MODULE 1

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LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS MODULE

1.1 Identify effective ways of involving community members in microplanning processes.

1.2 Understand how contexts influence planning and recognize the function of various microplanning tools.

1.3 Identify community and team needs when capacity has to be developed.

1.4 Appreciate the importance of community involvement in microplanning as a means of building commitment to change and innovation.
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The aim of education microplanning is to produce a localised plan of action that supports the implementation at the local level of national and sub-national education policies and goals. Community engagement is essential for local education planning (microplanning) initiatives to succeed.

Microplanning is not a task for an external team; it is a matter for the whole community. Participatory planning provides a platform for mutual exchange and dialogue concerning local needs, constraints, and possible solutions. The planning process should empower local actors to transform education to meet their needs and goals.

A community is unlikely to get behind any change if they do not believe that change is needed. People need a cognitive understanding of why the change is necessary, what will be involved, how it will affect them and what the consequences will be. This involves building relationships, communication and jointly developing a plan for how to implement the change. Transparency is the key to achieving engagement and good communication.

In a successful microplanning exercise, the various actors, including both the microplanning team and the community members, should get information from each other. Listening to the community is a key skill for education planners and responding to local needs is essential in any local level planning process.

There are numerous tools that can be used to collect information. These include community meetings and consultations, focus groups and feedback sessions and interviews. The purpose of these information-collection tools is to seek community views so that planners understand community needs and problems. Knowing which tool to use, and how, are important skills.
4.1 Engagement

Whenever policies are made that require changes in education at the local level, it is necessary to engage with local educators and community members and get their input into the planning process. Engaging the local community in the planning of activities is of crucial importance, otherwise the changes will not bring about the expected beneficial results. The changes may be related to teaching, such as a new curriculum, new teaching strategies and new assessment processes, or the changes may be related to logistics and infrastructure, such as new school hours and relocating school buildings, or to student attendance and parental involvement.

Microplanning is not something done “to” the community – it must be done “with” the community. Planners at the local level (microplanners) have close proximity with the local community, so are more able to engage with community members than are planners at the national level. Direct interface with local actors and the lived experiences and relationships forged with them allow microplanners to begin to understand the complexities of the local context – and deepen their understanding of the key local challenges relating to education.

Relationships of mutual respect and understanding should be cultivated for a healthy exchange of information and ideas. The Lok Jumbish or “People’s Movement” initiative implemented in Rajasthan, India, was a success because it began with discussions between community members, including teachers, parents and religious leaders. These discussions enabled each group to appreciate and understand the problems and concerns of the others.
4.2 Commitment

Engagement of the local community is the initial phase of microplanning. But for true change to occur the local community must become committed to taking action toward improving education.

Commitment requires recognition of the importance of the new initiative and a desire to support its implementation. Moving beyond engagement to commitment requires a personal decision by participants. People have to see the value in what is being planned - value for themselves, their family and for the whole community, and they must regard the change as something that they themselves decided to do; otherwise all implementation efforts are likely to be ineffective. When people choose something for themselves, they are likely to be far more committed to the outcome than if someone else chooses it for them. People also need to be part of deciding what the action plans will be. That is, they need to “own” the initiative and the plan.

Change is as much an emotional as a practical activity. If people are to “own” the change they must see it as a good idea and they must become excited about it (Mellina, 2006).

There is a continuum of participation, with passive participation (listening to a plan devised by others) at one end and empowered participation (joint analysis and decision-making about what should change and how) at the other end. Education microplanning activities should foster empowered participation.

4.3 Understanding the reasons for proposed changes

People must be confident that they can do what the change requires, whether it is about greater parental participation 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. To become confident about implementing the changes, they need to first fully understand the reasons why the change is being proposed. If microplanners want community support for proposed changes, they need to clearly present their reasons for these proposed changes (Rasmussen, Jensen and Sandoe, 2007).
Change is not a neutral process – it may challenge values and long held beliefs. The advocates for change whether they are public officials or community members, need to understand these values and beliefs, and how the proposed changes may be perceived.

