

Diagrams as Data: Participatory Methods for Inclusive Sustainable Development

Abstract: Practitioners and researchers alike have struggled with how best to include marginalized voices in management and corporate sustainability research, especially with regard to women's inclusivity in stakeholder engagement and evaluation. Much evidence demonstrates the importance of listening to these groups for the achievement of sustainable development, especially in developing country contexts. Sustainability research remains largely fixated with data as numbers and text, despite the prevalence of visual participatory methods in development studies, and a growing presence in organizational studies. This paper introduces the methodology of GALS (gender action learning system) to the field of corporate sustainability. A participatory methodology, GALS incorporates participants drawing and discussing in groups. A case study demonstrates how GALS can be used by business and academics alike to better achieve sustainable development. It is argued that the approach enables (1) a readdressing of power imbalances in the research context, (2) inclusion of marginalized voices for expertise and (3) discussion of sensitive topics such as gender equality. Ultimately, the visual method of drawing (4) contributes rich data through enhanced participation, resulting in a high level of credibility in research findings and evaluation, which can feed into enhanced sustainability programmes.

Keywords. Sustainable development, stakeholder auditing, gender, visual methods, participatory.

INTRODUCTION

CSR & sustainability programmes have been critiqued for ignoring stakeholders with less voice and power, including indigenous peoples (Banerjee, 2011); individuals from the global South (Jamali & Sidani, 2011; Newell, 2005) and women (Prieto & Bendell, 2002; Pearson & Seyfang, 2002; Grosser & Moon, 2005). In this paper I concentrate on women in the South as key marginalized stakeholders within the sustainability debate.

Sustainability Programmes headed by businesses are slowly coming round to the fact that many of the challenges associated with sustainability- economic, social and environmental- require the inclusion of and adaption for women's opinions, needs and experiences. This uptake and scale, however, has been modest at best (Grosser, 2013). Women are more likely to be affected by poverty (Habermas, 1998), climate change (Marshall, 2007), conflicts and resource scarcity (WDR, 2012; Higaga & Posadas, 2013). In turn, they are more likely to be positively affected by efforts to curb such global problems, and as such can be seen as salient stakeholders for firms (Mary Robinson Foundation, 2012; Thompson, 2008; Ruiz Thierry, 2008).

Past research has demonstrated how key facets of CSR & sustainability operationalisation, such as multi-stakeholder codes of conduct (Barrientos *et al.*, 2005; Barrientos & Smith, 2007; Bain, 2010); and various company-own codes (Prieto & Bendell, 2002) fail to cover marginalized workers (such as homeworkers) and their particular needs. Research also highlights the bias involved in social auditing (Auret & Barrientos, 2004) and exclusion of gender issues from CSR matrices (Kilgour 2007; Grosser 2009). These marginalized workers are most often women. In many supply chains, including textiles, fashion, fresh fruit and vegetables and consumer electronics, women make up to 70-87% of the production and manufacturing workforce (Dolan & Sorby, 2003; Barrientos *et al.*, 2004). Consultations on

decisions around sustainable development programmes, however, are often carried out through workers' group leaders, trade union leaders, or simply in discussion with a manager (Prieto & Bendell, 2002; O'Rourke, 2002; Auret & Barrientos, 2004), if they are carried out at all. Oftentimes women are distinctly missing from this process. More ostensibly ethical business models, such as organic cooperatives, or fair trade enterprises, have not been found to fare much better when it comes to gender equity- with the rules of fair trade membership often excluding women due to land ownership rules, or sometimes making women's work harder once new rules are adopted (Le Mare, 2007; Kasente, 2012; Mayoux, 2012). CSR codes & sustainability programmes are allegedly run to benefit workers, and usually to give some benefit (reputation, financial or altruistic) back to the business. If, for example, a move to fair trade practices improves the male farmer's lot, but women miss out, can we say that this is a success? Arguably unless women stakeholders are sought out in a transparent and non-threatening manner (i.e. not coerced into 'saying the right thing' when an auditor is present), sustainable development programmes & policies can, and do, fail.

How then can businesses, or third party consultants seeking to engage with marginalized stakeholders such as women producers do so in a useful and respectful manner? How can researchers evaluating the impact of CSR programmes ensure they include more diverse viewpoints? In this paper I share my experience of a GALS (Gender Action Learning System) methodology and aim to promote its use amongst a wide range of users- academics and practitioners alike. GALS is intended to be used to draw out gender as a concept with stakeholders, but can be adapted for use for any discussion or issue, including long-term business planning, health awareness or conflict resolution (Farnworth & Akamandisa 2011; Mayoux 2010).

