Unit 04
Strategic Corporate Development

ZOPP
Objectives-oriented Project Planning

A planning guide for new and ongoing projects and programmes

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH

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Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn
Germany

Text by:
Stefan Helming, Michael Göbel

English translation by:
Joan Tazir

Layout:
Stefan Mümpfer - grafic works -, 60316 Frankfurt

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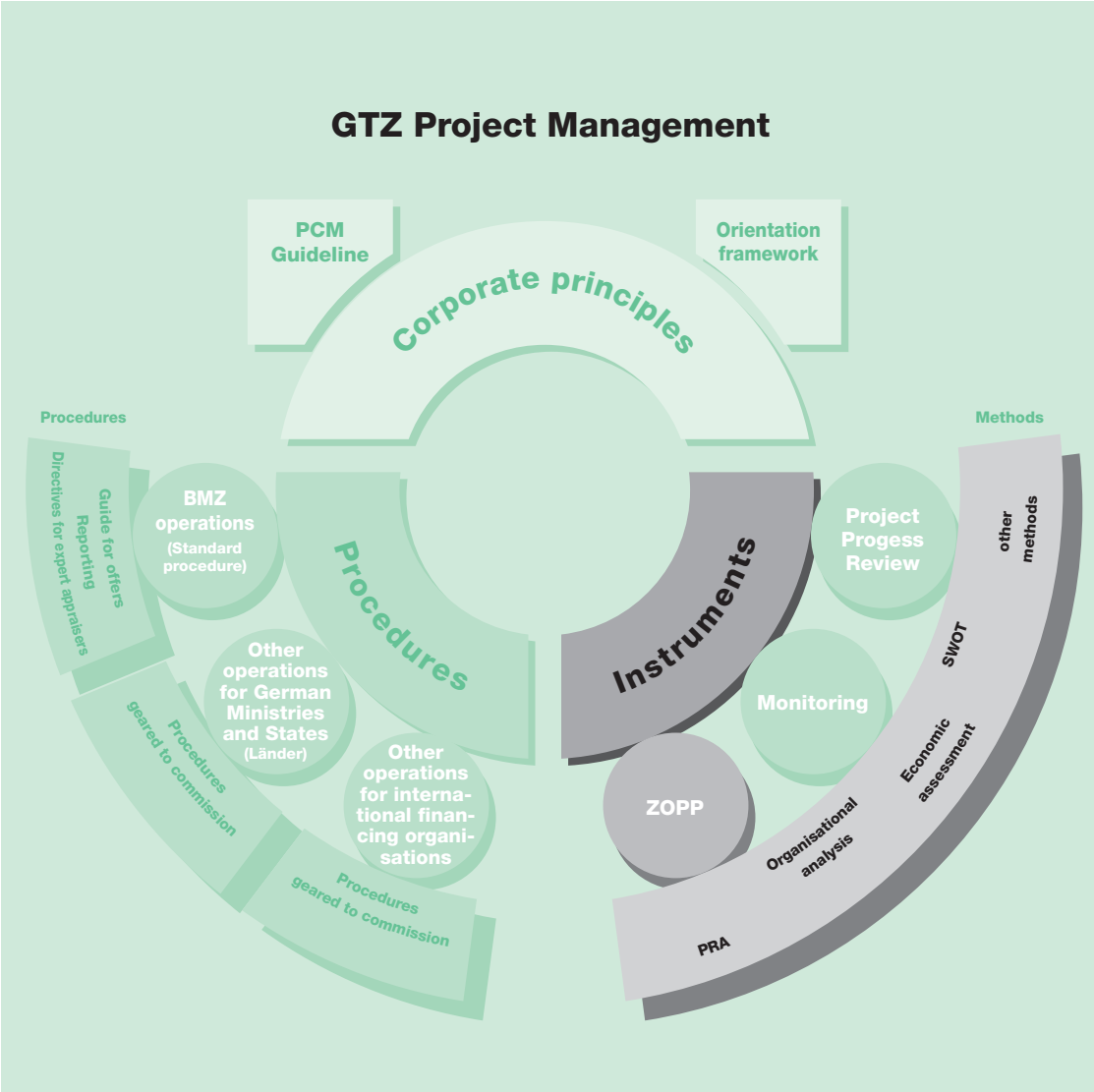

In the publication "Managing the implementation of German technical cooperation activities" GTZ Directors General explained GTZ's mandate and role and encouraged staff to take a flexible approach to their work.

The "Project Cycle Management (PCM) and Objectives-oriented Project Planning (ZOPP)" guideline describes the principles along which GTZ plans and manages its cooperation inputs.

The aim of this brochure is now to explain the role of the ZOPP Objectives-oriented Project Planning approach. ZOPP is GTZ's planning instrument. Its baseline features are quality and process orientation. ZOPP incorporates GTZ's many years of cooperation experience. This publication will be joined by a "Methods Compass" which explains the range of methods and techniques available to help objectives-oriented project planning achieve success.

A companion publication is GTZ's brochure "Cooperation on the right track – Standard Procedure and how it works", which explains the formal procedure for technical cooperation agreed between GTZ and BMZ (German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the consequences this has on procedures within GTZ and with partner organisations.

Preface

For many years the acronym ZOPP has stood for Objectives-oriented Project Planning. It has become GTZ's trademark for participative planning procedures geared to the needs of partners and target groups.

The ZOPP guide used for the last 10 years needs to be updated. Planning is now taking place in a different context. GTZ Head Office was reorganised and given a regional structure in 1989 and the Planning and Development Department was established. At the present time, GTZ is decentralising management responsibility and making in-company operations more flexible. We want to encourage staff members at all levels to take a proactive approach to their work. This also applies to project planning as an ongoing management function. Staff in project countries are particularly addressed, together with their counterparts. The Head Office in Eschborn will, of course, provide all the assistance necessary.

This guide does not contain new theories on project planning but rather describes how ZOPP can be used flexibly as part of GTZ's Project Cycle Management (PCM). Nowadays, the term "ZOPP" has a wider meaning: It no longer stands for a predetermined sequence of binding and prescribed steps and methods. Instead, ZOPP should now be understood as GTZ's overall planning framework. ZOPP should illustrate the quality of planning GTZ strives for, but it does not dictate specific tools or methods for individual planning steps.

This brochure is a guide for GTZ staff who are planning new and ongoing projects. It is not a "recipe book" covering all potential planning issues. Users have to contribute their own inputs. Nor does the guide claim to have the last word on planning. On the contrary. It will have fulfilled its goal if, in the coming years, we are able to update and improve this text by incorporating your experiences and new ideas.

Franziska Donner

Head of GTZ's
Strategic Corporate Development Unit

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1 The planning process

1.1 Cooperation in the project

All our technical cooperation ventures usually have a common basic structure: GTZ provides inputs for partners wanting to implement a development project. This project addresses target groups who want to improve their situation. The partner is responsible for its project. GTZ assumes the responsibility of supporting the project in such a way that the development desired by the target groups actually takes place. This basic pattern of cooperation is illustrated by the "three-level model" (Fig. 1).

3-way cooperation: GTZ – partner – target groups

We understand our "partners" to be those organisations or work units with whom we cooperate directly. They are the recipients of our advisory services and other inputs. In our project work we generally cooperate with several such partners. We understand "target groups" to be the recipients of the services provided by our partners.

This model applies in principle to all types of projects – no matter whether the partner is a government organisation, a bank, an association or a non-governmental organisation, or whether the target group consists of a private enterprise or people in a village. This basic model even applies when we provide emergency aid in a crisis region – although in such events GTZ often co-assumes the functions of partner organisations and provides services directly to the target groups.

