

Tool 2

WOMEN-INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

HOW TO USE TOOL 2

This tool is part of the [Enhancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements Toolkit](#).^v Information about word use and context can be found in the *Introduction* of the toolkit.

This checklist sets out in actionable and adaptable form the strategies laid out in Tool 1: Identifying and Addressing Barriers Women Face to Meaningful Participation in Community Engagements. It is designed to help users preempt and address some of the challenges they might face when seeking meaningful (presence, voice, and power) participation of women in community engagements.

As explained in the *Introduction* of the toolkit, community engagements can take a number of different forms across the land-based investment life cycle. To recap, the sorts of land-based investment-related community engagements Tool 2 might be useful for include:

- Ongoing relationship building
- Capacity building, sensitisation, and education
- Consultations
- Impact assessments and social performance
- Negotiations
- Agreement making
- Requests for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, and
- Grievance mechanism design and implementation.

Formal group meetings (whether all community or women only) are a very common form of community engagement, but there are many other ways of engaging with community members on an individual or smaller-group level, such as conversations with women while they are working (for example while gathering water at boreholes and wells), visiting people in their homes, and exchanging text or audio messages by phone. These alternative approaches can be very supportive for overcoming the barriers set out in this toolkit.

Tool 2 seeks to make the strategies set out in Tool 1 more easily applicable by breaking them down into strategies that can apply to all engagements (including group meetings) and those that are more relevant to a group meeting context. These categories are not fixed; they are just a suggestion for how to organise the content. Working with Tool 2 in the Word document form will enable users to customise the tool by editing, deleting, arranging, and adding strategies. Importantly, this checklist does not describe everything that should be done to ensure maximum participation by women; we urge users to take this checklist as a starting point for their own critical, creative thinking, and planning.

^v Toolkit landing page: https://ccsi.columbia.edu/content/women_participation_toolkit.

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Pre-engagement preparation

These are strategies that can be helpful to try for all types of engagements.

1. Plan and budget

- Prepare a plan and estimated timeline for your community engagements. Keep in mind that for engagements to be meaningful, you will need to build trust and not rush people. Allocate as much time as you can for your engagement processes.
- Prepare a budget to show how the strategies you intend to apply will be resourced. Remember to include lines for paying external team members, such as gender consultants, civil society organisations, local contact points, and others.

2. Curate the team and establish alliances

- In collaboration with the community, identify and establish a working relationship with two local people (a man and a woman) responsible for supporting your team's communication with the community. Be thoughtful about who will play this role: Select people who are honest, respected, and trusted by the community—regardless of the status, background, or the group those people belong to—as well as reflective and thoughtful about the community's culture, norms, and dynamics. It may be best to select individuals who represent the range of local socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to ensure that the whole community feels represented by them. To honour their time, consider paying them in money, skills training, and airtime (mobile phone credit) and in other ways.
- Appoint a gender consultant to the engagement team. The consultant will be responsible for creating and executing a gender strategy and also making sure everyone on the team is engaging with that strategy. Choose someone who has had significant gender-inclusivity experience working at the community level in the region you will be working. If possible, select someone who truly understands both the culture and language of the region, as well as the nuances of power and exclusion at the village level. The consultant should be given the authority to make relevant decisions and implement necessary actions. If there is not budget for a gender consultant, consider hiring a field team member with this experience and knowledge and make this one of her responsibilities.
- Identify and establish a (when appropriate, renumerated) working relationship with relevant local civil society or women's rights organisations working with women and marginalised groups that can:
 - Provide insight, advice and support
 - Identify marginalised groups
 - Facilitate meetings, and
 - Identify and mobilise relevant women's groups and networks.
- Partner with the local government to organise engagements with community women, since husbands or other male relatives tend to respect and feel more comfortable with meetings or programs that involve the government.
- Emphasise the role of traditional leaders and chiefs, elders, and religious leaders as protectors of community members and the inherent rights, dignity, and equality of all, ensuring that the importance of protecting women's rights and interests is formulated in a way that is attractive to leaders and inspires them to defend women's rights.

3. Ensure the team understands the local context

- Seek the advice and counsel of the gender consultant, local guides, and women's rights organisations regarding how to best understand and navigate relevant local cultural norms and traditional practices in a manner that does not inadvertently disrespect such norms and practices (and in so doing alienate community members) while still elevating women's voices. This may entail documenting such norms and practices to make them visible to all and provide a basis from which to start orienting concrete and participatory changes.