In this paper I explore the utility of a Gender Action Learning System (GALS) approach for evaluating a gender programme in the cocoa sector. I explain the benefits and challenges of

using GALS visual methods- and the distinctive data that it produces. While organizational studies have begun to use visual methods (Davison *et al.*, 2012), there are few innovative methodologies being used within sustainability research, despite the fact that visual methods can break down cultural and language barriers that often exist in sustainable development settings. GALS is a participant action research (PAR) type methodology familiar to development practitioners which aims to let stakeholders lead the debate, draw the boundaries of their own concepts and discuss sensitive issues without imposition of outsider values (Mayoux, 2010). This is done primarily through visual methods, such as drawing, in conjunction with group discussions, and can be triangulated with other methods, such as observation, one-to-one interviews or survey tools, as needed.

This paper contributes to the call for corporate sustainability to proactively incorporate marginalized voices into its research and practice (Prieto-Carrón *et al.*, 2006). It also contributes to the call for more innovative & creative ways of generating and handling qualitative data in management studies (Bansal and Corley, 2011). The paper lays out the substantial benefits of a visual methods approach to the field of sustainability. Further, it demonstrates the importance of handling stakeholder engagement sensitively and with recourse to gender, while offering a pragmatic idea on how to do this.

The paper begins by outlining how visual methods have been used in organizational research, and demonstrates how sustainability research can benefit from the visual. GALS is then introduced, using a Ghanaian cocoa case study to illustrate the benefits, and challenges, of such an approach. The wider contributions of visual methods to CSR research and practice are then discussed, along with some ideas for adaptations of this innovative research design.

VISUAL METHODS IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

Sustainability research remains dominated by quantitative methods and research design, reflective of organizational and management literature more generally (Lockett *et al.*, 2006). In a systematic review of top management and CSR journals, Lockett, Moon & Visser (2006) found that only 20 per cent of all empirical papers utilised qualitative methods. Similarly, a recent review of 588 journal articles and 108 book reviews found only 11% contained qualitative empirical research (Agunis & Glavas, 2012). This is surprising given the seeming people-centred focus of much CSR and sustainability research. When qualitative methods are used, ‘traditional’ methods such as interviews remain overwhelmingly dominant in leading journals such as *Academy of Management* (Bansal & Corley, 2011). However, there has recently been a growth in the use of non-verbal, visual methods in organizational studies (Davidson *et al.*, 2012), encapsulated in a recent special issue on the topic in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* (2012), the formation of an ESRC-funded visual methods in organization network, *InVisio*, (Vince & Warren, 2012) and various new chapters in leading qualitative research textbooks on the utility of visual methods in organizational research (e.g. Broussine, 2008; Stiles, 2013; Pink, 2004). A path has been opened up for more visual methods in corporate sustainability and CSR research, but so far remains largely un-trodden.

‘Visual methods’, however, is an ambiguous term. Warren (2005) identifies four approaches, briefly summarised here as: (a) images as data in themselves, such as the analysis of photographs used in advertising (e.g. Borgerson & Schroeder 1998); (b) studies that record events using photography or video (e.g. Holliday, 1999); (c) studies that use images to provoke a response within interviews, commonly described as photo-elicitation (Bagnoli, 2009) and (d) studies which enable participants to produce their own images. It is this last

element of visual methods that I focus on in this paper, although there is huge scope for the use of the remaining approaches within sustainability research more generally.

Participant-led visual methods, usually involving photography, video-making or drawing, are popular in disciplines such as sociology, psychology and education (Vince & Warren, 2012).

Whilst in organization studies the use of photography by participants to capture their working environments & experiences is growing (Ibid; Warren , 2005; Bramming, *et al.*, 2012; Vince & Broussine, 1996), less often are participants asked to draw. Organization scholars have sometimes asked participants to draw, primarily as a means to elicit discussion on sensitive topics such as institutional change and employee identity (Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Zuboff, 1988; Meyer, 1991; Vince & Broussine, 1996). The arena of sustainability is fraught with opinion, anxiety and above all, change: arguably the perfect context for the use of drawing as data.

Rarely, however, are final drawings used as a form of data in itself. Stiles argues that this is because drawings are seen as highly subjective, and to analyse them as a form of data *per se* would not be seen as methodologically rigorous, as ‘images are still regarded by the academic orthodoxy as a subjective, inferior, or even eccentric form of data compared to words and numbers’ (2004: 127). Vince & Warren lament the fact that the use of visual methods is often reduced to a textual outcome in the form of a ‘very traditional interview transcript as the participants and researcher discuss the image in words’ (2012: 12). While it is extremely difficult to skew text completely, drawings as data in themselves can, and have, been used extremely effectively in other fields, including development studies, and as I demonstrate, could be used further in sustainability research & practice.

VISUAL METHODS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES RESEARCH

Visual methods, in particular, the use of drawings as a form of data, have been used for almost thirty years in development studies. Diagramming, or drawing, forms the basis of much participatory action research (PAR) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Narayanasamy, 2009) commonly used with smallholder farmers. PAR visual methods have not only been used to generate verbal data (for example, by discussing the map drawn by a group) but also as a means to generate visual data that can be analysed as such (for example, by asking farmers to draw the quantity of bags of coffee produced in a season).