> *Every plan is wrong, when we look at it in hindsight*

Groups in society are rarely homogenous. They have different, and sometimes antagonistic, economic interests, social status, etc. Our partners' task is to make sure that the viewpoints of the recipients of their services are integrated into the planning process in

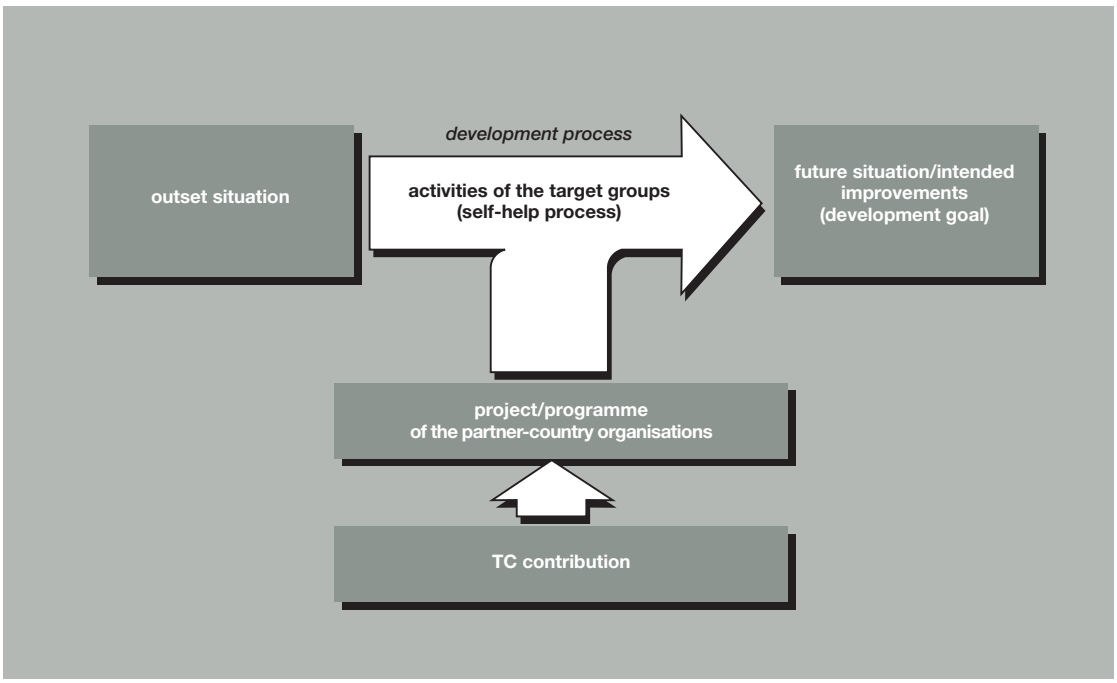


Fig. 1
The three-level model

a differentiated manner, turning these recipients into actors. Indeed, experience has shown that projects are only successful if they lock into the target group's own efforts. We at GTZ should encourage our partners to take up these perspectives and help build their capacity to do so. Target-group-orientation is a determining factor on whether the partner organisation is suitable for cooperation activities. An extension service which does not want to know about the demands of its different groups of clients cannot be promoted. Our partners' will and capability to enter into a constructive dialogue with their different target groups is a major criterion for selecting partner organisations.

> **Planning means replacing coincidence with error**

German development cooperation is financed by the taxpayer. It is subject to policy goals and allocation criteria, public accountability and control. The overriding development-policy goals of the German government are to combat poverty and social injustice, protect the environment and natural resources and improve the situation of women. Taxpayers expect development assistance to improve the situation of people in partner countries.

German development cooperation is subject to policy goals and public control

This is the context in which BMZ places commissions with GTZ. The same applies to commissions from international financing organisations. The relevant issue is not that a vocational training centre is up and running, but that its graduates can find jobs. Whether a water authority is working efficiently and on sound technical lines interests no-one apart from the professionals; the aim of development activities is to ensure that people have an equitable and ecologically sound access to water. In the final instance it is not the services offered which count, but the higher standard of living which the people can enjoy. The chain of services in technical cooperation is illustrated in Fig. 2 (see page 6).

Every project has target groups i.e. recipients of the services provided by the organisation implementing the project. Depending on the type of project, these may be the actual "end users" in the service chain as described above, for example the inhabitants of urban slums or other poor groups. In many cases, however, the direct target groups of a project are only linked to these "end users" via impact chains of differing lengths, for example when the aim of a project is to set up an environmental authority or a chamber of trades and industry to represent the interests of entrepreneurs. Even in such cases there must be a clear view of the benefits which the end user will experience.

1.2 What is planning?

Planning means that

- target groups and partner organisations,
- partner organisations and GTZ,
- GTZ and its clients

develop a common understanding of

- the goals of cooperation: What do we want to achieve? (chapter 2)
- the outset situation: What basis are we starting from? (chapter 3)
- the strategies to achieve the goals, the risks entailed and the criteria for success: What has to change? (chapter 4) and
- the action plan to implement this change: Who is responsible? (chapter 5)

Quality is relative

If the parties involved have been able to find honest and realistic answers to these questions, then the project has been well and truly "zopped".

No project plans are objectively "right". However, the planning can be deemed as

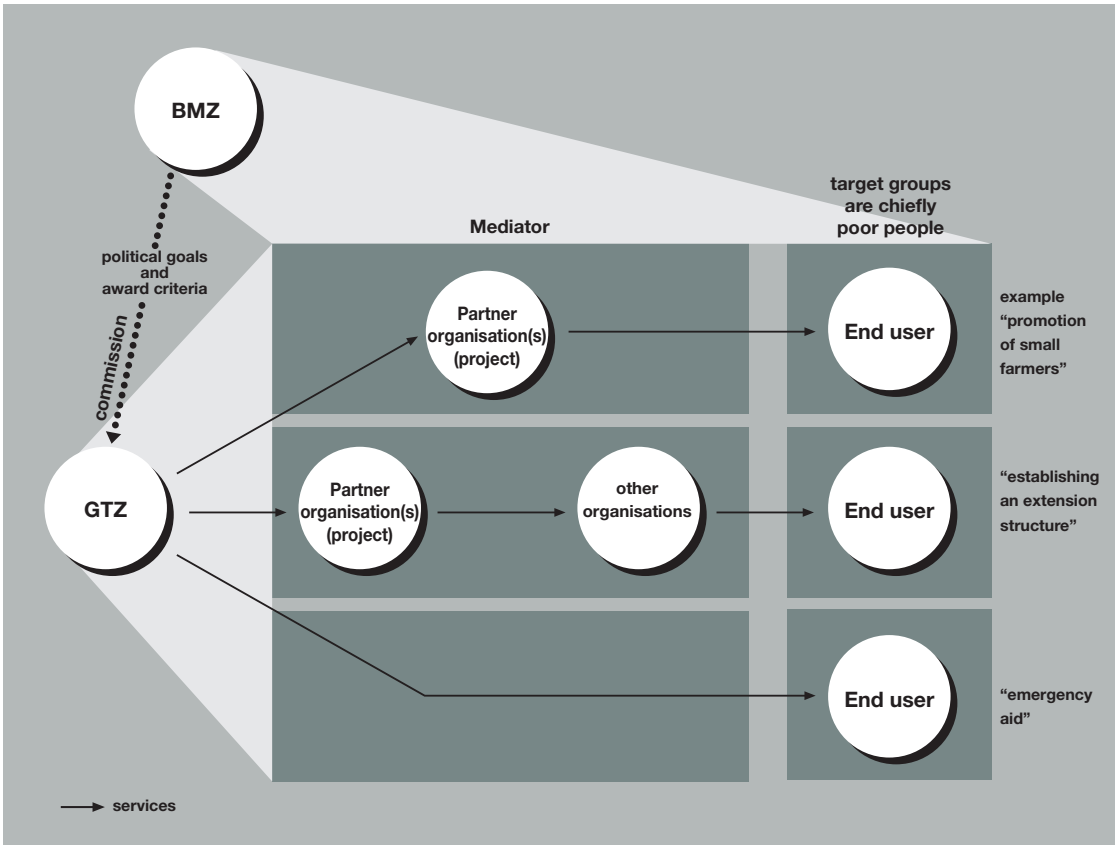


Fig. 2
Chain of services in Technical Cooperation

"relatively" good if the following criteria are met:

- Project management and the target groups accept the plan as a guide for their actions.
- Donors accept the plan as justification for the use of public funds.

The planners' job is to keep these criteria in mind and structure the planning process accordingly (planning the planning).

What people want to do
What people are able to do
What people are allowed to do

The plan should satisfy the desires of all major actors (be a compromise of different interests), correspond with their capabilities (be feasible and economically viable), and be within their power (framework conditions).

For GTZ, the project is a limited package of activities implemented by the partner-country organisations in order to achieve a previously determined goal. GTZ delivers a contribution to this effort. The partners and the target groups, however, often equate a project with the activities and inputs of GTZ. Different views of the project can lead to misunderstanding on the roles and responsibilities within it. It is important, therefore, that we first clarify with the partners and the target groups what we all understand by a project, and who is responsible for what.

Clarify what the meaning of a project is, and who "owns" it

Very often, projects are linked into programmes in order to create a greater development impact and generate greater synergy. This guide applies equally to projects and programmes because they both require similar planning inputs and there is no rigid distinction between them. An example: Ministers consider that reforming the economy is their "project". A departmental director speaks of the resulting "programme" of tax reform. Introducing value-added-tax is one individual project within this programme.

