

Visioning in gender-aware local and regional development

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Dreams

become visions, if shared and discussed

Visions

about the future become shared goals

Goals

become action, based on a multi-level strategy

Introduction

Gendering local and regional development is not an easy task, as development work takes place in an increasingly complex environment with many stakeholders, levels

of administrative layers, and foci of activities. Winnet8 is involved with the promotion of women in the labour market and entrepreneurship, but also in innovative actions, around technology, ICTs and even urban and rural infrastructure development, supported by Women's Resource Centres (WRCs).

The spiral of gendering development work, in Figure 1, is basically similar, irrespective of the field of activities. It starts by anchoring the project, analyzing the context, defining the vision and goals, choosing the appropriate strategy that guides the implementation, and progresses by conducting on-going monitoring and evaluation. Thus, gender mainstreaming can be seen in this context as a strategy that refers to the application of a set of gender-sensitive visions, concepts, strategies, methods and practices in the different phases and arenas of the planning, development and evaluation cycle.



Figure 1. The spiral of development as the object of gender mainstreaming.

A variety of methods and tools exists to enhance the spiral of development and its gendering. The tools can be classified in different ways, such as analytic, mobilizing and training methods, or diagnostic, expressive, conceptual, organizational and political tools. However, the tools that are seldom applied in gender-sensitive projects are the visioning ones. Many gender-aware projects seem to progress from the contextual or gender impact analysis directly to the choice of goals and objectives.

A vision is a motivating view of the future. It creates pull and gives direction. Visioning is especially useful at the stage of short-range planning activities, or when new directions for policy is required. It is also handy, if a variety of issues or perspectives have to be integrated which requires a wide range of potential solutions. The aim of this article is to discuss, why visioning is important, what good visions are like, and to provide a couple of visioning techniques that are easy to apply.

Why visioning is important?

“There is no ought from is”, claims the father of the famous “Hume’s guillotine”, namely the 18th century Scottish wizard, David Hume. Therefore, in order to create change, one has to apply practical thinking (syllogism) that involves the setting of a few premises and visioning. This provides a model that helps to explain and motivate action from the perspective of the participants’ intentions. For example, “if we want to have a flourishing WRC in our region, then we should start planning its characteristics and role right now with many

different stakeholders.... etc.” In addition, jumping directly from contextual analysis to the choice of objectives, like in traditional (teleological) planning, disregards the complex, emerging relationships that can be discovered by visioning and futuristic narratives.

Dealing with the future requires constant iteration in time and space, going back and forth between hindsight, insight, action and foresight. Future studies have a wide palette of visioning tools, depending on the spatial and temporal context. When the future is more or less linear and predictable, the tools for visioning are road-mapping, forecasting or simulation. But if the future is complex and some ten, twenty years away, the toolbox comprises Delphi-methods and scenario-building. In a chaotic future situation, which is difficult to even imagine, the tools might consist of the interpretation of weak signals and action research with risk analysis.

A vision is a mixture of facts and values

Popular movements have used creative methods, arts, music and dance to forge out affective visions, because emotions enhance memory traces. A vision only works, when it is remembered and it is up-front-and-central in ones thoughts. Therefore, the vision statement should not be too long or banal. Dynamic, emotive words and active verbs should be applied to paint motivating pictures. A good vision is both realistic and stretching. If it goes too far into the future, it

does not create pull. If it is too close to today, it is just another plan.

A good vision is not a bouquet of superlatives or an object, such as the Grail. It is specific, detailed, customized, distinctive, and unique to a given project or community. As the vision describes what you hope to become or achieve in the future, strong values help determine which road to take and how to measure the rightness of the chosen direction.

Values and beliefs affect which issues people see as important, and how they believe a particular problem should be solved. Value differences may lead to conflict in the community about what should be done, and how to do it. Navigating through the potential conflicts also requires an understanding of the important differences between facts and values.

A fact is a verifiable statement of what is, whereas values are beliefs about what should be. Values cannot be proven right or wrong. Reasonable people can agree on the facts of an issue, yet disagree about how to respond. Part of the preparation of the visioning process is to help the participants better understand facts about the project or community, and to reach compromise and consensus about how to respond to the challenges.

Two examples of visioning techniques

Visioning often follows a few principles that enhance the power to act in concert with

others which, in turn, is one of the most important assets of visioning. Thus, the visioning should:

- reflect the different perspectives within the community
- be built through carefully facilitated dialogue and thought
- be based upon an accurate understanding of current conditions
- be supported by plans for implementing and maintaining the vision
- have follow-through and nurturing.