Drawing has developed as a method in development studies primarily because the field has struggled for many years with how best to engage with key stakeholders, or beneficiaries: the poor (Raynard, 1998) and thus ensure development programmes achieve their goals.

Chambers (1997) and Moser (1998) have strongly argued that research and evaluation based on survey instruments and brief interviews frequently miss out the most vulnerable and least powerful. Women especially are often forced out of conversations or denied access to the events where data are collected by researchers (Guijt & Shah, 1998). Participatory research methodologies, that operate in small, carefully-selected groups and utilise drawing as a means to break down literacy barriers, were developed as an alternative research design in order to address these problems. It has become endemic in development research, encapsulated in the use of PAR in the World Bank's influential 'Voices of the Poor' study (Narayan *et al.*, 2000). Whilst there remains considerable debate about the efficacy, morality and validity of PAR methods (e.g. Guijt & Shah, 1998; Campbell, 2001), especially when it comes to the selection of participants (Mosse, 2004), the benefits associated with approaches that champion participation, inclusivity, and qualitative accounts are also strongly argued (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Chambers, 1997; Mayoux & ANANDI, 2005; Mayoux & Chambers, 2005; Barrientos, 2005; Crawley, 1998).

Development researchers share much common ground with sustainability researchers, both academic & professional, in that they are likely to be studying groups of people across cultures and contexts, not to mention language barriers. They share methodological & ethical questions on (1) power; (2) inclusivity; (3) sensitivity; and (4) credibility. To elaborate on these issues further, I now turn to my particular use of participatory visual methods in sustainability research, and relate the issues above to a short case study example.

THE GALS METHODOLOGY

For my participatory research into gender and sustainability I used a particular branch of participatory visual methods: GALS (Gender Action Learning System). GALS is a methodology developed by development consultant Linda Mayoux in the late 2000s. It is heavily influenced by PAR designs that generally involve group research, visual methods and qualitative accounts (Narayanasamy, 2009). GALS incorporates participatory approaches to social research in value chains (e.g. Auret & Barrientos, 2004) with participatory action learning systems (PALS) to address poverty. It borrows techniques of group teaching and research informed by Friere's Community Conscientisation theory (1970), and a wide range of participatory development tools and techniques (Mohan, 2001; Chambers, 1997). GALS methods include group discussion, drawing, diagramming and mapping, often in a workshop setting (Mayoux & Mackie, 2007; Mayoux, 2010). Over 3000 women and men have been involved in GALS research in Uganda, with 25,000 participants in Latin America (WEMAN global, 2013), and the methodology is currently being utilized by a range of non-governmental organizations, including Twin UK (Twin, 2013).

The GALS approach represents a creative approach to the problems of researching 'gender' and of reaching marginalized voices in the supply chain: poor men, and especially, women. To this end, it has utility not only for NGOs or development agencies, but for social auditors,

consultants and corporate teams who wish to research & promote equality and sustainability in the supply chain, and collect credible, reliable data.

GALS in Practice: The Cocoa Supply Chain

As part of a research evaluation team I carried out four GALS workshops with 48 male and female cocoa farmers in the Ashanti and Western Region of Ghana on behalf of Twin UK. These farmers were members of a fair trade cooperative producing cocoa for a UK confectionary company, and the sample included two locations where gender-sensitive CSR programmes had been taking place, and two without. The research aim was to evaluate the success of the gender programme along the lines of economic and holistic gender empowerment. As one of the objectives of the gender programme was to incorporate more women into cocoa farming as a strategy for sustainable production, the twin concepts of ‘gender’ and ‘sustainability’ provided the basis for the research aim. Previous research attempts had been somewhat hampered by dominance of men in discussions, and reticence of participants to talk about gender issues. From the inception of the research design I had to begin to plan for issues of sensitivity, inclusivity and power.

Table 1 goes here

GALS workshops took 3 hours in total; table 1 breaks down the timings. As Napolitano et al. (2004) found, timing, location and breaks were important considerations when conducting the GALS workshops. Farmers took time out of their busy days to travel to the communal area—usually the same location they would bring cocoa to be weighed and sold. We made sure that the days started early, so that farming could continue later. As some farmers had to travel some distance to take part in the groups we also ensured there were snacks and drinks for participants, and extra for children and partners who were in attendance. We found also ‘that

it was not always possible to control who was in the focus group' (ibid: 178), with observers sometimes chiming in within the group discussion session, or commenting on participants' drawings. This was not too much of a problem however, actually stimulating debate and encouraging participants further. The following sections break down the activities of the workshop.

Drawing Concepts. Participants in the GALS workshops in Ghana primarily drew individual diagrams. There were two exercises, the first involving drawing the household (dependent children and any adults who 'eat from the same pot') and circling the primary decision maker (figure 1). This enabled us to get a snapshot of each participant's home situation (married, widowed etc.) and to already collect data of decision-making in the home. This also introduced participants to working with pen and paper, and led to lots of laughter and discussion, thus easing everyone into the rest of the workshop.

