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# A Reflective Self-Inquiry into My Practice as an Inclusive Governance Advocate in the Ghana Forestry Sector: Bible-Based Collaborative Monitoring Evaluation and Control

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## **Abstract:**

*Through reflection and inquiry into improving their practices and outcomes, action research allows practitioners to evaluate and gain insight into their practices. The researcher conducts a deliberate and retrospective analysis of her practices in this study, a reflective self-inquiry. The goal is to identify the Bible perspective on collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and control, create an enabling environment for women participation in collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and control of forestry-related interventions, and propose alternative practices and measures to manage women participation.*

**Keywords:** Collaborative monitoring, evaluation, stakeholder participation, women

## **1. Introduction**

Action research allows practitioners to gain insight into their activities and explore techniques that can help to improve their practices through reflection and assessment. Reflection entails critical self-examination (Habermas, 1973), as well as 'self-evaluation, self-observation, and self-dialogue concerning a person's preferences, values, norms, and feelings' (Yip, 2006). Leitch and Day (2000) argued that during the process of reflection, one could evaluate relative components in specific circumstances and fundamental assumptions in practice, discover existing knowledge and investigate alternative methods (Yip, 2006).

This study is a reflective self-inquiry into a deliberate and retrospective analysis of the researcher's inclusive governance practices in the first-person dimension of inquiry (Ladkin, 2005; Torbert, 2001), with this reflective self-inquiry arising from recognizing an ongoing problem of low participation of women and youth in collaborative forest management. This research article is the result of a long period of reflection aimed at answering one of the most critical questions in my practice as an inclusive forest governance advocate: 'How do I create an enabling environment for all stakeholders, particularly youth and women, to participate actively and benefit equally from the sustainable management of forest resources in Ghana?' I have been frustrated with the de facto participation of women and youth in forest management decision-making at the strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control processes since the Collaborative Forest Management process was introduced into Ghana's forestry sector in the early 1990s. With over twenty years of forestry experience, I would like to examine what the Bible says about collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and control and how forest sector practitioners can carry out Bible-based collaborative Monitoring, evaluation, and control. The article addresses the question, 'How can I improve my practice and find a pathway that will result in greater coherence between my beliefs and principles as an inclusive forest governance advocate?' using a self-inquiry approach, I reflect on collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and control from the perspective of the Holy Book.

According to John Healey and Mark Robinson (2004), good governance is 'a high level of organizational effectiveness that contributes to economic growth, stability, and welfare.'

This is where I make a case for Bible-based collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and control as a means of achieving economic growth, stability, and the well-being of women and youth.

Following the above governance definition, my work will encourage and provide more space for expressing women's and youth voices through positive dialogues. The process will broaden my knowledge and understanding of engaging stakeholders at the policy and practice levels, allowing me to develop and implement inclusive governance practices that are more tailored to the needs and circumstances of specific stakeholders (Morin, 2000).

## **2. Inquiry into Inclusive Governance Practices through Self-Reflective**

My inquiry was prompted by an uneasy feeling that arose from my experience as an advocate for inclusive forest governance: the recognition of low participation of women and youth in collaborative forest management in my organization. My colleagues frequently complained that women and youth were not actively involved in the monitoring, evaluating, and controlling of our projects and programs.

### 3. The Bible and Collaborative Strategic Management Process

The book of Genesis is essential for organizational theology as it presents the story of God's work of creation. In Genesis, we see God at work and learn how He wants us to work. As described in the first chapter of Genesis, the creation week is an excellent example of monitoring, evaluation, and control, an essential step in the strategic management process. Our creator paused and looked back seven times during the six days of creation to evaluate what He had created and concluded that it was good (Genesis 1: 4, 10,12, 17, 25, and 31). Genesis 1:26 says, 'Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.' This verse tells us that Our Maker is the pioneer of inclusive governance. He invited the Trinity to collaborate on creating everything, including humans. God shared his plans with Noah and Abraham before carrying them out, according to Genesis 5:13 and 18:17. This is the result of careful monitoring and evaluation of the world. Then God used control measures to destroy the antediluvian age and Sodom and Gomorrah in both cases.

