

## **HELP & SHELTER**

### **TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING TO ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY PROJECT** **(FUNDED BY THE USAID GOVERNANCE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT BY AGREEMENT** **WITH PROJECT IMPLEMENTER TETRA TECH ARD)**

#### **Activity Report: Proposal Writing Workshop** **September 22 & 23 2011**

##### **1. Introduction/ Background**

This workshop was organized to introduce and upgrade the skills of participants in successful project proposal writing using a format which addresses project proposal writing as a process starting with project identification and ending with a final evaluation. It is hoped that with this knowledge, Help & Shelter and the other partner NGOs will improve the quality of project proposal planning and writing.

##### **2. Methodology**

The methodologies used were a combination of power point presentations, group discussions and feedback from small group activities. The workshop session was participatory and interactive

##### **3. Topics and Participant Feedback**

The programme for the workshop was as follows:

- ❖ Introductions
- ❖ Objectives
- ❖ Definition of project
- ❖ Project cycle
- ❖ Experiences with projects
- ❖ Stages of project
- ❖ Preparation of project (planning process, key concepts, objectives and indicators)
- ❖ Tips on proposal writing
- ❖ Evaluation

##### **Objectives**

By the end of the training it was expected that participants should be able to:

- Differentiate between the stages of the project cycle and explain their purpose and appropriate strategies
- Participate actively in the preparation of a project proposal

##### **Definition of a project**

Participants were asked to explain in their own words what they thought a project was, responses were: Projects have a time frame; have a specific purpose; are designed to achieve a particular aim; are made up of a single activity or series of activities; give guidelines on how to implement an activity; identify tasks re specific goals and objectives; needs careful planning; assesses/arrives at an outcome; identifies who, what, where, when and why in order to bring about a change.

It was also agreed that some projects can be stand alone projects and sometimes projects are applied for because money is available.

Power point presentation by the facilitator identified projects as:

- ❖ A planned set of interrelated tasks to be implemented over a fixed period and within certain costs
- ❖ Designed to achieve specific results
- ❖ Involves multiple stakeholders
- ❖ Is based on certain assumptions and may incur certain risks
- ❖ Ideally it should be developed with a programme framework

##### **What makes effective projects**

Participants discussed this question and it was felt that projects should fit the programme and mandate of the organization. It was also recognized that the identity and purpose of an organization can suffer if

projects do not fit into its overall aim resulting in a shift in the focus and resources of the organization. On the other hand it was felt that this can have some positive results i.e. financial to an organization which is cash strapped or helping the organization to build capacity. One way to achieve balance is through collaboration with other organizations. In the end it was agreed that an effective project:

- ❖ Should relate to the mandate of the organization
- ❖ Fit into the programme of the organization
- ❖ Contribute to the sustainability of the organization

### **Project Cycle**

The 5 stages of the cycle are: identification; preparation; appraisal; implementation (including monitoring); evaluation.

### **Experiences with proposal writing- small group activity**

Participants involvement included project planning; management; coordination; monitoring and evaluating; conceptualizing, development of proposals, implementation; budget planning' setting goals and objectives; logistics

### **Effectiveness**

Participants described the effectiveness of their involvement as follows: Planned activities were executed effectively in a timely manner; project proposal writing was effective as project was accepted; information was gathered from various stakeholders, staff and community needs and cooperation were addressed; project was approved with minimum changes required; objectives were fulfilled with little change; expected outcomes were surpassed; implementation was effective as individual needs assessment was done by staff to cater for the community as well as organization and those needs met without adding costs to the organization; coordination was effective because knowledge of the area and people within the community was done prior to implementation; some participants felt their involvement was not very effective as they felt they still has lots to learn and lacked knowledge about project work and planning. Participants also felt that better planning and project preparation could have made a greater impact on beneficiaries and led to better sustainability.

