
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING AND DESIGN

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This chapter will discuss participatory planning in detail, and explain how participatory planning and design is carried out.

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY PLANNING?

Participatory planning is the process whereby an activity or a project is designed jointly by all the partners, i.e. the participating communities (who will be the direct beneficiaries of the activity or project) and the project functionaries. This means that all the key decisions regarding the project will be taken jointly by the community participants and the project staff. These include:

- ⇒ **objective** of the project -- what the project hopes to achieve;
- ⇒ **activities** that will be implemented;
- ⇒ **implementation process** -- how will the trainings be carried out, how will participants be selected, how will training needs be determined, what type of support will be given to households, who controls the funds, how will the funds be disbursed, etc.;
- ⇒ **size of the project** - how many communities or households or individuals will the project work with;
- ⇒ **location** of these selected communities - where will the project work; and,
- ⇒ **timeline** for the project - how long will the project run, and a work plan for implementing each of the activities.

HOW TO CARRY OUT PARTICIPATORY PLANNING?

The participatory planning process starts with **participatory appraisals** which are described in detail in Chapter 3. At the end of a participatory appraisal process, we should have a detailed analysis on our selected topic (for example, level of awareness on HIV/AIDS or behavior patterns at the community level). This analysis should indicate community members' *key concerns or problems* at the local level regarding that particular topic. Such an analysis also brings out any gaps in information and knowledge, or any misinformation that the communities, or a group within the community, may have. As the appraisal process is coming to a close, facilitators can ask community members to generate suggestions for tackling these problems and concerns. This list of problems and suggestions forms the basis for developing a plan for action.

If a project plans to work with several communities (for example, different villages or several neighborhoods in an urban area), it is useful to complete the participatory appraisal process in all the communities, and then invite representatives from each community for a meeting to begin planning the project. Just as it is important to ensure that women and men, as well as older and younger people, take part in the appraisal process, it's important to ensure that the community is well represented in a planning process. If the project plans to work with people living with HIV and AIDS, they should be represented at this meeting along with those who care for them, if that is appropriate.

Tips for planning a workshop:

- ✓ If you are expecting a big turnout for this meeting, select an appropriate, which should be well lit, large enough to accommodate everyone venue comfortably, and should have lot of wall space so that visual outputs can be easily displayed on the walls.
 - ✓ Inform everyone well in advance of the meeting. The message should clearly indicate the time and venue for the meeting.
 - ✓ You will need large sheets of paper, sufficient marker pens, and masking tape to stick the sheets on the wall.
 - ✓ All the discussion points and decisions should be recorded on large sheets of paper stuck on the wall, so that everyone can read them.
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- ✓ If you expect the meeting to run for 3 to 4 hours, it is good to arrange some light refreshments.
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- ✓ It helps to rotate the responsibility for facilitation. Some community representatives can also be asked to facilitate parts of the workshop.
 - ✓ Take short breaks during the workshop. This helps to break the monotony, and increases the attention span of the participants.
 - ✓ If the gathering is large, it helps to break into smaller groups for discussion.

Getting Started!

1) Prepare a list of problems and concerns, and suggestions generated during the participatory appraisal process

The planning workshop can start with sharing results from the participatory appraisals carried out with the different communities. It is useful to display some of the main outputs from the appraisals on the walls for everyone to see. A combined list of all the problems and concerns can be prepared from these results and displayed on the wall. Similarly, all the suggestions generated

during the appraisal process can also be put together in one list and be displayed on the wall.

2) Generate objectives of the project by prioritizing problems and concerns

The list of problems and concerns can be used as a starting point for discussions. Since it is not possible for any one project to cover all types of problems and concerns, it will be important to prioritize and agree on one or two key issues that will form the objectives of the project. The group can decide how to prioritize. They can select issues that cut across communities, and that have been mentioned by all or most of the people who took part in the appraisal process. They can also decide to give scores to all the issues according to their importance, and then select the topics that get the highest score.

Sometimes it is possible that different groups attending the meeting have differing views, and may want to propose very different objectives. Such situations can be difficult and need sensitive facilitation. Usually it is best to leave the decision of selection to the groups themselves and allow them to debate the issue openly. Once each group provides their point of view, it should be easier for all to make an informed choice.

3) Develop an action plan for implementation

Once the objectives have been selected, pick all the suggestions related to the selected objectives. These can be used to develop activities that will be implemented by the project. However, the list of activities need not be limited by the suggestions generated during the appraisals. This planning meeting is an opportunity to generate ideas for project implementation. This meeting also provides the project staff an opportunity to introduce ideas that may not have come spontaneously from the communities. Project staff can introduce their ideas, or share experiences from elsewhere, so that these can be discussed and

considered for inclusion in the implementation plan. It is important that these new ideas be explained in detail, and that decisions on whether or not to include the suggestions of project staff be taken jointly with all those present at the meeting.

