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**PRACTICAL GUIDE**

**COMMUNITY MOBILISATION**

Chisinau 2009

This guide provides practical information on the methodology of community mobilisation and a set of methods and techniques for the improvement of the process and is intended to community social assistants.

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The creation and development of community-based social services is a priority for improving the integrated social service system. Community involvement in the development of social services is a community and interpersonal support for needs identification and assessment, planning and implementation of community actions able to provide solutions to different social issues.

Aiming at increasing the society's role in promoting the rights and applying the principles of good governance at community level, social assistants are responsible for mobilising the community potential to support people in difficulty by involving volunteers and creating support groups.

The community is a social-human entity whose members are related to each other by the fact that they live on the same territory and the social relations established among them are constant and consolidated in time. (C. Zamfir, L. Vlasceanu)

The community is one of the main sources of settlement of a large range of social problems. The community has unused resources the mobilisation of which could be useful for those in difficulty. In this regard, it is very important to identify such resources and target them to the beneficiaries. The social assistant is the main actor in the community who works with individuals, groups and the community as a whole. He/she needs to develop certain skills and knowledge to be able to do that.

It is necessary to make a clear distinction between the notion of community development and community mobilisation.

Community development is a problem-solving process, with clear stages that are required for achieving a goal to prevent or solve community problems. This is, in fact, a community facilitation process to assist a community to organise itself and take decisions aimed at solving problems, through participatory processes. This is also a process that cannot be imposed from outside.

Community mobilisation exceeds the limits of community development. The former requires involving the efforts of local public authorities, non-governmental organisations, community groups and members, to achieve sustained social development.

### **I. Community mobilisation: definition, goal, principles**

*Community mobilisation* is a process aimed at solving a problem whereby action is conducted and assessed by community members, groups and organisations from the community on a participatory basis and in a sustainable way.

Through community mobilisation, the members of a community become aware of a problem, realise that the issue is very important for their life and decide together on the necessary steps to solve it and take these steps.

The specialised literature also uses the term *social action*, which refers to community stimulation so that it is active, interested in the situation of all community members. In order for mobilisation not to remain a theoretical concept, but to be applied in practice, it is necessary to involve community members and people with initiative in the action to support the community social assistant. Community mobilisation provides people with the opportunity and support to overcome their problems, to understand their individual problems in a broader context and do something to solve them.

Community mobilization is based on the simple premise that *change is possible*. It uses problem posing as a means to identify and creatively address issues that the local people themselves identify as important or problematic. The community mobilisation enables groups of all ages and circumstances to take action and to achieve their collective goals.

Community problems are very diverse. There are problems faced by a person, family, groups of people and problems that affect the community as a whole. The social assistant cannot solve all community problems independently, because the resources are limited. In order to increase the efficiency of intervention it is good to use **other resources existing in a community:** organisations (school, kindergarten, health centre, church, NGOs, private organizations, etc.) and community members (people with influence, businessmen, opinion leaders, specialists, etc.).

The development of successful community mobilisation activities requires the social assistant to have sufficient knowledge of social assistance, skills of assisting people to analyse their own problems, skills to convince people that there are solutions for difficulties, to support them in achieving their objectives. It also requires enthusiasm, good communication and socialisation skills.

All community members, from the disadvantaged ones to those who have high positions, should participate in the identification and settlement of community problems.

**The goal of community mobilisation** is to involve all resources available in the community to improve the identification and settlement of problems faced by people at community level.

**Objectives of the mobilisation process:**

- Support community members to identify and realise problems;
- Build the skills of the community members to plan and solve problems.

**Community mobilisation is based on the following principles:**

- **The social justice principle.** Usually, the tendency in a mobilisation process is to exclude inequality and oppression with regard to race, gender, sexuality, age, religion, social class, disability or any other forms of social differentiation. Injustice and oppression are complex subjects with roots in social, environmental and economic policy. Community social assistants must know that people can go through difficulties as individuals, but these difficulties can be transformed in common concerns.
- **The principle of skills, experience and understanding** to address community problems. The community social assistant must realise that community members have different skills and experience in solving problems. Being gathered in “expert” groups, under the leadership of the social assistant, they could contribute to the change.

