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# The People's Perspective

**Making Communities a Success Factor for Partnerships**

**Evaluation of the selection procedure of the Dutch public-private partnership facilities: the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) & the Facility for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV)**

*Commissioned by the  
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs*



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*“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”*

*United Nations – report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997 (p. 28)*

# The Community Perspective in Partnerships

Countless studies have shown that non-involvement of the target group – in agricultural activities or water supply projects – leads to frustration and even failure. People are intelligent even when they are illiterate; they might lack education and skills but they know how to survive in their specific environment and to spread their risks. If people get a chance to improve their situation they will take it, but only when they are convinced it is good for them and their families. But, under any circumstance, it is very difficult for people to change their behaviour. This is even more so if people live in a very traditional society. Stepping out of such patterns is a challenge and different triggers are needed. But first and foremost patience and time is required.

Two public-private partnership (PPP) facilities were established by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012: the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) and the Facility for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV). In the selection procedure, partnerships were asked to describe their impact on gender, without much explanation of what was meant. In addition, partnerships were requested to elaborate on the social sustainability of the project and to create a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy including a gender strategy. A study of a large set of successful proposals showed that partnerships struggled with developing a strategy acknowledging local customs and gender roles while ensuring equal opportunities across various groups. Moreover, participation of communities and target groups received relatively little attention compared to technical and financial aspects of the projects. Such skewed attention can seriously hamper the relevance a project has to development objectives for which it is developed. Improving the balance between investment objectives and development aims in the project plans will benefit both investors and the population involved.

# Content

Based on the results from the studied project plans, this publication shows which eight key factors of community involvement are important to take into account when developing a PPP project and why. For each key factor a clarification is given on its meaning and its relevance after which observations from the review of the project plans are discussed. Additionally, three exemplary partnership projects are discussed to show how partnerships dealt well with key factors and where there is room for improvement. These examples serve primarily to explain the key factors of community involvement in partnerships in detail. A list of reflective questions, finally, provides practitioners support in incorporating the key factors in their project plans.

The structure of the report is thus as follows:



# Purpose



This booklet provides an understanding of what community and target group involvement – male and female – actually implies. It gives concrete guidelines on how to incorporate gender strategies and ensure community involvement in partnerships for development. In addition, this publication aims to aid partnerships in the process of developing their project plan. Succeeding in incorporating the people's perspective in project plans is not only likely to improve partnerships' chance at obtaining funding for their projects, but will also greatly benefit the social and financial sustainability of the partnerships.

This booklet can help applicants of future calls for PPP facilities. Gender has gained a more central role in the application procedures of many facilities. Policy makers can find input on how community involvement can become an integrated aspect in the formulation of partnerships.

# Key factors of community inclusiveness



Eight key factors for community involvement have been established, and assessed across 40 partnerships that were granted subsidy following the call of the FDW or FDOV facility in 2012. This section separately discusses each of these key factors and reports how partnerships incorporated them in their project plan.

# #1. Structural poverty reduction

## Responding to local customs and needs

One of the requirements of the partnerships was that they aimed at structural poverty reduction, sustainable economic growth and self-reliance. In order to effectively contribute to structural poverty reduction, projects need to take local customs and needs as a starting point rather than imposing a solution without considering the local context. This relates to benefits in terms of income, livelihood, knowledge and skills, education, food security, and health and sanitation. But also feelings of insecurity, exclusion and lack of perspective and self-esteem should be considered.

## Why?

Since people are the driving force of the economy, success at achieving development goals depends largely on their efforts and contributions. However, peoples' economic contribution and the roles of men and women differ, depending on local customs and traditions. In most cultures, women do not only play a social role by tending the family and caring for children, but also a vital economic role by working the land, looking after assets or the cattle, fetching water, or selling products. In the past, these local customs have often been ignored and female producers have frequently been bypassed which indirectly contributes to the economic marginalisation and poverty of women.

## Findings

In 50% of the projects there was sufficient indication that the project would contribute to poverty reduction because these projects also identified a 'demand' for the proposed intervention, through local authorities or other local partners, through consultations with target groups, or based on previous interventions. However, 27,5% of the studied projects (all FDOV) were clearly supply-driven and based on commercial opportunities, without showing much knowledge of the target group, their economic roles and potentials. Formulations in the proposals frequently came across as 'politically correct', using internationally accepted phrases on poverty reduction.

