# Women Take Part Briefing Paper

**Women Take Part (WTP)** is a piece of work funded by the Government Equalities Office, looking at the participation of women, in particular under-represented women, in governance and decision making, in both community and public life

**Women Take Part has been collecting information about two sides of the story:**
□ **'what works'** in terms of approaches, initiatives and learning models that encourage different groups of women to become more involved, **and**
□ **'what needs to happen'** so that structures, policies and organisations work in ways that encourage the recruitment and support of more women.

This paper is one of a set and others include: **Context and Rationale**[1]; **Methodology; Organisations and Structures; Women's Journeys; Learning Support and Development; Organisation Case Studies**

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Between September 2007 and March 2008, WTP investigated learning, support and development initiatives which encourage 'under-represented' women to become active critical citizens in the public domain and, through doing this, developed and tested a model of women's journeys to being engaged critical citizens. A model of organisational journeys was also developed and tested out; organisations and structures are a crucial part of this jigsaw as they can encourage and support women's involvement in governance roles, or act as barriers and blockages to change.

These two models are then brought together to form a **framework which illustrates the relationship between women's development and organisational change.**

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## Women's journeys/typology

Based on existing research literature[2] and issues that women have reported during our research[3], a model is proposed that outlines the stages of the journey that women may take. It is, like all models[4], a simplified analysis that helps us to understand how 'under-represented' women may move from being 'uninvolved' to being 'critically engaged', and informs what is needed to support them along the way.



| Journey stages | |
| --- | --- |
| Step 3 | Staying there |
| Step 2 | Being there |
| Step 1 | Getting there |
| Step 0 | Not there |

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*The stages are presented as steps in a progressive sequence. However, real life is generally more complex than this, with stops, starts, and movement backwards and forwards. Women will take different routes through the steps and the model should be of use to them; to make sense of their own journeys and see the path they took or are taking. We are interested in what is required in order for women to move from step to step and stay 'at the table' and be 'critically engaged' – in whatever context they find themselves.*

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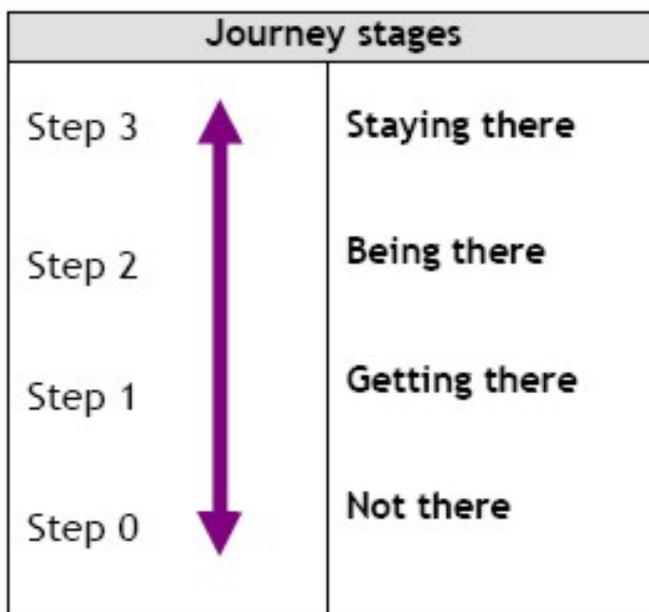
Women's experiences of both private and public domains provide the basis for the model. We all start our journeys in different places, for different reasons, and with differences between us, such as ethnicity, religion, disability, class, culture, income and sexuality. These will have positive or negative impacts on our progress. This typology seeks to encapsulate the experiences of '*EveryWoman/AnyWoman*' and so we anticipate that individual women will recognise significant aspects of their own journeys within it. Initial findings indicate that the Steps are relevant to a wide variety of women even though stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, such as racism, homophobia and discrimination based upon disability, class, background and culture, will affect those journeys in some way.

*Closing the gap: a framework for action*

## Structures' and organisations' journeys

Recent evidence[5] highlights the need for organisations and structures to change how they do things in order for 'women' to take part. Women Take Part combines different women's experiences, views from organisations and structures, and contemporary research and other commentary to construct and inform a model / typology of organisational journeys; a journey towards a genuine willingness to change, take risks and do things differently[6].