 Figure 1: Goes here

The second, and main, diagramming exercise was drawing a 'gender tree' (figure 2). Symbols representing tasks or objects were to be drawn either on the left hand side (women's work/expenditure/ownership); the middle (shared work/expenditure/ownership) or right hand side (men's work/expenditure/ownership) of a drawing of a tree. Participants followed along whilst I drew my own 'gender tree' on a large flipchart, substituting symbols they didn't need for their own, and putting them where relevant on their diagram. The gender trees created data based on the gendered division of labor, decision-making, expenditure and ownership. These aspects of male/female roles on the farm and at home were considered the best measures of gender equality, in line with much development research & experience (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Farnworth & Akamandisa, 2011). This is in turn influenced by the

theory that gendered relations are inherent throughout society, not least in an agricultural work setting (ibid) and that they have a bearing on the uptake and success of sustainable development programming (Marshall, 2007; Mitchell *et al.*, 2007).

Figure 2 goes here

The ‘roots’ of the tree covered ‘who does what?’: one sub-root representing cocoa work, one alternative income, and one household work. Work was drawn as symbols on the relevant parts of each participant’s tree. We wanted to explore what parts of each of these areas of work were being carried out by men, and which by women, to evaluate success of challenging gender norms, and to understand where and with whom it would be possible to leverage sustainability change through training. Echoing research carried out by Barrientos (2013), the visual data revealed that women were engaged in cocoa work that was crucial to the high-quality taste of chocolate, such as drying & fermenting, as well as weeding & caring for young plants to ensure the continuation of the farm, crucial given the crisis situation of aged cocoa trees in Ghana (IFPRI 2002). These actions contributed to the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the cocoa industry (Barrientos, 2013). Yet in discussion women often played down their part on the cocoa farm, calling it ‘helping’ rather than ‘work’. The visualisation of their part in cocoa farming was particularly helpful to supplier staff present at the workshop, who too had under-estimated women’s roles in cocoa farming. Participants were also urged to circle the tasks that took the longest time. This helped analyse where men and women were spending the most of their time, and if this was or could be alleviated through corporate sustainability programmes. For example, in one village women systematically circled cooking, laundry and fetching water. In discussion, they revealed that

this was because the locally-installed corporate-funded water pump has broken, and they had to walk large distances again to fetch clean water. This indicated that here was a corporate interaction that had knock-on effects for the gendered roles & experiences of the women farmers, and was keeping women from other farm tasks, thus having an effect on productivity.

Next, we drew the 'branches' of the tree: 'who gets what?' This answered questions on who received income and made decisions based on income, giving an indication of the success of gender programming which had aimed to empower women economically. Participants circled which items they spent the most on, and if they had received a loan through the cooperative, what they had spent the loan on. This was a revealing part of the exercise, as it demonstrated that even with a gender programme in place, with women engaged in alternative income streams, for the most part women remained financially reliant on their male family members. This meant that at present women were unlikely to be able to run or invest more into their own cocoa farms, for example, by planting younger trees. Finally, participants drew symbols for housing, money and land, relevant to their own household situation. For example, a picture of money drawn on the right-hand side of the tree-trunk represented that the male of the household controlled the finances. Again, in conjunction with the decision-making data, it was evident that simply giving women the training to earn extra income would not necessarily change culture-bound norms around bank account and finance ownership. This has been a crucial finding in the evaluation and future planning of gender programmes for the business, suggesting that economic empowerment schemes must be partnered with holistic, gender-sensitisation programmes for men and women in order for women to be able to take-up new roles or opportunities to make their farms more sustainable, and thus guarantee the continuation of a quality cocoa supply for the confectionary company.

As facilitator, I had already tested the symbols used for work tasks with supplier staff who had daily contact with farmers. Prior to arrival in each location, it was important to take the time with supplier staff and the translator to go through the instructions pertaining to the diagramming, and the phrasing of the questions. This was to ensure that English terms and phrases aligned with their local language counterparts. This meant that I could clarify terms like 'household' which in Twi was best translated to 'those that eat from the same pot'.

After individuals completed their trees, we took a break before reconvening for group discussions. Individuals were encouraged to keep their own trees, and the pens, and in some focus groups communities have kept the master trees and display them in a communal area (personal communication with supplier staff, June 2013). I took photographs of each tree, and their corresponding household diagrams, for later analysis.

Discussing concepts in groups. Following the diagramming activities, participants were split into male and female groups, with the aim that this would enable participants to speak more honestly about their answers (Morgan, 1997). They were asked to discuss their trees, considering the following questions at the same time:

- 1/ Are the trees balanced?
- 2/ What can men do to make the tree balance better?
- 3/ What can women do to make the tree balance better?
- 4/ What has the supplier done to make the tree balance better? What could they do in the future?

