

## **CO-CONSTRUCTING EDUCATIONAL CONTENT WITH EDUCATIONAL COMMITTEES – AN APPROACH THAT FOSTERS THE CONSIDERATION OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGES**

### **Target audience(s)**

This good practice is directed at any individual or organization developing educational content to promote social change.

### **Contextual setting**

Equitas and its partners have been increasingly seeking to transform power relations between organizations in the North and those in the South by giving more space to localized knowledges and understandings in the human rights education programs they design together. Over the years, Equitas has been solely assuming the drafting and the revision of documents, but it became apparent that, when evaluating community actions and trainings, that 1) participants (communities, facilitators, local coordinators) emphasized relevant commentary on the content of the manual, its strengths, what did not work out so well 2) they raised points of misunderstanding, as well as the lack of adaptability of certain concepts in the local context.

Henceforth, Equitas and its partners deemed necessary to involve representatives of all stakeholders in the creation and revision of manuals as to capitalize on all information that could potentially enrich the educational content and make it more digestible for the learners.



## The issue and the participatory approach

The participatory approach is at the core of the educational committee's operations as much as the human rights education programs developed and implemented by Equitas and its partners. This approach stems from the belief that the goal of education is to build individuals' capacity to shape their own world by analyzing the social forces that have been, in the past, limiting the opportunities available to them. **It is rooted on principles of respect and mutual learning and aims to include the voices of learners in the course of the learning process.** (Equitas, 2011 : 11-12)

In this context, **the instructional design task is to first and foremost create an educational procedure that's conducive to this process and implementation.** There are notably several educational strategies and techniques that can be utilized to design activities enabling participants to experience a participatory learning process. **But what about the application of the participatory approach throughout the instructional design phase itself?** In other words, if we are adequately equipped to understand what the "participatory" workshop entails, how can we ensure that the process leading up to its creation is participatory as well?

Yet, adopting a participatory approach during the instructional design phase is strongly desirable, if not essential. Indeed, **an educational content design process that can build itself from a variety of lived experiences (particularly of those directly concerned) and that fosters the sharing of perspectives and encourages critical thinking will inevitably influence the quality and the relevance of the final educational product.** This will notably nurture a multidimensional and diversified content development that's better aligned with the needs and realities of the learners and better adapted to the social and cultural context wherein it is embedded. Furthermore, a participatory methodology can **also help to shed light on recognizing and bringing to the forefront the voices, the knowledges and the epistemologies of traditionally marginalized groups by patriarchal and colonial systems in educational contents and processes.** Therefore, this methodology is better aligned with the goal raised by Woldeyes and Offord (2018), which is to implement *"a pedagogy of human rights that respects the cultural diversity and the intercultural applicability of social concepts and questions, in a fashion that does not defeat the purpose of human rights itself"* (p.25).

Equitas and its partners are in the process of continuous learning to improve their human rights education practices. There is still a lot to learn in order to make our educational material design practices participatory. One good practice that was effectively implemented consists of **aiming for co-construction of educational content with educational committees.**

## Good practice overview

Equitas and its partners explored educational material design co-construction processes via the organization of educational committees involved at different stages of the “Andandoo Action Guide!” update in Senegal and the Regional Human Rights Training Session in West Africa (SRFDH) 2023 manual update.

**These experiences substantiate that such co-construction of educational content with educational committees presents a major advantage: the inclusion of multiple perspectives, knowledge and experiences in the development of content and processes.**

Indeed, co-construction inevitably entails team design work: the observations on the objectives, the content and the structure of an educational activity are not carried out in isolation and in silo by one actor, but, as much as possible, by several people and in a concerted manner. As soon as several actors are present at the table to partake in the thinking process, the consideration of multiple views becomes possible. Each individual involved in a co-construction process acts simultaneously as the “expert” (by benefiting the group with their own expertise of knowledge and experiences) and the “learner” (by engaging in processes of mutual learning, confrontation of ideas and critical thinking). In this manner, the co-construction of knowledge cultivates curiosity, initiative and confidence, allowing the learner to interact and forsake a strictly passive position.