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### Organisational journeys: a typology
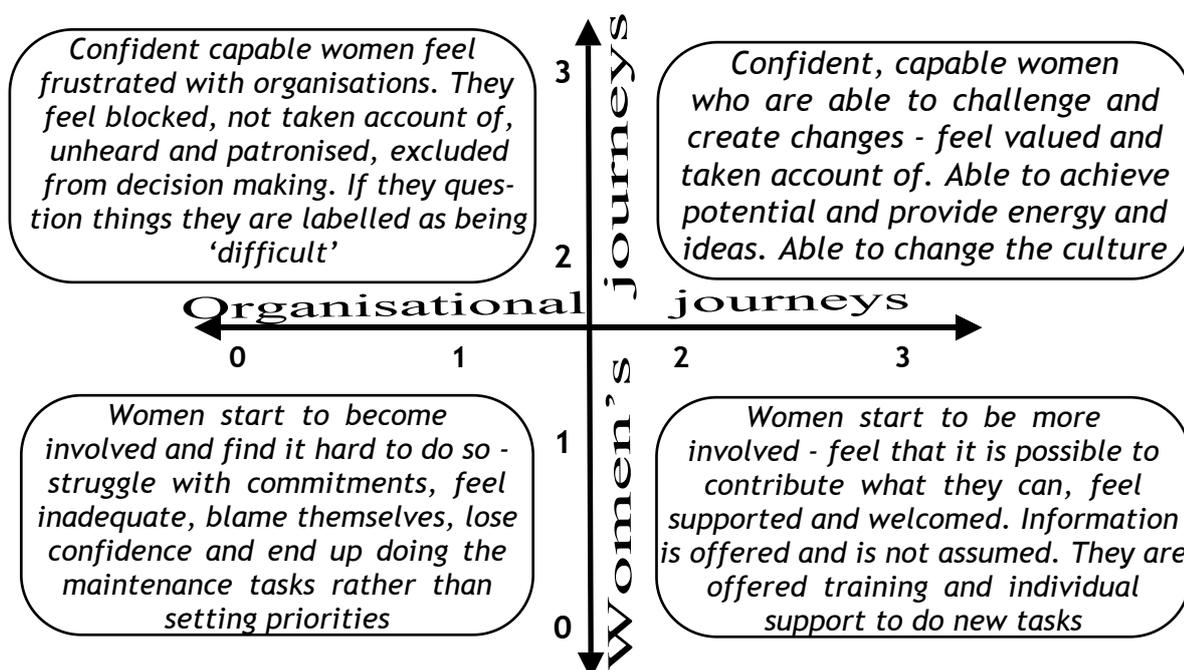
| | |
|---|---|
| *Level Zero* | Our organisation treats everyone the same |
| *Level One* | We recognise that there is a disparity between men and women in our organisation |
| *Level Two* | We recognise issues of gender inequality in our organisation and are willing to do something about it |
| *Level Three* | We are changing our structures and policies to actively encourage women to take part |

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# A framework for action

**Making sense of women's experiences in the public domain**

These two journey models are brought together to form a framework which illustrates the relationship between women's development and organisational change. It provides a simple way to understand and articulate the ***action required to improve the critical engagement of under-represented women in the public domain***.

- The vertical axis represents women's journeys from step 0 to step 3
- The horizontal axis represents organisational journeys from step 0 to step 3
- Each quadrant shows the relationship between these and illustrates how women's experiences of engagement in the public domain are directly linked to the culture and practices of structures and organisations
- The quadrants help to understand why women sometimes decide that participation is a waste of time: too time consuming for too little benefit

*Confident capable women feel frustrated with organisations. They feel blocked, not taken account of, unheard and patronised, excluded from decision making. If they question things they are labelled as being 'difficult'*

*Confident, capable women who are able to challenge and create changes - feel valued and taken account of. Able to achieve potential and provide energy and ideas. Able to change the culture*

*Women start to become involved and find it hard to do so - struggle with commitments, feel inadequate, blame themselves, lose confidence and end up doing the maintenance tasks rather than setting priorities*

*Women start to be more involved - feel that it is possible to contribute what they can, feel supported and welcomed. Information is offered and is not assumed. They are offered training and individual support to do new tasks*