Project planning is a continuous process of negotiation between project partners, target groups and funding agencies. The commencement of implementation work does not mean that planning is terminated. A good project is always based on consensus: All actors agree to work towards a common goal for a limited period of time. The aim is not to work on the smallest common denominator, but rather on a clear understanding of what we want to do together, while all parties retain their different interests and viewpoints. It is better to agree not to agree and abandon the project approach or completely change it, rather than implement it against the general wishes of major actors.

To plan is to negotiate

Technical cooperation always intervenes in existing social systems and interest networks and also follows political interests itself. An example: A private water vendor loses a lucrative business when an urban area is connected to the public water supply. While many people's lives are improved, others may lose out. In such a conflict German technical cooperation represents the position of the socially weaker group. Whoever intervenes must also assume responsibility. Planners have to be aware of the ethical responsibility they assume.

Technical cooperation is an intervention in social systems

GTZ may assume the role of the "unbiased broker", helping to make the different roles transparent and consequently enabling action to take place.

It must always be possible to mutually agree on changes to the plan. It is misleading to believe that a plan just has to be drawn up and then implemented. In reality, the project partners are continuously adjusting the details during implementation. Even a project's basic orientation and goals can change, although these do usually remain valid over a longer period. This does not mean of course that because of continuous planning and replanning the actors forget the actual work to be done. And under no circumstances should an "anything goes" atmosphere prevail. Planning generates costs, which must always be justified by the benefits to be reaped from replanning.

Blueprints are out!

As projects are becoming more and more geared to processes of social change and less to technical results, planners must increasingly refrain from fixing budget items too high upstream in the project cycle. Even when the project is very technical, for example the construction of a dam, assumptions on the foundations may prove wrong and the plans must be adjusted accordingly.

> *I know it when I see it*
> *(Title of an essay on quality)*

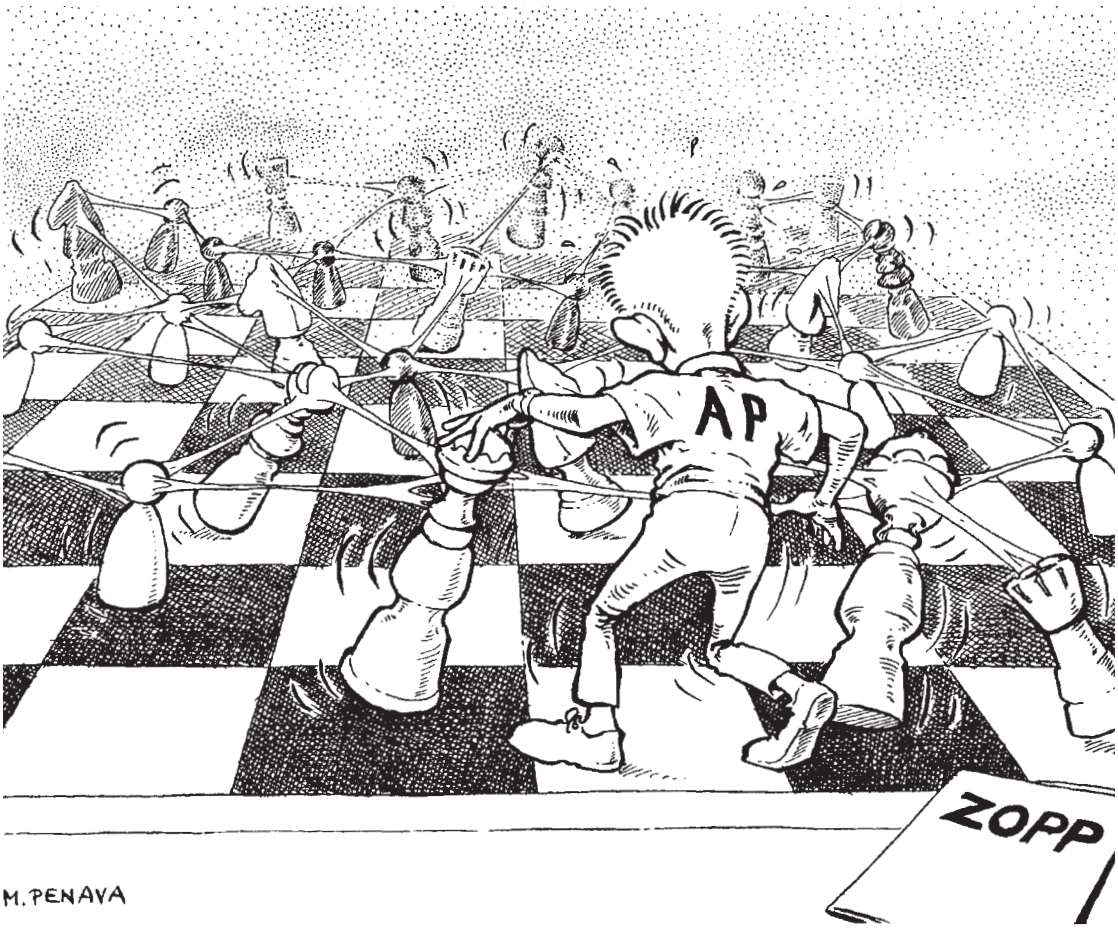
Another important point: Hardly any planning starts from scratch. Goals, wishes and interests have usually been articulated long before. This history must be actively incorporated into new planning work.

Rolling planning is in!

By far the most planning work takes place during ongoing project operations, when plans have to match the given situation or are reviewed in the course of external evaluations or project progress monitoring.

Who asks the questions? Who defines the methods to which the project processes are to be aligned? This does make a difference! GTZ Head Office, the GTZ adviser, the partner, the target groups? Whoever manages the process often also decides on its contents. Any method used will always have a value bias because it may give preference to specific groups or discriminate against them. An example: People who can't read and write don't stand a chance in a seminar when the points discussed are visual-

All methods have a value bias



ised in written form. The choice of the method to be used is a major factor when "planning the planning process". Participants should reach agreement on what methods are to be used. When recommending a specific method to the partners, planning ethics dictate that just referring to regulations "from above" is not the answer.

Partner organisations often have their own specific planning procedure. Working in a spirit of partnership means that each side must take the other's procedures as seriously as its own. Project partners must jointly agree on which procedure to use for the cooperation project. GTZ can, of course, provide planning consultancy services to partners if they wish.

Seriously consider the partner's own planning procedures

ZOPP: "Zeroing in On People and Processes"

1.3 Complex systems

"Technical cooperation addresses projects which are to raise the performance capability of people and organisations in developing countries" (official definition of technical cooperation).

The key concern is, therefore, to bring about processes of change for people and organisations. These processes are subject to the dynamic forces of complex systems: "An actor is equivalent to a chess player having to play on a board where several dozen pieces are attached to each other with elastic bands, making it impossible for the actor to move one single piece at a time. Moreover, both players' pieces also move under their own steam according to rules which they do not fully understand or about which they may have made false assumptions. And on top of it

all, some pieces are obscured by fog or are very difficult to recognise." (Dietrich Dörner, Die Logik des Mißlingens – *The logic of failure*).

This illustration well reflects social reality in many projects: Target groups and partner organisations are not homogenous. Rather, they have different interests and potentials. Large-scale farmers, smallholders and urban centres all want a safe water supply. Who will be left in the drought if there is not enough water? The answer to this question lies in the political influence of the social actors.

Modesty and the ability to thrive on chaos

In situations like these we have to abandon the idea that "the expert" must have "everything under control". Planners must be modest but also possess what today is called the "ability to thrive on chaos" i.e. be able to enjoy a situation of not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow, and be confident that, by working together, it will be possible to decide on the "right" thing to do in terms of the project's goals.

Planning means simplifying

It is not a question of digging down to the roots of all complex situations, because this causes confusion and puts the actors off the track. The issue at hand is to select the few very important interconnections between the chess pieces and to turn the complex picture into a simplified concept so that action becomes possible in the first place. Planning theory calls this the reduction of complexity. All planning methods, therefore, attempt to single out the patterns contained in complex relationships. We should not delude ourselves into thinking that the pieces on the chess board are not connected by elastic bands, or that we are versed in all the rules of the game, or that the chess board is well illuminated. A good dose of optimism is called for.

2 Objectives

2.1 Why do we need objectives?

Objectives are an orientation to guide actors. Only the objectives explain why project managers can receive money from the taxpayer. For us to develop visions and goals in the present situation, we must use our emotions, intuition and creativity. To find our way back from the objectives level to the present situation, we need our capacities for analytical thinking, logic, language and communication.

Objectives are an orientation to guide actions

Objectives usually remain valid for several years. But they are not infinite. Project management should periodically review whether they are still meaningful and still do justice to the desires, capabilities and powers of the project participants – GTZ, the partner, the target groups. Otherwise the negative side of objectives-orientation may set in: Goals become meaningless and paralyse progress instead of stimulating it. Fulfilling the plan becomes an end in itself.