These questions were decided on in order to focus participants' discussion, but allow enough room for unexpected viewpoints to be raised (Morgan, 1997). Each group was given a same-sex facilitator who could speak the local language and English. These took notes and

encouraged discussion, whilst I moved around the space. After approximately 30 minutes the groups re-convened to discuss their answers. Translators aided me, and videos were also recorded for this part of the discussion. Here we could use the visual data as prompts, teasing out inconsistencies in what people said in comparison to the very visually striking ‘gender tree’, which often demonstrated that women were over-loaded with work, whilst men carried out much of the decision-making and owned most of the assets.

VISUAL METHODS IN PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES: KEY BENEFITS FOR CORPORATE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Using studies from both organizational and development spheres, and my case study described here, four key benefits of participatory visual methods for corporate sustainability can be identified. They are (a) readdressing power imbalances in both research *and* systems of inequality; improving (b) inclusivity & (c) sensitivity in data collection and (d) improving credibility in data collection and analysis, which feeds into better informed decision making around corporate sustainability issues. I explore each further here, with reference to the Cocoa case study.

Readdressing Power Imbalances

Participatory approaches to data generation are often built on the assumption that they challenge power imbalances on two levels: *between researcher and researched* (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Prieto, 2002; Mayoux & Chambers, 2005) and *within systems of inequality* (Crawley, 1998; Mayoux, 2012). Much participatory research assumes that power lies within the hands of experts, corporates, large NGOs or international bodies, and so works to give ‘voice’ to the poor in a move to put some power back into their hands (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Local knowledge, language & experience are given preference over ‘expert’ opinion (Mohan, 2001; Mayoux & Chambers, 2005). In practice, this means that in a PAR approach

such as GALS, researchers are better termed ‘facilitators’ who ‘lead from the back’, ‘never touch the marker pen’ and are comfortable with silences (Mayoux, 2010: 20). Participants lead the discussion (prompted by the key questions posed) and as such ‘co-create’ the questions asked and answers given in the research process (Farnworth & Akamandisa, 2011; Warren, 2005). Furthermore, participants are centre to the research in that they produce and then own the data: their drawings stay with them. Participants in Ghana expressed surprise and delight at the fact they had created the end product of the workshop, especially older men and women who had not been to school and had never held a pen before. In a sense, this was an empowering process for them, even more salient than re-addressing power imbalances between researcher and the researched. ‘Power within’ (Rowlands, 1997) is provoked by the process of drawing, and of group discussion, when asking individuals to elaborate on the ways and means of improving gender equality themselves. Supplier staff who worked with women farmers frequently commented on their surprise with how eloquently women were able to express their position, in pictorial and verbal form:

They are smart. And I wasn't expecting them to be that smart. Looking at some of the answers that they give, to some of the questions, how they answer it –they know what they are about. You cannot put the – you cannot like, force things on them. In all, I learned that with a little help, the women can do marvelous things. (Interview with supplier staff member 1).

This revelation chimes with the desire of GALS not to see women as ‘victims of subordination in need of conscious-raising but as intelligent actors who already have aspirations and strategies but need collective and organizational support in order to better realize these’ (Mayoux, 2010: 6). Following ActionAid’s use of visual methods, we too found that ‘there is a feeling of “release”- a sense of wonder at what can be done with just a pencil and a blank page- and there is real joy in many of the images’ (Archer & Cottingham, 1996: 33).

Participatory methods, however, are not automatically empowering if they do not conceive of the rebalancing of power as anything other than listening & literally ‘putting the pen into their hands’ (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Crawley, 1998). ‘Voice’ alone is not enough. If we conceptualise power as ‘everywhere’, inherent in institutions, discourses and interaction (Foucault, 1978) rather than power only being an issue of voice/non-voice (cf. Dahl, 1961), PAR approaches must provoke reflection on such institutions (Crawley, 1998) if they are to be considered a methodology suitable to readdressing power imbalances. The experience of using GALS in Ghana was too short to claim that the workshops achieved this complex and long-term process of individual and social change, but if continued as part of a series of sensitisation workshops could potentially have the impact to do this, as evidenced in similar studies (WEMAN global, 2013; Twin, 2013). The women and men involved often understood that there was not one body or issue blocking their full participation in the supply chain, but a series of structural barriers. They also understood their agency in affecting change: ‘They are willing to change because – you – nobody –sat somewhere, and [said], ‘You should do this, you shouldn’t do that’ (Interview with supplier staff 1), instead they ‘came up with ideas on their own, and you see that they understand the concepts’ (Interview with supplier staff 2).

GALS as a methodology goes some way to breaking down the power imbalances between researcher and researched, given the control the participants have in creating and owning their data. It is also a powerful means of beginning to readdress power imbalances in societal structures, through provoking individual self-reflection. For companies concerned and overwhelmed with the complexity of promoting gender, or any sort of social equality in their supply chain, participatory visual methods are demonstrably a good place to start.

Sensitivity

Group discussions have often been found to be useful for the discussion of sensitive topics (Wilkinson, 2004), and they proved successful in the GALS context too. As each group went through their responses, it often caused much debate, laughter and consternation amongst the other group. This open-reflection was one key draw of the group discussion format, as it allowed participants to check each other's understanding and clarify responses, and generated debate more than would have been possible had other methods been used (Barnard, 2009; Wilkinson, 2004).