- Together with the local guides and gender consultant, discuss and draw up a list of what might stop women from attending and participating in community engagements. This may include uncovering and understanding community prejudices in relation to women, as well as how local power dynamics may be affected by the proposed policy, investment, or other land-based intervention.
- Start developing an understanding of the power dynamics that might be affected by the proposed policy or investment and consider how they might manifest.
- Seek advice from your local guides, community representatives, and women's rights organisations regarding how to best structure engagements so that women's safety is not in danger. Depending on the context, it may be helpful to hold meetings at locations that women feel are safe. These meetings might be safer if they are women only; in other circumstances, it might be safer for women to select trusted men to be present.
- Consult local women and female leaders (perhaps by visiting them in places where they routinely visit or gather, such as at wells, markets, and home) about what might stop women from attending meetings or other engagements and find out information, such as:
 - What days, times, and locations are women most likely to be available?
 - What weeks of the year should no meetings be held, as they overlap with agricultural cycles or other important events?
 - How else might the facilitation team ease or eliminate other barriers to women's attendance?
 - Map out women's schedules carefully to find out when that might be suitable (for example, after breakfast has been cooked, firewood collected, water fetched, and before dinner preparation). Do not schedule community meetings during planting and harvest times, unless potential female participants agree to that in advance.
 - Find out what support would enable women to be able to attend, such as providing childcare, transportation, and food.

It may be most effective to meet local women in places where they routinely visit or gather, such as at wells, markets, or home. This same strategy may be used throughout the project to ask local women about their experiences and involvement with the project.

All engagements

*These are strategies that can be helpful to try for all types of engagements. As a prerequisite to all engagements, it is crucial to **build trust with communities and not rush them**. It is particularly helpful to build trust with both male and female community leaders (including leaders who may not be elected but hold leadership in other ways).*

1. Share relevant information in appropriate ways

What information is relevant will depend on each context. For example, it may be details about a planned all-community or women-only meeting, information that is going to be discussed at that meeting, information about a planned policy or project to generally inform the community, details of an impact assessment, or requests for input, among many other types of information.

- Translate information into local languages. Work with translators and interpreters you can trust, selecting especially female translators and people who have a nuanced understanding of local culture.
- Broadcast details of meetings on local radio programs that women listen to. Ask the radio station for a short segment to discuss relevant information (for example, a question-and-answer session between two hosts about a prospective land deal).
- Encourage verbal, word-of-mouth communication among women.
- If appropriate, use local preferred forms of social media to target women who are literate and have devices (using apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, and Messenger).

- Design flyers and other handouts in simplified text in a large font with explanatory pictures and other visual aids.
- Display flyers with information where women congregate, such as bore holes, wells, and markets, as well as diverse community gathering venues (such as churches, mosques, schools, health centres). Make sure that these flyers include key details. For example, if the flyer concerns a planned meeting, include details of the meeting venue, the time, the topics to be discussed, and what practical arrangements (such as childcare) will be made so that women can attend.
- Arrange for community leaders or mobilisers to visit households, verbally share information about and relevant to the meetings, emphasise the need for women's active participation, and proactively request women's attendance.
- Require that information and all drafts of negotiated agreements are shared verbally with the entire community at well-publicised community meetings, as well as in written form, and that women have time to review and understand these documents before decisions are made.
- Provide technological support if needed. This might include providing access to a computer with an internet connection or a smartphone to review any relevant information that may only be available online.

2. Expand community awareness and understanding of women's rights, expertise, and wisdom

This may happen in all-community meetings or in other more private forums.

- Organise men-only meetings as early as possible to specifically address gender issues with them and create space for them to express their perceptions, concerns, and views. This can help prevent misunderstandings that may lead to domestic violence and allow you to identify male champions for the gender agenda.