The goal of the social assistant is to find out what is already there, stimulate people to realise their problems and use his/her knowledge in order to bring a change for the common benefit of all community members.

- **The principles of observing the right to self-actualisation.** Everybody has rights, including the right to be heard, the right to define their problems and the right to take actions to solve these problems. People also have the right to define themselves and reject negative stigma imposed on them.

The right of all community members to be involved in changes affecting them, to have a voice and importance in the society where they live are fundamental aspects in community mobilisation. The role of the community social assistant is to encourage and make them trust their own forces, support them in expressing their opinions, ideas, suggestions and in implementing them.

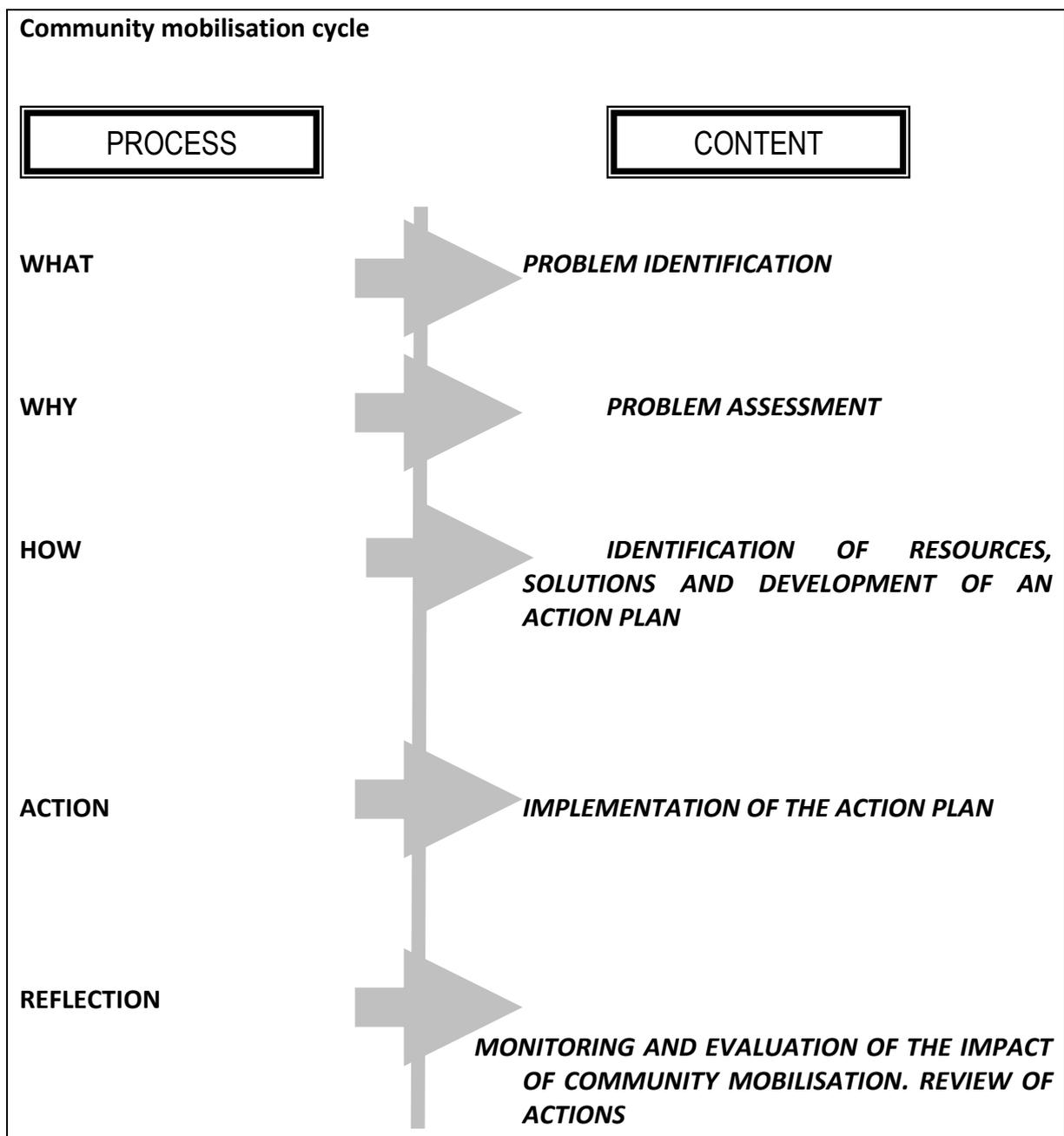
- **The principle of empowerment of people and community.** Working in a team, people can be strong. People who do not have power and influence to overcome injustice and oppression themselves, can solve the problem with support from other people who are in a

