

2 PROJECT PLANNING CYCLE

The project cycle consists of five distinct phases:

1. Collecting Baseline data: a situation analysis and resource charting
2. Needs Assessment
3. The Design phase: developing an action plan, a feasibility study
4. Implementation, including monitoring progress
5. Evaluation

In this chapter the first three phases are discussed.

2.1 A Baseline Study and Situational Analysis

The situation analysis aims at describing problems and needs within an area, and charting the local resources available to do something about them.

A good initial situation analysis is necessary for good project implementation. Goals, activities, and resource inputs are all meaningless without understanding the context of the target group: the environment, values, and relationships. All planning must therefore be based upon knowledge of the real situation, and of the various factors which have formed it.

The situation analysis is an activity which can firmly link planning to the realities in the field, and thereby to the implementation of the project. The findings should guide and -define the content of the project formulation. If this does not happen, a situation easily develops where what was planned is not implemented, and what is implemented was not planned.

Often, an NGO (non-governmental organisation) comes to an area because overwhelming problems have come to the attention of the outside world. It is essential to find out what is perceived as the real problem locally, how problems interrelate, how they have evolved, and which of the problems are considered most urgent.

It is important to identify the resources available locally. There is no region or group of people totally devoid of resources. Every group has a history, a way of coexisting with nature, a social structure, equipment, knowledge and skills, traditions, capital etc. An outsider often experiences difficulties in getting a complete picture of such locally available resources.

The attitude that everything needs to be supplied from outside should be avoided. Finding ways to use, supplement and complement locally available resources should be a prime concern.

Plans and decisions must be based on knowledge. However, not all types of data and information are equally useful. Too much irrelevant information is a common problem. Inaccurate, extraneous, out-dated or distorted information is of limited use.

Collecting enough relevant information to shed perfect light on every aspect of a problem is a virtual impossibility. There will always be unclear aspects about which more data can be obtained, and issues that can be assessed differently, in light of new information. The project partners must therefore seek to find a balance between too much and too little information.

Research in the traditional sense is not always relevant to planning. Reports often contain too much information or have significantly different objectives and perspectives. Research can be too expensive or take too long to carry out. On the other hand, there are too many projects based solely on information gathered during a short visit by a donor organisation. Sometimes a short conversation is all, and leads to a project plan and a budget.

Obtaining just enough balanced and well-founded information always requires careful consideration.

When the project idea is formulated by local groups or organisations which themselves are not part of the target group, preconceived "knowledge of local conditions" can be a problem: It can lead to quick and easy conclusions which do not take into account the target group's unique characteristics and possibilities.

Where, on the other hand, the target group itself has taken the initiative, it is often necessary to contribute by extending the perspective of the planning process to include regional and national factors.

2.1.1 *What Kind of Information?*

Every analysis is coloured by the conscious and unconscious assumptions and suppositions held by the person who reports, analyses and recommends. The principles, traditions, and attitudes of the initiators influence the choice and use of information from the field. A well-founded situation analysis can make possible a flow of influence in the other direction -from the field to the agency. Factual information from the field can help the organisation correct its perspective, and its attitudes.

It is important to clarify what type of external constraints of a more structural character the project must relate to at national, regional and local levels. This type of clarification allows for a more realistic view of what can be expected from a project. Project activities often run into conflict with such constraints, unless the constraints are acknowledged and taken into consideration during planning.

If the target group is a local community, it will most often be appropriate to begin the situation analysis right there, and then extend the perspective gradually. If the target group is harder to identify at this early stage in planning, it may be more appropriate to start with a defined administrative or geographical area. The project partners' principal fields of interest greatly influence the choice of issues, relationships, and processes to focus upon (such as children, the handicapped, co-operatives, labour unions, ecology etc.).

General information on the local context and the local community as a whole, should always be included.

In describing particular problems, links and causal relationships to other problems and issues must be made evident. Several problems may have overlapping causes. Doing something about some causes at one or more levels may be within reach of the planned project. It is therefore important to clarify what causes are within range of the project activities and which ones are not - at least at the outset.

2.1.2 *How to Gather Information*

One must seek to optimise the knowledge and experience gain from the information gathered (its relevance, accuracy and suitability), in relation to the investments made to gather it (the time and money spent). Before beginning, it is therefore important to clarify the following:

What information is not needed? Deciding that certain information is neither wanted nor necessary, demands courage. In some investigations, far too much information is gathered just in case it might become useful.

The level of ambition (quantity and quality).

