Chapter 6: Managing projects

6.1 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

This chapter presents **definitions** of projects and the project cycle and then looks at why many community development projects prove to be less successful than anticipated. It goes on to provide some best practice guidance for **project management**. It looks at how NGOs can best assess community requests for support, emphasising the importance of looking at these within the parameters of the strategic plan and annual team work plan. Some methods for assessing community needs and undertaking a **community needs assessment** are provided, with examples of tools for community research. Some advice is given about how to select the best tools for community research and how to set about planning, implementing and analysing the research results.

Sometimes community research is used as a tool for **project design**, although this is not its only role. It can also be used in strategic planning and impact assessments.

The second part of the chapter provides guidance on how to develop a **concept paper** for a project, how to identify potential funding sources and test the interest of potential funders, and how to write a full-blown **project proposal**. This includes guidance on how to produce a project budget, work plan and the additional information that funding agencies normally require.

6.2 STRATEGIC PLAN AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The content of this chapter links to Chapter 3 (Strategic planning) in two ways. First, some of the tools and exercises it contains can be used to aid a strategic planning process.

> **For example,** part of the external environment analysis might include an in-depth needs assessment of a community needing assistance and support from the organisation over the next three years.

Other tools suggested below may also be relevant to strategic planning and to the systems for impact assessment or monitoring and evaluation.

Second, Chapter 3 outlined how organisations can develop strategies for realising their strategic aims. These included:
- networking with others
- advocacy, or influencing policy
- capacity building and training

- institutional strengthening or organisational development
- research
- direct funding and grant-making to community based organisations.

What is a project?

Interpreted broadly, the concept of a project embraces most, if not all, these strategic activities. It concerns the steps taken to translate an idea about helping communities to meet an identified need into practical actions (strategies or a project) that will substantially change people's lives for the better.

In the broadest sense of the term, 'a project' can be defined in terms of four general characteristics:

- It has an output or set of outputs defined by an overall goal or strategic aim.
- It is planned, implemented and evaluated over a clearly demarcated period of time.
- It has a pre-determined input of resources (financial or material and human).
- It uses specific ways of working.

Some projects do not involve any direct funding, but do demand considerable non-financial support, for example advice.

> **For example,** a small-scale voluntary project aims to help a school to organise a garbage collection day in order to protect the environment. It may require the voluntary inputs of teachers, pupils and parents and, possibly, the staff of a local NGO.
>
> Similarly, the time an NGO Project Officer spends helping a community group to organise itself through various capacity building initiatives does not require direct funding, but has costs in terms of staff time for the NGO. Many NGOs find that much of their day to day work involves this type of non-funding support because of the high premium placed on empowerment.

At the other extreme are very large projects that require a large investment of funds, such as building a community primary school or a village health centre. Here an NGO may provide direct funds – often acting as an intermediary between the community and a larger funding agency – and other forms of advice and support to the community concerned.

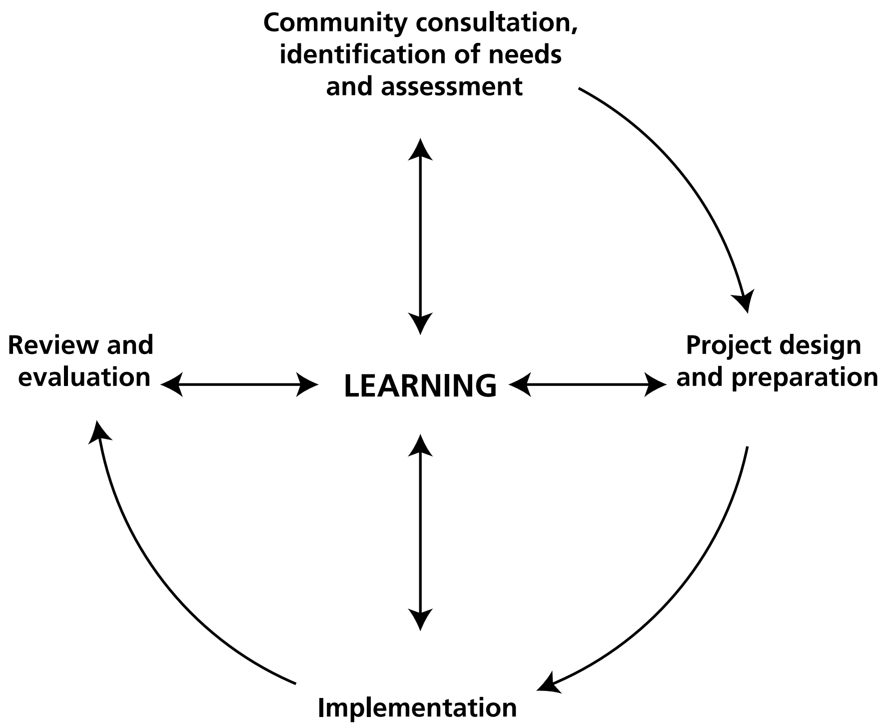
Some projects have **outputs** that are clearly visible and tangible, such as the rehabilitation of buildings or the construction of village roads. The outputs of other projects are often less straightforward.

> **For example,** the primary output of a project with small community groups organised by people living with HIV and AIDS to ensure more effective networking and communication is not as easy to demonstrate as a new building.
>
> A project to build the advocacy capacities of organisations working to advance the human rights of women so that they can influence the introduction of new legislation on women's rights to land (the eventual outcome) has less tangible outputs than the repair of community water pumps.

The impact of projects that have more tangible outputs and outcomes is much easier to evaluate than the impact of projects which aim to change the way people behave, think and believe. However, it is possible to define impact **indicators** or indicators of achievement for most projects, even the least apparently tangible.

What is a project cycle?

A project cycle can be shown as a complete circle with learning at its centre. Lessons can be learnt from both the successes and failures. The box below suggests some principles of project management guided by a participatory approach.