Visual methods are renowned for being suited to the discussion of emotional or sensitive topics (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Bryans & Mavin, 2006). In terms of GALS, the symbolic & recognisable shape of the gender 'tree' enabled the group to talk about potentially sensitive concepts such as the division of labor and decision-making, and gendered roles, through unfussy metaphors of roots and branches (Mayoux, 2013; Copeland & Agosto, 2012). In fact, these concepts were co-constructed in the local culture (Huss 2012), as participants included or ignored symbols as they believed necessary to their own situation. This adaptation of symbols underscored the importance of working with local staff, as without their help before the workshop, my understanding of a symbol of cooking, for example, was very different to the Ghanaian symbol used. Drawing in participatory methods helps cross cultural boundaries (ibid) and sensitises researchers to the context they are studying, crucial in the sustainability research area.

Supplier staff present at the workshops commented that the visual methods led to an unprecedented 'opening-up' of participants, who used the diagrams to explain their position on gendered roles on the farm or at home in a non-threatening manner. That is not to say, however, that conflict did not arise. Male farmers in particular were initially confused as to

why they needed to be included in the ‘women’s thing’, but as the translator explained, the innovativeness of the workshop, and the inclusivity of the task, helped draw them into the process. The resulting trees were very hard to ignore, even for those that were sceptical of the workshop: ‘One man, he was kind of, ‘You want us to believe that the women are suffering more than us?’ And the others told him that, ‘But it’s true, that’s a problem’ (Interview with Supplier Staff 2). Men and women in discussion referred to their ‘trees’ to express personal opinions on their roles, even when that included admitting that current behavior was unfair. Men in a number of workshops announced that they were going to begin helping with childcare, and some women told how they were going to save collectively to tide over household budgets in the low cocoa season. In a feedback group after the final workshop, I asked the women’s group if they had found the experience useful. They explained that the most useful aspect of GALS had been the bringing together of men and women to talk about sensitive topics, and to visually demonstrate to the men that women were working extremely hard. Supplier staff too were made more aware of gender divisions of labor, both in cocoa and at home through the visually arresting tool, and are beginning to use the visual data to plan for the next stage of the gender sustainability programme.

GALS succeeds in opening up a dialogue about ‘gender’ because it concentrates on the individual’s role in creating, perpetuating and ultimately changing gendered inequalities (Mayoux, 2013), but it does so in a way that is non-accusatory, open and participant-led.

Inclusivity

Supplier staff were at first cautious, even cynical, about the use of GALS on the cocoa farms. They cited the high number of non-literate farmers as being the main reason for their concern. Once the first workshop had taken place, however, they were won over, enthusing about the interest, energy and vocalicity of participants compared to past research experience: ‘Especially

the older people that were drawing. That was to me, that was important. And that they understand what they were doing. For me, I don't think the nice drawing don't matter that much' (Interview with Supplier Staff 2). We saw how the visual method was adaptable for many levels of literacy & penmanship, and how this meant it was an inclusive method regardless of age, gender, ethnic group or income level (Mayoux & Chambers, 2005; Archer & Cottingham, 1996). In facilitating a group using visual methods it is made further inclusive by always encouraging the least powerful to speak first, and by ensuring everyone has their say (Mayoux, 2010), and the fair use of the pens (no one hogging a particular colour!)

Use of symbols for work tasks and items purchased created a 'universal language' (Mayoux, 2012: 334), again enabling participants of different backgrounds and even different local languages to participate (Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Stiles, 2013; Liebenberg, 2009). My lack of local language skills, although aided by a translator, was not always a problem while using symbols & drawings, as I could understand and 'read' the images as well as the participants, most of the time. The diagrams and drawings were retained by participants, meaning they had a physical reminder of the experience that they could automatically re-read and re-visit regardless of literacy skills.

Of course, inclusivity within the group is only as good as initial sampling (Mosse, 1994). Again, working with local supplier and NGO staff meant we were able to attract a fairly representative sample to work with, although the percentage of women-owned and shared land in our sample was higher than average, probably because of the nature of the workshops. On reflection, more could be done to bring in the 'onlookers' (mainly women with children) present at each workshop location, who often joined in group discussion but felt unable or unwilling to join in the visual activities. There was a problem, however, in that these women were not members of the cooperative and so were not deemed of interest to the evaluation of the gender programme. This exclusion is problematic, as our data showed that even women

who are not officially members still do important work on the cocoa farm (McCarthy for Twin UK, forthcoming). This group of women need to be reached as stakeholders, and would be a recommended group for any future participatory stakeholder engagement for sustainability programming.

