TOOL 12
COMMUNITY MEETING

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What is the **purpose** of community meeting?

- To provide a participatory forum for discussion amongst different local stakeholders and the project team in a way that is formal, transparent and inclusive.

- To provide opportunities for changes in project design and implementation, to be discussed and agreed on.

- To ensure project accountability by key stakeholder groups, and to ensure democratic decision-making.

Plan Vivo Carbon Standard (PV Climate) **requirement?**

Community meetings are required at various stages during project design (PIN and PDD stages), implementation and monitoring.

When to use this tool?

- A community meeting is a generic tool that can be used and adapted for many different situations. It is likely that a series of community meetings will be held by projects for different purposes ranging from initial discussions at the PIN stage through to the PDD development. During these meetings, a range of different participatory tools can be used, or alternatively, they could be treated purely as community meetings following the steps shown here.

- During the time period of the project implementation, an annual community meeting should be held prior to submitting the Project's Annual Report to Plan Vivo. These meetings could be in the form of Public Hearings and Public Audits. Other meetings may be required as per relevance.

- Project validators and verifiers may also wish to conduct community meetings during their project visits to gather evidence and get feedback from project participants about the project's progress.

Why is this tool required?

A community meeting is not a participatory tool as such, but it represents a different type of meeting, from those with which project coordinators and participants

may be more familiar with (see the table comparing community meetings with conventional meetings). For example, a conventional meeting could be conducted with only limited opportunity for participation of key stakeholders. However, this tool describes the important features of a community meeting, to ensure that it becomes a participatory tool reinforcing the principle that underlies all PV Climate projects, of community-driven project design and implementation. The 6 key features of a community meeting conducted to meet the principles of Plan Vivo Standards and to ensure good governance are:

- **Participatory.** Everyone gets an opportunity to participate in the meeting. Meetings are a good opportunity to use some of the participatory tools described in this manual.

- **Formal.** Meetings are conducted according to a planned, written agenda with all decisions taken and points raised recorded in the meeting minutes prepared afterwards.

- **Transparent.** Discussions take place in an open and inclusive environment. Important decisions are taken in public.

- **Deliberative.** Meetings provide an opportunity for discussion amongst participants with everyone having a chance to contribute, and with everyone listening in a respectful manner (regardless of social status).

- **Evidence based.** Decisions are taken based on the best available information rather than ad hoc information and hearsay.

- **Efficient.** Meetings make good use of time and are properly planned and conducted, to meet their objectives without distractions, and without becoming a burden on participants' time.

Comparison between a Community Meeting (participatory) and a Conventional Meeting

Participatory Meeting	Conventional Meeting
Everyone participates, speaks and listens to others.	The fastest thinkers, best speakers and most important people get more time to speak.
Different opinions are encouraged and accepted.	Differences of opinion are treated as conflicts that must be ignored or 'solved'.
People try to understand each other through conversations and deliberative discussions and by asking supporting and exploring questions e.g. "Is this what you mean?"	Questions are often understood as challenges, as if the person being questioned has said something wrong.

People listen to each other's ideas because they know their own ideas will also be heard.	People give speeches that don't really respond to what earlier speakers have said. No structured discussions.
Everyone contributes during discussions.	Some people don't speak at all.
People reach agreements that represent consensus (and sometimes compromise) reflecting a wide range of perspectives.	People are unwilling to accept compromise and allow differences of opinion to continue.
Everyone knows what has been agreed at the end of the meeting and understands how these decisions have been reached.	People aren't clear what has been agreed and why.
There is a formal record of the meeting available to all that includes the names of all participants.	No formal record of the meeting is available.

Who should participate?

This depends on the type of meeting, but as a general principle, meetings concerning a project should be open and free for all project participants and beneficiaries to attend unless there are specific reasons otherwise e.g. confidentiality or discussion on sensitive topics.

How to use the tool?

The most effective community meetings are those where there is a diversity of participants and views, and where there is a clear agenda, high quality facilitation and useful outputs. This section concentrates on these four aspects:

1. **Participation**

2. **Planning**

3. **Facilitation**

4. **Outputs**

1. Participation

Getting a diverse group of people to attend a community meeting can be challenging. It is often the same people who attend meeting after meeting - but don't necessarily represent the whole community or all key stakeholders. There is a tendency for older, better educated, male, wealthier and socially elite people to attend. It is harder to get youth, less educated, women, socially disadvantaged and 'ordinary' working people to attend. Some ways to overcome this problem and, get better and more diverse participation include:

- ☐ **Advance notice of the meeting.** Don't announce it at the last minute - give a few days advance notice (less than a week).

- ☐ **Communication about the meeting.** Use multiple ways to communicate about the meeting, including posted notices, word of mouth, public announcements e.g. in church or mosque and social media. Encourage people to let their family and friends know about the meeting and encourage them to attend.

- ☐ **Purpose of the meeting.** Make the purpose of the meeting very clear by explaining why the meeting is being called and why it is important for people to attend.

- ☐ **Timing.** Hold the meeting at a time when it is most convenient for everyone. Usually this is early in the morning, or later in the evening or on a day when people aren't working (like a Sunday). But be especially careful to select a time of day when women will be able to attend because they have their own domestic responsibilities to attend to. Also bear in mind that if the meeting is held early in the day or late in the evening, participants will have to reach the venue from their home and return - this might be a problem for some.

- ☐ **Incentives.** Provide simple snacks and drinks at the meeting if the budget is sufficient. This will help people if they have to skip a meal in order to attend. Never serve alcohol at a meeting! Avoid paying people to participate unless you are paying for their transport costs to travel, to and from the meeting.