A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

- Project design involves the community, rather than being something an NGO staff member does in the office.
- Project monitoring and evaluation are guided first and foremost by listening to clients or beneficiaries.
- Significant project decisions are made with the participation of the target group and beneficiaries, and are based on consensus.
- A key component of any project is changes in attitudes and behaviour in the name of sustainable long term change.

Strategies and projects

Increasingly organisations have found that the positive impact of their work in changing people's lives is enhanced if programmes include a combination of different strategies. Hence the emphasis nowadays is less on 'projects' than on strategies to help communities achieve their aspirations.

> **For example,** NGO support to a community wishing to develop its water resources might include, for example, a combination of capacity building and training for a community based organisation in basic organisational skills and small-scale dam rehabilitation; small-scale funding for safer drinking water; and support to community activists advocating increased government spending on water development in a particular locality.

It is generally believed that such a combination of activities results in greater **sustainability** and **reduced dependence**, as well as having greater long term impact on the lives of more people than project funding alone. The basic assumption made by the Somaliland Capacity Building Caucus (CBC), for example, is that reaching development goals means that people become involved in their own development. The organisation, therefore, will '*help people to shape their own lives*'.

If an organisation is operating at a national or regional level, much of its programme may consist of making grants to other organisations that, as a result of this support, become **partner organisations**: they provide a way of channelling financial and other support to the target groups or ultimate beneficiaries at a more localised, community level.

However, some organisations make a strategic decision to work directly at community level with the target group or beneficiaries. A key question to ask is always:

How can an NGO best reach the target groups it has identified at community level that are in greatest need of support?

Sometimes embryonic or developing **community based organisations** (CBOs) exist with which an NGO can work. Often, however, NGOs must start community level development virtually from scratch, with activities to support members of a community to develop their own organisational structures and their own development initiatives.

An NGO may work primarily through partner organisations, or directly with community groups and other structures, or combine the two approaches. But however it works, the support it provides to a community should generally include a combination of strategies.

Why do some projects have little impact?

About 80 per cent of development projects fail before or after they are completed. This means that development workers must think seriously about what works best and what works less well. There are many reasons why development projects are less successful than they might otherwise be. Some of the most important are presented in the box below.

WHY PROJECTS FAIL

- Not enough time is spent on preparation and reflection before starting work. NGOs rush into projects without good planning.
- There are problems with logistics: not enough money, not enough time, the Project Manager gets sick, etc.
- The NGO has not developed the skills of project design and management, which require learning and practice.
- NGOs are inconsistent in the methods they use.

Some NGOs see projects as opportunities to secure funding; others see them as a vehicle for change. But few take the time to work out a carefully planned project with the target group before it is implemented.

Logistical problems are usually related to poor planning.

> **For example,** an NGO puts together a budget very quickly and then realises that there is not enough money for the necessary supplies. Or insufficient time is budgeted to implement all the planned capacity building activities.

Most logistical problems can be prevented by better planning.

Learning from experience is one of the most important success factors. In addition, training in programme management skills can be very helpful and should therefore not be limited to one or two people in an organisation. If only a few people can participate in training events, it is important that they share their learning with others.

Sometimes the cause of a problem may have been clearly identified, but the project does not deliver because the method used is inappropriate.

What works best?

In the box below the CBC outlines the factors that it has found lead to most success in project management.

CBC PRINCIPLES

Our principles	The ways that our organisation will implement these principles
1. Use a participatory strategy	• Approve a governing document that will define roles and responsibilities. • Adopt a management style that supports people. • Plan how the beneficiaries will measure the NGO's effectiveness.
2. Design the project to be sustainable	• Set indicators. • Involve community members in project implementation. • Secure funding for the entire project.
3. Build on community and participants' contributions	• Solicit community contributions. • Ensure that income generated from the project is used to develop the project further.
4. Be transparent and accountable	• Approve and implement financial and administrative policies and procedures. • Prepare financial reports and share them with funding agencies and beneficiaries. • Conduct both internal and external audits.
5. Build partnerships through cooperative, participative and open approaches	• Practise working in partnership. • Collaborate with other key actors. • Establish strong formal and informal links with the target community.

The box below shows some of the constraints on a participatory approach to community development and project management.

CONSTRAINTS ON PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Issue	How to tackle it

Problems with funding agencies
• Mandate often limited to specific objectives, areas, or target groups.
• Different values.
• Funding limited, short term, or allocated to specific areas.
• Insufficient flexibility to meet different needs.
	Relations with funding agencies
	• Reduce dependence through:
	  ○ local fundraising
	  ○ raising money through income generation activities
	  ○ community contributions in cash or kind to projects.
	• Talk in a constructive way, avoid confrontation.

Problems with local organisations (NGOs and CBOs) • Members serve individual interests. • NGOs do not use participatory methods. • NGOs are not transparent. • Organisations lack training and capacity in project management skills. • Mandates are limited to specific objectives, areas, and target groups.	***Relations with NGOs and CBOs*** • Be flexible and patient; listen, and communicate with different members of the community. • Persuade those involved in the project that dialogue is important.
Problems with the community • Influential members (elders, police, and local authorities) seek to advance their own interests. • Other members are in the 'back seat', but this does not mean that they are not ready to support good initiatives.	***Relations with the community*** • Learn to recognise potential activists. • Avoid problem-makers. • Trust and use relevant experience and skills. • Look for resources in a group, place or situation. • Do not focus on problems: look for solutions.

6.3 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

If a local NGO provides either grants or capacity building support for community development initiatives, it will inevitably receive numerous requests. How can these be assessed? The starting point is the strategic plan and annual team work plan. Although strategic planning is a continuous, rolling process amenable to annual updating and has some built in flexibility, ALL programme activities must fall within its parameters.

Inevitably, unexpected requests for support, in the form of a small grant, capacity building, advice or other inputs, will be received. However, the basic **best practice rule** is that only requests that fall within the parameters of the strategic plan and can be accommodated in the annual team work plan are considered, however worthy or interesting other requests may be.

Hence when requests for support that requires the time of a member of staff are received, the following three questions must ALL be answered in the affirmative:

- Does the request for support fall into an area covered by the aims of strategic plan and the strategies that the organisation is adopting to meet them?