Organisational journeys — 0  1  2  3

Women's journeys — 0  1  2  3

The research indicates that *women's experience of public life is generally contained within the top and bottom left hand quadrants – that is, within structures and organisations that do not actively encourage or support women's involvement*

**Focus groups with women in governance roles offer the following observations:**

☐ Women's ideas are often ignored in meetings and only acknowledged, minuted and discussed when they are repeated by a man. *"Often the straightforward ways are not open to them so they will seek to influence 'sideways e.g., make a suggestion that the men pick up on. The suggestion will be given no value when it is coming from the women. This way of working means that there is no credit for women".*

☐ No family friendly organisational commitments – timings, time commitment unclear. *"They also expect me to do what they do as if I had the same freedom and time available – which as a single mother, I don't".*

☐ Cultures and normative styles of operating – explicitly unwelcoming or just not welcoming. Women's experiences include the following: adversarial, competitive, put down, macho bullying and personal abuse, discrimination and racism, negative attitudes and behaviours

☐ Sometimes negative behaviour towards women is perceived as active/intentional, and sometimes as passive/unintentional. However, what's important is the impact such behaviour has and the attitudes that underpin it, whether intentional and unconscious; women are not seen as serious or as skilled as men, roles and expectations of women are often predefined into the 'caring' roles. *"A box is created for women in which they are expected to fit and that box – non aggressive, compliant – is a role that is constructed for us and we slot into it whether it is what we want or not".*

☐ Women report resistance to change where they are seen as a threat and a challenge to how things have always been done. Exclusive cliques and men's networks are cited as mechanisms to exclude women, where discussions and decisions are made before meetings. *"Don't give you information - you have to find it yourself. They have their own meetings and don't tell me about it. They arrange things and you don't really know about it".*
*"You are a threat when you start climbing – they let you come to there (a level), but once you start going higher, they don't like that… Men will do what they can, not in an awful way, but in their own way, to stop you from getting up there"*

☐ Women feel they have to be more effective and work harder than men to be taken seriously

☐ Jargon and acronyms often make it difficult to understand and comment

☐ Men speak longer in meetings and tend to take up more time

☐ Women report that motivation for being in governance roles is often different for men and women. *"Wherever there is a pile, men want to be on top of it, whatever the pile is…"*

*Does difference make a difference?*

Women in the WTP focus groups made the following comments – mainly with regard to experiencing racism, sexism and prejudice:

☐ Asian women often feel they are viewed as passive, submissive, compliant, are undervalued and not taken seriously and are not seen to have strong opinions

☐ Black women often feel they are viewed as demanding and over-powering

Many Black and Asian women feel that they have got to try harder than their white or male counterparts – *You have to work that much harder to be equal as a brown face, because what they see is the brown face….*

These comments reflect some of the many generalisations and stereotypes that exist about minority ethnic women which underpin the everyday discrimination and racism that they face. And, as Zohra Moosa puts in, '*policy makers tend to speak **about** ethnic minority women instead of **to** them. Indeed, ethnic minority women are rarely allowed to speak for themselves*' [7]

Closing the gap: a framework for action

# Moving on up … *for women*

*For more women to see themselves in the top right quadrant of the framework, they are likely to experience more of the 'characteristics' of Steps 2 and 3, as below.*