similar situation. This process will help people share experience, join their resources and skills, formulate their goals and find solutions. The task of the social assistant is to help people gather, exchange opinions, experience, join their resources and skills to solve problems. Identifying a common goal can provide people with will and strength to address more difficult problems than problems they can address independently.

- The social assistant is not a leader but a facilitator in the work with community. His/her task is to make people take decisions for themselves and hold control on the results of such decisions. The contribution of every person in this process is important.

In the work with community members, the community social assistant appreciates all skills and knowledge equally without making distinctions between their experience and qualification. The task is to work with the group, resisting to the temptation to become the leader of the group.

## II. Community mobilisation cycle



The five stages are in more detail as follows:

## **WHAT/ PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

This is all about discovery, finding out what is happening in community members' lives. What are their issues, problems and concerns? What makes them angry, frightened, happy, or frustrated? What occupies their thoughts? The mobiliser designs ways in which the community members can express all this, creating as comprehensive a picture as possible of what is going on in their lives at present, without interpretation and without at this stage having to worry about what to do with the material. This is often the longest stage of the process.

There are two target groups in every community: community and the authorities in charge for the community. The community goals are to consolidate and promote its own actions, while the goal of authorities is to make the work sustainable in the context of development. The social assistant's objective concerning political or informal leaders, administrators, experts is to determine them to become suppliers and facilitators of support in the community. This activity implies a lot of involvement.

The identification stage implies several steps:

### I. Informing local authorities about the community mobilisation process

Before starting work in the community, the social assistant could inform the authorities of the fact that a process of community mobilisation starts. To facilitate active cooperation, it may also be helpful to obtain a series of documents on public policies, contracts, memorandums and other necessary acts.

### II. Holding a public meeting with community members

The following action carried out by the social assistant is to hold a public meeting (community meeting) with all community members. This action is a phase of community mobilisation cycle and is defined as awareness growth. It is necessary to make sure that all categories of people from the community will attend these meetings: women, men, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, very poor and marginalised people. During the discussions on community problems it is necessary to make sure that the solved problems will be to their advantage. It is necessary to explain that they will solve their problems themselves, and the social assistant, as mobiliser, will assist and guide them.

### III. Identifying and using resources existing in the community in an efficient way

Another important issue refers to the identification and efficient use of resources. Community members must identify and provide their own resources and the social assistant must assist in using them. The goals of community members may differ from the community goals. For example, they want a water installation, a school or a road, others want that this community is stronger, reduces poverty or improves the administration but both can be met through community mobilisation.

### IV. Reviewing priorities

In analysing problems and looking for practical solutions, the community can answer by reconsidering priorities, problems and redefining goals. It is important that the social assistant does not accept passively their first choice, their first goal. The whole community, not just a

community group must participate in decision-making and people with high positions from the community must discuss about priorities for the community.

The community social assistant could mobilise the community to solve any community problems such as: joint caring for children, helping older people, preventing social exclusion and human trafficking, holding activities for young people in their free time, etc.

When the community is prepared and has realised the problem, the unity has been improved, priorities have been set, the following stage starts.

## **WHY / PROBLEM ASSESSMENT**

Once the issues have been agreed it is important to identify the reasons why they exist so that any solutions devised will attack root causes and not just symptoms. Asking 'why?' helps people examine their private troubles in the wider context. It provides them with a deeper understanding of their causes. This is necessary if community members and service users are to go on to create and own positive social change. This stage of the process allows the community members to engage in analysis and to present their understanding of the problems facing them. It also helps to discover the most effective point of intervention; the place at which it is possible to make changes that will affect the final outcomes. This analysis is accepted by the mobiliser, without interpretation once again, reinforcing one of our basic beliefs: *people are experts in their own lives*.

