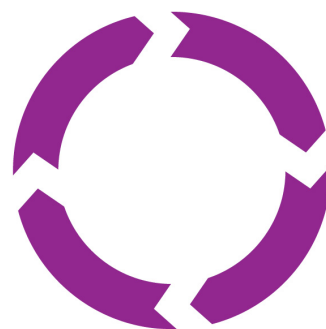


# Managing the Project Cycle



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## MANAGING THE PROJECT CYCLE

### The Project Cycle – an overview

The project cycle consists of four stages:

- 1) **assessment** and **planning**,
- 2) **implementation** and **monitoring**,
- 3) **evaluation**, and
- 4) **adaptation**.

Each stage has its own characteristics and requires specific knowledge and skills.

*A Project Cycle Diagram:*



The **assessment** phase is sometimes also called the identification phase, as in this period the “why?” of the project is the important question to ask. In this stage, the real problems and issues that need to be addressed are identified.

The assessment phase is followed by a **planning** phase in which goals and objectives are defined and the feasibility of the project is carefully researched. Then an action plan is made, resources are determined and the use of the resources is planned. At this stage it is already important to think about and identify indicators to be used to monitor and to evaluate the project.

In the **implementation** phase, during which the project is actually carried out, continuous **monitoring** needs to take place, in order to see whether the project is on the right track, is meeting its objectives and is using its resources as planned.

During the **evaluation** phase the project is measured against its objectives in order to see if objectives have been met – and also to see how this was done and what the impact of the project is. In other words what changes have occurred as a result of project activities?

On the basis of the evaluation, **adaptation** of the project can take place and lessons learnt can be identified and used for future planning.

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The project cycle is a continuously ongoing one: after evaluation and adaptation, the planning starts again, followed by implementation & monitoring, etc.

### Project Cycle Management (PCM)

Project cycle management is the term given to the process of planning and managing projects, programmes and organisations.

In order to make development projects successful, good planning is needed. Some important factors need to be taken into account, in particular the needs and views of stakeholders.

- “Stakeholders” is the word used for everybody with an interest in the project. “Primary Stakeholders” are the people who, it is hoped, will be helped by the project – the clients, target groups, beneficiaries. Other stakeholders may include local leaders, the community, NGO workers, and donors.

PCM ensures that all aspects of a project are included in the management process. Each part of the project cycle is considered, and any changes are noticed and taken into account for future project planning and design. This way of working contributes to the success and sustainability of the project.

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### 1. The Assessment and Planning phase

During the assessment and planning phase you will:

- **Identify** the real problems and issues that will need to be addressed, through collecting information;
- Consider the **feasibility** of a project;
- Set your **goals and objectives**;
- Develop an **action plan**;
- Carefully plan the use of your **resources**;
- Identify **indicators** for monitoring and evaluation.

Many organisations at this stage use the **logical framework**. More information on what the logical framework (or 'log frame') is and how to use it can be found in:

- Tearfund's *Project Cycle Management* publication (Section 2.4):  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/~media/Files/TILZ/Publications/ROOTS/English/PCM/ROOTS\\_5\\_E\\_Full.pdf](http://tilz.tearfund.org/~media/Files/TILZ/Publications/ROOTS/English/PCM/ROOTS_5_E_Full.pdf)
- EuropeAid's *Project Cycle Management Guidelines* (Section 5):  
[https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/methodology-aid-delivery-methods-project-cycle-management-200403\\_en\\_2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/methodology-aid-delivery-methods-project-cycle-management-200403_en_2.pdf)

#### 1.1 Training your staff in Project Cycle thinking

If your NGO staff is not accustomed to using the Project Cycle as a management tool, consider using Networklearning's **teaching module**:

<http://networklearning.org/index.php/library/the-project-cycle>

It is designed to get them thinking in cycles. The example used in the module is drawn from a specific field (constructing housing after a disaster) but you can bring your own fields of expertise in, to ensure that people are applying what they are learning.

Tearfund's *Project Cycle Management* publication [see link above] can be used for planning programmes as well as managing and developing organisations.

There is a phrase: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Think of examples of when things have gone wrong because planning was not carried out adequately. Why did things go wrong? What was not taken account of?

#### 1.2. Identifying the real problems and needs

The first steps of the Project cycle involve identifying the real problems and needs.

- What needs or problems exist and whom do they affect?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses that the different affected people have, which influences their ability to address their problems?
- What can they do themselves?

