



CHAPTER 9

Gender as Key in Community Participation

Megan Romania,^{1*} Mary Njenga^{2,3} and Ruth Mendum⁴¹ Social and Gender Scientist, USA.² World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), P.O. Box 30677-00100, Nairobi, Kenya³ Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya, P.O. Box 30197-00100, Nairobi, Kenya⁴ Office of International Programs, College of Agricultural Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University, 106 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802, USA* Corresponding author, e-mail: megan.romania@gmail.com

9.1 Introduction

The notion of community participation is longstanding in the development field and aims to bring marginalized voices into development processes to ensure more equitable development (Cornwall 2003). While today it is deemed critical that projects and programs involve local communities – to the point of it being mandatory – the extent of this participation (Table 9.1) and who participates are contentious topics. For instance, while in many instances when community participation is purported as the foundation of a project, in actuality it involves selective participation, whereby wealthier, more educated, more visible and more vocal individuals (Botes and van Rensburg 2000) are able to be involved in the development process. Engaging with only certain groups and community representatives is a pitfall that many projects fail to overcome, as other important groups are overlooked during the development process.

It is critical to consider community participation in the gender-energy realm. For instance, while both women and men use energy sources every day at home, they do not always do so equally; women and men have different energy needs as well as dissimilar access to this energy. This disparity is compounded by the fact that most energy programs and

TABLE 9.1. Typology of participation.

Form/level of participation	Characteristics
Nominal participation Passive participation	Membership in the group Being informed of decisions <i>ex post facto</i> ; or attending meetings and listening in decision-making, without speaking
Consultative participation	Being asked an opinion in specific matters without guarantee of influencing decisions
Activity-specific participation	Being asked to (or volunteer 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 decision

Source: Agarwal (2001).

projects are gender-blind, meaning they fail to account for these unique gendered variations in energy use and access stemming from deeply embedded cultural (gender) norms. Here, there tends to be selective participation whereby, for example, cookstove implementation projects are mainly used by women yet men and community representatives (also commonly male) are the ones consulted. While energy interventions that take gender into account have the potential to be more effective, efficient and sustainable (Clancy and Stockbridge 2017), it is clear that interventions typically consider women and men as a single, heterogeneous unit, whereby they are designated as ‘people’ or ‘community members’.

Issues of this failed gendered differentiation come to light particularly when women’s interests are not considered during the design and implementation of projects. In such instances, the projects often fail as they do not sufficiently or accurately address women’s unique energy needs and access abilities. As women are frequently the primary users of household energy sources, such as to cook with, taking their viewpoints into account is important for the success of any projects as discussed in the case studies presented in this document.

9.2 Gender and Community Participation as Depicted in the Case Studies

Clean cookstove projects over the past several decades have aimed to reduce the amount of organic material used in cooking for various reasons (i.e. to reduce deforestation, to improve user health conditions) and reduce indoor air pollution. However, arguably millions of dollars have been lost due to the high failure rate of these clean cookstove projects. This failure rate is directly related to project managers overlooking what the users (i.e. women in sub-Saharan Africa) actually want, including the specific barriers they wish to address by switching their household energy type and use. The authors of the case study on gasifier cookstoves illustrate how women’s needs and preferences in cooking systems can be successfully integrated in projects by involving them as researchers in the participatory cooking tests as opposed to having them as study subjects.

The authors in the case study on briquettes in Uganda by Green Heat discuss how, while there is potential for both women and men to be involved in the briquette supply chain, often women face unique difficulties including 1) lack of time to participate in sales training events due to household burdens, 2) religious hindrances that impact women’s ability to interact with men outside the family, 3) household budget control where men divert women’s briquette enterprise running capital to other uses and 4) cultural barriers. Cultural barriers are important to note as they directly relate to societal gender relations and norms. For example, and as noted in this case study, due to cultural norms men feel insecure or undermined if their wives earn

more money than they do, which in turn impacts not only their spouses’ success and capability in the briquette industry but also the industry itself as a large talent pool (i.e. women) becomes unreachable and underutilized. On the other hand, gender roles shape men and women’s skills in unique ways. For instance, women make up 91% of the people involved in sales through kiosks due to their intimate experience with household cooking fuel (i.e. men generally do not cook), a positive skill that the business is relying on.

Recognizing these cultural barriers, Green Heat has, by way of community participation, tried to include the husbands of female sales agents in the sales training process. For example, the husbands were invited to basic finance training events, which subsequently reduced “incidents of extravagance or spending business capital outside business needs”. It is important to note that this involvement of men was not the ultimate solution to increasing women’s control of their earned income. In many traditional communities, men make the household financial decisions. This factor arose in the case study, whereby the female sales agents contended their husbands were using their earned sales income for other purposes, thus hindering the growth of their briquette businesses. Green Heat has continued to work with the husbands by explaining the business model and its importance in order to ensure that their spouses’ businesses can sustainably grow.

Growth of women-led waste-to-energy businesses is being inhibited by their low participation in sourcing funds from formal external sources; they prefer to borrow from family members and friends, which could be associated with limitations in skills or the complexity of acquisition procedures. On the one hand, the authors of the case study on investment climate for waste-to-energy enterprises in Kenya show that women’s access to financial resources from banks or donors is affected by their low education as well as the intimidating application procedures. On the other hand, applying for licenses is faster for women as they spend less time negotiating to give bribes. Other factors that affect adoption may not be considered while working with women, as their groups are assumed to be homogeneous. The case study on the potential uptake of briquettes by women fish smokers in Ghana who are currently using firewood illustrates that large-scale firewood users who are older than their small-scale trader counterparts are not likely to adopt briquettes as they obtain a discount for firewood compared to small-scale traders who purchase on a daily basis and spend more money.

Overall, this document suggests that there is room for potential concerning community participation. For instance, while community participation has not yet been implemented in this sector, it is clear that briquette projects will likely follow suit *vis-à-vis* other energy efficiency projects (i.e. cookstove projects) and fail if they do not consider the specific, unique needs of, for example, the women fish

smokers. For example, whereas practitioners might believe that these women will adopt briquette technology if it renders health benefits, in reality the women indicated that costs (and in particular, discounts) are their main concerns. To fully understand what is important to these women (i.e. health versus costs) and therefore to most efficiently drive the clean briquette business in this industry, stakeholders should endeavor to bring in these women and discuss *how* they could best benefit from *which* types of cleaner and more cost-efficient energy sources like briquettes. Moreover, involving these women could further illuminate the extent to which they are willing to adopt this technology and the conditions they have for such adoption. Such involvement goes beyond the nominal type of participation discussed by Agarwal (see Table 9.1) and extends to interactive, empowering forms of participation, meaning these women are able to actively influence and choose to what extent they adopt new technologies.

9.3 Lessons on Gender Considerations in Community Participation in Development

In general, this chapter lends credence to the importance of community participation in development processes. It also points to the necessity of considering gender norms that might inhibit such participation or the success of certain projects. The crux of effective project implementation, then, lies in the ability to bring in the points of view of all potential stakeholders rather than only a select group.

9.4 References

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