For example, some education systems are implementing policies that aim to end corporal punishment in schools. If corporal punishment is an accepted type of punishment for children, this proposed change in behaviour at the school level requires community dialogue around conceptions of respect and discipline. If an outside team enters a community and simply lectures on the evils of corporal punishment, the community will not be very receptive and will feel they are being judged negatively or misunderstood. The community’s views should be listened to before alternatives are explained, so that the community feels that their opinions are respected. When people feel their views are respected they are more open to embracing new approaches. If mutual exchange on the topic is successful, the community would be open to discussing alternative forms of classroom management, and would be willing to participate in developing an action plan towards phasing out the use of corporal punishment in schools and even in the home.

This collaborative approach to planning sends a strong message to the community about the way in which you wish to work. It may take some time to establish such an approach but it is worthwhile doing so because it can counter any possible resistance that might emerge later.

4.4 Communicating about the change – a two way process

Communicating with people about policies and proposed changes should not be one-way – from officials to the community. It must be genuine two-way communication, involving not only speaking but listening as well.

For example, there have been cases when new text books are distributed to schools but are never removed from their glossy packaging. Instead, the new books are locked in a cabinet away from student access, and they therefore do not serve their intended purpose. In such situations, education officials need to ask school leaders and teachers why the books are not being used, and then need to listen carefully to the reasons given. One reason given by the teachers and school leaders could be that they are worried that there will be negative consequences if the books are damaged or lost. By understanding the underlying reasons why the books are not used, this issue can be addressed by assuring teachers and school managers that it is okay if the books are damaged and that they will only be useable for a limited period of time. Thus, the issue can be resolved through clear communication and mutual understanding.
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, including support to enable people to participate in implementing microplanning exercises.

Support may be in the form of training if new skills are required, the provision of mentors who can provide advice and assistance during the change process, or new infrastructure if 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 where the change initiative is complex and participants need additional information as they encounter operational issues.

Lack of support can cause the proposed change to be rejected because participants will be tempted to give up if they are not adequately supported to solve problems. Thus, support is an investment rather than a cost.

Another form of support is acknowledging successes, however small, as the implementation process moves ahead. Providing encouragement signals to the participants that their efforts are valued. This can be done very simply with small celebrations and constant attention to the things that need to be achieved. Change is a human process requiring the human touch.

Many of the requirements for successful changes require skill sets that may not be readily available in some communities, or even among the officials charged with the responsibility for managing the change effort. It is important to be aware of the kinds of skills that are needed. For example, if questionnaires are used to collect information, it is necessary that the person designing the questionnaire has the necessary skills to ensure the questionnaire will produce relevant and useful data. Furthermore, if the questionnaires are to be filled out by the community members, they must be written in a way that is appropriate to the level of literacy in the community.

Similarly, meetings need to be designed with the type of community in mind. In hierarchical societies, for example, the views that government officials share might be regarded as the final word rather than a subject for further debate and discussion, so in this case it must be explained to the community members that they can ask questions and debate topics if they disagree on anything. And meeting facilitators need to have facilitation skills to ensure that all types of views are heard, not just the views of the loudest or most powerful meeting participants.
In general, the local circumstances need to be well understood by project teams. No two communities will be the same, and the team must get to know the communities with which they are working. For example, the perceptions and expectations of an urban community may not be for the same as those of a rural community. The context will determine what is possible and the processes that can be used.

Whatever those processes may be, it is important to keep a focus on the desired outcomes. Even though there is a priority on engaging local communities fully, it is also important to achieve the education goals. Such goals may be prescribed in policy or even in legislation. There may be many ways to get there and significant adaptations may be necessary to conform to local conditions. 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 can be discussed, debated and at times even negotiated, but they need to play a leading role in all aspects of microplanning.

4.6 Transparency

For communication between microplanners and community members to be effective, it is necessary to adopt the principle of transparency. Transparency is when all people involved have access to all the relevant information. Furthermore, decisions must be open to public scrutiny, to debate and to discussion. This builds trust, which is essential in engaging communities in microplanning exercises.

There are different ways to ensure transparency, including keeping records of meetings and making them public then seeking feedback on those records, and giving information to the media.

4.7 Methods of collecting information

There are several methods by which microplanners can collect information from a community. Asking questions and listening are the two key skills to use with these methods.