You may already have a lot of information, and may already have a good idea of what you want to do. However this information might be less complete than you realise. An exercise to actively gathering information may bring in an extra dimension.

## MANAGING THE PROJECT CYCLE

Accurate, reliable and sufficient information is necessary in order to:

- Plan effectively and efficiently;
- Be aware of all factors and circumstances that can influence the project, such as the context in which the project will take place;
- Understand the causes of problems or issues;
- Know what others are already doing, in order to avoid duplication and see where cooperation is needed;
- Define the most appropriate way to respond to a need or problem;
- Justify your input and use of resources.

### 1.3 Stakeholder analysis

A first step in the identification of problems and needs is the stakeholder analysis. Stakeholders are those who directly or indirectly become involved in deciding what a project or programme should achieve and how it should be achieved. They may include beneficiaries, project or program staff, management (at local, regional, national or international levels), researchers, government agencies and donors.

Effective and efficient project cycle management requires a **participatory** approach, involving all stakeholders in all project cycle phases, especially in decision-making:

- A truly participatory approach will strengthen responsiveness and provide a sense of ownership, which will contribute to the likelihood of achieving the project's objectives.
- When people become committed this contributes to sustainability.
- Using local knowledge and skills might strengthen efficiency and avoid mistakes.
- When stakeholders are given sufficient information and decision-making power, then transparency and accountability improves. People are informed about what is happening and why, and have a specific responsibility in the project.

Knowing who your stakeholders are and having an idea of the existing problems leads to the next questions:

- What information do you need exactly, and from whom?
- How will you gather it?
  - A **Needs Assessment** or a **PRA** might be the right tool. Use Networklearning's *Information: its collection and use through the Project Cycle* to help you:  
<http://networklearning.org/index.php/library/information-its-collection-and-use>
  - **Focus Group Discussions** may be one of the tools used to gather information:  
<http://networklearning.org/index.php/library/key-information-sheets>

A Needs Assessment is often seen as a separate activity – a team drawn from the NGO and other disciplines goes and spends a week with the primary stakeholders. But some NGOs plan ahead. If the primary stakeholders are nearby, living in shanty-

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towns or in a refugee camp, you may have already built information collection into routine NGO activities: for example, a pair of workers who spend an afternoon a week visiting a few families or individuals and gathering information in an organised way. In such a case your NGO will already have good information on which to base future planning and decisions.

In addition to the primary stakeholders, other sources of information may be experts from outside your NGO. In every case, make sure that what they say is taken seriously. No NGO has complete expertise. Needs Assessments may therefore be done in partnership with other experts – for example, people working in Government offices or private enterprises. If you are concerned with poverty, you might want to involve an expert on micro-enterprises; if you are interested in health and sickness, you can involve the local health workers. Building partnerships with such people is worth doing.

Most groups of primary stakeholders can play an active part in the process of finding out what the problems are. This includes children over seven, people with psychiatric problems, the elderly, even people with special education needs – they may still be able to communicate if you say to them in a careful and respectful way, “What are your problems?”, “What kind of place do you want to live in and why?” They will have a point of view worth hearing.

It is important to assess needs based on a **gender needs assessment** – see Networklearning’s checklist *Gender Issues in the Project Cycle*:  
<http://networklearning.org/index.php/library/incorporating-gender-into-your-ngo>

As men and women have different tasks, they also have different needs. Child bearing requires natal care and access to specific health services. Being the head of the household requires the skills and means to provide sufficient income.

Needs may be divided into practical and strategic ones.

**Practical needs** could be water provision, health care, provision of agricultural tools or earning income to run the household. These needs are mostly connected to the specific tasks of women and men, including reproduction and productive work. Note that responding to practical needs can solve practical problems but usually will not change anything in terms of power relations, control over resources or decision-making power.

*For example: the community may feel that that they have a serious problem with malnutrition in the small children and have ideas for improving the situation by growing vegetables*

Looking at **strategic needs** means looking at power relations, access to and control over resources, and decision-making rights. Examples of strategic needs could be: access to credit and other resources;

- measures against violence;
- freedom of decision-making;
- the rights to own land or property.

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Responding to strategic needs will influence, and hopefully transform, these underlying issues.