According to the experiences and diverse identities of each person, this sharing of perspectives fosters the development of thorough, diversified and culturally adapted content. In fact, the involvement of educational committees in the revision and development of material, as much for the “Andandoo Guide!” than for the SRFDH manual, has tremendously contributed to enrich the content, particularly by adding local and regional reference tools and examples (e.g., the inclusion of reference tools such as the “Manden Charter” or “Children’s Rights and the 7 Y in Wolof”). They also contributed by ensuring the presented case studies were related to the realities of the target audience and therefore more apprehensible, as well as ensuring the utilized educational structure and techniques were relevant and adapted to the contexts and targeted groups.

As a committee member who was also a coach during the AEHRE project pointed out, **the learning objectives must be established in advance and shared by all members of the co-construction process, as the participation terms and conditions are not easy to apply.**

When we consider the participatory approach, in which reflections of learners are centered on methods and techniques (skits, group work, case studies, forum theater, roleplay) and specific events (collective action, community action, gatherings, dialogue, forums...), other important questions might arise regarding its application: what do we want our target audience to participate in? Answers, for example, could be related to decision-making, or the nature of a decision and its constraints (opportunities, deadlines, budget, etc.). **Well-defined objectives are crucial for common and efficient content design.**

Several ways of working in educational committees are possible. We will present here a few elements that may be considered, as well as examples of the ways in which this practice took shape throughout the “Andandoo Action Guide!” and the 2023 Regional Human Rights Training Session in West Africa (SRFDH).

## 1 Defining how many people to involve in the committee depending on resources and priorities

Depending on the educational objectives, the context as well as the available resources and time, a committee may consist of only a few members or involve a larger group. A balance should be set between the objective of including a plurality of expertise and perspectives, while simultaneously ensuring efficient functioning for the co-construction work. A smaller group might curtail the number of voices around the table but may potentially allow a faster work pace and in-depth exchanges on certain subjects. A big group enables the inclusion of several ideas, while incorporating more intricate communications and segregation of tasks processes requiring more time and coordination.

### Example

The educational committee assigned to the Andandoo Guide update in Senegal consisted of 5 members, whereas the one for the 2023 SRFDH had 6 members. In both cases, work in smaller groups made room for teamwork and in-depth exchanges, while respecting the quite tight deadlines.

## 2 Establish committee member selection criteria in accordance with the objectives and the needs of the educational project

It is vital to define clearly what are the diverse experiences and knowledges the team wishes to prioritize and capitalize on within the co-construction process. Here are some questions that can provide guidance regarding the selection of people who will join the committee:

Do we need the input of people with specific experience and knowledge on particular processes, topics or approaches?

### Examples ...

#### Educational committee for the update of the Andandoo Guide in Senegal

The Advancing Equality project team wished to integrate human rights educators who not only wielded strong experience in facilitation, social mobilization, human rights and gender equality, but also had been previously involved in former Andandoo projects and therefore were familiar with the previous Andandoo Guide's content and proposed approach. This provided an opportunity for the stakeholder project team of the committee to share their experiences stemming from the previous Andandoo Guide, particularly, the challenges at the implementation level, the clarification of facilitators' role during the action plan drafting process, as well as the importance of reinforcing the guide's revision tools and techniques.

#### Educational committee for the SRFDH 2023

The team wished to integrate human rights educators who were not only actively engaged in the development and the implementation of HRE activities, but who were also alumni of the SRFDH or IHRTIP, thus bringing their lived experience and knowledge as former participants to the discussion regarding the content and structure of the training program.

In order to foster the consideration of multiple perspectives and lived experiences, do we wish to ensure a diversity of identities and social belongings (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) within the committee? Depending on the context and the topic, do we wish to ensure a strong representation of specific social identities in particular?

#### Examples ...

Educational committee for the update of the Andandoo Guide in Senegal  
Reckoning that the Andandoo Guide is centered on the topic of gender-based violence in educational settings, we aimed to ensure adequate representation of women on the committee, which consisted of 3 women and 2 men.

