

21

Tips for Trainers: for or against?

- **Objectives**

- To discuss contentious issues and opinions in more depth;
- To energise participants through active discussion; and,
- To deal with potential conflicts and sharpen analysis in the group.

- **Time**

About 20 - 30 minutes per statement.

- **Preparation**

Two chairs in an empty space.

- **Procedure**

1. Identify the contentious issue and formulate it as a clear but explicitly controversial statement e.g. "Women are better at natural resource management than men", "PRA is a way to get projects funded", "PRA is used by decisionmakers to avoid responsibility".
2. For each statement, ask for two volunteers, one of whom will represent a viewpoint supporting the statement, and the other to represent a stance disagreeing with the statement. Make clear that they are simply starting off the discussion and will be replaced during the exercise by others (see point 5).
3. After some reflection time (perhaps over a coffee break or lunch or simply for 5 minutes), ask the volunteers to sit in the chairs that are placed opposite each other.
4. Ask the others to stand anywhere around the chairs. Explain that when the two volunteers start debating, the spectators should move to stand behind the chair of the person who makes a statement with

which they most agree. As the spectators shift between the two chairs, it will become clear that there are always at least two sides to each issue.

5. If one of the seated volunteers seems to get stuck with their viewpoint, ask a spectator to take over. Alternatively, a spectator might want to contribute to the debate and replace one of the seated participants. He/she should signal to the person they want to replace and exchange places.

- **Applications and alternatives**

If you find yourself in a tricky training situation, with many heated discussions because of rigid attitudes, use this exercise to refine the debate. It also worked well in one workshop when participants asked for more discussion about fundamental gender issues. The facilitators invited participants to formulate statements and selected two of these for the exercise. This removed some frustrations and helped to move the debate forward, beyond simplistic opinions.



NOTE

Source: This exercise is adapted from a number of different sources. This version is from Questions of Difference by Irene Guijt, forthcoming from IIED.