*For example:*

— *a change in the law so that women can own property would change who has control over the land.*

— *the creation of a cooperative might empower men, women or both to obtain better prices for crops.*

### 1.4 Problem analysis

Once the needs and problems have been identified, the next step is to analyse them. No problem exists by itself. It is always part of a cause-and-effect chain of problems and these causes and effects have to be identified in order to plan well.

An exercise often used is to draw the **problem tree**, from which project objectives can be derived. This exercise is described in Section 2.3 of Tearfund's *Project Cycle Management* publication [see link on page 4] and in pp. 67-69 of EuropeAid's *Project Cycle Management Guidelines* [see link on page 4].

Problem trees enable you to:

- get to the root of stakeholders' needs and problems;
- investigate the effects of problems;
- think about ways to address these problems;
- define priorities.

### 1.5 Project planning and design

The next steps of the Project Cycle involve deciding what the project should do and then planning how to bring about the changes that are wanted. To ensure that you get to where you want to go to, choose a goal and objectives that together reflect the vision of your NGO.

A **goal** is the general purpose of the project.

*For example:*

— *to decrease malnutrition of small children.*

— *to improve the clean water availability in a village.*

**Objectives** are specific, measurable results to be achieved by a specific point in time. They need to be realistic and feasible. Each will require resources – financial, human or other – and these must be available or possible to acquire.

Which changes are desired? Objectives are desired future situations, they are not activities. You can define the objectives of the project by studying your needs assessment and problem analysis. The problem tree exercise will help to reformulate problems into objectives [see links on page 4 for guidance]. Writing an objective is often simply a matter of turning a problem statement around.

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*An example of a problem statement is that farmers have no access to information on the prices of their agricultural products. An objective then is that these farmers have access to that information.*

Here are three objectives...

Two are long-term:

- *“In three years time, 75% of the families in the project community will have vegetable gardens”*
- *“In three years time, the Under-5 children will be eating more vegetables”*

One is short-term:

- *“By October every family will have access to seeds, fertiliser and tools at an affordable price”*

Ask yourself whether these three objectives are relevant, feasible (do-able) and measurable. Now, in order to reach each objective, you need to define how you are going to do it – and that is by using a strategy.

### 1.6 Strategic planning

After the analysis, you have decided what you want to change or what needs to be changed. But how are you going to bring about these changes? What is needed? The process of planning how you will make it happen is called strategic planning.

Sometimes several problems need to be addressed at the same time, which means that you will have to develop more projects. Each project needs to be assessed in terms of:

- the expertise required
- length of time needed to put it in place
- type of budget requirement
- which stakeholders are involved

To appraise strategy options, EuropeAid’s *Project Cycle Management Guidance* [see page 4] advises to use the following key questions:

- What is likely to solve the problem?
- Can the key problem be solved by one or two projects or is it necessary to put in place a parallel set of projects all focusing on the key problem?
- Do the problems and objectives match?
- What resources are available?
- What can potential implementing agencies do?
- What other projects or initiatives are planned or being implemented?
- If the project is successful, can it be mainstreamed?



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### 1.7 Defining indicators

Indicators are necessary in order to measure the impact of your project (impact indicators), to monitor the process, and to know in how far the objectives have been met (process indicators). These indicators are a type of measurement agreed upon beforehand in the planning stage. They are used to see in how far objectives have been reached.

There are several requirements for good indicators.  
An indicator has to be:

- **Relevant** to the objective it is measuring.  
*For example: if the objective is that children will eat more tomatoes, an indicator 'to increase the number of families growing tomatoes' would not be relevant, because it says nothing about the tomatoes being eaten by the children.*
- **Measurable.** Can the indicator realistically be measured?  
*For example: how can you measure 'more children will be well nourished' – could you use existing Road to Health cards that measure weight for age?*
- **Sufficient.** Is one indicator sufficient or are more indicators needed in order to measure in how far the objective has been met?  
*For example: if the objective is to improve the sanitation in the village, which indicators would you need to measure this?*
- **Achievable.**  
*For example: would an indicator such as 'in one year time there will be no more malnutrition in the village' be achievable? A more achievable indicator would be: 'in three years time, the percentage of malnourished children will be reduced by 7% if you define malnutrition using the percentiles on the Road to Health'.*
- **Specific.** Matters of quality, quantity and time need to be specified.
- **Adaptable.** It should be possible to adapt the indicator to allow for changes that occur in the project.
- **Cost-effective.** The resources – human, financial and other – needed in order to measure the indicators should be reasonable and in proportion to the project costs.
- **Available.**  
*For example: to measure income in periods that no crops are sold, might not be possible.*

Preferably, indicators should be developed in a participatory way. There could also be a participatory assessment later on [see Section 2.2]. Use of participatory methods

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will keep people feeling involved and help in measuring the real impact of a project on the lives of the (primary) stakeholders.

