

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

A Facilitator's Guide

LIMITED EDITION

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Through the project *Accelerating Systemic Change for Gender Equality and Biodiversity Conservation through NBSAPs*, Antigua and Barbuda, Comoros, Costa Rica, Eswatini, Tajikistan, Thailand and Togo led national co-creation processes to strengthen gender-responsive biodiversity planning and implementation. Countries undertook activities that enhanced institutional capacities, deepened understanding of the gender-biodiversity nexus, identified gender and biodiversity priorities, and strengthened the participation and leadership of women in all their diversity.

Practical experiences and lessons learned from the seven countries informed the development of the Gender and Biodiversity Resource Collection, comprising the *Practical Guide: Co-Creating National Gender-Responsive Biodiversity Action* and a set of accompanying tools and templates to support countries seeking to strengthen gender-responsive biodiversity action in their own contexts. Together, these resources contribute to global knowledge exchange and support implementation of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, particularly **Targets 22** and **23** as well as the **CBD Gender Plan of Action (2023–2030)**.

The project was funded by the Government of Canada and implemented by the **NBSAP Accelerator Partnership**, in partnership with the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, and **Bioversity International (as part of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT)**, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**.

PROJECT RESOURCES

https://nbsapaccelerator.org/gender-and-biodiversity/

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Photo: Narasimha Hegde/LIFE Trust

PURPOSE

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." *(World Bank, 2013)*

This tool provides guidance for planning and supporting inclusive participatory processes, with particular attention to ensuring that women from diverse backgrounds–including those facing intersecting forms of marginalization–have opportunities for full and effective participation in discussions and decision-making.

An inclusive participatory approach ensures that those most affected by an issue are actively involved in generating knowledge, understanding challenges, identifying priorities and co-creating solutions.

Facilitators play a critical role in creating inclusive spaces where diverse stakeholders, including men and women in all their diversity, can contribute their knowledge, experiences, priorities and perspectives on an equitable basis.

This resource provides practical strategies that facilitators can use before, during and after participatory processes to foster more inclusive, equitable and meaningful participation. It is organized around three practical steps to help facilitators:

- *understand existing power relations*;
- *support inclusive attendance*; and
- *facilitate full and effective participation*.

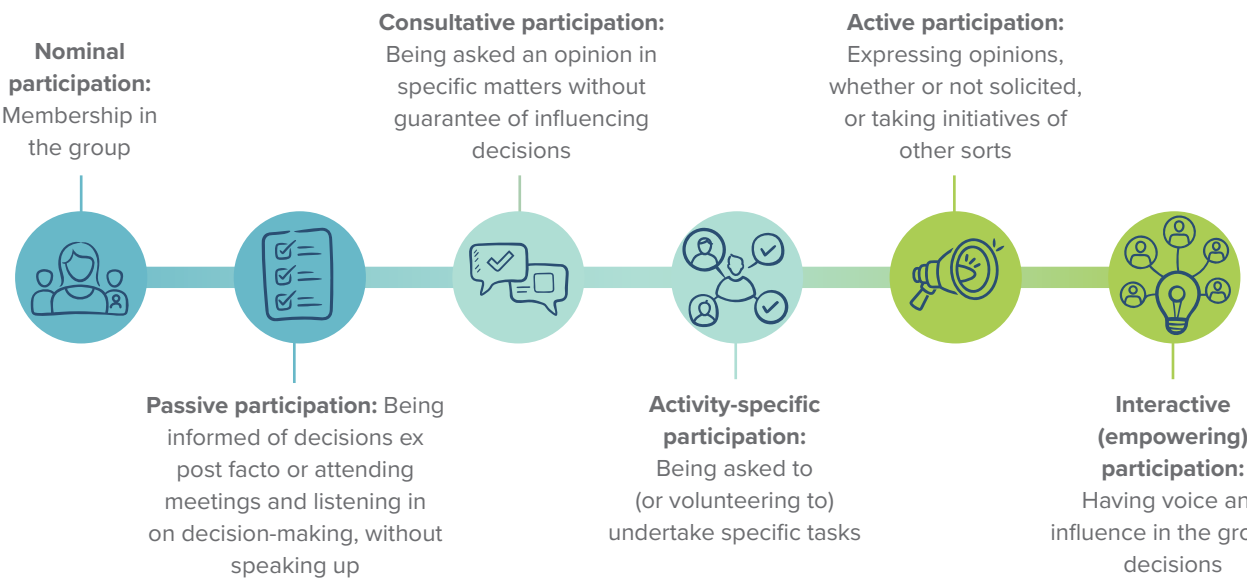
The principles can be adapted for use across a wide range of sectors and local contexts and for different participants and objectives.

WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH?

Inclusive participation requires recognizing that women, like men, are not a homogeneous group. People's opportunities to participate are shaped by the intersection of gender with other dimensions of identity and power–including age, ethnicity, indigenous identity, disability, caste, livelihood, wealth, education, migration status, marital status and geographic location. Women, particularly from underrepresented groups, often face multiple and reinforcing barriers to participation and decision-making.

Simply inviting women to attend meetings does not guarantee full and effective participation. Facilitators should intentionally create opportunities for women and men from diverse social groups–particularly those who face multiple forms of exclusion–to participate fully, effectively and meaningfully in discussions and decision-making processes.

Participation is not simply about being present. It varies in the extent to which people are able to exert influence. **Participation exists along a continuum.**



Source: Agarwal (2001), p. 1624

The objective of using inclusive participatory approaches is to go beyond nominal participation to enable the active and interactive participation of women from diverse backgrounds, especially those facing intersecting forms of marginalization. By recognizing and valuing different forms of knowledge, supporting equitable participation, and creating opportunities for diverse voices to influence decisions, facilitators can contribute to broader processes of empowerment and social transformation.

Inclusive participatory processes can help:

- Build trust and community cohesion.
- Strengthen self-reliance and leadership.
- Value diverse knowledge, perspectives and ways of communicating.
- Identify potential risks, trade-offs and unequal impacts before decisions are made.
- Strengthen the legitimacy and ownership of decisions and actions.
- Foster more equitable and self-determined decision-making.



STEP 1 UNDERSTANDING EXISTING POWER RELATIONS

Public meetings often reflect existing community power structures. Women may not be recognized as relevant stakeholders, invited or encouraged to contribute, may feel uncomfortable speaking publicly or may believe their views will not be taken seriously. Women from marginalized social groups may face additional barriers to participation or to having their perspectives heard and valued. Even within groups of women, factors such as social status, education, age, income or position within the community may influence whose perspectives are heard and whose voices remain underrepresented. Understanding these dynamics is essential to designing an inclusive process.

External facilitators should also be mindful that their presence may itself affect existing power relations and expectations. They should clearly communicate the purpose and scope of the engagement, including that participation does not imply or guarantee future funding, projects or other support for the community.

Inclusive participatory approaches begin with understanding local power dynamics and factors of marginalization. When planning an engagement event, such as a workshop or consultation, consider:

Which groups are most affected by the issues under discussion?

How do gender, age, ethnicity, indigenous identity, disability, socio-economic status, education or other forms of social differentiation intersect to influence participation?



Are there existing or potential conflicts between the rights, priorities or interests of different groups that could affect participation or decision-making?

Which women's perspectives are being reflected in discussions, and whose experience, priorities and knowledge may be missing or underrepresented?

Which women and men are currently represented in decision-making? Which are not?

What local social norms or power relations may influence interactions within and between different groups of women and men?

Which women may face additional barriers to attending, speaking or being heard?



Photo: Foundation for Ecological Society

STEP 2 SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE ATTENDANCE

Identify stakeholders and establish trusted relationships

- Identify a diverse range of community representatives, ensuring participation from women across different social groups.
- Build rapport and trust with prospective participants.
- Engage community influencers and gatekeepers where appropriate.
- Promote broad and diverse participation by engaging women in all their diversity, including women from marginalized and underrepresented groups, rather than relying on a limited number of representatives.
- Avoid assuming that one woman can represent the perspectives of all women.

Organization

- Consider transport and security needs.
- Arrange childcare where appropriate.
- Choose an accessible and appropriate venue, considering physical accessibility, facilities and whether the location may create barriers for particular groups.
- Consider whether compensation for participation is appropriate.

Scheduling

- Select dates and times that are convenient and safe.
- Consider seasonal calendars, women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, formal and informal work demands, and cultural norms.
- Repeat meetings or organize smaller group discussions where necessary.

Invitations

- Use local language(s).
- Consider literacy levels and use verbal or visual invitations where appropriate.
- Clearly communicate that perspectives from women and men across different social groups are sought.

STEP 3 FACILITATING INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

The role of the facilitator

The facilitator's role will vary throughout the process. At different stages, they may:

- Build trust and create an environment in which participants feel safe and respected.
- Use appropriate facilitation methods to encourage dialogue, value lived experience and local knowledge and support equitable participation.
- Listen actively and ensure that different perspectives, particularly those that may otherwise be underrepresented, can be heard.
- Mediate conflict and manage group dynamics.
- Clearly communicate the purpose of the process and explain how participants' contributions and the results will inform subsequent decisions, design or implementation.