Certain principles are fundamental:

Spending time on the first phase of planning is a good investment.

Listen and learn. Allow the local people to express themselves. Consider them teachers and yourself a student. Assume that they possess important information.

Combine several approaches. Try to approach each question in many different ways. This tends to correct and enhance the picture. Don't believe that a particular approach is the only right one.

Clarify your assumptions. Try to clarify on which assumptions statements are being made, and where possible pitfalls are hidden. How, for instance, is the situation analysis coloured by the sex of team members or of informants, by the route taken by the team, by the time of year the project area was visited, etc.

2.1.3 *Methods of Gathering Information*

The following describes various methods of gathering data and information. The reasonably priced and straight-forward ones should be preferred. In cases where the more complex and expensive methods must be used, one should evaluate critically which one(s) will be most appropriate. The approach taken by an external organisation which is just starting up work in a new partner country will naturally differ from that of a local organisation which is already established and in operation.

a) Use of available documentary evidence

It is not necessary to re-invent the wheel. In many developing countries, large amounts of research material and lots of reports exist, but are hardly made use of. Identifying possible sources of such information is an important task. Good places to look are universities, colleges, research centres, and larger development assistance organisations and multilateral bodies (such as UN organisations, WHO, World Bank).

The most relevant statistics can often be found in the appropriate government ministry or planning office, or in an office of national statistics. The quality can vary, and needs to be assessed. Finding specific data relevant to small local areas is often difficult. However, more information is usually available than one expects.

b) Observation

Observation includes all forms of direct presence in the project area. "Field visits" are most often quick visits to the field by one or more representatives of the project partners (increasingly by consultants as well) with the aim of gaining personal impressions on which to found recommendations.

A select few master this form, and can in the course of a brief field visit grasp (and later on express) the essential details in a situation while retaining a clear overall view. For most others, field visits may seem to have been efficient, but the knowledge gained is at best superficial, and sometimes completely wrong.

Observation is important and necessary, but not sufficient alone.

Observation can be more or less efficient. Observing in an unstructured manner, like when the observer aimlessly wanders round talking with people, or is perhaps just a spectator, is in general far less effective than structured observation. Preparing a checklist of what is important to look into, and then observing the same conditions in, several villages, is an example of a way to structure observation to improve its value.

c) Interviews and seminars

The use of interviews is a common way of collecting information. Like observation, interviews can be more or less structured, depending on the type of information that is required, and the planning process itself. Important questions should be properly formulated beforehand. This will increase the level of accuracy and help make the use of the data more consistent. A general checklist of issues to be discussed should always be prepared in planning for interviews.

Finding and getting in touch with local key figures can be of vital importance. They know the country, the people and the area, and can help answer many of the questions which are connected to the planning phase. Useful resource people are representatives of other organisations, local and central authorities, social workers, teachers, etc.

Particularly in the planning of local community projects, access to the experience possessed by the local population is essential. They have a unique and superior knowledge of the plants, animals, soil conditions, farming methods, social and cultural traditions, etc. Finding and meeting with people who are in the centre of the local network in one way or another, formally or informally, is therefore very important.

Interviews should also attempt to identify conflicts (of interest and otherwise) and differing sets of values in the area. This will usually mean supplementing other information available by consciously seeking out groups and individuals who do not ordinarily have the opportunity to express their wishes, their demands, and their interpretation of the situation.

Group interviews are often advantageous. They allow for contact with more people. Another advantage is that when trying to obtain sensitive data, the group often has a correcting and controlling influence.

Panels of experts, or panels with representatives of different groups can also meaningfully be used, both to highlight important issues, and for more in-depth discussion on particular areas of concern.

d) Field studies and investigations

There are many ways of conducting field studies: Local ad hoc investigations can be undertaken in direct co-operation with the potential target group, perhaps involving other local co-operating partners, students, teachers or researchers. Investigations of this type can have an informal and qualitative nature, or a more formal questionnaire can be utilised. The "community diagnosis" (a much used starting point in the planning of primary health services), is an example of how this type of investigation can meaningfully be used.

Better methods and more resources, often including special expertise, may be necessary to find relevant, accurate, and up to date information on people's understanding of themselves and their living conditions, or in order to analyse particular problem areas in depth.

In the case of larger and more expensive investigations, care must be taken to define a precise objective, decide upon a clear approach to the problem, and limit the scope according to the particular need. It is also important to bring the time plan for the investigations into agreement with the time plan for the rest of the planning process. To be useful, the results from investigations must be ready in time to aid further planning.