It is also important to involve your stakeholders as your NGO may have a clear idea of what is a core principle but if a donor thinks differently you may need evidence to convince them.

### 1.8 Measuring indicators

Once you have identified the indicators, decide how you will measure these indicators. How will you collect your information? You would have to think about the following:

- Which methods will you use for information gathering?
- How often do you need to collect information, and when?
- What will be your sample size to get the information? How to select your sample?
- Who will be responsible for the information collection, data processing, analysing and reporting?
- What is needed in terms of money, time, human and material resources?
- What will be the means of communication?
- How will the reporting be done, and how often?
- How and where will you store your data, in written form and digitally?
- Who will be responsible for the follow-up, and adaptations of the project if necessary?

*For example: you can measure the nutritional status of under-fives in cooperation with the women of the community, literate and non-literate. They can learn to measure Upper Arm Circumference with the standard coloured tape measures. Normally the women are divided into pairs with at least one of each pair able to use a tally sheet. Then both women measure each child. If they come up with different results then the supervisor does a third measurement. If they agree, the finding is accepted. By measuring malnutrition, the women learn to recognise it.*

*For example: one of your indicators is that 'In three years time, 75% of the families in the project community will have vegetable gardens and use these vegetables in the family diet'. During the development of the project, everyone agreed who would do the routine monitoring: members of the Health Committee. You want them to monitor whether the project is making progress and it is agreed that they will do this every two months, with a sit-down review after one year. You will also decide who will be responsible for support visits to the community, collecting the raw data, processing and analysing it – including how this will be done and who will be responsible for the follow-up.*

In general the amount of information you can gather and the method you will use are determined by the resources and time you have available.

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Consultation with primary stakeholders is time-consuming but does not need technical facilities. Collecting a lot of quantitative information is also time-consuming and might require computer work to analyse data. With this in mind, you also need to consider the following:

- Will you develop special tally sheets for literate and non-literate committee members?
- Will you write the results in your quarterly report, summarize it in an existing database, or set up a specific database for this information?
- How will you feed the findings back to the different stakeholders?
- Which donor(s) needs to be informed?
- If the result is disappointing, who will be responsible for taking action?

Specifying and planning the monitoring and evaluation in this preparatory stage will facilitate the actual monitoring and evaluation later on. (For more details on monitoring and evaluation see Section 2).

### 1.9 The Action Plan

The next step is to turn the objectives and strategies into an action plan. An action plan consists of several elements:

- **Activities:** Which activities need to be undertaken in order to reach the objectives? When, where, and by whom?
- **Required input:** What do we need in terms of human, financial, and material resources? And how much time?
- **Expected output:** What do we expect to achieve? What will be the result of the specific activities and inputs in the course of the project?
- **Indicators** (see above)
- **Evidence:** How can you prove that the measurement of the indicator is true? For example how would you prove that more vegetables are used in the family diet?
- **Expected effect:** What effect will the action or activity have on the (primary) stakeholders?
- **Assumptions:** These are factors that are important for the project, but which are outside its scope or control. Assumptions are the answer to the question “What external factors are not influenced by the NGO’s activities, but may affect its plans?” Some examples: the political environment; the amount of rain in the monsoon; conflict situations; world prices for fertiliser.

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- **Precondition:** A precondition is the first and most important assumption you define. The precondition is usually a policy that needs to be in place, or an agreement by a major contributor to your project. If the precondition is not met at the start of your project, your level of risk is high.

*For example: if you want to start a programme for which you will need improved seeds, the co-operation of the department of agriculture might be essential in order to get access to these seeds.*

- **Gender:** How gender friendly is the project planning? Will the project contribute to gender equity? Are needs of both men and women met (if applicable)?
- **Timeline.** An action plan needs a timeline so that you know, for example:
  - when will you conduct certain activities?
  - when will you expect results?
  - when will you measure the expected effects?

### 1.10 The budget

Now you know what you want to do and how you want to do it. The next step is to prepare a budget. This is needed for transparent financial management, planning and monitoring. Maybe you already have money; otherwise you will have to approach donors and write a proposal.