HOW WILL ACTIVITIES BE IMPLEMENTED?

Once the group agrees on the activities to be implemented, the next step is to decide how to implement them. If the group has decided to carry out training programs, for instance, they need to decide how many training programs, for whom (for example, men, women, adolescents boys and girls), when and where these training activities will be carried out. The basic framework of a project action plan includes agreeing on: scope of the activities (for example, number of training programs, number of households, number of women's groups, etc); roles and responsibilities in carrying out the action plan; and timeline.

Other issues to be considered include:

- ✓ How will the activities be carried out – will there be project staff for all the communities or will there be community volunteers who will take responsibility for some of the activities?
- ✓ What will the structure of the project be like – for example, project staff living and working at the community level?
- ✓ Will there be a committee established for the project or will it work through existing institutions, such as the village health committee?
- ✓ Will the project work with groups of people, individuals, or households? How will these be identified and selected?

The planning process includes broad agreement on how the responsibilities will be shared among the different partners. Some of these details can be decided at this meeting. However, there will be other details that will take more time, and can be decided at subsequent meetings.

It is important to remember that project planning is only a participatory process when the people for whom the project is intended take part in the decision-making process. Such a process may seem tedious and time consuming at first, but once the process starts, implementation becomes much easier and has a much higher chance to succeed.

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY IN IMPLEMENTATION

By carrying out the process described above, an overall plan for the project is created. There is one more level of detail required before implementation can begin: at the community level. Once the project objectives and activities have been decided, this information is shared broadly at the community level. The discussion that follows focuses on how activities are operationalized at the community level. This stage in project implementation can include decisions regarding selection of households, selection of volunteers, and selection of participants for training programs, as well as clearly defining people's roles and responsibilities.

Once planning decisions are made, they should be available to the general public so that all members of the community have easy access to the information. One useful and simple way to do ensure transparency is by preparing a visual that shows the project's planned activities over a certain period of time. For example, if a project has decided to work on raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, it may plan to hold three training workshops over the next year. On a social map depicting all of the households in the community, project staff can indicate which household will participate in which training workshop -- the first, the second or the third. This same map can be used as a monitoring tool to record who from each household participated in each training.

Similarly, in an AIDS home-based care project, a social map can be used to identify households providing care and support to people living with HIV and

AIDS. As above, this same map indicates which households will be supported through the project. The type of support provided to each household (for example, nutritional support, training, supplies) can be added every month. Such a map can also be used for participatory monitoring of the project activities. If it is not possible to depict all the activities on the map, other visuals can be prepared – for example, a calendar of events can also be very useful.

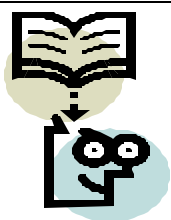
A participatory planning process:

- allows for widespread sharing and communicating of decisions that may have taken place outside the community by community representatives;
- ensures that Decisions pertaining to the community are made by community members themselves;
- promotes transparency in the decision-making process, and accessibility of information within the community.

How does participatory planning relate to PM&E?

For the planning process to be complete there is one more necessary step. No project plan is complete without a description of how the project is going to be monitored and evaluated. The logical next step, after the group of representatives has decided the project objectives and the activities, is to decide how they will make sure that everything is moving satisfactorily. This discussion can take place at the meeting described above, or it's possible that the group meets again for a separate discussion on monitoring and evaluation. This group may also decide to select a smaller group among themselves who can take the responsibility to prepare the monitoring and evaluation plan. The group responsible for M&E must make sure that the monitoring plan is also prepared in discussion with the community members.

The action plan forms the basis for a monitoring and evaluation plan. Once people know what they want to achieve through a project, they can identify what they need to monitor in order to track progress and ensure that everything is moving according to the plan. Once community members have been directly involved in planning project activities, it's easy for them to take an active role in deciding what needs to be monitored and evaluated, and how that will be done.



Remember!

- ✓ Participatory planning implies that all the key decisions regarding the project (objectives, activities to be implemented, strategies for implementation, and timeframe) are taken jointly by the members of the communities for whom the project is being designed, and the project staff.
- ✓ Participatory planning is based on the results of the participatory appraisal, and reflects the problems and concerns that communities are experiencing as well as the suggestions they provide for addressing these issues.
- ✓ While most of the suggestions and ideas for the project come from the participating communities, project staff and other 'outsiders' can also share their ideas and experiences that may be included in the plan.
- ✓ Participatory planning takes place at the community level, where decisions are made on how selected activities will be implemented for people living in that community
- ✓ Participatory planning precedes the design of a participatory monitoring and evaluation plan.