

SECTION 2: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation is a core principle of the RAPID programme nationally. The following section summarises some of the consultation & participation actions developed to facilitate large-scale community engagement in the programme

2.1 Participatory Community Planning Project:

Introduction

In developing a community consultation programme, Carlow AIT agreed to use Participatory Community Planning (PCP) as a model for consultation with target communities. These methods include the use of tools such as community mapping, problem trees, venn diagramming, timelines and headlines of the future.

For over twenty years, starting in South East Asia and moving around the globe, different methods of community survey based on community chart and map – making have been tried, tested and developed into a powerful developmental approach. These methods are easy and enjoyable to use and do not require extensive literacy skills. Agencies and communities have used these methods in large scale and small-scale health, environmental and local development projects.

Participatory Community Planning (PCP) techniques can be used to gather information about a community or neighbourhood quickly and effectively. As it is a quick process, it can involve a wide section of the community who do not normally fill in questionnaires or go to repeated meetings. Because it involves a cross-section of the local community coming together and “holding a mirror up” to their neighbourhood it also creates conditions for consensus-based action planning.

PCP techniques can be used intensively in meetings, or in a more relaxed and unstructured way in the context of public survey.

The types of information that can be gathered are environmental trends, population trends, local history, external and internal influences on the community, aspirations and priorities for the future.

How the Participatory Community Planning was Carried Out

The participatory community planning involved a mixed group of 10 men and women from the community and voluntary sectors in Carlow Town. In February 2003, the group underwent 5 days intensive training in facilitation skills, listening skills and participatory planning methods, with a particular focus on group mapping. New Ground Talamh Nua provided the training with support from the RAPID Co-ordinator.



During the first week of their training, the group organised and facilitated two community planning evening workshops, one in Graiguecullen and one in the Tullow Road area. These workshops were widely publicised and open to the public. Community planning techniques were put into action, involving the participants in gathering a rich and informative community profile of each area. The techniques included group mapping and chart making followed by whole-meeting feedback sessions.

A total of 78 residents took part in the three meetings. Work collated has been used to inform the area **profile** and **needs analysis** sections of the RAPID plan.



During the second week of training, a workshop was held with a group of teenage young people focused on the needs and potential of their age group.

The training group analysed the findings of the three workshops (appendix 2). They gathered community concerns into categories, identified the main goals expressed by participants in the meetings, and set out some initial options for action.

Implementing Participatory Community Planning

Findings from participatory community planning meetings have been used to feed into the wider process of the work of the Carlow RAPID Area Implementation Team (A.I.T) and have supported its work by identifying community needs and priorities. The Area Implementation Team has identified a number of potential projects for further assessment. These projects relate to the Graiguecullen area, to the Tullow Road area or are appropriate to both communities.

The Area Implementation Team is considered to be the body best equipped to address the community goals identified. Options were reviewed to identify high value projects, in terms of community gain. These project proposals have been assessed by the AIT (appendix 3 & 4). Where feasible, they will be implemented in partnership with the communities of the RAPID areas.



2.2 Community Participation: St. Bridget's Patchwork Quilt

The St. Bridget's Patchwork Quilt was developed as part of the RAPID consultation process, it was agreed that consultation actions should be as innovative and accessible for all target groups concerned. The patchwork project was developed by a group of Traveller women recently accommodated at the newly completed estate at St Bridget's Place, those involved felt that expressing their needs through craft and design was very appropriate to their skills and interests and provided a innovative forum to look at their "*past, present and future*" issues, experiences and needs.

The purpose of this project was three fold. To create and develop a project, which would facilitate the women in socialising in their area, stimulate creative imagination in the use of their centre and to explore priority issues for them as residents of a RAPID target community.

Choice of Project (A Patchwork Quilt)

The quilt offered a wide range of possibilities for difference of opinion, range of ideas, skills, and self-expression.

Quilts are a very useful tool for describing and communicating messages and the images which the group chose to describe their **past**, **present** and **future** displayed a really creative and imaginative flair.



Some of the key issues raised by the group included – access to education, community safety, the success of working in partnership with the local authority when developing the estate, activities for young people and employment.

Having completed the 12-week programme, the quilt is now on display in St. Bridget's community centre. The residents involved have expressed a keen interest in further developing their skill in the craft and design area.

2.3 Community Participation: Youth Consultation Event

Each year Carlow Regional Youth Service organise a youth consultation event to support young people in identifying their priority needs.

Last year the event informed many of the actions identified in the County Development Board 10 Year Strategy.

This year the Carlow Area Implementation Team allocated resources from the community support budget to Carlow Youth Services in support of the event.

The views, concerns and ideas identified at the conference have been used to form the basis of youth actions identified in the RAPID Strategic Plan.

Recommendations are included in the needs assessment section, with correlating actions identified in the project templates.

2.4 RAPID COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES FORUM

During the “Taking Stock” conference in Kilkenny, AIT community representatives from the southeast region identified the need for a forum, which would enable them to meet regularly to share experiences, learn from each other and identify collective training and support needs.



The Regional Co-ordinators Cluster progressed this action and in June 2003 the group met for the first time.

2.5 Community Participation; CIVIC LINK CONSULTATION

Civic Link Youth Project, run by Carlow Regional Youth Services played a mayor role in the consultation phase of the RAPID programme. Comprising of young people from the Tullow Rd area the group participated in the participatory community planning representing the voice of young people from their areas.

During this consultation, the young people identified 3 priority needs:

- to contribute to the development of their communities
- to be included in decision making
- to be seen as a positive group in the area

As part of their Civic Link project, this group were examining the issue of community safety in their estates. Through the links developed with RAPID, the group decided to expand their work and explore methods of meeting the 3 primary needs identified while also developing their Civic Link project.

The group identified a photography initiative as the most appropriate way of identifying and communicating their concerns regarding community safety in their areas.

Following the initiative the group organised a massive clean up in one of their estates, particularly focusing on the back lanes which had become a dumping ground for rubbish and environmentally unsafe for all.

Overall the group made a huge contribution to their community, demonstrated their ability to make decision as the organisers of the event and represented young people as one of the most positive forces in their community.

CIVIC LINK PHOTOGRAPHY INITIATIVE



"Our green areas cant be used because of the Rubbish"



"The dirt in the lanes attract rats and puncture the tyres on our bikes"



Some areas are kept well, but we'd like to plant more flowers especially around the grotto in New Oak"

2.6 RAPID COMMUNITIES ACHIEVING TARGETS (RCAT)

RAPID Communities Achieving Targets (RCAT) grew from the consultation process developed in Carlow. Supported by CANDO and the RAPID Co-ordinator this group actively represents the voice of the target communities.

Three of the representatives also sit on the Area Implementation Team and this facilitates ongoing communication between both structures.

At present RCAT are participating in a Committee Skills / Effective teamwork programme which is aimed at strengthening the group.

Following this training the group will engage in various capacity building measures, which should further support their development.

To date the group have identified the following as their primary roles and objectives:

The role of RCAT:

- To be a point of contact for information on the RAPID programme.
- To feedback information to the wider community and resident groups.
- To inform community representatives on community needs, which would in turn be fed back to the AIT.
- To support the community representatives in their role on the AIT.
- To encourage wider community participation in the RAPID programme.
- To invite relevant personnel to speak to the group on specific issues and to assist and inform the group of supports that they could access.
- To participate in task groups, and encourage others in the community to become involved.
- To identify possible initiatives in response to needs and work with appropriate partner organisations with particular expertise in developing these initiatives.
- To participate in the needs analysis / community profile of both the Tullow Rd and Graiguecullen Communities.