2.1.4 *Summing Up*

A systematic understanding of the current situation in a given community sets the stage and provides the basis for any community project. It helps to consider how changes can be made to achieve certain goals and ideas. A situational analysis is a database for the project and should

contain gender-disaggregated data. On the basis of these data a community profile can be developed.

Data collection for a community profile

Data:

- * political/administrative structure
- * demographic features and population characteristics
- * economic activities
- * social stratification and power relations
- * organisations and their functions and activities
- * leadership pattern and its influence
- * cultural facets or traditions
- * critical issues and problems

Sources of information are:

- * documents or files in government offices/NGOs
- * reports of surveys
- * community members
- * informal leaders in the community
- * government officials or formal leaders
- * NGO personnel
- * politicians or local representatives of the area

Methods:

- * document review
- * questionnaires
- * discussions
- * interviews
- * observations and informal conversations
- * listening to people
- * brainstorming sessions

Important points to remember:

- * There is no single technique that is appropriate to get information from all sources.
- * The best option is to use a variety of techniques.
- * The most common techniques are questionnaires, interviews and observations.
- * Group discussions are frequently used.

2.2 Needs Assessment

Needs assessment deals with the question: **Who needs what** as defined **by whom**.

2.2.1 Needs Identification

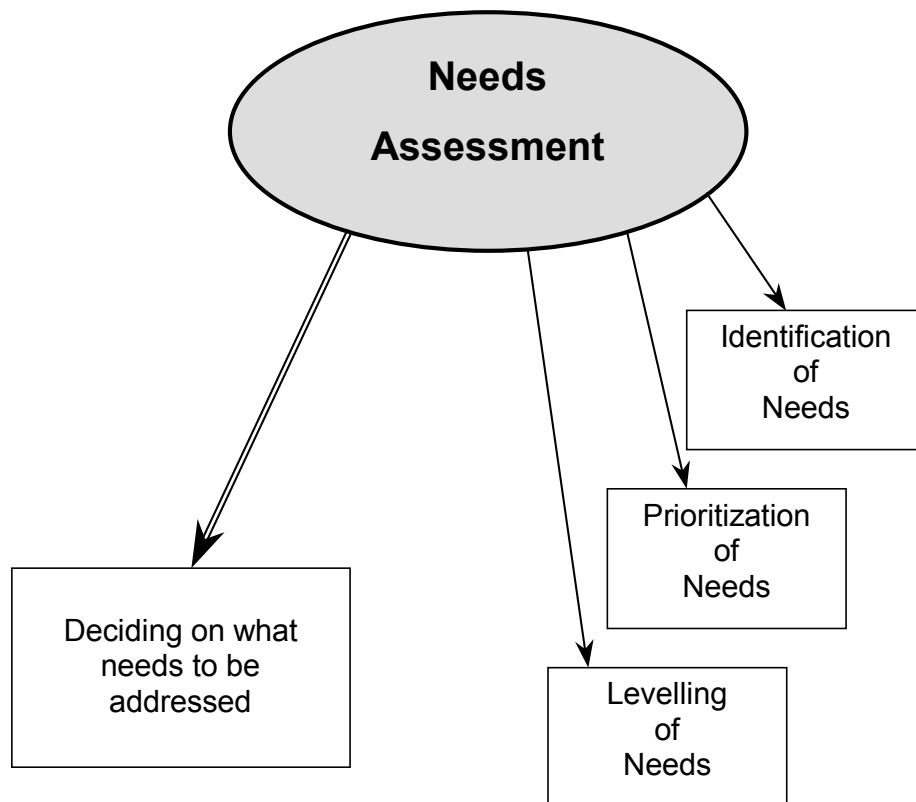
Needs assessment is one of the critical stages in the project development process, Reliable, accurate and usable information is needed that reflects the ideas articulated by representative groups of the target population and other stakeholders in the community. Women and men should be consulted throughout the process so that both perspectives can be taken into account. Women's needs often are different from the men's needs and if not taken into account project planning has a false start. Moreover, consulting the people will stimulate the sense of ownership when the project will be implemented.

2.2.2 Prioritising Needs

No one can address all identified needs in one project. Therefore, priorities have to be set. This has to be done with all stakeholders concerned, men and women. See sheet for prioritising needs

2.2.3 Levelling of Needs

Stakeholders may have different priorities. Then a negotiating process should bring consensus on which priorities should first be addressed.