- ☐ **Generate interest and enjoyment.** Meetings should be enjoyable and interesting. Using some of the participatory tools in this manual will help with that. People are always more interested to engage and be proactive during a meeting rather than listen passively to long speeches or PowerPoint presentations.

2. Planning a Community Meeting

Planning for a community meeting is just as important as the meeting itself. Without good planning a community meeting is unlikely to achieve the intended objectives. Use the table below as a checklist for planning an effective community meeting.

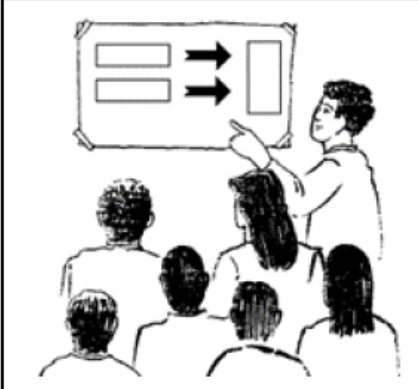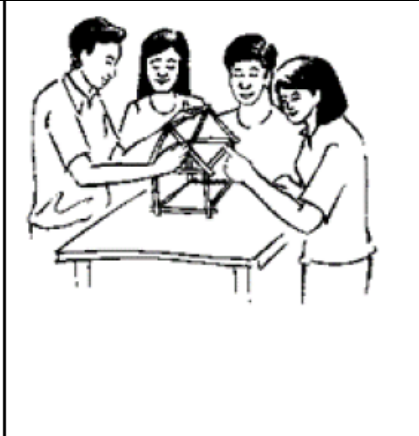| Checklist	Deadline	Status	Notes
What is the date, place and time of meeting?			
Who will participate - who has to be invited?			
Is external support needed from somewhere?			
What materials are necessary for the meeting? e.g. poster, flipcharts, pens etc.			
What resources are available to support the meeting? e.g. maps, data, local experts etc.			
What are the main topics to be discussed?			
What is the meeting agenda, clearly linking topics to meeting outcomes?			
What is the time schedule? Is it flexible enough to allow for small changes?			
What about additional factors e.g. time for breaks, toilet facilities, seating arrangements, food, snacks, tea, water etc.			

3. Facilitating an Effective Community Meeting

There are many techniques that can be used for facilitating effective meetings. A skilled facilitator will have a diversity of techniques to hand that can be used as the need arises. Some of these are shown in the Table below

Technique	What for?	How?	Considerations
Participatory presentation/ lecturing	To introduce new subjects or presenting summaries/ overviews, for groups of any size, especially suitable for very large groups.	A prepared talk using visual aids followed by a question and answer session with participants. Usually the facilitator has complete control over the material presented.	Limit presentations/ lectures to 15 – 20 minutes. Break up longer lectures with short buzz sessions, to illustrate key points. Do not be afraid of pauses to allow the group to absorb your points and for you to check their understanding. Speak clearly. A resonant voice carries further and sounds better. Avoid the use of power-point in village situations.
Small groups	To discuss specific issues, during a longer session. To exchange ideas and draw on their collective experiences. To encourage better reflection and generate comments and opinions from participants that might not arise during large group discussions.	Break plenary into smaller sub-groups or in pairs, trios etc. One member of each group reports its findings to the plenary later.	Takes more time (depends on the number of sub-groups). Need to consider seating arrangements for group working.
Brainstorming	To discover new ideas and get responses very quickly. To generate as many ideas as possible without judging them.	List ideas exactly as they are expressed on a board, flipchart, cards, etc. Later they can be grouped/ analysed or discussed further.	Limit the time, to avoid losing attention of some participants.
Role play	To give participants the opportunity to understand/feel other people's views, feeling. To add some fun/humour to a meeting!	Participants use their own experiences to play a real-life situation and to observe others.	Check if participants are willing Needs careful planning to make it relevant. Careful debriefing is needed to make best use of a role play. Tasks of individuals must be clearly defined.

Technique	What for?	How?	Considerations
Group work/ group tasks	To discuss a certain topic in greater depth. To give confidence to individuals who are unwilling to speak in a plenary.	Split participants into groups and give each a task. Follow up with plenary presentations and discussion.	Think of group division beforehand. Write clear group tasks (including time).
Plenary discussion/ presentation	Thorough /in-depth discussion to get consensus. To exchange ideas and knowledge from individuals and groups.	Play the role of a moderator. Use visualisation aids.	Facilitator needs to ensure a balance between allowing free flow of discussion and controlling the direction of the meeting.
Case study	To use participatory techniques in a certain situation.	Presentation of situation/ case situation followed by a debriefing.	Case and objectives must be clear. Requires careful facilitation.
Participants' inputs	To enable participants to share their experiences and demonstrate what they know.	Participants give a short presentation about a certain topic.	Inform participants before workshop about objective, length, time.

Adapted from KfW8 (Vietnam) Training of Trainers handbook (2016)

Presentation

Small group

Brainstorming

Role play

Group task

Participant Inputs

4. Meeting Outputs

Community meetings of all kinds should have a clear aim and a defined output. The aim should be explained to participants at the start of the meeting (or can be included in the meeting agenda). The outputs will vary depending on the purpose of the meeting and on the facilitation techniques used and could include any of the outputs of the different participatory tools described here. Particularly important outputs include:

- Meeting minutes (especially important for more formal-type meetings)

- Maps, charts, posters etc. (for participatory meetings involving some of these participatory tools)

- Photographs (taken by the facilitation team)

- List of names of participants (should be prepared for all types of meeting)

Examples of a community meeting

Community meeting in the Upper Tana Nairobi Water Fund project, Kenya.
Credit: Plan Vivo Foundation