

Preparing Microproject Proposals to Improve Household Food Security and Nutrition



Contents

	page
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Part One: Preparatory Phase	
- Where to start	3
- Defining the microproject: Selecting activities to be included in the proposal	5
- Collaborating with other development workers	9
- Enlisting the support of local authorities	10
- Understanding potential funding sources	11
Part Two: Developing a Proposal	
- The planning process	13
- Clarifying the goal	14
- Identifying beneficiaries	16
- Setting objectives and defining outputs	17
- Project design	20
- Listing the tasks	21
- Sequencing the tasks	22
- Making an action plan	24

	page
- The work plan	29
- Preparing a budget	32
- Developing a funding strategy	37
- Grants	39
- Loans	40
- Choosing the strategy	41
- Project management	43
- Monitoring and evaluation	44
Part Three: Writing and Submitting the Proposal	
- The sections of the proposal	47
- The work plan	50
- Submitting the proposal	59
Conclusion	61
Glossary	62

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Introduction

This manual on “Preparing Microproject Proposals to Improve Household Food Security and Nutrition” was prepared as a complement to the “Guidelines for Participatory Nutrition Projects”.

The “Guidelines for Participatory Nutrition Projects” were designed to help development staff working at community level to promote the design and preparation of participatory nutrition projects. To accomplish this, these Guidelines take the user through four key stages of the project cycle:

1. Preparation: establishing initial contacts between development workers, communities and other development agents.
2. Appraisal: conducting a participatory appraisal of the food and nutrition situation of the community.
3. Design and implementation: selecting and implementing activities to improve the food and nutrition situation.
4. Monitoring and evaluation: monitoring and evaluating project activities.

The Guidelines recognised that local resources (whether from the community or from local development institutions) may not always be sufficient to implement some of the activities identified.

Microproject proposals may, therefore, be needed to raise the funding required. In order to formulate community nutrition proposals, it is essential to have a good understanding of what determines nutrition, i.e. household food security (through production, income-generation and food purchasing), health, information/beliefs and related practices. Microprojects aiming at improving household food security and nutrition take into account the needs of the poorest households and address those needs in an integrated way. They can, therefore, make a major contribution to community development and poverty alleviation.

Funding mechanisms for community level activities have been set up in most countries to facilitate quick responses to local needs. However, community members and development staff working at community level often have no experience or training in preparing microproject proposals.

This manual on “Preparing Microproject Proposals to Improve Household Food Security and Nutrition” has been written to help communities translate good ideas to improve household food security and nutrition into feasible projects. Securing funding is often a key element and usually requires the community to write a proposal, which is then submitted to potential donors. This manual explains how to request funding and provides detailed guidance on how to develop, write and submit a proposal. It also presents a process that development workers can use or adapt to ensure community participation in the planning and endorsement of the proposal being developed and submitted for funding.

This manual takes the community through all the steps necessary in developing a project, determining funding needs and funding sources, and writing and submitting a microproject proposal for household food security and nutrition. By following the process outlined here, the community will end up with a realistic and sound project proposal that both addresses community food security and nutrition needs and meets donor requirements.

This manual has been written for government and non-government development workers who have been working with communities to identify and solve their household food security and nutrition problems in a participatory manner. It will be particularly useful to development workers who have already been using FAO's "Guidelines for Participatory Nutrition Projects."

In participatory projects, development workers, whether they are agriculture extension workers, school teachers, nurses or social workers, act as facilitators and resource persons for the community. The community must make its own decisions about the project and funding sources. However, once the decisions are made and details decided upon, development workers may have to take the community's decisions and transcribe them into a proposal or help community leaders do so.

This manual is divided into three main parts. Part 1: "The Preparatory Phase" reminds the reader of the conditions that need to be fulfilled before initiating the process. Part 2:

"Developing a Proposal", describes the steps necessary to help a community formulate a project. Part 3: "Writing and Submitting a Proposal", focuses on translating the information gathered in Part 2 into a well-developed proposal to be submitted to a donor.



Where to start

This manual is intended for use by development workers or organizations who have already been working with the community to identify its household food security and nutrition problems and possible solutions. The successful development of a proposal requires sound preparation. The following checklist can be used to determine if most of the necessary preparatory steps have been completed. If the answer is “Yes” to all of these questions, it is possible to proceed. If there are still some “No” answers, further preparation is needed before moving into the next phase. In this case, development workers may want to refer back to FAO’s “Guidelines for Participatory Nutrition Projects” (from now on, referred to as the “Guidelines”).

