Gender & Participation

Not everyone is in an equal position to participate in WFP's programmes. Power, gender, resources, social status, education, access to information, household chores, being part of a group and physical abilities are just some of the factors that influence who is seen, who is listened to and who has the time to participate. If we are to meet the needs of the people we serve – from individual women, men, girls and boys, to their community organisations and to national governments – our processes need to be inclusive and participatory.

WHAT

Through participation we can learn about the situations, needs, interests and capacities of individuals and groups, and we can ensure that they are involved in decisions that affect their lives, now, and in the future. But it’s not a level playing field. **Not all women, men, girls and boys are in the same position to equally participate.** We, WFP, need to make sure that we follow participatory processes so that all members of the community we are working with have a say and can shape their futures.

Participation is fundamental to quality programming and to achieving concrete, empowering changes the lives of the women, men, girls and boys we serve; wherever we are. There are two key elements of participation – inclusiveness and modalities.

**Inclusion:** When we are developing, implementing, monitoring and learning from our programmes we need to include diverse groups of women and men (and of girls and boys as the case may be). We need to be inclusive of individuals and of the organisations that represent particular groups in a population. Through a stakeholder analysis you can identify the different groups in the population with which you are working; including women leaders and women’s organisations.

**Modalities:** From our consultations, we need to ensure that women and men, and girls and boys – and their organisations – have access to different ways of participating in our programmes and operations. In everything that we do, e.g. community consultations, focus group discussions, mVAM, individual interviews, complaints and feedback mechanisms, CBT planning, food distribution committees, field monitoring, surveys, and identifying asset creation opportunities, we should ensure that women and men have the opportunity to equitably participate.

**Remember:** participation is not presence. For example, while women may be members of a food distribution committee or small farmer producer cooperative it does not mean that they are able to actively participate and influence the decisions that are made. Equal numbers of women and men doesn’t automatically translate into equality in outcomes. This means that we need to understand how differences in power, roles, access to resources, status etc. affect how women and men are able to participate in our programmes. We then need to create opportunities to support their participation in a way that is equitable and leads to the empowering outcomes that we are working towards.

Participatory processes create opportunities for women, men, girls and boys to be meaningfully and equitably involved in WFP's work.

WHY

Participation is critical to understanding the “gender inequalities that affect people’s opportunities, visibility and voice as a first step in ensuring effective and efficient food security and nutrition programmes and policies”. (Gender Policy 2015-2020)

**How we – WFP – do things is as important as what we do.** For sustainable outcomes, like long-term food security and nutrition, our processes need to be empowering; which means they need to be participatory.
Consciously ensuring the active participation of individual women and men (and girls and boys, as applicable), along with their organisations, is important for many reasons.

To understand the (changing) situations, needs, interests and priorities of women and men: We cannot assume that we know what people need or that the needs of every member of a community are the same. We need to listen to and engage the women, men, girls and boys that WFP serves – at all levels, in all stages of our operations, for all initiatives. Rather than making assumptions, we can understand the realities for women, men, girls and boys by asking them about their experiences, responsibilities, coping strategies, priorities, solutions to problems, ideas for change etc. Because contexts, relations and people change, the participation of women and men, girls and boys in identifying the issues that need to be addressed is ongoing.

To identify, and then change, discriminatory practices that perpetuate inequalities: We need to actively seek, and obtain, the participation of different individuals and groups in the population we’re working with; not just the loudest and most powerful.

Meaningful participation is empowering: Creating lasting change requires participation. A sense of, and actual, ownership is created through participation – whether being a member of a community committee, distributing food, joining a climate change or health education initiative or preparing for emergencies. Enabling participation is also a means of raising awareness, educating and empowering diverse women, men, girls and boys.

WHEN & WHERE

In all phases of programming. Women and men, and their organisations, should be involved in all stages of programming. Identifying and prioritising the food security and nutrition issues to be addressed is a start. The success of a programme – in achieving the agreed outcomes in a timely manner – requires women and men being actively involved in the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning stages too.

HOW

1. Ask: Who is participating? Who isn’t participating? Why?

Identify the different stakeholders; making sure to consider women, men, girls and boys (and their organisations) separately.

Understand the nature and extent of the participation of each stakeholder.

List the reasons why stakeholders are able, or not able, to participate.

