

Who is able to take part in community activities?

Why use this activity?

This activity helps us to think about ‘participation’ (taking part) in community activities, from the perspective of different groups of people, such as older people, people of different ethnicities or people with disabilities. While communities may think they are representing these groups of people in activities and decisions, often such people have not been consulted or included. This activity helps us to see that for some people participation can be very difficult. It also helps us to think about how we can give everybody the opportunity to meaningfully take part in community activities.



A brief description

Everybody in the group is given a role – a description of a person they need to pretend to be. This description includes details that help people to imagine what it is like to be the person whom they are pretending to be. They stand in a line at one end of the room or meeting area. The facilitator reads out a list of community activities, and people move forward a number of steps, depending on the extent to which their role would be able to engage and participate in the activity. The activity ends with discussion about who is unable to participate and why, and what could be done to help everybody take part.

You will need

A large meeting area or room.

Explaining the words we use

Participation - taking part in an activity. This means much more than just being physically present. It means being able to fully hear and understand what is happening, and being given the opportunity to fully take part by speaking, and being listened to, or undertaking other actions the activity may include.



Timeline

Allow an hour for this activity.

Examples

- Sara is 30 years old. She was involved in a serious car accident last year. Since then, she has been unable to walk, and uses a wheelchair to get around. She is always invited to community meetings and events. However, the community centre - where most activities are held - has steps leading up to the entrance, and very narrow doorways, which mean that it is difficult for her to attend in her wheelchair. Last week an important local politician came to visit her village. She wanted to see him but there were so many people present, she couldn't see anything through the crowd. The politician asked people what their biggest needs were, and what they would like to see happen in their community. Lots of people were given the opportunity to talk, but the politician didn't even see Sara, hidden at the back of the crowd.
- Edgar is an elderly man. He is unable to walk far without his knees being very painful. He wants to join in community activities but is often not told about things that are happening. Sometimes he finds out at the last minute, but may not be able to walk the distance to where the activities are taking place. Also, meetings are often held in the evening, when he is afraid to leave the house. When he is able to make it to meetings, he feels embarrassed to speak because he is not as educated or knowledgeable about modern things as the younger people are. He is never asked to contribute and so tends to keep quiet, listening to what other people say.
- Theresa is 40 years old. She has grown up in a community where women do not usually speak in public. She would like to take part in community activities but is worried about what people will think of her if she attends and tries to speak. She has many ideas about how she would like her community to move forward, but the thought of speaking in front of a group of people makes her feel very nervous.
- Michael is 16 years old. He always tries to attend community and church meetings, but often sits at the back and doesn't take part. He thinks that the front rows are reserved for older people. He feels that young people's views aren't listened to, but he doesn't know how to change this. Whenever people are given the opportunity to speak at community meetings, he always puts his hand up to speak, but is always ignored by the person chairing the meetings.



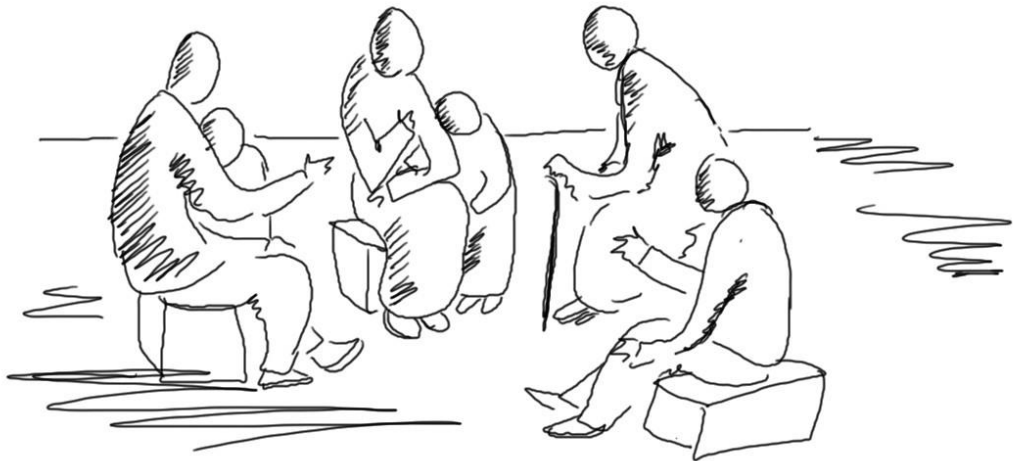
What to do

Preparation

- Decide upon ten 'roles' that you can give to people. These should all be groups of people that exist within your community. Here are some suggestions:
 - young girl
 - teenage boy
 - blind person
 - church elder
 - school teacher
 - widow
 - male farmer
 - female farmer
 - older male
 - older female
 - person from an ethnic minority
 - person who is unable to walk
 - person who is unwell
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- For each 'role', prepare information that will help people imagine - as much as possible within the limits of this activity - what life is like for the people they are imagining to be. You could describe things such as their daily activities, what challenges they face, how other people speak to them, etc. See the box above for some examples and the type of information you might include.
 - You could also ask the group to suggest roles at the beginning of the activity, but ensure they are people who may not normally feel included.
 - Prepare a list of community activities that you will read out to the group. Here are some suggestions, but ensure that you choose ones that are relevant to your context:
 - a community meeting is called to discuss conflict. It takes place at 10am, Monday morning in the church hall.
 - an NGO visits to carry out a needs assessment. This involves the NGO walking around the village speaking to people.
 - a district leader visits and wants to speak with the community about how they are coping with a drought. The meeting is held 3pm under the large tree where meetings take place.
 - the local water committee calls a meeting to discuss the fees for using the village borehole. This is held at 2pm, Saturday, in the school yard.
 - a meeting to discuss how communities in the area can become better prepared for disasters. This is held at 12 noon, Wednesday in the neighbouring village.

Carrying out the activity

- Start by explaining to your group what will happen during the activity. Explain that everybody will be asked to pretend that they are somebody different, and that they have to imagine how easy or difficult it would be to take part in activities if they were that person.
- Explain what you mean by 'taking part' or 'participation'. This doesn't just mean attending the activity - although that is obviously an important part. It also means being able to contribute to the discussion - having opportunities to speak and be listened to.
- If there are a lot of people, you could divide them into small groups of two or three people and give each group a role.
- Ask people to stand in a straight line at one end of the room or meeting area.
- Read out the first activity. Ask people to think about how easy it is for their 'role' to take part in that activity.
- If people think that it would be very easy to take part if they were the person they are pretending to be, they move forward two steps. If it would be quite easy, they move forward one step. If it would be difficult they stay standing where they are.
- Then read out the second activity. Again, ask people to imagine they are the person whose role they are playing. If it would be very easy to take part in the activity, they take two steps forward. If it would be quite easy, they take one step forward. If it would be difficult they stay in their original position.
- Continue to do this with the rest of the activities.
- Once you have finished, ask the group to look at how far some people have travelled compared to others. Ask each of them how they feel and why they think they are where they are.



- Invite people to sit down in a circle for a time of discussion. If your group is large, you could divide people into smaller groups for this discussion:
 - Why is it difficult for some people to take part in community activities?
Think about both practical reasons, such as the timing and location of activities, but also other factors relating to confidence and experience, and how much people are encouraged and enabled to participate.
 - If people find it difficult to participate in an activity, how will this impact their willingness to take part in future activities?
 - Why is it important for everyone to be able to participate in community activities?
 - What could be done to make it easier for everyone to participate?