

## TRAINING MODULE TWO

This Module will look at the importance of engagement and decision making.

### **Engagement:**

Engagement just means *to take part in*.

The aim of community development is for everyone in the community to be involved in community processes. Engagement is therefore an important part of empowerment. Community projects should be delivered BY and FOR the benefit of the community WITH the support of the community. It is also the process by which plans for change are translated into action by participants.

### **Encouraging and Supporting Engagement:**

Despite the difficulties of achieving genuine engagement, there are a number of ways in which engagement can be encouraged and supported. Encouraging people to take part is an important part of the community development process. While some people will not participate, a deliberate decision not to participate is those people's right. This is very different from someone not participating that results from a lack of opportunity or support to do so. This is a failure of a system.

Some of the factors that influence engagement are as follows:

#### **1. people will engage if they feel strongly motivated by the significance or importance of the issue.**

Self determination of issues and activities is very important to ensure a strong sense of community engagement. e.g. After the initial community development training a group of men decided that access to clean water was the major problem in their village, so 12 of them got together and dug a well. With this they were then able to set up a business growing vegetables. It is their well. They dug it. They own it. They will look after it properly because their income producing business relies on it. That is community development in action!!

Later on we will be looking at how to do a Needs Assessment. This will give people an opportunity to identify the needs of their community. The process of encouraging participants to survey and review the range of options to be involved in is an essential part of community development. Needs and priorities will naturally emerge from this process, rather than being assumed or imposed externally.

#### **2. people must feel that their engagement will actually bring about change.**

The community may have defined jobs as the major priority, but if people do not believe that community action can make any difference to local employment prospects, there will be little encouragement to take part. It is necessary to demonstrate that the community can do something that will make a difference and that will result in meaningful change. (How to do this will be discussed under the Open Door Plan.) People must also feel that their actions will make a difference on an individual level, so start small. Start with something achievable. Success will give people confidence to look at what else needs doing.

#### **3. different levels of engagement must be acknowledged and esteemed.**

Too often community engagement is seen as an involvement in committees and formal meetings, but setting out the chairs for a meeting is also an important community role to uphold.

#### **4. people need mentoring and support to encourage engagement.**

If you are organising a community meeting and want employed people to participate, do not make consultation during working hours. If you want women to participate do not make consultation at mealtimes.

#### **Questions to Consider in encouraging and supporting engagement:**

We should take active steps to ensure people feel that their *taking part* is genuinely valued as we can not assume that this happens automatically. It often takes individual effort to ensure that participants have a strong sense of self esteem , worth and value. We should all be encouragers and be involved in giving feedback as participants exercise their own control over their situation.

#### **Making Decisions:**

The way decisions are made is an important part of participation. People must be kept informed every step of the way, and constant monitoring and feedback is required to ensure people are taking part in making decisions about the important issues. (This is also why conducting a Needs Assessment is so essential.)

Community workers need to be continually checking and evaluating throughout the process to ensure people are actively exercising their rights in regard to management, governance and direction setting. This should also extend to taking part in the daily decisions about how activities are undertaken.

Participants will often need confirmation and assurance that their decisions ARE actually being acted on – nothing destroys engagement quicker than inaction or inactivity on promised areas of concern. Therefore actions and goals should be set that are achievable, able to be monitored, and reported on regularly.

This also includes celebration of successes, and admission of shortcomings. Often these shortcomings can provide helpful insights and learnings to be incorporated into future decision making processes.

#### **Conclusion:**

Making a real and significant difference to the circumstances surrounding them is at the heart of community development. Engagement activates changes and brings ideas, plans and strategies to life. It is a dynamic partnership between the community worker and the local community to discover the often unrealised and untapped resourcefulness that already exists within the community, and harness it in new ways to bring about effective change.

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### FACILITATORS NOTES AND FEEDBACK

<u>Concepts and Ideas</u>	<u>Notes &amp; Questions</u>
<p>1. Name 4 conditions that are important to encourage people to engage</p>	
<p>2. What do you think are the major conditions in your community that will influence people to participate in community planning ?</p>	
<p>3. What assistance do you think people may need to increase their engagement ?</p>	
<p>4. What help might you need to ensure people are able to engage?</p>	