2. WHAT IS A GENDERED PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL?

'The (gendered participatory appraisal) exercise enlightened us all to the needs of the people on the estate. It was a real eye opener... it gave me an insight into the estate that I hadn't had before.'

Mark, youth worker, Gellideg estate

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is a planning, research, analysis and action process that uses certain methods to involve all sections of the community in consultation and the action that results. Originally developed with communities overseas, it is also sometimes known as PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) or, originally, PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal).

For the participatory process to be gendered it must take into account the different needs and experiences of men and women, boys and girls, young and old people, throughout the process, from the planning stage, through analysis, to implementing solutions.

For a process to be participatory it requires meaningful involvement of a wide variety of community members. They also need to be involved in the implementation, monitoring and appraisal of plans after the assessment. A 'participatory appraisal' can also be known as a community needs assessment, community audit, community survey and participatory action research.

Using different terminology can be confusing, but the most important thing to bear in mind is the principles upon which the work is based.

Why do participatory work?

The term 'participation' has different meanings for different people, ranging from passive (where people are told what is to happen) through consultation (where people's opinions are sought but may or may not be acted upon) to self-mobilisation (where people take initiatives either with or without external institutions). Often though, the word is used unqualified. What someone with power considers to be participation ('We asked the public what they thought') and what those without power consider to be participation ('They asked us but did not listen') are often very different. Real participation means changing decision-making processes to ensure that those who are most affected by decisions are able to influence them.
Participatory work means involving local people in decisions about their lives. This is important for the success of any project because:

- Only local people know the issues they experience, the barriers they face and the opportunities available in the area where they live.

- Men and women, girls and boys have different experiences and any action plan needs to be based on their knowledge of these differences.

- Community members are experts in their own lives and have good ideas as to how to solve the barriers that they and the community face. They also know how to build on the strengths of their area.

- Sharing funding priorities and finances with a community readdresses power balances. Communities have a right to be involved in how public money is spent.

- If the process has a long timescale, using and increasing local skills will add to any funded project's sustainability.

If participatory work is undertaken badly it will be much harder for the next piece of participatory work to engage the same people. People who have the experience of not being listened to are less likely to want to be involved a second time around.

**Participation as process**

Participation is a process. It is a powerful means to bring about change in a community, by the shifting of power to the people closest to the issues – those living in an area and/or a community group which represents them. For local men and women to
become empowered, they need to be in control of this process. This is where a participatory process differs so considerably from a standard survey process; it is not about asking large numbers of people the same questions, it is about engaging as many people as possible in a process of learning, analysis and thinking through solutions.

A good process will be inclusive and move through information gathering, analysis, prioritisation and action planning, to decision-making. It is therefore important to be reflecting on and challenging how inclusive the process is at all these stages and how it promotes an equal voice for all community members, whether powerful or not.

**Effective participation is gendered participation**

For participation to be effective, there needs to be an understanding of how a community is made up. No community is homogeneous – not everyone has the same needs, thoughts, or experiences. Different people will have different access to power as well. All this needs to be understood. Gender is one area where there are fundamental differences. Age, disability and race are some of the others. These all affect each other and influence decision-making in two fundamental ways:

**Process** – the way things are carried out. Different people will be able to engage in decision-making processes in different ways – not everyone can stand up at a meeting and talk, not everyone will be happy to fill in a survey questionnaire, not everyone will go to a public meeting. Developing an inclusive and participatory decision-making process requires a range of different approaches to suit different needs.

**Content** – the issues that need to be addressed. Within a community, people will have a range of different problems and needs and different opinions about what those problems are. Decision-making processes need to take these into account so that programmes and projects can be designed effectively.

Good participatory work should lead to action plans that promote equality between different parts of the community, including between women and men. It should leave a community stronger and should result in tangible changes for the better.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GENDER IS NOT INCLUDED?

One series of PAs took place to find out what local residents wanted to change in their area. They were asked questions like: What is good about living here? What is bad? What would you like to change? The consultation recorded answers to the questions, but not the age and sex of the respondents.

The same top three preferences emerged for everyone. Residents wanted:

a) A local police station
b) A swimming pool
c) Less dog mess.

The PA team were left with a problem because they did not have the power, resources, influence or ability to implement any of these solutions.

When the questions were later recorded by age and gender, it became clear that the three issues had emerged from different groups for different reasons.

For example, older women wanted a police station because they lived in fear of crime. Young men wanted one because they lived in fear of violence from other young men – a fear founded on experience.

If the PA team had had this information available to analyse they could have dug deeper into the issues behind why so many people, old and young, men and women, feared crime in this area. A gender analysis would have helped the team to come up with targeted solutions that helped older women through ‘better street lighting’, ‘a house-sitting scheme’, ‘cutting back overgrown street hedges’, and ‘lunch clubs’.

Identifying young men’s issues could have led to: confidence building classes, leading on to literacy and numeracy classes, activities, sport, driving lessons, drug rehabilitation, a supported housing scheme and life-skills training.

When to use a gendered PA?

All PAs need to be gendered if they are to be successful. A gendered PA can be used in very different circumstances; for consultation, research or even to draw up funding proposals. It is useful if you want to get to the deeper causes of problems in an area and involve men and women in changing things.

The tools can also be used in different contexts to explore issues, pose questions or specifically for community development work.