### **I. Establishment of the initiative group**

In order to improve the community mobilisation process, the social assistant should create an initiative group among the most active members of the community.

This group must be well structured if it wants to achieve the objectives. It can consist of 5-7 representatives. It is necessary to elect a leader of the group. Other members can join as well and be involved in the accomplishment of certain tasks. When the group is established, it is important that its members undertake to work together for a while to achieve an objective. It is recommended that this commitment is adopted in written and made public. The members of the initiative group must:

- know and trust each other even when there are divergences between them;
- be concerned with local issues and wish to have better living conditions for them and for their neighbours;
- be aware of the difficulties they can face.

This initiative group carries out the evaluation of problems faced by the community. The Problem Tree technique is proposed to be used to assess the identified problems (see description of this method in Chapter IV: Methods and techniques used in community mobilisation).

By using this method, they will know the essential community problems and the 1<sup>st</sup> –level (the most urgent) and the 2<sup>nd</sup>- level (secondary) effects of each of them. Using this method, the group will decide what problem/problems will be addressed in the nearest future.

The role of the social assistant at this stage is to guide the members of the initiative group in carrying out a qualitative assessment. The group can also suggest the involvement of other people in this process.

## **HOW / SETTING SOLUTIONS, RESOURCES AND DEVELOPING THE ACTION PLAN**

This stage should answer the following question: how can people solve the identified problem and change things in an efficient way independently? It includes the following steps:

### **I. Meeting of the initiative group**

The members of the initiative group will meet to propose and discuss ideas on problem solving and on the necessary changes. Other community members can be invited as well.

At this stage, the role of the social assistant as a mobiliser changes. The responsibility now is to identify and create safe spaces where the group can test out their ideas for change before putting them into practice, to stimulate ideas of the members of the group (using the brainstorming method). It is vital that the community members are not set up to fail and that their ideas undergo a rigorous examination before taking them to the world outside the group. The decision on which ideas will be taken forward lies in the hands of the group.

### **II. Setting concrete actions to solve the problem**

The identified problem is analysed in such a way that its settlement is realistic, and the objectives meet the possibilities and urgent needs of the community. The members of the initiative group set priorities in community development and the actions that are to be carried out in the further activity. The members of the group must consider alternative solutions to the identified problem.

To achieve this, the community social assistant must facilitate community communication.

This is a preparatory stage for the development of the action plan.

### **III. Development of the action plan**

Developing an action plan is based on all the previously undertaken activities. The action plan must answer the following questions:

- What is the issue identified as a priority for the community?
- What should be done to solve it?
- What resources are there in the community?
- What are the expectations of community members?
- What are the actions to solve the problem?

An action plan can be developed for just a few months or 1 year, 5 years or for another period depending on the local plans. The action plan must be developed by the initiative group, be based on feedback from the community and adjust in line with the feedback received from it.

## **ACTION / IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN**

The initiative group with other community members put their ideas into effect. They should by now have a realistic sense of the possible outcomes, whether it will solve their problem or simply be the first stage in a longer struggle. Even if the action disappoints, as sometimes happens, the legacy of the work is that the group members now have an understanding and practical experience needed for dealing with problems that they will face in the future.

The following issues should be taken into account during the implementation of the plan:

1. Actions must correspond to the planned ones;
2. The terms are observed;

3. More persons must participate, not only the members of the initiative group;
4. Somebody must be appointed in charge for the implementation of the whole action plan
5. People must be appointed in charge for every separate task;
6. A person must be appointed in charge for financial resources, if the activities imply this aspect;
7. The venue and invitations must be prepared for such actions.

At this stage, it is good to set monitoring indicators and the period when the first assessment of effects and the possible impact of the community mobilisation will take place

### **REFLECTION/ MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY MOBILISATION. ACTION REVIEW**

This stage should answer the following questions: “What happened? What changed? Now that we have carried out our action, are the issues, problems and concerns the same?” This critical reflection enables the initiative group and the community members to learn from their experience, review the actions and to plan future actions for change.