## #2. Knowledge of the context

### **Showing detailed knowledge of the unique local situation**

A relevant context description contains – apart from some general facts on the degree of poverty, economic and political environment – specified data on the region in which the project is taking place with regard to: its population, ethnic groups, farming systems, division of labour on specific (cash) crops, traditional practices which affect men and women, as well as other cultural issues which can be relevant.

### **Why?**

Many partnerships for development deal with remote or neglected areas where poor people survive at subsistence level with very limited economic opportunities. Their situation can vary greatly and can determine whether they are willing or able to work with the project. Determining factors can be situations such as tensions between ethnic groups making people unwilling to co-operate or farming systems resulting in lacking technical skills and low productivity. But also traditions which prohibit women to own land or other assets, or customary division of labour which make certain chores specifically male or female.

### **Findings**

Most of the studied projects proposals relied heavily on information from public sources on countries' general characteristics. Apparently many partnerships still lack awareness of the importance of understanding the context in which a project is to take place. Scores were based on whether projects specified the project region in which they were located, its population demographics, its socio-economic situation and cultural issues. In 75% of the cases only relatively general information was provided on the local poverty situation. Only 35% of the cases touched upon the socio-economic situation and only 10% mentioned some information on culture or traditional practices.

# #3. Dialogue with the target group

## Engaging with the target group to safeguard legitimacy and commitment

To ensure a fruitful co-operation with the target group, it is important to not only have extensive knowledge about the specific situation (#2) but also to engage with target group in a mutual dialogue.

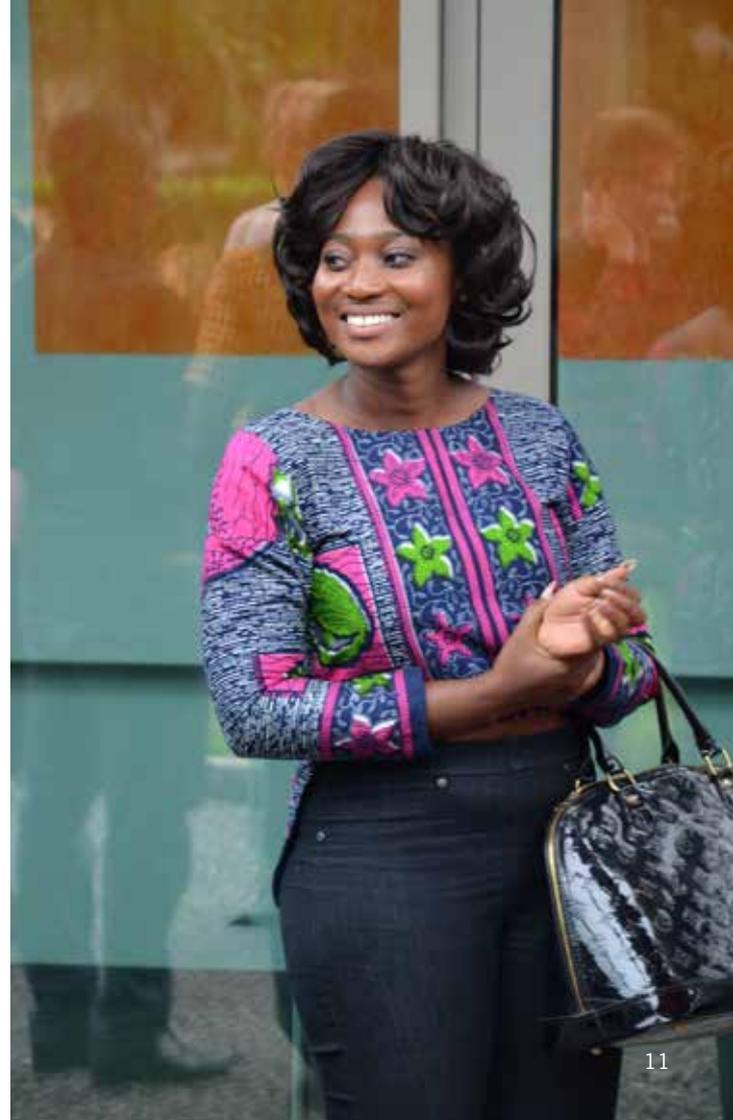


### Why?

A dialogue with the target group of a project will prove valuable for both the target group and the partnership. Firstly, in any development activity that involves people it is crucial to make sure that they are informed, interested and motivated to put in their efforts. A dialogue allows further fine-tuning and tailoring to the local needs. Secondly, it is important to inform the target group about the project. The people involved in the project have a right to know what is going to happen and what is expected from them. If a project is to outsource its production to local farmers, they should know what the proposed activity is about, how it links to their own knowledge and skills, and how it can improve their lives. Only on the basis of transparent information the target group can calculate their risks and decide to participate. Excluding target groups from the project development phase might not only result in unsuited solutions, but also in lacking support or even local resistance. Mutual engagement greatly contributes to the financial and social sustainability of a project.