Objectives can also become meaningless

The ministry responsible for the project will understand and support a decision to make plausible changes to the project objectives if the changed objectives are clearly meaningful and the benefits compensate the costs involved. In bilateral technical cooperation, agreements on new objectives can be approved in a modification offer to BMZ and in the scope of official government negotiations.

2.2 What demands should objectives satisfy?

Objectives should be realistic i.e. achievable using existing resources under the existing framework conditions.

Objectives should be realistic

BMZ prescribes many policy objectives for bilateral development cooperation: Poverty reduction, environmental protection and resource conservation, basic education and vocational training, promotion of gender-and-development, promotion of private initiative and economic reforms. More detailed political guidelines are contained in BMZ's country, sectoral and trans-sectoral concepts. BMZ has also drawn up five criteria for cooperation: Observance of human rights, orientation to a market economy, rule of law, popular participation in political decisions and development orientation of government action.

However, each individual project does not have to satisfy all goals. Care should be taken not to pack **all** political desires into one objective, with the false aim of covering against all contingencies. The best way is to clearly describe the intention – and hence what is not intended. GTZ should clarify with BMZ which development-policy goals should have priority in a given project.

An objective is a situation in the future which people consider desirable. It has become common practice to use the past participle e.g. "management is improved" when describing goals in the project planning matrix (see chapter 8). While this does make sense, because planning is based on a desired state in the future, it does not

Objectives should be clearly worded

conform to everyday language and may sound artificial or even academic. We should not insist that this form of speech be used.

2.3 Goal categories in development cooperation

Development cooperation differentiates between the following goal categories:

- development-policy goals,
- overall goals,
- development goal,
- project purpose.

Development-policy goals

Like BMZ, partner governments have established national, sectoral or regional goals in their development policy. If each side's development-policy goals largely match, cooperation can prosper on a solid foundation.

Overall goals

Governments enter into a political dialogue to negotiate on the common development-policy goals for their cooperation and the key areas to be addressed. In this setting, the partners then define the overall goals for the individual projects and hence the cooperation strategy to be followed. Projects which fall under these overall goals can usually be promoted. A project can be linked to several overall goals. Overall goals provide criteria for selecting which projects are to be included in the cooperation scheme and also set a framework for the project design.

> *An objective is the roof over a commonly entertained we-feeling*

An example: BMZ has agreed with a partner government that the overall goal of cooperation is to improve the situation of the rural and urban poor. At the same time, NGOs are to be involved in the projects and private initiative is to be strengthened. The project is to impact equally on men and women. BMZ will promote a project by the Ministry of Agriculture to set up an irrigation system if it can be clearly oriented to one or more of these overall goals: Is the project going to stabilise smallholder agriculture in order to satisfy the region's food needs? Are private organisations to be involved? Such strategic issues often hide deep-reaching conflicts of power and interest – for example the distribution of land and water. They greatly influence the project design. To stabilise smallholder agriculture it may be necessary to establish and monitor a pertinent legal framework. If, in the course of implementation, the irrigation project does not remain geared to smallholders, BMZ must re-examine whether it can continue its assistance.

Development goal [1]

The development goal focuses the attention of all actors participating in the project on the target group's development process. The priority of development cooperation is to achieve impacts at this level.

Projects take place in order to promote processes of change. It is always specific people and organisations who are affected by a project. These are not passive recipients of project inputs but proactive actors. They want to and must co-decide on what direction their development is to take. The function of the development goal is to give the desired process of change a common perspective.

The development goal describes the change which the target groups – i.e. the people addressed by the project – themselves desire. This can be, for example: "All children in the district have completed primary schooling" or: "The crime rate in

The development goal describes the target group's desired improvement to their situation

1 *GTZ's offers to BMZ for project implementation do not indicate the development goal separately because the information on the target groups is already contained in section 2.2.3 of the offer.*

residential areas has dropped". The development goal clearly indicates the benefit which the target groups expect from cooperating with the project. In the final analysis, cooperation is only successful if the development goal has been reached.

The question asked at the beginning of the planning work is: What process of change is to take place? What is the common orientation? Planners should observe individually who is following what goals and whether it is possible to develop a viable compromise. Target groups are rarely homogenous. An example: In a project to promote private-sector self-help organisations it becomes clear that industrial associations and trade associations have different interests. One side is aiming for high import duties, the other wants lower ones. Can they define a common goal upon which both sides agree?

A common goal is the result of a negotiated compromise between the different groups. Such negotiations are time-consuming.

The development goal must agree with what the target groups **want to do**, their values and aspirations. It must also be oriented to what they **are able to do**; otherwise it just leads to disappointment and discouragement. And: No development process can be sustainable if it permanently tries to swim against the tide i.e. if it ignores what people **are allowed to do** in the given framework conditions.

Project purpose

Once the planners have demarcated the targeted development process by defining the development goal, the next question is: At what point should the project lock in, to make sure that this process is supported most effectively? An example: The development goal is "The people of a district can satisfy their drinking water needs". A project could lock into the village communities as its starting point if the prime issue is to use existing water resources more economically. It could also focus on the water supply utility if this constitutes the greatest bottleneck. Perhaps the project will have to start at both ends. The next planning task is then to determine what impact the project is to actually have on the district community or the water utility. This is the project purpose. In our example it could read: "The water utility effectively maintains its plants and facilities".

The project purpose describes how the recipients of the project inputs change their actions

The project purpose describes the desired changes in the way people or organisations behave. The project's inputs and services are designed to ensure that these changes take place. In this way, target groups are able to improve their own situation. The project purpose could also be termed the milestone on the path towards the development goal. For a project to achieve its purpose, the people and organisations who are to change their actions must be actively involved. Planning must differentiate between inputs which have to be provided and the impacts which these inputs are to generate. The project can "guarantee" that inputs are made but not the impacts they achieve. One question repeatedly arises: How much responsibility does project management bear? Project management must constantly monitor the impact level, otherwise it runs the danger of providing inputs for inputs' sake, applying the maxim "We've lost sight of the goal so we'll have to double our inputs."

A project cannot guarantee specific impacts

Many planning experts feel a project should only stipulate one single project purpose. It seems a plausible statement that activities and alternatives only have a uniform reference framework when the project has one single purpose. But often this is nothing but a theoretical discussion.

"ZOPP must give more account to common sense"

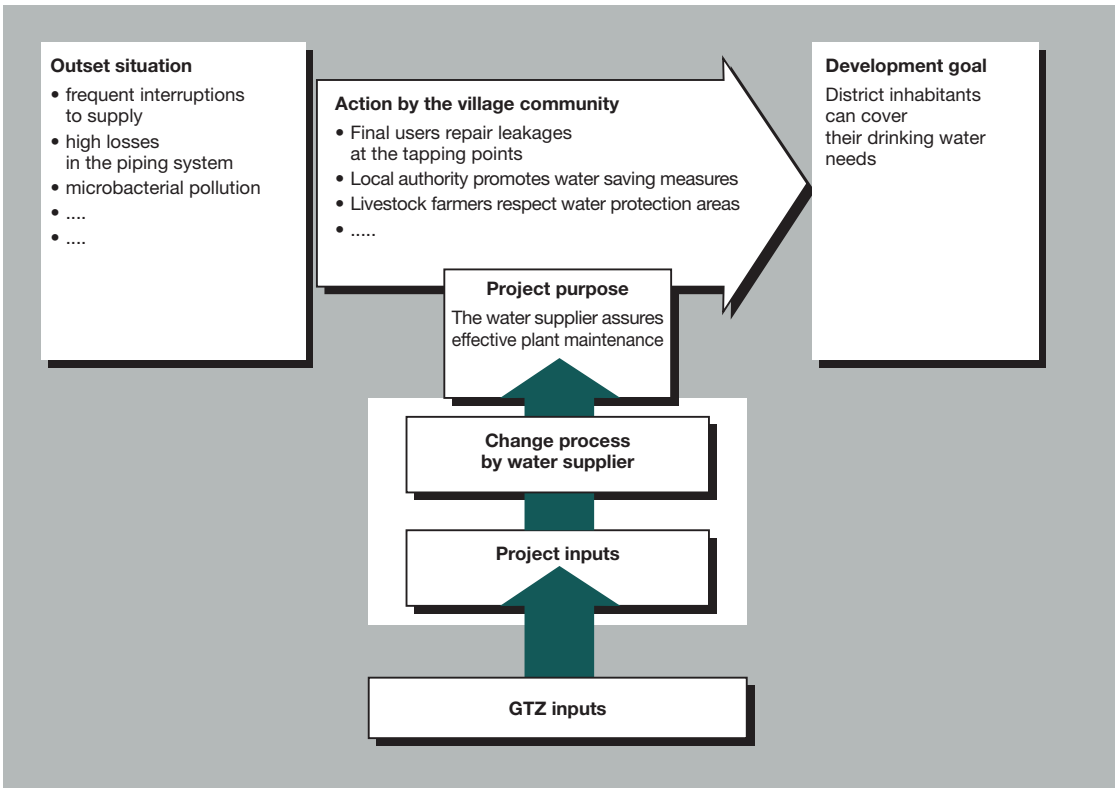


Fig. 3
Three-level model – a practical example

Should several project purposes be stipulated then the project can be divided into sub-projects.