The task of the social assistant with the initiative group is to monitor and assess the community mobilisation process. This is an analysis process, which considers several aspects related to problem solving such as:

- the resources and efforts involved in problem solving
- how the process itself was conducted
- the results achieved until the corresponding moment
- the effects, consequences, results of the process
- the impact and benefits for the community through its mobilisation in the settlement of the identified problem.

As a result of this process, the gaps, errors, positive experience, the potential of certain people are identified, which helps draw conclusions on actions that could be useful in the future.

The What, Why, How process begins again to solve another problem identified by the community.

### **III. The role of the social assistant in community mobilisation**

***The role of the social assistant as community mobiliser is to:***

- supply accurate information to all community members;
- make sure that the information is interpreted correctly and collected correctly; eliminate incorrect information, especially, the information that discourages expectations or can create problems or mistrust in the future;
- contribute to the organisation and delivery of human and material resources that are required to solve the problem;
- stimulate community members to take part in the development of their own community through actions expected in the community;
- participate in activities that increase efficiency, capacity and force;

- encourage community members to confirm that they have the skills to develop independently;
- make sure that every decision on community activities is understood, change in the interest of the entire community not only of a limited group;

The social assistant is the resource person and a facilitator who helps the community define their problems, find solutions and develop supporting tactics. The social assistant can assume responsibilities to liaise community members. The social assistant can also convince resource holders (local council, raion council, economic entities, NGOs) to invest in community problem solving. Working on a broader scale than person-person or person-group interaction implies working with people, and communication skills are indispensable in this field. The capacity of the social assistant to communicate efficiently with the others and to be accepted as a person can be a significant factor in obtaining support and cooperation. The social assistant must show empathy and respect. The capacity to help people clarifies a series of problems and helps determine priorities.

To be a good mobiliser, it is necessary for the social assistant to assess the own skills and knowledge to be able to develop community mobilisation activities. The first feature or skill is to be able to decide if I have time and interest in helping community members to solve their own problems. I can work under critical conditions and in situations of conflict.

The skills a social assistant needs to mobilise community are not difficult to learn, but represent important tools required for mobilisation, which will be used for the benefit of community rather than for personal benefits. The mobiliser must have well developed personal features such as: honesty, enthusiasm, positivism, tolerance, flexibility, creativity, understanding and motivation. He/she must know how to listen to and understand people who express their opinions. The technical skills a mobiliser needs are: public speech, planning, observation, analysis and writing. These skills can be acquired through work.

It is important to discuss in public in order to raise awareness on community problems and organise the community. A successful mobiliser needs more than just technical skills of dialogues in public and organisation of the group for action; he/she must know how to use these skills. If the target is the community, the social assistant must know how to assess community needs, the nature of social changes that take place in community development. If you want to develop a community with low incomes you must understand what determines these things, what is the relation between them, to determine the changes that will influence these reasons.

Another important aspect in this regard is the capacity of the social assistant to discuss with key people who have contacts with a large number of people and with disadvantaged groups or people in difficulty. These are, in many cases, opinion leaders in their communities, such as the doctor, teachers, priest, owner of the shop, managers of agricultural associations, etc. It is also important to take into account the informal leaders in the community, who, sometimes, are more trusted by community members than the formal leaders.

The mobiliser is an agent or a catalyst of social change. He/she must learn something from social, economic and sociologic sciences. The mobiliser must know essential elements of society, understand the interdependence between cultural dimensions that form the community. When the mobiliser is engaged in promoting social changes, he/she promotes the learning of new ideas and behaviours. In the process of mobilisation and community organisation, the mobiliser must always understand what is happening, in general, to the community and what is happening to individuals separately. The community is a super-organic system, it lives and functions having different members who come and go, are born or die.