- Can the support requested be accommodated within the annual team work plan, even if it has not been planned for?

- Can the request be met adequately by incorporating the necessary activities into the individual work plans and objectives of staff members?

If the answer to any of these questions is ‘no’ or ‘unsure’, then it is best to decline the request for support or assistance and if possible recommend another organisation that might be able to help. Many development and humanitarian organisations find it very difficult to learn to say ‘no’, but the overall positive impact that can be achieved through sound focus and clear direction should not be compromised by the desire to help everyone.

It might be difficult to assist a particular community to meet its desired goals immediately. In some cases a further opportunity may arise to reconsider the request when the strategic plan is reviewed and a new annual team work plan is developed for the year ahead.

If a community request for development support appears to warrant further consideration, the next question is how best to assess it further. Some key considerations are outlined in the box below.

TEN KEY QUESTIONS

1. Is the project, planned activity or strategy addressing an unmet need in the community?
2. What will be the likely impact of addressing this unmet need?
3. What type of support is the community looking for from the organisation?
4. What contribution, if any, will community members themselves make (for example, labour for the rehabilitation of a community well)?
5. Where did the idea come from or start? Was it the idea of a group of community members or of a single individual? Does the idea have broad based support and agreement within the community?
6. Who will the direct beneficiaries be? Are women and other marginalised people included or involved?
7. What will be the likely environmental impact?
8. How will gender relations be influenced?
9. What will happen when the organisation stops providing financial and other support? Will the community be able to continue or develop the activities?
10. What level of organisation exists in the community to assure effective implementation and management of the project, or activities planned?

The CBC recommends five steps to assist understanding of the needs a community may have:

1. **Identify** a problem situation (using needs assessment tools and techniques).
2. Check with **stakeholders** to see if they think it is a problem.
3. Consider **every angle** of the situation.
4. Establish a **cause and effect relationship** between the various issues.
5. Make a **problem and objective tree**.

Most communities can identify hundreds of problems or issues. The key thing is to prioritise these (see Chapter 3: Strategic planning).

Regardless of who is conducting the research – activists in the community or the staff of an NGO – the following principles are recommended when undertaking any form of research at community level.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Respect. Always be respectful to the community and its members.
Simplicity. Be simple and direct in conducting the research.
Feedback. If using a participatory approach, give feedback to the community on the results of the research. Listen to comments and adapt the approach as necessary and appropriate.
Expectations. Be extremely careful about raising expectations while conducting research. Do not make false promises.

6.3.1 SOME TOOLS FOR A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A needs assessment helps the NGO to understand a community better. It can help to identify what the major areas of unmet need are and determine the best strategies to address them.

There are many ways to conduct a needs assessment, including:

- **Community mapping.** Community members make a map of their community that identifies the resources available in it. This can be used to start a discussion about existing resources and gaps.
- **Pairwise ranking.** Community members brainstorm to compile a list of needs and compare each need to the others on the list to get a better understanding of which needs are the greatest. It is best if several groups with different interests, such as elderly women, farmers and young men, do the ranking separately and compare results.
- **Success ranking.** Community members list their needs and rank these from most urgent to least necessary.
- **Group discussion** is a good way to air and share ideas. In some situations, however, discussions can be dominated by certain individuals. They thus require careful management if they are to provide an opportunity for all to express their opinions.
- **Seasonal calendars.** Community members identify what happens at different times of the year using an annual calendar. Some points that may be raised are the times of year when it normally rains (and resulting lower or higher prices), influxes of nomads, increases in certain illnesses, availability or scarcity of certain goods, etc.
- **Historical profiles**. A historical timeline of someone's life may show how the overall environment, and community priorities and concerns, have changed over a generation or more. This can be done by an elder who maps out her life with respect to certain issues (for example education: what schools were there in the village when she was born, which children attended school, etc) and records it on a timeline. Others can then contribute their ideas or fill in any gaps.
- **Case studies.** A case study (of a village, a person, or an event) can illustrate priorities, concerns and what happens in various situations. Ask people to either explain what happened or to role-play what occurred in the case you are studying.
- **Problem trees.** The roots and the fruits of the problems as perceived by the community can be plotted as a tree diagram.
- **Focus group.** Prepare a set of guiding questions and invite various representatives of the community to a discussion.
- **Questionnaire**. Discuss a list of written questions with different members of the community.

- **Semi-structured individual interviews.** Ask several people from the community what they think the community's needs are.

- **SWOC analysis.** Ask the constituency to identify its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints.

Any of these tools can be combined with **informal observation**. Remember, when collecting information, to separate facts from opinions. Ask people for their opinions, but also ask them to support these with facts.

EXAMPLE: VILLAGE SKETCH MAP

This tool is considered one of the best and easiest participatory tools to identify and analyse community needs. The sketch map is a way to encourage residents to talk to each other and share their experiences and stories about the community's accomplishments and needs.

This tool can achieve the following objectives:
- Open a development dialogue within the community and between the community and assessment team.
- Announce to the community that there is an opportunity to tell outsiders something worthwhile about their accomplishments as well as their needs.
- Begin building a database to help community groups rank their problems and consider solutions that they can undertake themselves.

A good way to start a community based needs assessment is for the community to draw a sketch map that will locate the village's development successes, failures and continuing problems.

It may be helpful to have two or three groups each doing their own map: perhaps men, women, and young people or some similar arrangement.

Groups can draw their maps on the ground, build three-dimensional models or simply draw them on paper.

At the end of the exercise, one person should be charged with making a good copy of the map on flipchart paper or reporting back to the community later.

EXAMPLE: VILLAGE HISTORY

This tool is a list of events that happened in one village over a certain period of time. The goal is to retrieve important events in the life of the village.

The tool is useful for three reasons:
- It tells the assessment group about important events in the village's history.
- It allows the villagers to exchange views on which events they think were most influential in their past.
- It informs the community's younger generation about events which they may not know about.