Through the Prophet Isaiah, we also receive the invitation to 'Come now, let us reason together,' says the LORD in Isaiah 1: 18. Another act of collaborative monitoring evaluation and control with humans. David presented himself to God for a joint evaluation when he asked God to search him and know his heart'. In the gospel story, we see a Savior sent by God to 'preach the gospel to the poor; to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed' Luke 4: 18 NKJV. Paul, reiterating the gospel of inclusiveness and the importance of monitoring, evaluation, and control, urges Christians to examine themselves to see if they are in the truth.

### 4. Justification for the Study

The researcher is inspired by the first chapter of the Bible in his search for the best values and principles for collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and control. My goal is to examine my attitudes toward women and youth participation and my personality. These factors may impact my collaborative forest management practices and the participation of women and youth in forestry projects and programs, which may have contributed to their failure to actively and effectively participate in monitoring, evaluation, and control. Furthermore, due to this self-reflective inquiry, I will generate alternative practices to create an enabling environment for women and youth to participate in Bible-based collaborative monitoring and evaluation and control. I will also propose various evaluation measures to assess the effectiveness of my reformed practices in collaboration with my Community of practice.

### 5. The Forestry Commission

The Ghana Forestry Commission (FC) was established in 1909 and re-established in 1999 by an act of parliament (Act 571), following the provisions of Ghana's 1992 Constitution. The FC is a government agency that protects, develops, manages, and regulates Ghana's forest and wildlife resources. To promote inclusive governance, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources issued forest and wildlife policies in 1994 and 2012 to conserve and sustainably develop forest and wildlife resources to maintain environmental stability and the flow of maximum benefits to present and future generations' (Forest and Wildlife Policy 2012). The policy aims to:

- Encourage collaborative resource management among communities, governments, and stakeholders.
- Recognize multistake holder interests in forests and wildlife and forge a shared vision to protect, manage, and use the resources.
- Promote capacity development for stakeholders in the forestry and wildlife sectors.
- Mainstream gender and vulnerability issues into forestry development planning and management.

In my opinion, this commitment embodies the inclusive governance principles of equity, participation, and transparency. When properly implemented, this policy will lead to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that seek to 'leave no one behind.

### 6. Review of Literature

The strategic management process is divided into four phases. The first stage is Strategic Goals and Analysis, which identifies the organization's vision, purpose, and value statements. The information from stage one is then used in the Strategic Planning stage to develop strategic objectives for the organization. The implementation or execution stage is followed by the Strategic Evaluation and Control stage, which monitors and controls the achievement of critical milestones against performance indicators. This narrative self-inquiry examines how stakeholders can be involved in the final stage of the strategic management process by utilizing the Bible as the foundation for Collaborative Monitoring and Evaluation of FC projects and programs.

#### 6.1. Participation of Stakeholders

Involving stakeholders has evolved and is moving away from simple 'participation' and toward a more methodical approach (Quick & Feldmen, 2011), where decisions are made collaboratively to improve effectiveness and legitimacy (Noveck 2009). Clarisa (2009) defined *equity* as a good governance principle that promotes equal participation or involvement of different classes of people in the welfare of society.

#### 6.2. Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Control

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2009) describes monitoring as a continuous process in which stakeholders receive regular feedback on their progress toward achieving their goals and objectives. On the other hand, *evaluation* is defined as a rigorous and independent assessment of activities to determine the extent to which they meet stated objectives. Monitoring and evaluation are thus continuous processes that entail developing goals and project success indicators for planning and collecting data and analyzing the project's efficacy, relevance, impact, and

sustainability on a continuous and systematic basis. This definition of monitoring and evaluation corresponds to what God did during the week of creation. The Godhead paused at the end of each day's planned and implemented activities to evaluate what had been accomplished jointly, and the feedback was: And God saw what he had done, and it was good. Every day, monitoring was carried out.

