

USING A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD, SOCIAL JUSTICE, GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN TANZANIA

Contents

This practice aims to share the importance and effectiveness of using a participatory approach for sustainably promoting and protecting the rights of women, children, people with disabilities (PWDs) and other marginalized groups. It provides a step-by-step process of how to empower individuals and organizations to develop strategic actions for social transformation. By integrating a participatory approach into human rights education and advocacy efforts, individuals, organizations, and communities can work together to achieve sustainable livelihoods, social justice, gender equality and inclusion for all members of society.

Target Audience (s)

This good practice targets human rights educators such as project officers, facilitators and CSOs that design, plan and implement activities that promote human rights, gender equality and economic empowerment. This includes:

- Human rights educators who are challenging existing socio-cultural norms, practices and beliefs.
- Human rights educators who wish to improve their collaboration with others.
- Human rights educators who want to engage project stakeholders and encourage them to take ownership of program activities.
- Human rights educators who aim to build new experiences, skills and confidence to act on their responsibilities while acknowledging barriers and opportunities.



Context and Problem

A participatory approach in human rights education is an empowering process that promotes a more holistic, inclusive and effective learning experience that empowers individuals to become active agents of change in promoting and protecting human rights.

Integrating a participatory approach is crucial for achieving sustainable impact in promoting and protecting the rights of women, children, people with disabilities (PWDs) and other marginalized groups. It is an educational and holistic approach that enables participants to share their experiences and beliefs. It encourages them to analyse and act on their knowledge and experiences. It enhances critical thinking, self-esteem and the ability to work collaboratively with others. It's not only about active participation but also encourages participants to analyze their experiences and challenge existing power relations.

Previously, TUSONGE used an "expert model" approach in programming, not engaging communities in participatory reflection and group discussions. This approach placed the spotlight on the facilitator, with little space for contribution from participants. TUSONGE beneficiaries were not fully engaged in the planning process of the programming. During implementation, some marginalized voices were excluded (e.g., PLWDs, elders, youth). This resulted in poor outcomes and minimal ownership and sustainability of the program. There was a lack of understanding of the community's issues since there was no opportunity for marginalized groups to express their ideas or concerns. Using the participatory approach has minimized conflict and increased the engagement of community members and duty bearers to play an active and meaningful role in their communities.

TUSONGE has witnessed a transformation of behaviour, skills and confidence among its employees, who have continuously integrated a participatory approach in TUSONGE's programs and activities. The participatory approach has included community members and allies in the planning and implementation of community activities. There has been an improvement in community-led monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the progress of program interventions. TUSONGE believes that this approach will lead to more impactful and more lasting social change.



Description of good practice

The guidelines below are examples on how human rights educators can apply a participatory approach to promote social justice, gender equality, inclusion and sustainable livelihoods in their communities. The guidelines are based on TUSONGE's experience in applying a participatory approach throughout their programming.

1 Conducting a needs assessment

A needs assessment is a comprehensive activity that identifies community needs, strengths, resources and priorities. TUSONGE identifies and trains community members who conduct the surveys, interviews, focus group discussions and conduct the data analysis for reporting. The sharing of the findings is done by the community members, enhancing their skills and building their commitment and ownership of a project or activity.

In contrast, when this is done in a non-participatory manner, key stakeholders of a project or activity are not involved in the organizing, decision-making, or coordination of the needs assessment. They may be informed of the results once the assessment is completed but they are denied from playing a key role in the process.

2 Strengthening capacity

Strengthening capacity through training has empowered community members in Tanzania with knowledge and skills to take action within their communities. Capacity-strengthening sessions offer knowledge and skills on human rights, gender equality, economic empowerment and leadership. This enables community members to plan and implement actions that are results-oriented. Training materials are contextualized and tailored to the community's local language and cultural context. This ensures the accessibility and sustainability of the initiative. The sessions use participatory techniques and strategies such as brainstorming, flip charting, group discussions, and energizers to actively engage a diverse set of voices.

This is also done among TUSONGE staff through in-house training. The in-house capacity-strengthening sessions are conducted by TUSONGE staff on a weekly basis. This is as an opportunity to sharpen the organization's skills on key thematic areas related to TUSONGE's values. All activities are followed by a participatory end-of-day evaluation, consisting of drawings, skits or questionnaires. Later, a debriefing session is held to assess the results of the in-house training. It is an opportunity learn and to celebrate achievements.

In the past, capacity-strengthening was done through the expert model. The process was not community-led. Community members had many expectations but were often disappointed as they could not contribute to the programming and express what their needs were. Without a strong understanding of the project objectives, and their role within it, it was difficult to create a sense of ownership among project participants.

3 Participatory Planning

A participatory approach values the experiences of the learner through the principles of mutual respect and reciprocal learning whereby their voices are an integral part of implementation. Consequently, the planning of the activities is participatory when community members and key allies are involved in identifying issues and setting goals (compared to non-participatory approaches, where these are identified by an external actor). In participatory planning, key stakeholders are involved in the planning of activities, the review of the materials, the budgeting of activities, the preparation of materials and in the division of roles.

