

FACILITATORS' GUIDE

Community Involvement in Education
Kit

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Introduction

This Guide is written for facilitators of effective action-oriented meetings who are working with children in primary schools, their families, parents and guardians, and members of the community surrounding the school. The guide is written also for action oriented meetings with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), School Management Committees, teachers, Community Development Workers, local government officials, education managers and all those who are committed to improving the links between the community and the school for quality learning.

What is Community Involvement in Education (CIE)?

Community Involvement in Education (CIE) is part of UPHOLD's integrated Education Strategy. CIE strategy is centred around the concept that, "It takes a community to raise a responsible child; "and that, "children are a Social Capital to Society". It encourages parents/communities to actively participate in their children's learning in schools by visiting schools to monitor hygiene and teaching/learning in the classroom, discuss pupils' performance with teachers and provide support to their children's quality learning. It promotes school-community partnerships for quality pupils' learning by encouraging dialogue between parents-teachers, teachers-pupils, schools and community leaders.

What are the objectives of CIE?

- To increase the daily *attendance rates* of primary school students
- To increase *girls' retention* in primary school
- To increase the number of *parents observing teachers* teaching in the classroom
- To increase the number of *parents visiting schools to review pupils' performance*
- To increase the numbers of *parents talking to their children* about delaying sex & avoiding risky behaviours to prevent HIV/AIDS infection.

What are features of strong school-community partnerships?

Meaningful partnership of parents, pupils, teachers, education managers and community members that results in better schools and improved pupil performance. This partnership can best be achieved if all partners are

informed about the challenges and success of the school, understand the benefits of a good quality school, know how they can contribute, and feel a sense of pride and ownership in the school's achievements.

- **Parents and schools who communicate regularly and clearly.** They share information important to pupils' success. Teachers inform families about learning objectives, school programs, discipline codes and pupils' performance.
- **Primary Schools that are well managed.** The School Management Committee and the Parent-Teacher Association are well-run, collaborate well with the school leadership, advocate for the school and are focused on improving pupil performance. They help develop family involvement in school improvement plans.
- **Schools that welcome visits from parents.** Parents and guardians are warmly welcomed at the head teacher's office and in the classrooms. They are treated with respect, chairs are made available for them when they visit a classroom, and the teacher finds time to sit with them and talk about what they have observed.
- **Teachers who are ready to guide and advise parents.** If a parent has concerns about a child, or a child has special needs, the teachers are ready to help with guidance and counselling. Teachers are also ready to talk about ways in which parents can monitor their children's progress and check on their homework. All parents and guardians, even those who cannot read and write well are treated with respect.
- **Parents who support their children's learning.** They talk positively about the value of education, provide them with the necessary school supplies, help children develop good study habits, make sure that the children have enough time after their chores to do homework, monitor TV viewing and after-school activities and supervise regular bedtimes.
- **Schools that are family resource centres.** It provides information and links to public and private agencies, religious, civic and community-based organizations that provide support to families. In these days when many orphans are being raised by grandparents and guardians,

the school can play an important role in linking families to services and community organizations that can strengthen home environments and pupils' learning.

- **Parents and guardians who share their skills and knowledge with schools.** Parents volunteer as classroom aides, assist in field trips, coach sports, help with lunches, monitor school hygiene, such as the latrines and hand-washing facilities, provide teaching aids such as used boxes, seeds, bottle tops, banana fibre, act as resource persons ready to speak to the children on selected topics, help organize school events such as school open days, attend pupils' performances in drama, music and dance and are active participants in school meetings.

Use of the CIE Kit

Who is the Kit intended for?

The primary users of the kit are facilitators of action-oriented meetings who may include:

- Civil Society Organization (CSO) staff members
- Community Development Workers
- Community Participation Coordinators
- Education Managers (Education officers, Inspectors, Head teachers, Centre Coordinating Tutors)
- Teachers
- School Management Committee members
- Parent-Teacher Association members
- Religious leaders
- Local Council members
- Parents

Meeting participants will include:

- Parents
- Parent-Teacher Association members
- School Management Committee members
- Head teachers
- Teachers
- Religious leaders
- Local Council members
- Civil Society Organization (CSO) staff

How will the action-oriented meetings be organized?

The meetings should be organized at least once a month at the primary school, but this may differ from one school to another.

Tips for Organising & Holding Effective Action-Oriented Meetings

We have all experienced what happens when things go wrong. Sometimes people don't show up. Sometimes meetings ramble on until people fall asleep. Sometimes people don't say what they really think, or meetings degenerate into hostility. Some meetings fail before they begin because they have been inadequately publicised or are organized at an inconvenient place or time. Some meetings are disorganized and discourage future participation. Some meetings do not need to be held at all when, for example, a memo is sometimes a better tool for communicating information.

Facilitators need to work with Partners, especially Education Officers and Head Teachers when planning for School-Community meetings that involve parents and other stakeholders. Here are some tips:-

BEFORE THE MEETING

Work with your partners to:

- Set date, place and time
 - Consider a time that is convenient for parents, such as non-working times and days, especially during rainy seasons when parents are busy in their fields.