Assemble as many of the older men and women in the village as possible and ask them to reconstruct what they think are most important events in the life of the village.

It may be helpful to divide them into smaller groups to allow each group to select one particular important event and discuss it separately.

At the end of the exercise, one facilitator should be assigned to write the final community history on flipchart paper and report back to the community later for their feedback.

EXAMPLE: MEETING WITH TARGET BENEFICIARIES

Direct contact with specific groups within the community can yield useful information.

Meeting with target beneficiaries can help researchers:
- to listen to the ideas or problems from the perspective of particular people in the community
- to present specific programme objectives to potential target groups in the village
- to avoid raising expectations and conflicts from people in the community who do not belong to the target groups.

This method can be used with potential target beneficiaries to discuss their needs and ways to address them. A facilitator of the group should record (for example, on flipchart paper) the main points agreed during the meeting, then present these at the end of the meeting.

EXAMPLE: A PROBLEM TREE

One format for summarising community discussions is a problem tree.

Arrange the problem, its causes and effects in the format of a tree. The causes are the roots of the tree, the problem is the trunk, and the effects are the leaves of the tree. The exercise is very easy to do, and can be used to summarise and analyse information from the community.

The problem tree reminds us that the causes of a problem are rarely visible. Most of what we see is the effect of the problem.

EXAMPLE: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This is a formal but unstructured participatory method of collecting data. Focus groups use a set of prepared questions to guide discussion among selected representatives of the community.

Using a focus group discussion will achieve the following:
- discussion of a particular topic or issue in the community
- use of the vast knowledge and experience already available in the community that relates to the topic under discussion
- better understanding of the different views that may exist among different groups about the causes of or solution to a particular problem.

A focus group discussion in the village usually has between six and 10 participants who do not represent one particular group. They are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic under discussion. Focus group members are invited to discuss and share their ideas. Group discussions can be organised at different times with similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions.

Some important points to remember for planning a focus group in the community are:
- Participants must know something about the topic under discussion.
- The number of participants should be between six and 10.
- The group interview should be semi-structured.
- The discussion must be participatory. The questions must be open ended.
- Answers from the group must represent a consensus or different opinions, not facts or specific data.

EXAMPLE: **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW**

The staff employed by the implementing organisation may meet their target beneficiaries on a daily basis. They have a good feel for what problems exist in the village and how the community feels about those problems.

The major purpose of contacting key informants is to:
- get first-hand information from the community
- hear informants' ideas, based on their own experiences of working with a community, about how programmes could be developed to meet their needs more effectively.

Interview an expert (community leader, government official, health worker, religious leader, schoolteacher, etc) who is related to the target community, but not a direct beneficiary, to help identify needs and solutions.

Try also to identify project stakeholders and involve them in a brainstorming session where they can identify and discuss all aspects of the problems. Look at all the community issues discussed and define the specific problems. Compare current activities with desired activities to see what type of project can solve the problem identified.

The box below lists tools that can be used for more technical research.

EXAMPLE: **TECHNICAL RESEARCH FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Research usually means trying to develop new knowledge and ideas to solve a particular problem. The most common types of research used in community development work include:

- **Survey.** A survey collects information by looking at several different cases (people, places, dates). A **questionnaire** is usually used to do a survey.
- **Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA).** Developed in the 1980s, RRA is a collection of research methods used by a team of local and/or external researchers. RRA includes, but is not limited to, informal observation, individual interviews, group interviews, surveys, ranking exercise, role play, community mapping, sketch maps and calendars.
- **Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).** Developed in the 1990s, PRA is a collection of research methods used for and by the community. It includes RRA methods as well as some additional techniques and tools.
- **Participatory Learning Approach (PLA).** A British method developed in the mid-1990s, PLA uses group learning (without a formal division into students and teachers) to assess a problem or develop a solution.

6.3.2 ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

When designing questions for a focus group discussion, or any other dialogue where getting the right information is important, bear the following points in mind.

ASKING QUESTIONS

- Make sure that the questions on the same topic are grouped together. For example, do not put questions about what marketing skills the participants have in the middle of a set of questions about social needs.
- Check that the questions are not overly repetitive.
- Keep the questions simple. Do not put too much information in each question. If it seems too big, then break it down into several questions. For example instead of: 'What literacy and numeracy training have you had?' ask: 'What literacy training have you had?' This way, the group can discuss each part of the question separately.
- Avoid vague questions and questions that can mean different things to different people. For example, 'Are you healthy?' is a difficult question to evaluate because people have different standards of what healthy means. Also, it is vague. Health can refer to nutrition, diseases, personal habits, preventive health care, etc. Instead, ask: 'Have you been out of work sick in the last year?'
- Do not make assumptions about what answers people will give when designing questions. For example, if you planned to ask 'What income generating projects would interest you the most?' and to follow this with 'What training have you had in soap making?' you would be assuming that the respondent was interested in soap making.
- Try to establish a good flow of questions. Put the questions on a related topic together. Put questions of the same style (such as true/false, yes/no questions) together. Put questions on one idea together, followed by a summary question for that idea.
- Review the questions when you are finished and check that they cover all the topics you need to research.

6.3.3 SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Other resources may help to supplement information provided by the target group or community. This may be especially important when collecting technical information.

OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Contacts

- Line Ministries
- Ministry of National Planning and Coordination
- Municipality
- Community leaders
- Consultants
- Umbrella organisations

Documentary resources

- Reports from other NGOs who have done similar projects
- Government reports and data
- Newspapers
- Technical books
- Old project proposals, successful and unsuccessful
- Workshop reports and materials

6.3.4 PLANNING COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Some of the techniques for community research are low cost and time efficient. Some are expensive and time consuming. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, and it is important to select the right technique and tools for each situation.

When choosing the most appropriate tools and techniques:
- Use participatory methods of fieldwork and research wherever possible, to encourage community participation.
- Involve the beneficiaries in the data collection process: they know more about their own needs than any outsider.
- Use different tools and methods together to generate different types of information and perspectives.

