TOOL 17
ENGAGING WITH DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Women of Trees for Global Benefits project, located in Uganda.
Credit: ECOTRUST

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What is the **purpose** of engaging with disadvantaged group?

This is not really a participatory tool like the others in this manual. Instead, it is a description of some participatory techniques that can be used to engage with disadvantaged groups or stakeholders in project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These techniques can be applied alongside many of the participatory Tools already described. The aim of this description is to assist you in developing ideas and techniques that will contribute to two particular aspects:

- Enhancing the 'voice' of disadvantaged groups (by supporting, empowering and listening to them).

- Improving responses of other groups (by improving their awareness and attitudes towards disadvantaged groups and thereby improving project governance and participatory decision-making).

Plan Vivo Carbon Standard (PV Climate) **requirement?**

Required. It is a safeguarding requirement of the PV Climate that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals are not adversely affected by a project. If any adverse impacts do arise or are anticipated, projects are required to put in place mitigation measures accordingly. Moreover, it is precisely these disadvantaged groups and individuals that projects falling under the PV Climate would expect to disproportionately benefit. Consequently, project monitoring procedures need to be established to track these impacts on disadvantaged groups.

When to use this tool?

Engaging with disadvantaged groups must take place at all stages during the project cycle (project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). Therefore, the techniques described here can be used or developed for all these stages. Whilst it is essential that disadvantaged groups are properly identified during project development e.g. with Stakeholder Analysis, the requirement to engage with disadvantaged groups does not end there. It is critically important to continue to track and understand the impact that projects have on these groups at all times.

Why is this tool required?

Community based projects must ensure that community representations are inclusive. This means that the views and perceptions of all groups, including those that are often ignored or missed, are taken into consideration during decision-making. In practice, the wider views of local communities do not necessarily reflect the views of all (even though they often claim to do so), because they are interpreted through complex social and cultural layers and through traditional attitudes and perceptions that prevent this. Disadvantaged groups themselves are often not in a position to challenge the status quo - often this is again a result of prevailing social and cultural norms.

Giving a particular focus to these disadvantaged groups is considered important because:

- they can be difficult to engage with effectively (for various reasons - see below) and

- because all too often they are missing from normal participatory consultations with the result that projects may be less effective in meeting their livelihoods needs.

Rural communities are rarely homogenous in terms of social status or in their access to resources. Whilst it is often easy to determine the views and preferences of the more outspoken or dominant groups in rural societies (by using the various participatory tools described in this manual), it is often much harder to engage with disadvantaged groups in a similar way due to a number of factors including:

- Culture, tradition and societal norms

- Ability to communicate (access to language and level of literacy)

- Time constraints and availability of resources

- Conflicting 'minority' perceptions

Issue/Constraint	Examples
Culture, tradition and societal norms	- Women often don't speak out in public when men are present - Local leaders often claim to represent the views of all people in a community ("I speak for all") - Older and wealthier people tend to speak most in meetings - Discrimination of ethnic and social minorities ("their views don't matter")

Issue/Constraint	Examples
Ability to communicate (access to language and level of literacy)	• Minority ethnic groups may not speak the prevailing language of the community • Illiteracy rates are often highest amongst women, poor people and older people • Disadvantaged groups may not have access to some means of communication e.g. social media
Time constraints and availability of resources	• Wealthy people have more time to attend meetings. Poor people may lose wages if they do so. • Landless households have fewer opportunities to practise 'land-based' project interventions and often depend more on communal resources (like forests or water) • Wealthier people are less risk averse to new developments (poorer people have more to lose and have fewer safety nets)
Conflicting 'minority' perceptions	• Livestock herders may have very different perceptions from smallholder farmers (and they may be few in number) • Women may have different views about how communal resources should be managed compared with men

Who should participate?

The aim of the techniques described here is to engage with disadvantaged groups in a meaningful way (by trying to overcome the constraints listed in the table above). Whilst the techniques described are primarily intended to enhance the participation of disadvantaged stakeholders and households - it is important to realise that solely engaging with these groups is not sufficient. Space also needs to be created for non-disadvantaged (mainstream) groups to become aware of these views and to respond and act accordingly. This is often difficult to achieve since it may mean overcoming a range of traditional cultural and social attitudes that are often very firmly entrenched.

Key Techniques

Rather than a step by step description, this section briefly covers key points that project developers and project coordinators can use to improve the level of engagement with disadvantaged groups.