Development workers who know the community well may be tempted to skip directly to Part 3 (“Writing and Submitting a Proposal”). However, it is important that development workers and the community go through the steps outlined in this manual. These are intended to ensure that the community is effectively involved in all aspects of project formulation and identification of resources, and develops a sense of ownership and responsibility for the project. This usually leads to better project implementation and impact, and to greater accountability of resources.

By following the step-by-step process outlined in this manual, development workers can help the community

1. *Has existing information on food and nutrition issues related to the community been gathered and reviewed?* Yes No
2. *Is an inventory available of local institutions and of services provided in the area?* Yes No
3. *Has a participatory appraisal of the food and nutrition situation of the community been carried out?* Yes No
4. *Has this appraisal included the participation of as wide a range of community members as possible (e.g. village leaders, men, women, youth, illiterates, the poorest people in the community)?* Yes No
5. *Have the major food and nutrition problems in the community and their causes been identified and agreed upon?* Yes No
6. *Have the activities likely to address these causes - and therefore to alleviate these problems - been identified, discussed and agreed upon?* Yes No
7. *And last but not least, is the development worker able to follow the process on a regular basis in the coming months?* Yes No

assess the resources needed and determine which are the best options for obtaining these: the community, the local government, grants, loans, or a combination. In so doing, the community may decide that it is not actually necessary to write a proposal.

If the community decides that a project proposal to obtain a grant is necessary, development workers can help the community to develop a well-formulated and detailed project plan by following the steps outlined here. This will make it much easier to write a good, solid proposal - one that is acceptable to both the community and the donor.

Projects that have been developed for communities - rather than by communities - often face unforeseen social problems (such as disputes over land or water resources, gender or ethnic discrimination, rivalry between groups in the community). This not only wastes donor funds, but may erode the community's confidence in its ability to solve its problems. By using a participatory approach to project formulation, development workers and communities will be able to identify such problems and address them before writing the proposal.



Defining the microproject: Selecting activities to be included in the proposal

Microproject proposals usually cover only part of a participatory nutrition project. A proposal submitted for funding will include only those activities that cannot be carried out with existing local resources - either at community level or local level.

A microproject may consist of one or more activities (or components). When the community is preparing to undertake its first community-led project, it is probably wise for the participants to start with a limited number of activities. Although many planning manuals suggest that problems be ranked in order to establish priorities, it is preferable to start with fairly easy activities, rather than with the most important ones which are usually the most difficult. Success in designing and carrying out an activity develops the community's sense of accomplishment and confidence. This helps the community to establish a foundation and move on to more ambitious activities in the future.

Proposals may be prepared for microprojects involving the whole community. In other cases, they may be limited to activities meaningful to a given group within the community (e.g. farmers' association, youth group, savings and loan group). Or they may address the needs of a certain segment of the community such as the landless, female-headed households, recent immigrants, HIV/AIDS affected households, low-caste households or mothers of malnourished children.

They may include a combination of activities addressing different aspects of household food security and nutrition with their respective

target groups. If the community has experience in implementing activities, or if it has effective organizations, (such as village development committees, women's and youth groups, water users' groups, village health committees, and farmers' associations), it will be easier to have different interest groups take responsibility for specific activities more or less simultaneously.

In all cases, it is important for development workers to start with a participatory appraisal of the food and nutrition situation of the community. This will ensure that the microproject proposal fits the wider framework of ensuring household food security and good nutrition for all. The examples in Box 1 illustrate how microprojects can combine a series of activities which all contribute to the final goal of improving nutrition.

Different types of activities have different funding implications. Some can be done with local resources (e.g. training and organizational activities), some could benefit from grants (e.g. construction of basic community infrastructure such as a well or a child-care centre) and some may be eligible for loans (e.g. income-generating activities like a food store or a grinding mill). These issues will be discussed in more detail in Part 2.

The list of activities to improve the food and nutrition situation of the community can be quite long. The community will need to sort through the problems and solutions to determine which can be done with their own resources and which will need external assistance. Box 2 describes a participatory tool that can help a community to determine just this.

Box 1: Examples of microprojects

In a household food security and nutrition project in northern Zambia, villages carried out a participatory appraisal of the problems leading to malnutrition and identified a number of solutions to these problems. The type of activities suggested included:

- introduction of labour saving technologies, e.g. hammer mills, cassava drying equipment, oxen for cultivation and transport;
- construction of improved crop storage facilities;
- establishment of community oil palm nurseries;
- improving water supply systems;
- setting up child care systems.

