

Natural Resource Project Planning and Management

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Introduction

Natural Resource Management is clearly a systematic undertaking with a set of activities and tasks programmed to contribute to meeting a desirable outcome. The success of a project is based on how well the project team manages the time and resources designated for the undertaking (project). A large proportion of projects fail because the efforts to achieve the desired outcomes are poorly defined and managed. This chapter on Natural Resource Management Project Planning and Management presents the broad, overarching strategies, framework and cases providing a hands-on account of the full project cycle as related to NRM projects and programmes by putting a community perspective—on new developments in project design, implementation and assessment.

The new face of project management especially for community based NRM initiatives is cognizant of the holistic context including human, social, natural, physical and financial assets and processes that underpin programme and project management strategies. Project *initiation*, design, implementation, reporting, communication and evaluation are presented using local concepts, cases and frameworks. Since monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement are integral components of NRM programmes and projects, the chapter presents details and approaches to assess the impact, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and legacy of NRM policies and programmes and a process to promote accountability by all stakeholders.

A series of narrative illustrations, cases, guiding questions and NRM problems and other essential references are provided for guidance on specific approaches and tools for Project Planning and Management. This is done in ways that are compatible with the broad approach of integrated community based NRM. Learning activities, additional reading and hand's on resources are also provided to guide implementation of projects targeting redress of problems of NRM at community and other scales. The overall objective of the chapter is to expose the reader to the concepts, principles and application of project planning and management in natural resources development and more specifically to:

- Explain the overarching definitions, concepts, framework and approaches in the development and management of NRM programmes and projects;

- Guide the development and implementation of project-level NRM plans;
- Reinforce, review and refine natural resource management and investment strategies and practices to ensure that adaptive management occurs as part of continuous performance management process;
- Enable readers to design, implement and assess NRM projects with a result orientation;

The chapter is intended to facilitate the reader to be able to:

- Describe key concepts, elements, tools, frameworks, approaches and processes of NRM project planning and management;
- Discuss the elements of NRM project proposals and write fundable proposals for NRM projects;
- Apply relevant tools and frameworks for effective management of NRM projects;
- Formulate plans for monitoring and evaluation of NRM projects and apply monitoring and evaluation tools in development and implementation of NRM projects and programmes;
- Systematically document and communicate processes and results of NRM projects;
- Demonstrate professionalism in project management and appreciate the contribution of project management essentials such as planning, community participation, Monitoring and Evaluation, learning and reporting, teamwork and budget management in sustainable NRM.

Project Planning

As a crucial part of Project Management, Project Planning relates to the use of schedules to plan and subsequently report progress within the project environment. The key to a successful project is in the planning. Creating a Project Plan is the first thing to do when undertaking any NRM project. Often Project Planning is ignored in favour of getting on with the work. However, many projects fail to realize the value of a Project Plan in saving time, resources and addressing many implementation constraints. This section looks at practical approaches to NRM project planning.

The Concept of Planning

It is often said that, ‘failing to plan is planning to fail’ (Blackman, 2003) Thus, planning is the key to the success of a project. But what exactly is *planning*? When we think of planning, we are faced with multiple definitions, even without including specific areas of planning - such as physical planning, economic planning, regional planning, etc. However, our definition should be in line with the commonly accepted uses and meanings of *planning*.

One good definition is that ‘planning is the process of preparing a set of decisions for action in the future directed at achieving goals by preferable means’ (Cleland & Gareis, 2006). This definition includes seven different elements. Planning is substantially and in most cases, also formally and legally a process of preparing a set of decisions to be approved and executed by some other organs. It is important to emphasize the difference between *planning* and *decision making and policymaking* in general. While planning is a kind of decision making and policymaking, its specific characteristic in this respect is its dealing with *a set* of decisions, that is, a matrix of interdependent and sequential series of systematically related decisions.

Planning primarily involves making a set of *decisions for action* and is not directed at other objectives, such as pure knowledge, development of its planners, and so on. So planning is *execution-oriented*. The actions in planning are taken *in the future*. This is perhaps the most important characteristic of planning, introducing the elements of prediction and uncertainty and conditioning all aspects, problems, and features of planning. Planning is *directed at achieving goals*. The planning process cannot operate unless it has more or less defined goals to the achievement of which its recommendations for action in the future are directed. These goals are achieved *by preferable means*: The very nature of planning, as a process for rational shaping of the future according to our desires, depends on the *means-ends* relationship, which is basic to the planning process. The planning process is directed at suggesting the preferable means for achieving our goals; i.e., at selecting on the basis of rational processes – including, for example, collection of information, utilization of knowledge, and systematic and integrative data processing – the preferable means for achieving the desired goals. A variety of Project Planning activities are normally carried out to ensure all elements of NRM Project Management are scoped, planned and executed in an integrated way.