There are separate forces in every community that are based on differences of ethnic groups, religions, classes, gender, age, education, physical features, mental skills, occupations, incomes, wellbeing, access to land or other characteristics that can separate or divide people. It is important that the community social assistant is neutral in the communication with these people, acts as a referee and does not favour one of the parties. This means that the social assistant must know the community very well, spend some time with people from that community, not be afraid to present publicly the various community problems. However, this must happen without bringing arguments that would favour one of the parties. The role of the social assistant is not to make the community more homogenous. Community unity means that community groups work in an atmosphere of tolerance and that their members respect each other. The unification of community is the basis in the identification of community priorities and with regard to the problems and goals of the community.

#### REMEMBER!

- Be **EXPLICIT**. Your task is to bring clarity in community actions. Community mobilisation is an inclusive activity so that all goals, materials, meetings must be carried out in a friendly way that is understood by everybody. Do not change your tone or communication pattern significantly depending on the audience.
- Be **CONSISTENT**. It is vital that you do not change your mind or change your attitude endlessly. The trust of the community in you and in your work is based on the fact that you say the same things at the beginning and at the end of the process.
- Be **LOGIC**. Community mobilisation must exist in a logical process, which is simple and communicated easily.
- Use solid **THEORETIC BACKGROUND**. The theory of community development provides several participative models you can choose from. Be **OPTIMISTIC**. It is your responsibility to be optimistic regarding the success and results of the project. Community members have the right to have doubts. Your doubts must not be verbalised. It is not the obligation of the community to encourage you. You set the tone for the project and this tone must be serious, but lively and optimistic.
- Be **AMBITIOUS**. You must have high goals and expectations from the community's potential to change the life for the better. Do not limit the action plan because of your concerns or as a self-protection method.
- Be **TRANSPARENT**. The information is available to all those who need it. All questions about your work, your approach and your intentions must be communicated and receive an answer from community members.
- Do not **PROMISE** what you cannot fulfill.
- Do not expect to be **TRUSTED** by all community members. You do not have the right to this. You will be assessed after the finalization of activities, and the community will reflect on your actions and behaviour.
- Be **RESPONSIBLE** for deficiencies and failures. Defense or apologies are not appropriate in the community mobilisation process. The community does not care about external factors or anything that is not under its control. It is your fault if things are wrong.

## **IV. Methods and techniques used in community mobilisation**

Description of methods and techniques that can be used in community mobilisation

### **I. Methods to inform community members**

#### **1. *Announcements and informative boards:***

These awareness raising tools must meet the following requirements:

- Be placed in public places, including in the outskirts of the village;
- The announcements must be written in large characters that are visible from the distance;
- The announcements must not be stuck on trees, houses and fences to avoid people's dissatisfaction;
- The informative boards must comprise both written and graphic information (photos, drawings);
- The information on the boards must be updated whenever necessary (once a week, month, etc.);
- The language of information must be accessible;
- The boards must be made in lively colours;
- The boards must include official information and news from the community life.

#### **2. *Direct, „from house to house” contacting of community members***

The direct contacting of community members is a frequently used method and has a positive result. Home visits ensure the direct transmission of information to community members. Another advantage of this technique is the possibility to see people's reaction to the provided information. To increase the credibility of information disseminated „from house to house” the teams must consist of young people, local council members informal community leaders. It is very important that those who transmit messages are well documented, so that the information is identical, irrespective of who the messenger was.

#### **3. *Raising awareness during community events***

Sports, cultural and religious community events are good opportunities to disseminate public information. The mayor, social assistant or people with a certain status and influence among the community members have a special role to play in this process.

#### **4. *The involvement of educational institutions in community mobilisation***

Community-based kindergartens, schools and lyceums are not only centres of knowledge, but also sources of community initiatives:

- The organisation/mobilisation of the community can be launched through parents' and teachers' associations;
- Community members can be informed through teachers-children-parents communication;
- As the most active messengers, children can be involved in disseminating announcements, leaflets, newspapers, and in arranging the informative boards, etc.;
- The school can mobilise the community by organising concerts, exhibitions, fairs where people can be invited and convinced to participate in community life;

- Teachers are the most active members of initiative groups; they have communication skills and a credible image in the community.

