PLANNING THE OPERATION AND APPLICATION

Why plan?

Good planning is a precondition for a successful operation. Above all, planning has to do with deciding how resources are to be distributed and choosing between different options in order to achieve the desired result.

It is important to remember that the purpose of planning is to establish a basis to work from, and that a plan can be changed if necessary. As it is impossible to know the exact results of activities in advance, the objective of planning is not to lay down a path we are to follow in every detail. Rather, the plan serves as a qualified estimate of how change will take place, and we must be prepared to reconsider and adjust a given plan if it turns out that it does not align with reality. For this reason, it is extremely important to also plan for how to **follow up regularly** on the operation, so that lessons can be learned and priorities altered where necessary.

Planning is also a **communication** process. All the people affected by the operation and its activities have their own ideas about the situation that is desired – and how to get there. So, in order to reach agreement we must share our ideas with others. Shared planning helps us understand each other's different perspectives and to reach consensus on a target image.

If the principles of non-discrimination, participation, requirement for accountability, openness and insight are to be applied to the planning phase, the planning must be carried out in close **consultation** with all players involved, and the **target group** must also be invited to take part.

Don't forget that there may be structural obstacles that make it hard for everyone's voice to be heard. This may, for example, be on account of gender, age or level of education. These obstacles must be highlighted and consciously tackled. In this context, it is absolutely essential that the Swedish member organisation, partner organisation and target group participate in the planning together, so that everyone gains a shared understanding of the situation, what can realistically be achieved within a given timeframe, and what are the most appropriate activities for achieving the goal.

There are a great many things to think about in order to determine the optimal design of a project or an operation. For example, it is important to be familiar with the context in which the operation is to be carried out, and to analyse what is to be achieved – and what needs to be done to ensure that this happens. Everyone who participates in the planning contributes with their specialist knowledge, perspective and experiences.

One way of planning together is to arrange a meeting early in the process – known as a **"planning workshop"** – attended by representatives of the working groups from both the Swedish organisation/the Olof Palme International Center and the target group. This provides a good forum to get to know one another and to establish a shared image of how the operation is to be shaped. Many people choose to hold the planning workshop during a **preliminary study trip**.

Methods for planning and following up your operations

In the work to plan and follow up, there are several useful methods that have been prepared precisely for this purpose. An umbrella acronym for these methods is **PMEL**, which stands for **P**lanning, **M**onitoring, **E**valuation and **L**earning.

Different methods often include similar fundamental planning steps, and they have different strengths and weaknesses. It is not necessary to use a specific method; in many cases, the best approach is to cherry-pick whatever seems meaningful in the context. Choose what works best on the basis of your organisation's preferences, type of operation/project, and the context in which you are working. It is a good idea to contact your programme manager if you would like some advice or need any kind of support when preparing your planning.

You will find method material that can prove useful on our website.

Results-based management

Results-based management (RBM) is a strategy for increasing knowledge about what works and what is effective, and for reporting on the results. As the name suggests, it is a matter of using results as the basis for the ongoing management of the operation. Learning from the ongoing work is an essential foundation if one is to take a results-based approach. It is therefore important to plan what to follow up on and evaluate, and how to do it, as it is through the follow-up that we can gain the learning necessary to ensure that the planning and management remains relevant going forward.

There are several different methods for working with results-based management, including the **Logical Framework Approach (LFA)**, **Outcome Mapping (OM)** and **Theory of Change (ToC)**.

Describing the context and identifying relevant players

One of the first steps in planning a project is to perform an **analysis of the context and the problem**. The purpose of this is to establish the most comprehensive image possible of the current situation, which can then be used as the starting point when defining **which changes are necessary** to ensure progressive development.

It is important to ask the target group directly what they need, and how their rights and needs can be accommodated. This provides an occasion to generate a shared understanding of what the different **political priorities** the Olof Palme International Center works with mean in the partner organisation's country and context (see our International Strategy). Initiatives to support workers' rights or equality can mean one thing in one country, but something else entirely in a different context or country. Here, it is particularly important to include the target group, because they are best equipped to describe what is most problematic and can provide valuable insight into how best to tackle the issue. It is essential to try to establish the root cause of the problem in order to attempt to identify which strategy is likely to prove most effective.

One method that can be used to apply a pedagogical approach to visualising the different causes of the problem is what is known as a **problem tree**. In a problem tree, the causes represent the roots of the problem which, in turn, symbolises the trunk. The effects of the problem are shown as the crown of the tree.

