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Tips for trainers: participation ‘poker’

- **Objectives**

- to enable you to discern the false promises from the potential of community participation in natural resource management (NRM);
- to enable you to understand the simplicity of some assumptions behind participation in NRM; and,
- to help you understand the most likely benefits from increased participation in NRM.

- **Materials**

A sufficient number of pre-designed playing cards for the number of players and number of rounds that are to be played. Each card should contain one statement completing the phrase ‘Community participation in natural resource management is good because...’ (see the examples given below, following the description of the game).

- **Steps**

- Form groups of 6 people. Choose one dealer who will deal the rounds and keep score.
- The dealer should shuffle the cards and deal so that each player receives five cards. Five rounds will be played.
- Once the cards have been dealt, look at your hand and think about whether each statement is more or less correct. Decide whether you think they are strong completions of the statement ‘Community participation in natural resource management is good because...’ or whether they are weak endings.
- Place one card face down in front of you, declaring whether it is IN - a strong ending

for the statement, or OUT - a weak ending for the statement.

- When everyone has one card in front of her/him in the same sequence, all the players who declared OUT turn up their card and explain her/his decision.
- The group debates the decision. If the group accepts the player’s decision about the card being an OUT card - a weak ending, the player receives 1 point. If the group rejects the decision, the player loses a point and the card is placed in the centre.
- After all the OUT cards have been discussed and decisions taken, the process is repeated with the cards which players declared IN. If the group agrees with the decision, the card is placed in the centre. If they disagree, the player loses a point.
- At the end of the round, one card is chosen from all those played in that round and placed in the centre after discussion. This card represents the group’s view of the most accurate reason for the benefits of community participation in natural resource management. The player who selected the card gains two points. If a card originally declared OUT is chosen, the player who declared it OUT loses two points and all others in the round gain a point (see Table 1).
- Repeat steps 4 to 8 for each round.
- If there is time, the teams should present their five top cards to the other teams who are playing and defend their choice, challenging the choice of others, until agreement is reached between all the teams about the three statements that best describe the benefits of community participation in natural resource management.

Table 1. Summary of scoring system

Decision made by player	Points for player if group agrees	Points for player if group disagrees	Points if selected as top card for that round
OUT	+1	-1, card placed in centre	-2 for player, +1 for all others
IN	0, card placed in centre	-1	+2 points

• Comments

The original version was based on 24 people playing in 4 teams of 6 (5 players and the dealer not playing) and had 8 rounds. The mathematics is variable and does not influence the exercise much. I have used it with 24 people for 3 rounds and with 45 for 5 rounds and have not found it makes a difference. Just make sure you have enough decks of cards, enough statements for the number of rounds you want and enough time. The most tricky thing is to get the teams to end more or less on time. And as some will debate less and others more, this can be more complicated with more groups. Time keeping is important and that is the role of the dealer. Although the dealer may play if she/he wishes, their most important role is keeping time and making the final decision if there is no consensus.



Remember you can vary your statements depending on your training objective. You might want to make your own set which starts with the words 'Government support for community-based planning is important because....' or 'Researchers' involvement in participatory research is good because...'. I have also used it to discuss forest policy myths and just selected about 30 common assumptions - more and less correct ones - without them starting off with the same opening words. This worked just as well. The essence is to encourage discussion about fact and fiction related to the topic at hand! Have fun!

- **Thirty statements (for 5 rounds with 6 players, or 6 rounds with 5 players)**

'Community participation in natural resource management is good because.....'

1. local people know best;
2. if observant, local people will have a greater natural history of the area than those that do not live in the resource area;
3. resource related conflicts can always be resolved that way;
4. it is cost-effective for governments;
5. it ensures community representation in resource management debates;
6. it is cost-effective for communities;
7. it is a right of those who are affected by the state of the natural resource;

8. the outcome will be more acceptable to all those involved and, therefore sustainable;
9. it allows different interest groups to understand each other's views and priorities better;
10. there is not a good alternative;
11. it is the only way to ensure a positive outcome;
12. the scale the some natural resource management problems require collective action, and therefore collective decisions;
13. it will ensure the inclusion of unbiased information into decision-making;
14. it will avoid mistakes by creating opportunities for more informed choices/plans/projects;
15. it will empower the community to undertake further resource management action in future;
16. most natural resource management problems will need solving at a local level;
17. government agencies and their staff are ignorant about local resource issues;
18. it is appropriate for all contexts;
19. it will ensure better accountability of government spending;
20. it will raise awareness in the community about resource management problems;
21. it is relatively cheap in the long term;
22. it will ensure that the relatively socially/economically marginalised groups are included in decisions that will affect their lives;
23. it will achieve greater transparency in decision-making;
24. it is being demanded by local communities;
25. refusing it is a recipe for disaster when it comes to implementing a local resource management plan;
26. it avoids the need for an elaborate bureaucracy to deal with natural resource management;
27. the iterative discussion and negotiation means that wiser decisions are likely to be made;
28. it will prevent a loss of faith in the political process related to decisions about resource issue;
29. the government simply does not have the capacity to make decisions and implement resource management in all cases; and,
30. it allows for better identification of those likely to be affected by decisions about the resource being considered.

NOTE

Source: developed by Irene Guijt, based on Feminist Poker invented by Dr. Karina Constantinou-David and her colleagues in the Philippines. For a full description, see The Oxfam Gender Training Manual. Oxfam, UK and Ireland, 1994.