Meetings are an important means of communication. A meeting can be convened to explain an education policy or goal, ask people’s opinions on a policy or goal, answer questions and identify any concerns.
Focus groups bring together small groups of people to share information. Very often people feel more secure in smaller groups because such groups allow them to talk and listen to each other more easily and to respond not just to the person asking questions but also to others in the group. Microplanners can learn a great deal from a focus group just by listening and seeking to understand them.

Interviews can either be structured or semi-structured. In a structured interview, the same questions are used for each person. Because you ask the same question to different people it is possible to easily compare the answers. By interviewing a range of people it is possible to develop an understanding of various perspectives on an issue and how different people respond to it. In a semi-structured interview, there is a basic set of questions that stays the same but new questions can be brought up during the interview based on the responses of the person being interviewed.

A questionnaire consists of a set of questions written on paper, and usually requires respondents to tick boxes and write down answers to the questions. Alternatively, if the person cannot read and write, or if the questionnaire is long and detailed, the questions can be read out to the person and answers written down for them.

Surveys are studies that are conducted with the aim of understanding a certain situation, group of people or issue. Surveys use meetings, focus groups and questionnaires to collect information. The process of conducting a survey involves selecting the people to be surveyed (a “sample”), preparing the data collection process (e.g. organizing meetings and designing a questionnaire), collecting the data (e.g. convening the meetings and collecting completed questionnaires from the sample group surveyed), then analysing the data that was collected, preparing a summary of the findings of the analysis, and making conclusions based on that information. Most surveys are concluded by preparing a report that describes the methods used to collect the data and which presents the key findings (analysis of the data) and the conclusions.

Mapping is a method of collecting and combining data about geographical, economic, social and cultural factors regarding a particular situation, group, or issue. Data about social, cultural and economic factors (e.g. number of children per household, beliefs about the importance of education, level of income of each household, etc.) can be collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups; while data about geographical factors (distances between households and schools, type of roads, forms of transport available, etc.) can be collected from maps and government departments (e.g. department of roads and transport). When the various forms of data are combined and analysed, they together provide a spatial overview of the situation. This overview can then be presented in the form of charts and graphs that show the relationships between the various factors (e.g. children who do not attend school tend to be located far away from the schools).
In the case of Lok Jumbish, referred to earlier, a school mapping process was used to collect information about the village community. This mapping process involved undertaking a household survey using questionnaires to collect information. The survey involved going from house to house to talk to each household individually, ask them questions, listen to their answers and establish the educational status of all children in the 5 to 14 age group, and to register all of the children in a database. By identifying the status of every child, the process identified who needed what level of education (Govinda, 1999).

Different kinds of information gathering tools may be needed to achieve different purposes. It is important to use the right tools for each purpose.
Top down strategies that seek to force change on local communities are likely to fail. Instead, communities need to participate in change efforts as genuine partners. This involves engaging the community, explaining the policy or proposed change, listening to opinions, understanding any resistance, and enabling the community to suggest ways of overcoming the problems so as to achieve the desired changes.

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 a microplanning exercise. Support in the form of training and encouragement can be provided to ensure that a microplanning exercise is successful in achieving its goals.

Tools such as meetings, focus groups and interviews can be used to collect the information needed for microplanners to understand contexts, views, needs and obstacles to change.
Case 1: **Focus group process**  
(Mefalopulos, 2008, p. 106)

“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)

Technical education and development centres were developed to be all-round development centres that would also be channels for the introduction of new technologies in rural areas. A rural technology course was designed for these rural technical schools. The course aimed to provide students with the skills and attitudes that they would find relevant to their future life. After completing school, some of the students may want to specialise in any one of the areas, and during such post-school training there will be guides or trainers for younger students. The technical education and development centres also provide open education opportunities for those who 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? If you were running the group, how would you explain the roles of the two people?

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

3. Imagine that you would like a community to develop the same kind of school 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, what would you do? Do you think a focus group would be a useful tool in this situation?

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

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

What might be the main elements to improve communication between the change agents and the community? Why are they important?

How would you ensure transparency in a microplanning exercise?


