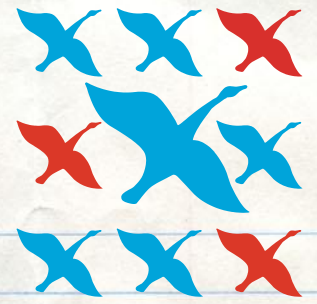# WILDE GANZEN

ONTWIKKELINGSSAMEN**WERKING**

PI-DOC 1

Project cycle

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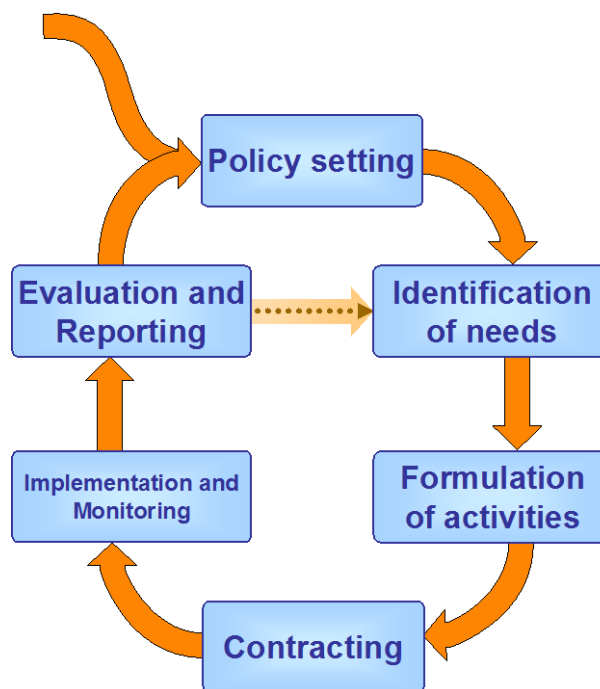
PI-DOC 1: THE LIFE CYCLE OF YOUR PROJECT

With each project, possibly without actually being aware of it, organisations pass through a number of similar steps. We call this the life cycle of a project or project cycle. Each phase has specific characteristics and activities to be undertaken.

The life cycle of your project

The life cycle of a project is used by many organisations in development cooperation. The approach has the following advantages:

- The identification phase involves all stakeholders (Project Owner, target group, local governments, PI) right from the start, so they can think along about the need, the content and the implementation of the project. It increases the chance that the right solution to the problem is chosen. It offers a possibility to learn from each other, because each stakeholder brings in his/her own ideas and perspectives. In this way, more creative choices towards the solution of the problem will be made.
- Going through the different phases will enhance the successful planning and implementation of the project. By taking the project step by step, more deliberate choices will be made. It is very important to lay down in a document a clear description of the project and the engagements of all stakeholders. For a donor to commit itself financially to a project, the aim of the project has to be clear, the way this aim will be reached and how much money is needed.
- During implementation monitoring of progress is important. If needed, the project can be adjusted in time.
- The evaluation is important to celebrate and document successes, but of course also to find out what worked well, what did not work well and what should be done differently next time.

Six phases of a project

The life cycle of a project has six phases. We will now present some ideas and suggestions of what to do in each phase of the project. These ideas and suggestions are meant to assist the stakeholders in the project. How to use them is up to each and every party involved to decide.

1 – POLICY PHASE

In the policy phase the Project Owner develops and describes his policy. A policy describes the main area and target group the organisation works for. The Dutch PI most likely has ideas and guidelines for the type of projects it would like to support. The choice which project to support will be guided by the expertise and affinity the PI has for a certain theme or target group. Both the Project Owner and the PI can lay down their policy in their articles of association.

Suggestions

- Project Owner and PI should think about their policy before starting to plan a project. It is important that both, based on their own experiences, analyse why they exist and why they should choose to realize this specific project.
- The organisations lay down their policy and the reasons for their choices in a document. In this document your principles and guidelines are stated and motivated. In this way all stakeholders (donors, volunteers, partner organisations, beneficiaries) can know whom they will start a partnership with.
- Having a policy also helps to decide with whom to collaborate. Like national or local governments, village or social organisations, but also local NGOs or other development organisations and projects.

Pitfalls

- Do you think the word "policy of your organisation" is too complex? Don't worry, it is only an explanation of the objectives of your organisation and their reasons. Make a short policy statement for your website or your constitution. Don't forget to mention what your reasons for the policy are.
- It is not always desirable to stick strictly to your policy. Well-founded exceptions can be made. Lessons learned or previous experiences might also be reasons to adjust your policy. It is wise to document these adjustments.
- Not all choices need to be based on policy only. Emotions also play a role. This need not be a problem with projects. But also these choices need to be communicated clearly.

2 – IDENTIFICATION PHASE

The idea of a development project arises during the identification phase. Ideally it is the target group who identifies the problem, but it could also be your organisation. You will describe the target group's needs, as well as the contribution each partner in the project will give. If needed, a feasibility study is made and alternative ways of project set up are compared. The result of this phase are clear and well explained choices for the project goal, target group, location, time frame, etc.