**Step 2:**

**Women are involved in public structures and community organisations. They:**

- know more about how decisions are made in the external public world and feel they can contribute opinions and ideas and have something useful to say
- question how they can juggle family expectations, their own expectations and other commitments
- still find it difficult to break out of traditional caring roles and housework
- are supported by family members
- know more about others who are different to them
- are involved in local community projects and civic structures
- feel they are 'not good enough' and wonder if they are doing things right
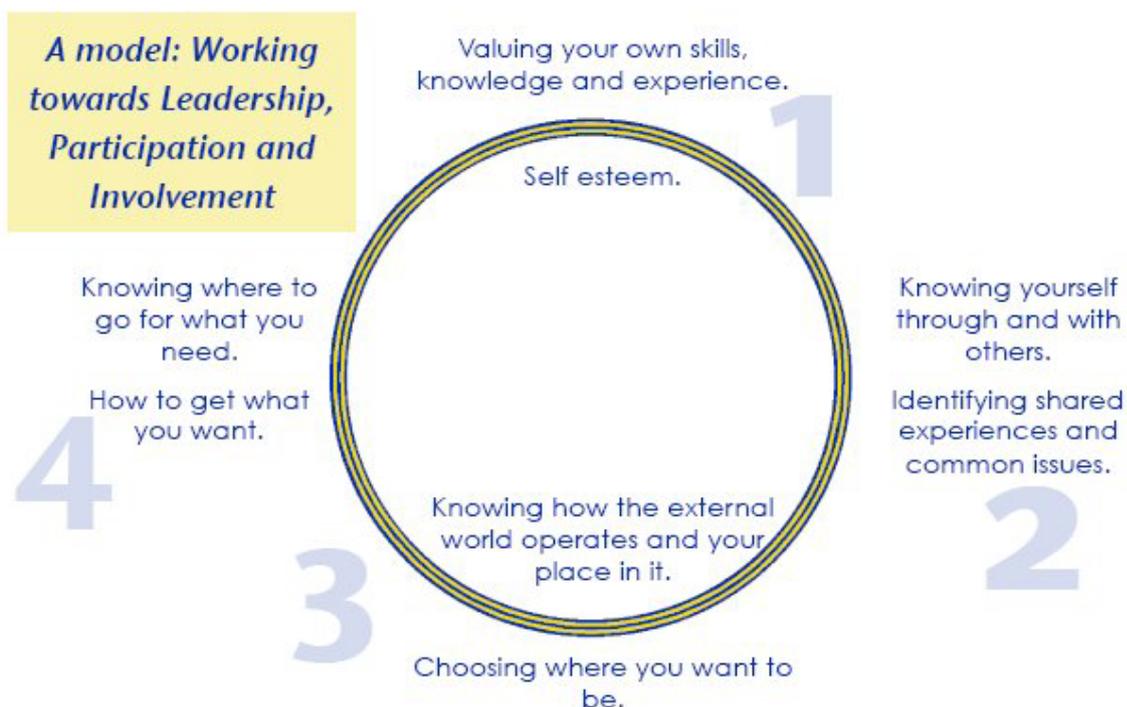- limit themselves to what they know they can do

**Step 3:**

**Women work with and within structures and organisations to deliver change based upon equality and social justice. They:**

- feel able to question how things are done
- know what they want or need and know where to go to get it
- know they can make a difference and value their own contribution
- understand the complexities around decision making and policy development and see how power inequalities operate – for themselves and others
- have a critical analysis of issues and events and can critically analyse official documents
- understand how gender inequality affects them and other women and how race and class connect with gender inequality
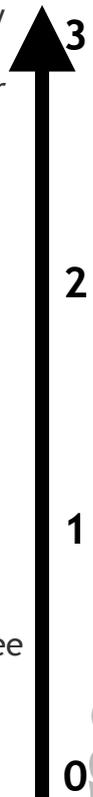
The **'Four Essential Ingredients'[8]** used in the Take Part Learning Framework[9] suggest specific learning outcomes, which combine to create the conditions for women to be confident and active in the public domain.



A model: Working towards Leadership, Participation and Involvement

Valuing your own skills, knowledge and experience.
Self esteem.

Knowing yourself through and with others.
Identifying shared experiences and common issues.

Knowing how the external world operates and your place in it.

Choosing where you want to be.

Knowing where to go for what you need.
How to get what you want.

The research identified **four general approaches** to working with women to develop skills, knowledge and confidence around becoming, and remaining, active critical citizens in the public domain.

**Courses**
Structured learning programmes linked to mentoring and support during and afterwards.

**Holistic approaches**
Women's organisations offer individual and group support and mentoring around specific issues. They support women to take control of their lives and to start to see a role for themselves in the public domain.

**Networks**
Local and national networks with a focus on women's support and development. A source of research, information, support and shared strategies.