The CBC encourages **participatory methodologies** and tools because these are more likely to lead to sustainable, community-based initiatives. These approaches are built on community involvement, participation and listening to all community members, in less formal and structured ways. However, some situations demand more **quantitative information** or statistics.

The tools chosen will depend largely on the type of information that is being sought and the purpose of collecting it. It is helpful to consider the questions in the box below.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING TOOLS

What information is needed and who is likely to have it?
- List key questions to ask.
- List key people to consult.

What resources are available?
- Look at the resources (human, financial, material) available to the organisation and the community or target group (refer back to the strategic plan).
- Refer to the annual team work plan and individual staff work plans and objectives.

What methods would be most suitable for gathering the information required with the resources available?
- Consider how much statistical data, if any, is needed.
- Assess different tools and methods in terms of their costs (money and time) and benefits.

To use any tool practically in the field, the organisation needs to choose those that best fit local circumstances and the research objectives (the information required). Tools can be tested and then modified as necessary. Sometimes training in the use of a particular tool is helpful, but in most cases using and refining them in practice works best. Once the most appropriate research tools have been selected, it is a good idea to test them and then adapt them as necessary to fit the specific conditions of the community.

Community research is about working with a community, and any interaction with the community must be positive and respectful.

Both the cost and the timeframe of the fieldwork will depend on the tools and techniques that are being used.

Bear in mind that no research is ever completely objective. The methods and tools selected will carry some bias. Bias can be introduced:
- **when research tools are designed**: who is asked, where they live, when a survey is conducted
- **during the fieldwork**: improperly calibrated measuring equipment, attitudes of the researcher, illogical translation of questions
- **in data analysis**: different tests carried out on the same data, variables classified in different ways.

It is particularly difficult to avoid bias when using **qualitative methods**. It is therefore important to recognise the perspectives of all key players, and the potential bias of both researchers and the community.

Based on the information in this section, make a plan for collecting data on the needs of a target group and then implement it.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- What tools will be used to find out what the community or target group needs?
- How will these tools be used? (Who will do what: introduce the tool, facilitate the discussion, take notes, etc. When will the activities take place and where?)
- Once the data collection is finished, invite people to summarise and prioritise needs to see if there is consensus about these.
- Answer the following questions together:
    - Which people from the NGO participated in the data collection?
    - Which people from the community or target group participated in the data collection?
    - What were the needs that the target group identified?
    - What was the main need that the community wants help with?
    - What are the community's own resources?
    - What solutions did the target group identify?

6.3.5 HOW TO ANALYSE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Once the fieldwork is complete, the findings of the research need to be analysed. Data analysis involves interpreting the information collected and transforming it into useful facts, figures and observations that can be used to design a project or strategy. If the data collected is not analysed there will be much information, but no strong conclusions on which to base actions.

How the data is analysed will depend on the type of information collected. The box below lists the seven most common methods of statistical analysis.

STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS

- Average (mean and median)
- Percentages (ratios)
- Frequency tables
- Percentiles
- Standard deviation
- Grouped data
- Difference of spread (range, interquartile range)

Data analysis for information collected using qualitative methods of research is less straightforward. Analysis of data collected from informal observations and discussion groups, for example, requires analysis of any notes taken, and a summary of the main points and their relationship to the issue that a community is trying to tackle. The analysis of qualitative information is often more illustrative of an issue, providing concrete examples, anecdotes, and insights into social and other relationships.

The box below describes a process that can be used to analyse the findings of community research and transform them into ideas for action.

TRANSFORMING QUALITATIVE DATA INTO ACTION

1. Prioritising or ranking
- Members of a community brainstorm to list and prioritise their needs.
- The discussion can take place in several groups representing different interests, such as elderly women, farmers and young men, who rank needs and compare results.
- This process will enable members of the community to rank their needs from most urgent to least necessary.

2. Filtering
- Not all priority needs and ideas collected from the community necessarily imply a role for the organisation. This tool can help programme staff examine different needs and ideas.
- The purpose is to look at needs and ideas from the community to see if they fit with the organisation’s mission, goals and objectives.

3. Transforming
- The needs and ideas suggested by the community need to be transformed into concrete concepts.
- The concepts should be simple to communicate so that everyone in the community understands them.

4. Processing
- After selecting a project concept in agreement with the target community, the implementing organisation should translate it into a meaningful (practical) form.
- The purpose is to specify the components needed for the project and to define the process of project design.

5. Finalising
- This is used as a follow-up to check with the community if the detailed project concept can be improved before the project design is completed.
- It should include a risk/benefit analysis, to identify the risks and benefits that may arise from implementing the proposed project, in order to reduce risks and maximise benefits.
- The implementing organisation should also carry out a cost evaluation to eliminate any costs that will not contribute to realisation of the project objectives.

6.4 A CONCEPT PAPER

A concept paper is a summary of the proposed project that will convince potential funders that there is a real need for it to be implemented. If the funding agency does not express interest in the project after seeing the concept paper, it can save the time and energy of researching and writing a full proposal. If the funding agency does express interest, the concept paper is a good starting point for further research to develop a full proposal that will be submitted to the agency.

Writing a concept paper is a valuable exercise. It enables the organisation to collect project ideas and write them down for preliminary review by potential funding bodies.

A concept paper should be no longer than two pages and should attempt to address the questions in the box below.

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS IN A CONCEPT PAPER

- **What** does the organisation want to do? Give a general summary of the project, but be specific about objectives and goals.
- **Why** is the project important? Why is there a need for the intervention? Based on the data collected, give qualitative (observations) and quantitative (statistics) information to demonstrate the need for the project.
- **Who** will the project benefit? Who are the beneficiaries, and why do they need the proposed help?
- **When** will the project take place? Is there a start and a finish? What is the timeframe?
- **How** will the project be implemented? What methods will be used, and more importantly, why?
- **How much** will the project cost? In the absence of a budget, state what funding agency inputs are being requested. Be realistic about the project costs. Do not inflate the costs because this will deter potential funders.