Credibility

Proponents of participatory methods often claim that their approach increases the validity of the data collected, and of the analysis undertaken thereafter (Chambers & Mayoux, 2005; Chambers, 1997). The argument is that since the raw data collected emanates directly from those who we seek to research, analysis that follows will give a more valid, or credible, picture of reality. There is, however, a problem of interpretation of what is said or drawn during participatory workshops (Campbell, 2001; Mosse, 1994). How do we stay close to the original first-order concepts of participants, whilst translating their stories for academic or business audiences? Or, as Opie asks, ‘What does it mean to write critically but less authoritatively when the act of writing is so strongly associated with authority and centrality?’ (1992: 24).

While research philosophy, especially that influenced by feminist epistemology, continues to debate such questions, as with any qualitative method there are means to ensuring credibility. With participatory visual methods researchers cannot erase themselves from the process of collecting, or analysing data. Too little involvement at the drawing stage can mean that drawings become meaningless to the viewer once back in the office (Meyer, 1991). Too much involvement and drawings become dominated by the researcher’s own examples in the workshop. We found in Ghana that we had to repeatedly emphasise that each person’s household experience would be unique and different to ours, and to their neighbours’. Triangulation of methods, however, offers a means of ensuring credibility in the research

(ibid; Pink, 2004; Copeland & Agosto, 2012). Pairing participatory visual methods with the group discussion not only allowed for key themes to emerge and be debated, but allowed us to cross-check the diagrams with the accounts spoken in the group. Observation, even on a simple level of making a note of where men and women sit, who is allowed to sit in certain chairs, and body language, all reveal much about gender roles and complement the stories told visually and verbally. Triangulation can also occur through sharing data with others (such as supplier staff present in Ghana, or colleagues at home) to check if the resultant analysis of diagrams largely correlates, as is the norm with content analysis (Pink, 2004).

Second, different levels of analysis open up when utilising participatory visual methods. The drawing itself not only holds content about the participants' experience, but can be analysed for their composition, skill, detail, colour choice and so on, as is popular in psychology studies (Huss, 2012). We did not do this in the Ghana case study, but simply by looking at the level of skill in the drawing between male and female participants we could infer a history that denied equal education to women in the past, and matched with discussions later held. Further, the GALS focuses on the individual as an independent actor possible of agency, but also of having a part in the gendered system. The utility of drawing in a group is that individual experiences can be shared and compared, and then contrasted with other findings from different groups in different areas. Thus, the individual accounts build a picture of a social group, allowing for another level of analysis (Stiles, 2013) and adding to a credible account of social life.

Third, visual methods can 'enhance our understanding of sensory embodiment and communication, and hence reflect more the diversity of human experiences' (Prosser & Loxley, 2008: 1). GALS' use of drawing crosses linguistic barriers to participation. Thus, I refer back here to the inescapable benefit of participatory visual methods, in that in reducing power differentials between researcher & researched, in including a wider range of views and

getting closer access to poorly represented groups, and in adopting a method that can approach topics sensitively and without imposing Western cultural values (Liebenberg, 2009), GALS produces data that is arguably more credible and reliable than competing research methods (Mayoux & Chambers, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The use of participatory visual methods as described here is beneficial to any topic of research that requires first-hand data on potentially sensitive topics. I have explored the current use of, and elements of visual in organization studies (Davidson et al., 2012) and elaborated on their solid presence in development circles. However, participatory visual methods remain largely absent from CSR and sustainability research. I have argued here that this is unfortunate, given that social sustainability research often seeks to connect with the more marginalized, less-powerful stakeholders of businesses and of society at large. The GALS project described here allows for descriptive quantitative and qualitative data to be collected on the experiences of men and women working in the supply chain, at the same time as opening up new avenues of knowledge on how and why this might be (Kaul Shah, 1998) and feeding into the future planning of corporate sustainability programmes.

Gaventa & Cornwall rightly point out that one of the biggest questions hanging over the use of any participant methodology is ‘how do we understand the dynamics of power when participatory methods are employed by the powerful?’ (2001: 77). Participatory visual methods, such as GALS, could easily be used as a tick-box exercise by companies, NGOs or aid agencies alike, which erodes the four benefits to the approach as outlined in this paper. As such, the operationalization of participatory research requires sensitivity, time and resources to commit to the GALS approach, or similar (ibid).

I have explored my experience of GALS in this paper, but the concept of ‘gender’ could be replaced by any number of sustainability issues needing research and evaluation.

Participatory visual methods could be used not only with women in supply chains, but with suppliers themselves, home-based staff, even children who are connected to the supply chain and are at risk of homeworking or child labour. The approach is adaptable to particular research needs in sustainability, working well also in factory settings, plantations and so on. PAR approaches have been used successfully with women in order to investigate the effects of climate change on, and opportunities for mitigation by, women by a number of development agencies (e.g. Mitchell *et al.*, 2007; Mary Robinson Foundation, 2012). PAR approaches offer the dual benefit of not only generating data, but introducing new ideas and concepts to participants in a non-threatening, non-Imperial manner. This has been shown to be useful when discussing gender, but could be just as effective when faced with any cross-cultural ‘sticky’ areas, such as resource scarcity, or health and safety standards.

