

This booklet contains:

Principles

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Principles to guide practice

A framework for sustainable development emerged in the form of a series of principles to guide practice. The research and work with women in the three communities indicated the *very marked differences* among the localities.

Each area was different in a range of factors including:

- geographical location
- identities
- cultures and their trans-local networks
- internal cultural differences
- populations, their mobility and their diversity
- life trajectories of people—people's fears, hopes, joys and sorrows
- dominant values and their sources of conflict—economic, political, cultural, existential
- histories
- economic bases
- public and private sector resources—and access to these
- level of, and access to, skill and knowledge
- character of collective life—organisations, supports, networks, privilege, inequities, openness, and exclusiveness.

The specificity of localities meant that it was unlikely that generalised models or standardised measures could be developed that would both hold everywhere and have a realistic chance of success. In the case of local community based initiatives, generalised models or standardised external measures have a rigid, formulaic character that is unresponsive to the cultural and economic specificity of a locality, unresponsive to a changing environment, and runs counter to the development of audits or indicators of community strength.

This is particularly the case where social diversity is great and social divisions are extensive, the macro environment is changing rapidly, and populations are mobile and boundaries porous.

It seemed that a series of principles to guide practice would be more responsive to local life and more sensitive to its internal complexities. An open series of principles to guide practice was truer to the work of the Partnership Project, because it could be designed with a flexibility that enabled:

- different 'packaging' for different areas
- ongoing dialogue and negotiation with the 'ground' of local culture (from which is built both sustainable collective lives and robust democratic cultures)

- a responsiveness to different women's standpoints within local communities
- a responsiveness to changing macro and micro environments, and the interrelatedness in the shaping of local cultures
- a combining of the 'how to do' and the 'what do to'.

In the first instance, the principles and their application highlight the relationship between the policy making/implementation role of government and the people or the community that the policies address. As a secondary product, the principles are also relevant to community/cultural development at the community level, for non-government sector organisations, and diverse groups of women engaging in effecting change within communities both of place and of interest.

The following principles to guide practices are organised around the principles that set the foundation, those that can be regarded as structural, and the application of principles to practice. They serve to inform the way programs are designed and the processes for partnerships and working relationships between government and women in diverse communities.

Principles to set the foundation

The principles that set the foundation for sustainable development for women reflect a philosophy of justice, equity and rights (Human Rights Declaration) and respect for unassimilable differences. They qualify the following structural principles; thereby ensuring the structural principles are not absolute.

Structural principles to guide practice for sustainability

Community and collectivity	focusing 'over and above the individual' to build community capacity and democratisation
Plurality	providing a recognition of diversity
Embeddedness	situating strategies and activities, in the first instance, in the historical relationships and obligations that define the totality of women's lives (men, family, children, work, leisure, cultural mores, local women's organisations and affiliations)
Integration	bringing together relevant institutions, organisations and grassroots levels for a dialogue of differences
Inclusive reflection	referring to the totality of factors affecting the welfare of women and shaping the well being of women's lives (including women's needs and talents, families, self-esteem, confidence, aspirations, fears, health, leisure, money, and the situation of community sector and other local workers)
Complementing needs	developing activities among women that complement the delivery of services that are their rights as citizens (including welfare, income support, training, education, health, child care, transport and communications)
Building on strengths	starting from points where women feel strong and from which they derive pleasure
Organicity	arising from and being appropriate to the relevant community or culture of women
Autonomy	arising from and being desired, owned and controlled by the local community of women

Flexible participation	being open to full participatory involvement to allow for the changing trajectories of women's lives and representation
Dialogue	being open to ongoing talk and negotiation within the group, and with other groups, organisations and institutions, including government
Inclusive honesty	building trust through openness, communication and understanding (including the realities of misunderstanding and vagueness)
Committed communication	ensuring that contact and dialogue—talking with and listening to—is maintained at all levels and stages of the process, and that there is access to communication technologies and ongoing multiple media of communication
Transformation	encompassing the natural evolution of community based activities among women (including flat periods, periods of failure, lapses in energy, new participants and changes in focus)
Sensitivity to power relations	being aware of the impact of power relations on life chances and on dialogues and negotiations with and among groups
Attunement	encompassing the very different temporalities, spacialities, cultures and protocols that meet at the intersection of government and the community
Accountability	ensuring all stakeholders take responsibility for outcomes, processes and directions
Broad based support	putting in place structures of support based on 'public good' and public moral obligations (public and private sector, local and trans-local) that ensure the sustainability of women's activities and facilitate the process of democratization
Life long learning	connecting with formal or informal learning and training (including in subjects that enhance women's confidence and their general sense of well-being)
Democratic collaboration	starting from the local/grassroots and including collaboration at the level of whole of government, intra-community, community to community and on the ground
Sociality	developing sustainable activities among women through an informal grid of sociability
Outside mediation	acknowledging the importance of an outsider (individual or organisation independent of immediate stakeholders)

Applying the principles

Based on the process and outcomes from the Partnership Project, the following general recommendations are put forward for how the principles might shape effective practices that contribute to sustainable development.