## Findings

In 77.5% of the cases some information was given to the target group while consultation only took place in 40% of the projects. In 25% of the projects the target group was asked to participate and in 20% was the people's willingness to participate investigated. Only in 7.5% of the projects the target group had expressed an interest to contribute financially. In 40% of the projects some differentiation was made between male and female members of the target group.



## #4. Organisation of the target group

### **Adopting a considerate approach to the organisation of target groups**

There can be various reasons to stimulate the formation of co-operatives or producer groups. For food security projects it will ease the process of delivery of supplies and inputs as well as the collection and marketing of products. For water supply projects it will be easier to inform and mobilise people, to collect their contribution, and to organise maintenance. Moreover, being organised can improve the bargaining position for the collective interests.

### **Why?**

Despite significant investments in setting up and strengthening farmers organizations, in general very few function adequately, for various reasons. This is why organizing the target group should be handled with care. A number of projects would greatly benefit if the target group would be well organised. In some cases they are already organised, independent of the proposed activity. In other cases, however, it looks as if the project would find it convenient to organise the producers in groups, without taking people's immediate interests and wishes into account. This situation can lead to undesirable effects and dysfunctional organisations.

### **Findings**

In only 47.5% of the cases the organisation of the target group was mentioned – almost all FDOV projects. Of this subsample only five scored positively on all sub-criteria. These projects were also the most inclusive for women, as for half of the subsample a differentiation was made between male and female members. However, it remains uncertain whether these women are members on their own account or as part of a household, with or without their own voting rights.

# #5. ICSR principles

## **Making international corporate social responsibility (ICSR) principles actionable**

ICSR guidelines for project proposals reflect good practice for all and should be adhered to by all partners and projects in the Netherlands. Integrating ICSR principles properly in a proposal can greatly improve the project's social quality. Gender, however, is only a subset of the principles, specified as equal pay for equal work. A somewhat broader perspective puts the emphasis on the human rights principles part of ICSR such as treatment of workers, safety measures, equal pay and prohibition of child labour.



## **Why?**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become part of proper business practice. It is a logical consequence of our respect for human rights and fight against injustice. It has taken many years to ban child labour, to improve working conditions for everyone, and to fight against discrimination and corruption. However, following the CSR principles in practice is not as simple as signing a declaration. Especially in areas where these principles are not yet common practice, explicit guidelines are required to safeguard their proper implementation.

## **Findings**

In most projects, ICSR principles – an obligation of the facility - are hardly elaborated. All partnerships, however, vouch that in the first phase of the project, they will (more) clearly outline their ICSR policy. 20% of the projects did not describe their commitment to ICSR principles in any detail, while 63% of the projects showed commitment to all relevant principles. The partnership can speed up the adoption of ICSR principles, provided the partners make sure that those parties that have not yet adopted ICSR principles will use the partnership to do that.

# #6. Social sustainability

## Understanding and aiming for social sustainability

One of the FIETS<sup>1</sup> criteria is social sustainability. This refers to community members, customers, suppliers, local government and other local stakeholders. It also relates to a better living environment of the people and communities involved and it is thus concerned with personal assets such as education, skills, experience, consumption, income and employment, a better livelihood and living conditions. Social sustainability is not an easy concept to grasp and can be interpreted in various ways.



## Why?

Thinking about social sustainability can guard partnerships from neglecting or excluding groups within the community on the one hand, or fostering unbalanced power positions on the other hand. The notion implies a projection in the future: target groups' social position should improve in a sustainable way through the project's activity.

## Findings

In practice, interventions often fail to set tangible objectives. Less than half of the projects gave some sort of definition of social sustainability with a wide variety of interpretations; ranging from the creation of some jobs, better living conditions, more income, group organisation of farmers, representation of stakeholders, and access to knowledge and education to social changes, inclusive strategies and improving the position of women. The studied documents give the impression that partnerships have grappled with the term social sustainability and have used very general formulations representing all sorts of development goals vaguely related to the well-being of communities and their members.

