



Report on Pan Asia Regional Workshop on Project Design and Proposal Writing

Kathmandu, Nepal
15–19 August 2011

Conducted by
ELD Training
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Introduction

This report documents the process and evaluates the outcomes of a five-day training on Project Design & Proposal Writing conducted for 16 participants of various Save the Children South and Central Asia Country Offices held at Kathmandu, Nepal, August 2011.

The training was conducted at the Summit Hotel, Lalitpur, and ran from 15 – 19 August 2011. The course was designed by ELD, and facilitated by ELD Training Manager Uttam Uprety and co-facilitated by ELD associate Paul Reitman. The training was the one of a series of country-level trainings following on from training for the Child Protection Initiative at Nairobi in February 2011.

ELD adapted the course based on an analysis of the needs of participants. Prior to the course, participants completed questionnaires and submitted writing samples. The samples of writing submitted helped in designing and delivering a course that was focused on the work of Save the Children. We also received suggestions and inputs from Bimal Rawal, Coordinator (Pan Asia Regional Programmes). Uttam Uprety also met with Ms. Ayano Suzumura, Education Project Manager, to ensure current SC terminologies were used.

This report is based on daily feedback from participants, final evaluation of the course and the trainer's own observations.



Evaluation & Conclusions

The training was monitored on a daily basis, with participants completing feedback cards at the end of each day highlighting what they found useful as well as what they found unclear.

On the final day, participants completed a questionnaire and added their final comments on the training. The questionnaire results (completed by 16 participants) are below, with areas where five or more participants responded highlighted. Overall, participants were extremely satisfied with the training and from the table we can see that all participants consistently rated the course very positively in all aspects.

Criteria / Satisfaction	0-20	20-40	40-60	60-80	80-100
Objectives met?				XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXX
Your skills improved?			X	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXX
Confidence gained?			XXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXX
Content appropriate?				XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Useful materials?			XX	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Methodology appropriate?			X	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Trainer's knowledge and skills				XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX
Logistics		X	XXX	XXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Worth coming?				XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX

Participants also noted their perspectives on the training. On the whole, feedback was positive. There was the general appreciation of the training, as well as participants noting the particular areas that were useful – the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) process, writing skills inputs, etc. However, as with any mixed group, there were those who would have preferred more / less inputs, more / less discussion, which is an inevitable outcome of having such a diverse group. Specific comments from the participants included:

- *All my expectations were met*
- *I gained more than I expected*
- *Everything was sufficiently covered*
- *All dimensions of the training were sufficiently covered and explained*

There were also suggestions to bear in mind for future trainings. Some participants felt that there could have been more presentation / inputs and less discussion, and more time spent on editing. Indeed, discussions could have been briefer, but ensuring all participants are active and involved can take time. It was also suggested that participants be “of equal experience” – something which would be hard to manage when trying to involve so many staff from such diverse backgrounds.

Daily Narrative

Day One

The day started with a welcome address from Mr. Brian Hunter, Country Director, Save the Children in Nepal. Mr. Uttam Uprety started the first session with an icebreaker activity that linked into an exercise on the Writing Process. Participants learned that successful writers separate writing into four steps – Analysis, Planning, Drafting and Editing.

The next issue discussed was why some proposals fail. The trainer led a discussion in plenary and key reasons identified were:

- The problem being faced / need for the project has not been explained properly
- The issue does not strike the reader as significant
- End users (communities) have not been involved in the planning
- The proposal is poorly written and hard to understand
- The proposal's outcomes do not reflect the donor's area of concern
- The proposal asks for more funding than the donor can provide
- The project has not been coordinated with other organisations
- The donor is not assured of the organisation's capabilities
- The project is too ambitious
- The writer did not follow the guidelines
- The evaluation procedure is inadequate

The discussion continued with a group discussion on what problems they faced while writing project proposals. Participants raised many challenges:

- How to start
- Lack of proper analysis
- Synthesizing all the ideas
- Having to work alone
- Linking with donors' strategies
- Confusion on donors' terminologies
- Designing indicators
- Explaining sustainability
- Organizing ideas well
- Lack of in-depth knowledge
- Time limitation
- Selection of appropriate information
- Lack of innovation
- Going beyond specific activities to address policy issue / global problems
- No idea how to make proposal attractive
- Helping donors understand concepts / ideas

The trainer then wrapped up the introductory session highlighting that a winning proposal should persuade donors in three main aspects: that the problem exists and it needs attention, the proposed intervention is a viable solution and the organisation will be able to manage the project successfully.

