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General Tips on Training

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

This manual emphasises a participatory approach to training and mentoring rather than a lecture-based approach. The participatory approach is proposed because it has been shown that people are much more likely to learn and retain more when they participate actively in the learning process and are exposed to practical exercises. The participatory approach is also well suited to a situation where the learners have knowledge about the topic, but the nature and extent of knowledge differs across participants. A participatory approach encourages a situation of mutual learning, where participants learn from each other as well as from the facilitator, and in turn, the facilitator learns from the participants. This is especially appropriate for the GB training exercise, where the government officials who participate know a lot more than the facilitator about the government activities for which they are responsible. Also, participatory approaches are far more fun than lectures!

For the facilitator, a participatory approach means giving up some power and control - and sharing power and control with participants. This can create anxiety, but should, in fact, be liberating as it means that you share responsibility with participants.

PRESENTATIONS

Using a participatory approach does not mean that you, as facilitator, should not provide any inputs. There will be some new knowledge that you will want to share with the participants. For this, you might need to use Powerpoint presentations. To keep the participatory approach dominant, you can:

- Keep the Powerpoint presentations short. You should not have more than about 15 slides in any presentation.
- The 'presentation' should not exceed 20-25 minutes. Most people cannot concentrate on listening for longer than this. Leave an extra ten minutes, as the minimum, for discussion.

- Avoid having two consecutive presentations in the programme. Intersperse more participatory sessions between presentations.

GROUP WORK

Group work is one of the standard tools of the participatory approach. Group work encourages participation of all participants, including those who might be too shy or hesitant to speak in plenary. Group work also provides participants a chance to practise tackling a task by using concepts and knowledge that they gain through earlier sessions. Group work also allows you to cover a greater number of examples in the workshop as different groups can work on different examples.

Group work is not, however, a fool-proof method. Too much group work can be boring for participants. Group work, because it is less structured than plenary inputs, can also make it difficult for participants to extract the key learnings. Sometimes groups lose their way. This can happen because they do not understand the task they have been given, because the task is too difficult, or because they wander off the topic. In some cases, one or more people might also dominate the group work. Finally, report backs are often long and boring, with the lessons to be learnt unclear.

To avoid boredom, try to avoid having two sets of group work one after the other. Try also to create different groups for different sessions, unless a particular group work session builds directly on the previous group work session. Having different people in groups each time means that participants have a chance to learn from a greater number of peers. It also means that if there is a dominant person, the negative consequences are shared among participants.

To avoid groups wandering off their task, ensure that the task you give is clear and manageable. Limit the number of questions you want the participants to discuss in the group. Write these questions up clearly on a board or flipchart, or give them to participants in the form of a handout. Then, as the groups are about five minutes into the activity, walk around to each of the groups in turn checking that they are confident that they understand the task and have a plan for doing it.

Some facilitators favour placing resource persons in each group to guide the discussion. The danger here is that the resource person may dominate. An alternative approach is to ask each group to elect their own facilitator, recorder and rapporteur. To avoid boring and lengthy report-backs, give each group a maximum of two pieces of flipchart paper and tell them that they have a maximum of x (e.g. five) minutes to report back. Enforce this limit strictly in the first group report-backs and the participants will quickly get the message!

In the report back, allow time for other group participants to add after their rapporteur has reported. Also allow time for participants to comment or ask questions about the group reports. In some cases you can do this after each group reports. In other cases it is better to do it after all groups have reported.

You, as facilitator, also need to comment in some way on what the groups report. This should not turn into a long 'expert lecture' by the 'teacher'. However, you need to indicate to participants where you disagree with what they have reported if this will affect how they take Gender Budgeting forward. For example, if you feel that their report reflects gender insensitivity, you need to say so and explain why you feel so. It will also assist participants' learning if you summarise the main similarities and differences you see between the reports from the different groups.

BUZZ GROUPS

In addition to using full-scale groups, you can encourage participation through buzz groups. Instead of allocating participants to three or four groups, you can ask participants to discuss ('buzz') with the people sitting next to them about particular questions or issues. One advantage over this approach when compared to full-scale group work is that no time is wasted setting up their groups. Buzz groups are also especially useful if you want participants to have several small discussions on different questions, interspersed with plenary input. In contrast, groups work better when the task allocated will take some time and requires a more comprehensive feedback from each group.

DAILY SUMMARIES

When planning the workshop, you will have some logic in deciding which sessions to include and in what order. This logic might not always be clear to participants, especially if much of the material is new for them. It is therefore useful to keep reminding participants of the logic so that they are better able to fit their new knowledge together and understand what it means for their own responsibilities. You should first explain the programme at the beginning of the workshop. If the workshop is longer than one day, you can also start each day with a quick summary of what was covered the previous day. The summary should not be detailed. Rather, the emphasis is on showing the logical link between the sessions - reminding participants what they have done so far, and explaining how you will build on that during the coming day.

EVALUATION

As a trainer, evaluations will help you improve your approach. They will also help you understand which sessions work best for different audiences. In every workshop, there will be diverse participants, and some will like one session better while others will prefer another session. If we rely only on those who tell us spontaneously what they like and don't like, we might get a biased picture. Evaluations help us see the overall pattern of responses, so that we can focus on common trends.

If the workshop is for more than one day, it is best to do an evaluation at the end of each day while the sessions for that day are fresh in the minds of participants. Ideally, the evaluation form should ask questions about each and every session, so that you get a clear picture of what works and what does not work. For the evaluation on the final day, you can also include some general questions about the workshop, such as accommodation, venue, food, facilitation style, etc.

The evaluation form (Annex 1) is an example of a relatively quick mode of evaluation. It will take 5-10 minutes for each participant to complete the evaluation, it allows anonymity, and asks for quick scoring and also leaves space for qualitative comments.