GETTING STARTED:
INITIATING AN EDUCATION MICROPLANNING EXERCISE
1.1 Understand the planning process.

1.2 Become familiar with mechanisms for consulting stakeholders in an education microplanning exercise.

1.3 Become aware of the need to link education microplanning to the needs of local communities.

1.4 Identify the steps taken in initiating an education microplanning exercise.
STRUCTURE OF THE TOOLKIT

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Focus: Working with local communities – building partnerships.

Focus: Getting prepared for an education planning exercise at the local level: spatial, social, economic and educational considerations.

Focus: Getting to understand local needs through engaging communities in planning and building capacity.

Focus: Getting to understand the planning, implementation and evaluation processes that contribute to successful student learning.

Focus: Using data for understanding and improving education at the local level: assessing the outcomes of planning in areas such as access, participation and learning.
This module will focus on the processes that are necessary to initiate an education microplanning exercise. It assumes that any mandate for education microplanning will come from a national policy priority that needs to be implemented at the local level – either across a district or within a single local community or school.

In a microplanning exercise, the task of the microplanning team is to find the common ground between the policy requirements and local needs. The team needs to engage the community and identify the concerns and needs while seeking the community members’ inputs and enabling them to be part of the solution.

There are many different purposes for undertaking an education microplanning exercise. These could include developing a locally relevant curriculum, increasing school attendance among girls, reducing the number of school drop-outs, and establishing technology learning centres.

In any case, the keys to success are ensuring the microplanning team is well prepared, engaging the local community from the very beginning, and conducting a participatory diagnosis of community concerns and needs.
4.1 Revision: What is education microplanning?

The Education Microplanning Toolkit uses the following definition:

Education microplanning - education planning at the local ("micro") level - is a holistic and participatory approach to local-level planning and decision-making. While it is focused on the local level, it is linked to national and sub-national education policy directions.

Education microplanning involves managing change – whether it is related to new teaching strategies or the introduction of non-formal education. Change can be intimidating, so the processes used to bring about change need to be very carefully considered. The trust and confidence of the local community must be gained.

4.2 The preparation process

As noted in Module 1, any microplanning exercise involves engaging the local community and seeking their views and solutions to issues. At the same time, it is important to remember that there is a broad education policy to achieve or a goal that needs to be reached.

As will be shown throughout this module, education microplanning is a process that seeks to connect broad policy objectives to local contexts. The assumption is that action needs to be taken at the local level if such policy objectives are to be implemented.
The desired outcome of any education microplanning process is a specific action plan. Such a plan needs to contain:

- Achievable objectives.
- Clearly stated actions that will move the community towards those objectives.
- A monitoring process that will allow the community to be able to monitor the progress it is making towards the objectives.

The task for the microplanners is to set the community on a pathway that will lead to the successful development of an action plan. What follows are suggested steps that can assist in achieving that outcome.

**Figure 1**: The preparation process

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TEAM TRAINING</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Developing a shared understanding of the project</td>
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<td>- Developing skills in and commitment to participatory planning</td>
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<tr>
<th>COMMUNITY PREPARATION</th>
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<td>- Communicating the idea, building trust, developing relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identifying community members who will carry the project forward and providing training for them</td>
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<th>DEVELOPING STRUCTURES</th>
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<td>- Identifying existing social and political structures that can take responsibility for implementation and monitoring</td>
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<td>- Where these are not available, creating a new structure (e.g. a committee) that will take the responsibility for the exercise</td>
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<th>DIAGNOSING NEEDS</th>
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<td>- Developing a ‘snapshot’ of the community in terms of its social, cultural values</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Documenting local characteristics based on available official knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reconciling different sources of information</td>
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4.3 Training of microplanners

Whoever is responsible for the microplanning exercise needs to ensure that all those involved (e.g. the district and provincial education officers, consultants, volunteers) are well acquainted with the requirements of the initiative as well as the principles of participatory planning.

Training workshops can be used at the beginning of the project to prepare the microplanning team. In particular, all team members should be well briefed on the requirements of the initiative that is to be implemented. This includes the legislative framework (if any), the specific policy requirements, the timeline for implementation, the available resources, the specific deliverables that are required and the main lines of responsibility. The outcome should be a shared understanding of the initiative. It is important to highlight the importance of learning from the community. The microplanning team should be introduced to the idea of participatory planning. The very simple idea behind participatory planning is that all stakeholders need to be involved in preparing the action plans to implement policies at the local level. For example, when district officers are preparing to undertake a microplanning exercise to implement a district policy at the community level, it is important to ensure that they understand they are implementing the exercise “with” the community. It is not an exercise that is done “to” the community. During the training workshop the team (or teams) can start the process of collecting whatever official information is available on the areas or the communities for which they will have responsibility.

