5. LESSONS WE LEARNED

'At first it was difficult to get people to believe that things could change [as a result of the gendered needs assessment]. But now people are starting to believe that something can be done.'

Collette, Coordinator of the Gellideg Foundation Group

Bringing gender and participatory methods together makes sense. Any community has many kinds of people within it, and an attempt to involve everyone must mean trying to reach and involve old, young, men, women, different ethnic groups, disabled as well as able-bodied. It must ensure that they can all take part in the process and the decisions that emerge from it.

These are some of the lessons learned from the different Welsh projects given as examples in this guide.

1. **Being a good interviewer** means listening carefully to the hidden as well as the obvious messages, for the feelings as well as the facts, for the qualitative and the subjective as well as the quantitative and objective. It is about valuing how people feel as well as what they think, and using this alongside the bald data. It requires working at grassroots level, enabling the participation of busy people with complicated lives and adapting your timetable to theirs.

2. **Raising complex issues** Analysing inequality (such as gender) will raise issues which are not necessarily revealed by participatory methods, such as who holds the power? Who has the resources? Who decides? Who benefits? Finding out what the real issues are takes time and imagination. It means acknowledging that community empowerment will alter the balance of power in the community. This will give some people more control over the allocation of resources (such as money and time) than they had before you started.

3. **Confidential issues** will come up in interviews which are personal and need to be treated with care. You may hear about problems (such as financial difficulties or domestic violence) that you need to keep confidential. A locally recruited development worker will know the importance of keeping such things to themselves. It is perfectly possible to draw the interview results together in a general way that identifies the issues collectively without mentioning names.

4. **Getting beyond the data** It is not that unusual to gather data by age and gender using participatory methods. However, looking at the data and analysing what women are doing, what men are doing, where their needs and roles are different and where the same, and what can be done to reflect those differences, is a second stage. This goes beyond data gathering, and is much more rare – and more valuable in finding solutions.
5. **Attitudes to data collection** Gendered participatory research means having the right attitude when collecting data. Like gender analysis, the key to success is not making assumptions, being aware of your own bias, respecting the perceptions and voices of others, 'passing the stick', and being aware that the powerful people in a community shape reality in a way that may remain unquestioned.

6. **The importance of good documentation** Taking good notes, keeping your records organised as you go along, sorting and storing your interview sheets, flipcharts and notes you have used in training, is essential to a good analysis later. It is tempting not to bother when you are tired and need to start on something else – but the time spent on good documentation is worth its weight in gold.

7. **Comparing your data with known facts** where possible. This is a good way of checking for accuracy. For example, the solid statistics about men and women’s lives and work in Wales that was available through equal opportunities guidance for Objective 1 applications were helpful for comparison and checking back in the Gellideg study – and they proved to be very similar.

8. **The need for time** Gender-sensitive participatory assessment training takes time, especially in order to explore the layers of subtlety needed to enable gender differences (or other dimensions of inequality) to be brought out through participatory methods of collecting information.

9. **A mixture of tools and techniques** A gender-sensitive participatory assessment is achieved through a mixture of tools and techniques. These might include focus groups as well as street work, and more in-depth and analytical tools. Using different tools, at different events, with different people, enables a wider range of people to engage. There is a greater chance that they will find a way that suits them best. In addition, it allows the issues to be explored from many different perspectives and so promote wider and deeper understanding within the community.

10. **A good consultation process will include:**

   - Training local people and local community staff to be the implementing team. This keeps skills, experience and ownership of information at a local level.

   - Through careful participatory action planning, ensuring that community participation does not finish with the end of the consultation exercise.

   - Considering power relations at every stage. Who is asking whom to participate in what? Who decides what happens after the consultation?

   - Checking that people being asked to participate have all the information they need and want for full participation.

   - Using appropriate techniques to enable everyone to be involved.

   - Checking that you have you listened to everything, not just what you want to hear, or from people you have a particular rapport with.

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1. Where a stick or something similar is passed around, the person holding the stick has the right to speak and others must listen.