

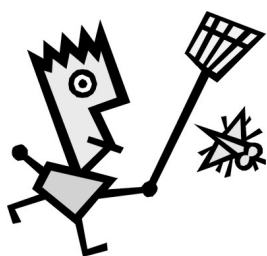
Women Take Part Briefing Paper

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, the others include: **Context and Rationale¹; Methodology; Women's Journeys; Learning, Support and Development; Closing the Gap: a framework for action and Organisation Case Studies**



Recent evidence² highlights the need for organisations and structures to change how they do things if they want different types of people to become involved. The evidence

shows that, even if women do 'get into' various governance structures, they still often experience the 'zapper effect' or the 'concrete ceiling': not feeling equal, frustrated by the way 'business' is conducted, feeling knocked back or just not taken into account.

This Briefing Paper focuses on the research done through Women Take Part³ around values, cultures, attitudes and actions of organisations and structures which act to block or to encourage women's active critical involvement and participation in the public spheres of civil and civic engagement. It combines the views of women, representatives from organisations and structures, contemporary research and other commentary to construct and inform a framework of organisational journeys towards a genuine willingness to change, take risks and do things differently⁴.

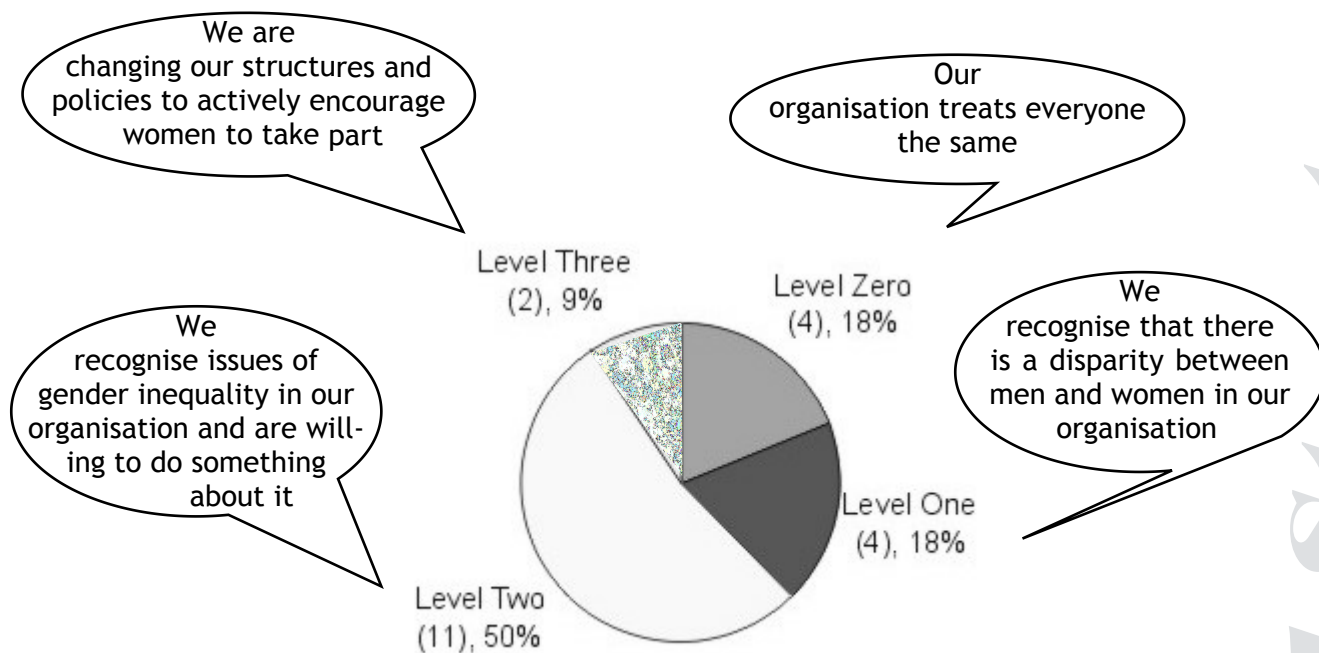
The Women Take Part Typology, or model, of organisations' journeys was developed and tested. It was drawn from the following sources:

- a typology of citizenship⁵
- the Take Part Network National Framework for Active Citizenship Learning⁶

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

The WTP research aimed to test out the typology, using an initial survey and a sample of follow up interviews⁷; the **purpose of the initial survey** was to gain a snapshot of those organisations' positions on gender and women's participation. It examined whether they recognise issues around gender, how seriously they take these issues and whether they are doing anything to increase women's participation, including that of under-represented women, both within their organisations and in their external work. It was emailed to a cross section of 30 civic/civil/government and non-government/local, regional and national organisations, eliciting 22 responses.

Survey respondents were asked which of four statements best describe their organisation's approach to gender equality and women's participation in their organisations. (One organisation did not respond to this question, figures for the remaining 21 are given in brackets.)



The *purpose of the interviews* was to interrogate the responses to the survey and gain more qualitative and in depth information for the four steps of the typology, based on people's experiences. 17 of the original 22 civic/civil/government and non-government organisations were approached for in depth interviews and 12 responded.