4.4 Community preparation

Once the team is ready to work with the community, strategies need to be developed to enable the team to both talk with and listen to community members. At this point, the development of the action plan is a secondary issue. The main priority of these initial contacts is to communicate with the community and, through such communication, to develop relationships, build trust and confidence in the community. A particular outcome for this phase should be the identification of community members who will work in the community to support the exercise. Such people will need training.

The communication process involves providing information to the community about the policy or proposed change. In a case in Bihar, India, for example (NIEPA, 1997) reference is made to “environment building” in which the entire village is made aware of the initiative as well as its importance. In Bihar, the “environment building” exercise was particularly
effective because it embraced locally-appropriate platforms for communication. The process included: wall writing, padayatras (communicating with people as part of the journey), and panchayat meetings (political group meetings). The process was developed to match the local context by adapting to the communication styles used by the community. During the “environment building” exercise, change agents who represented disadvantaged parts of the community were also identified, they became prekaks (trainers) for the initiative – one third of the prekaks were women.

These informal processes engage the community. The microplanning team should then select from them “champions” who will be able to be the spokespeople for the initiative being planned. These “champions” are then given formal training for the roles they will be asked to play in the community, and subsequently can become the spokespeople for the change in their communities. In this way, responsibility for the change is located in the community itself.

This same approach can be applied when the proposed change comes from within or outside the community. An externally-initiated change could be, for example, a policy established by the national government. There are two key questions to be asked by the microplanning team:

- How should communication with the community take place about the policy?
- What are the views of the local community with regard to the matter?

### 4.5 Developing structures

Once the team and the community have been prepared, it is important to set up a structure or group that allows sharing and taking responsibility for implementing the action plan, and monitoring and evaluating the progress. The group might be a Village Education Committee made up of local representatives, or an existing political or social structure. It is also important to have community leaders involved in the implementation of the initiative.
4.6 Diagnosing local needs

The microplanning team needs to then assess the needs of the community. At this initial stage, the diagnosis provides a simple snapshot of the community and its needs. The following questions will help identify the needs of the community:

- What administrative and political structures are in place to support the initiative?
- What are the characteristics of current educational provision? (e.g. education facilities, teachers and assistants, curriculum, students – both in school and out of school).
- What are the major social and cultural characteristics of the community that might impact on the initiative (e.g. gender issues, family structures, leadership roles, religious orientation).
- How does the community support itself economically? Who is involved and are there any implications for schools and schooling?

These types of information might already be available as part of the official school census, in district level files or databases or in schools. The school principal and school staff can play a very important role in providing an understanding of the local context. It is important to collect the available technical information (i.e. number of schools, number of teachers, number of students, curriculum, completion rates, graduate employment rates etc.) and later reconcile this information with community perceptions and values. There is a connection between the technical information and what will be learned during the community participation activities. The types of information are shown in the figure below.
Figure 2: The types of information used in microplanning

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DIAGNOSING LOCAL CONTEXT</th>
<th>INFORMATION COLLECTED FROM THE COMMUNITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Collect whatever official information is available from within the community or from the District/Provincial levels.</td>
<td>- Compile information collected through community participation activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Based on this information, develop an overview of the current state of educational provision and identify any gaps in provision.</td>
<td>- Identify the way local values are reflected in the views and ideas of the local community.</td>
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<td>- Summarize the local views and explanations of why there are gaps in education provision or low quality education at the local level.</td>
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This is not the only time the microplanning team collects information. As the project progresses it may be necessary to collect detailed information about specific aspects of education in the local area (e.g. the actual number of students who attend schools and their attendance pattern, the way a particular school facility is being used, the demand for school graduates among local employers, etc.). The purpose of this initial diagnosis is to have some baseline information on which change ideas can be generated.

### 4.7 Collecting information from the community

Activities to collect information about the community can take many different forms. Note, for example, in the Bihar case cited above (see 4.4) that the methods chosen were consistent with the cultural values of the community. The purpose of any method chosen is to facilitate understanding of the situation, and the views and concerns of the community members.

Some possible methods are:

- **Meetings** – some with community leaders but, importantly, meetings in which the whole community is involved.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with relevant samples of community members.
- **Informal interviews** and daily interactions.
Direct observations by the team (see Mercado, 2006, p. 6 for more information on this method).

Focus group discussions.

Participatory mapping (see http://cec.vcn.bc.ca/cmp/modules/par-tech.htm).

Social media (for an introduction to this relatively new application as a planning tool, see Abukhater, 2011).

The methods are not mutually exclusive – they can be used in various combinations to secure the goals of participation, engagement and learning.

As mentioned earlier, the social and cultural contexts in which these methods are used must be kept in mind. For example, in Cambodia village chiefs host commune-level meetings where villagers convene and identify the needs in their communities and prioritize them. The results of these meetings make up the Commune Development Plan (CDP). District Integration Workshops are held each year and these serve as a place where commune councilors present the five-year Commune Development Plan and meet with others to discuss progress on the previous year’s activities. The various CDPs comprise the multi-year Commune Investment Programme which feeds into the priorities of the national budget. Identifying these local structures is an important task for the microplanning team so that local processes can be respected.

