



Women's
Environmental
Network

Working across languages and cultures

Guidance notes for working with groups from different languages and cultures

These notes were produced as a result of a discussion group, Working Across Languages and Cultures, organised by the Women's Environmental Network in November 2007. They aim to give basic guidance to help those with limited experience of working with groups of people from different languages and cultures make the most of opportunities to work with these groups.

- Be welcoming: start with a smile and introduce yourself.
- Speak clearly, and not too fast.
- Have a clear message for your audience. Make sure you have a structure for your points, and that people know what is planned for the session and what they're meant to do.
- Use visual aids - actions and pictures to communicate a message or actual objects to show, touch or smell.
- Consider the words you use - some words are international. Do you know (or could you learn) a couple of greetings or words from your audience's language eg kudu (gourd)?
- Incorporate small-group activities so that the session isn't all about listening to a speaker that the audience may not fully understand. This also allows informal opportunities for people to share ideas while focussing on a particular topic, and to assimilate or consider the information they've been given.
- Think about the tone you use in delivering your message - people are less likely to be receptive to your ideas if they find you intimidating or you make them feel uncomfortable by putting them on the spot, for example asking them to write things or pointing them out individually. Using humour often helps.



Clare Joy (WEN) opening Culture Kitchen 2006 in Bradford.



The common language of carrots was a starting point for discussion, Tower Hamlets 2007.



Ceremonial planting of a mulberry tree, Tower Hamlets 2007.

briefing

The WEN local food project offers support and training to groups of women growing food in urban areas.

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- Try to get participants' input, for example sharing stories or experiences, or asking them to bring something they have grown or made. People often bring valuable skills and knowledge so listening and being receptive to this can make the session a two-way learning process.
- Get a friend or neighbour to help with translation if necessary. Try to avoid jumping in on the assumption that you know what a person is trying to say, although of course offering occasional words can be helpful.
- Be aware of your audience's culture and traditions, and frame your message in terms of certain values or interests if appropriate (eg care for creation), but avoid making assumptions or stereotypes - if in doubt, ask. Different cultural/religious sensitivities include animals (pigs, cows, dogs), modest dress, mixed gender groups, soles of the feet.
- Try and think beforehand about what might be a new or difficult idea or activity for a particular group and be ready to offer help or an opportunity to opt out of something somebody doesn't feel comfortable with.
- If using handouts, be aware that not everyone is accustomed to receiving written information, or able to make use of it. Direct contact with demonstration and explanation is often much more effective, backed up with information in plain English. Any written information will be more accessible if plenty of illustrations and diagrams are used.
- Consider whether you can use small prizes or incentives (eg free seeds from a seed-saving workshop, snacks or a lunch at an event) to motivate people to attend or participate.



Keeping a photographic record of projects can make activities easier to convey.



Seeds were distributed and planted at a workshop at the 2007 Tower Hamlets event.



Seed saving workshop at Culture Kitchen 2006 using tactile and visual aids.

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About Women's Environmental Network
WEN is a registered charity educating, informing and empowering women and men who care about the environment. It researches and campaigns on environmental and health issues from a female perspective.

Individual membership (women & men)
£20 ordinary
£12 unwaged
£40 supporting
Affiliate membership (organisations)
£35-150 depending on size.

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