Common Barriers to Women’s Participation:

- Unpaid domestic work - household chores, caring for children or the elderly
- Low level of literacy
- Perceived lack of knowledge or skills
- Lack of interest or understanding of the issue and its significance to their lives
- Social norms that assign decision-making responsibilities to men
• Social norms that inhibit women from speaking up in public settings
• Lack of access to information
• Lack of self-confidence or self-worth
• Opinions not being listened to or taken seriously
• Personal safety and security concerns
• Lack of access to transportation
• Perception that there is nothing to gain from participating

2. Address the barriers to participation

Ensure that women, men, girls and boys – and their organisations – know that they are welcome to participate: Do not assume that women and men will consider a general announcement about a project or an invitation to a meeting or a job vacancy announcement etc. in the same way. It is important to target women, men, girls and boys, as needed, so that they know they can, and are welcome to, participate, as well as understand that a given initiative or activity is relevant to them.

Communicate verbally and in writing and through images – in the language(s) and communication means (print, radio, web, SMS, sign etc.) that enable all people to (a) understand the relevance of an activity to them, and (b) meaningfully participate.

Schedule meetings / activities at times when women – and men, girls, and boys, depending on the initiative – can participate: Consider the existing responsibilities and workloads of the different individuals; how women and men are spending their time inside and outside of the house. Also consider safety risks, which can change depending on the time of day, week, season etc.

Make sure that the location is accessible to all: If individuals need to travel to the location, does everyone have access – physical, financial, socially-acceptable – to transportation? If not, can the location be shifted? Is the location safe to reach and to return from? Are there any social norms that need to be respected so that women, for example, are able to participate (e.g. women-only spaces)?

Use visual aids, drawing and practical examples to enable women and men, girls and boys, with no or minimal literacy to participate.

Understand the socio-cultural context: Social norms – beliefs, behaviours, practices – influence the nature and extent of women's and men's, and girls' and boys', participation. It may, for example, be necessary to create spaces and opportunities that are only for women, or for men, or girls or boys, so that all stakeholders can fully, freely and fairly participate in a meeting, in monitoring activities, in distributing food, in validating the results of a programme or whatever the activity may be.

Facilities: In order for women and men to participate equitably consideration needs to be given to the unpaid care work – taking care of children or elderly persons, cooking, cleaning, etc. – that is done mostly by women. This may mean providing onsite childcare services, facilitating a community child-care network, educating men about discriminatory social norms or ensuring access to transportation.

3. Ensure participation is meaningful

Presence is not participation:
• Women - and men - need to feel safe (physically and emotionally) if they are going to participate. Create environments where women and men, separately and/or together, feel comfortable expressing their opinions, suggesting ideas and solutions, assuming responsibilities and undertaking activities.

• Remember that not everyone is confident in expressing their views, standing up or being seen by others. Communicate to women and men that everyone's opinion and participation is wanted and valued. If required, establish means of ensuring confidentiality. Enforce rules surrounding participation. With zero tolerance on behaviour that is discriminatory and abusive.
• Make sure that everyone has access to information they need to understand the project, operation, request – whatever your work is about.

• Encourage and support a constructive debate in case of conflicting issues.

**Remember**

• Identify and address reasons for exclusion – age, sexuality, caste, religion/belief, colour, literacy, social status, wealth, mobility restrictions etc.

• Consider the views, interests and needs of all stakeholders; not just the loudest.

• Use a range of different methods to maximise participation.

**Some consultation modalities**

**Key Informant Interviews**

Definition: One-to-one discussions where a WFP or partner staff member asks a beneficiary a set of open-ended questions. Conduct interviews to obtain detailed information and understanding about beneficiaries’ / stakeholders’ experiences, opinions and feelings about the WFP programme or operation. Interviews are useful in obtaining feedback on sensitive or complex issues, such as gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage (which can be associated with issues of food insecurity).

One-to-one interviews can be conducted in community spaces, at food distribution sites, in WFP offices, via telephone. Ensure safety and confidentiality for all interviewees.

Except for gender-targeted programmes, like nutrition education for pregnant and lactating women, ensure gender balance among the interviewees. For a WFP programme to be efficient, effective and equitable, it is important that both women and men have opportunities to submit complaints and/or provide feedback. Ensure representativeness of the diversity within the community; which means interviewing women and men of different ages, ethnicity, caste, economic status, disability, belief etc.

Be sensitive to the interviewees' preferences for a woman or man interviewer.

Ensure that all interviewers have received training about their roles and responsibilities; from active listening to referral procedures when an interviewee reports an act of sexual exploitation or abuse.

**Community Committees**

Definition: Any form of public gathering such as community meetings, focus group discussions and workshops.

Remember certain locations may not be accessible to everyone. Socio-cultural norms, personal safety risks, transportation requirements, physical infrastructure, household work, caring responsibilities (children, elderly persons etc.), language and access to information about community consultations can be obstacles to participation; such as by women, members of minority groups, youth, persons with disabilities, people with low literacy levels.

Consider holding consultations for particular groups, such as women’s rights organisations, community leaders, girls who lack literacy skills and persons with hearing impairments.