**Partnership approaches**
Alliances of organisations working towards agreed aims led by either the voluntary and community sectors or the statutory sectors around 'engagement'

The notions of *created space* and *invited space*[10] are used to draw attention to the origin and motivation of the initiatives. '**Created spaces**' refers to action and thinking within civil society; women's groups, voluntary and community organisations which are often motivated by a passion for women's equality and social justice. '**Invited spaces**' refers to action and thinking within government departments and structures; local government, Partnerships, national departments and Quangos, which are motivated by policies designed to increase democratic activity and citizen engagement. In this research, invited space initiatives were motivated by women in key positions who are also passionate about women's equality and social justice.

The *majority of provision is located in created spaces which emphasise the importance of the women's Voluntary and Community Sector as a mainspring for women's civic and civil engagement and involvement*. If we accept the premise that we need to increase the **pool of women** available for civic and civil engagement and involvement, then due thought and consideration has to be given to how this is done and who does it.
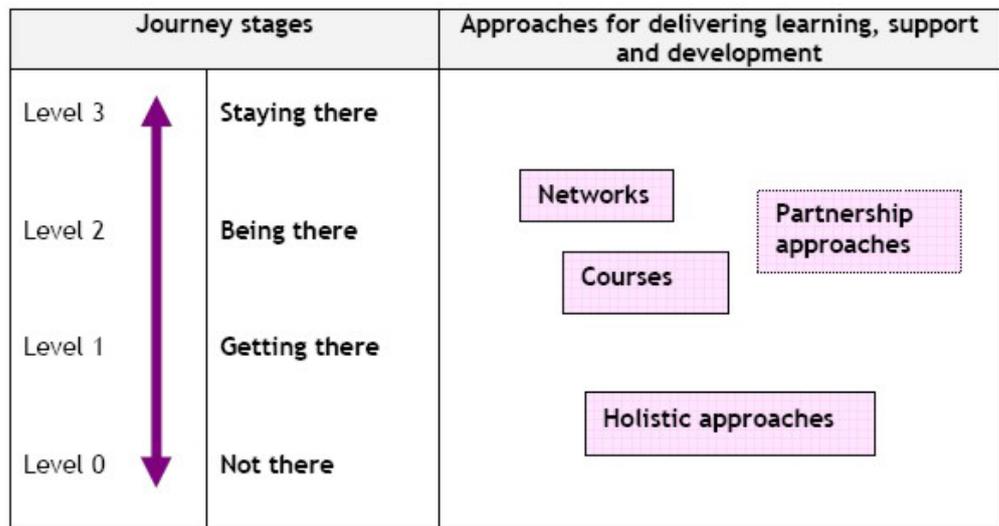
## Journeys and learning; the links

*Women are generally active in the public domain when they are active in their own lives*.

Women are active in different spheres at different times:

active in their own lives

active in the community

active in the wider world
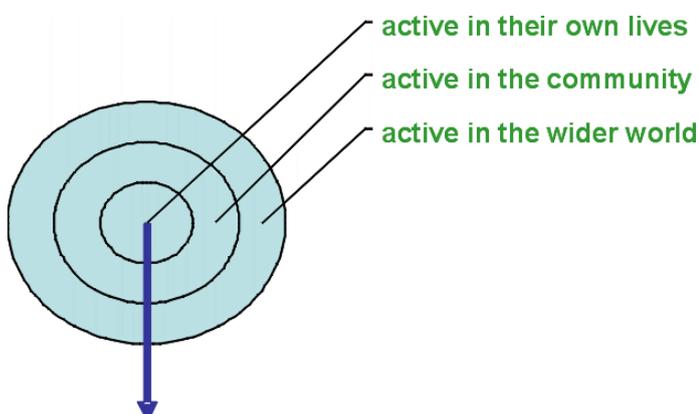
To provide the relevant learning experiences to achieve such 'active critical women citizens', delivery methods should be rooted in a learner centred, participative and informal educational pedagogy within an explicit vision in relation to gender, race, equality and social justice

Approaches to delivering learning, support and development need to be geared to the aspirations and situations of the women in question. It would be wrong to prescribe particular approaches for specific stages, although it would seem that the holistic approach is very appropriate for women at levels 0 and 1.

| Journey stages | | Approaches for delivering learning, support and development |
|---|---|---|
| Level 3 | Staying there | |
| Level 2 | Being there | Networks   Partnership approaches |
| Level 1 | Getting there | Courses |
| Level 0 | Not there | Holistic approaches |

