

## HOW TO FACILITATE PARTICIPATORY EXERCISES

The most important thing to remember about being a facilitator is that you are not a teacher. Your role is to help or “facilitate”.<sup>1</sup> In planning your communication, recognise that command and control, and participatory processes go hand-in-hand. Human rights demand participatory processes in which all stakeholders buy in and contribute to solutions. Participatory processes are valuable in all stages of an emergency programme cycle – from rapid assessment to monitoring and evaluation - but such processes need to be integrated and balanced with command and control procedures during rapidly changing events that require quick decision-making and action.

With that in mind, when leading focus group discussions, doing a ranking or pocket chart exercise, a KAP survey or using any rapid assessment or monitoring and evaluation tool, your role is to help affected individuals and community groups to:

- Identify issues of importance to them.
- Express their problems.
- Analyse their problems.
- Identify possible solutions.
- Select appropriate options.
- Develop a plan to implement the solutions to which they identify and agree.
- Evaluate the outcome of the plan.

## So you must not:

- Give information: instead, allow the group to find out information for themselves (although, it may be that in the initial days after a disaster, people will be seeking/needing information).
- Tell the group what they should do. Let them discuss and agree on what they should do and how they would like to do it.
- Make assumptions about what the right response should be to an activity.

Using participatory methods does not reduce the role of the facilitator in an emergency response situation, but rather redefines it. What you can do is encourage and facilitate community involvement; and create an environment in which the participants can discover information for themselves. In so doing, participants will build the confidence and self-esteem necessary to analyse problems and work out solutions.

As a facilitator, you are not a leader who directs the group to where you think it should go. Instead, you help the group to better understand its own situation and to enable them to make informed decisions on how to improve that situation.

## Keep these important points in mind:

### All participants are equal

The activities in this guide have been developed so that the participation of each group member is considered equally important. The participants must view you as an equal. So you should not present yourself as an authority figure. Information should flow from you to the group and vice versa. By sharing and receiving information, you and the group will remain equal. For this type of information exchange, good listening skills are essential.

### There is no one right answer

This means that there can be many correct answers or results. Decisions made by the group reflect what is right for the group and what the group is prepared to take responsibility for.

### Create the right atmosphere

If your aim is to reach agreement on priorities for activities, or a plan for improving hygiene behaviours and sanitation, participants must be able to work well together. This is why participatory sessions often begin with a fun activity, something to break the ice and make people laugh. You need to make people feel at ease

throughout the planning process. Most cultures have traditional games and songs that can create the right atmosphere and build group spirit.

### Coping with dominant personalities

From time to time the group process may not be able to proceed because one individual wants to control the group's thinking. If this happens, find out whether the dominant individual is a designated leader, or simply a competitive or aggressive person with little or no significant support or influence in the group. Competitive or aggressive persons can either be taken aside and convinced of the importance of the group process, or given separate tasks to keep them busy and allow the group to carry on. If the persons concerned are community leaders, approach them formally or privately – early in the planning phase – explain the process, and try to gain their support. Hopefully, you will convince them that allowing community members to fully and equally participate will result in the personal growth of and better conditions for each participant.

### General guidance for all activities:

1. Have all the materials for each activity ready before starting.
2. Make sure the materials are large enough to be seen by all participants.
3. Try to limit the size of your group to no more than 40 persons.
4. Make sure that people can talk to one another easily. Use a circle where possible.
5. Begin each new session with a warm-up activity such as a game or song. Provide refreshments where possible.
6. Go through each activity one step at a time and follow the instructions in the guide.
7. When giving the group its task, use the exact words provided for this purpose.
8. Encourage and welcome the input that individuals make. Remember, there are no wrong answers.
9. Facilitate the group, do not direct it.
10. Try to encourage the active participation of each participant. Be careful not to find fault or make critical comments when you respond to people.
11. Take into account the participants' literacy level and work out ways in which they can keep record of what is discussed and agreed.
12. Have the group keep the materials and records in a safe place.
13. At the end of each activity, ask the group members to evaluate the activity on the basis of what they have learned, what they liked and what they did not like.
14. At the end of each session, congratulate the group members on their efforts and explain briefly what will be covered at the next session.

15. At the beginning of each new meeting of the group, ask the group to review what it has done so far and the decisions it has taken.

## Footnotes

- 1 Adapted from Sawyer, R., et al., 'Part I 'Introduction to the PHAST Step-by-step Guide' as cited in *PHAST Step-by-Step Guide: a participatory approach for the control of diarrhoeal disease*, WHO, Geneva, 1998, p. 88.