Educational committee for the 2023 SRFDH  
The 2023 SRFDH was focalised on issues of gender equality in the context of various african countries, and as such, we aimed to ensure a diversity of genders and countries within the committee.

### 3 Establish from the start in a concerted manner with the members the objectives of the committee, the roles of each and the preferred mode of operation

The ways of co-constructing material and working in a concerted manner are multifold! No matter what working methodologiness are to be used, **a first good practice consists of first and foremost taking the time to establish in a concerted manner the foundations of the educational committee before initiating the collective work. These foundations comprise the clarification of the committee's purpose and main objectives, the clarification of the members' roles and responsibilities, and the identification of the operating modes of the committee.** Developing a common vision and understanding of these foundations will foster efficient communication within the team and allow to clarify expectations and interpretations from the very start.

#### **Clarifying the purpose and the objectives of the committee may include:**

Identifying the different deliverables that will need to be produced and their objectives within the project;

A discussion on the role of the committee in the production process of these deliverables;

For example, is the role of the committee to review content that already exists, to update it, or to improve it? Is the task to develop new and innovative material? Is the task to better adapt the content to a particular social context or to the needs of a particular group?

### **Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the committee members may include:**

- Establishing collectively “Group rules” to ensure efficient teamwork;
- Establishing how tasks and responsibilities may be allocated in accordance with the respective strengths and expertise of the committee members, as well as their level of involvement and availability. As such, working in teams does not mean that each task should be done collectively at all times. Some tasks can be assigned to specific individuals or sub-groups within the committee. A person can also be designated to oversee the coordination and the sharing of efforts. Thus, it is important to divide the tasks while keeping in mind the workload required for each and the availability of members, while making sure members’ invested time is used wisely to maximize the impact of their involvement.
  - One individual with only an occasional level of involvement of a few hours per month may hold a very specific role within the committee, for example by commenting on certain content only;
  - People who bring to the committee specific expertise on a particular topic may be in charge of revision or creation of the content on this particular topic;
  - Decisions related to structure and content ideas may be taken in larger groups, and then some individuals may be entrusted with the task of producing the material needed.

### **Identifying the operating modes of the committee may include:**

- Validating that the selected methods and tools are suitable for the committee with regards to their utility as much as their accessibility and safety. In summary, it is crucial to ensure all will be able to participate fully in accordance with their situations and contexts;
  - For example, in case of security issues, it may be imperative to choose encrypted software or tools that safeguard privacy when sharing information and documents.
  - In the case of individuals that may have connection issues, in-person meetings may be preferable.
  - If members of the same committee are based in various cities, regions or countries, a virtual or remote work formula that’s accessible to everyone should be necessary.
  - In the event of issues with coordinating member’s schedules and availabilities, it may be beneficial to adopt an asynchronous work formula.
- Ensuring all committee members share a common understanding and comply with the chosen operating mode.

## Examples ...

### Educational committee for the update of the Andandoo Guide in Senegal

A first online meeting was held with all members of the committee to discuss the envisioned goal, objectives, deliverables and members' roles. Once members collectively settled on the operating mode and coordinated the teamwork, they reached an agreement to draft the first outline of a work schedule detailing the steps of the project, as well as a meeting schedule for the next 4 months. It was collectively established that the role of the committee would consist of focusing on questions related to the action guide's structure and content. Aspects of revision, idea-sharing, reflection and decision-making on the needed adjustments and additions would be carried out together. The development of new activities or reference sheets would be assumed individually by certain members of the committee. The implementation of the committee's decisions regarding the educational material and the layout would be then carried out by full-time project member Equitas Education Officer. The main communication tool selected to work collectively and simultaneously on the educational material to update was Google Drive. From the outset of the process, the committee assessed that all members were able to easily access the shared documents on the drive and were comfortable using it. The other chosen communication channel was Microsoft TEAMS for online meetings. This allowed committee members to meet easily, regardless of the distance between their respective locations in Senegal and the staff member based in Canada.

