

# Workshop on Technical Assistance

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## Key components of a successful proposal

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### Objective of the session

To share with the group of participants the essential elements needed for a successful technical cooperation proposal.

### 1. Key factors for an adequate formulation of a technical cooperation proposal.

#### 1.1 Methodological approach

Several factors are implied at the time of formulating a technical cooperation proposal and there are plenty of handbooks and guidelines designed for this purpose. However, the methodological approach is a detail that usually is not taken into account, given the fact that such manuals are vast on technical aspects.

One of the most important factors to be considered is the difference between *the tools* applied for making a proposal (forms) and *the process* by which the proposal is developed.

Sometimes, it is thought that the submission of forms provided by donor organizations is sufficient to elaborate a formal project proposal. As a result, a great number of proposals are rejected, even if forms have been thoroughly completed.

The core of a project proposal is in fact, its *formulation*. An adequate methodological approach such as the Results-Based Management (RBM) will allow from the beginning the construction of the *concept* of the project, in which there is present a conductive thread and a rigorous logical connection among all its components. Results-Based Management is *a means designed to improve*

*the effectiveness and responsibility of management. It is a life-cycle approach to management that integrates strategy, people, resources, processes and measurements to improve decision-making, transparency, and accountability. The approach focuses on achieving results, implementing performance measurement, learning and changing, and reporting performance (CIDA, <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca>).*

**Result:**

***A describable or measurable change resulting from a cause-and-effect relationship***

(Results-Based Management in CIDA Policy Statement, April 1996)

## **1.2 Relevance**

Given the fact that the spectrum of technical cooperation is extensive and diverse, it is recommendable that relevance prevails, that is, a logical relationship between the different actors that are involved in the proposal (donor agencies, executing or implementing entities, local counterparts, etc) and the subject of the proposal. In such a sense, it is necessary to consider the diversity of viewpoints and demonstrate that the proposal responds to that diversity.

However, a proposal should be relevant as long as it takes part of higher political framework, whether sectoral (e.g. Labour and Social Security) or national (National Development Plan).

## **1.3 Sustainability**

In terms of international cooperation issues, it is frequently mentioned the importance of the sustainability of the actions and projects. Sustainability is understood as the directed effort entrusted to guarantee the flow of technical resources, technologies, services and skills, once the implementation phase of the process has finished, so that results achieved are sustained over time. In other words, as AECI (1988) says, *it is of fundamental importance that the expected results become a common practice at the institutional level without subsequent external funding.*

## **1.4 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Every project is unique. Therefore, it is recommendable that before initiating a project, a thorough discussion oriented to identify monitoring characteristics should be carried out. Among these characteristics there could be mentioned ones such as simplicity, capacity of providing quick and pertinent/relevant

information to facilitate taking corrective measures, cost effectiveness, flexibility, security, comprehensibility, relevance, accessibility, absorptive capacity, learning oriented initiatives, transparency and capability of gathering information at all levels inside the project.

One of the greatest weaknesses of management information is the lack of effective and timely communication of information to the users. Some monitoring staff often invest too much time and resources gathering data, which they frequently fail to interpret and present in a form that will convey the meaning of the progress made. If possible, this should be avoided. Monitoring tools should be set in the correct place and utilised according to the case.

The importance of communication during the project execution is as well a critical factor. Information is the oil that lubricates the movement of a project towards addressing and achieving the established objectives.

## **2. Which are the questions that need to be solved and in what order?**

Once the formulation process has begun, it is necessary to address a series of key questions, whose answers will progressively shape the project. Among these are:

- i. What is the problem which this project responds to?
- ii. What is the purpose or main reason for this initiative? What is the long-term goal which this project contributes to achieving?
- iii. What type of out-comes or effects are expected to be achieved in the middle term? (*What transformation is anticipated?*)
- iv. What are the specific objectives/outputs that will be accomplished in the short term within this project?
- v. What are the qualitative and quantitative indicators that will be used to measure the success of the different results of the project?
- vi. What kind of means of verification will be used to assure the evidence of the project's expected results?
- vii. What sort of external and relevant assumptions or risks might affect the likelihood of achieving the expected results? What is the risk mitigation strategy to minimize potential impact of risks, and to maximize adaptability of the project to facilitate success?
- viii. What are the main activities of the project? What are its approximate costs?

It is highly recommendable the use of the Logical Framework (logframe) Matrix, as well as the ones that come from the RBM approach, for the formulation and for monitoring and management processes.

The formulation of the project should clearly establish the chain of results (outputs, outcomes, impacts) that wish to be accomplished.

