speak up if the first speaker called upon is a woman and if at least one of the moderators is a woman.**³⁵ Facilitators can help quieter groups feel more at ease to speak by giving extra time to ask questions and clearly

communicating that **there are no wrong answers or bad questions.**³⁶ Furthermore, facilitators may want to **count how often women speak compared to men and set quotas** for more equitable airtime.³⁷ This can control for biases, as studies have shown that women are sometimes perceived to talk more than men even when this is not the case.³⁸ When different groups speak up, the facilitator should **acknowledge the contributions of different speakers and groups equally**, communicating that all speakers’ contributions are valid and valued.³⁹ The facilitator can **be explicit and deliberate** about these strategies as they employ them, explaining the reasoning behind tactics such as calling upon women first.⁴⁰



If there are multiple facilitators, the facilitation team should model inclusive and equitable behavior by not talking over each other, making sure that men and women facilitators take an equally active and outspoken role, and respecting and supporting each other. This requires coordination, planning and communication among facilitators before and between each event or meeting to agree on aims, goals, and strategies.

In addition, facilitators should be aware of and respect differences in the speech patterns of different social groups. Creating a space in which all participants feel comfortable and empowered to speak requires understanding the different ways in which diverse groups communicate and the varied patterns that their meetings follow. Women's and men's meetings or activities may take different forms and rhythms. For example, a study of online town hall meetings in New York shows that women participants made use of narrative (storytelling) nearly twice as often as men.⁴¹ In another example from the rural Solomon Islands,⁴² women's meetings were "louder and looser" than men's and marked by side discussions, laughter and whisperings or side murmurings, often while others were speaking publicly. Women also talked more frequently than men and for shorter periods of time, speaking rapidly after each other or speaking at the same time. **Facilitation approaches that encourage women's communication patterns can make them feel supported and empowered**

to engage in discussions.⁴³ In contrast, meetings that exclusively follow men's meeting styles reinforce the idea that their approach is more legitimate. Moreover, **women-only meetings in which women's speaking styles are respected and encouraged can build women's confidence to speak up not only during those meetings but also in other contexts, and valorize women's contributions more generally.**⁴⁴

In order to identify these styles of participation and facilitate accordingly, facilitators can try different ways of grouping participants, and of bringing sub-groups together for broader sharing. Different kinds of discussions and ideas may emerge through diverse meeting formats, such as:

- Single-gender meetings (with same-gender facilitators) with joint reflection across gender groups in plenary and including small-group activities or strategies to foster teamwork, collaboration, and relations within the small group;⁴⁵
- Single-gender meetings (with same-gender facilitators) without immediate joint reflection;⁴⁶
- Single-gender groups that are further separated based on other distinguishing social factors (e.g., caste, ethnicity, or age);⁴⁷
- Smaller mixed groupings with a representative from each subgroup to report back in plenary.⁴⁸



Informal spaces and gatherings may also represent opportunities to learn about and identify issues of importance to marginalized groups in order to more fairly construct meeting agendas in partnership with local communities. For instance, in a public meeting in Lake Victoria,⁴⁹ facilitators noticed women talking informally about an important topic (public health) on the margins. Recognizing its importance for women in the community, the facilitator proposed formally adding the topic to the next meeting's agenda, to which local women agreed.

Centering meetings around topics of particular importance to women further contributes to increasing women's active participation. To this point, in Nepal and India, Agarwal⁵⁰ found that: "there is a 67% greater probability of women speaking up at meetings where the village has reported firewood shortages than where there are no reported shortages." Likewise, in the above-mentioned meetings in the Solomon Islands, "men always contributed more than women regardless of how many men or women were at the meeting except when the meeting topic was about issues clearly defined as women's business".⁵¹ **Topics of importance to marginalized groups should be placed at the top of meeting agendas**, and these agendas should be shared in advance with all meeting participants. This signals to marginalized groups that their priorities will be taken seriously, and recognizes that the issues are important to the meeting.

The facilitator is responsible for guiding the content of meetings in a way that fosters active participation. To do so, it is advisable to **ease participants into discussing sensitive or contentious topics** with icebreakers and dialogues that create common ground and understanding. For instance, a sequenced approach for discussing sensitive natural resource management issues may involve:⁵²

- Beginning by introducing 'benign' topics of relevance that easily meet consensus; e.g. the market price of agricultural products, the influence of the climate on agricultural yields, etc.;
- Drawing attention to socially differentiated knowledge, allowing for reflection on the value and validity of different kinds of knowledge systems and the benefit of having a diversity of voices present to reach holistic solutions;

- Turning to the specific and differentiated natural resource management needs and priorities of different groups;
- Moving beyond surface problems and proximate causes to discuss deeper roots of unsustainable and inequitable resource use and management, taking a historical perspective;
- Finally, developing common visions for the future, solutions, goals, and action plans.

