

AID Conference 2004

Minutes for Session Named Projects Workshop

Date: May 29, 2004

Time From: 10:00 AM

To: 11:30 AM

Minutes Taken By: Rajendra Marulkar

Number of attendees: ~30

Audio/Visual Component?

Slide show.

Speaker/Panelist Names:

1. Srividhya
2. Tulika
3. Kiran

What they are speaking about:

Tulika, Kiran: Best known methods, approaches, and ideas for project sustainability.

Kiran, Tulika: A case study: Health projects.

Srividhya: Project workshop: Working with New NGO, pre- and post-approval guidelines.

Main Presentation:

The aim of project workshops is to train new volunteers. Tulika and Kiran started by asking the audience what they hope to learn from project workshops. Some of the answers were: to know how projects work, to learn new things. A volunteer from San Diego asked how to stop funding for a continuing project which is not doing well. Some volunteers had questions about site visits, best ways to train new AID volunteers, and handling projects when the project coordinator for that project leaves AID.

Kiran and Tulika talked about a few major issues such as gender inequality, poverty, illiteracy, environmental degradation, poor health services that India faces. All of these problems are inter-connected and should be tackled in an inter-connected, holistic manner.

A case study approach was adopted to explain in details on how to understand projects and ways to make them sustainable. Health was the focus of this case study. The first step when dealing with projects related to health issues is to set up health centers. For instance, setting up health centers in remote villages in the Northeast was one of the few things done by Tulika's chapter. Some of the questions that need to be asked when reviewing a project are: did the project

achieve its stated purpose? What was the vision and long-term goals of the project? Is there any other way to handle the same problem? For example, it is not possible to create health centers in all villages. So the next best thing is to work in collaboration with government health centers.

Some of the causes for poor health are low income, poor nutrition, superstitions, and lack of knowledge, among others. It is important to identify the proper relation between poor health and the its cause. A few approaches to handle health problems could be through village health activists doing house visits to monitor the health of the people, holding vaccination camps, mobilizing the community, and providing basic health infrastructure.

It has to be kept in mind that there will be problems in achieving the project goals. The problems faced will vary from region to region based on the local conditions.

Another issue to think about is the sustainability of the project. Is it a good idea to support a health project that entails setting up a health center? A better way would be to explore ways to empower the community and see whether local governance can administer the health program. This will go a long way towards making the project sustainable without AID support for a longer time.

Many times there is little community involvement in administering the project and solutions are dictated from the top. There is a need to move away from that and adopt a more bottom-up approach.

What should projects achieve: Assist quality projects? Work with Sathis & Jeevansathis.

We should work with NGO's with whom we have had long term interaction. We should not take up short term sporadic projects.

Enhancing the Quality of Projects (Srividya)

Send mail to projects@india.com if you get a project from a new NGO. At present project details are not communicated well. Send mail to AID OPC to get positive as well as negative feedback about the NGO from other chapters. Sathis and Jeevan Sathis can be a good source of information for various projects.

We should start identifying the focus areas and focus regions for some of the states where we have worked a lot. We should not randomly pick projects in states where we already have a good focus. We should also try to collaborate with existing movements and work through them.

There is also a need to identify other organizations and establish relationships with them. For instance, many of our projects are in education. However, we have not worked with Asha in a sustained manner. Never collaborate with organizations that have a history of discriminating on grounds of gender, religion and so on.

Sometimes we get project proposals with a huge budget. We have to analyze if such projects aim to hit the root cause of the problem. We should see if it makes more sense to build new infrastructure or to work with existing people and existing infrastructure.

We should always communicate negative feedback/experience about an organization/project to other chapter if they are handling projects/NGO which we think are not good.

Site Visit:

Very often site visits are not undertaken after a project has been approved. Stress on post approval visits as well. Ideally there should be two project coordinators for each project so that if one person leaves, there are no problems in terms of project coordination.

We should try to get to know all the people in the NGO we are collaborating with. Typically there is only one point of contact within a NGO. We need multiple contacts within a NGO. We should try to ascertain how the community perceives the project and to what level the community is involved.

Apart from monetary help, we ought to identify sources of non-monetary support like toy drive, booklets etc. We should also ask the NGO if there are other ways and methods to help them. When talking to the NGO we need to possess humility, critical thinking and the willingness to learn from them.

We should check to only those NGOs who have FCRA. If we have to send the check to such NGOs, we have to make sure that there is collaboration with some other NGO which has a FCRA clearance. Even if the project is not funded, update that information. Online check request and the online project database are used to send the check. So update that information as well. Files can be monitored by the IRS. So a hard copy should be kept.

Question/Answer Session:

Comments from Balaji: Make this presentation to local communities as well. Share this workshop with a larger audience.

Q: Sometimes people don't want to take stance about few issues that are controversial because there is a fear that this will affect the donor's base. How should we handle this?

A: Try to have a general body meeting where you invite all donors. Give as much information as possible to all the people, especially the donors. Ask NGO's, Sathis and Jeevan Sathis questions which you feel are too tough and controversial and get their feedback on those issues.

Q: Question and answer sessions for other projects should be available as it would be helpful for similar set of projects.

A: The project database is for that purpose. Project coordinators should enter all the information into the database.

Q: Meeting minutes are open to public and can be accessed from Google.

A: Make sure that you do not put raw minutes. The NGO or the public may not understand the context and this may lead to miscommunication.

Q: Sometimes NGO's do not follow some of the guidelines. How do we handle this?

A: Send NGO's a template if they are not following certain guidelines if you think are critical.

Q: Sometimes it takes a long time to approve the project to understand their project.

A: Make sure we do the balanced, fair project reviews. Don't spend a long time reviewing the program. Sometimes you may have to send the first phase and take time to learn more and always make sure to mention "conditional approval" for the 2nd installment.

If nothing happens in first phase that is all right, but mention that and even if you want to continue with the funding that's ok. But give the reasons.

Additional Notes/ Observations: