PRINCIPLES OF DECISION-MAKING: WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS MODULE</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE OF THE TOOLKIT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNOPSIS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND SKILLS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASES</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION TASKS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUGGESTED READINGS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1 Identify effective ways of involving community members in decision-making processes.

1.2 Understand how contexts influence decision-making and recognize the function of different decision-making tools.

1.3 Identify community and team needs when decision-making capacity needs developing.

1.4 Appreciate the importance of community involvement in decision-making as a means of building commitment to change and innovation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Module</td>
<td>Introduction to education microplanning</td>
<td>The purpose and functions of education microplanning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 1 CURRENT MODULE</td>
<td>Principles of decision-making: working with communities</td>
<td>Working with local communities to build partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2</td>
<td>Getting started: Preparing for an education microplanning exercise</td>
<td>Getting prepared for an education planning exercise at the local level: spatial, social, economic and educational considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3</td>
<td>Conducting a needs assessment: instruments, data collection and analysis</td>
<td>Understanding local needs through engaging communities in planning activities and building capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 4</td>
<td>Enhancing curriculum and teaching processes to improve student learning</td>
<td>Getting to understand the planning, implementation and evaluation processes that contribute to successful student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 5</td>
<td>Data and information for decision-making and planning</td>
<td>Using data for understanding and improving education at the local level: assessing the outcomes of planning in areas such as access, participation and learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rationale for education microplanning is to develop local support for national education goals. To be successful, these national goals must be made relevant to local communities. An important function of education microplanning, therefore, is to link national/provincial education goals with local level education aspirations. To this end, involving community members in local education planning initiatives is critical.

Numerous planning methods available to planners may help facilitate local engagement. These include orientation workshops, community meetings and consultations, focus groups and feedback sessions. In the context of education microplanning, the purpose of these tools is to convey information about proposed changes, seek community feedback and understand community aspirations. Listening to the community is a key skill for education planners and responding to local needs is an essential feature of any local level planning process.

Knowing which tool to use, when and how is an important skill to develop. Capacity development is another ingredient to ensure the success of education planning at the local level; therefore it needs to be thoroughly embedded in the microplanning process.
4.1 Engagement

The great advantage a microplanner may enjoy is close proximity and engagement with the local community. The lived experiences and relationships forged allow the microplanner to better understand the complexities of the local education context and to deepen knowledge of the key challenges.

Knowledge of the local context is an essential prerequisite for efficient and effective planning. Yet, it is not only the microplanners and their team who require this knowledge, but also the community. Relationships of mutual respect and understanding should be cultivated for a healthy exchange of ideas. The microplanning team and the community should learn from each other. For example, the Lok Jumbish or ‘People’s Movement’ initiative in Rajasthan, India, was implemented in a move toward universal primary education. In this initiative, the school mapping process was an essential element of community engagement in microplanning. The microplanners and their team can learn from the community. It also served to increase demand and interest in primary education, especially for the marginalized members of society (Govinda, 1999).

The important point here is that microplanning is not something done to the community, but rather an act done in conjunction with the community. Positive change and improvement of education systems rely on the shared efforts of different levels of actors. It is also essential that communities understand the goals of national and local education policy-makers. For example, sometimes new textbooks are distributed to schools and never removed from their glossy packaging. New books locked in a cabinet away from students do not serve their intended purpose, a scenario that usually implies a disconnect in communication between actors. School leaders may worry that there will be negative consequences if the resources are damaged or allowed to leave the school facilities. Parents, students and teachers may not realize the resources are at the school site. Teachers may have an unclear understanding of
who is allowed to take out the new books for use and when to fetch them. Thus, community members and the local stakeholders in education change and reform must be engaged in the process of change and development.

4.2 Commitment

Local community engagement is considered the initial phase of microplanning. For real change to occur, the local community must be committed to take action toward goals they believe will improve education. Participatory planning should provide a platform for mutual exchange and dialogue concerning local needs, constraints and possible solutions in the short term. The long term goal for education microplanning is to empower local actors to transform education to meet their needs and goals.

Local community engagement is one of the several preconditions for strengthening both institutional capacity for decentralized planning and local planning capacity.