### **How could involvement been improved**

Participants felt that more exposure to workshops and training to build capacity could have improved their involvement; more thought put into planning and sustainability; better communication with regards to project work; more feasibility and research could have been done to better understand project communities; better logistical and technical support; more networking; wider inclusion in the project planning stage; need for consultation with all stakeholders before submitting proposal; improved communication between management and ground work staff vital; upgrading skills through training for persons implementing project

### **What was learnt about project planning**

Participants said they learnt that there was need for more involvement by team members during the planning stage; better preparation was necessary; more research needed, particularly when working in communities; need for better objectives, indicators need to be both qualitative and quantitative; need for consultations and needs assessment with all stakeholders including beneficiaries; need for statistical data, effective budgeting, team work, effective communication and sufficient resources; monitoring must be ongoing from start to end: project staff must work within allotted time frames in submission of reports, meeting targets, conducting activities; sustainability of project should be considered as part of planning.

### **Stages of project**

These were presented as:

- ❖ Identification – assessment of relevant research, needs & opportunities
- ❖ Preparation – project planning & proposal writing
- ❖ Appraisal – review of proposal to assess economic, technical, social and environmental viability of project
- ❖ Implementation – setting the stage, carrying out actions, garnering resources, involving stakeholders in activities, monitoring, preparation of reports
- ❖ Monitoring – collection of data r.e. progress relative to the planned results, usefulness of planned activities, management of budget, challenges encountered

- ❖ Evaluation – assessment of project, formation of conclusions to inform decision making and programming

### **Project preparation**

Before writing a proposal the following actions were discussed and identified:

- ❖ Interview past and prospective beneficiaries
- ❖ Review past project proposals
- ❖ Review past project evaluation reports
- ❖ Organize focus groups
- ❖ Check statistical data
- ❖ Consult experts
- ❖ Conduct surveys etc
- ❖ Hold community meeting or forums

Participants went into small groups and were given a H&S document “*Questions to be Considered during Project Preparation*” for discussion.

### **Reflections on Day 1**

At the end of Day 1 participants were asked to reflect on what they would take away from the session. Participants felt a lot of information was gained which would have been helpful in carrying out project work prior to this workshop; it was pointed out that different organizations operate differently and some persons are comfortable using different approaches; participants grasped the importance that no one can implement a project on their own, there is always need to have cooperation and compromise; they reflected on the need to value people’s opinions even criticisms, be more appreciative about others and keep the focus on the project; with good planning there will be success as planning is integral to success as is stakeholder input at all stages of the project; in project work there is the need for humility and understanding especially as everything is dynamic and changing; through defining the roles of persons within an organization people have ownership of their status; challenge of finding money to do project preparation can be offset by piggy backing on other activities taking place in communities i.e. attending community activities and taking the opportunity to speak about an upcoming project, collect information about the community or ask other organization to assist with some of this work; one participant reflected on information shared at the previous workshop which indicated that the greatest power lies within ourselves, but we tend to give persons the opportunity to exert power over ourselves

### **Assessment of Day 1**

Day 2 started with an assessment of the previous day. In reflecting on what worked well and what did not participants said they were able to analyze and share their unique experiences with others; participants indicated that the session helped them to appreciate that project planning was not only the responsibility of the project coordinator but everyone needs to be involved and if this is not understood and shared it can lead to the downfall of a project; the issue of training in communication in the workplace and in NGOs was recommended; it was noted that top management and decision makers from some organizations were not represented so a mechanism may be needed to impart this to them; the need to ask questions about a project even though already being implemented was recommended; it was suggested that project planning is not only about involvement of different persons at different levels but also having the right people involved; the concept of validation and practical ways of doing this in organizations were explored; one participant shared that between knowledge and practice there is understanding; participants also reflected on the concept that when speaking of projects it does not mean funded projects only;

### **Elements of project proposal**

- ❖ Project title
- ❖ Background to the project
- ❖ Project justification
- ❖ Goals and objectives of the project
- ❖ Description of expected project results
- ❖ Description of project activities
- ❖ Project implementation plan