At the end of the sixth day, an evaluation of the week was carried out in collaboration with Man, which resulted in the same feedback: And God saw that it was good. However, after a second and closer evaluation that sought to incorporate a new indicator, 'man's welfare,' into the monitoring processes, God noticed something was wrong, that it was not good that Man should leave alone.' A corrective or controlling measure was put in place by the Godhead and Man to create women, a helpmate for man. It was not until this measure was implemented that God realized everything, He had made was flawless.

According to Bourne (2010), traditional monitoring and evaluation were carried out by external experts, primarily to please donor or funding organizations. However, a continuous paradigm changes from the traditional to a modern strategy incorporates internal and external stakeholders in monitoring and assessment. Guijt argued in 1998 and again in 2014 that participatory monitoring and evaluation is more cost-effective, empowering, accurate, and relevant.

Following these authors' footsteps, I propose a Bible-based collaborative monitoring and evaluation process that includes women and youth and seeks to empower them by allowing for capacity development and fostering collaborative learning, promoting commitment to corrective actions as was accomplished during creation week.

### 6.3. Participatory Monitoring and Control and Evaluation in the Bible

The Bible presents a shared evaluation of our actions with our maker, where God invites man to come and reason with Him in Isaiah 1:18. After the assessment, God intends to apply a corrective measure if Man is found wanting by 'making us as white as snow or wool.'

The World Bank (2010) defined participatory monitoring and evaluation as 'a process in which stakeholders at various levels monitor or evaluate a specific project, program, or policy, share control over the content, process, and outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation make decisions.

Furthermore, according to Kwena and Moronge (2015), allowing communities to actively improve their understanding and perspective of an organization or project leads to sustainability. Similarly, Whittington et al. (2009) discovered that communities that feel like part of a project develop a sense of ownership. Participation of communities in monitoring and evaluation is beneficial to a project's efficiency and sustainability. As a result, programs such as rural water supply emphasize participatory monitoring and evaluation (Sulemana et al., 2018; United Nations, 2017).

Collaborative monitoring and evaluation ensure that protocols are followed and that transparency in the organization's programs and operations is encouraged (Sulemana, Musah, & Simon, 2018).

## 7. Reasons for Women Participation

There are compelling reasons to focus on and emphasize women's participation in monitoring evaluation and control. The primary reason is that they play critical roles in long-term natural resource management. In addition, women are more dependable and more dedicated to their jobs (Hunger Project 2000).

Through this self-inquiry and reflection, I have identified three themes that may require further consideration in my practices and create the enabling environment for the participation of women and youth.

### 7.1. Women and Youth Have a Low Capacity to Participate in Forest Management Monitoring, Evaluation, and Control

Most women and youth in my Community of practice are within the cocoa-forest landscapes lack the necessary capacity to monitor, evaluate, and control cocoa-forest-related interventions. They typically have limited information about the FC's and COCOBOD's projects and programs. According to Kongolo (2009), education is vital to any society, ultimately improving social well-being. Women in Forest-fringe communities must have the capacity to improve their social well-being. Research shows a strong link between education and improved life and economic development (Browne and Barrett, 1991). Women's education has been shown to have a significant developmental impact on their primary role of nurturing, rearing, socializing, and educating children. Their ability to actively serve in these areas can be improved if they have the adequate capacity (Browne and Barrett 1991).

Women's participation in development initiatives is heavily influenced by their educational levels (Kongolo 2009). When women have the capacity, they are more likely to be included (Browne & Barrett 1991).

Although I recognized that knowledge and information are the most important aspects of participation, I did not assist women in gaining access to the information they needed to improve their participation. I often assumed that they were not as well informed as their male counterparts without taking any action. I was aware that their participation was limited due to their lack of knowledge about forest management projects and programs. However, I tried to avoid this problem partly because I was always confined to my practices and thought that spending time developing their capacities would be too time-consuming and unnecessary. Furthermore, I assumed that their inability to participate was due to a lack of interest. I did not bother putting in extra effort to develop their abilities.

Through this reflection, I realized that increasing women's participation in monitoring and evaluation may necessitate developing their monitoring, evaluation, and control capacities and skills. I am concerned that women and youth will be unable to reverse their passive participation without receiving instructions and the ability to do so. Women and youth cannot actively monitor, evaluate, and control unless they gain this knowledge. As a result, as an inclusive governance practitioner, I cannot ignore this severe shortfall, and I am determined to improve my practices by

incorporating regular capacity development into my practices. Given the limited time available for project and program evaluation, I must also determine the feasibility of such actions.