Women's expertise and wisdom

- Find ways to showcase women's knowledge and expertise. This might be done by leading the community to brainstorm and list all the natural resources gathered and used by the community, highlighting how, because of their gendered responsibilities, men and women hold different but complementary knowledge. Alternatively, it can be helpful to support women to comprehensively map local biodiversity and list foods and medicines they gather and use, then share those lists with the whole community.
- Illustrate the true value of women's work by ascribing monetary value to the list of natural resources gathered by women from forests, watersheds, and grazing areas. A simple valuation exercise can showcase both women's household contributions as well as the value of the natural resources found in common areas and available to community members.^{vi}
- Showcase this knowledge and expertise and show men by example (do not lecture or tell) how women hold important land- and natural resource-related wisdom that men may not know, as a result of different, gendered livelihood-related tasks. For example, project staff might:
 - Lead brainstorming sessions in which men volunteer ideas about how their mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and sisters use land to support family well-being and tend flourishing ecosystems.
 - Support women's verbal descriptions of or physical site visits (when appropriate) where necessary medicines can be gathered, thatch grows and should be protected, wild foods are foraged, women practice important cultural or spiritual rituals, water is collected, where clothing is washed, and so on.
- Help men understand that women's knowledge and wisdom are crucial to understanding a full picture of the context, impact, and long-term implications of land-based investment.

^{vi} For a an explanation of how to undertake a valuation exercise See Knight, Vogelsang, and Brinkhurst, *Valuation of Community Lands and Natural Resources*.

Women's rights

- Explain to the whole community how women will be directly impacted by the matter to be discussed. Explain that women's voices matter and how the subject matter of the engagements will impact their lives, therefore they need to join community engagements.
- Help men and other key stakeholders understand that the whole community will benefit by meeting women's and marginalised groups' needs generally and in the context of investment projects. For example, project staff can act out two scenarios: one where women's knowledge is overlooked and problems arise, and the other where women's knowledge informs project design and implementation and the outcome is better for all. These scenarios can build in:
 - Unique insights about the land in question (for example, the women using that marginalised land know that there is less rain in that site so a commodity crop with high water needs will not survive on rainwater alone)
 - Forward-looking solutions and ideas (for example, they can suggest crops that do thrive there and the specific users of that land can be employed to manage the work on that site, which will lead to higher yield), and
 - Potential future problems and negative impacts with problem-solving for their proactive prevention (for example, if land is cleared in an area where an important medicinal plant grows, those women will be unable to treat a common community ailment; but if particular areas are preserved and those women can still access them, then the investment and the community medicinal needs will be met)
- Address men's fear that strengthening women's rights will reduce their power. Mobilise men to become champions of gender equity by developing their understanding:
 - That empowering women and girls is also empowering men (working with the youth—young men—might provide better and faster results since they may be more exposed and open to cultural changes).
 - That the balance of power is not men versus women but how a community can be in the strongest overall position to engage and negotiate with outsiders. Men and women will benefit if women are also given a seat at the table: women's knowledge and expertise will augment men's, allowing the community as a whole to leverage that combined wisdom and power for better outcomes.
 - Of the connection between women's land tenure security, increased household income, and better outcomes for children and community members.
 - Of the benefits of addressing both men's and women's needs in project planning and risk reduction.

This can be done through different avenues such as:

- Meetings with customary leaders
- Specific agenda items in general community meetings
- Formal men-only meetings, including young men, and
- Informal discussions with men at the places they spend time

Different approaches can be useful, such as:

- Showing this through mapping and valuation activities, and
- Finding sympathetic customary leaders and other socially influential figures (such as sports and cultural figures) and encouraging them to take a leadership role educating other men and boys.

- Where they exist, list and compare constitutional or other domestic laws that promote gender equality with customary norms that discriminate against women. This exercise could be part of the legal literacy sessions that should be organised for the communities to address land governance and environmental human rights in the context of land-based investments. When appropriate, work with community leaders and members to address contradictions between customary laws and national and international laws and create dynamic opportunities for communities to critically reflect upon their traditions and adapt them to evolve with the current context.

- Identify and promote historical or customary examples where women had roles in leadership, decision-making, and land stewardship. In many cultures, community decision-making and leadership were more gender equitable before colonisation. Invoking traditional stories or ancestral practices can help shift perceptions and remind men that women's leadership is also traditional custom.
- Teach the entire community about women's rights (see Tool 3). Include targeted training for men to understand why women's presence, voice, and power in community meetings is important and why they should bring women in their homes and surrounds to community meetings. Rather than lecturing, seek a participatory and interactive approach that starts with what the community already knows about women's rights, and build knowledge and awareness from there.
- Work with schools and youth programs to instil gender-equitable attitudes in the next generation, ensuring long-term transformation.

3. Gather information and feedback from women

- Be creative about how to gather women's input and feedback, especially when it is not safe for women to actively participate in community meetings or other engagements. Female project staff might:
 - Call local women to seek their input by phone
 - Visit women at home for one-on-one, private conversations
 - Meet women at places where they work (for example, where they gather water, wash clothing, sell farm produce)
 - Record or receive anonymous audio recordings
 - Use other ways to gather information and feedback, such as text messaging or messaging through social media (such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Messenger), considering digital security and encrypted platforms (such as Telegram or Signal), and
 - Support the community representatives to collect feedback from women individually.

