

**Source:** VAN WIJK C 2001. *The Best of Two Worlds? Methodology for Participatory Assessment of Community Water Services* TP 38, IRC - International Water and Sanitation Centre, NL Pp 113

### **Effects of gender-sensitive assessment on gender relations**

Women in Sewukan community in Magelan district, Java, Indonesia had never met to discuss other than in social or religious events. Their participation in the evaluation of 11 water systems in their community affected gender relations in several ways:

*Recognition of 'power on':* Initially, the kepaladusun (sub-village head) had considered the consultation of women on technical design and workmanship of the systems a waste of time. He said women knew nothing about such aspects. However, his views and those of the other men changed when the group of women came with very concrete design errors such as too low ratio of cement to sand in concrete and a too low entrypoint for the water pipes in the reservoirs. The men's group brought out only very general remarks such as a lack of training. The experience led the kepaladusun to make the, in that culture, unusual remark in public that the women had brought out more useful technical observations than the men. When the men presented the outcomes in the plenary meeting (women and men) alternated in presentations and the men started), they presented only the women's findings, until a man in the audience asked: "But what about our findings?" and everyone began to laugh.

*Introduction of 'power over':* The women's own evaluation of the design and quality of the existing services also served to put two women's need on the agenda for the new water supply: a better distribution of domestic water and the addition of sanitation to the project. Because the community already had eleven small domestic water supplies, the male leaders had assumed that there was no need for a twelfth system. They had therefore decided that the new water supply would be built for irrigation. The women's evaluation of the water quantity then showed that, while all households had access, the distribution of water throughout the community was skewed. Therefore, the meeting decided to use its social map to plan the new water system for better distribution of domestic water. A hot debate developed on the addition of toilet facilities. The women disliked the lack of privacy for defecation and the inconvenience of going to the local streams at night. The men were satisfied with using the streams and thought that private latrines were too expensive. However, during the discussion it became clear that they had taken the costly and unused *public* latrine as the mosque as the model for domestic facilities. The team then provided the groups with line drawings of the different models and materials for household latrines. Using the drawings to calculate what the various models would cost, the men and women soon realized that they could build all types of latrines according to their own preferences and capacity to pay. The women furthermore came with the suggestion that when a household could not afford a latrine of its own, up to five households could build and use one together. In two meetings (the design

review event and the community review meeting), this issue could not be resolved. However, the women had become conscious of their common demand and had united around the issue. Pressure to solve the problem will therefore quite likely continue until a satisfactory solution has been found.

*Emergence of 'power within' and 'power with':* Through the process, the women had become aware that they had the same water and sanitation problems. They said that, although they were organized and held women's meetings, they had not previously discussed anything else that social and religious issues. In the assembly where they presented their findings along with the men, they stated that they wanted to set up committees in each of the six community neighbourhoods to participate in the design of the new water supply and monitor the contractors on their quality of construction. The male leaders supported the idea stating that, when the work was not done well, they would use the legal means open to them to ensure good quality design and construction.

*First experience of 'power to'.* In the group session, women and men had agreed to alternate in presenting the outcomes in the plenary meeting. Presenters acted in pairs of two men or women for mutual support. The meeting started formally with everyone sitting in a large circle. The leaders opened the meeting using a hand microphone and passed it on to the presenting teams. The men used the microphone with skill and confidence. The first woman did not know how to use it and was helped by a man. The second woman closely observed this and handled the microphone with more confidence. Soon thereafter, discussion became so lively that the circle broke up, participants gathered around the tools and the microphone was forgotten. Asked later about whether they could continue to use the PRA (Participatory Rapid Appraisal) tools, the older women were doubtful. Suddenly, a young woman spoke up and said that maybe it was not possible for everyone but that she thought she could do it. When the older women were asked for their view, they said that perhaps they, too, could learn how to use them, but "meanwhile, let the younger women take the lead". To what extent actions will follow remains to be seen.