## **II. Methods to identify, assess and solve the problem**

### **1. Organisation of the community meeting**

This is a relatively flexible technique, because information can be obtained from every community member, who wishes to take part in the meeting, irrespective of the age, religion, ethnic group, etc. Before starting the meeting, the initiative group must identify a set of questions that will be asked and that need to have the goal of structuring the meeting around certain issues. People should be informed about these meetings and encouraged to take part in them. This could imply the transmission of invitation letters to individuals, families and organisations. In addition, the existing medias could be used: radio, local newspaper, etc.

Community meetings must be held in such a way as to create small groups to encourage everybody's individual participation. Meetings with many participants do not lead to the ease of communication. The participants' ideas, attitudes and opinions must be recorded.

At the end, a list with all these suggestions on the discussed subject will be compiled highlighting the most important ones or those that met the consensus.

A community meeting has the following advantages: it is easy to organise and manage; it brings opinions from all segments of community population; it leads to an increase in people's participation and identifies those who can become resources.

It is necessary to take into account the possibility of unpleasant events: the meeting can turn into a complaint or a group can take over the leadership and can impose its points of view.

Activities that need to be undertaken before an efficient community meeting:

- Establish the subject to be discussed;
- Establish the list of questions to be asked at the meeting;
- Establish the time limits for every issue;
- Establish the venue of the meeting that must be accessible for all participants;
- Inform people through announcements, letters, medias;
- Identify the person to record ideas, information, and attitudes;
- Process the information collected at the meeting, taking account of the opinions of every category of population;
- Write the report (minutes) of the meeting.

Every discussion held at community meetings must have the following structure:

1. What seems to be the problem?
2. How long does the problem exist? Have there been such problems before? How were they solved? What dangers are there?
3. What is the cause?
4. What is the current situation? What actions are taken? What are the last results, progresses? What are the available resources?
5. What is the solution?

An efficient meeting must be a competition of ideas not of people.

The meeting report or minutes must include:

1. The date, venue and mediator of the meeting;

2. The name of those who are present;
3. The agenda – issues, decisions taken, people responsible for the decided actions;
4. The time of meeting closure;
5. The date, time and venue of the following meeting.

At the end of the meeting, it is necessary to set the date, time and venue of the following meeting.

These methods can be used at all stages of the community mobilisation process.

## **2. Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is an excellent technique to be used in groups that look for solutions to a problem and represents an idea generation process. The following basic rules must be taken into account when using this technique:

- It can last from one minute to half an hour;
- The meeting continues as long as ideas are being generated;
- Every meeting is open;
- It is the quantity not quality of ideas that matters. The more ideas, the bigger the possibility to have useful ideas;
- Participants are encouraged to build on other members' ideas, whenever possible, other combinations of ideas;
- Participants must focus on a single problem, a single issue;
- The meeting must take place in a relaxed, cooperating atmosphere;
- All members, irrespective of how shy or uncooperative they are, should be encouraged to take part;
- After the closure of brainstorming exercise, the group selects the best ideas related to the problem.

## **3. Diamond ranking**

An activity to help people to set priorities together. Is carried out in group.

A problem area is identified and people prioritise ideas of overcoming it. There must be 9 ideas.

The group is divided in two subgroups.

Write each idea on a post-it note and ask each group to arrange their nine ideas in a diamond shape (as above) with their top priority at the top, two in second place, three in third place, two in fourth place and the lowest priority at the bottom. They need to get a consensus as a group and can move the ideas around until they reach an order with which they all agree.

This technique is very useful because:

- The groups discuss the issues without it feeling like a discussion.
- Post-it notes allow the ideas to be moved around again and again.
- Even if someone hasn't got views on all the issues, they usually have an opinion about the importance of some of them.
- It encourages people to justify why certain issues are more important in their opinion.
- Participants can compare diamonds and collate results even across different groups at different events.

- You can give clear information to service providers, for example about what service users believe the spending priorities should be.
- This method can be used at the following stages of community mobilisation: problem identification and resource setting, identification of solutions and development of the action plan.

#### 4. **SWOT analysis**

##### **Goal:**

Useful exercise in helping a group in their planning or in evaluating their work or an event. It can be used as part of a wider strategic planning process or as a stand alone exercise.