# Moving on .... *for Organisations and Structures*

0    1    2    3

→

*These are the characteristics, identified by organisations around Levels 2 and 3 of their journeys, and serve as an initial list of actions that organisations can take if they are serious around gender equality and genuinely involving women.*

**Level 2: our organisation recognises issues of gender inequality and we are willing to do something about it**

**Inward looking - they:**
◆ work to increase women's employment in the organisation
◆ work to increase women's participation in their governance
◆ work to involve black and minority ethnic women in employment and governance
◆ recognise 'gender' as a key strand of equalities
◆ recognise the significance of role models

**Outward looking - they:**
◆ work to ensure that women are represented
◆ develop and disseminate good practice
◆ support and develop women's networks and forums
◆ monitor and research women's participation
◆ collaborate with women's sector organisations
◆ target funding
◆ work specifically to increase black and minority ethnic women's participation

**However:**
◆ there is lack of knowledge specific to black and minority ethnic women's participation
◆ measures taken to increase women's participation are not far reaching enough, there is not enough effective targeting and the approaches are not systematic within organisations
◆ organisations in this category tend to take a generic approach and it is left to individual women to pursue equality
◆ demand for delivery is prioritised above developing equalities structures

May 2008

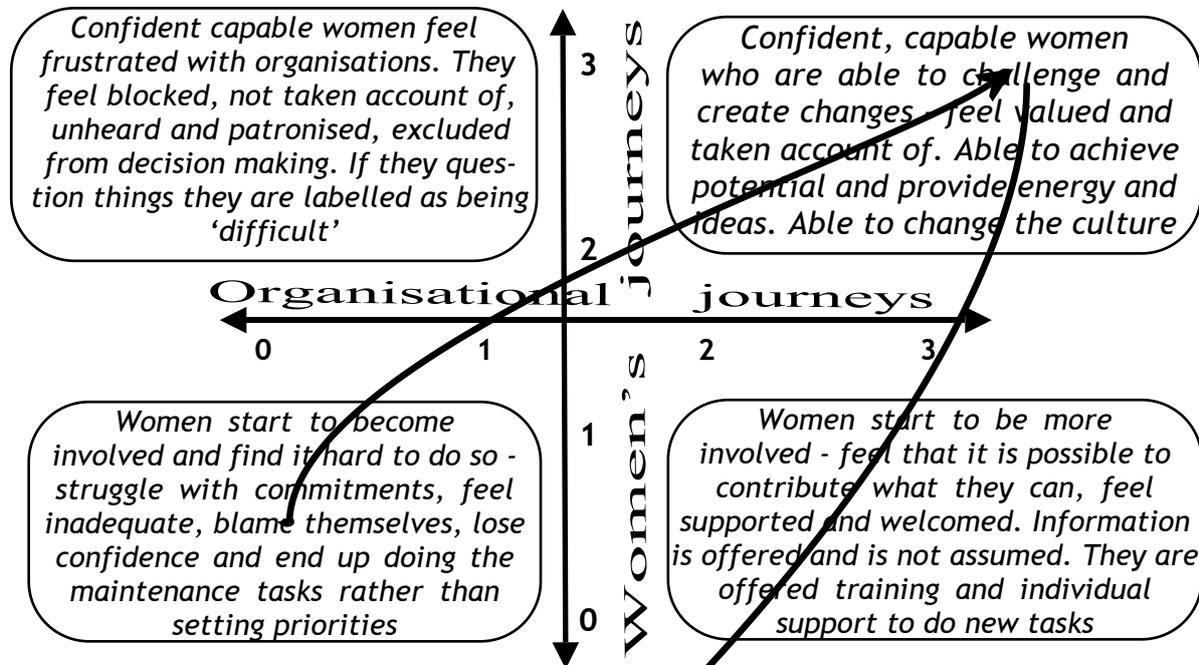**Level 3: our organisation is changing its structures and policies to actively encourage women to take part. They:**