Once these questions have been answered, the ideas must be transferred on to paper clearly and concisely. Ask:
- Is the concept paper clear, simple and easy to understand?
- Are the problems and proposed solutions well stated?
- Is the necessity of the project clearly conveyed?

Proofread the concept paper carefully, and ask others in the organisation to revise it. Ask the beneficiaries of the project to read it and comment, as appropriate.

Before writing a full project proposal, it is advisable to share the concept paper with funding agency representatives so that the proposal is written for a specific agency. This is important because different funding bodies have different requirements that need to be satisfied in the full project proposal (see Chapter 8: Publicity and fundraising).

Once a number of funding agencies have been identified that might fund the project, visit them. Show them the concept paper and discuss plans with them. Consider inviting them to visit other projects that the organisation has implemented or is implementing and to meet the relevant staff.

An example of a concept paper is given in Appendix 1.

6.5 A FULL PROJECT PROPOSAL

Once a funding agency has expressed an interest in supporting the project, it is time to start working on the project proposal.

Many agencies have their own guidelines for writing proposals, and they will not accept one that does not include all the information they require. Hence it is advisable to ask at an early stage for any written guidelines or general guidance they can give. Consider the implications of this advice carefully.

Some funding agencies may not be able to fund certain items of a budget. For example, some are unable to provide funding for recurrent office costs such as staff salaries. There is little point in approaching them to fund such items. Find out the restrictions before starting to write the proposal, to avoid unnecessary work.

6.5.1 WHAT IS A FUNDING PROPOSAL?

A proposal is a document that presents a project or programme idea in a clear and concise way. Some organisations draw up a proposal to encapsulate the key components of their strategic plan with the aim of securing funds to contribute to their whole programme of work. Others use such proposals mainly as a means of securing funding for parts of the overall programme.

A proposal is written to show a funding agency that there is a challenge or need that the organisation can help to resolve in partnership with the community or with other organisations. It shows why the project or programme should be funded.

REASONS FOR FUNDING A PROJECT

A proposal should demonstrate:

- **credibility of the organisation** (continuity, adequate research to support activities, good relations with funding agencies)
- **credibility of the approach** (project design and implementation with community support and inputs)
- **coherence of the idea** (concrete and aligned with the organisation's capacity and vision)
- **realistic budget** (the budget is not inflated and accurately reflects the forecasted implementation costs).

Writing a funding proposal can be a collective activity, and **stakeholders** may be drawn in at various stages of the design process. A proposal is best written once the unmet need or challenge is clearly defined and the community is clear about how it wants to address it. Probably a concept paper will already have been shared with a funding body or bodies who have expressed interest in receiving a full proposal.

To develop a concept into a fully worked up plan, the following questions might prove useful. The answers will aid clear thinking about the contents of the funding proposal.

JUSTIFICATION
- What is the problem to be addressed?

OBJECTIVE
- What would an improvement in the beneficiaries' situation look like?

ACTIVITIES
- What can the organisation do to improve the situation?

EVALUATION
- How will you evaluate success?

BUDGET
- What are the costs?

A proposal has a number of sections. These depend on the type of programme or project funds being sought, the capacity of the organisation and the criteria of the funding agency.

6.5.2 HOW TO STRUCTURE A FUNDING PROPOSAL

There is no single model for the structure of a funding proposal. However, there are elements that are required by most organisations and funding agencies. This list of headings gives the most important components to include. The headings are explained in the following text.

STRUCTURE OF A FUNDING PROPOSAL

- Background
- Statement of the problem
- Justification of the project
- Goals and objectives
- Planned activities
- Division of responsibilities
- Phase-out and sustainability
- Implementation

Much of the information and analysis needed to write a full proposal will be contained in the strategic plan or the annual team work plan from where it can be drawn.

Step 1: The **background** provides an introduction and should include the following information, as relevant:
- a brief history of the organisation
- the current situation of the target group or groups
- the reason for this situation (political, socio-economic)
- sector analysis: information on the specific sector.

Step 2: The **statement of the problem** describes a condition affecting a group of people in a specific location. Stating the problem clearly is an important step in writing the proposal because funding agencies must see that the project will address a community problem. Here are a few tips for writing the problem statement:

- State the problem using facts and figures.
- Use statistics that are clear and support the argument.
- Make sure the data collected is well documented.
- If possible, give anecdotes (stories) of beneficiaries as realistic examples of the problem.
- Limit the explanation of the problem to the target group in the geographic focus area.

Step 3: After the problem is stated, the need for the project must be demonstrated. The **justification** should include information such as:
- the problems to be addressed
- the situation expected at the end of the funding period
- whether the impact anticipated justifies the budget costs
- local community participation and support
- type of beneficiaries
- sustainability of the improvements to be made.

Step 4: Once the project has been justified, the **goals and objectives** can be developed. These tell the funding agency how the problem identified will be addressed.

The **goals** are the anticipated end results. They will tell the funding agency how the project will help improve the target group's quality of life. Goals identify what the long term impact will be.

The **objectives** give the funding agency more detail about what the project or programme is trying to achieve. Objectives are much narrower than goals and must be **SMART** (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound).

When developing objectives, remember the following:
- what the project or programme will change
- the target group
- the direction of change (increase/improve, decrease/reduce)
- the degree of change to be achieved
- the timeframe for reaching the desired degree of change.

Here are two examples of SMART objectives:

> - There will be a 20 per cent decrease in the incidence of water borne disease by the end of the project life.
> - There will be a 15 per cent increase in primary school enrollment in three years.

Step 5: The next step is to identify the **activities** that will achieve the goals and objectives. At this stage, the tasks and sub-tasks should be detailed.
- Relate the activities to the problem and the objectives.
- Make sure that the organisation has the resources to support each activity.
- Explain the reason for each activity.
- Build one activity on the other (all activities should work toward the same end).
- Develop a timeframe for each activity.

All activities require inputs, mainly time and money. Inputs may be:
- human resources – by number of staff, positions, qualifications
- material requirements – by quantity, type, quality, size
- financial resources – salaries, overheads, direct costs
- time – days, weeks, months.