The first point refers to engagement (as discussed above) but the second point refers to commitment. This includes recognition of the importance of the new initiative, ownership of development objective and the aspiration to support its implementation. Securing an effective engagement is a somewhat technical task. It can be achieved by having community members fill in a survey, respond to an interview or attend a meeting. However, moving to the next level requires a personal decision by participants. They have to see the value in what is being planned – value for themselves, their family and for the whole community. That is, they need to ‘own’ the initiative and come to see it as their own as well as that of the government.

There is no magic formula for winning commitment to change. The following explanations of ‘state of mind’ (Mellina, 2006) can be used to characterize the pathway to commitment in any change effort (see Table 1.1).
Table 1.1: Pathway to Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State of Mind</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persuaded</td>
<td>When people understand and agree with the rationale for the change; when they come to realize the status quo cannot be sustained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>When the change truly resonates with the interests, values and beliefs of the people in the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>When people have confidence in the ability of the organization to navigate the change journey; when they believe the leadership has the resolve to see the change through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able</td>
<td>When people feel they possess the skills required to display the new behaviours and succeed in the new environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These states of mind remind us that change is as much an emotional activity as it is practical. If people are to ‘own’ the change they must be ‘persuaded’ that it is a good idea and they must become ‘excited’ about it. Some of this involves a cognitive understanding of the change (more about this in the following section). Unless people regard the change as something that they themselves can support, then all implementation efforts will likely be ineffective. Finally, people must be confident that they can do what the change requires – whether it is about enhanced participation (for example, taking a greater interest in the running of the local school) or sending their children to school on a regular basis rather than keeping them at home to assist with domestic work. The change must be ‘do-able’ in the local context. This brings us to another important element in the change process – understanding the change.

### 4.3 Understanding the changes that are being planned

Change involves moving from where people are presently to where they need to be in the future. It may be change on a small scale – new teaching strategies, new school hours, new assessment processes or it may be change on a large scale – the relocation of school buildings, the expectation of more regular attendance by students or the introduction of an entirely new curriculum.
Whatever the scale of the change, participants must be well informed about:

- What will be involved;
- How it will affect them; and
- What the consequences will be.

Much of the change literature assumes that change has a most significant effect on individuals who will either accept or resist change. Yet, in work associated with education microplanning, change is a community process and while it may only affect certain individuals, it must always be negotiated at the community level.

The community must also understand what the change is and what its effects will be. This involves communication (to be discussed in the next section), relationship building and developing a shared vision of both the change and the future it will bring. A community is unlikely to get behind any change that has not been explained and which they do not understand. This has implications for the way changes are planned. For example, very complex change is difficult to explain and equally difficult to implement – its components have to be identified and carefully explained.

There is another aspect of ‘understanding’ change which is related to the ‘change agents’ themselves. Advocates for change, whether they are public officials or community members, need to understand how the change will impact the lives of the individuals it will affect. Change is not a neutral process; it may challenge values and long held beliefs. Therefore, the advocates for change need to understand the possible impacts and how these can be best explained in order to reduce anxiety and gain support.

4.4 Communicating about the change – a two-way process

Communicating with change participants is an essential process but it is not a process of one-way communication from officials to the community. It must be genuine two-way communication of not only speaking but also listening to and exchanging of ideas.

There is a continuum of participation in communication about change with:

- passive participation (listening to a plan or update devised by others) at one end and
- the desired empowered participation (joint analysis and decision-making on what should change and how) at the other.
For example, some education systems are implementing policies to remove corporal punishment in schools. This type of change in behaviour requires deep community dialogue around conceptions of respect, discipline and shifting boundaries. If an outside team enters a community and simply lectures on the evils of corporal punishment, the community may not be very receptive and may feel judged negatively or misunderstood. In a successful mutual exchange on the topic, teachers might want to discuss alternative forms of classroom management in light of this change. Some schools may wish to gradually adopt change so that only the principal uses corporal punishment as a way to monitor its use against community perceptions of what is appropriate.

A successful project develops an explicit communication strategy as different kinds of communication are needed to achieve different purposes at different points in change initiatives.