In Tanzania, this approach has strengthened the capacities of those involved in the process, building their confidence to challenge gender inequalities and gender-based violence. Stakeholders are encouraged to take ownership of the process and of their participation in the project.

Project stakeholders have worked to apply of a trauma-informed approach by ensuring a safe space from harm, discrimination and violence in all forms. They have also been trained to provide support through applying a survivor-centered approach, supporting and project participants who share disclosures of traumatic experiences.

4 Inclusive decision-making

A participatory approach ensures that the decision-making process is inclusive, transparent and accountable. It creates opportunities for marginalized groups of women, children and people with disabilities to amplify their voices and claim their rights. It ensures respect for diversity, where every opinion matters and is valued.

When the approach is non-participatory, it is solely the administrators or managers of a project that decide who gets to be involved and how decisions get made. Too often, this approach overlooks the key voices, perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups.

5 Organizing and implementing community actions

Activities organized by community members, CSOs and duty bearers through local meetings, events, campaigns, forums and dialogues that engage community members and duty bearers to share experiences on the issues and build shared understanding on strategies and actions to address the situations. The actions engage community radio, newspapers and television for wider sharing.

In the past, TUSONGE would share stories directly to media platforms, on behalf of others. Now, through the participatory approach, they ask community members directly to share their own stories, using their own voices.

6 Applying holistic educational approaches

The participatory approach is reinforced by other approaches. Using the participatory approach helped us to broaden our perspective in terms of different inclusive methodologies and techniques that allowed the most amount of people to participate.

Other approaches such as a human rights-based approach, a people-owned process, a women's emancipation approach, a visionary approach, a survivor-centered approach and a disability-inclusion approach, help to include marginalized groups and ensure that no one is left behind.

7 Participatory monitoring and evaluation

A community-led process whereby TUSONGE has trained community members as community-based teams and participatory monitoring and evaluate teams to monitor the progress and document changes and results of the programs. Through ongoing mentorship and coaching with technical support enhance effectiveness and efficient performance. This is conducted successfully through a performance measurement framework and monitoring plans and tools to track progress, challenges, lessons, areas of improvement and adaptation of strategies.

In a non-participatory approach, a project officer or an external resource person would take on this role, instead of having it be a community-led process of monitoring and evaluation.

In Tanzania, when conducting the baseline study for the AEHRE project, community members and intermediaries were involved in the process. The participatory approach encouraged them to take ownership of the process and enhanced their skills in monitoring and evaluation.



Criteria for good practice

Relevance

The practice is appropriate in that it empowers human rights educators and communities by involving them directly in decisions that affect their rights. It raises a sense of ownership among participants in human rights initiatives and actions. It ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are heard and valued in the process of social transformation. In Tanzania, this has increased the number of women who participate in decision-making structures and leadership positions in local government.

The participatory approach values co-construction by recognizing and respecting the dignity and equality of all marginalized groups, including but not limited to women, children and PLWD. It encourages them to organize and implement actions that are sustainable and impactful in the realization of human rights.

Participation

The practice ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are heard, respected and valued in the process of social transformation. It enables community members, CSOs and duty bearers to challenge their own beliefs, perspectives and power relations and seek common ground in collaborative actions and strategies that influence decisions for social change.

Effectiveness:

The practice empowers individuals and communities to understand, claim, and defend their rights. This can be seen through the increased knowledge, skills, confidence, and sense of agency that is fostered among participants. The approach encourages them to use what they have learned to take action and address human rights issues in their communities (e.g., gender inequalities, power imbalances, sexual violence). It facilitates greater accountability by fostering dialogue between rights-holders and duty-bearers. It cultivates a sense of ownership, motivating women, girls, and men to continue advocating for their rights beyond the duration of specific projects or initiatives.

Adaptability:

Participatory approaches are adaptable and can extend beyond human rights education programs. TUSONGE has integrated the participatory approach in other programs that aim to achieve sustainable livelihood through economic empowerment and strengthened leadership for women and PLWD. The approach has enhanced organizational structures and management by promoting inclusive decision-making, engaging all staff and Board of directors. The approach encourages the analysis of the barriers and opportunities within the institution to ensure every person has an active role in the decision-making process.

Innovation:

The practice is innovative as it creates participatory and collaborative solutions to address challenges within communities. Through the guidance of the community, a project initiative may end up going in an unexpected direction, but one that has profound social impact.

TUSONGE has been using social media platforms to include more voices, to be more transparent, to involve stakeholders in decision making, and to encourage them to take ownership of their participation. Digital devices can be a tool to support women, helping them to communicate and connect with one another. Through social media platforms, TUSONGE gets to hear and amplify their stories.

Conclusion

A participatory approach in human rights education encourages commitment and accountability of every individual to be a change-maker in their society. It reinforces the respect of human rights values and principles while challenging perspectives and beliefs that are detrimental to the realization of human rights. It enables us to share our visions, struggles and successes in achieving a just and equitable society.