- Set and share objective for the meeting:
 - Identify ways in which parents can get involved in the school and in improving the quality of pupils' learning

- Invite parents, community leaders and appropriate officials:
 - Use all possible means e.g. notes carried home by children, church announcements, local radio, and local notice boards.
 - Consider how to motive people to attend. Incentives are often assumed to be food, but this may not often be affordable so consider other ways of injecting some fun. How about getting the children to perform a song or a dance at the meeting for the parents and community members?

Make sure you have:-

- Flipchart
- Pictures to share with participants
- Action Planning forms

Decide:-

- Who is going to Chair the meeting
- Who will take notes

☺ It is important to clarify roles and responsibilities before the meeting: Chairperson, Secretary, Facilitator and others.

The Chairperson ensures that:

- attendees have information they need to participate effectively
- venue is suitable and arranged in good time
- s/he leads and guides, but does not dominate, discussions
- s/he fosters the participation of all present
- procedures are followed, including a timely start
- disagreements are mediated well
- **meetings result in ACTION**

Secretary:-

- records minutes and distributes when applicable
- **complete forms on Action Planning for each topic and hands to school management, community leaders and the facilitator.**
- Assists the Chairperson to inform participants of the time and place of the meetings; organize the venue well so that it is well arranged and comfortable; clarify points; and run the meeting.

As a Facilitator:-

- Be informed on the background & issues pertaining to the meeting
- Work within the structures/agenda set up by the Chairperson
- Facilitate the participation of all attendees
- **Ensure that by the end of the meeting, participants have agreed to an Action Plan for each topic.**

DURING THE MEETING

1. The Head Teacher welcomes the parents.
2. The Facilitator presents the objectives of the meeting clearly.
3. The Facilitator uses the flip chart, handouts and monitoring forms to facilitate an action-oriented meeting.

Throughout the meeting, good communication is very important. Remember these simple tips, and you will do very well.

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

- **Thank parents for coming.** Many of them are busy people and they may have walked a long way to attend.
- **Talk with respect.** Some parents may not have had the benefit of schooling, but they have a great deal of wisdom to share and they know the issues and challenges of parenting, their children and their school.
- **Use active listening.** Repeat what has been said and check if you heard correctly. Watch people carefully to pick up non-verbal signs of doubt, disagreement, support or irritation. Observing and responding to such signs can help you head off a situation before it happens. Sometimes it not what people say that counts but the way that they say it.
- **State ideas. Don't tell people what to do.** Parents are more receptive if they can discuss, negotiate different viewpoints and agree.
- **Facilitate participants to identify their own solutions.** Don't push your own solutions.
- **Value active participation and contributions.** Encourage everyone to share opinions and solutions. Help parents share stories and testimonies, especially positive ones. These stories are powerful and should be shared with others.
- **Summarize the final agreements in the Action Plan, so that everyone leaves with the same understanding of what needs to be done. Action Plans should be REALISTIC, ATTAINABLE by the Parents and Community. IT should reflect SIMPLE ACTIVITIES the parents/communities have decided to do to improve their children's learning. Activities DO NOT necessarily need to have MONETARY IMPLICATIONS on parents/communities.**

AFTER THE MEETING

Here is a checklist that helps make sure the job is finished properly:-

- Were the objectives met? Did all participants leave feeling like their presence and participation had been valued?
- Is the date for following up on Action Plans set?
- Did you debrief with the Chairperson? Did you share thoughts on what went well and what could be improved for future meetings?
- Is the Secretary is satisfied with the minutes? Are there any points for clarification from you?
- Are copies of the Action Plans left with the school office, community leaders and you, to deliver to the Regional Office?
- Did you write down any stories that came up to encourage other parents to get involved in supporting their children's learning in schools?
- Now you can reflect on your own performance as a facilitator. What did you do well? What will you do better the next meeting?

Materials and Tools in the Kit

This Guide is to help you effectively run an action-oriented meeting. During the meetings, you will use a flipchart that addresses key issues in CIE.

The front of each card has pictures to stimulate discussion as you ask parents to describe what they see in the picture. Parents are also very happy to share their ideas when you ask what they think should be done to improve the pictures or situation affecting their children's learning

The back of each card suggests steps for introducing the topic, initiating discussion and facilitating action planning. Some include role plays.

The role plays are designed to illustrate points of discussion. To facilitate role plays, either prepare two participants before the meeting and ask them to present the role play, or simply read out the roles and ask for volunteers from the audience. This technique usually works best if the actors do not have too much time to prepare.

After the acting, it is very important to process the role play. Ask the actors how they felt while acting in their roles. Did they find that the words came easily? Did they feel comfortable acting their parts? Would they like to share any more ideas with the audience? Then ask the rest of the participants what advice they have for people who find themselves in situations similar to those shown in the role play.

Picture handouts...

Monitoring forms...

Conclusion

Facilitating Action-Oriented Meetings is an important way of contributing to the work of improving children's learning and performance at school. A child who knows that he or she is surrounded by the love, care and protection of a family, a school and a community grows up to become a secure and responsible person, able to meet the struggles of the world with equanimity and to walk confidently towards a bright future. For your part in this, we thank you.