As a result, I questioned my community of practice about my idea via e-mail correspondence. The majority favored the need to develop women and youth capacity to enhance their participation. Two people stated that they would find it difficult to carry out the plan due to time constraints.

My confidence in carrying out this practice has grown due to consultation with my community of practice; therefore, I am determined to incorporate systematic and explicit training sessions for women and youth before asking them to collaborate in monitoring, evaluation, and control assignments. I plan to devote enough time to the process by beginning early and drawing inspiration from the Bible. At the end of each day, the three Godhead paused to reflect and evaluate their actions, and they saw that it was good.

A personal journal recording the observation of women and youth activeness and involvement during monitoring and evaluation processes and their improvement will be used for data analysis to assess the effectiveness of this practice. The journal will also include personal reflections on my attitudes toward women who are still hesitant to participate. I will apply the Bible principle that those strong in the faith should strengthen their weak brethren to encourage the more active women to reach out to the less active ones.

## *7.2. Insufficient Consultation with Women and Youth in the Design and Implementation of Forest Programs and Projects*

Although it is frequently required to involve all stakeholders as stipulated in the 2012 forest and wildlife policy, including women and youth, in the planning, designing, and implementing projects and programs, it does not always happen in practice. As a result, very few, if any, women or youth are consulted early enough in project design and implementation decisions. There are no platforms for women and youth to monitor, evaluate, and control.

Most literature on women's involvement in development gives the impression that there are no specific solutions to rural women's inclusion and participation in development (Robinson 2004). However, the Hunger Project (2000) emphasizes that women's needs, rights, and concerns should be fully integrated into development programs.

Reflecting on the past three decades of collaborative resource management experience within the FC, I have realized that other practitioners in the field of inclusive forest governance and I have not paid as much attention to the lack of women participation as we should. We assumed that we could check the box that we had completed our consultation efforts once stakeholders were consulted. We have always been enthusiastic about consulting relevant stakeholders, oblivious that marginalized groups, such as women and youth, are underrepresented in our multistakeholder meetings. When this occurs, their voices and opinions are silenced. Women's participation in this process discouraged me from deeply interacting with them after I facilitated a multistakeholder platform at the landscape, regional, and national levels for one of my organization's flagship programs that sought to develop an alternative for illegal chainsaw operations in Ghana. I also avoided interacting with women as much as possible because I was too impatient to wait for any response, which would have been possible if I had waited until they had gained a certain level of confidence. To avoid wasting time, I invited and consulted the few women who were willing to be consulted. Thus, women were underrepresented during consultations. I also assumed that most women and youth in forest fringe communities and forestry-related professions are uninterested and unconcerned with issues of inclusive forest governance. This assumption also reinforced my conviction that generating any change for their participation was difficult, justifying a one-way consultation method of simply providing information and not asking for their opinions.

I am not constantly concerned that women and youth are not interacting during the stakeholder consultation because I use primarily direct instruction. When they are present, I assume they have been consulted, even if in small numbers compared to the males. My team and I never organized or planned any activities to engage them individually, nor did we create an enabling environment to empower them to construct their engagement style. This practice has not improved our engagement with women and youth, nor has it motivated them to participate actively. I was aware that the women and youth in my Community of practice, particularly at the landscape level, were not actively monitoring, evaluating, or controlling forestry-related interventions. Nonetheless, I convinced myself that I was a conscientious inclusive governance advocate and collaborative forest management expert and that I had fulfilled my responsibilities by transferring information to them. I blamed their lower level of participation for their lack of interest, but I was aware I was looking for an excuse to avoid my responsibilities.