The budget must include all the materials, activities and resources needed in order to carry out the project. And it has to be realistic, using actual and reasonable prices and amounts, if you hope to convince the donor to fund the project – and ensure that the project can be implemented as planned.

- For more on budgeting, see <https://www.mango.org.uk/guide/budgeting>

### 1.11 Assessing the risk of a negative outcome

Some people consider this an important exercise to do towards the end of the planning stage. Sometimes it is also called a 'quality assurance check'. The aim is to step back from the planned project and think about all the possible ways that it could go wrong. Then, for each possible problem that is identified, the team can consider whether they have the flexibility and resources to adapt.

Things to consider include:

#### The **technology**.

- How acceptable is the technology?
- For how long will the technology be affordable?
- For how long will the technology be functional?
- Will there be money for maintenance?
- Your technology always costs the user something – time, money. Where would the resources have gone to if the project did not happen?

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### The **primary stakeholders**.

- Who do you hope to reach?
- Who will not be reached – and how will they react?
- What do you expect of the primary stakeholders?

### The **personnel**.

- Are you training personnel? What will happen to them at the end of the project? Do they expect a career?
- Will they continue to need supervision? What could go wrong if they are unsupervised?

### The **timeline**.

- You have a timeline for the plan, the money and the people. What could go wrong if they do not match?

### The **objectives and activities**:

- Do the activities match the objectives?
- Do all the objectives have clear indicators?
- Are objectives and activities gender-friendly?

## MANAGING THE PROJECT CYCLE

### 2. The Implementation and Monitoring Phase

The implementation phase is the period in which the project is actually conducted and the planned activities are carried out. During this phase a continuous monitoring is also necessary:

- to keep up the quality of the work that is going on
- to ensure that the project is heading in the right direction and progress is made towards the objectives
- to spot problems early.

In this phase it is important regularly to reassess the risks and to check if the stakeholders remain the same. The results and knowledge gained from the monitoring has to be fed back into the project design – and, where necessary, adjustments or improvements have to be made.

In practice nothing will go completely as planned and few plans are carried out within the originally estimated time. Management need a good flow of credible information – and a large measure of flexibility. Problems will always arise.

Consider how you will respond if, say:

- Supplies are held up for at least a month;
- You are told that half the workers are reporting faked data;
- The Community is angry because they think they are being exploited;
- The Community has stopped doing what it promised.

Make your own list of what might go wrong and how you would respond.

#### 2.1 Monitoring

Implementation is a process of change. You need to continuously check if you are on the right road or if you have taken a wrong turn. If the results are not what you expected, things may go slowly or people lose motivation – and then action must be taken. A change process is like a child learning how to walk: falling and getting up again. Do not get discouraged. Enjoy the positive outcomes and adapt your strategies when there are negative ones.

So, for the duration of the project, monitoring is essential – to find out whether the program and activities are effective, and how strategies need to be adapted to ensure the best possible results. Simply put: having made a plan, are we now carrying it out in good time and using the right means, people and approaches?

Reasons to monitor:

- Regularly updated information is vital in ensuring that programs remain relevant and effective.
- Regular monitoring allows managers to determine priorities and guide revisions to their programmes.
- Regular monitoring allows managers to identify emerging problems and determine the effect of their responses.

## MANAGING THE PROJECT CYCLE

- Regularly updated information means that questions can be asked that will help with evaluation – whether, for example the programme is really going to affect the problem addressed.
- Information derived from continual monitoring can be used for reviews, evaluations and other purposes.

Monitoring looks complex but should not be. It is an activity based on data collection. The knowledge and skills required for monitoring are the same as for assessment and analysis. In fact your monitoring has been planned beforehand by defining indicators and how to collect information on these indicators.

It helps to use a monitoring system adapted to your needs and situation. Some projects are easier to monitor than others. If you are vaccinating children, it is simple to count the kids and calculate the proportion of all children covered and not covered. Changes in attitudes or behaviour are more difficult to monitor, but the use of good indicators from the very beginning will facilitate this process.

Some additional aspects to think about:

- Information collected should be directly relevant to the programme – in other words, it should be useful and acted upon. It should also be documented, and made available as needed to other sectors and agencies, as well as the affected population.
- The means of communication used (dissemination methods, language, etc.) must be appropriate and accessible for the intended audience. A report to your donor needs to be in an official format. But information provided to your non-literate stakeholders should be in a form they will understand. In some cases you might decide to have a workshop to present the results, discuss the outcomes, and talk about the next steps.