2.4 How to handle objectives in practical project work

Projects can only be successful if target groups and partner organisations accept them and are actively committed to achieving the agreed development status. Nobody can plan a project without knowing whose development process it is supporting and what the affected people themselves think about this process. Figuratively speaking, a project planning process takes the "bottom-up" direction. It begins with the declaration by the target groups on what their needs and goals are, and the project is generated from this. Nevertheless, the chief components of a project's hierarchy of goals have often been set before project planning begins. The development-policy goals are prescribed from outside. The participating organisations operate along set guidelines even though the actual overall goal may only be detailed during the course of project planning. From the planner's viewpoint, the development-policy goals and the overall goal have been established "top-down". They dictate the framework within which the project can be designed.

Goals are set from "below" *and* from "above"

Sufficient time and suitable methods are required to ensure that the maximum number of affected people and organisations can participate in planning. Broad-based, participatory, "bottom-up" planning requires high inputs. There is often only a limited scope for taking such an approach, especially when preparing a project. The ethical issue also arises: Is it not irresponsible to commence a broad-based, participatory process which arouses so many expectations, before knowing whether a project will even be implemented at all?

Planners must decide in the light of the given situation on how much "bottom-up" planning is necessary and feasible to ensure that the target groups' perspective of their development process is appropri-

ately incorporated into the planning process.

Studies, statistics, community and regional development plans are often already available. Planners can also interview individuals who know the situation more intimately. It is important to involve actors who are really accepted by the target groups. The planner's job is to critically inquire as to who has the mandate to speak on behalf of target groups and what this mandate is based on. Non-governmental organisations which have been working in the region for some time are often a good source of information.

An example: The findings from the first information collected could suggest that improved primary education is a high priority for many people in the region. It becomes apparent that a development plan aiming to achieve primary school education for all children already exists for the region. This development goal is then an orientation for the ensuing planning process. The question of where project support is to focus is answered from the analysis of why so many children do not complete primary schooling. The planning team organises several meetings with representatives of the communities, the farmers' association, a women's organisation and the school authority. A clearer picture slowly emerges: Many families don't send their children to school because they need them to work on the fields. Some fathers also fear that school teaching will tear their children away from traditional values. If a project could help to bring about changes in these areas it would probably remedy major constraints on the path towards the development goal. Once these starting points have been identified, the next planning step is to specify the project objectives, strategy and inputs.

The clarification of objectives is a major element of the participation analysis

3 Situation analysis

All project planning methods contain an analysis of the situation in which the project is embedded:

- the participants,
- the problems and potentials
- the environment.

The sequence in which these elements are analysed can be decided to best fit each particular project.

3.1 Participants

The participants analysis focuses on the major actors, their interests and goals and their interrelationships. The aim is to obtain an insight into the social reality and power relationships. Major actors include not just potential winners but also potential losers.

Take into account power relationships and social structures

The participation analysis must bring clarification in the following areas:

- A false picture of other people's views and interests is often obtained if we don't ask them ourselves. Many projects are based on false assumptions such as "the population will benefit from safe water, hence they will support the project even if they don't appreciate the importance of hygiene" or "the economic reforms are rational from the planners' viewpoint, therefore officials will support them". If such assumptions are incorrect, the project will fail. Conclusion: Always let each and every affected group have a say.

Let the people affected themselves have a say

- Women and men have different scopes for action and different viewpoints. Men may reject a new water supply system, for example, because they have to pay for its costs. Women would welcome such a project because it eases their workload. To ensure that their interests are not cast aside, planners must pay special attention to making sure that women have a say themselves.
- Planners should differentiate between active participants and passive affected parties. Many projects are geared to turning affected parties into participants.
- We should not be taken in by the illusion that participants can act in a void. They are all embedded in their given social situation. If this is not taken into account there is the danger that an "island of happiness" will be created which is crushed by the stronger forces in the environment once external support has ceased.

Examples of participation analysis methods include[2]: Target-group analysis, relationship maps, power matrix, service interaction analysis, organisational analysis, participatory rapid appraisal (PRA).

3.2 Problems and potentials

Problems do not exist independently of the people experiencing them. Whether people experience something as a problem and are motivated to solve it depends on how much it troubles them. But not every problem causes suffering. If people

2 *The methods indicated here and elsewhere are described in detail in GTZ's "Method compass – a practical orientation aid for planning and management tasks in the environmental sector", published by GTZ Division 402 (see also annex 1).*

Problems exist because people experience them

do not feel that an "objective" problem, such as the need for hygienically safe drinking water, really is one to them, they will not be committed to a water programme. This is why we talk of "**felt** needs".

A problem is often expressed as a lack of specific resources to solve the problem: "We have no loans, no seed, no legislation". Beware of such wording! Very often, bringing in such "solutions" will not solve the problem. A loan won't help if there isn't a market for the goods it is to help produce. Mistaking an existing problem for a lack of a solution leads to premature statements being made during the course of the planning process which block the view for other options. In the above example, a loan project would not bring any progress.

Beware: Do not mistakenly believe that the lack of a solution is the problem

Planners should use methods which are based on the viewpoints of the affected people, and specifically compare the different viewpoints.

The desire to solve a problem is not always the driving force behind change. For example, the wish to change and take up a different profession may arise because new openings are attractive. Planning which automatically derives its goals exclusively from the existing problems is often inadequate because it sees the future as just being the prolongation of the present. Potentials and visions are equally strong drives towards change.

Methods of dealing with the problems and potentials analysis include: SWOT, problem-goal-matrix, paper computer, mind map, scenario-writing, problem tree.

3.3 The project environment

The situation analysis should also incorporate relevant factors from the project environment. Factors are relevant if they influence the performance process and the anticipated impacts. The analysis of the project environment gives an insight into the major conditions in which the project operates. These include the policies of the partner country and of BMZ or other funding organisations the legal and economic framework, technologies, technical concepts, natural and geographic conditions. Most of these factors are also subject to change.

What external factors are important?

When tackling a new project, planners first investigate a project environment which is unknown to them. In ongoing projects, efforts should centre on monitoring any changes in the project environment and pinpointing opportunities and risks. The project environment itself can be influenced by the project, although only to a limited degree. The project and its environment mutually impact on each other.

During the course of project implementation, therefore, GTZ and its partners must repeatedly update the situation analysis. This is not as easy as it sounds, because in the implementation rush almost everyone becomes routinely blind and can't see the wood for the trees. We almost have to climb aboard a helicopter and take a bird's-eye view of the project and of our own action in the project. Outside help is often required to do this and it should be carried out more frequently than the scheduled project progress reviews. GTZ colleagues from other projects or the Head Office Planning and Development Department, or external consultants can be called in to assist.

Examples of methods to help analyse the project environment are: Paper computer, scenario techniques, specialised studies, politico-scientific analyses.

4 The project strategy

The project strategy describes how the project plans to operate in order to achieve its goals. This includes the results to be produced and the resources they require. The project strategy also addresses the risks entailed in this process.

4.1 Results and alternatives

Results are those products and services provided by organisations implementing the project so that the anticipated changes for the users of the services can take place (project purpose). Results are outputs that the project management produces and is responsible for.

An example: The project purpose is that the children in a district regularly attend lessons in the primary school. The project cannot guarantee that the purpose will be achieved because action by other vital players is required. Although schooling is compulsory, sanctions by the school supervisory board have failed. The parents are not cooperating, particularly the fathers and older people are opponents. The project can guarantee the following results: (1) The schooling authority organises the timetable in such a way that children can attend school in addition to doing their work in the fields. (2) It revises curricula and teaching aids. Traditional norms and behaviour patterns are taken into account. (3) The local authority organises information programmes for the fathers and older people and trains teams of advisers together with non-governmental organisations. (4) It organises school transport and (5) provides financial assistance.

Results are the project's products and services

"Many roads lead to Rome." Planning has the job of finding out which is the best one to take. This can only be done when a clear idea has been obtained of what other alternative procedures could be adopted and what disadvantages and advantages they offer. Potential alternative courses to be taken often only become visible if we can break away from all concepts to date and develop new scenarios on the basis of the knowledge we have of the situation.