After the break, we discussed the basics of Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and the Log Frame itself. Throughout this session we tried to avoid getting diverted by issues of terminology. Key terms were explained, with special emphasis on the terms Save the Children currently uses.

We began with brief differences between the LFA - the approach - and the Log Frame itself, the 4x4 matrix which presents a snapshot of the project. We then looked at the Log Frame in more detail, exploring the different columns and looking at what goes in each. We also explored the diagonal logic, which shows how each level is dependent on external factors.

The introduction to LFA ended with an outline of the steps to be covered over upcoming sessions.

Analysis Stage

1. Analyse the situation / Identify the problem
2. Analyse the stakeholders / Identify their stakes in the problem
3. Analyse the problem (Problem Tree)
4. Analyse the objective (Objectives Tree)
5. Analyse and select an approach or combination of approaches

Planning Stage

1. Define the Results Chain (Narrative Summary – Outcome, Impact, Outputs and Activities)
2. Establish Indicators
3. Define Means of Verification (Project Monitoring and Evaluation)
4. Describe the project context (Assumptions and Preconditions)

In the afternoon, the trainer first illustrated the Problem Tree tool, and in break-out groups participants developed Problem Trees based on a case study. Then participants formed two working groups for extended group work and proceeded with the first step of the analysis stage, analysing the problem. Groups identified their own problems to be addressed and developed Problem Trees. Problems selected were:

- Corporal punishment at school
- corporal punishment at home

As at many points in the course, participants all had a chance to present their analysis back to the plenary.

Day-end Reflection¹

Happy About ...	Questions / Concerns ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly impressive • Training was very clear and well paced. • Learning LFA (4) • Exercise on project design: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact (2) • Discussion on why proposals fail • Problem analysis (5) • Group work was good • Energizers were great • Practical day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need little more-in-depth on LFA • More examples / less presentation • Can have more interacting and participatory sessions • Not clear in identifying core problem • Difficulties in constructing problem tree • Longer session on 'Cause and effect' analysis • Lack of free internet facility • Difficult to understand what people are saying (varieties of English spoken in the team)

Concerns mentioned were to be expected, as much work remained to be done on LFA, and the Problem Tree tool would be reviewed. After the first day's essential theory, the course was ready to move into a much more practical, hands-on phase.

Day Two

The day was full of practical which helped participants develop their skills and gain confidence in using the Logical Framework Approach. The day began with a brief review of key points from Day One, and the trainer took this opportunity to address the concerns from the previous day's reflection. This was followed by teams presenting their Problem Trees. After feedback from their peers and the trainer, teams fine-tuned their Problem Trees to ensure the logic was sound.

The first formal input of the day was on setting objectives. Firstly, the trainer explained principles of setting objectives and gave some examples. The Problem Tree was then used as the basis to develop an Objectives Tree that illustrated the means-end relationship of the desired future state. To do this, all the elements of the Problem Tree were restated as positives except those which could not be changed (Assumptions).

Once participants had finalised their Objectives Trees, they were ready to identify a strategy to address the problems and achieve the desired changes. Using a case study, the trainer highlighted how, in the roots of the Objectives Tree, we can identify broad approaches that, together, would form a project strategy. He demonstrated how, once approaches were identified, they could be analysed by drawing up a list of factors and evaluating each approach independently, before being compared to one another to identify how to combine the approaches.

¹ At the end of each day, participants noted their reactions and feelings on blank cards under the categories of things they were happy about / achievements and concerns / questions. Multiple responses are indicated in parentheses.

Groups then identified the possible approaches to address the problems they had analysed on Day One. After working through the alternatives analysis, each group had a set of approaches to ensure both long- and short-term objectives could be achieved.

The afternoon sessions were spent developing the first column of the Log Frame – the Narrative Summary – and identifying indicators. The trainer illustrated how the Objectives Tree can be used to identify logical results-chain – especially Outcomes, Impact and Outputs – and complete the Narrative Summary. By the end of the session, most groups had completed first column of the Log Frame.

By the end of the last session, both groups of participants had identified Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs).



Day-end Reflection

Happy About ...	Questions / Concerns ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impressive course• So far so good• Great day! Very educative and resourceful!• Very good flow of sessions• Happy with group work and exercises which helped to make the process clear• Excellent in making the teaching understandable and practical• Exercises along with explanations • Group discussion is really useful for developing the Log Frame and doing the analysis• The groups work is very useful to understand the terminologies and logical ways of planning, designing • Learning about indicators, outputs and outcomes were very useful• Problem analysis and alternative analysis• Wonderful learning of objective and alternative analysis• The indicator setting is practical and helpful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need more to discuss about outcomes development• Still confused about ranking in alternatives analysis • Need a simple definition of input, activities, outcome and impact• LFA could be further explained • Some games need to be included



Day Three

The day was divided between two major themes. The first half was spent in completing Log Frames for team projects, while, in the afternoon, there was the first major writing input on Writing Clearly.

To complete their Log Frames, participants had to add their Means of Verification (MOV) as well as Assumptions. The trainer illustrated the principles involved in setting MOV (sometimes known as monitoring mechanism) and then asked participants to identify the MOV for their own ongoing extended assignments.

Next, he clarified the principles for identifying and analysing the project risk. Participants then identified Preconditions - conditions which must exist prior to starting Activities - and then outlined the Inputs needed. This section did not need to be as detailed as the project budget, but still needed to summarise the overall resources required. Next, they worked up the Assumptions column, identifying at each stage what, in the external environment, might cause the intermediate results not to lead to the next level of achievement.

Paul Reitman led the afternoon session on Writing Clearly. The first part focused on the principles of Professional Writing. Participants discussed their answers to the focus question 'what is Professional Writing?' They offered many suggestions about what good writing should be. We went on to discuss how Professional Writing is about action and creating change.

The session continued by exploring that writing sends a message, and discussed how readers will always make judgments about us / our organisations based on how we write. Hence, poorly organised writing suggests disorganised people; while writers wasteful with words may be seen as being extravagant in other ways, not necessarily favourably. This led us onto what makes writing effective?' Participants offered many useful ideas, and the final criteria presented were:

- Clear Objectives
- Well-organised
- Clear, Brief and Concise
- Appropriate Language
- Modern, Relaxed Style
- Correct Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation

The rest of the day was spent learning how to make writing have more impact. Participants were introduced to a tool called the Fog Index. By analysing the Average Sentence Length (ASL) and percentage of complex words (words of three or more syllables), the Index gives us a score equivalent to 'the number of years education a reader needs to easily understand a text the first time'.

Next, a short text (from the Child Protection Initiative web site) was taken for evaluation. In many ways, it was a good piece of writing, but also it forced readers to slow down and re-read. In other places the meaning came through only after some considerable strain on the part of readers. We realised that this was due to poor clarity, mainly caused by long sentences and too many complex words. On analysing the text using the Fog Index, we saw that it was extremely high.