To foster critical thinking and diverse perspectives, facilitators may want to formally appoint participants who represent diverse and underrepresented groups to share their thoughts with the whole (larger) group to provide their subgroup's perspectives.⁵³

Box 3 **Tactics for supporting equitable and active participation**

- Center meetings on issues of importance to women and other marginalized groups, placing these issues at the top of the agenda
- Actively seek contributions from quieter groups
- Call on women to speak first
- Include women in facilitation, moderation, and leadership roles
- Establish quotas for women's and men's participation, consultation, decision-making, and voting
- Communicate that there are no right or wrong answers and no bad questions
- Promote and respect distinct and gendered speech patterns and meeting rhythms
- Allow for discussions in informal settings, smaller groups, and single-gender groups
- Ease into difficult topics with ice breakers and other planned approaches to find common ground between partners
- Be explicit and deliberate about how and why various inclusive tactics are being used



5.2.3 Strengthening capacities and confidence to participate

Facilitators can support women and marginalized groups by helping strengthen their confidence and capacities before meetings/dialogues take place. **Holding pre-dialogue meetings or workshops that strengthen understanding and knowledge of the topics at hand can help build women's confidence**, not only by familiarizing them with the subject matter, but also by allowing them to practice their public speaking skills and to become more comfortable in a meeting setting.⁵⁴ **NGOs and civil society organizations that are sensitive to gender issues as well as women's groups in participating communities can play a role in this process.**⁵⁵

To inclusively facilitate a dialogue, **the materials and topics presented and discussed must be accessible and understandable to all stakeholders.** This may require ensuring that presentations and discussions are conducted in local language(s)—particularly when many women do not speak the official national language—and including verbal or image-based learning to account for all literacy levels and to encourage interactive participation.⁵⁶ Activities should be tailored to the knowledge, strengths, and abilities of women and marginalized stakeholders to encourage their effective participation. **Interactive activities such as theater, roleplay, and storytelling** can help promote participatory and accessible learning and sharing, and help break down social barriers and taboos.⁵⁷ Roleplay (i.e. having different groups such as men and women act as each other) can be an

excellent tool for using humor to address sensitive and difficult issues, while allowing community members to speak about sensitive topics (e.g. gender norms) in a manner that is culturally acceptable.⁵⁸ Facilitators can further encourage and ease participation through **interactive activities such as small groups challenges, drawing, individual voting, and games.**⁵⁹ Such forms of interactive participation cater to different learning styles and allow participants with different levels of formal education to engage in difficult topics on a more level playing field than presenter-audience formats.

Building thinking time into a participatory meeting is another tactic to encourage less confident or marginalized stakeholders to speak. Giving participants ample time to think, reflect, and formulate responses before opening the floor for comment “gives the risk-averse or introverts time to organize the wording of their question and non-native speakers the time to find the right words”.⁶⁰ For instance, facilitators can introduce a topic, then allow time for individual reflection, followed by a short discussion in pairs, and discussions in foursomes, before bringing the whole group back together -- an approach that is referred to as the ‘Liberating Structure 1-2-4-All’.⁶¹ This tactic can help less confident participants to practice expressing their ideas and acquire reassurance from their small group before presenting them to the larger group. Using **tools that allow for participants to share their views anonymously** can also help more reserved individuals or marginalized groups express their ideas in ways that may not be in line with local conventions.

Box 4 Tactics for strengthening capacities and confidence to participate

- Hold workshops or meetings before the event to help women and other marginalized stakeholder groups prepare and gain confidence
- Partner with gender-sensitive NGOs, civil society organizations or women's groups to build women's capacities and confidence to participate
- Tailor activities to women's knowledge, strengths, and capacities
- Make presentations and activities accessible to all groups
- Make learning and sharing interactive, fun, and dynamic (e.g. through theater, storytelling, roleplay, and/or the Liberating structure 1-2-4-All)
- Give participants time to think before they speak





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5.2.4 Post-dialogue strategies

Inclusive facilitation does not end when the formal matter of the meeting is over. After the formal meeting or dialogues, facilitators can **ask participants to reflect on the process and share their takeaways.** Facilitators should recognize the way the same process is experienced differently by diverse participants, and use this information to create more inclusive future community partnerships.⁶² When facilitators are not community members, they are encouraged to **stay in the community after the meeting to create opportunities for informal conversations,** to build trust and familiarity between the facilitator and participants.⁶³

Organizing a series of dialogues, meetings, or workshops at a regular frequency can help “to create inter-group friendships, understanding, and appreciation, and to generate a common vision for collective action”.⁶⁴ Each successive session should begin with a recap of the previous meeting(s) to show and sum up progress and encourage participation. Importantly, the **priorities, opinions, and goals expressed by diverse participants and collective agreements must be translated into action,** and communications should reflect the changes that resulted from these actions, to encourage continued engagement.⁶⁵

Box 5 Tactics for post-dialogue strategies

- Ask groups to reflect on the process and make note of how experiences and feedback vary across groups
- Remain in the community after the event to allow for informal conversations
- Organize a series of dialogues or workshops to create and reinforce bonds among participants and allow concrete change to take place over time
- Begin each successive session with a recap of the previous sessions
- Translate ideas and agreements into action



