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Online Learning: OL 343 Adapting to Climate Change: The Community Focus.
Center for Sustainable Development <http://www.csd-i.org/>

Assignment Eight. Leading a Participatory Teambuilding Workshop: Forming a Village Committee

Part 1

I started preparing for the workshop a week in advance to make sure I have all the materials in place beforehand (like flipcharts and markers and a good camera for shooting photos). Also, I had to develop some materials like a how-to card for participants, using adaptations based on the online resources I had previously identified. In bullet forms, I have outlined the points to be discussed as a checklist, to make sure we stay on track throughout the workshop, and to avoid any eventual clumsiness during the actual workshop attributable to poor preparation.

I also needed to find two colleagues that would be willing to help me facilitate the workshop, support me during the workshop, and to prepare some snacks and a luncheon. I was able to get a hold of my colleague who helped me during the very first workshop. The community school teacher who was with us for the second workshop, had also agreed to join us again this time.

Part 2

My workshop session plan outlined on a flipchart and posted on the wall was very helpful as it gave me no chance for deviation. I tried to be as inclusive as I could in order to make the community part of the process. We have started off with funny jokes based on the cultural values of the areas. This is was our special icebreaker, truly breaking down the wall of mistrust and making everyone feel comfortable and invited to engage in the process.

The discussions have started and evolved very smoothly and more friendly than I was expecting. This is because most of the individuals in this workshop had a good grasp of the project we are working to develop together. So, participants were receptive, and they contributed constructive ideas and useful information.

I had shared roles with my other two friends: one was taking photos and managing the distribution of snacks and tea while the other friend was taking notes of the discussions. While facilitating, I took notes of things that were going well—and the things that I could improve the next time—and I also kept track of how long each of the exercises took for future reference. Participants suggested that we distribute snacks and drinks so people can take while they discuss. This way we did not need to break for coffee-time, and it saved us time! We were able to wrap up by 1.30pm, after five hours of continued activities.

Later in the evening the same day, the team and I got together and reviewed the workshop and made notes that would help us to further improve future similar workshops. We all felt that the lesson plans from the handbook were very well done and we didn't really need further improvement works.

Results of the workshop.

Over the past six months I've been working with four direct points of contacts from the Sodieni community. All four have prepared a list of three to five people who they would recommend participating in this workshop on setting up a Village Agricultural and Water use Management Committee to help steer the implementation of the upcoming project which has a broad water use management component and two important agricultural programs:

1. Proper use of water resources program
2. Climate-Smart Agriculture program
3. Market-driven agricultural program

The community points of contacts have come up to the workshop with a good profiling of the attendance, proving their interest for taking ownership of this future project. The workshop has gathered 18 participants of whom 6 women and 4 representatives of the community youth. We discussed the importance of having this committee, had a brief overview of the responsibility that committee members would have and the skills that they would need specific to a Village Water Use Management and Agricultural Committee (WUMAC – Comité villageois pour la Gestion des Ressources Naturelles et Agricoles = CG-RNA). We also discussed in a step-by-step process (using the Village Forestry Training Manual lesson plan and the example lesson plans given by the CSDi that I adapted to work well with my project) how committees are formed, how they're structured, how committee members are chosen, and a little bit about the development of the structure of the committee and the development of goals, and an implementation plan.

We discussed how many people would be an ideal number to have on the committee, the roles they would play, and what qualities members should have. We then discussed traditional committee member selection methods.

As we thoroughly discussed the importance of involving traditional leaders who weigh culturally on the institutional aspect for anything that concerns the life of the community, it was agreed among the participants that this workshop could only nominate key persons who will establish the connection with the elders, and then carry out consultations at the grassroots' levels for setting up a committee. Since participants have understood the importance of such a committee and how to go about setting up one, they will hold a second gathering in a village setting among themselves and elect the management structure of a permanent committee. The need for fully abiding by the rules of the community is to come up with a solid structure which benefits legitimacy from a village perspective.

So, as the idea of a temporary committee did not make it based on the traditions and customs of the village, participants have voted (by raising their hands) for nominating 3 people: 2 men (respectively 50 years old and 25 years old with a good level of education) and 1 woman of about 40 years old with strong leadership abilities to lead the process until a permanent committee is setup. These 3 people were selected from a list of 7 participants who had volunteered to conduct this mission.

This small group of 3 key people will be working as the village task force, and as such, has scheduled already to gather villagers at the chief's house on Friday evening (Friday November 1st, 2013) after dinner time. From that meeting, villagers are expected to agree on the names of the individuals who will occupy the key positions already pinpointed such as the Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary General, Events Manager, Conflict Prevention and Resolution Officer, Partnership Development Officer, etc. making up the committee management body. This administrative body is not expected to count more than 8 seats. Participants have already agreed that once the committee is elected, it will hold their first meeting the following Friday (November 8th) and then schedule to hold regular meetings the first Friday of each month at evening time (Friday in Sodieni is like Sunday elsewhere. Nobody works on Friday). However, it was made clear to participants that the frequency of the meetings could be shorter when the project activities begin effectively (likely to become bi-weeklies, as suggested by many).

Before the meeting adjourned, I shared with the new task force a list of our project's outline activities, and asked them to brainstorm on how community members think we can start implementing some of them soon. I have invited them to reflect upon making a tentative plan of action during their first committee meeting.

So for next week, the village will communicate the list of the elected leaders of the committee, and the date and agenda for the first meeting of the committee, which is going to be Friday November 8h, 2013.