In the next phase, the villages worked on the formulation of microprojects that needed outside funding. Two of these were:

1. Constructing a well which required pre-construction planning and organization, obtaining technical advice, digging and cementing the well, establishing a users' group and maintenance fund and showing families how to make good use of the water to improve health and nutrition;
2. Promoting oil palm production and consumption which included the organization of a community nursery, training for the care and maintenance of trees, setting up a group enterprise to run an oil palm press and disseminating information on how to make the best use of oil in food preparation.

Box 2: Sorting out activities

In this exercise, cards are made up depicting all of the activities identified by the community during the participatory appraisal phase. These are depicted either as pictures or in words.

The participants are asked to divide these cards into three groups:

1. Activities that can be resolved by the community itself;
2. Activities that will need help from local institutions (government, NGOs);
3. Activities that will require additional resources (government or NGOs).

Sorting out the cards, agreeing in which group to put them and organizing them on the ground or on a wall for everyone to see raises the participants' awareness. It allows them to exchange points of view and agree on what needs to be done and how practical each activity is.

After identifying the activities, community members need to discuss how easy or difficult each of the activities will be to implement, and how important each of them is and for whom. It is a good idea to carry these discussions out first in focus groups (e.g. by gender, age, livelihood) to highlight the different perspectives and gain a better understanding of people's motivation. Development workers should ensure that everyone has a chance to participate effectively in this consultation.

Whenever possible, it is good to bring in resource persons who can answer technical questions about the activities.

The next step is to present and discuss the outcome of the small focus group discussions with the whole community. The development worker's task is to make sure that the different opinions are presented or that some mechanism allows the point of view of minority groups to be taken into account. This discussion should allow the community to select which activities can be started immediately with community resources, which can be carried out with existing local resources (government or NGOs) and which will need additional resources.

Box 3: Listening to women

When working with the community, it is essential that development workers understand what women think. In most cases, they need to meet with women in separate groups in order to allow them to express freely their ideas and reservations. The active participation of women in the planning stage is important both as a way to empower them and to ensure that the project designed meets their needs without burdening them excessively with extra tasks.

This is easier said than done. Although women are usually the first to face food and nutrition problems, in many societies they are reluctant to participate in community meetings. Moreover, they are often too busy with domestic chores at the time meetings are usually held. It is a good strategy to start encouraging women to meet first among themselves in small groups to discuss issues of common interest. They will be more ready to participate actively in a wider meeting.

Women should not be seen as a homogeneous group, however. In most cultures, the role, behaviour, constraints and perceptions of women differ according to age, social status and family situation. Younger women with infants and small children are usually busier than older women and may have even less time to spare for meetings. They are also not usually granted the same recognition in society. It is, therefore, unlikely that they will voice their opinion or be listened to, unless special efforts are made to elicit their point of view.

Time is a factor in deciding whether or not to ask for external funding. The preparation of a microproject proposal, if well done, is a lengthy procedure. Preparing a microproject proposal can contribute to community capacity building, better organization and empowerment. But this is only the initial part of the process and the only one that the community can control. The review and approval of the proposal by the funding institution and the actual disbursement of funds can also take significant time. Once the project proposal is submitted to a donor, the community often has no information on its progress. People should, therefore, not expect immediate results. Microproject proposals should be considered for activities that do not need to be started immediately, as the whole process will likely take several months or more.

The community may feel that it is ready and capable to take on a number of activities. However, when in-depth discussions have been held about the resources that the community members need to provide, in particular time and labour, some activities may no longer seem practical at that particular time. By immediately discussing what resources are needed for each activity, the community can weed out any very unrealistic activities early in the process and sort out which activities definitely require external funding.

Box 4: Is there really a need for external funding?

Different kinds of activities need different kinds of resources:

- Planning and organizational activities require time, advice and stationery.
- *Training activities* require time, technical assistance from development workers, training materials, demonstration facilities, etc. Development workers can usually provide the technical assistance and facilitation skills needed for this type of activity.
- *Construction activities* require tools, machinery, technical assistance, labour, materials.
- *Maintenance activities* require tools, materials, spare parts, technical knowledge, labour.

Construction projects usually provide some form of community facilities. This type of activity may be eligible for grant funding or local budgetary allocations to help in the buying of materials or the hiring of machinery and possibly subsequent maintenance.

- *Production activities* require inputs such as land, labour, machinery, seedlings, fertiliser, tools, transport.

These activities are typical of private enterprise, e.g. poultry projects, grain milling or village food stores, and may be eligible for loans if they can make sufficient profit to repay the loan and reinvest in the business. Such activities should be backed up by an assessment of the market potential.

Collaborating with other development workers

Once the community has identified a number of food and nutrition problems and come up with a list of possible activities to improve the household food security and nutrition situation, it is useful to group the activities by technical field.