Technique for engaging with disadvantaged groups	Comments
Detailed Stakeholder Analysis	• Stakeholder analysis should be detailed and thorough. It should be 'granular' allowing for different ethnic, social, cultural, age, gender, and wealth groups to be separately identified. • If it was not properly done at the start, consider redoing it later to provide more details. • Stakeholder analysis must be facilitated by someone who has knowledge of the local context - otherwise, certain details or groups will be missed.
Don't accept all statements at face value (question, triangulate, probe)	• All the participatory tools described here require local people to speak and give their views. However, people will often tell you (the project team) what they think you want to hear. Always double check to confirm the real situation. • Be wary of statements such as 'the community wants…' or 'everyone knows that…'. Check these kind of views through more detailed questioning and by cross-checking. • Do your own observations in the village and surroundings confirm what you are being told? If not, then probe more deeply during the various participatory tools.
Use sub-groups during participatory tools or separately (before/afterwards)	• Suggestions are given in different Tools for dividing participants into sub-groups. Gender sub-groups can be used for most tools (men/women) but others can be based on occupations (herders/farmers/traders); wealth (land owners/landless), age (young/old), ethnicity etc. • Sub-groups have two functions (i) to get the separate views of the sub-group (compared with the prevailing or majority view) and (ii) to empower the sub-groups to speak out in-front of the wider group e.g. by presenting their different views or different information on a flipchart. • Be flexible during project planning and implementation e.g. if you become aware of a stakeholder that is somehow disadvantaged, then plan additional participatory tools to work separately with that group.
Use Focus Groups and Semi-structured Interviews with key informants	• Smaller groups and/or individuals will often be able to give views which they may not be prepared to give in-front of a wider community group. • Use the findings from such tools to present to the wider group yourself (whilst maintaining any confidentiality that might be needed).
Feed-back results from disadvantaged subgroups to the wider community group	• Always provide an opportunity for a sub-group to present their separate work to the wider plenary during participatory tools. Preferably this should be in a written or illustrated form (flip-chart). • Not only does this empower the sub-group, it also helps to challenge prevailing views e.g. that everyone in the community has the same view.

Technique for engaging with disadvantaged groups	Comments
Emphasise project governance structures and transparent decision-making processes	• During project development, as a project developer and/or coordinator, introduce concepts of transparency, accountability and representation (good governance) into discussions about how the project will be managed. • Ensure that decision-making processes are transparent, representative (of all all groups) and participatory.
Composition of the project team (language, gender, ethnic groups)	• Consider the location, timing and communication of village meetings to ensure that disadvantaged groups are aware, able to participate and have sufficient resources to attend. • Try to find out if there is any particular constraint for certain groups to attend meetings. If there is poor attendance by certain groups, find out why and, if necessary, reschedule or repeat the meeting at a different time. • Provide any necessary resources for disadvantaged groups to enable them to attend e.g. childcare/creche for women, transport (for distant participants or older people), food/snacks for daily paid workers etc. • Experienced facilitators will have the necessary skills to encourage disadvantaged groups to speak and give their views. • If necessary, bring external facilitators to do this.
Carefully plan and organise village meetings	• Consider the location, timing and communication of village meetings to ensure that disadvantaged groups are aware, able to participate and have sufficient resources to attend. • Try to find out if there is any particular constraint for certain groups to attend meetings. If there is poor attendance by certain groups, find out why and, if necessary, reschedule or repeat the meeting at a different time. • Provide any necessary resources for disadvantaged groups to enable them to attend e.g. childcare/creche for women, transport (for distant participants or older people), food/snacks for daily paid workers etc.
Use skilled or experienced facilitators	• Experienced facilitators will have the necessary skills to encourage disadvantaged groups to speak and give their views. If necessary, bring external facilitators to do this.
Value people's contributions	• Provide everyone with an opportunity to introduce themselves (everyone should speak at least once during a meeting). • Always make a list of participants during the different tools (this provides a written record of everyone who has participated and shows that you recognise their respective contributions). • Use photographs to show people participating during meetings.

Technique for engaging with disadvantaged groups	Comments
Use oral and illustrative communication means	• As far as possible, avoid using written materials during these participatory tools (this will exclude illiterate people). • If written materials are being used make sure they are in local language and make sure that everything that is written down is also read out aloud by someone during the meeting (for those who cannot read). • Aim to get participants own contributions though speaking and drawing, rather than writing. • Always get sub-groups to present their flip-chart poster, map, diagram etc. to the wider group. This helps them to have a 'voice' during meetings. • Encourage oral contributions - if necessary record these after having been given permission to do so (this especially good for working with older people).

Specific considerations for working with Women only groups

- In many rural societies women speak much less in group settings when men are present. This compromises women's ability to voice opinions on all issues, especially on matters related to gender. The best way to address this barrier is to hold separate sub-group discussions (Focus Groups) for women (taking into consideration the need to select appropriate meeting times and places).

- Rapport building is particularly for women sub-groups to ensure that women participants are comfortable and willing to engage in group discussions. For this, the facilitator must spend more time with female participants (or other socially excluded people) to make them comfortable and open to talk. Making some key contacts within the group is important so that they could easily introduce the facilitator to the group prior to the discussion. In some cases it may be appropriate for the facilitator to visit women at their homes at agreed times and spend time together conversing on various topics. It is strongly advised that only a female facilitator should visit the homes of women participants in this way. Participating in women's daily activities is a useful way to build rapport e.g. cow dung preparation, milking, cooking and food preparation, crop weeding, knitting, gardening and festival rituals and ceremonies. This also allows the facilitator to observe and capture insights of women's day to day activities and routines.

- The facilitator should preferably come from the same ethnic group as participants in order to enable the discussion to be conducted in the language participants are most comfortable in. It also allows the facilitator to understand and pick up on cultural cues. Normally, a facilitator working with a women only sub-group should also be a woman. It may be inappropriate or intimidating for women to attend a focus group led by a man or if a man is present. The facilitator's awareness of gender concerns can also influence the way in which they facilitate the discussion and ultimately the quality of the findings.