Monitoring enables you to learn:

- what went well
- which was a right method to use, which not – and why not.
- whether the right resources been used
- whether the amount of money spent is in relation to the outcome
- whether people feel involved

*For example: the community might decide to monitor whether the vegetable gardens have been dug out and fenced, and whether seeds were available at the time and price agreed. Later, after complaints, they add to their monitoring list what the stakeholders think about the variety of seeds, the taste of the vegetables... and any other comments or suggestions.*

When you discover, by good monitoring, that something does not work, you are obliged to act.

*For example: one of the new seeds is doing badly, which means you have to take action to ensure that the project agronomist finds out why and passes good advice via the Committee people doing the monitoring. Quick action is needed so that other crops can fill the gap.*

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### 2.2 Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA)

Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) involves the use of participatory tools, combined with more conventional statistical approaches, to measure the impact of humanitarian assistance and development projects on people's lives. The approach emphasises the involvement of project participants and community members in assessing project impact – and recognizes them as experts to indicate changes.

Traditionally, evaluations tended to focus on measuring aspects of project implementation, such as the delivery of inputs and services, the number of water points constructed or the number of people trained. PIA aims to measure the real impact of a project on the lives of the project participants.

So, as far as possible, a PIA should use indicators that are identified by the community or intended project participants. Communities have their own priorities for improving their lives, and their own ways of identifying impact indicators and measuring change. Often these are different from the priorities and indicators identified by external actors.

A project-level PIA tries to answer the following three key questions:

1. What changes have there been in the community since the start of the project?
2. Which of these changes are attributable to the project?
3. What differences have these changes made to people's lives?

- More details on PIA and methods to use can be found in *Participatory Impact Assessment: A Design Guide*:  
<http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/participatory-impact-assessment-a-design-guide/>

### 2.3 Distributing information

The information you distribute should be concise and essential, considering who needs to know what. What do the field staff and the community need to know? What is important for the director to know?

*For example:*

- *in the sowing season, the director might want to know how many families have hoed and planted seeds. He or she does not need to know the names, dates etc.*
- *The project support officer needs a record of contact with the Committee members, including discussion of what is going right (and why) and where the problems are (and why).*

Different forms of communication are needed. These could be verbal or written, formal or informal. Tally sheets can be filled in by non-literates.

- Use Networklearning's *Information: its collection and use through the Project Cycle to help you*:  
<http://networklearning.org/index.php/library/information-its-collection-and-use>



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Photographs are always handy. For example, to show what a training looks like. And especially to show a situation before and after, such as uncultivated bush versus cultivated garden.

Make sure that you can cross-check information to gather evidence and pass the right information in the right way to the right person.

*For example: you receive a verbal message that the well and water pump in one village have been repaired and the pump is now working well. Your cross-check method will be for you (or someone else) to go to the village and observe if the well is indeed working properly.*

Monitoring often overlaps with evaluation [see next Section]. Some means that can be used for monitoring and evaluation are:

- Discussing and exchanging information with partners and stakeholders;
- Writing reports;
- Using computers for analysis (spreadsheets, databases, statistics, graphics);
- Using diagrams, matrices, graphics, mapping etc;
- Using video, photos;
- Using observation.

You can write your monitoring plan in a matrix. Have a look at your action plan, decide what you have to monitor, how and by whom. Use the indicators from your action plan to see if you are on the right road.

Example matrix for monitoring							
Subject/ action	Indicators	Method of data collection	Who	Frequency of data collection	Reporting system	Analysis by whom	Redesign or adaptation by whom

Depending on the findings, you may have to re-visit your objectives and strategies and adapt your action plan.

### 3. The Evaluation phase

Evaluation is often the last part of a project or process. At the same time it is often the beginning of the next phase, extension or new proposal.

Three evaluation moments can be distinguished:

- Mid-term, often mixed with monitoring, and sometimes called an assessment;
- Immediately after the completion of the project;
- Some time after the completion of the project.

Staff of the organisation can do an internal evaluation. An independent outside agency can perform an external evaluation, often at the request of the donor. An evaluation can also be a joint one, with staff from the organisation and personnel from the outside agency. The organisation itself can also clearly indicate what they think is important to evaluate and should certainly be involved in defining the Terms of Reference. Remember that a real participatory evaluation will involve the primary stakeholders as well.