2.3 Project Design

2.3.1 *The Target Group(s)*

The project plan must define clearly the target group(s) for the project. This seems self evident, but is nevertheless often given little attention.

Finding target groups already organized at the outset, and ready for discussions and negotiations about objectives and the means for self development, happens rarely.

In many real-life projects, the target group is somewhat diffuse and sometimes seems nearly arbitrary. Example definitions are "those who come", and "those we have contact with". Health projects often fall into this category .The demand for services itself creates the target group.

Choosing not to relate consciously to any particular target group means giving priority to those who for one reason or another are able to get into contact with the project. This leaves no time nor resources for those who do not come.

Broad, general terms used to define the target group (i.e. "the poor of the village" or "the poorest of the poor"), can be meaningful in policy papers, but have no place in concrete project planning.

The situation analysis attempts to broadly outline what the problem is, for whom, and why. Defining the target group is to ask:

Towards whom can we direct our efforts to do something about the problem?

The target group can be defined according to age, sex, occupation, income group, geographical area, or membership of a particular social class or other group. Other possible criteria are for instance peoples level of access to particular services, their nutritional status, etc.

Being conscious of the target group helps focus and concentrate the project effort. The choice of target group defines limits, and can in some cases erect new social barriers and improve the situation for some at the expense of others. Local society is seldom homogeneous. Conflicts, power blocs, and contradictory opinions and needs are part of almost every society. Care must therefore be taken in making the choice, and in assessing its consequences.

In light of the problems and causal relationships revealed by the situation analysis, and taking into account the type of assistance the organisation can offer, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Who should the target group be for real changes in the desired direction to take place?
- What conflicts may arise?
- What structures are already there, or can be mobilised, to enable broad communication with the target group, and to deal with potential conflicts?

2.3.2 *Goals and Objectives*

Defining goals is an important part of the planning process. The project ideology of the project partners, and the prevalent understanding of causal relationships and how they can be influenced, are usually the most important factors behind the choices made and the limits decided upon.

The statement of goals for the project should answer the question:
Where do we want to go with the project?

Development goals, project objectives and intermediate objectives must relate to the problems which have been identified in the situation analysis and to the causal relationships described there.

The target group must play an important role all through the planning process for real participation to be possible. In fact, the target group should by this stage already have been involved in the situation analysis, and in finding causal relationships between various problems.

Defining goals and objectives means deciding what problems are to be given priority.

The work of formulating goals must therefore be given the attention it deserves. Achieving meaningful interaction through the exchange of views between the different parties involved, is particularly important at this stage. Areas of agreement need to be clarified, and areas of disagreement must be found and properly related to.

A rough draft of goals and objectives can often be obtained by simply re-formulating the description of a chain of problems.

Example problem:

Many children die before the age of 5 in the Bhagari Region.

Goal:

To reduce child mortality in the Bhagari Region.

Including something on how much in what time frame makes the goal more specific. For example:

To reduce child mortality by 30% in 3 years.

To be able to do something about the problem, one must find the causal relationships behind it. By considering all the problems and needs together (as identified in the situation analysis), it is possible to shed light on how they are linked up and interact, both as causes and consequences of each other.

Certain causes are immediately obvious to planners. Further research and analysis can reveal others. Some causes and the connections between them can only be understood by members of the local community. Therefore, the planners must share their knowledge and the plans they make with the local community, and the local community must be encouraged to share its knowledge with the planners.

The goals should as far as possible be realistic, and should take into consideration inherent constraints. This is often easier said than done. A possible approach is to first make a rough draft of goals and objectives, then go back and review the causal relationships, the assumptions made, and the constraints and limitations found. The proposed strategies also need to be re-assessed in light of the findings. Finally, the goals and objectives are re-formulated, making them more concrete and more realistic (See also our example).

Example:

In the case of the "Bhagari Region", with its high rate of child mortality, a whole range of problems need to be identified.

Some possible factors:

- The long distance to water; polluted surface water.
- Many mothers being responsible for their families alone; unemployment forces the men to leave the area.
- Little opportunity to produce food for yourself; arable land is being contracted out for cultivation of cash crops.
- Very few girls attend school long enough or regularly enough to learn to read and write. Widespread under nourishment among children and adults.
- Long queues and high prices at the 3 health centres in the region.
- Taboos regarding food and disease.

In this case, **the immediate causes** of the high rate of infant mortality can be identified as:

- Diarrhoea, respiratory infections, measles, under nourishment, tetanus during early infancy.
- Infectious diseases and under nourishment amplify each other mutually as causes of death.