# #7. Gender strategy

## Adopting a strategy to ensure equal opportunities

A simple definition of gender relations is the ‘historically determined relations between men and women in a given society’. It is different from the biologically determined roles as bearing and nurturing of children. Gender is about women’s role in society, their say in whom they will marry and at what age, their productive roles, and their access to and control over assets, income and credit.



## Why?

The economic contribution of women is underestimated in much of the country data since most of their work is within households and in the informal sector and thus invisible to statistics. Despite multiple studies over the last four decades that stress the importance of considering women’s productive roles, practice still shows there is a lack of awareness of this fact. For example, in Africa more than 60% of all agricultural work is done by women. Good understanding of the local gender roles and explicit efforts to engage women in a project can greatly contribute to better project results.

## Findings

In the studied project format, gender was only explicitly treated under ‘cross-cutting themes’, and therefore treated as an additional aspect instead of being part of the core project. In 85% of the projects the economic role of women was somewhat acknowledged. Equal treatment of men and women was mentioned in 35%. But equal treatment is often not sufficient to deal with gender inequality. In many cultural settings there is no level playing field and women and men do not get the same opportunities. Often an explicit gender strategy is required to help women overcome their feeling of inferiority and encourage them to claim their position and to participate in the project activities. In 33% of the projects a specific strategy was developed or the intention expressed to develop it.



## #8. Women's economic role

### Having a consistent understanding of women's economic roles

The approach to women's roles should be consistent at project level. Women can take a productive role, a social, caring role at household level, or both. The role should be relevant for the project ambitions. In food security projects it seems best to focus consistently on women's economic role. For example, in most societies fetching water for household consumption is considered typically a women's task. It is not seen as an economic activity.



### Why?

Partnerships are about investments in activities which are to benefit investors on the one hand and a local community on the other. This implies a clear strategy on how to involve people, both men and women, who want to improve their livelihood. So the strategic focus should be clear, consistent and unambiguous, either on women's economic role or on their social role.

### Findings

The role of women was included in the analysis as a double check regarding consistency in the approach to gender and the role of women in all 40 projects analysed. Of the proposals, 37.5% contained inconsistencies; mixing roles of women as weak human beings on the one hand and economic agents on the other. Other cases show a lack of understanding that rural women need to produce the family food and possibly also cash crops, hence their physical strength which allows them to carry heavy loads on their heads. In the case of the fortified food or baby food projects, women's mother role was vastly overemphasised, while ignoring their role as food producers. A possible explanation of this finding is the insertion of politically correct language which however did not fit the logic of proposals.

## Example 1

### Providing security to invest



*This small partnership targets one of the poorest countries in Central Africa with a carefully constructed but also ambitious project. The objective of the partnership is to break through the vicious cycle of low food production, poor health care and risk averse decision-making. Activities combine improving agricultural practices, improving health care, and providing financial security through insurance. By ensuring positive financial conditions, farmers will be stimulated to invest in their businesses resulting in more availability of food. The activities of the partnership will not only contribute to improved food security at village level but will also improve financial and health conditions of farmers and their families.*

### **Good practice**

The partnership applies a Communities System Strengthening approach which includes community mapping, identification of vulnerable groups and their inclusion, consideration of conflicts and building local resources and capacities. With this approach, the partnership performs well on the dimension of participation of the target group (#3). The project is also consistent in its approach to women's economic role (#8) as it pays special attention to female target groups: the empowerment and resilience of women receive elaborate attention.

### **Room for improvement**

While the project aims to perform a baseline assessment on different themes including the target group's willingness to pay, no target group profiles were available in the project plan. For this reason the project scored moderately low at knowledge of the context (#2). Like many other collaborations, this partnership did not provide an explicit gender strategy (#7) on how to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women.



## Example 2

# Commercialising maize production

*This innovative maize value chain partnership in Eastern Africa constitutes of nine partners of which half are companies representing different clusters of the local maize value chain. The proposed partnership activities are twofold: (1) accelerating the uptake of agricultural technologies by small scale farmers in rural areas and (2) investing in various clusters of the maize value chain. With these activities the partnership aims to improve the efficiency of the local maize market. Improved functioning of markets is in turn anticipated to be an incentive for small scale farmers to increase their productivity which will allow them to enter commercial markets.*

### **Good practice**

The partnership scores high on structural poverty reduction (#1) because the partnership has clearly taken the local situation as a starting point in deciding how to improve food security. The project is demand-driven in its approach and the partners intend to perform a demand-driven technical market research. The partnership has also adopted a good gender strategy (#7). Not only has the partnership planned a social analytical study, elaborating on financial literacy of women and men, its impact will also be measured disaggregated for men and women, which is crucial for accountability on gender.

