



CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION

1. FROM PLANNING TO ACTION

With the first community project, the steps of knowing the situation, analyzing it, doing the Christian reflection and, finally, the planning may take a lot of time and seem never-ending. Remember that in the Pastoral Circle one of the important things is the learning process of all participants. All this time has been very important for learning how to work together, for finding out more about what is going on and for starting to ask the question 'Why?' It has also helped to increase the group's ability to analyse and to see events with God's eyes. Be patient. Don't rush the front end of the process. Getting the involvement of a broad section of community members is essential to your long-term success. Community activities and opportunities are occurring concurrently with the planning process.

If you find that you are getting bogged down in planning and frustrated by a lack of concrete action, then:

- o Prioritize your goal and objectives and focus your energy and capacity in those areas.
- o Ask yourself if the focus of your activity needs to be narrowed in order to make it manageable and in keeping with the present capacity of the group.
- o Ask those involved in the process for ideas and suggestions on how to move forward.
- o Review the situation and see if bringing in people with certain expertise and capacity can help you to move forward .

Change and adjustments are an ongoing part of the community process. Do not be afraid to re-define your original approach if you find it is not working. However, balance this with the necessity to take the time to do the hard front-end work that is needed to create a group/community plan.

Remember to use your project plan as a basis for activities and encouraging participation. To maintain enough energy and enthusiasm to get others interested and involved, it is important that all participants keep the vision and goals clearly in sight.

2. IMPLEMENTING AND ADJUSTING THE PLAN

While carrying out the plan of action, you will meet with difficulties and obstacles as you introduce changes, etc. All this must be done together in the team. Note down what provokes the problem and what improves the situation. This will be a help for the evaluation.

Doing inclusive community planning can be a time-consuming process. The reward for investing this time and energy comes as you begin to implement the plan. Implementation, however, has its own challenges. The implementation process must be well-planned and well-managed if it is to be successful.

Successfully managing of the activities requires strong leadership and a structure to support implementation. At this stage more than at any other you will need a coordinator (leader, animator) a person who makes sure that each person responsible for a task is doing it.

3. LEADERSHIP

As we saw, the leadership of the group can be shared by a number of persons (the core group). Each one of them according to his/her capacities can exercise an aspect of leadership. It is important that the leaders get together and agree on certain issues. The role of the leader is, over time, to build the group and the community capacity and to help the group to be committed and open to change and adaptation. The leader has to promote the empowerment of each member of the group and of the community, not have control over it.



Openness is a key ingredient for leadership. This means that the leaders must be visible and accessible to group members. Below, is a reminder of some thoughts on leadership given in the 'Introduction to the Manual:'

Some roles of the leader:

- o Effectively communicating the vision of the group. Helping individuals keep focused on the big picture and making sure that vision, goals and objectives of the project plan are clear and well-understood.
- o Integrating and coordinating tasks and activities.
- o Being a good steward of resources.
- o Motivating individuals to act together for the common purpose.
- o Identifying and building on community capacity.
- o Keeping community members motivated and connected.
- o Ensuring community ownership of the projects remains strong.
- o Focusing energy on results and inclusion.
- o Remaining positive and not getting discouraged by the unexpected or by things not be working out as envisioned.
- o Timing actions so they build upon rather than compete with the actions of others.
- o Making hard decisions when resources are limited.
- o Communicating and celebrating results, acknowledging successes and discussing what may not have worked out and why.
- o Working through issues of concern and conflict.
- o Providing constructive feedback to those accomplishing the tasks.
- o Developing ongoing leadership capacity in the group or community.

It is beneficial if not only the core group, but also most members develop these leadership attitudes. In this way the group will function more easily.

3.1. Roles of the core group members

As you move to the implementation of the plan, the level and the nature of the activities may demand a certain structure or organization of the group in order to be more efficient and supportive. This will allow for the sharing of responsibilities and so make some tasks more manageable. Seek out individuals who have leadership skills and abilities. Ensure that those in leadership roles have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and what can be delegated to others.

Failing to have a solid structure can lead to: burnout of community leaders; wasted effort; confusion in the members; conflict and/or loss of credibility and legitimacy.

Identify the leadership skills required for the project. You will need different qualities and capacities. This is why a leadership group can be easier and more adapted to the needs. There are different roles of leadership needed. Some examples of these roles are:

- o The facilitator or coordinator who brings together and coordinates the group/community.
- o The resource manager that manages the resources that are needed to implement the project.
- o The prime implementers who are responsible for the design and implementation of the different tasks.
- o Some partners who are organizations with whom we collaborate for certain activities.
- o The congregations, JPIC groups, Church groups and organizations that support our project and activities.

