



A CONSULTATION CHECKLIST FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right [...] to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government"

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23 (16th session, 1997) on Article 7 (political and public life)

Introduction

Section 49A of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which provides for the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), stipulates, among their core responsibilities, that Committees will 'drive meaningful citizen and community engagement in the scoping, planning, delivery and evaluation of local and community development programmes' and 'focus on learning and feedback, enhancing the links between service delivery and policy development'. This makes good business sense. Programmes and services designed based on a needs-based, evidentiary approach are more effective and cost-efficient. And decision-making processes informed by diversity¹ have been found to be consistently more likely to find innovative solutions to foster inclusive growth.

NWCI provides this guide as a means of supporting members of LCDCs and relevant local authority staff in pursuit of more inclusive and equal communities.² LCDCs can, through their competences and composition, undertake concrete actions in favour of gender equality. While it is important not to categorise women as a minority group, it is essential to recognise the particular or perceived nature of women's and men's roles in society and tailor budgets, policies, plans and programmes accordingly. Equally, women's equality is not a minority issue; the rights and needs of women cut across all sections of society. Policies and programmes should not be shaped by assumptions. We must establish what women need from programmes and services and whether existing ones meet their needs.

International human rights mechanisms recognise that public participation rights encompass the rights to be consulted at each phase of legislative drafting and policymaking, to voice criticism and to submit proposals aimed at improving the functioning and inclusivity of all governmental bodies engaged in the conduct of public affairs.³ Consultation is thus a crucial element of the duties conferred on LCDCs under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.⁴ We begin by outlining key steps to be undertaken prior to consulting women and women's groups.

¹ Gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, nationality, race, civil status, religion, socio-economic status

² The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) called a public consultation in late 2015 on its guide to public engagement, yet to be finalised. NWCI considers this document a supplementary support to DPER's guide and encourages its use in all instances of public and community consultation.

³ Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on *Factors that impede equal political participation and steps to overcome those challenges*, A/HRC/27/29, 30 June 2014.

⁴ Commonly referred to as the 'public sector positive duty'

KEY STEPS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION AND IMPROVE RESULTS

Open up the floor

Aim to reach women who have not previously been included in discussions. Incorporating a diversity of views and experiences is critical to effective design of policies, programmes and budgets. This involves seeking out a broad range of expertise, including service or programme providers and target groups, including those who have not yet engaged. Watch out for and challenge unconscious assumptions when deciding who to consult by ensuring that all those who can or wish to benefit from a policy or programme are invited to contribute.

Anticipate the unexpected...

Public policies, programmes and services affect men and women differently and they will always affect those who were not considered in the original drafting process in unexpected ways. Consultations should therefore be considered an integral part of design, implementation and review. As part of any review process, existing policies and programmes should be gender proofed to (assess whether it has had particular intended or unintended impact on women or men) with the findings applied in subsequent planning.

... And the expected

Participants should be informed of the intended use of their contributions and of how whether their views are likely to bring about change. Following the consultation process, they should be made aware of how to access feedback on whether and how their contributions were incorporated into final decisions.

Be creative

To ensure maximum participation, a variety of communications channels should be utilised, including online surveys, focus groups, online and written submissions, face-to-face interviews, etc. Diverse needs and lifestyles of the target groups should be accommodated, with particular consideration of care responsibilities, part-time and out-of-office work schedules and disproportionate dependence on or lack of access to public transport among some groups of women. Meeting times should be staggered throughout the day and week, make sure meetings have a set finish time and give plenty of notice once a meeting has been scheduled to allow for alternative care arrangements to be made.

Cover the costs

Expect that there will be additional financial burdens and limitations for women attending the consultations. Arranging childcare on site and/or providing reimbursements for care and travel costs should be standard. Make sure participants are aware of such arrangements and know how to complete the reimbursement process. Where resources are limited, consultations can be brought to those whose views are being sought, e.g. in Direct Provision Centres, family resource centres, etc. Women with disabilities, who face multiple barriers to travel and participation, could particularly benefit from outreach initiatives.

Allow for diversity in communication and learning

Have due regard to the ways in which people absorb and contribute information. Traditionally, women's communications styles are more narrative, while men can be reticent to expand when describing personal experiences. Make allowance for language barriers, differing literacy levels and learning difficulties. Make sure written documents are written in easy-to-follow language (see National Adult Literacy Agency guidelines). Be aware that some women may not have experience of formalised structures and so will need time to get used to the process; small-group discussions will allow for meaningful interaction where members are more likely to raise their voices.

Make room for top-up communication

Full and meaningful participation relies on open communication lines and good relationships. Make regular communication easier by setting up fora, working groups, task groups, working papers and online discussion groups.

Monitor and evaluate

Monitor the outcomes consultation by seeking women's feedback on the experiences of the consultation and ascertaining the barriers to those who could not attend. Note any issues and adapt future consultations accordingly. Incorporating these steps into work practices is a process and may be part of incremental change.

THE CHECKLIST

- ✓ Has a diverse group of women been identified and invited?
- ✓ Have you considered what assumptions you might be making when identifying groups to consult, based on traditional roles of women and men?
- ✓ Has every possible effort been made to reach women who are disadvantaged or marginalised?
- ✓ Have you considered how women may be affected by the plans in question?
- ✓ Have you assessed how relevant budgets, policies or programmes have impacted on women?
- ✓ Have the findings of this assessment been shared with those being consulted?
- ✓ Have participants been informed about why a consultation is necessary?
- ✓ Have participants been told about the potential for change by contributing their suggestions?
- ✓ Have participants been told how they can access updates or feedback on their contributions?
- ✓ Is there more than one way to contribute to the consultation?
- ✓ Has there been more than one meeting scheduled and are they staggered over the week?
- ✓ Has there been sufficient notice given for the meeting and have they been given a concrete end time?
- ✓ Are there resources available to reimburse those attending meetings for alternative care arrangements and transport? Are participants aware of how to claim reimbursements?
- ✓ Have you considered travelling to those you want to consult?
- ✓ Can all information covered in the meeting be understood by everyone in attendance – is simple, straightforward language being used?
- ✓ Is the group size appropriate for the members in attendance?
- ✓ Has the moderator received gender and equality training?
- ✓ Are there regular opportunities to ask questions or comment?
- ✓ Are the barriers to attending meetings / engaging in discussion being recorded?
- ✓ Are the outcomes of consultations being monitored?
- ✓ Have you asked for feedback on the consultation process from participants?
- ✓ Have changes been made regarding this feedback?