This reflection has helped me realize that I may have discouraged women from participating by ignoring them and failing to make a concerted effort to empower them. This practice is likely to have contributed to the inactiveness and unwillingness to participate. I began to consider how I would deal with such a situation. To learn more about this topic, I read articles from the literature and the Bible to see what the Bible says about empowering women. One of my former superiors directed me to the story of Mary Magdalene and the woman of Samaria after consulting my Community of practice. Before meeting Jesus, both women were powerless and relegated to the margins of society. After their encounter with Jesus, he stated that they discovered their worth and were empowered to spread the good news. They went out motivated and willing because Jesus never condemned them. According to the literature, this approach, known as the 'learner-centered approach' (Perkins, 1994), assumes that learning is a constructive process (McCombs & Whisler, 1997) that is best facilitated in a positive environment with supportive interaction. Furthermore, I understand that this approach necessitates extensive planning and stakeholder management Altan and Trombly (2001)

To put this practice into action, I will be putting women into mixed groups that include the more competent and empowered and the less capable to allow the more skilled and empowered women to assist their less competent counterparts. I will organize a variety of stakeholder engagement platforms to promote collaborative and interactive participation in all processes, including monitoring, evaluation, and control.

My team and I will keep a personal journal to record our observations of women's interactions and reflect and analyze their reformed and transformed attitudes during the stakeholder consultation to evaluate and interpret the practicability and effectiveness of the learner-centered approach applied to women and youth participation. In addition, I will ensure that women and youth are consulted early in the project design and implementation process to include and monitor their concerns. Taking a cue from a previous project, I will introduce self- and peer-evaluation by women and youth during stakeholder consultations.

### *7.3. The Cultural Setting, Traditions, and Norms That Give Men an Advantage over Women in the Decision-Making Process*

In many African countries, including Ghana, cultural differences put men in a better position to obtain knowledge, skills and access to resources. According to Robinson (2004), the most significant barriers to women's participation are culture, limited access to management, and family responsibilities. According to Kongolo (2009), women have always been seen as belonging at home. They are supposed to attend to the needs of their husbands and children, while men make all the decisions (Ntomb'futhi Zondo 1995). The rural situation conveys the impression that: If you are a woman, you have no say in social discourse. According to George (2019), cultural influence shapes women's ability to engage primarily as community organizers. Women's fundamental restraint is an entrenched patriarchal system in which males have family control and decision-making powers. Traditional views and cultural attitudes, notably surrounding women's responsibilities and social positions, are still prevalent, particularly in rural areas (Sadie, 2005). Traditional functions and labor divisions are distinctly gendered. Social conventions make it more difficult for women to abandon traditionally domestic duties in favor of more public responsibilities outside the home (Kangas et al., 2015). Women's gender identity is still primarily viewed as domestic, a barrier to women's participation in organizational projects and programs.

In my experience, socio-cultural issues significantly impact women's participation. Women generally sought advice from their male relatives because they believed leadership was reserved for men in society. With this perspective, women believe they are merely there as observers during monitoring and evaluation and agree with what the males say. This is because the culture of the community played a part in determining gender roles. Gender, a traditionally assigned role, determines women's jobs and advancement. In the survival of retrogressive cultural behaviors, the study identifies a broad shift in attitudes. Men are gradually accepting women's leadership and participation in community development.

The research also demonstrated that cultural norms hamper women's access to information. Finally, based on the findings, it was suggested that the numerous socio-cultural elements influencing women's decision-making and dispute resolution be abandoned. Thus, based on the study's findings, the researcher recommends that to increase women's engagement in community activities, society should modify its stance on the patriarchy system to allow women's leadership.

How women and youth are invited to participate is not well thought through. I engaged both men and women during a typical platform setting by ignoring the reality that most women in my Community of practice will always look to the males in the meeting to make decisions on their behalf, which they gladly endorse with statements like 'What the men said is enough.' During multistakeholder engagements, I frequently heard statements like 'I agree with what the males have said.' Although I was aware that some cultures in the landscape forbid women from speaking in public, I did not create the appropriate platform to allow women to express their opinions freely. I assumed that 'how' males are consulted should be the same as 'how' females are consulted. Thus, I dismissed suggestions to host a female-only platform or sessions. I expected the women to be inspired by the males to participate actively, not realizing that some of them felt inadequate in the company of their male counterparts. Without regard for their conventional responsibilities, I have found that interaction has not been beneficial for most women, particularly young women. Furthermore, my staff and I have not made appropriate arrangements for the children to be cared for when meeting with women.