### **Room for improvement**

While the partnership intends to perform a social analytical study, the project plan itself showed little knowledge about the target group. For example, no elaboration was provided on client profiles and the client's willingness to pay. For this reason the project scored low on knowledge about the context (#2). Moreover, initial documents mentioned the intent to improve the organisation of farmer groups (#4) while no further explanation was provided and how this would be done. The partnership did not indicate whether and how it will incorporate the ICSR principles (#6) specifically the labour or human rights.

# Example 3

## Improving resilience to floods and droughts

*A small partnership of two local partners and two Dutch partners was proposed to help communities in West Africa cope with increasingly frequent and severe droughts and floods. Inputs of the partnerships are the introduction of an innovative flood protection system, new farming practices, and innovative irrigation and drainage techniques, combined with training of local stakeholders. With these new practices and knowledge transfer the partnership aims to help the local region become more resilient to the extreme climate conditions. Through the intervention access to water will be secured and currently abandoned land will become attractive for commercial agricultural exploitation.*

### **Good practice**

The partnership demonstrated good knowledge of the local context (#2) with a detailed description of the project region and of the problems that small scale farmers face when they aspire to improve their economic position. Special attention is given to women who face additional cultural problems preventing them from economic participation. The project scores high on social sustainability (#6) because it recognises the importance of social change for the adoption of technical innovations and sets clear targets and monitoring structures. ICSR principles (#5) are acknowledged to be important in the specific context and additional decision-making mechanisms are employed to ensure fair labour conditions.

### **Room for improvement**

The project scored moderately on gender strategy (#7). While the partnership sets ambitious goals for women's participation in training and in representing power positions, no strategy has been developed on how to motivate women to participate or how to convince men to approve of such social change. Similarly, organisation in farmer groups and women associations (#4) associations is only mentioned, but explicit information on how to achieve this is lacking.

# Reflective Questions

*This section offers reflective questions for each key indicator of community inclusiveness. These questions are developed to aid practitioners in better including the people's perspective in setting up partnership projects for sustainable development.*

All key factors of community inclusiveness make an impact on the central question: how and why will the proposed plan work? Each proposal is built – explicitly or implicitly – around a Theory of Change that addresses this question. All partnerships for development involve communities which are, in some way or another, assisted in their road towards development. Hence, much of the success of a partnership is dependent on choices of target groups and community involvement. Paying close attention to the perspective of target groups boils down to answering the following reflective questions:

## **Theory of change**

- What is the theory of change: starting with the issue the partnership aims to tackle, what is required for the situation to improve?
- What will motivate people to co-operate with your intervention? For example, to adopt new farming methods and techniques or sanitation practices.
- What is a realistic timeline for these changes to take effect?
- How can the theory of change become operational? For example, comprising aspects such as a communication plan, media messages, social media applications, skills training or peer to peer education?

## **Structural poverty reduction (#1)**

- Is there an adequate balance between supply side considerations and considerations related to the needs of the beneficiaries?
- What is the degree of poverty of the specified area?
- How will the project contribute to poverty relief?

### **Context description (#2)**

- What are general features of the area and its population?
- What is the socio-economic situation of the population?
- What are cultural issues determining people's role – male and female – and position within their community?

### **Target group involvement (#3)**

- Is the target group – male and female – informed or consulted about the project?
- Has the target group expressed interest and willingness to participate in the project?
- Has the target group shown willingness to invest financially – out of pocket or credit?

### **Organisation of target group (#4)**

- Is there a sound analysis on the expected viability of the farmers organizations or cooperatives
- Are men and women free to join the group, co-operative or organisation?
- Are decisions within the organisation taken democratically?
- Do women and men have equal say (voting power) in the organisation?

### **ICSR principles (#5)**

- Are human rights principles respected and adhered to in the project?
- Do men and women have equal rights and equal pay?
- Are all partners informed on how and when to act upon the agreed ICSR principles

### **Social sustainability (#6)**

- What does social sustainability mean and how should it be translated in the project proposal?
- What targets should be reached at the end of the project?
- How should these targets be monitored during the project period?