The **underlying causes** seem to be:

- Lack of available basic services (water supply, health services, education).
- Barriers (economic, attitudes, options) preventing the use of new knowledge full utilisation of established services.
- Unemployment.
- Unstable and vulnerable nutritional situation due to dependency on outside and
- poor use of limited choices with regard to local production.

To make a good choice of goals and strategy for this project, one would need to know which of the identified causal factors are given the highest priority by the target and which ones it would be realistic to try to change.

A rough draft of goals and objectives might look like this:

Example*Development Goal:*

To improve the living conditions and the quality of life for children and their families in the Bhagari Region.

Project Objective:

To reduce the infant mortality rate in the Bhagari Region by 30% within 3 year

Intermediate Objectives:

A. To establish basic health services for mothers and children making them available to 75% of the population.

Activities under A:

- 1 Group work on health, disease and local understanding in 3 pilot villages.
- 2 Vaccination of children ages 0-3 years with 75% coverage within 3 years.
- 3 Contact with 75% of pregnant women at least twice during each pregnancy. Etc.

B. To increase the production and availability of nourishing food.

Activities under B:

- 1 Establishing opportunities to borrow money for small-scale production initiatives.
- 2 Establishment of 2 production cooperatives.
- 3 Nutrition education as part of all activities. Etc.

C. To make better water available within 10 minutes walk to 75 % of the population.

Activities under C

- 1 The construction of 10 new small-scale water supply systems.
- 2 Improving 15 existing wells.
- 3 Educational program on water hygiene for a total of 25 women's groups. Etc.

Comment:

Intermediate goal B is still not sufficiently well formulated. It is not specific enough to make the measurement of progress possible. This reflects too poor knowledge about the causal relationships in the field of food production in the area, and about opportunities to change them. The suggested activities are therefore only outlines, and the whole issue would need to be looked closer at during the starting up phase of the project

Summing up:

Determining goals and objectives based on prioritised needs is essential for the successful completion of a project. They set the direction of the project and are the terms of reference for monitoring progress and the final evaluation.

A goal defines, very broadly, what is expected of a project and is made up of several objectives all leading to the achievement of the goal.

Objectives have to be:

- Related to needs

- Specific
- Clear
- Measurable or quantifiable
- Appropriate
- Achievable/feasible
- Time-bound

2.3.3 A Feasibility Study: Assumptions and Constraints

The situation analysis is meant to give all involved parties an overview of actual needs, practical constraints, and likely possibilities.

The problems as they relate to the chosen target group were the main consideration in formulating goals. However, it is important to reconsider them in the light of identified assumptions and constraints to make sure they are feasible in the given situation.

As part of this reconsideration it is necessary to look at the causal relations which have been demonstrated. One must find out what external conditions and developments beyond the control of the project have been assumed at the various levels, and how they might come to influence the success of the project. Identifying and assessing the assumptions made and the inherent constraints, makes it possible to adapt goals and to choose the strategies with the best chance of success.

Example

Problem:

Qualified personnel are needed for a church-related hospital

Project Idea:

Building a nurses training college

Project Objective:

Establishing a nurses training college with the capacity to graduate 15 nurses per year

Assumptions made:

- a) There must be an adequate supply of qualified students who would like to start nurses training.
- b) That a sufficient number of the trainees will (1) complete their training, (2) continue working as nurses, and (3) want to work at the church hospital.

All the assumptions create uncertainty as to whether the final goal will be reached, i.e. getting sufficient qualified personnel for the church hospital to ensure high quality nursing care.

The nurses training college project has little control over these factors. Identifying them at the outset, makes it possible to examine them closely. The risks can be properly assessed, and possible measures to reduce the risks can be considered.

There are likely to be other constraints in the situation as well. National approval of the nurses training college may be required. This might for instance limit the range of choices with regard to the qualifications required of applicants. Or there may be a national quota system for posting trained nurses. This might mean that the mission hospital's needs might not in the end be satisfied.

Ideally, all assumptions should be identified which may influence whether or not the principal objectives of the project will be attained. If this can be done, it is possible to assert with a high degree of certainty that if the required resources are invested, and the assumptions hold, then the project objectives will be attained.

This kind of analysis makes it possible to accurately analyse the feasibility of the project goals, and to find out which are the most critical risks, already during the planning phase. It also constitutes a good basis for choosing what factors to monitor closely during the implementation of the project.