Through this reflection, I realized that to be effective as a collaborative resource management practitioner; I needed to change my strategy and practice by adopting new techniques to break down cultural barriers. I polled my Community of practice on the subject, and they all agreed. As a result, I must employ several tactics for women to be empowered, have a sense of accomplishment, and enhance their participation confidence.

My Community of practice has drawn my attention to what the Bible says about women in the Old Testament, sometimes replicated in the New Testament. Women were not even counted during the census, and their names were not included in the Bible. It usually concerned their spouses, fathers, or brothers when they were mentioned. Moreover, following the Corinthian custom, the apostle Paul encouraged the women to keep silent during congregational meetings. I called my male colleagues to get their thoughts on how to break down cultural and conventional obstacles. They recommended that I engage women separately from males, that the organization provides an enabling atmosphere for women and youth to participate in stakeholder monitoring and evaluation sessions, and that the timing for meeting women be adjusted. Furthermore, I have learned that it is sometimes better not to use a structured approach to involve women but rather to engage them in a conversation and use adaptive management learning approaches, which are more flexible to get them to participate. This flexibility will allow me to interact extensively with the women while avoiding cultural difficulties.

As a result, I have opted to test these methods in my monitoring and evaluating process. I will first inform the women that I will be seeking their feedback on these new tactics, which they will be required to explore with me. I will also explain why I utilize this method and talk about women's expectations. The practice also necessitates that we do collaborative self and peer evaluations of our new approach by agreeing on some parameters and developing review and analysis criteria jointly.

Data will be gathered and examined to assess the success of this approach. They will involve an evaluation of our new strategy, which two colleagues and myself will observe. In addition, I shall keep reflective accounts and notes in my journal about my observations and reflections.

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Following Yip's (2006) assertion, I have received significant insight into my 'basic assumption in practice' from the experience of engaging in this process of self-reflective inquiry. My preconceptions about women's unwillingness to participate in collaborative monitoring and evaluation have been unraveling. Because of this assumption, I adopted a passive approach toward them, employing less effective and inappropriate tactics. I avoided their inactive participation, blaming it on their lack of interest in matters of sustainable forest management. Because of my preconceived notions and assumptions, I preferred one-way communication and information exchange over providing more possibilities for interaction with them during any engagement process, including PM&E. As a result of this contemplation, I discovered that my assumptions about women and youth and my low expectations of their performance in forestry-related initiatives and programs most likely influenced their attitudes about participation, culminating in their underachievement.

This self-reflection has also provided me with insight into my personality characteristics. Examining my emotions and feelings made me more conscious that I can become a more competent inclusive governance practitioner by becoming more patient, accommodating, innovative and adaptable. I identified a plausible link between my impatience, inflexibility, and female participation. I realized that I had always been more concerned with meeting donor requirements than providing additional opportunities for women and youth to compensate for their deficiencies through capacity development to motivate and facilitate their participation and allow them to voice their opinions. I also recognized a lack of flexibility, blindly monitoring and assessing efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability rather than giving substitute assessment techniques that measure the well-being of women and youth and even incorporating Bible principles and values in the PM&E process.

Furthermore, I discovered that I am the type of person who is resistant to change, acts conservatively, and is satisfied with the status quo. This characteristic prevented me from improving my practice and constituency. I also realized that I had only assumed that I was a responsible, collaborative forest management expert rather than confronting the fact that women and youth were not consulted as they should have been. This self-reflective inquiry has also assisted me in recognizing what knowledge I have and seeking substitute techniques (Yip, 2006).

In this study, I used the action research technique to conduct a self-reflective inquiry into my practices related to women and youth participation in forestry projects and program monitoring, evaluation, and control. Through contemplation and observation, I recognized three significant themes in my activities that may contribute to low participation among women and youth. Women and youth have a low capacity to participate in monitoring, evaluation, and control; there is a lack of consultation and space for women and youth participation; and culture, traditions, and norms have been recognized as barriers to women's participation.

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