Many roads lead to Rome. The job of planning is to find out which one is best

To evaluate the alternatives, cooperation partners must agree on common criteria. The most favoured path is usually the one which allows a set goal to be achieved with the lowest inputs of capital and operating costs. However, a whole combination of factors have frequently to be compared with each other and a cost comparison alone is not enough. In many instances the criteria used by different participants are pre-formed by their values and policies.

BMZ has issued basic guidelines for technical cooperation particularly addressing the themes of gender, environment and poverty reduction. GTZ assesses alternatives on the basis of criteria drawn from these guidelines.

4.2 Activities and resources

Activities are the individual steps taken to achieve a result. The decision on which activities are necessary depends on what planning phase is currently being operationalised. In master planning for a new

Activities are the individual steps taken to achieve a result. They allow an estimate to be made of the resources needed

project or a new phase of an ongoing project it is meaningless to plan exact details in advance because when implementation begins much of this will have changed anyway, as events often turn out differently than expected. In this phase it is often sufficient to summarise what the project has to do.

But: The activities are the basis for drawing up the specification of inputs and costs which has to be submitted in GTZ's offer to BMZ or to other financing organisations. Nevertheless, this obligation should not lead us to detailed planning for planning's sake. BMZ well understands the complex situations in projects. It does not want to deal with details of project implementation, but rather receive a transparent offer in everyday language, which clearly illustrates how the recommended project concept can be linked to development-policy goals (see 2.3).

Decide on the right degree of planning detail

Planning and implementation cannot be schematically separated but go hand in hand. In practice this means that activity planning should start with rough estimates which are then gradually detailed in the course of operational planning. Don't be afraid of changes during implementation. As long as the goals, the cost framework or major elements of the concept are not changed, BMZ does not have to be involved[3].

Planning and implementation go hand in hand

4.3 Risks and assumptions

Risks may be inherent to the project itself or to the project environment.

An on-project risk exists when the participating partners do not agree and pull in different directions. Like all external assistance organisations, GTZ runs the danger of imposing a project concept which the partner may not fully agree to. Sector-specific and transsectoral concepts developed in the donor countries play a major role here.

On-project risks: Do we want the same as our partner does?

These self-made reasons for failure can be avoided only by openness, by always keeping grips on reality and by ensuring that our work is "client-oriented".

Another on-project risk is when the partner does not provide its agreed inputs. We must ask why this is so. Were these inputs not realistically defined? Or does the partner not fully back the concept and consequently not really consider it necessary to invest that much? In extreme cases we must consider terminating cooperation if the project is not really based on a spirit of partnership.

Off-project risks jeopardise the project, but can be influenced only slightly or not at all by project management.

Off-project factors which must exist for the project to be expedient and realistic are termed assumptions. An example: The central bank is providing advisory services to smaller banks on how to set up and operate credit and loan facilities for microentrepreneurs. The project purpose is worded as "Micro-enterprises access bank loans at market conditions." One of the assumptions for the success of this project could be that non-governmental organisations operating in the area will not provide subsidised loans to the target entrepreneurs.

Assumptions – how high are the risks?

The project management keeps an eye on assumptions, perhaps even monitors them formally in order to get a feeling for the size of the risk. If a risk becomes dangerous, the project concept must be adjusted. In extreme cases it might be necessary to terminate the project.

3 *Modification offers are described in "Cooperation on the right track - Standard Procedure and how it works" (GTZ, 1997)*

Risk analysis methods include: Mind map, problem tree, relationship map, assumption assessment grid.

4.4 Indicators

Indicators describe what is exactly meant by the project's goals, the results and the assumptions and how to recognise them when they have been achieved. Indicators give information on the level of achievement and the project's criteria for success. They are a path-marking for project management in "monitoring and evaluation". Indicators cannot be pre-fabricated, they have to be customised. They are the result of an agreement and reflect the common view of participants. Wherever precise indicators are not set up, misunderstandings and conflicts occur during implementation because the participants have different interpretations of the level to be achieved, or the scope of the goals.

Agree on the level to be achieved and the criteria for success

Our partners may be satisfied with a generalised definition of the quality of goals, whereas we want to "exactly define" what has to happen. In such cases we should try and find a practicable solution. It would be wrong for GTZ advisers to define indicators "because they have to do so" in a situation where the partner is not interested in such indicators and, therefore, does not keep to them.

Indicators should describe the major features of a goal, a result or an assumption. They must be unbiased. Unbiased means, for example, that the number and duration of courses held cannot indicate whether training was successful. A good indicator would be to state the quality deficits in production.

Indicators describe major features of goals, results and assumptions

Indicators can refer to physical outputs (e.g. harvest yields) or changes in an organisation (e.g. partner's planning is improved).

5 Responsibilities and roles

The three-level model (see chapter 1.1) distinguishes between the activities of GTZ, its partner organisations and the target groups. Target groups are responsible for the development process, the partners are responsible for the results, and GTZ is contributing to the partner's project. This does not exclude GTZ from assuming responsibility for a defined part of the results and project management if this is important and expedient for sustainability.

Each actor is responsible for his/her process

In planning, the aim is to find out

- how far target groups can alter their situation on their own and where they need project support;
- how far the partners can generate their outputs by their own means and where they need GTZ support.

In this way a clearer specification is obtained of the responsibilities of the different actors.

When deciding who is to do and be responsible for what, the roles and mutual expectations of the partners must be clarified together.

- Should the GTZ team be "advisers" or "doers"? Clarifying this role is more difficult than it seems because the GTZ adviser and manager of the German contribution to the project also controls GTZ's funds.

Do the actors' expectations really match each other?

- How is responsibility for management functions like project planning, operations planning, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, project progress monitoring divided between the GTZ team and the partner?
- How will the project cooperate with other projects?
- Who "owns" the plan? Who failed if a project flops? Who carries the blame? Who receives the praise when the project is successful?
- Who pays what? Who gets what? For example: Who can use the cars and for what purpose?

These questions cannot have one-off answers. Many issues can only be tackled when they arise. It is useful to record any agreements made on these points in writing. But a real live agreement is more important than a written compromise. In many projects it has proven expedient to bring in off-project advisers to tackle sensitive cooperation issues and clarify roles and responsibilities. A single investment in relationships often brings a far higher return than a whole series of sector-specific actions.

Roles develop and change. They have to be repeatedly reviewed

Methods to deal with responsibility and roles include: SWOT, service-interaction-analysis, team workshop.

6 Project organisation

The partner organisations have received a mandate to implement the project from a politically responsible body, usually a ministry, which, together with BMZ, is also responsible for the contents of the government arrangement. GTZ receives its commissions from BMZ or other funding organisations.

> **ZOPP is when GTZ advisers deliberate with their partners on the project's objectives**

Many different organisations may participate in a project – government and non-governmental, public-benefit and private-sector, grassroots and supporting organisations, manufacturing and service organisations. Each one follows its own goals and interests and has its own organisational culture. Bringing these varied interests under one roof is often not an easy matter.

Numerous actors participate and must be networked into the project organisation

GTZ wants to find partners

- who really want the project,
- who are accepted by the different target groups and capable of effectively cooperating and communicating with them,
- who already possess the legal prerequisites to implement the project.

Methods to analyse the project organisation include: Organisational analysis, function analysis, relationship map, and other methods also used in the participation analysis.