#### 3.1 Purposes of evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation can be two-fold:

- to assess the actual results of an activity, and/or
- to assess what has been learnt from the project.

A difference can be made in types of evaluation, like **process** evaluation, where you look at the process during the project and **impact** evaluation, where you look at the impact of the project on the primary stakeholders.

A distinction is also made between **formative** and **summative** evaluation. This relates to the perspective from which an evaluation is conducted. For 'formative' evaluations this is 'public accountability'; for 'summative' evaluations it is 'improvement'.

The following questions concerning the project management and planning could be examined during a **formative evaluation**:

#### **Effectiveness:**

- To what extent have the objectives been achieved? ...and at what costs?
- If objectives were not met, then why? What were the strengths in the strategies/actions used? ...and what were the weak points?
- Are objectives still valid, or do these need to be adapted?
- Which changes need to be made in order to reach the objectives?

#### **Efficiency:**

- Are the costs in proportion to the benefits? These costs refer to resources: human resources, time, energy, money and materials.

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*For example:*

- *if a lot of woman/man hours were needed to cultivate the gardens, and fertiliser had to be imported and was extremely costly, the balance between input and output might not be correct.*
- *if a lot of time, effort and money was spent on vegetables but the farmers are making the harvest into alcohol – this project could be a waste of money.*

### **Impact analysis:**

- What has been the impact on the staff, the organization and the stakeholders?
- What changes have been brought about by the project?  
These changes can be the ones desired, but sometimes, unexpected ones occur. A Participatory Impact Analysis can be used to understand the stakeholders' perspectives [see Section 2.2].

*For example: a Hygiene Education project linked to newly installed pumps and vegetable growing was very concerned with helping women get control of their home situation. The NGO monitored the process of the project and during the end evaluation they used tools drawn from Participatory Impact Analysis. Their findings were that women felt more empowered – and, something not expected, they also reported less diarrhoea among the children.*

The improvement-oriented **summative evaluation** could focus on:

- What went well, and what not – and why?
- What improvements are needed in order to be more effective, more efficient or to reach the objective?
- What are the lessons learnt and how can this knowledge be used for future plans or projects?
- What did you learn from the practices and approaches implemented?
- Which methods worked well, which did not?
- Which were the best practices – and which were unsuccessful? Identifying these things should help with future planning and could contribute to organizational strengthening or institutional learning. Best practices can be used again and unsuccessful ones eliminated.

**Internal evaluation** is often improvement-oriented.

The practice of evaluating one's own effort is a natural one: women will look to see if spots have been removed from shirts after washing; a mechanic will check if the motor he repaired is working properly; a carpenter will run his hands over the wood to decide when a piece is smooth.

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### 3.2 Participatory evaluation

Participatory evaluation means that all the people involved in the project – at the different levels – engage in ongoing evaluation of the project and its effects. The focus of participatory evaluation is to actively engage those who the project is designed for, in all aspects of the process – so that they share control in planning, undertaking, analysing and applying learning from an evaluation process.

The aims of participatory evaluation:

- Above all, to develop and improve a project by continuously learning and using the lessons to adapt the project ever better to its specific context;
- To build skills and knowledge that empower sustainable action in the future;
- To communicate with external and internal stakeholders;
- To provide a method of accountability for the project.

The participatory evaluation works from both the public accountability and improvement-oriented perspectives ('summative' and 'formative', as described in the previous section).

The key principles, or advantages, of participatory evaluation are:

- It ensures participants are involved actively, not just passive sources of information;
- It builds the capacity of local people to gather information, analyse, reflect and take effective action;
- It supports the joint learning of people involved in a project, including those who are involved at different levels and in different ways;
- It acts as a catalyst to help people commit to taking more effective action in a project or community.

## MANAGING THE PROJECT CYCLE

### 4. The Adaptation phase

In the adaptation phase, the project or programme is adapted based on the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation.

#### 4.1 Feeding lessons learnt back into the planning

During monitoring and evaluation, information is collected that can improve projects or programmes. These activities are part of the continuous process of checking what the needs are, the appropriateness of responses, and desired changes.

The results of accurate monitoring can be fed into the evaluation process.

After the evaluation, the NGO can identify best practices and lessons learnt. So the whole process of planning and assessing can start again.

Usually an evaluation will provide clear recommendations concerning changes in terms of “what” and “how”. The aim is to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the project or programme.