As the onus falls further on companies and their suppliers to ensure a move towards sustainable working, in all senses of the word, participatory visual methods offers a fresh approach to gathering data and also opening up conversations on sensitive, cross-cultural issues such as gender equality. It does this through breaking down power differentials between the researcher and participants and including a wider range of participants in an inclusive, largely non-verbal manner. These components contribute to rich data, which is arguably more credible and reliable than alternative methods currently employed by much sustainability research.

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Timing	Activity
10 minutes	Introductions, outline of aims, permissions to photograph & video, confidentiality issues.
5 minutes	Explanation of tasks
10 minutes	Household drawing
60 minutes	Individual Gender Tree drawings
15 minutes	Break with refreshments
30 minutes	Single-sex group discussion
30 minutes	Whole group discussion
15 minutes	Feedback and sum-up
5 minutes	End of the day, final photographs & thanks

Table 1: Breakdown of GALS Workshop

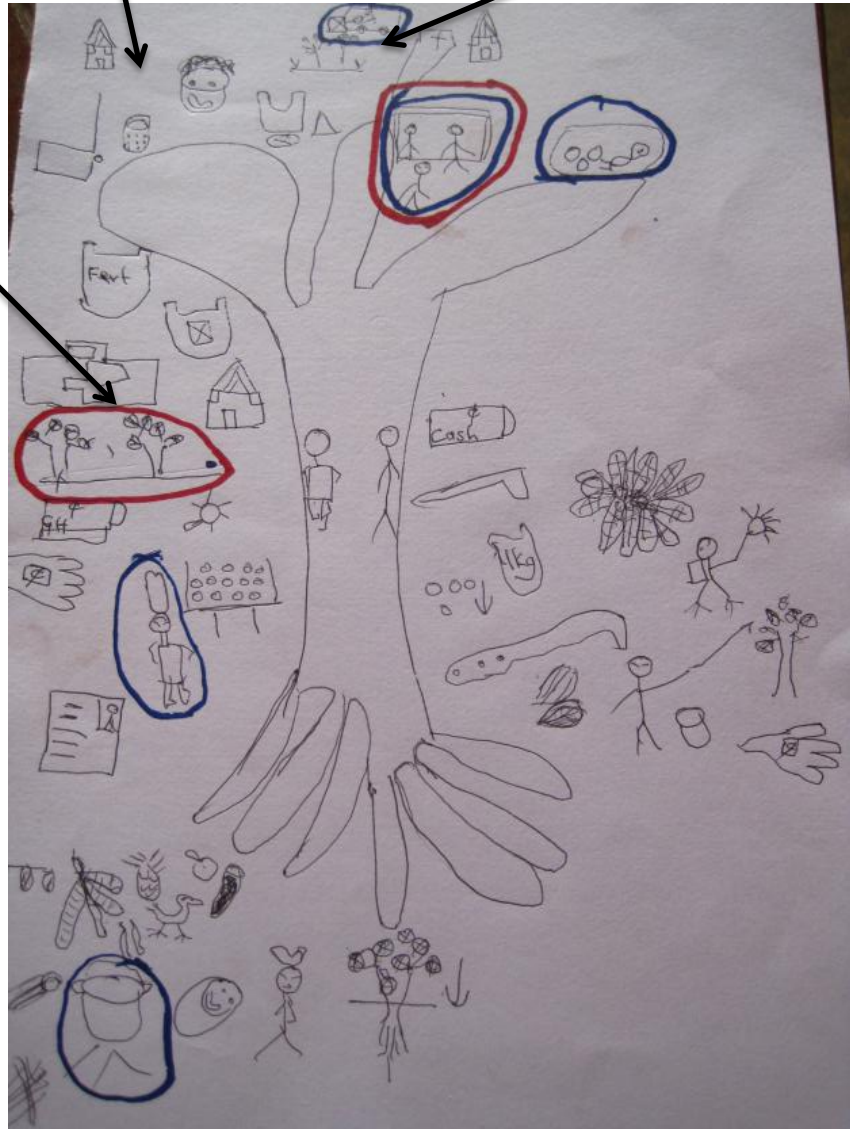


Figure 1: Female Participant's Household Diagram. Ashanti Region, Ghana.

Expenditure
 The woman buys medicine, fertilisers and pesticides, clothing, hairdressing and accessories.

Expenditure
 Income is spent jointly on school fees, funeral attendance, transport, housing and land. But the man has overall control of the finances and purchases the food.

Ownership/control
 The woman is the Kuapa Kokoo member and owns part of the land. She has also received a loan, which she spent on land and school fees (circled in red).



Labor
 The man does most of the cocoa work, including the selling of the cocoa beans

Labor
 The woman does all the household chores, as well as rearing fowl & selling cassava, pineapple, aubergine & onions. She is in charge of drying cocoa, and fetching water for the farm.

Figure 2: Gender Tree and summary explanations drawn by Female Participant in Western Region, Ghana.