The Dream Method

“If you can imagine it, you can achieve it, If you can dream it, you can become it”

The Kokkola Women’s Resource Center in Finland, experimented in 1995, with several innovative methods in order to involve women in the economic, social and political life of their region. In order to enhance the production of realizable ideas they created what they called the Dream Method. In fact, it was a two evening training course with practical homework in between.

The aims of the training was to:

- Activate women so that they will value their own know-how
- Increase awareness of the specific strengths of women
- Collaborate in a creative way
- Participate in the development of their living environment
- Take advantage of available resources.

The target group consisted of women who wanted to develop themselves and the well-being of their region. The method was based on experiential learning in which the participants were urged to narrate their personal and collective visions on the basis of practical rehearsals.

The programme of the first evening was the following:

The Women's evening in development I

- 19.00 Purpose of the evening
- 19.10 Relaxation exercises
- 19.30 Women in the Region in the year 2005 (narratives)
- 20.45 Discussion (questions and contracts)
- 21.30 Good night and a safe journey home

The dreaming was facilitated by visualising techniques, either by drawings, postcards, clay work, or photos from newspapers and magazines that enhance the mapping of the individual and collective stories of the participants.

The tasks to reflect over during the following two weeks were:

1. How does women's life differ in 2005 from the present life? What will the developmental tasks be like? Where do I want to begin? What would I like to learn more about?
2. An agreement of future networking. How, where and how often will the women of the region meet in the

future? How will the collaboration be organized?

Women's evening in development II

- 19.00 Purpose of the evening
- 19.10 Statement of the Women's vision for the region
- 20.00 Ideas, projects and funding
- 21.00 How do we network in the future? How do we market our projects?
- 22.00 Future steps

This type of visioning resulted in successful networking around the first WRC in Finland for several years. Unfortunately, the activities withered, due to internal schisms and envy. Consequently, visioning is not enough but it has to be followed by on-going nurturing and monitoring of the psycho-social processes, along with the economic ones (see the last principle of visioning above).

Backcasting or Remembering the future

Backcasting is a creative tool that is easy to apply in the building and implementation of shared visions from different perspectives. It might last half a day or even two days, depending on the depth of the purpose and process. It usually consists of three steps:

Preparation

The group of stakeholders gather in a cozy place with several small tables, depending on the number of participants (preferably not more than 5-7 participants at a table). The facilitator has provided lots of creative

material on a big table: newspapers, magazines, different kinds of pencils, chalks, glue, ribbons, pictures, etc. The event might start by creative dancing, guided by the facilitator and enchanting music.

Building the vision

The participants choose the material they feel for and start working, first individually and then collectively, to create a collage of the future vision.

The first task is to ponder individually, what a gender-aware near environment, neighbourhood, WRC, a region or its labour market is in the year 2015? The following questions might be helpful:

How does the vision feel, sound or smell?
Who are the main actors, women and men?
What do they do, in what kind of roles and places?

The ideas can first be written on a piece of paper. Then each participant starts working individually with the chosen material, for example by cutting pictures from the magazines and making a collage on a sheet of paper (A4 or A3).

The individual collages are then integrated into a collective collage of the group, and the participants tell the story of their ideas concerning the future. Gradually, the shared vision emerges from the process. The scribe, who has been chosen among the group members, documents the most important characteristics of the vision. Finally, the group gives the collage a dynamic,

metaphorical name, which symbolizes its essence.

If the session consists of several groups, each of them presents their vision. The groups can also be formed on the basis of the sexes. Finally, the different visions are either integrated into a new one or one of the group visions is chosen to represent the shared outcome of the participants.

Planning the steps of implementation

After the building and sharing of the vision, the group(s) start working with a table that comprises rows for the descending years 2015, 2014, 2013 and 2012, and columns for different groups or perspectives, such as the social workers or social and health affairs, economy, political decisions, etc. Yellow, red and blue post-it can be used, as well as pens of different colours. This part of the workshop leads to the strategy and plan of implementation, which also contains the names of responsible persons for the tasks.

Backcasting or reminiscing the future can be applied in a great variety of projects and organizations, as it is so simple and flexible. Currently, new digital devices enhance visioning, especially through scenario building and 3-D modeling. For example, CommunityViz is an advanced, yet easy-to-use GIS- software that is designed to help people visualize, analyze, and communicate about the future of their communities or projects.

The next stage is to develop skills in Futures literacy, which allows to imagine changes in the conditions of change, and to create

changes in the way one learns and acts in the present with gender-aware local and regional development.

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