Process and structure

- facilitate practices that build activities *from the ground up* rather than the reverse

Building activities from the ground up ensures full participatory dialogue, a trueness to diversity, a sensitivity to power relations and a working through and clarification of the roles of people involved.

- embed 'government business' in local protocols and attune these to local times
- address the discrepancy between the *times, spaces and rhythms* of community life and of institutional life
- develop government support practices that are *flexible* in terms of time, criteria of success, shifts in focus, goals and outcomes, cultural appropriateness, impediments and changes at the local level
- reconcile *flexibility and accountability*

Reconciling flexibility and accountability means that accountability (responsibility or answerability) becomes a facet of flexibility itself. Consequently, they are built together into the process of negotiation and dialogue from the beginning. For example, flexibility in the development of sustainable activities *on the ground* should include establishing with the women a series of desired goals, clear and realistic outcomes, training needs, milestone measures, reporting structures, exit points and exit interviews, and so forth.

- develop practices that involve 'putting in place' *vertical and horizontal support structures* for that activity

Putting in place support structures, especially in remote and regional areas, may require:

- an assisted seeding period
- the assistance of community sector workers, especially community development officers
- the assistance of mentors or 'agents of entitlement'
- the assistance of state and federal government representatives.

- develop processes where putting in place support structures includes assessing the *availability of services addressing women's social needs* that are basic to sustainability
- provide a chart of support structures that are *attuned* to the locality and to women

The configuration of support structures (including community sector staffing) will differ with each activity, the confidence of the women involved and for each locality.

- include putting in place structures that *support community sector workers*
- support community sector workers, especially in rural areas, by providing *periods of paid release* mini-sabbaticals for professional development or further training
- actively encourage the role of a *committed outsider* who can be an agent of entitlement, a catalyst, a sounding board, a source of ideas, an emissary and a friend for community groups

Consider, in particular, developing collaborative links between the community sector and tertiary institutions.

Communication and working relationships

- develop practices to facilitate talking with local women about the *role of government and the philosophy of policy, including collective goals and benefits*
- facilitate practices of listening among local interface workers and government bodies—in particular, *listening over a period of time*

If local women are to own their activities and calibrate them to their daily lives, then they need time to think about what they want and then how they might articulate this.

- develop new practices to *substitute for or supplement the consultation process*

The consultation process is not working, especially in rural and remote communities. This does not mean that this role should be passed back to local interface workers, because apart from their workload, people in remote and regional communities want to see the human face of the centre. Substituting or augmenting consultation requires finding new or different ways of talking with communities, such as a NSW Government 'on the road' bus rolling into town twice a year.

- enhance communication between the centre and periphery, between similar activities and between women and support structures

The practices should include a strategy for ongoing communication at each level.

- develop communication strategies that are *multi-faceted* or comprehensive

A communication strategy for women must involve all aspects of the communication process and should include transport, telephone, IT, sociality, the trajectories of women's lives and the human face (especially of the centre). IT alone is an inadequate support to the development of sustainable activities among women, especially in remote and rural areas.

- enhance access to information, especially funding and policy information

Enhancing access to information should not be limited to IT access. Enhancing access to information should include, especially for remote and rural populations, access across distance to a human voice and to an actual (not a virtual) human face from the centre.

Funding processes

- review and revise the length of time between release of funding guidelines and funding submission dates, the modalities and times of reporting, the modalities and temporalities of accounting, time charts and time spans allotted to projects, and the time given for the establishment period in light of community time
- encourage broadband funding or the funding of 'nests' of activities among women, where each activity enhances the sustainability of every other
- develop a practice of *seed funding* to assist a group of women to:
 - work through a community based sustainable activity
 - keep an activity alive in the period of consolidation
 - develop a project and/or carry an activity over a 'dead' period or a period where there is a need to establish succession

Training and skill development

- develop *education and training* as a key aspect of sustainability—for example, workshops, leadership training, strategic planning, Internet training, outreach education, formal education, audiovisual training and so forth
- promote practices (in training and education for sustainability) that include forms of training that *enhance women's sense of well being*

Examples that arose from the field included exercise, meditation, alternative medical practices, massage and singing.