Having a clear understanding of what inputs will be necessary for each activity will make it easier to implement the project.

Step 6: To prevent disputes, the **responsibilities** of each partner for the activities must be clearly identified.

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

- **The funding agency** is responsible for funding as agreed, providing feedback on project reports and a contract of agreement outlining these responsibilities.
- **The organisation** is responsible for successful implementation and for cooperating with other agencies working in partnership.
- **The contractor** (eg construction engineer) is responsible for carrying out the organisation's instructions.
- **The target group** is responsible for working with the organisation during planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; for specified contributions (eg labour); and for sustaining the project or programme (unless it is a one-time activity, such as building a village school) once the funding and other support have come to an end.

Step 7: The proposal should also include information about how the organisation plans to **phase out** and ensure **sustainability**. Describe local communities or other partners who will take over the organisation's activities and responsibilities once the funding comes to an end.

Step 8: Implementation is the process of transforming inputs into outputs. In developing the implementation procedure, think about the timeframe: how long will the activities last for? And who will be involved in each activity?

6.5.3 WRITING A WORK PLAN

It is advisable to present some information in the form of a work plan rather than as narrative text. The work plan can subsequently be used to guide the various phases of the project's implementation. As the project progresses, the work plan will become a tool to help monitor the project.

PREPARING A PROJECT WORK PLAN

- Randomly list the activities.
- Arrange them in chronological order. The activity to be implemented first will be listed first.
- Show the scheduled start time, finishing time and expected duration of each activity.
- Indicate when specific inputs will be needed for each activity.

6.5.4 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is important that the funding proposal includes a description of the systems that will be used to **monitor and evaluate** the project, to identify weaknesses and learn from them so as to reduce the chances that they will arise again. Monitoring should be a continuous process that is built into the design of a project. Additional periodic evaluations may also be required by the funding agency. Be sure to state who is responsible for monitoring and evaluation, and how the results will be shared with the funding agency and others (on-site visits or written reports).

6.5.5 DEVELOPING A BUDGET

The best format for a budget is a chart that includes the description of the items needed, their unit cost, quantity and total cost. The budget must include everything that the organisation wants the funding agency to fund. It can usually be broken down into costs for the following sections:

BUDGET CATEGORIES

1 Materials and equipment
2 Labour
3 Administration
4 Transport
5 Monitoring and evaluation
6 Community workshops/consultations
7 Contingency (usually 5-10 per cent)
8 Total cost
9 The organisation's contribution
10 Total contribution requested from funding agency

A **budget summary** gives the total cost of each section listed above and is included in the **project summary** (included with the completed funding application – see below).

Administration costs are usually calculated as a percentage of the material and labour costs. They may vary, but should be no more than 15 per cent.

Usually the funding agency will ask the organisation to pay a percentage of the total cost. Again, this will vary depending on the funding agency.

Make sure that the budget is complete and not exaggerated. An experienced funding agency will not even look at a proposal with an incomplete or exaggerated budget.

6.5.6 HOW TO COMPLETE THE FUNDING APPLICATION

In addition to the proposal and budget, funding agencies also usually require that you submit a cover letter, cover page and project summary. These should be sent to the funding agency together with the proposal.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Cover letter
A cover letter must accompany the proposal. It should include:
- the proposal title
- the reference number (if there is one)
- a brief introduction to the organisation
- a proposal request and justification (what the organisation wants and why)
- contact information for the organisation (name, address, telephone/fax number).

Cover page
The first page of the proposal should be the cover page, containing the following information:
- the project or programme title
- the reference number (if there is one)
- the organisation's name
- the total amount of funding required (in US$ or the currency specified by the funding agency)
- contact information for the organisation (address, telephone/fax number).

Project summary
This is a brief explanation of the main proposal and should include:
- an introduction to the organisation
- the goal and main objectives
- a brief summary of what is being proposed
- explanation of how the work will be carried out (implementation)
- a budget summary
- a summary of arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

Once all this is complete, the funding proposal and additional information can be submitted to the funding agency. ***Be sure to keep a copy of the proposal, along with any other project documents, for the records.*** Having a copy will make it easier to answer any questions and is also a useful reference when writing other proposals.

6.6 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Managing a project or programme requires many of the same skills and experience that any management post needs. Most organisational management issues have been covered in other chapters of the manual. This section highlights those specific to project management.

It is likely that the Executive Director, with the approval of the governing body, will have appointed a Project Manager. This person may already be a member of staff who has been delegated specific responsibilities for managing a particular project or part of the programme as defined by the strategic plan or annual team work plan. In rare cases, where the responsibilities are particularly large and nobody on the payroll can assume them, a new staff member may be appointed (again with the authorisation of the governing body).

Whoever the Project Manager is, he or she will have overall responsibility for seeing that the project meets the objectives set out in the funding proposal. The box below outlines some specific responsibilities.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROJECT MANAGER

- **Activities:** making sure that the planned activities take place on time, that they meet the beneficiaries' needs, and that the service the NGO provides is continually improving.
- **Resources:** overseeing the efficient and effective use of any resources, including materials donated specifically to the project as well as any of the organisation's own resources. The procedures laid out in Chapter 4 (Managing finances) should be fully applied.
- **Staff and human resources**: ensuring that any staff employed on the project perform to their best, according to the procedures contained in the human resources management policy document (see Chapter 5). This may include recruiting new staff, building the project team, delegating tasks, monitoring and evaluating individual progress, and solving problems.
- **Self-management** (where the Project Manager is situated far from the office). Although the Project Manager is accountable to the Executive Director or, perhaps, a Senior Programme Officer, self-management on a day to day basis will be the reality. It is important for the Project Manager to set a good example in all aspects of the job.

Other **qualities** that will be demanded of a Project Manager working at community level include:

- motivation to work hard
- patience
- sensitivity
- confidence
- communication skills
- sectoral expertise
- knowledge about the NGO.