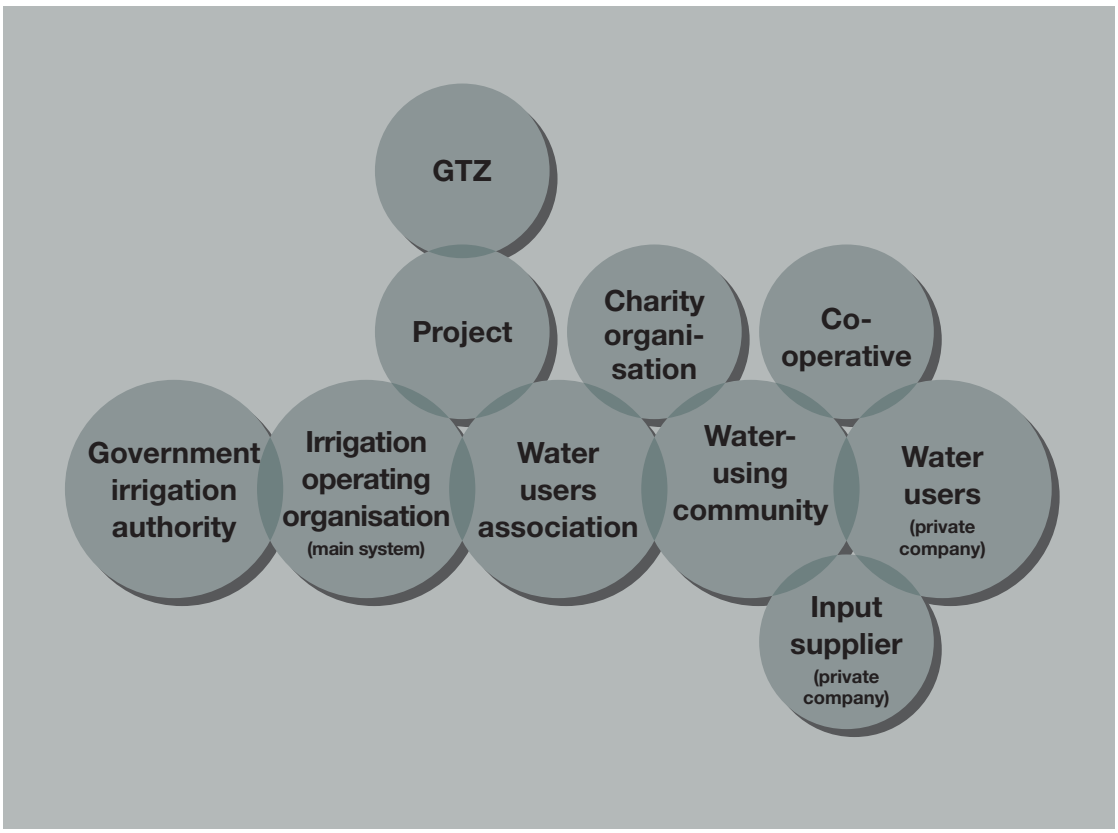


Fig. 4 The organisational landscape of an irrigation system
(Source: W. Huppert, K. Urban, 1994)

7 Participation and workshops

7.1 Participation

In development cooperation participation is often a goal in its own right. When affected parties become participants and take the improvement of their living conditions into their own hands, development has already been achieved.

At each planning step the issue on hand is to decide on who should participate and in what way: Who can provide information and good ideas that will improve planning? Who must participate in the planning process because he or she has to be informed of what's happening in the project? And above all: On whose commitment will project success depend? Participation allows project concepts to grow out of the viewpoints of the affected persons.

Beware of solutions not reached with the participants themselves

Participation builds up loyalty to the project concept. Whoever considers the project to be his/her "own baby" will also supply the promised inputs.

This is where the limits of participation become clear: Only those people should participate in decision-making who are really affected by a project and who contribute to its success. In other words: Those who bear responsibility have the right to co-decide. But participation does not automatically mean being included in decision-making. Often it is "only" a question of information and consultation.

Participation does not automatically mean a right to co-decide

In many cases, therefore, different groups or persons have to participate in different phases of planning, and participation is graded according to the given planning depth. Participation does not mean that people can co-decide on something that they will not contribute to or be responsible for. Otherwise the resulting plans would be unrealistic and have little relevance for action.

Feigned participation is worse than no participation at all. If, for example, a group in a workshop draws up a concept believing that they will be responsible for this decision but the concept is subsequently changed at a higher level, this can spell the end of the group's motivation and cooperation. Therefore: Consider carefully who is to have the right of say on what subject. And do not arouse false expectations.

Do not feign participation

7.2 Workshops

Workshops are project management tools for specific purposes. Workshops can be held to

Workshops are not an end in themselves

- transfer information and knowledge;
- improve working relationships within the team;
- support management functions such as planning and evaluation.

Workshops supplement other types of work such as meetings or desk work but they do not replace them. They are one element in the process and are not the process itself.

Workshops are high energy phases in the project. They are relatively expensive and time-consuming. Workshops can be used to intensively deal with specific sub-

jects which are difficult to tackle in everyday project work. The energy generated in a workshop should not be squandered on banalities.

Every workshop is like a small project: The project partners deliberate and reflect on what they want to achieve and how they can achieve it. The decision on who is to attend the workshop, how long it should last and what worksteps are to be planned, depends on this basic deliberation. Each workshop should be tailored to reach its specific target – for example using the right location, catering, accommodation, relaxing and livening-up elements, facilitation, working language, seating arrangements, visualisation etc.

Workshops should be planned like small projects

A different group of participants will be invited depending on whether the aim is to disseminate information, consult important interest groups, take decisions or relieve group tensions. It is often advisable to invite different participants at various phases of the workshop.

In ZOPP, workshops are very suitable for consolidating information, crystallising a common understanding of a given situation, underlining interests and viewpoints, and deciding on the next steps to be taken. Workshops have also proven successful to clarify needs or solution strategies directly with the affected people, or to inform funding organisations on major results of planning and pending decisions.

Project management is responsible for workshops and cannot transfer responsibility to external workshop facilitators. External experts who support project management in planning should sometimes be more than mere facilitators. “Process consultant” is a more appropriate descriptor for them.

Planning is a job to be carried out in partnership. Partnership is not served if GTZ prescribes the workshop, draws up a list of participants and arrives with ready-made concepts. The partners may then be heard to say “we’ve been zopped”.

Visualisation techniques in workshops have proven very successful i.e. coloured cards and pinboards. Communication is improved when hearing is supplemented by seeing. Visualisation prevents any thoughts from being forgotten, and raises the chance that attention will be paid to opinions and viewpoints of participants who would otherwise not speak up.

Some appropriate methods to deal with workshops are: Facilitation, visualisation, group work, video.

“ZOPP has to be freed from mystery and mist”

8 The project planning matrix (PPM)

What details have to be recorded during the project cycle depends on the information needs of the participating organisations and people.

The partner government and BMZ have the task of development-policy decision-making, overall control and provision of funding. In return they need transparent and clear data on the rationale and objectives of the project, the strategy and the costs involved. The partner organisations and GTZ are responsible for ensuring that in the scope of cooperation, the inputs are provided in line with the commission and in agreement with the given corporate principles. For this purpose the management of these organisations need "aggregated" information on the course of the project and its impacts.

Who has to record what and for whom depends on the needs of the different actors

The closer anyone stands to the project on the ground, the more information they require. Detailed information on project operations and impacts is only required by the partner's project management and the GTZ team on site. The target groups and other participants in the project need information on what is exactly expected of them and what they can expect of others.

The project planning matrix is the tip of the iceberg which becomes visible to donors. Only divers wearing the right goggles and who can hold their breath long enough can see the real project

The project planning matrix (PPM) has proven expedient in providing information particularly for actors at a distance or at the political level. The American original matrix was called the logical framework. It provides "at one glance" an insight into the major elements of the plan and how they relate to each other. It is used in some form or another by practically all development cooperation organisations. It is also used for in-house decision-making at GTZ.

It is seldom possible to present all planning information in one single project planning matrix. And often this is not even necessary because seldom do all participants need all the information. An expedient variant of the matrix to provide basic information on the project is explained in Fig. 5.

The terms used in this matrix[4] were described in chapters 2 to 4. There are many different ways of using the matrix. For a programme, for example, it could be expedient to draw up an overall matrix and then use a separate matrix for each component. Or the project and the German contribution could be described in two separate project planning matrices whose contents would, of course, be closely linked (i.e. a PPM for the German contribution). This has the advantage of clearly differentiating the responsibilities in cooperation.

The PPM is not rigid

If alternative ways of summarising planning are already being successfully used in a given situation they can also be taken on. The information can then be transferred into a project planning matrix outside the participative planning process, if it is assured that agreements are not then unilaterally changed.

The project planning matrix aims to make planning transparent. The logical links

4 *In GTZ's offers to BMZ only four project planning levels are given i.e. overall goal, project purpose, results and activities. The development goal level is not explicitly described.*

Strategy	Indicators	Assumptions	Indicators of the assumptions
Overall goal: Superior strategic goal for the project			
Development goal: The changed situation designed by the target groups	How to recognise whether the development goal has been achieved		
Project purpose: Change in actions of the users of the project's services	How to recognise that the project purpose has been achieved	Matters outside the influence of the target groups which must happen for them to achieve their development goal	How to recognise that the assumption has taken place
Results: Products and services generated by the project management	Major characteristics of the results	Matters outside the project which must happen if the project purpose is to be achieved	How to recognise that the assumption has taken place
Activities to achieve the results	Quantities and costs		

Fig. 5 Project planning matrix

The PPM should create transparency

between its cells help in reviewing the plan's plausibility. We always have to be aware of the danger that the attempt to find a logical relationship between results and goals will become too far fetched from practical reality.

Practical hints for work with PPMs:

- When something is written into the project planning matrix, it gives the impression that it is now a "higher truth".
- A plan written as a narrative can give the impression of being complete.