### Educational committee for the 2023 SRFDH

The role of the committee consisted of focusing on establishing what adjustments needed to be made to the SRFDH manual in order to shift its content towards a new topic – gender equality. The manual also needed to be better adapted to the social and cultural contexts of the represented African countries during the SRFDH. One of the committee members, beside from her involvement in content review, also acted as a coordinator in charge of the communications with all members, as well as the prioritization of the tasks and the gathering of all members' comments and propositions. An Equitas staff member assigned full-time to the SRFDH project then handled the implementation of the proposed adjustments, in coordination with the coordinator.

## 4 Foster exchanges between committee members and collective decision-making

Although the sharing and the allocation of tasks within the committee are essential to ensure effective teamwork, planning collective work sessions with the whole committee at key moments of the design process is capital as well. These key moments, for example, may include the following: at the outset of the project, when the objectives and the general structure of the educational material to produce are being established; when it may be deemed necessary to assess the progress of the team, or each time a step of the process is finalized; when diverging opinions or multiple propositions are emerging, thus requiring deliberation to take in account the diverse perspectives and make a collective decision. A just co-construction of content cannot be done in silos and must involve exchanges, discussion and open communication with involved members. To put it another way, it is fundamental to create spaces and opportunities for team discussion and sharing, not only to ensure fluidity and efficient coordination of the efforts deployed by the committee members, but also to allow confrontation of ideas and collective decision-making.

## Examples ...

Educational Committee for the update of the Andandoo Guide in Senegal To review and update the various sections of the Andandoo Guide, committee members would first work individually on a shared document online. All members could easily access the documents shared on the drive and would add comments and suggestions on the content and structure of the former Guide. Working on documents shared online avoided the circulation of multiple versions of one same document and allowed all committee members to see the suggestions and comments of each. Subsequently, once the first round of comments on one version of the material was finalized on Google Drive, all members met online to discuss together the given propositions and shared comments. This nurtured between members direct exchange of ideas and questions, as well as collective thinking and debating on the proposals, and enabled them to decide on what additions and edits were to be applied to the content and structure of a specific section of the Guide. Once these decisions were made, one of the members (in this case, the Equitas Education Officer) was in charge of applying the modifications in a new version of the document. When proceeding to add new activities, other members of the committee could also be entrusted with developing the activity to be integrated. The committee would then restart with a second round of individual comments on the new version, followed by a team meeting, until a final version was ready for layout.

### **5 Plan moments during the process to reassess with the committee if the established operating mode is still suitable and foster flexibility**

To ensure continuous improvement of the work methodology, it is essential to assess as the project is underway whether the operating mode of the committee is still suitable for its members, or if other suggestions or adjustments may be proposed to adjust the approach. A committee that remains flexible and encourages input at all stages of the process will be apt to adapt itself as new needs or circumstances may arise, while nursing the full participation of its members.

#### ***Good practice criteria***

##### **Relevance**

Setting up educational committees to design educational material gives room for co-construction of content and methodologies. Such co-construction of content upholds the participatory approach of education and the principles of human rights education, as it allows an educational conception that sprouts from the sharing of experiences of a diversity of concerned actors, which fosters critical thinking by considering plural perspectives and promoting the diversity of knowledge and voices.



### **Participation**

This good practice nurtures the participation of a diversity of actors in the educational design process and the valorization of multiple experiences as part of that same process. The creation of educational committees may also foster inclusion and participation of groups that have been marginalized by various systems of oppression.

### **Efficiency**

This good practice fosters the creation of richer, more diversified educational material that's better adapted to the needs of the targeted audience or to the sociocultural context in which it is anchored.

### **Adaptability**

The creation of educational committees to co-construct educational content is a practice that can take many shapes and adapt to diverse contexts and settings.

### **Innovation**

This practice encourages innovation in the design of educational material, as localized voices and experiences are better integrated in the offered content. This knowledge of local realities is a great asset to conceive educational material that responds adequately to the needs of the learners.



## Sources

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