Throughout the process, facilitators should remain neutral, ensuring that participants identify and communicate their own priorities, knowledge and solutions.

Inclusive facilitation requires strong communication, active listening, conflict resolution and an awareness of local culture, power dynamics and one's own biases.

Strategies for inclusive facilitation



Create an environment of trust

Creating an environment of trust can help address the lack of confidence, social exclusion and reluctance to speak that some participants may experience. Facilitators can foster trust by:

- Seeking community consent and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) before the process begins.
- Calling participants by their names and establishing personal connections.
- Speaking personally or creating subgroups with participants who may be less likely to contribute during formal discussions.
- Working with community leaders, gatekeepers, cultural mediators or trusted local facilitators, where appropriate, to support inclusive and culturally appropriate participation. When engaging indigenous peoples and local communities, ensure that engagement processes respect local customs, knowledge systems, worldviews and priorities.
- Establishing ground rules that promote respectful and equitable interactions, protect confidentiality where appropriate and minimize risks of retaliation or harm.
- Arranging the meeting space to communicate equality (e.g., circular seating and equal seating arrangements).

Support equitable and active participation

- Centre discussions on issues identified as priorities by women from diverse social groups, especially those who are most affected by the issue under discussion.
- Communicate that there are no right or wrong answers and no bad questions.
- Recognize that different participants may communicate in different ways or require different amounts of time before contributing.
- Allow for discussions in informal settings, smaller groups and single-gender groups.
- Actively seek contributions from participants who speak less frequently.
- Consider inviting women from marginalized groups to speak before community elites or more dominant participants.
- Adapt facilitation methods where existing structures or practices may limit women's ability to participate, be heard or influence decisions.
- Use gender-responsive and inclusive language, images and examples that reflect diverse experiences and avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes.
- Ease into difficult topics with icebreakers and other planned approaches to find common ground among participants.
- Include women from diverse backgrounds in facilitation, moderation, and leadership roles.
- Be transparent about why inclusive facilitation strategies are being used and how they contribute to fairer decision-making.



- Set participation targets that promote diversity among participants and decision-makers, rather than simply equal numbers of women and men.
- Use small-group discussions organized, where appropriate, by shared experience or social group (such as women-only groups) to create safer spaces for dialogue.

Strengthen capacities and confidence to participate

- Hold preparatory meetings with participants who may have had fewer opportunities to engage in public decision-making.
- Work with women's organizations, indigenous organizations, local community organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities and other trusted local groups to strengthen participants' confidence and capacity.
- Tailor activities to build on participants' existing knowledge, experiences and strengths.
- Make presentations and activities accessible to participants with different literacy levels, languages and abilities.
- Make learning and sharing interactive, fun and dynamic (e.g., through theatre, storytelling, roleplay).
- Provide time for participants to reflect individually before contributing to group discussions.
- Provide a mechanism for women and participants from marginalized groups to seek independent advice or support where needed.

Close the dialogue and share next steps

- Ask participants to reflect on whose voices were heard, whose were missing, and how experiences differed across different groups of women and men.
- Collect feedback separately from participants who may have been less comfortable sharing publicly.
- Consider whether agreed actions reflect the priorities of women from different social groups– not only those who participated most actively.
- Share immediate outcomes, timeline and next steps with communities, including how participants can stay informed or engaged.
- Remain in the community after the event to allow for informal conversations.
- Translate ideas and agreements into action.
- 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.

Inclusive facilitation for online discussions

Online discussions can improve participation and flexibility, but they can also reinforce existing inequalities in access to technology, digital literacy and participation. **Facilitators should consider participants' access to digital tools and adapt online processes to promote equitable participation:**

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.



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.

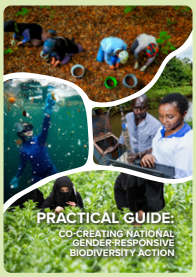
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ABOUT THE RESOURCE COLLECTION

This tool is part of a collection of Gender and Biodiversity resources that accompanies the Practical Guide: Co-Creating Gender-Responsive Biodiversity Action. The practical tools can be used in sequence or on their own to provide detailed 'how-to' guidance to strengthen gender-responsive biodiversity planning and implementation.