Technical fields can include such things as food production, income generation, food storage and processing, health and sanitation, child care, etc. Every development worker will be able to assist the community with certain activities, but the community may also need technical assistance from other development workers. One of the main tasks of development workers is to facilitate contacts and collaboration with colleagues working in the same area. Although this process has been started in the previous stages, it is now important to review and discuss the activities one by one with a development worker specialized in the activity. This will help the community understand the technical requirements and the time, labour, equipment and money needed for the initial investment and for operations.



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Enlisting the support of local authorities

10

Local government authorities, at municipal and district level, should be informed about the activities that the community is interested in pursuing. One good way of keeping them informed is to invite them to planning meetings.

Once the different activities have been discussed, sorted out and selected, the community should call an official meeting to present the outcomes of the participatory nutrition process and invite the local authorities and all development workers concerned. This will allow local authorities to be fully informed. It will also give the community the opportunity to learn from the local authorities about the development process in the area and about government resources, priorities and procedures. By keeping government authorities and any other development workers informed of its plans, the community will:

- avoid problems of approval in the later stages of the project;
- learn about resources that government authorities or development workers might be able to bring to the project;
- determine whether they need special authorisation for specific activities;
- determine the willingness and ability of government and other institutions to support the project (with finances, materials or personnel);
- learn how the project might fit into any district-level plans.

For example, if the community has decided to build a health clinic, it may want to ensure that the government is in a position to place a primary health care nurse there once it is built.



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Understanding potential funding sources

A wide range of organizations provide financial grants for community-level projects. Each organization has a funding strategy, which means that it might favour one type of project over another type, one location in the country over another location, or one size of grant over another. Moreover, each organization has its own set of funding guidelines and requirements that need to be followed when submitting a proposal. For example, some donors require that an officially registered village-level organization submit the proposal, while others insist that a new project management committee be established specifically for the proposed project.

When applying for a loan from a financial institution or a loan fund, it is necessary to prepare budgets that show the income-generating potential of the proposed activity. This information allows the financial

institution or loan fund to evaluate repayment prospects. It is also necessary to provide very clear information about how production activities will be managed, particularly if it is a group enterprise.

Before preparing a proposal, development workers and community members need to know what institutions might be able to provide support, their priorities, the type of assistance they provide, their requirements and proposal guidelines. It is also important to understand what happens to the proposal after it is submitted to a donor, as this determines when funds can be made available and, therefore, when the activities can be started. There are a number of ways to find this information. In order to develop as full and accurate a picture as possible, development workers may need to follow some of the following avenues.

- **Meet with the local authorities for information and advice.** The local authorities may have been contacted by visiting development institutions and may be aware of funding sources. Development agencies may have offered to support community initiatives or encouraged them to elicit microproject proposals for submission to specific funds. The local authorities could also ask for information and advice from the central level and be able to share experience and lessons learnt from previous efforts.
- **Build from their own experience.** Through their work, development workers have usually heard about or encountered some donor and resource organizations. Development workers could arrange to meet with them to find out if they can help or provide names of other institutions worth contacting.
- **Refer to the institutional inventory.** The preparation of an institutional inventory is one of the first activities in the development of participatory nutrition projects and strategies (see page 18 in the Guidelines). This tool can provide a good starting point for arranging meetings with the institutions identified. These may be able to provide development workers with the names and addresses of other organizations that could then be contacted.
- **Network.** Development workers can ask colleagues from both government institutions and NGOs to share what they know about donor and resource organizations. NGOs often know a lot about donors since they usually rely on donor support for their own projects.

When exploring funding sources, make sure to include the government as a possible source. Donors sometimes give or loan large sums of money to governments to support community-level projects. The World Bank, for example, has set up Social Funds in a number of countries. These funds are frequently managed and disbursed by units within a government ministry. In some countries these units are called the Microproject Unit.

Make sure to ask both donors and government about programmes that might have community development funds. These funds are usually built into large programmes to allow the programme management to support worthy, community-level initiatives that fit with the objectives of the programmes.

Box 5: Possible funding sources

- Multilateral donors: World Bank Social Funds, Social Action Funds, Socio-economic Development Funds, Social Investment Funds, European Union Microproject Funds
- Bilateral donors such as USAID (American), DFID (British), DANIDA (Danish), FINNIDA (Finnish), CIDA (Canadian), SIDA (Swedish), NORAD (Norwegian), Japan
- United Nations agencies such as UNDP, FAO, UNICEF and ILO
- NGOs (international and local)
- Foundations
- Embassies
- Programmes/projects which manage community development funds
- Commercial banks
- Development banks
- Special credit programmes
- Credit unions
- Savings and loan associations
- Private traders or business enterprises