It can be helpful to compile women's feedback (anonymously) into a short document or flyer so it can be shared more widely, such as with government officials or representatives of the potential investment.

- Support female representatives to feed women's priorities into all community engagements and agreements.
- Identify and encourage contextually relevant role models and inspiring women to spread information and encourage other women to be involved.
- Pay attention and provide support to women who may enjoy a more conducive family environment to attend meetings to be gender-equality ambassadors or even represent those who may not be able to attend.
- Ask questions that reflect an understanding of local custom, for example, probing into who uses a certain area of land, not just who owns it. Be as specific as possible when framing questions.
- Ask questions that seek to understand how the topic in question (for example, natural resource use or decision-making power) has evolved over time in the community (that is, how it used to be versus how it is now) and what the various subgroups of women would like it to be.
- Ask follow-up questions (see tips in **Box 3** in Tool 1) to vague answers to find out how things really work. For example, which households and which members of those household access, use, make decisions about, and benefit from the land and land-based resources? It may be helpful to keep asking, "Does anyone else (like nomadic groups) use the land? What do they use it for?" until the respondent has nothing left to say.

Scheduling and organising all-community meetings

These are strategies that can be particularly helpful when holding group meetings.

1. Choose meeting times and locations to ensure that women can attend

- Schedule meetings for days and times that accommodate women's work routines to ensure that women are more able to attend meetings.
- Organise meetings close to where local communities live. Choose a venue for meetings that is central and accessible to people across the community (in terms of distance but also non-exclusionary: churches, mosques, or political headquarters may alienate segments of the population). Meeting outside may be best, as long as there is adequate shade and appropriate seating.

2. Publicise the meeting to women and institute strategies that ensure diverse women attend

- Encourage women to bring friends with them to future meetings.
- Ask husbands to bring wives and female family and household members with them to meetings.
- Build on existing networks or preexisting women's groups, such as local tree planting and microcredit groups.
- When appropriate, arrange future sessions that are run by women for women (and separate sessions for other marginalised groups) (see below), but first have sessions with men too so they understand why. Consider doing so through a trusted local or community organisation.
- Recognise that women may have different views depending on factors such as their level of wealth or poverty, education, and background—and ensure that women from diverse backgrounds take part, including women with disabilities, migrant women, and women from other ethnic or minority groups.
- Make sure that not only married women are present or represented at meeting—require attendance by or on behalf of widows, single women, women with disabilities, migrant women, and women from other ethnic or minority groups.
- Support the community in deciding whether to set its own quota and quorum requirements for women and marginalised groups (for example, youth, pastoralists, people with disabilities, migrants, members of minority ethnic or tribal groups, and poorer families).

3. Identify and address barriers that may stop women from attending

- Avoid scheduling meetings when women are preparing family meals and at mealtimes.
- Arrange support that can enable women to be able to attend meetings, such as providing on-site childcare.
- Identify women with extra needs (such as disabilities or those with extra household responsibilities), and provide support to ensure their involvement in meetings. This may include arranging transportation for women who live far from the meeting venue, the elderly individuals, and people with disabilities. It may also involve other interventions such as sign language interpretation and using a microphone and amplifier.
- Seek the advice and counsel of the gender consultant, local guides, and women's rights organisations to identify risks women may face (whether because of gender-based violence, conflict, or militarisation) if they wish to take part in meetings or otherwise engage, express their opinions, and simply assert power.
- Take measures to preemptively protect women's safety. For example, consider the safety of local transportation options, and suggest pairing up to navigate potentially unsafe situations. It may be necessary to put in place processes for identifying when women are at risk of violence and setting up appropriate response and grievance mechanisms, not only for participation in meetings and other engagements but also for the impacts of the decisions made. Note that prevention actions can take time and would be best undertaken by experts (such as an NGO) who are retained by the engagement team.

- Work with traditional leaders and local government to ensure that women who attend meetings and speak up are protected from violence and intimidation.
- With support from the local guides, the consultant, and women's organisations, brainstorm locally appropriate strategies to ensure that women attend engagements in high numbers. As you do so, consider intersectionalities and resource scarcity constraints, and make sure to understand which kinds of women are being included and which kinds of women are being excluded (because of class or ethnicity, for example). Ensure that you take measures to include and involve all community residents.