5.3 Inclusive facilitation for online discussions

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally shifted the ways in which we gather, share, and process information. More people worldwide are communicating, discussing, deliberating, and making decisions online than ever before, and inclusive facilitation for participatory and collective action in digital spaces has become increasingly important. This is particularly true in rural communities, where communication capacities have been gravely impacted by COVID-19, with temporary restrictions on meeting in public spaces such as marketplaces and often limited digital recourse to connect outside of face-to-face interactions. Yet, digital spaces, like face-to-face meetings, can perpetuate or exacerbate existing inequities. For instance, around the world, women have less access to computers, mobile phones, and the Internet, and are less digitally literate than men.⁶⁶

When online facilitation is necessary and/or possible, several strategies can foster inclusive online deliberations. These deliberations can be oral (i.e. voice or video calls and sessions) or written (i.e. message boards). Box 6 includes guidance for both. If online tools are designed with equitable participation and inclusion in mind, they can have many advantages and potentially diminish some of the disadvantages of face-to-face meetings by making attendance and participation easy, casual, and flexible.⁶⁷ In areas with poor connection, **formats like written message boards that allow**

participants to each connect in their own time can be invaluable for fostering dialogue without necessitating that all participants be online at the same time.⁶⁸ **Allowing participants to contribute anonymously** to written virtual discussion can allow them to act and speak outside of social norms and has been shown to produce higher levels of engagement.⁶⁹ Other **innovative tools such as a points-reward system can boost participation.** For example, in South Korea, participants in an online discussion forum were rewarded virtual points “based on the frequency of postings, frequency of being read by someone else, and number of favorable replies.” This was found to increase overall engagement.⁷⁰

In online forums, moderators may play several additional roles to those they play during in-person interactions:⁷¹

- **“Cybrarian”:** providing expert knowledge on particular topics;
- **Open Censor:** deleting messages deemed inappropriate, normally against predefined rules and criteria. Feedback is given to explain why, and an opportunity to rewrite is provided;
- **Covert Censor:** deleting messages deemed inappropriate, but without explaining why;
- **Cleaner:** removing or closing dead threads, hiving off subdiscussions into separate threads”.

Box 6 Tactics for facilitating inclusive online deliberation

- Assess participants’ conditions of access to the Internet and basic digital literacy, and if needed, create arrangements to enhance these
- Hold workshops to train participants who need extra help with basic digital skills
- Recruit facilitators for each discussion group to “balance participation, create a respectful climate, and stimulate, clarify, and summarize discussions”⁷²
- Allow users to post anonymously to overcome shyness or social norms that would otherwise hinder their participation
- Adopt a system of positive reinforcement for participation (e.g. through a points system) to increase participation and multiple responses to posts





6. Inclusive facilitation for empowerment and social transformation

What happens when participants leave a participatory process and go home to long-established norms, gender roles, and power imbalances? Socially inclusive meetings and participatory problem-solving are an achievement in and of themselves, but even more importantly, they may lead to greater inclusion and equality outside of meeting contexts and in relation to other topics of importance to the community. Facilitators can play a role in fostering more lasting, transformative change by working with participants toward these goals. For instance, in a project on inclusive management of native fruit trees in India, participatory approaches carried out within and across different social groups who worked toward a common goal helped break down social cleavages and contribute to positive and lasting changes in social relations.⁷³

In addition to showing the value of different forms of knowledge, inclusive facilitators can play a role in publicly recognizing and valuing women's communication styles, ways of interacting, and ideas more generally, which can contribute to improving their overall position in their community.⁷⁴ Inclusive facilitation processes can also demonstrate the value of **inclusivity as its own end rather than only a means to an end**. Finally, such processes can help build community cohesion, self-reliance, mutuality, and leadership among some participants who may themselves eventually take on facilitation roles. This can support a shift toward 'communicating through community' rather than external facilitators, and ultimately toward self-determined change.

7. Conclusion

Although they are the most affected by ecological degradation, marginalized groups -- including rural women and Indigenous peoples -- are often excluded from participatory processes to address these critical challenges. Participatory approaches have the potential to center development and environmental solutions on the needs and priorities of affected communities and their most vulnerable members. Yet, the importance of inclusive facilitation in these processes, and guidance to achieve this, have been largely overlooked. Although it is not an exhaustive how-to manual, this guide has sought to present tested, actionable strategies and tactics for more inclusive facilitation. As each context is unique, these must be tailored to each participatory process and its diverse participants. When facilitators are equipped with the tools and self-awareness to manage participatory processes inclusively, these can have a transformative impact, and contribute to more equitable and empowered communities.



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Headquarters

Via di San Domenico, 1
00153 Rome, Italy
Telephone: (+39) 0661181

<https://alliancebioversityciat.org>
www.cgiar.org