Suggestions

- Take your time for the identification phase; well begun is half done.
- The target group knows best what their problem or need is. It is up to them to indicate what problem needs to be solved. It is essential to know the problem first, after which solutions are being sought. It is important to know if the situation is seen as a problem by all involved.
- In finding the solution you as future Project Owner can contribute substantially, because you are well aware of the situation, you bring in your own experience and you master the language. And, even more important, you will be able to indicate what is feasible. However, the actual choice for the solution will be made by the target group.
- After the choice has been made, the Project Owner collects the information needed for the project that will address the problem. This has to be done in close consultation with the target group.
- The PI, the Dutch partner, will think along and advise on the feasibility. They will also be able to tell if the project is likely to receive money.

Pitfalls

- It is essential to be well prepared. Too often, people jump immediately into the implementation of the project. Most probably this is the biggest pitfall for all involved organisations. A successful project rises or falls with proper preparation. Again, ensure you'll reserve sufficient time for the identification phase.
- It is a misconception to think that representatives of a village or community will be aware of and consider everybody's interests. Representatives of the target group should be well informed about the needs and wishes of the target group.

3 – FORMULATION PHASE

During this phase the choices that are being made are written down in detail in a project plan. The Project Owner will describe the project and budget as detailed as possible, in consultation with other parties involved. The project document might also serve as the subsidy request to donors. As for the latter, a close communication between Project Owner and PI is very important.

Suggestions

- Stakeholders agree who will contribute with knowledge, time and human resources and when. This is a result of a negotiation process among the different parties involved, and thus this requires time. It is recommended to lay down the consequences of failing to keep one's engagements.
- Prevent ambiguities during the implementation of the project by agreeing with all stakeholders how the project should look like.
- It is useful to indicate why certain alternative solutions have not been chosen. This provides clarity to other parties who might become involved during the implementation. It will also show donors that the project has been well thought through.

4 – CONTRACTING PHASE

After the project plan has been submitted to and approved by a donor, the Project Owner and the PI draw up a contract between their organisations. This contract states what is financed by whom and how the use of the finances will be accounted for. Even when no external financial sources are involved, the parties should lay down their partnership in a contract. You can also use the contract to describe the interests of the different stakeholders in the project.

- It is fun to throw a party with donors, partner organisations and beneficiaries, after the contract has been signed. This will give you an opportunity to give positive attention to the parties involved and will increase support for the project.

Pitfall

- Some people experience the need to sign a contract as a token of mistrust, whereas it actually helps to avoid ambiguities, problems and suspicion. It will protect the relations in the long term.

5 - IMPLEMENTATION EN MONITORING

When financing of the project is safeguarded the project can be implemented. Concrete work plans are made. During implementation the progress of the activities is followed to ensure that they will actually contribute to the project goal. This is what we call *monitoring* of the project. Monitoring provides information to decide if adjustments are needed; it provides insights in what does work and what does not work. In the first place, monitoring is a task of the Project Owner together with the target group. The PI will play an observing, advising or participating role.

Suggestions

- Do not suspend problems that arise during the implementation, but try to solve them as quickly as possible. It is necessary to explain to all stakeholders why some changes are necessary, what are the financial consequences and if there is a threat of not achieving the project goal.
- Stakeholders report the changes, the choices made and the underlying reasons, so that it is possible to learn from it for a next project.

Pitfall

- It is inevitable that certain activities will work out differently from planned. You might be tempted to lay the responsibility with the other parties involved. However, it is important to realise that you as the Project Owner will be accountable.

6 – EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Once the project is completed, an evaluation assesses to which extent the project goals were achieved and what has or has not contributed to achieving them. Based on this assessment, recommendations for future projects are described. The Project Owner can use these recommendations to adjust his policy. They could also be relevant to a new project and thus play a role in a new identification phase.

Based on the evaluation results the Project Owner writes a report (with or without the support of the PI), including financial accountability to the donor. All co-financing donors receive a copy of the evaluation.

Suggestions

- When assessing the project it is important to know what the beneficiaries gained from it. Their opinion has therefore to be asked for. Allow them also to think about improvements for a next time.
- The evaluation should also mention unforeseen (positive and/or negative) effects.
- If recommendations from the evaluation study are being used to change your policy, it is good to mention this, because then you show that you have actually learned from your experiences.

- The evaluation report is sent to all stakeholders, including the Dutch PI and the donors of the project. The Project Owner can publish a summary report for his own supporters.

Pitfalls
- Too often projects are not being evaluated at all. That is a pity, because it is a suitable moment to close projects and celebrate successes.
- Take care to avoid indicating a culprit if (some) conclusions of the evaluation are negative. What's done cannot be undone. It is better to try to analyse and to formulate what has to be done differently next time.

Need to know more?

An excellent guide on project cycle management is available at the EU website:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/about/actors/fpa/2003/guidelines/project_cycle_mngmt_en.pdf