3.2. About implementation

- o The Action Plan is a guide, not a detailed blue print. When implementing action in an environment of change, stay true to the principles, values and purpose of the plan, but make adaptations as required.
- o Make sure the Plan and implementation activities are connected in a way that ensures all those involved understand the goal. Make sure everyone knows the goal of the project, the expected outcomes and the link between their task and the goal. It is important that each participant in the project keeps in mind the 'big picture.'
- o The old example shows well the importance of seeing the 'big picture.' A visitor arrived in a town where there was a big construction site. He met a man carrying bricks in a wheel-barrow. *What are you doing?* He asked. *I am carrying bricks.* A bit further away he met another man with a wheel-barrow. *What are you doing?* He asked. *I am carrying bricks to build*



a wall. He answered. The visitor walked a distance and met another man carrying a wheel barrow with bricks. What are you doing? He asked. *I am building a cathedral.* He answered. We need “builders of cathedrals” and not carriers of bricks or builders of walls!

- o Listen to community members when they are not happy with the way the actions are carried out. Sometimes our assumptions about what is possible or desirable need to change.
- o Community development is a long-term approach. Action that sustains interest and motivation, such as acknowledging contributions and staying focused on a shared vision, is important.

4. COMMUNICATION

Communication is essential for maintaining the momentum of a group project. However, like so many other aspects of the process, effective communication takes time and effort. Communication is a two-way process that involves the exchange, transfer and understanding of information. Although by email and internet we can communicate across the globe instantly, effective communication depends on more than technology. It requires:

- o An understanding of the people and groups with whom we wish to communicate.
- o Clarity of thought and word.
- o The creation of opportunities for input, and our willingness to hear and respond to this input.
- o The selection of an appropriate mix of communication methods.

Communication is a primary mechanism for building continued support for group/community JPIC project. Encourage group/community members to become involved and to ask questions. Never assume everyone knows what is going on or that communication is unnecessary. Time spent on communication is never wasted. Use a variety of communication modes so as to be as clear and as straightforward as possible.

Communication is an important tool to:

- o Create awareness of community development and encourage participation.
- o Develop support and momentum for the activities.
- o Enable community members to contribute their knowledge, skills and abilities.
- o Advocate for a particular option or decision.
- o Receive information and feedback.
- o Avoid and resolve conflict.

If you find that the group/community or supporters' perceptions about the project and its results differ from those of the group, this is a clear signal that communication has not been effective. Usually a lot of energy is put into communication during the initial stages as support is built and a plan developed. Often, however, as implementation takes up more and more energy, the emphasis placed on communication decreases. Failure to sustain good communication throughout the whole process is a common mistake that can undermine the efforts towards transformation.

Effective communication requires us to:

- o Listen.
- o Be aware of non-verbal ways of communication.
- o Speak and write effectively.
- o Facilitate conversation and discussion.
- o Be open and respond to feedback.

For an effective communication process, the group needs to be clear about who to communicate with.

4.1. Communication Strategy

Why do we communicate?

What do we want to communicate?



How will we create an open process so that others can be involved?

Discuss the answers to these questions in the group and develop a strategy for communication.

- o Communication that is not clear can undermine the credibility of the group. Think carefully about what you want to communicate and the best method to use.
- o Make sure the group is communicating with present and future allies.
- o Clear and simple communication requires work. Take the time to be clear about what you are saying and then say it simply.
- o Listen to and respect the opinions of others.
- o Always build feedback loops into your communication processes.
- o Balance formal and informal methods of communication.
- o Communication is a two-way dialogue, not just a downloading of information.



What communication approach or strategy is the group currently using?



How can this approach be improved?



Does your approach include both formal and informal methods of communication?

5. BUILDING GROUP CAPACITY

Group capacity building is multi-faceted. All these need consideration: skills, knowledge, ability, access, leadership, infrastructure, time, commitment and resources.

Developing group capacity means taking risks, improving things and sharing control. It involves change, training and the sharing of power. Give people time to express themselves, to adapt to change and to learn. This is best done when the group/community members have a voice and are in charge of the process.

Some of the keys to success in the capacity-building process are:

- o Assess everything required to carry out the plan, role or action.
- o Understand the skills and knowledge required for the various roles or action.
- o Identify the gaps, the lacks.
- o Develop strategies for filling in the gaps, what is wanting.
- o Develop strategies to support individuals while they learn to apply new skills and knowledge.

Try to use community members and organizations as a resource for skill development. You may be surprised at the range of skills, knowledge and abilities that individuals and organizations possess.

Building on the strengths, skills, abilities and knowledge that already exist in your group/community will be an ingredient for in the project's success. People do not participate if their contributions are not valued and recognized, or if the participation does not improve their particular situation. Don't ask for the involvement and help of community members if you are not willing to give them a meaningful role or address their interests and needs.

All group/community members have skills to offer. The challenge is to organize and support individuals so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the process. To increase capacity, you must first understand the current capacity of your group/community (knowledge, skills and abilities, etc.) and those needed at the different phases of the project.

Sometimes we fail to identify and build on capacity because, initially, it seems to be a daunting and somewhat complex task. Link capacity building to the goals and objectives of your group/community project plan.

The process of the Pastoral Circle and the implementation of the action are powerful tools for the support and development of young people and those who are marginalized. Young people may have skills but little work experience. Find ways to let these individuals become involved in the process and gain this needed experience.