You begin by introducing what SWOT stands for:

**S – Strengths**

**W – Weaknesses**

**O – Opportunities**

**T – Threats**

**Variations, Adaptations and Developments:** it is possible to change the words to help the group understand better. For example,

Strengths – what was good?

Weaknesses – what was bad?

Opportunities – what could happen now?

Threats – what might stop things happening?

Training – what help do you need?

You then identify with the group the thing you are going to SWOT – it can be the group itself, a project or event.

It can be used as a planning or a reflection exercise.

#### **5. Problem tree**

The purpose of this method is to analyse the first and second-level causes and effects of a core problem identified by community members.

The following principles must be followed when using this method:

1. To deal with a problem you may need to understand what causes it and what the effects might be.
2. Understanding how different stakeholders view the causes and the effects of a problem may be important.

This method is used in the form of group discussions as follows:

1. Identify a **core problem**. Define this problem as clearly as possible.

2. Ask "Why has this problem occurred?" Identify up to five or six existing factors that are directly responsible for the problem. These are the **first-level causes** of your core problem. Write each first-level cause on its own card using a short sentence, with words that are clear and concrete (such as "The country's population has grown" instead of "Higher population density"). *Timeline* may help you identify your core problem and its causes over time.

When you write these short sentences, make sure that you **do not**:

- a. Record more than one cause on a single card (such as "More and more older people are single");
  - b. Write down the cause and its effect(s) together (such as "The elderly are marginalised, excluded from society and institutionalised");
  - c. Create different cards and sentences that describe the same cause (such as "More and more older people are single" and "Their children prefer to go to cities or abroad rather than to take care of them");
  - d. Use words that emphasize the absence or lack of a particular *solution* to the problem at hand (such as "Children cannot have decent living in the village, they cannot find a job"). Describe instead the consequence of what is lacking (such as "There are no legal mechanisms to penalize children who do not look after their old parents").
3. Place all the cards that show first-level causes in a row below the core problem.
  4. Use the method described in Step 2 to determine the factors that are directly responsible for each first-level cause. These are your **second-level causes**. Write (or draw) each second-level cause on its own card. Place the new cards in a row below the corresponding first-level causes.
  5. Discuss the findings on the core problem and the active solutions for the examined situation.
  6. Identify the causes that you believe are priorities, based on one of these factors: they are the most important, the most pressing, or the least difficult to handle.

#### **For simpler versions**

1. Draw a tree trunk to represent your core problem. Add roots and rootlets to represent the direct and indirect causes, and then branches and twigs to represent the direct and indirect effects (or implications) of your core problem.
2. Identify the *causes at one or several levels* but leave out the effects.
3. Restrict your analysis to major causes and effects only.

This method is used when assessing problems identified in the community.

EXAMPLES of community mobilisation:

I. The community social assistants know from their work that there were very prejudiced attitudes towards disabled people. With families with disabled members they went into local schools and spoke with pupils about the lives of disabled people, and then organised a competition in the local school for children and young people to create posters promoting the rights of disabled people and to change the attitudes of the community to disabled people. Local businesses donated prizes for the competition and the poster were 'judged' at a community event – attended by disabled people, their families, students, teachers and local dignitaries. Local businesses were persuaded to donate food for refreshments and prizes for the winners.

II. A community needs assessment highlighted that there was a real need for support for young parents. A group of local people including young parents agreed to work together to establish a group for young parents. The community social assistant worked with them to obtain permission to use a room in a school (or residential home for older people?) to meet in 2 mornings a week. Families in the community were asked to donate toys and games to be used at the session. The group was advertised through word of mouth, the school, the clinic. Initially the group was attended by the community social assistant who worked with the young parents to find out what they wanted to do at the sessions. The young people identified they wanted to know more about how to feed their children healthily on a budget, invite a doctor from the clinic to speak about child development as well as just have time to be together and let the children play. After a while the community social assistant did not attend every meeting, as the young people could manage by themselves, however the community social assistant continued to come to the meetings at regular intervals to check everything was OK and to help resolve any difficulties the group had.