The session continued with an exploration of how to improve readability by reducing the Fog Index. First, we brainstormed reasons why it's a good idea to use short sentences and came up with:

- Easier and faster to write
- More accurate
- Easier and faster to read
- Make your message more obvious
- Get your reader's attention
- Easier to remember

The trainer then presented, gave examples of and practiced through exercises various ways to reduce the ASL and increase readability:

- Breaking up long sentences
- Breaking up long paragraphs
- Preferring short words where possible

- Reducing unnecessary words and phrases

Participants learned that reducing even just a word or two can enormously improve readability. A key principle here was, whenever we are about to write a phrase that we would not ordinarily say, looking for a simpler, briefer alternative. Many phrases that we use automatically in writing can delay us getting to the point and make our writing long-winded and dull. Avoiding these helps get our message across more efficiently and leave a more dynamic impression.

- Reducing emphasizeers

There are a lot of words we tend to use because we think they make our writing more powerful. 'Essential', 'significant' and 'serious' are just three examples. Often these words are just 'crying wolf' - demanding unnecessary attention - and can be avoided. In fact, omitting them altogether can often increase the writing's impact.

- Reducing nominalizations and abstract ideas

Abstract nouns like 'investigation', 'consultation' and 'discussion' make it sound like nothing is actually happening. Professional writers make their writing clearer and more powerful by preferring to use the verb form – 'investigate', 'consult', 'discuss'.

Day-end Reflection

Happy About ...	Questions / Concerns ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped me a lot. Thanks • Very productive • Wonderful facilitation • I liked everything • Both sessions were good and useful • Exercises are fruitful • Great exercise of completing Log Frame • Working on Log Frame and understanding 'cause-end relationship • Objective tree into hierarchy of objectives • Risk analysis • How to turn problem tree into problem statement • Very easy to follow the rules of clear writing • Excellent session on clear writing • Practical learning to improve writing • Clear writing: Fog Index (2) • Tools for writing are useful and practical • Scientific evidence is given as a reason we write clearly • Impressive-today! Realised why one of my teacher said after seeing my report that 'you NGO people ruined the English language' • Uttam: Good as always • Paul: Excellent! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time limited, so exercise not enough • Allocate enough time for practical • The discussion on risks / assumption was not enough • Not enough time to develop Log Frame • Need more time on reviewing Log Frame development • Facilitators need to make sure everyone is participating in group work • Clear writing conflicts with previous training and hence confusing

Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction with progress, although there were some concerns about how well the course duration allowed for adequate in-depth coverage of all topics. However, most of those concerns would be addressed as the Log Frames were developed into proposals during the rest of the course.

Day Four

Day Four introduced participants an important skill – how to organise ideas in writing. They also learned how to use Mind Mapping for as a planning and drafting aid in proposal writing.

After a review of Day Three and clarification / resolution of learning concerns, the morning session then focused on organising ideas in writing. Participants saw that there were two main ways of organising ideas – Inductive and Deductive. While the Inductive approach is logical, it often fails to be persuasive. We suggested that participants prefer to use the Deductive approach as:

- It's more persuasive
- It helps the reader to decide on action
- The reader might not read everything
- It gets the reader's attention
- It helps the reader to follow the argument
- It shows respect

The session continued by looking at the various ways to organise the main points of any document:

- Chronology / Sequence
- Location
- Order of Importance
- General to Specific
- Specific to General

However, whichever way of organising ideas is used, it is always essential to give the main point as soon as possible to help the reader to follow the rest. The session on what makes a paragraph effective further reinforced this. One key feature of a good paragraph is the presence of a Topic Sentence, usually the first sentence of the paragraph. The Topic Sentence can give the structure of the argument, but, more usually, is interpretive, offering a summary, conclusion or reaction to the evidence the paragraph presents.

The rest of the session was based around practical exercises where participants tried to identify the Topic Sentences for a range of paragraphs. Interestingly, as well as being hard work (something we should not force on our readers!) participants came up with many various (and often contradictory) Topic Sentences for the same data. This further illustrated the importance of Topic Sentences in persuading the reader to see things the way we see them.

The session concluded by examining how, if we are consistent in using Topic Sentences, we can both aid readers in speed reading and also summarise our documents easily by using the Topic Sentences as the basis for a document overview.