An organisational typology/ journey

The typology appears to have merit in relation to understanding and making sense of the varied approaches different organisations take to gender equality. It clarifies the relationships between organisational values, culture, attitudes and action on gender equalities. The research has generated a set of characteristics which can help break down the four steps of the typology/journey (see page 3). We are mindful of potential contradictions between some of the characteristics, as they have emerged from organisations self selecting the appropriate step of the typology and then providing their own rationale for their selection. It is clear that more work needs to be carried out to refine the characteristics further, as well as to investigate its relevance for other equality groups. It could form the basis for planning around organisational change.

Case studies of good practice and ideas

- School Governor's One Stop Shop;
- Association of Muslim Governors;
- Sunderland Back on the Map - NDC;
- IDEA Equalities Standard for Local Government;
- Operation Black Vote;
- Sunderland and Thurrock LSP action research

Issues and challenges

The characteristics of the steps are drawn from information provided by respondents who took part in the research. As with any research, the responses may vary depending on who within an organisation is interviewed, and their own individual perspectives on structural inequalities, and gender in particular. It would be interesting to validate these responses with women within these organisations, checking out perception versus reality. The focus groups⁸ and other research⁹ raise issues around *intended and unintended types of gender discrimination*, including difficulties for women in raising issues and challenging the status quo, and consequently being positioned as 'difficult'.

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Organisational self-assessment within Women Take Part typology

characteristics

Level Zero Our organisation treats everyone the same	<p>Organisations :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Involve women but their role in the organisation is incidental and not seen as an issue ◆ Recognise women’s unequal position in governance structures generally, but resist taking positive action to address it ◆ Misinterpret the legal position on positive action ◆ Accept gender stereotyped roles ◆ Take an individual rather than a targeted approach ◆ Lack knowledge about why women occupy unequal positions and tend to make assumptions, particularly about black and minority ethnic women ◆ Involve women at lower levels of the organisation
Level One Our organisation recognises there is a disparity between men and women in our organisation	<p>Organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Do not encourage debate and challenge around gender issues ◆ Recognise that particular styles of working can benefit women ◆ Offer limited concessions for women, mainly when additional resources can be secured ◆ Operate subtle sexism and women often feel isolated ◆ Lack of disaggregated information and do not track women’s participation in the organisation; ◆ Do not understand why there is a disparity between men and women in the organisation ◆ Do not have an organisational stance on gender
Level Two Our organisation recognises issues of gender inequality and we are willing to do something about it	<p>Inward looking - organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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 <p>Outward looking - organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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 <p>However:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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
Level Three Our organisation is changing its structures and policies to actively encourage women to take part	<p>Organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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 <p>However:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Women who get involved are still faced with adversity, stemming from male dominance and bureaucracy, and it takes a lot of ongoing support to keep them there

Organisations and Structures

Issues and challenges continued

The organisations and structures 'interviewed' range from a small voluntary sector organisation with a particular equality focus, through to large government departments and national voluntary organisations. This range represents a hierarchy of interests and resources; some of those interviewed clearly have a much bigger role to play in reducing blockages and encouraging cultures and attitudes supportive of women's - and under-represented women's - further involvement and engagement. One small voluntary organisation which positioned themselves at level 3 on the typology were clear about their own agenda regarding increasing the involvement of women in their own organisation, and in the public realm, yet their interview focused mainly on the barriers and attitudes of existing structures and mechanisms which serve to frustrate their attempts to change the situation.

A significant finding refers to levels of knowledge around positive action in volunteering and Board member recruitment. A common theme from interviews is that organisations are unable to target specific groups of people as this is perceived to be counter to equalities legislation. This often leads to the situation where organisations treat everybody the same in a 'gender neutral' way.

A common thread that runs throughout this research, and others, is the additional exclusion of black women by organisations and governance structures; this is linked to a range of factors including stereotyping, misunderstanding, assumptions, organisational inertia, and indirect and direct discrimination.

*'Ethnic minority women are caught up in a collision of invisibility and visibility that means they slip through the cracks of everyday policy and politics'*¹⁰

Taking part in the research has led to some of the respondents starting to re-think their approach to gender equalities; this is most prevalent in those organisations that positioned themselves at level 0 or level 1. **Interestingly, there has been no mention of the Gender Equality Duty in any of the organisational interviews.** Clearly there needs to be more research into the impact of this policy.

The Councillors Commission stated that just changing rules and structures doesn't necessarily change the attitudes and behaviour of those organisations which control the **demand** for women in governance positions. According to research on local authorities, women leaders can **shift** the culture of organisations¹¹, offering effective leadership which can then lead to critical review and dialogue with the organisation. However, there is no ready made 'toolkit'; we need to "have hope and keep faith".

Notes

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

² 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

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

⁴ Stanford Uni Press 2003, Councillors Commission paper - RAO et al 2007

⁵ 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

⁶ www.takepart.org

⁷ See Appendices for report on the WTP organisational research: this will be available on www.changesuk.net

⁸ See Appendices for detailed research report and for focus group reports: these will be available on www.changesuk.net

⁹ JRF Routes and Barriers to Citizen Governance 2008

¹⁰ Seeing Double. Fawcett Society 2008

¹¹ Bristol Business School, UWE. Broussine and Fox, Gender isn't an issue