When presenting information, photographs can be used to illustrate key points, important activities, and creative re-enactments of community issues. For example: using before and after images of school building rehabilitation projects (see Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan, 1998).

4.8 Capacity building of local community members

Training of local community members is another important stage. Participatory education planning requires identifying community members committed to making the government more responsive to community needs and then assisting these community members to gain the capacity to facilitate community participation. It should never be assumed that rules, processes, protocols and skills are known by everyone. Pre-activity guidance and clear
communication of expectations should always be factored in before any activity is initiated. Community members who are to act as “champions” will need formal training. Training workshops need to be organized to acquaint them with their role and equip them with facilitation and negotiation skills. These new skills will be useful not only for a specific microplanning exercise but will be transferable to other contexts. The identified change agents should also be responsible for ensuring all members of their communities are able to participate in the microplanning exercise.

4.9 Checklist

It is often a good idea to have a checklist to make sure that all key stages have been covered. The following questions might help to construct such a checklist:

- Has the microplanning exercise’s scope been defined?
- Have all the stakeholders been identified?
- Have local leaders and “champions” been identified and trained?
- Have major issues of possible contention been identified?
- Is there a written agreement about the priorities and directions of the action plan?
- Have specific activities in the action plan been agreed?
- Have the costs of the activities been identified?
- Has an assessment been made of whether external requirements (policies, mandates, etc.) can be met?

There may be some issues that have not been completed by the end of the initiation phase – these should be noted and follow up actions taken to ensure priorities can be met.
The initiation phase of an education microplanning exercise provides the foundation for the remainder of the exercise. The diagnosis of community needs provides a snapshot of the community context. Then information is collected about opinions, issues and solutions through communication with community members, including discussions and debates. This involves some presentation by the microplanning team of the main policy elements, but it mainly involves listening to community members and responding to the issues they raise. In this way, the issues are addressed at the community level.

The project team needs to be fully prepared before communication and information-collection activities begin with the community. The community members who become project “champions” also need training to ensure that they are aware of their leadership roles and equipped with facilitation and information-collection skills.

In terms of community participation activities, there are many options from which to choose. Select those activities that suit the community, using existing structures where possible.
Case 1: Community mobilization  
ADB, Tajikistan: Education Sector Reform Project

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the government of Tajikistan launched an education reform project in 2003, in which community stakeholders were encouraged to take charge of the educational well-being of their children. The project supported community mobilization in pilot districts through advocacy campaigns and organization and training of Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members on their duties and responsibilities. PTAs were established in 237 schools. The project helped institutionalize the PTAs with a formal structure and clear definition of roles and responsibilities, and followed this with a series of training programmes on the roles of PTAs. This training focused on enabling the PTAs to perform their roles more effectively. The PTA chairs affirmed that the establishment of PTAs brought about a positive change in attitudes of parents toward getting involved in the education of their children and in the affairs of their children’s schools.

Case 2: Participatory Microplanning  

The purpose of the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) Jeevika programme is to empower whole villages to independently manage and maintain projects. When the SEWA went to the village of Fatehpur to introduce the Jeevika programme, the first priority was
to establish a Village Development Committee to be responsible for the implementation of SEWA Jeevika initiatives. They also called a village meeting (gram sabha) to communicate with all the villagers. Before this meeting about SEWA Jeevika, however, they began communicating the purpose of the Jeevika process and its value for the villagers. The Village Organizers and District Coordinators visited the village three times to explain the concept before the first village meeting was held. During these visits, Village Organizers visited every house in the village encouraging people, especially those from poorer areas, to attend the village meeting. Three village meetings were held with the villagers, following which the villagers agreed that they would like to start the Jeevika process in their village.

**LEARNING FROM THE CASES:**

1. What is the role and function of the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in the Tajikistan case? How does it relate to the principles of participative planning?

2. Why do you think training was provided to the PTAs? What is the function of this kind of training?

3. How do you think the project team might have been prepared before their initial visit to Fatehpur, the village in Case 2? What kind of information might they have collected about the village before that visit?

4. How do you think the project team might have communicated with community members? First, to encourage them to attend the meeting and then at the meeting itself?
EVALUATION TASKS

1. Draw a diagram to show all the steps to be covered during the initiation phase and provide a timeline to show how much time might be needed for this phase.

2. Several kinds of training and workshops are required in initiating a microplanning activity. Identify where training is generally required and ways these workshops might be run. For example, what differences might there be between a staff training workshop and a workshop for community members?

3. Why is it useful to understand the culture and viewpoints of the community in which you were working?

4. Why do you think there might be resistance to change in a community? How would you respond to community members in a meeting if it seemed they were opposed to a proposed policy or change?