RBM emphasizes:

- The importance of defining realistic expectations for results, clearly identifying beneficiaries and designing developmental efforts to meet their needs.
- The monitoring of progress using appropriate indicators, while effectively managing risk.
- The empowerment of line managers and partners to measure performance and act on performance information.
- The added value of independent and professional internal audit and evaluation functions.
- Meaningful stakeholder participation (developing a common understanding)
- Transparency in performance reporting (e.g. results achieved, resources consumed).

RBM has been introduced as a tool for “result management” in order to improve organizational performance in terms of aid effectiveness. In this context, the operations are perceived as a learning process, that has the flexibility to make changes as experiences are gained. Such, performance reporting is a management tool, to facilitate adaptation when necessary, rather than just a matter of compliance with donor expectations.

Once the formulation process is finished, there comes the presentation of the project. In general, the different cooperation donors do possess their own guidelines and forms.

Some organizations stress certain technical or methodological aspects, which is important to know beforehand so that the project document will satisfy the appropriate requirements. It is of fundamental importance to write the proposal as concisely, clearly and coherently as possible in order to facilitate the work of the persons responsible for its analysis, which is carried out from different perspectives. There is a wrong belief that a good proposal has to be voluminous, when in reality most of the donors look for precision and no more than the necessary paperwork.

### **3. Relevant Aspects for Donor Organizations.**

#### **Facing donor organizations, which factors make a project proposal successful?**

Generally, donor organizations will look that all the formal requirements will be accomplished according to the presentation guidelines. This is such because often the information is stored in databases. If some categories or items have not been covered or have been poorly written, the submitted proposal will face the risk of subsequeednt information interchanges between the source and the recipient

entity, which in turn will eventually complicate and thereby extend the project's negotiation.

In spite of the above, donor organizations will look for some key aspects of the project:

### **3.1 Logical Coherence**

The first contact of the program officers (from donor organizations) with a project proposal of international cooperation takes place as a first analysis about the project's logical coherence. The existence of a chain of results (in the short, middle and long terms) with their respective success indicators as well as the justification and description of the pertinent target population, constitute the foremost key aspects to take into consideration.

Thus, donors look for coherence between the budget and the activities. It often happens that the categories used to prepare a budget not necessarily show what exactly the item of funding is about. It is highly recommended that budget preparation be undertaken according to the cost of activity per object of expenditure, as OAS has suggested in different workpapers and guidelines.

### **3.2 Sustainability of Results**

If the project results will not lead to more and better practices in regards to service delivery or knowledge production, that initiative is not sustainable. As already indicated, for the donor organizations a key aspect for a successful proposal will consist of the permanence or durability of the outputs and effects during a definite period of time. One of the key elements of international cooperation is to ensure the establishment of some kind of capacity building at a local level in order to make it common practice with adequate institutional support.

### **3.3 Monitoring Systems**

Likewise, donor organizations put emphasis on monitoring systems in order to ensure the accomplishment of different results, through signalling when corrective measures are necessary to achieve the desired results on time and within budget. Monitoring is viewed as a process that provides information and ensures the use of such information by management to assess project effects (both intentional and unintentional) and their impact. It aims at determining whether or not the intended objectives have been met.

### **3.4 Organizational Learning & Capacity Building**

With RBM, organizational learning is an integral part of the entire process of project management. It is accomplished through regular monitoring, reporting and program adjustment in loops that continuously refresh the participant's understanding of how the project or program is progressing and of the effectiveness of inputs and activities.

Capacity building is assistance which is provided to entities, usually developing country governments, which have a need to develop a certain skill or competence, or for general upgrading of performance ability. Intergovernmental organizations (international organization, often of the UN- family and OAS), provide much capacity building as a part of their general work, but also through bilaterally funded entities and/or by private sector consulting firms or NGOs. In addition, sometimes NGOs in developing countries are themselves recipients of capacity building.

Capacity Building is, however, not limited to international development cooperation work. More recently, capacity building is being used by governments to transform community and industry approaches to social and environmental problems.

Capacity Building is much more than training and includes the following:

- Human resource development, the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively.
- Organizational development, the elaboration of management structures, processes and procedures, not only within organizations but also the management of relationships between and among different organizations and sectors (public, private and community). Important in this regard is the potential for collaborative efforts among Labor Ministers in context of IACML in areas of mutual interest. Project proposals can be multi-national in nature and achieve economies of scale in design and implementation to address common problems and commitments.
- Institutional and regulatory framework development, striving for sound public policies, legal and regulatory changes which will enable organizations, institutions and agencies at all levels, and in all sectors, to enhance their capacities and to improve the quality and impact of the services they provide.