Noted was the fact that some projects do not fund salaries or operation costs so organizations need to plan how these will be funded. One way to overcome such challenges was to try to negotiate with funders. The

sharing of experiences could go a long way towards not repeating past mistakes of organizations. The need to re-look at past project proposals and evaluations so as to learn from past experiences was recommended. Examining strategies to see what worked and what did not was key for improved project proposal planning. Attention needed to be paid to the whole concept of sustainability after the completion of a project. NGOs were challenged to market themselves effectively. The use of different support mechanisms, method of documentation and production of learning tools were stressed eg use of survivor stories to encourage behaviour change, survivor support groups etc. Exploring different ways of achieving objectives, new strategies was recommended. Background on the project including elements of research or documentation in area of work already done by organization was an important part of a project proposal. The cost of the detailed project plan was recognized as very important as some essential areas may be overlooked and therefore not budgeted for. it was also recognized that the project management team can make or break a project and knowledge, commitment and skill of project team members was important; where this is lacking capacity building training can be done.

### **Gantt Chart**

Since some participants were unaware of how Gantt Charts were used it was explained that this is a mechanism that shows you what is planned for each period. The format outlines the proposed activities, outputs, outcomes and impact planned.

### **Indicators**

A handout of examples of indicators was given out. These documented both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The acronym KISS was also introduced as a easy way to keep focus

### **Evaluations**

Participants said they learnt how to avoid pitfalls by engaging in detailed proposal planning before proposal writing; they learnt not only theory but gained valuable knowledge from sharing of experiences of participants; learnt that planning takes time and organizations need to have a vision of what they want to see happen; that the project proposal is like the marketing tool to achieve the organizations vision; one participants said she had already started work on a Gantt Chart; participants also indicated that they benefitted from learning about effective proposal writing and when implementing and using the techniques learnt then more questions may arise; other aspects identified as important learning points were questions and areas to be considered during project preparation, the different stages of project planning and community involvement; one persons also said that the information was vital to them, it was very clear and the handouts were very useful allowing her to become involved in the writing process as she was now better equipped with this new knowledge; participants also outlined gaining information on importance of communication among project staff, stages of proposal writing and who should be involved, use of Gantt Chart, logical framework and results based M&E and the importance of project staff involvement in proposal writing; on participant said that the entire content of the workshop was relevant to their work;

Participants said they would use this information for future ventures both within their work environment and personal lives; individually other participants said the workshop would help in assisting their agency in improved proposal writing and they would be integrally involved in this process; another participant said the information gained help her in the process of re-focusing the organization from not just responding to donor demands to addressing the real needs of the community; another participant said the workshop information would be put to use on work in future projects more effectively and to examine where mistakes were made in previous projects; one participants also said that they were tasked by their organization to write a proposal on their return from the workshop; other participants said they would use what they had learnt for self-empowerment and capacity building

Participants recommended that organizations should always have proposals to hand so they can pull these out quickly and expand on them as necessary; likewise agencies who are interested in research and base line data, can incorporate these into the project e.g. KAP surveys; it was also suggested that NGOs could develop a relationship with UG sociology department which would allow for access to information on this topic; Another recommendation was for participants to receive an electronic copy of the materials which they could use to share with others.

### **4. Follow-up sessions**

There is to be another 1 day session on results-based management to complete this 5 day workshop.

### **5. Qualitative reporting Techniques**

Qualitative information was gathered through the use of group evaluation reports. Qualitative information was also gathered during the course of the workshop from feedback sessions, small group reports, role plays and discussions involving participants.

### **6. Quantitative reporting techniques/methodologies**

Quantitative information was gathered through the use of tools such as ARD required attendance sheets and registration forms.

Participants were given registration forms in their file folders to fill out and return by the end of the workshop. As participants arrived they were directed to fill out required information on the attendance sheet.