When moulding the plan into a project planning matrix, however, gaps become visible e.g. in the indicator cells. Everyone suddenly begins to look just at what is missing. This can be a good sign because it shows that the orientation is not complete, but it can also have a paralysing effect if, for want of perfecting the plan, we don't stride into action.

- A matrix which is just carried along unchanged for many years is often not worth the paper it is written on. Changes can be made at any point whatsoever. The deeper the level of planning, the more frequent are the changes.

9 Final remarks

There is often an enormous step between a guide and practical action. Whoever reads this text hoping for more practical hints and planning tools may be a little disappointed. Other readers may welcome the guide's open character because it turns away from rigid rules and schematic procedures and helps them develop their own ideas on how to shape a planning process. Perhaps some readers feel that the information given is not detailed enough. The guide has been limited to providing a common platform for different positions, where practitioners themselves can design and further develop ZOPP.

Annex 1: Further reading

GTZ	An enterprise in development
GTZ	Managing the implementation of German technical cooperation activities (1995)
GTZ, Unit 04	Project Cycle Management (PCM) and Objectives-oriented Project Planning (ZOPP) – A guide (1995)
GTZ, Unit 04	Cooperation on the right track – Standard Procedure and how it works (1997)
GTZ, Unit 04	Forster, Reiner / Osterhaus, Juliane: Target-group analysis – What for, When, What and How (1996) *A brief review of issues, methods and reference literature*
GTZ, Unit 04	Forster, Reiner (ed.): ZOPP marries PRA? Participatory Learning and Action – A Challenge for our Services and Institutions. Workshop Documentation (1996) *Constructive criticism of ZOPP, although not always flattering*
GTZ, Unit 04	Mabille, Yvonne: Dare-to-share fair. A documentation (1995) *Report on the dare-to-share marketplace for exciting ideas*
GTZ, Unit 04	Osterhaus, Juliane / Salzer, Walter: Gender-differentiation in the project cycle – a guide for planning, monitoring and evaluation (1995) *On the little difference that makes all the difference*
GTZ, Division 402	Methodenkompaß, Eine praktische Orientierungshilfe für Planungs- und Managementaufgaben im Umweltbereich, 1996, 402/21 d PVI *(currently in German only)* *Compilation of participation and dialogue-oriented analysis and planning methods which fit well into a ZOPP environment. Although specifically addressing the environmental sector, they can nevertheless be put to good use in all sectors*
Huppert, Walter **Urban, Klaus**	Analysis of Service Production GTZ, forthcoming

Annex 2: The history of ZOPP

1. Genesis

ZOPP's history began when GTZ was established as a corporation under private law in 1975. The general intention of making technical cooperation more flexible and efficient was reflected not only in GTZ's legal status as a company, but also by the introduction of modern management instruments. Interest soon centred on the well-known logical framework approach (LFA) as a comprehensive management tool on which to base planning, implementation and evaluation.

BMZ had requested GTZ to test the logical framework approach in projects as early as the seventies. After initial positive experiences had been gathered, GTZ applied it in a pilot phase in 1980/81 and further developed LFA into the ZOPP (zielorientierte Projektplanung) Objectives -oriented Project Planning system. ZOPP contained new steps such as participation analysis, problem analysis and objectives analysis. Teamwork in interdisciplinary workshops in which GTZ, its partner organisations and the target groups all took part, became standard procedure.

Even a new professional profile was created – the ZOPP workshop facilitator. Hundreds of workshop facilitators were trained in Germany and in partner countries.

ZOPP workshops used visualisation techniques such as small coloured cards to express the different worksteps and results.

2. Logical framework

GTZ incorporated the logical framework or *logframe* approach into ZOPP. The original *logframe* had 16 cells containing the major elements of the management-by-objectives approach to project implementation. The matrix cells are organised in four columns along a logical structure. The left-hand column contains the project's development hypothesis and the "overall goal", "project purpose", "results" and "activities", all connected by "if-then"-links. The second column contains "objectively verifiable indicators" for the overall goal, the project purpose and the results. The third column allocates "sources of verification" for the indicators and the fourth column contains the "assumptions" for each planning level. The cell containing the "specification of inputs and costs" is attached to the "activities" cell. Project management is responsible for the "results", "activities" and "specification of inputs/costs" cells (i.e. the *manageable dimensions*).

3. Introduction

A GTZ in-house organisational instruction formally introduced ZOPP into project planning on a provisional basis in 1983, and ZOPP became binding when it entered GTZ's organisational manual as regulation No. 4211 in 1987, forming an integral part of the project cycle.

By the end of 1988, GTZ had trained all managers and staff concerned with project implementation, and also its sub-contractors, in the ZOPP method and how to use it. Mastering ZOPP became an essential pre-condition for promotion and careers. Even to date, intensive ZOPP training programmes are carried out at all levels both in Germany and abroad.

ZOPP became a GTZ trademark in its partner countries.

When GTZ re-organised along regional lines in 1989, and the Planning and Development Department was created, responsibility for applying ZOPP changed, but not its contents or its binding character. Gradually and in coordination with its principal commissioning body, BMZ, GTZ organised all project management instru-

ments along the ZOPP structure. For example, project briefs, project progress reports and progress reviews were all structured to match ZOPP.

4. Dissemination

GTZ encountered positive reactions from its project partners. The words "the donors are beginning to listen to us for the first time" were often heard. The strict logical structure, the orientation to problems and the trans-hierarchical participative approach to work were particularly well received. Many partner organisations began to apply an approach similar to ZOPP in their own organisations.

Other international cooperation institutions such as NORAD, DANIDA, the ADB, the European Union, Japan's FASID and the Swiss DEH became interested in this method. ZOPP in its various forms has become a regular feature on the curricula of numerous universities, particularly in studies relating to developing countries.

5. Criticism

In the nineties, several critical points became the subject of debate both in the general project environment and at GTZ itself. Although this was not intended by either the ZOPP documents or training courses, many ZOPP seminars had become schematic rituals which did not sufficiently take into account the varied situations encountered in different projects.

ZOPP workshop participants sometimes got the feeling they were passive objects in a "workshop screenplay" which they could not fully understand. Many staff members, partners and representatives of target groups experienced ZOPP as being an instrument of power dictated by GTZ Head Office. People felt they had been "zopped". The artificial workshop situations generated project concepts which merely amounted to a coincidental reflection of the specific workshop day rather than being really feasible and realistic plans and representing a sustainable and workable compromise. For many people involved, ZOPP came down to just a workshop and coloured cards and had little to do with the practical reality of everyday project work.

By reducing project planning just to workshops, too little attention was paid to target-group participation in planning and to obtaining differentiated perceptions of the varied viewpoints of the affected people – and this was quite contrary to ZOPP's real intention.

For numerous planning officers ZOPP's rigid orientation to problems paralysed their efforts, because this approach made it necessary to take a retrospective, backward-looking view of the situation, tempting to emphasise the search for who was to blame.

Between 1992 and 1995 GTZ actively tackled these mis-developments in the ZOPP system. An in-house project was set up entitled "Planning and Sustainability". In the scope of this project GTZ better defined what it understands by quality in project management, it flexibilised the procedure for project preparation and developed its "project cycle management".

6. Further development

Parallel to the unsatisfactory applications of ZOPP and also in order to specifically address the critical voices heard, numerous new forms of project planning were developed in practice. Creative workshop facilitators incorporated "non-scheduled elements" into workshops, changed the sequence of the ZOPP steps, deleted steps or introduced completely new ones. ZOPP began to live, in an uncoordinated and self-organised way.

As an alternative to the original ZOPP procedure, new sequences were developed, e.g. the SINFONIE®, 12-step toolbox which aims to help better understand the systemic relationships and develop strategies for action in complex systems.

GTZ decided to "deregulate" in-house procedures. As early as 1990 hints on how to use ZOPP more efficiently and flexibly were incorporated into its organisational manual. In 1996, regulation 4211 was replaced by a guide on "Standard Procedure" (see annex 1). Finally, in the course of the corporate decentralisation process (1996 to 1998), GTZ's Directors General decided to deregulate all organisational project directives except those to which GTZ was bound by outside rules. Project steps can now be designed flexibly in agreement with all involved.

From 1993 to 1996 BMZ carried out a review of ZOPP in theory and practice. The findings: ZOPP should be retained at all events. But its concept and implementation should be reviewed. ZOPP must become more realistic and better account for social contexts.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH

– German Technical Cooperation –

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
Postfach 5180
65726 Eschborn, Germany
Telephone: ++49(0)61 96 79-0
Telex: 4 07 501-0 gtz d
Telefax: ++49(0)61 96 79-11 15
Internet: http://www.gtz.de