The management of any one project is never quite the same as that of another. However, there are some basic points that a good manager should adhere to. In addition to the guidance contained in other chapters of this manual, the following checklist may be helpful.

CHECKLIST: PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- Review the organisation's **principles** to ensure they are being used internally as well as in work with beneficiaries.
- Decide on lines of responsibility and roles for staff employed on the project. An organisational structure chart may be useful (see Chapter 7).
- Make sure that the **job descriptions** of all staff employed by the project are clear.
- The **individual performance objectives** and/or work plan of the Project Manager will have been agreed with his or her line manager. Use the same system with any staff employed specifically for the project.
- Set up a **project file** for all project documents.
- Plan **regular meetings** with the project staff to review progress.
- Plan time to **meet the beneficiaries** for their feedback.
- Keep in touch with the **funding agency**. In addition to the formal project reports, the agency may like to receive informal reports on progress and photographs. If possible, invite the agency to visit the project, talk to the beneficiaries, and meet with the project staff.
- The budget is the cornerstone of the project and needs exceptionally careful monitoring. Funds must be spent in the ways that have been agreed. Always obtain **written approval** before spending funds in a different way.

As emphasised in Chapter 7 (Office administration) a good filing system is an essential prerequisite for successful administration. Make sure that all project documents are filed in a logical and orderly fashion. Documents to be kept on file include those listed in the box below.

IMPORTANT PROJECT DOCUMENTS

- Concept paper
- Project proposal, including project budget
- Correspondence to and from the funding agency or agencies
- Work plans
- Minutes of meetings with project staff and beneficiaries
- Narrative and financial reports
- Evaluations
- Job descriptions of all project staff
- Employment contracts of all project staff
- Timesheets
- Inventory records for expendable and non-expendable supplies
- Documents relating to any training events (eg names of trainees and their attendance records; training notes; workshop notes or handouts or other related information and resources)

Copies of some of these documents should also be kept at the head office.

6.7 CONCLUSION

If the guidance provided in this chapter is followed, the benefits will include those summarised below.

BENEFITS OF GOOD PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Strategic plan and project management	A clear relationship between the strategic plan and specific projects is obvious. Project staff understand what a project and a project cycle are. They understand the link between strategies and projects.
Approach and constraints	Project staff understand what the essential ingredients of successful projects are and how to overcome factors that may limit success.
Community needs assessment	Project staff are familiar with a number of key tools, how to select and use them, and how to analyse research findings and translate data into ideas for action.
Concept paper	Project staff know how to develop a concept paper and what it should include.
Full proposal	Project staff and others know how to structure a proposal, what information it needs to contain, and how to develop an accompanying work plan and budget.
Project management	Project staff who work at community level understand their specific responsibilities and how to perform their management duties to best advantage.

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE CONCEPT PAPER: CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR LOCAL NGOS IN SOMALILAND

Somaliland, because of its lack of bilateral relations with other governments, receives an overwhelming proportion of its assistance through non-governmental organisations. Therefore much of the development work is implemented not by the government, but by the NGO sector. As a result of this availability of funds, local NGOs have sprouted from every corner of Somaliland in enormous numbers. At present, over 400 local NGOs have been registered at the Ministry of National Planning, but many more are operating without such registration.

COSONGO is a consortium of 27 local non-governmental organisations from the northwest region of Somaliland. The umbrella was established mainly to strengthen local NGOs in Somaliland, but also to give credibility to those organisations with a proven track record and greater transparency than those 'briefcase NGOs' which exist only when they have money for a specific project. COSONGO screens its members using five criteria and has a constitutional mandate to provide them with support in terms of conflict resolution, advocacy, training, resources, and information.

Over the past year, COSONGO has worked to meet its mandate in all areas, but its work in conflict resolution has been particularly important. Four major conflicts broke out and COSONGO was formally requested to intervene and solve them. These conflicts were all different. The first was between two members of COSONGO, the second between two other umbrella organisations in Hargeisa, the third between an international NGO and a member organisation; the fourth was an internal conflict in a member organisation. In addition, many other smaller conflicts broke out within local NGOs that COSONGO did not resolve. If local NGOs are to continue to grow, then they must have some regular mechanism for solving their problems, be they internal, with another local NGO, or with a different body.

Most local NGO conflicts relate to one of three areas: disagreement over financial management, conflict about the structure and legal system of the organisation, and disputes about the constitution. Other conflicts arise over gender issues, tribal loyalties and technical knowledge. With basic training and improvement of local NGOs' legal, constitutional and financial systems, many of these conflicts could be avoided. COSONGO is the most suitable body to facilitate such work because it is directly within its mandate and because it has experience in such work. COSONGO's Executive Director has been trained in conflict prevention, resolution and human rights. Therefore COSONGO proposes to implement a one-year project with two objectives: to better prepare the Board of Directors (the conflict resolution body) to resolve conflicts when they are requested to do so; and to prevent more conflicts within local NGOs.

These objectives will be achieved through a series of activities. The first activity will be to do an assessment of the types of conflicts that COSONGO member local NGOs are experiencing. Second, we will offer an 'understanding of conflict' workshop to our members reflecting the results of the assessment. Third, a local trainer in conflict resolution will be brought to COSONGO to train first the Board of Directors and then the executive directors and board members of our member organisations. Next, COSONGO will offer three workshops to its members, one each on developing a suitable financial policy, constitution, and legal system/structure for those who have weak existing systems. Lastly, COSONGO will work with the Somaliland government, particularly the Attorney General and the Ministry of National Planning, to develop conflict resolution guidelines that conform to local and legal practices. Lack of coordination among these bodies and local NGOs is exacerbating some of the current problems.

The expected outcomes of this project are two: stronger local NGOs as a result of reduced internal conflicts, and a stronger local NGO-government relationship when dealing with conflict resolution. At present, two of COSONGO's oldest and best members are facing serious internal problems and are not able to function to their full capacity. It is our hope that with training and awareness raising, our member NGOs can bring a better service to their own beneficiaries and the long term development of Somaliland.