The Practical Guide and the suite of tools can be accessed directly at: https://nbsapaccelerator.org/gender-and-biodiversity/

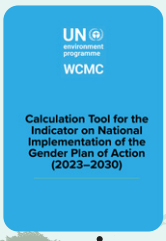


Practical Guide: Co-Creating National Gender-Responsive Biodiversity Action

Suggests a flexible five-step process with tools to support each stage and country experiences that illustrate how elements of the process have been applied in different national contexts.

Calculation Tool for the Indicator on National Implementation of the Gender Plan of Action (2023–2030)

Supports countries to track progress against 18 indicative actions and identify gaps and opportunities for action.



Gender and Biodiversity Analysis: Illustrative Outline

Offers an indicative report outline for a gender and biodiversity analysis, with accompanying guidance on what evidence to collect and analyze.



Participatory Inquiry Exercises for Co-Creating Gender-Responsive Biodiversity Action with Local Communities

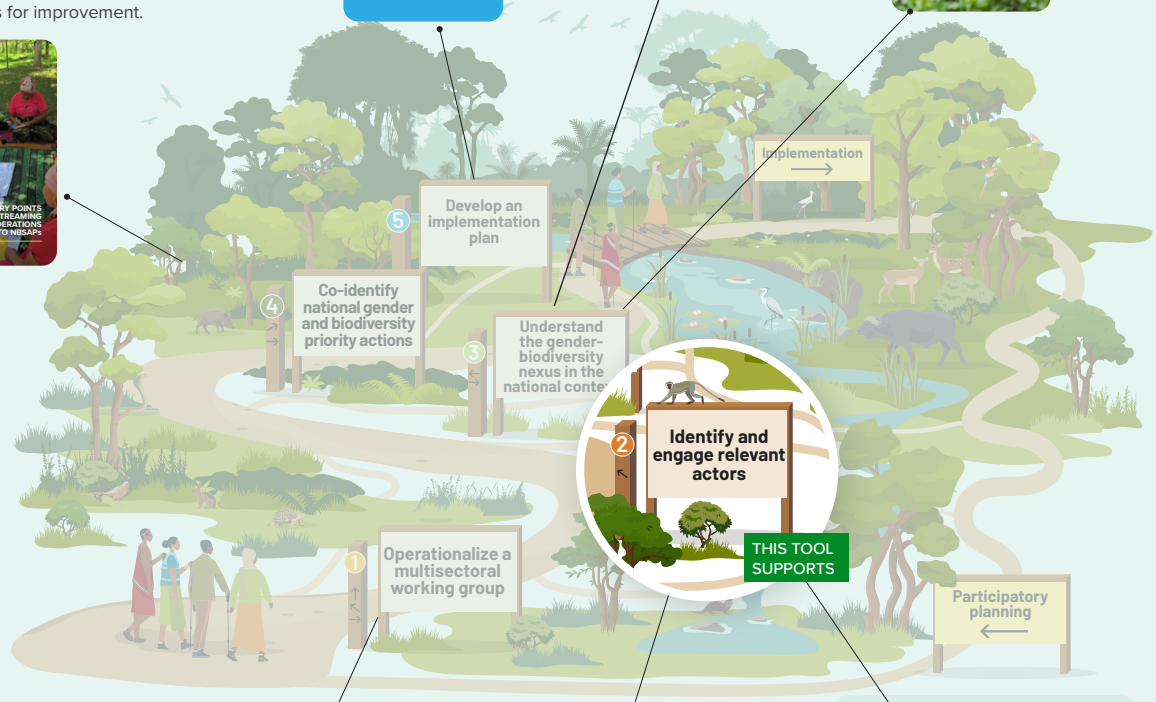
Provides three sequential exercises to explore gender inequality and biodiversity challenges, their root causes, and possible actions with local communities.



Entry Points for Mainstreaming Gender Considerations into NBSAPs

Presents a practical reflection tool to identify where gender considerations are relevant in a country's NBSAP and to highlight gaps and opportunities for improvement.



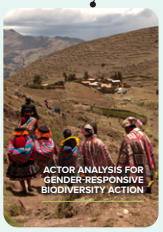


Scan here for Resource Collection:



Model Terms of Reference/ Procurement Notice for a Gender and Biodiversity Expert

Provides a ready-to-use, adaptable template for procuring relevant expertise on gender and biodiversity.



Actor Analysis for Gender-Responsive Biodiversity Action

Helps identify who to engage, why they matter and barriers to their participation.



Inclusive Participatory Approaches: A Facilitator's Guide

Offers practical strategies for supporting full and effective participation before, during and after participatory processes.



Photo: Trong Chinh/CIAT