The afternoon focused on Planning the Proposal. Participants learned about how to use Mind Mapping software and were given a generic map of the proposal structure. They developed their maps and continued working on these, organising key components of the project proposal, especially, the problem statement section until the end of the day. The trainer coached individuals and teams throughout the afternoon. By the end of the day, both groups had prepared a problem statement section for their project while some participants started developing their individual projects on their topics of interest.

Day-end Reflection

Happy About ...	Questions / Concerns ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perfect day – everything was nice• I got answer to all my questions. It was very productive and the trainer was very helpful. Thank you so much Uttam• Everything's good!• Happy with everything! • I am definitely benefiting from writing a lot today• Clear presentation and explanation on how to organise a paragraph• It's helpful to learn how to organise my thoughts in writing• Tools for organising writing• Mind Mapping is great for organising our ideas • I am very happy with the practical sessions• Group work to make activities• Individual coaching for me on LFA design on my own case• Individual and group exercises • Exercise on problem statement• Working on problem statement is a good exercise as a reinforcement and given us the chance to use 'Gunning Fog Index'• Practicing making simple sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most of the tips for organising writing are not new• Limited time – not enough time to rewrite the topic sentences

Day Five

Throughout the final day participants worked on teams to finish planning and drafting their proposals. These were shared and received feedback in plenary, and the course was reviewed and evaluated.

All groups started by finalising their plans for their proposals, after which they began drafting. Participants tried to follow the principles of Professional Writing as they did this. Meanwhile, the trainer also gave inputs / guidance on how to develop the activities and M&E sections of the proposal. He further presented sample of a project budget.

Once all drafts had been completed they were shared in plenary. Both the trainer and participants gave feedback on:

- Whether the proposals achieved their objectives
- Organisation of ideas
- Completeness of information
- Clarity of language

Unfortunately, due to time constraint, participants did not have time after lunch to review their own work and make changes before the plenary feedback. This meant that some proposals were still in a rough state, and, on reflection, we should have allowed time for this. Even so, we could see that proposals were generally well presented – persuasive and well organised, even if still containing some errors. Major changes during this stage usually consisted of either moving some sentences or paragraphs to a more prominent position; adding topic sentences where needed; adding data where absent; and deleting unnecessary paragraphs / sentences.

The course ended with a review of the key points covered throughout the week. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires and give open feedback on the training, and these results are contained in the Evaluation section of this report. All participants were provided with electronic copies of training materials, photographs from the training as well as other useful resource materials.

The training was formally closed with closing remarks from Bimal Rawal, CPI Regional Representative for South and Central Asia.

Annexes

Annex 1: Workshop Schedule

Day/Time	Session
Day One	
Session 1	Opening Introduction of participants Expectations collection and objectives sharing Common problems with project proposals
Session 2	Project proposal writing: Introduction
Session 3	Logical Framework Approach in project management
Session 4	Situation Analysis
Day Two	
Session 1	Review Situation Analysis (Cont.)
Session 2	Objectives Analysis Alternatives Analysis
Session 3	Designing the Results Chain
Session 4	Designing Indicators
Day Three	
Session 1	Review Identifying Means of verification Analysing Risks and Making Assumptions
Session 2	Analysing Risks and Making Assumptions (Cont.)
Session 3	Professional Writing
Session 4	Writing Clearly
Day Four	
Session 1	Review Organising Ideas in Writing
Session 2	Organising Ideas in Writing (Cont.)
Session 3	Drafting the Problem Statement
Session 4	Drafting the Problem Statement (Cont.)
Day Five	
Session 1	Review Drafting the Project Description
Session 2	Drafting the Project Description (Cont.) Project Budget
Session 3	Tips for editing the writing
Session 4	Editing Evaluation Closing

Annex 2: List of Participants

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CP / SCS

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Program Coordinator - Child
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Sr. Communications and Reporting
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Ekvisoth Khat Ty
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Myanmar
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China
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