- develop training and education programs in *cultural development* for community sector workers with tertiary institutions

Cultural development introduces a creative element into the work of community sector workers and balances a deficit model of development.

Mapping local knowledge

- provide audits of community based activities among women for the purposes of linkages, exchange of knowledge and mutual support
- map the *spatial and temporal dispersion of women's services and facilities*, including educational and employment services, facilities and projects
- map the *spatial and temporal dispersion of women's services and facilities* including educational and employment services, facilities and relevant projects for Aboriginal women and for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- create a *register of women mentors* as a key aspect of ensuring the sustainability of collective activities among women, especially for Aboriginal women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Mentoring is a preferred form of training among women experiencing disadvantage.

Pathways from activity to enterprise

The challenge in the development of sustainable enterprises and for women's participation lies, in part, in the process between identifying a need, organising small activities and facilitating the pathways to sustainable enterprises. Models for what can be regarded as low level can be used to initiate discussion and assist in planning. The sustainability of enterprises to a large extent will depend on the degree to which women are able, and allowed, to move at their own pace and to make their way beyond the traditional set of recognisable activities. Such a process:

- facilitates discussion about feasibility and planning
- ensures the sustainability of activities

- plots exit points
- builds in diverse trajectories of development for different women involved
- works up a preliminary sketch of the support structures needed to sustain the activity.

The linkages that are imagined and the pathways that can be organised will determine the extent to which women's initiatives grow into local economic, social, cultural and environmental development, and the degree to which women participate and shape their futures. Such decisions will be based on whether activities identified by women are located as single or multiple activity groups, or as interlinked specific activities. The structure of support and intended outcomes will be different. For example:

- For a *single activity* the group will come together around a single activity congruent with building sustainability. In this instance, the focus needs to be on putting circles of support into place.
- There are two models for *multiple activity groups* (including interconnecting groups). Firstly, women may come together for a multiple number of activities and they may organise through networks, collectives, or cooperatives. In the second model, women may come together around a multiple activity space (such as an Internet café, laundromat, child care centre, produce garden, arts/crafts/media centre or some combination.)
- For *interlinked activities*, the project will be linked to existing activities in the broader community in a way that benefits the group. An example would be a women artists collective linked into a cultural tourism trail.

Women can also be directly or indirectly the focus of interventions. Women experiencing disadvantage may be involved directly as initiators and managers of their project. Benefits are direct and the activity is local, although the risks for sustainability relate to economic hardships and lack of resources, and the often low self-esteem of the women involved.

Alternatively, programs can be initiated that build on existing, established enterprises, which then provide nurturing to economic and cultural development projects—for example through small business or environmental and cultural activity. In addition, drawing together the mixed skills of diverse women can provide a sustainable base for community renewal and economic and cultural regeneration.

Women will often identify activities that are familiar to them as starting points. To build sustainable outcomes and work towards economic, social, cultural and environmental development, the pathways that build beyond and out from the initial activity are critical. The pathway from cooking to horticulture or to managing a small catering business will be

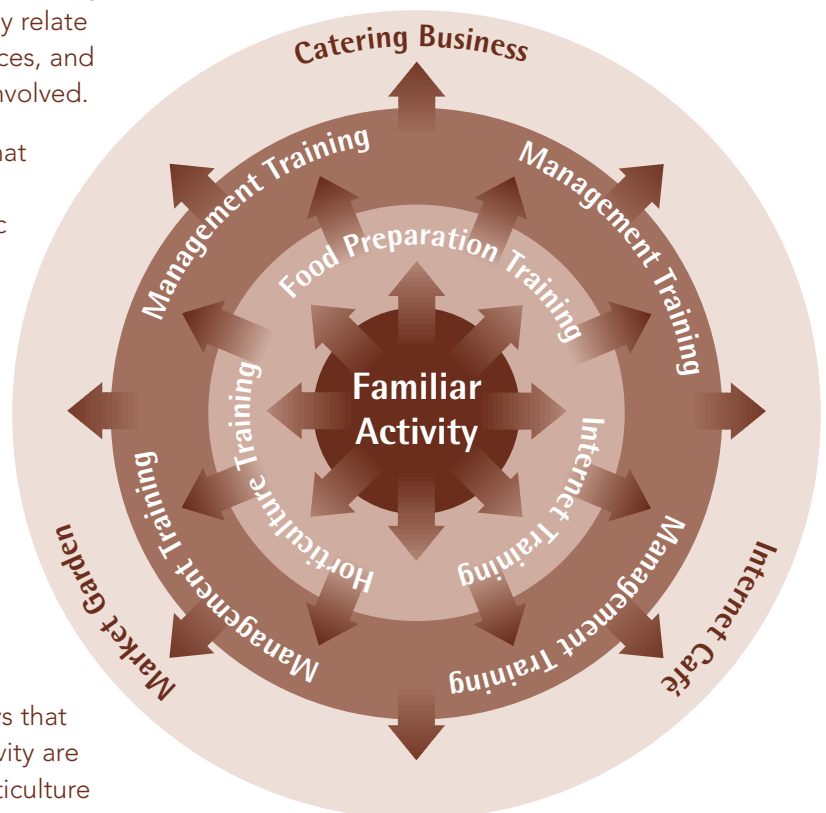
the key to building sustainable participation by women in both local and regional development.

Support Structures

Support structures are critical to building sustainable outcomes at all levels.

Vertical support structures are sources of structural support at the local, state, regional and national levels. They include:

- ensuring that the broad infrastructure to sustain women’s activities is in place (child care, health, welfare, family crisis services, domestic violence support services, access to income, education, training)
- private and public sector funding options for the activity at all levels
- private and public sector sources of in-kind support for the activity (lobbying, organisational, auditing, coordinating, materials and equipment) at all levels



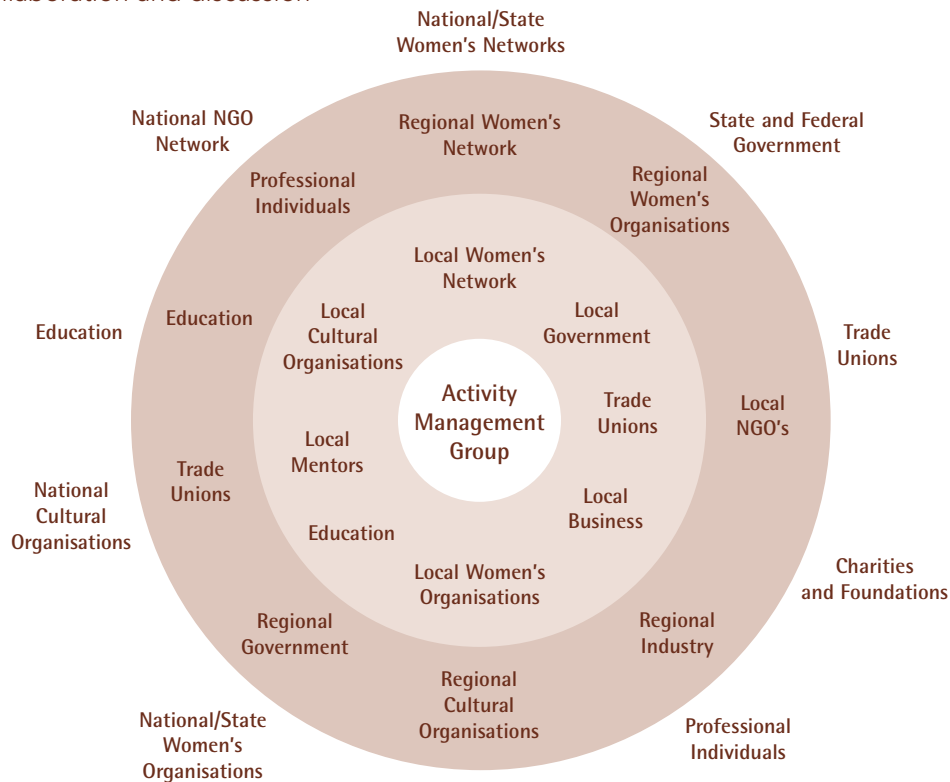
- mapping education and training options for the activity
- mentoring options relevant to the activity.

Horizontal support structures are sources of support at the local community or grassroots level. These include:

- establishing linkages with other local community based activities for moral support, collaboration and discussion

- mapping similar activities in other communities for moral support, collaboration, linkages and discussion.

Locking in support structures for the activities generated through the Partnership Project was a key element in ensuring their sustainability.



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