- recognise and understand wider agendas that exclude black and minority ethnic women
- are aware of gaps in data and knowledge and take action to address this
- know the religious and cultural context of particular groups of women and take action
- understand women's position and have a pro-active commitment to changing structures, policies and cultures to address this
- encourage positive action to improve women's position such as spaces and resources specifically for women's development
- set targets, monitor and improve their performance in involving women in management and governance
- have outreach strategies in place to target particular groups of women
- encourage role models of black and minority ethnic women in senior management and governance positions
- encourage women, including black and minority ethnic women, to participate at every level and influence decisions
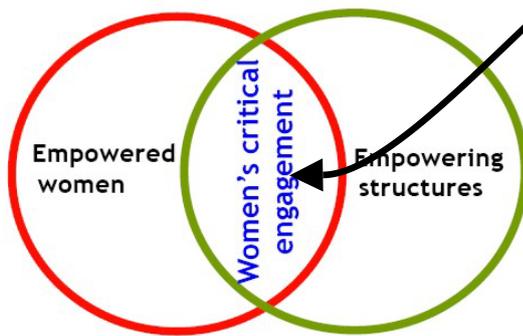
# A framework for change - moving on up

*If the aim is to increase and sustain the numbers of under-represented women in public life then the direction of movement has to be towards to the top right quadrant of the framework. In order for this to occur action needs to be identified to encourage both 'under-represented' women and structures/organisations to develop further.*

May 2008

**Organisational journeys**

**Women's journeys**

3 — 2 — 1 — 0

0  1  2  3

*Confident capable women feel frustrated with organisations. They feel blocked, not taken account of, unheard and patronised, excluded from decision making. If they question things they are labelled as being 'difficult'*

*Confident, capable women who are able to challenge and create changes - feel valued and taken account of. Able to achieve potential and provide energy and ideas. Able to change the culture*

*Women start to become involved and find it hard to do so - struggle with commitments, feel inadequate, blame themselves, lose confidence and end up doing the maintenance tasks rather than setting priorities*

*Women start to be more involved - feel that it is possible to contribute what they can, feel supported and welcomed. Information is offered and is not assumed. They are offered training and individual support to do new tasks*

To summarise, increasing the number of 'empowered' women and 'empowering' organisations and structures; is more likely lead to **an increase in women's critical engagement in the public domain**.

Empowered women — Women's critical engagement — Empowering structures

It is not enough to '*capacity build*' women or to see women as deficient in some way ……if only they were more confident, knowledgeable, skilled….. Ely and Myerson[11] state that we need to go further than the traditional approaches of '*fix the women; create equal opportunity; and celebrate the feminine*', acknowledge that 'gender' is a central organising feature of social life and that we can '*take risks, learn new ways, experiment and…..invent a different kind of organisation*'.

*Notes*

[1] Document in progress: will be available on www.changesuk.net

[2] Westheimer, J. and Kahne, J. (2004) What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy, *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 237–269; Take Part Learning Framework for Active Citizenship Learning www.takepart.org See Bibliography which will be available on www.changesuk.net

[3] See Appendices for detailed research report and for focus group reports: these will be available on www.changesuk.net

[4] *A simplified version of something complex used in analysing and solving problems or making predictions: Encarta*

[5] Includes Councillors' Commission Report, Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report on Citizen Governance, Leadership Centre for Local Government, Where are the Women in LSPs: Urban Forum/Oxfam/Women's Resource Centre, Routes to Power: research on ethnic minority women and decision-making: Fawcett: see Bibliography which will be available on www.changesuk.net

[6] Stanford Uni Press 2003, Councillors Commission paper – RAO et al 2007

[7] Seeing Double: Race and gender in ethnic minority women's lives, March 2008, Fawcett Society

[8] *See 'Women, Leadership, Participation and Involvement Report' at www.bctrust.org.uk*

[9] www.takepart.org

[10] A Cornwall (2002) Making spaces, changing places: situating participation in development. IDS working paper 170

[11] Women Leaders and Organizational Change, Robin J. Ely and Stanford University's Debra E. Meyerson, in *The Difference "Difference" Makes*, edited by Debra L. Rhode. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003

[12] Ely & Meyerson (as above)

*"few people think about the fact that Western models for organizing and doing work were created by and for a certain subset of men—white, middle class professionals—or consider how this might not only limit who progresses but also constrain our very sense of what organizations are and what they can accomplish. This aspect of the "white male power structure" is invisible to most people. It's just the way things are, like water to a fish or the air we breathe. What's to notice? What's to change?"[12]*