

Sponsoring agency (SA): The organisation initiating a health or social programme within the community, and which has organised the participatory learning and action workshop.

Course Overview

Empowering Communities: Participatory Techniques for Community-Based Programme Development is a two-week course (suggested length) for the staff of organisations aiming to encourage community participation in health or other related sectors. Participants are ideally those who work directly with the communities involved in their programmes. This course trains participants to work with communities to improve their well-being through the use of participatory learning and action (PLA). While the course focuses heavily on the health sector, the skills that are taught can be applied to other development sectors, such as education or environment.

PLA is a process enabling community members to...

- Analyze their needs;
- Identify possible solutions and resources to meet those needs; and
- Develop a plan of action for implementing their solutions.

This process takes place through a PLA workshop which is conducted in a community. Why use PLA within programmes?

- Because when communities identify problems themselves and come up with their own solutions, the results can be both spectacular and sustainable.
- PLA allows communities to discover their own wealth of knowledge and capacity for problem identification and problem solving.
- The solutions that the communities identify are more likely to be feasible and implemented than those that have been created by outsiders.

PLA is based on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and other participatory approaches. In its traditional form, PLA has been used to empower communities to identify problems and solutions in all sectors. The authors of this manual recognise that course participants will have to work within the pre-set agendas of their sponsoring organisations, which will have specific objectives in different areas of health and related sectors. Therefore, most of the course's classroom learning activities use examples from the health sector. For the

field experience, participants will work with a project in the health sector or another related sector (e.g., water and sanitation, education, gender).

This hands-on course uses *experiential learning* to help participants become proficient in participatory programme development. Course participants learn by discovering concepts and practising skills. They are also asked to draw heavily on their experiences for many of the learning activities. The course covers...

- The participatory programme development process;
- The attitudes, behaviours and skills necessary to be a successful PLA facilitator; and
- The specific techniques that can be used.

Course participants will learn how to use these approaches for planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Approximately half of the course focuses on the participatory programme development process; attitudes, behaviours and skills of the participants; and classroom practice of various PLA techniques. The other half is devoted to facilitating and/or observing a PLA workshop in the field, which will take place within the context of an existing community development project. For this reason, the field experience may occur at any time during the training, depending on the project's schedule. The course finishes with the presentation of field experiences and participants' reflections on how to successfully integrate these new skills into their work.

The authors recognise that PLA is a continually evolving field, with new methods and techniques being discovered all the time. Therefore, the authors will also continue to adapt the content of this course according to the latest innovations. The trainer will also need to adapt the course according to the different field experience sites and the participants' needs and expectations.