As shown later in this module, the mode of communication chosen (e.g. survey, public meeting, interview) can also reflect the level of participation that will characterize any initiative. This means that those responsible for the change effort must decide whether their purpose is to inform, to consult, to discuss or to engage. It is for this reason that every project should develop an explicit communication strategy because different kinds of communication will be needed to achieve different purposes at different points in change initiatives. It is important to use the right strategy at the right time. One must think of different ways to communicate a message; it might be in the form of a poster for the whole community or a Power Point presentation that will highlight the main issues in a clear and concise way. You might develop a simple brochure that describes what the plan is and how it will improve the current situation. If social media is available and is well used within the community, then these would be an ideal way to get your message across. Communication depends on context and what different communities might be used to in the way of receiving and responding to messages and ideas. This issue will be raised again later in the module when specific tools for encouraging participation are discussed.

4.5 Providing support for change

Change can rarely be accomplished without providing support of some kind to the people who will be affected by the change. Support may be in the form of training when new skills are required, the provision of mentors who can provide advice and assistance during the change process or new infrastructure when the change effort requires physical resources.

Support may also be in the form of moral support – being available to discuss issues arising from the change. This is particularly important when the change initiative is complex and
participants may need additional information as they encounter operational issues. Lack of support can endanger a project because participants will be tempted to give up when they are not adequately supported to solve the problem. Thus, support is an investment in future success rather than a cost.

Another form of support is acknowledging successes, however small, as the implementation process moves ahead. Providing encouragement to the participants signals that their work is valued and it is on track. It makes change a less isolating experience. This can be done very simply with a word of encouragement, small celebrations and constant attention to what needs to be achieved.

Change is a human process requiring human interaction on every possible occasion. Support should be provided, especially to those who will be affected by the change. Support may be provided in the form of training, mentoring, listening or encouragement.

4.6 Training teams and communities in decision-making skills

Many of the requirements for successful change outlined above require skill sets that may not be readily available in communities or even amongst officials charged with the responsibility for managing the change effort. Thus, from the very beginning of a project, a skills audit should be conducted to make an assessment of the types of skills that will be needed for successful project implementation. It is important to consider skills training from two different perspectives:

- What skills do the project teams need?
- What skills does the community need?

Do teams need to know how to run meetings? Design surveys? Conduct focus groups? There are some technical aspects to these skills and these are covered in a variety of online resources.¹

For conducting focus groups see: http://www.omni.org/docs/focusgrouptoolkit.pdf, OMNI [Online]
Once the technical skills are mastered, it is important to understand how these tools can be used to engage the community as well as to collect information that will help to make decisions. For example, the sequence of engaging the stakeholders and receiving feedback is displayed in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: An Example of Steps to Engage Community

As well as technical skills, consideration also needs to be given to other attributes the project team should exhibit, including teamwork, internal communication skills, problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking. These kinds of characteristics make it clear that projects are not just bureaucratic exercises, but are regarded as exercises in working together around a shared vision and agreed outcomes. This may take some pre-project training to build the kind of team that can confront the challenges of implementing complex change initiatives.

Consideration also needs to be given to the skills required by the community. Surveys, for example, require a level of literacy that cannot always be assumed and therefore needs to be assessed. Meetings designed to encourage participation assume that individuals know how to contribute in such a context but this may not always be the case, especially in hierarchical societies where the views government officials share might be regarded as the final word rather than the subject of further debate and discussion. Where there are particular, local circumstances related to stakeholders, these need to be well understood by project teams, as no two communities will be the same. For example, what can be done with an urban community will likely not be possible for a rural community as context will determine what is feasible and the processes that can be used to get there.
Whatever those processes may be, it is important to keep a focus on the desired outcomes. Even though there is a priority placed on engaging local communities fully, there is also a destination and end to the journey, which may be prescribed in policy or even in legislation. There may be many ways to keep the local community engaged and there may even be significant adaptations to conform to local circumstances. Nevertheless, the key outcomes need to be firmly in place and well understood by all parties – the project team and the local community. These outcomes need to guide action and will inevitably be the subject of evaluation. They can be discussed, debated and at times even negotiated, but they need to play a leading role in all aspects of project decision-making.