Facilitating all-community meetings

1. Ensure women speak at meetings and that their inputs are taken seriously

- Incorporate standing agenda items that give women and marginalised groups the opportunity to raise their concerns and share their ideas.
- Ask questions that solicit information that only women would know and so require women's verbal participation and showcase their knowledge and expertise.
- Ensure women lead in collecting and sharing their own experience-based expertise and knowledge. One way to do this is through breakout groups: partway through meetings, split meeting attendees into discussion groups of men, women, youth (and any other subgroup that is appropriate) to discuss key points. Then have each group elect spokespeople to report back on the groups' discussion.
- Call on women to speak at least as much as men. Facilitators can scan women's faces for strong opinions (even if they are not raising their hands) and proactively and respectfully ask women to speak. Facilitation is an art: Meeting facilitators must be well trained and skilled at giving women the floor and getting men to listen to, understand, consider and take action to implement women's opinions, concerns, and contributions.
- If women prefer to have a man representing their views in community meetings, then support women to fully share their views with their chosen representative. Work with him to ensure he represents women's ideas correctly and in a way that is taken seriously by the community at large.

2. Ensure that women play an active role in community decision-making processes and engagements with outsiders

- Work with chiefs, elders, and religious leaders to support women's inclusion in community decision-making, framing women's expertise and wisdom as a benefit to the whole community.
- When decisions are made during community meetings, pay careful attention to whether women's perspectives, expertise, interests, concerns, and suggestions have been heard, considered, and incorporated into any resulting decisions and plans.
- Support the community to carefully craft a plan for how they will make decisions related to the community engagement, especially during consultation and negotiation processes. Discussing it all in advance and arriving at general action plans can help to make decision-making more equitable and inclusive. These discussions could address:
 - Who gets to decide whether an investment or project is welcome, and how it will interact with the community? Will all residents, including women, youth, and members of marginalised groups be given a chance to voice their opinions and be listened to? What will happen if a minority group strongly disagrees with the majority?
 - How will the decision be made? What percentage of community residents must agree? Will both women and men have a vote?

- What process can the community follow if their leaders or certain elders and leaders agree to allocate to outsiders a large amount of land without community participation and approval? What strategies can women pursue if male leaders make decisions that disenfranchise women or impede their access to lands that they depend on to ensure their family's survival?
- Support community-wide discussions about who should be on any community-outsider negotiating team. Emphasise that women have different expertise and knowledge than men as a result of their gendered work, and help community members understand that any negotiation will be incomplete without women's knowledge. To choose the right people to do this, the community might hold a big meeting and discuss the following questions:
 - Will community elders, elected leaders, or a special negotiating team of men, women, youth, and elders specially chosen for the role represent the community?
 - How can the negotiating team be representative of all stakeholder groups in the community, so that the opinions of all members of the community can be considered?
 - What qualities, skills, expertise, and knowledge should team members have, to ensure comprehensive protection of community interests?
- Support the community to take every effort possible to ensure that leaders do not have private, secret meetings with investors. Hold an open community discussion on this matter designed to help the community brainstorm strategies to hold leaders accountable to public negotiations.
- Support women to elect strong female leaders who can speak on their behalf in all community governance meetings and during engagements with outsiders.

Supporting women-only meetings

Alongside or as an alternative to mixed-gender meetings and dialogues, create women-only spaces where they can freely discuss concerns, build confidence, and strategise. At these meetings, facilitators can 1) gather more information about women's concerns, ideas, and reflections, and 2) support women to speak more effectively in all-community meetings. At root, these meetings can be a forum to empower and prepare women to advocate for themselves as a group.

- Hold meetings where women informally meet and congregate.
- Train women about their rights—both their substantive rights and their right to play an active role in community governance—and the investment-related relevant information. Such trainings can include both national laws and international legal frameworks protecting women's right to be included in community decision-making.
- Provide coaching and training designed to support women to 1) most effectively speak in meetings, 2) engage confidently in economic and financial discussions related to land deals, and 3) understand risk factors of investments and advocate for risk-reduction tactics.
- Encourage women to create a women's caucus that makes presentations to the full community at all-community meetings. Support women to elect representatives who are comfortable speaking on their behalf during mixed-gender meetings.
- Encourage and support women to seek election to leadership roles in community governance structures, and provide mentorship and training to prepare them for these roles.