An **actor's analysis/mapping** is part of the work to map the relationship, while focusing on actors (who can, for example, be individuals, groups, organisations, religious communities, parties or institutions) helps make the description more palpable. This is helpful in the next stage of the planning, as it clarifies the specific aspects that need to be changed, rather than simply stating that "something" needs to change to contribute to achieving the objectives of the project or operation.

You will find a set of tools on our website under Method material

Goals and strategies

When you have completed a description of the context and identified the problem (i.e. a context and problem analysis), you will have a deeper understanding of the issues that need to be tackled, and where you can contribute.

For the operation to result in positive development, all the parties involved must agree on which changes they want to see.

The objective(s) of the operation describe the change that is to have taken place once the operation is concluded, and this relates to the description of the context, the issues identified and the mapping of the players that has been completed.

Once you have identified the goals of your operation, you also need to consider how these must **align with the objectives of the programme** of which your operation is to form part. In accordance with the Olof Palme International Center's international strategy 2020–25, the programme must contribute to **five political priorities/outcome areas**, which in turn are a part of a progressive development.

In order to achieve your goals, you need to decide which **strategy** you are to apply – including what you are actually to do to achieve your goal(s). An overarching goal can, for example, be divided into several **intermediate objectives**, with the idea being that completing all the intermediate objectives should result in achieving the overarching objective. There should be a logical chain between the overarching goal and the intermediate objectives. When you look at the intermediate objectives, it must be possible to understand their connection to the overarching goal, and how they lead to achieving it.

In operations that are targeted at societal change, and which are often conducted in a changeable and – in many cases – unpredictable context, it is not always easy to make a correct assumption about how change is to take place. Instead, it can be easier to work with **"outcome areas"** or **"operation areas"** so as not to lock down planning on the basis of assumptions that subsequently prove to be incorrect.

In the same way, there must be a logical connection between intermediate objectives/outcome areas and activities. The intermediate objective, or what is achieved in the outcome area, should be the overall result of the activities completed. Completing activities is always a means to achieving something, the activities cannot be an end in themselves. However, in the same way as it can be difficult to make assumptions about which intermediate objectives lead to the overarching goal, it can be hard to predict which activities lead to an intermediate objective or contribute to a target area. The activities can, for one reason or another, produce results other than those we anticipated, or no results at all. It is therefore important to constantly evaluate whether the logical result chain you imagined actually holds water, or whether you will need to make adjustments as you go. This is what being **adaptive** (i.e. adjustable and flexible) is all about.

Follow-up, learning and adaptation

In connection with your work on planning the implementation of the operation, you also need to plan for how to follow up on an ongoing basis. One way to do this is to use pre-defined **indicators**, i.e. specific factors to check and measure while the operation is under way.

Indicators make it easier to determine whether or not you have reached your goals. Indicators can thus be defined as *measurable signs* that demonstrate whether the goals have been achieved.

- They may be **quantitative**, i.e. provable with figures and statistics.
- They can also be **qualitative** and formulated with "soft" measurements such as the perception among participants that they have broadened their knowledge or improved their self-awareness, or examples of how the participants have acted after completing an educational programme.

In many cases, **changes in attitude among different players** are what constitutes evidence that goals have been achieved. These could, for example, include changes in relations between different actors, policies and legislation, or changes in attitude at institutions and organisations or among individuals. In operations that are not overly complex and where the expected change is clearly predictable, this is a particularly good way to work with follow-up. However, there is always a risk of becoming so fixated on indicators that you miss a different change that may have taken place as a result of the operation, but which was not covered by the indicators. So, try to be inquisitive about all types of change, even if a given change was not what you expected when you were planning your project or operation.

In extremely complicated operations, on the other hand, it can be better to start by **observing change**, before working to establish how it was achieved, and thus determining whether it was a result of your project/operation.

Continuously following up on the operation enables you to check that the operation is heading in the right direction, or whether you need to make any changes to get back on track. Moreover, it is necessary to be able to verify (i.e. prove) and document how the follow-up was performed and what it resulted in. Someone who is not familiar with the operation must subsequently be able to "track" it and understand how the changes came about. The issue of how the change was made is also something you need to be able to describe when it is time to report on the project or operation.

Take time in your working group to discuss aspects that appear in the follow-up. What lessons can you learn? What functions and leads to results, and what does not? Have any changes taken place in the context in which you work, or among those players who are relevant, which means that you will need to change or adapt the operation? Can you adjust the implementation in any way to achieve an even better result? Did you schedule regular occasions to focus on learning and adaptation?

Discuss:

- How are you to identify change?
- How are you to collect information and document the change?
- How are you following up on the change? How are you incorporating what you learn in the work going forward?