4.7 Transparency in decision-making

When different groups or individuals are engaged in decision-making, an important principle is that the decision-making process is made clear to everyone. This is often referred to as ‘transparency in decision-making’. Rasmussen, Jensen & Sandoe (2007) put it this way:

“Transparent decisions are decisions in which the decision maker clearly presents to others the normative and factual premises behind the conclusions and explains the reasoning leading from these premises to the conclusion. Transparency thus involves uncovering, describing, documenting and communicating all the argumentative steps in the line of reasoning. It also involves acknowledging the weighting of any evidence drawn upon in reaching the final decision.”

Transparency is a democratic process. It ensures that all people involved, whether the project team or community members, are on an equal footing. Participation should not just be tokenistic; it must be real (see section 4.2 above) and everyone involved should feel they have the opportunity to express their points of view known and to comment on the views of others. This means that decisions must be open to public scrutiny, to debate and to discussion. Figure 1.2 indicates different ways to ensure transparency.
All of these processes seek to develop inclusive decision-making and they help to build trust and relationships. Trust is essential if people are to be engaged in significant change efforts that can transform their communities.
Decision-making is at the heart of education microplanning. New policies, new ideas and new strategies have the potential to change the status quo and assist communities to move in new directions. Top down strategies that seek to enforce change on local communities are likely to fail and instead, communities need to be engaged in change efforts as genuine partners. This involves explaining the change, seeking support for it, understanding any resistance, providing information and engaging the communities from the very beginning of the change initiative.

Participation is key to achieving engagement and communication helps to involve people in the process. Various kinds of meetings can be organized – orientation meetings, feedback meetings, review meetings and they can be inclusive of all stakeholders. Tools such as surveys and focus groups can be used to collect information and understand contexts.

Support in the form of training, mentoring, encouragement and celebration can be provided to ensure that the change journey is well managed.

Change is not only a technical task – it is an emotional and moral task. It requires trust, good relationships, transparency and openness. These take time to build but are worth spending time on to ensure the success of complex yet important change initiatives.
Case 1: Focus Group Process  
(Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 106)

“To implement the focus group discussions, the invited individuals sit in a circle for face-to-face contact. A note taker sits outside the circle. The facilitator asks a set of questions aimed to start and guide the discussion. His or her task is to keep an open space to encourage input from everybody, while making sure that the discussion is not derailed by issues of no relevance to the scope of the focus group.”

Case 2: Technical Education for Rural Development  
(Kalbag, 2011)

“We are trying to build a prototype institutional structure that will have links with technology establishments on the one hand and rural development agencies on the other. They will also provide technical services in the rural area and better educational centres for that. We are evolving a rural technology course for rural technical schools, which will be aimed at providing a package of skills and attitudes which students will find relevant in their future life. After school, some of the students may want to specialize in any one of the areas and during SSC training, they will become guides or trainers to the 8th, 9th and 10th standard students.

The technical education/development centres will not only be centres of all-round development but also channels for introduction of new technologies or designs in the rural areas and be centres of innovation. They should open educational opportunities for the masses that have dropped out of the present book-based system.”
LEARNING FROM THE CASES:

1. In Case 1, what do you notice about the structure of the focus group? What kind of training do you think would be required for the two people involved in running the group? Do you think the people invited to participate in the focus group would feel comfortable with having these two people involved? If you were running the group, how would you explain the roles of the facilitator and the note taker?

2. The focus group will only involve a small number of people. What do you think is its purpose? If you wanted to record the views of a larger number of people, what tool would you use?

3. Imagine that you would like a community (with which you are familiar) to develop the same kind of schools as described in Case 2. What would be the first step you would take to engage the community in the initiative?

4. If parents in your community complained that the schools in Case 2 were not academic enough, how would you negotiate with them? Do you think a focus group would be a useful tool in such a situation?

5. How would you go about developing a shared vision so that the kinds of school described in Case 2 became acceptable to the community? At what stage of the change process do you think this should be done?
Why is it important to engage participants in the change process?

What skills do project teams need to operate effectively as change agents in the community?

What are some of the main elements in any communications strategy? Why are they important?

Can you see a role for technology in any communications strategy?

How would you ensure transparency in decision-making throughout a project?