### **Gender strategy (#7)**

- What is the situation in terms of gender equality: what are roles and opportunities, and is there a level playing field?
- What steps should be taken to decrease the inequality between men and women: has a specific strategy been developed?
- What measures have been taken to encourage women to participate in the project?

### **Women's economic role (#8)**

- Has the position and role of women as economic agents or caregivers been understood and described in a manner consistent with the purpose and objective of the project?

# Appendix: methodology



For the analysis of this report 40 partnership project plans were studied. The sample existed of 28 FDOV projects and 12 FDW projects. All the studied projects are partnerships that passed the selection procedure and have been granted subsidy to implement their plans. The project plans were rated on each of the 8 key factors on a 5-point Likert scale in which 0 would indicate no consideration of the key factor and 5 a complete incorporation of the factor. However, as the eight key factors differ in nature, a specified scoring guideline was developed for each of them. The table provides information on the scoring guidelines, average scores recorded per key factor, and the share of projects that received a specific score for each of them.



Key factors	Scoring guideline	Scores*
<b>Structural poverty reduction</b> (1) demand/supply drive, (2) degree of poverty.	0 = completely supply-driven 2 = mixed supply- and demand-driven 5 = completely demand-driven	27.5 % 22.5 % 50 %
<b>Knowledge of the context</b> (1) project area, (2) population, (3) socio-economic situation, (4) cultural issues.	0 = comply with zero elements 1 = comply with one element 3 = comply with two elements 4 = comply with three elements 5 = comply with all elements	10 % 35 % 25 % 20 % 10 %
<b>Dialogue with the target group</b> (1) target group informed, (2) target group consulted, (3) target group asked to participate, (4) target group willing to participate, (5) target group willing to contribute financially, (6) male/female differentiation.	0 = comply with zero elements 1 = comply with one element 2 = comply with two elements 3 = comply with three of four elements 4 = comply with five elements 5 = comply with six elements	22.5 % 30 % 12.5 % 17.5 % 10 % 7.5 %

Key factors	Scoring guideline	Scores*
<b>Organisation of the target group</b> (1) members free to join (2) membership open for men and women (4) decisions taking democratically (5) equal vote for men and women	0 = comply with zero elements 1 = comply with one element 3 = comply with two elements 4 = comply with three elements 5 = comply with four elements No answer	0 % 20 % 12.5 % 2.5 % 12.5 % 52.5 %
<b>ICSR principles</b> Principles: ILO principles, universal declaration of human rights, and OECD guidelines	0 = no commitment to relevant principles 2 = some commitment 5 = commitment to relevant principles	20 % 17.5 % 62.5 %
<b>Social sustainability</b> (1) Definition of sustainability, (2) targets are set (3) monitoring is included	0 = comply with zero elements 2 = comply with one element 4 = comply with two elements 5 = comply with three elements	42.5 % 25 % 15 % 17.5 %
<b>Gender strategy</b> (1) recognition of equal role m/f, (2) equal treatment m/f, (3) specific gender strategy developed, (4) effort to encourage women to participate	0 = comply with zero elements 1 = comply with one element 3 = comply with two elements 4 = comply with three elements 5 = comply with four elements	12.5 % 35 % 17.5 % 12.5 % 22.5 %
<b>Women's economic role</b> Approach to women's roles as for example caretakers, providers, producers, employers, consumers, leaders and empowerment of their cultural, social and economic position	0 = inconsistent 5 = consistent	37.5 % 62.5 %

\* Share of projects that received this score.

# Colophon

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This report has been written by Antoinette Gosses, expert on gender issues, and Nienke Keen, research associate at the Partnerships Resource Centre (PrC). The authors have developed the report in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Rob van Tulder, Academic Director of the PrC, and Jan Anton van Zanten, research assistant at PrC.

<sup>1</sup> Littig, B. & Griessler, E. (2005). Social sustainability: a catchword between political pragmatism and social theory. *International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 8(1), 65-79.

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## Photography:

Cécile Fassaert (p. 3, 10, 13, 16, 17)

Nasim Payandeh (p. 7, 14)

Nienke Keen (p. 15)

Susanne Roelofsen (p. 6, 11, 18, 19, 24)

## The Partnerships Resource Centre

### Postal address

P.O. Box 1738

3000 DR Rotterdam

The Netherlands

T +31 (0)10 408 8715

E [info@partnershipsresourcecentre.org](mailto:info@partnershipsresourcecentre.org)

### Visiting address

Burgemeester Oudlaan 50

3062 PA Rotterdam,

The Netherlands



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