The process is as follows:

After determining goals and objectives on the basis of prioritised needs, it is essential to take stock of the needed and available resources (human, material, financial, institutional), as well as the constraints that may be encountered in attempting to achieve the objectives.

This involves a feasibility study to decide whether the necessary human, institutional and financial resources are available and what constraints could negatively influence the project. Cultural concepts about gender relations could, for instance, be a constraint for the successful implementation of the project. If so, this constraint should be dealt with first.

2.3.4 *Main Strategies*

Whereas the goals and objectives spell out where we want to go, **strategies and activities together show how we plan to get there.**

There are usually several different choices of strategy available, all of which will lead to the desired objective. A description of goals does not necessarily suggest a way of reaching them.

Most strategies are based on accumulated experience from real project situations. The popularity of strategies changes with time and place:

Examples from different sectors:

In *agriculture*, there was a time when centres with demonstration plots were common. More recent projects have often chosen to emphasise decentralised farm advisory services

In health, the main strategy used to be to improve medical facilities. More recently, preventive medicine has been emphasised. At present, combining preventive and curative medicine is the trend.

Possible choices in *health* include: Institutional and mainly curative medicine; integrated services mainly focused on primary health; concentrated efforts directed towards mother and childcare, etc.

Social services were once considered important to improve the living conditions and the quality of life of the poorest population groups. More recently, stimulating entrepreneurship to increase economic activity has often been favoured.

A strategy for *community development* which has become popular in the 1980's is characterised by decentralisation of initiative, activities and responsibility. This type of strategy carries with it a whole range of inherent assumptions and consequences.

The term "vertical project" has been used to describe sector inputs consisting of single components within a given sector. Examples are malaria control, family planning, adult literacy training for school leavers, etc.

"Integrated projects" include a whole range of components (within a specific sector, or cross sectoral) which actively interact. The components are seen as a functional and administrative whole (e.g. "integrated rural development").

Most project strategies have both strengths and weaknesses. The choice between them should be made according to the project goals and according to the general context of the project.

The description of goals and the analysis of assumptions and constraints both contain valuable background information for making these choices. For example, a nutrition program might benefit from an integrated strategy, whereas leprosy might best be dealt with through a vertical project -of course co-ordinated with other health services.

The choice of strategy is important, and should be considered carefully. It has important implications for the priority given to different means and project components, and should harmonise with what is generally emphasised by the different parties involved (including the future project management). All the project partners, including the target group, should therefore participate in the process of choosing strategy.

It is often fruitful to discuss alternative strategies in order to find the one which offers the best chance of success.

The choice of a main strategy should be described in the project document, and thereby help ensure continuity. Changes of main strategy along the way must be possible, but should only be made consciously, and should be well founded in relation to the initial terms' reference for the project.

The project strategies will help bridge the gap between the basic development philosophies and principles of the organisations, and the choice of goals, target groups and inputs for individual projects.

In describing the project's main strategy, the project document should specifically clarify:

- strategies in relation to women's participation
- strategies in relation to environment and sustainability

These two concerns, and the consequences of the strategies employed to deal with them, are considered so important to the sustainability of the development process that they always need to be addressed carefully.

All strategies should be analysed with sustainability in mind, attempting to predict both the short term and the long-term effects of project inputs into the local society - ecologically, economically, socially and culturally.

2.3.5 *Action Plan*

Planning project activities involves the following steps:

- 1) Identifying activities. Identifying project activities is the most important step in the project planning phase and should involve all the stakeholders, men and women, in a participatory way. The activities should be based on the objectives, taking into consideration the resources and constraints.
- 2) Sequencing activities.
- 3) Determining human, financial and material resources.

- 4) Developing a time frame for activities. The time frame should include a monitoring schedule.
- 5) Monitoring and Evaluation

To help you develop an action plan use the following checklist:

- What are the activities to accomplish the objectives?
- Why is the activity taking place?
- For Whom is the activity?
- Who is doing the activity? Which human resources do we use?
- Where is the activity taking place?
- When is the activity taking place?
- Who is responsible for coordination/implementation?
- How is monitoring and evaluation assured?
- What is the budget?

After the design has been made it should be written down as a project plan and, when external funding is needed, a project proposal should be prepared, including a detailed budget.

The budget should include an estimate of the services, equipment, facilities, and materials that can be contributed by the beneficiaries (both in-kind and financial contributions), so that: the community knows the value of its own contribution, donor agencies can see how much the beneficiaries are contributing, because they often require matching funds, ownership is reinforced.

For guidelines on funding and proposal writing, see chapters 5-7.