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ROLE

STATE-LEVEL DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS, WATER AND SANITATION

The mayor had been quite enthusiastic about your visit to the City of Urbana. Mayor Zambene was eager to invite a multi-stakeholder group from local government, the private sector and civil society organizations to meet you so you can hear from them directly on the water and sanitation conditions in Urbana. You insisted on meeting with groups whose views may differ from that of the local government or the mayor as you wanted to assess whether there is potential for collaborative action on the new program.

The President of Oknevia had given you direct responsibility to design and implement this new program to create community savings and loan associations. This program aims to build sustainable initiatives at the local level. The President also wants to demonstrate how gender inclusive decision-making processes should be integrated into development work. Local government needs to work with local communities to identify which sector interventions are given top priority. The community savings and loan associations are a mechanism for increasing access to funds from the national government. But the local government and the local community get to decide which sector needs financial support – it can be education, health, or infrastructure. This is their choice. The local government proposal must justify why this sector is given top priority for funding. In the case of the city of Urbana, the mayor informed you that their priority is water and sanitation. You would like to hear more from the multi-stakeholder group. And to do this, you want to sit down with all these parties, to gauge for yourself if the divisions you have heard about can be overridden by their willingness and ability to cooperate.

As Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation, you have 20 years of experience in the sector. You began your career as a civil engineer for your local government in a medium-sized town in the central part of Oknevia where water scarcity was a perennial problem. Frustrated with the slow pace of work in government, you left government to join the private sector – working your way up the corporate ladder to become Vice-President of a large engineering company working throughout Oknevia drilling for water and designing and constructing sanitation facilities. You rejoined government a decade ago when the country was at a crucial turning point. The President then had invited you to head a government initiative to create a blueprint for a medium-term plan to modernize water and sanitation in the country. It was also at this time that women's rights were at the center of the national dialogue, and women finally received the right to vote. You wanted to be an active participant in the country's work to attain economic growth while promoting gender inclusive dialogue and development planning.

As you reflect on what will constitute a successful dialogue with the multi-stakeholder group assembled by the Mayor of Urbana, you are going to assess the following aspects of the proposed program:

- a. Will there be a potential for collaboration among the various stakeholders?

- b. Is there agreement that clean water and improved sanitation is the priority need?
- c. Is there a plan for integrating gender inclusive decision-making processes in planning and implementing the program?
- d. Is there a fair and transparent process for program implementation?

You will be a good listener at this meeting but will ask direct questions of anyone to uncover hidden assumptions or explore potential disagreements on issues. You will serve as the convenor of this meeting and will keep the meeting informal, without the bureaucratic formalities of government- led ‘stakeholder consultations’ of the past. You will be particularly observant of how roles of men and women are perceived in this culture and will call the attention of all whenever appropriate to expose any actions that prevent men and women to respect one another’s views. You are not willing to compromise on what will constitute success – the community must be able to do the substantive work (to create the community savings and loan associations and build community water taps and toilets in households) while at the same time promoting gender inclusive decision-making behaviors throughout program planning and implementation. For you, there are no half-way measures.

While your aim is to have everyone in agreement, you must see evidence by having this group vote on whatever provision you deem necessary. You are skeptical of the fuzzy notion of ‘consensus’. You want to know who is for and who is against, and why. If necessary, you are willing to break any tie vote among the six with your own vote.