Stage 4:
Taking action
Overview of Stage 4: Taking action

Aim of this stage:

To help a project working group consider all the essential aspects of the day to day running of a project.

Contents of this stage

This stage contains a number of activities and tools for helping a group run and manage a community project. The activities and tools should not be done all in one go but selected as appropriate for your situation.

It is important to keep looking at the learning and reflection questions in section 12 as you use the tools and activities.

1. Bible study on Nehemiah
2. Clarifying the purpose of the project and the priority tasks
3. How to monitor your project
4. Delegation
5. Managing and valuing people
6. How to keep ourselves motivated
7. Building a team
8. How to have an effective meeting
9. How to keep others informed
10. Keeping project records
11. Taking specialist advice
12. Learning and reflection

1. Bible study - Implementation and monitoring

Nehemiah builds the walls

Section A: Working together

Read Nehemiah 2:17-3:32

In the Bible study on page 68 we saw how Nehemiah assessed the need for repairing the walls of Jerusalem. In this passage we see him helping to organise the actual re-building work.

1. What is happening in this passage?
2. Is it just Nehemiah and his servants that do the work? Who else gets involved?
   - Some of the people who get involved are: Priests (3:1, 22, 28); goldsmiths, perfume-makers and merchants (3:8, 32); rulers and officials (3:12); women (3:12); residents (3:13, 23, 25), and guards (3:29).
3. Do you think the number of people involved will have helped the walls be built quicker or slower?
4. Who is already involved in Umoja projects in your community? Are you? Who could be encouraged to get more involved?
5. Nehemiah involved a whole range of people — rich and poor, men and women, local residents and people living further away. How can you help everyone who wants to be involved help out in the project?

Section B: Overcoming difficulties

Read Nehemiah 4:1-23

1. What is happening in this passage?
2. What are the difficulties facing Nehemiah and those re-building the walls?
3. Are you facing any difficulties in your Umoja project?
4. What are the ways Nehemiah responded to these difficulties?
   - He prayed for help (verse 4), he encouraged people (verse 14), and he took action (verses 21-23).
5. What ways can you respond to the difficulties you are facing?
2. Clarifying the purpose of the project and the priority tasks

As you launch the project, it is a good idea to have a general discussion about the purpose. As you lead the discussion, include the following points:

1. Remind the group of the project purpose.
2. Agree dates and the venues for meetings.
3. Revisit the roles and responsibilities of the participants.
4. Discuss the hopes and fears for the project.
5. Identify possible challenges and how they might be addressed. It may be a good idea to revisit the minibus exercise on page 122, paying particular attention to what could hold us back and what could get in our way.

3. How to monitor your project

An important part of running a project is being able to measure its progress both in terms of the way it is being done and how it is changing lives. This is called monitoring. Monitoring is about collecting information that helps us to know how the project is going. This often involves collecting information regularly from attendance records, feedback from community members on how they are finding the usefulness of the project, and also reviewing budgets and expenditure. Monitoring is really useful as it provides lots of information which can be looked at at the end of the project when it is evaluated.

There are three key questions that need to be asked while monitoring a project:

Are we doing what we said we would do?

Are we making a difference?

Could we use our skills and resources more effectively?
If you do not ask these questions regularly, you may find yourselves going in a direction you did not want to go.

For example, if you wanted to monitor the building of a local school, the following questions would be useful:

- Do we have all the resources we need to build the school?
- Is the school being built to a good standard?
- Are everyone working together as a team?
- Are skills being used effectively?
- Is the project keeping to the budget?

Monitoring the budget

The best way to monitor a budget is to compare the budget to what has been spent (expenditure). This needs to be done on a regular basis so that changes can be made if necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of timber</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of cement</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase sand</td>
<td>$95</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase bricks</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees of brick layers</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin roof</td>
<td>$1200</td>
<td>$950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$2695</td>
<td>$2345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is useful for planning how you are going to monitor the activities you are doing. If possible, try and draw it up on a large piece of card or paper, so that it can be reviewed in public meetings. It might be useful to consider using some of the tables in the information gathering section (pages 86-96) as this will show you the difference between the beginning of the project and where the project is now.

Make sure records are well designed, well kept, useful, accurate and accessible.
4. How should we delegate?

A key role of the co-ordinator is to think about the delegation of tasks. Delegation is the giving of responsibility for certain tasks to other people.

Delegation is really important as it makes the most of the time available, it helps the task to be completed effectively and also helps everyone to become more motivated, confident and skilled. It also reduces the work load of the project co-ordinator. Here are eight simple actions for successful delegation.

Action 1: Decide who to delegate to.
Action 2: Show the benefit or importance of delegating the task.
Action 3: Break down the task and decide the level of support needed for each aspect.
Action 4: Make time for training the person in their task, if this is needed.
Action 5: Allow time to practise carrying out the task in a safe environment, followed by feedback.
Action 6: The task is then done under supervision, if appropriate.
Action 7: Meet together to give feedback.
Action 8: Celebrate what went well and affirm the person.

5. Managing and valuing people

When running a project, in most cases, we need people either to be directly involved or overseeing it. The way in which we support and encourage people will determine their motivation and commitment to the project. An important way of doing this is by valuing people and giving positive feedback.

Here are a few ways of showing people they are valued:
1. Welcoming them at the start of the day.
2. Taking the opportunity to thank them for the things they do during the day, however small.
3. Asking for their opinions.
4. Showing interest in them as people.
5. Celebrating with them when a major task has been achieved.
6. Providing them with opportunities for training.
7. Encouraging them to share their experience in church or in a community meeting.
8. Providing them with stationery or information booklets.

Rules of giving positive feedback

• Give it frequently.
• It must be varied.
• It must be honest.
• It should be appropriate to the achievement.
• It should be consistent.
• It must be timely.
• It should be appropriate to the individual as much as possible.

Task to do

Make a list of the ways you currently value people and think about how you could do it better.
6. How to keep ourselves motivated

During the life of the project it is important to help all the people involved be inspired and kept motivated. There are a number of ways of doing this:

1. Revisit some of the Bible studies used in this guide and other Bible studies you have used which you have found helpful.

2. Look for opportunities to celebrate key points of success in the life of the project.

3. If appropriate, take opportunities to get the successes of a project reported in the local newspaper or on the local radio station.

4. For some projects it is sometimes good to organise a local show of produce or crafts, which have been produced by the community.

5. If there are sufficient funds, it might be fun to provide the project team with T-shirts or baseball caps with the project logo on.

6. Carry out the “bicycle activity”.

The bicycle activity

When running a group and setting up projects, it is important to work together as a team and share tasks and responsibilities. There is often a balance to be kept between getting on with tasks and making sure the group or committee are together and mutually supporting each other.

One way of doing this is using the bicycle activity. This involves listing actions needed to help the task under the back wheel, and actions needed to help maintain the unity and good spirit of the group under the front wheel.

Actions to help the task

1. **Initiating.** Getting the group started on the task. Offering new suggestions, topics for discussion or plans.

2. **Asking for information.** Drawing out the resources of the group and identifying information which needs to be found elsewhere.

3. **Giving information or facts or sharing relevant experiences.**

4. **Asking for opinions.** Good decision making depends on knowing what all members think and feel about a suggestion.

5. **Asking for opinions.** Some people do this too much and some too little. Sometimes a quick way to get all opinions needs to be found.

6. **Explaining.** Giving practical examples to make a point clear.

7. **Clarifying.** Asking a question or repeating a point in different words to make it clear to all.

8. **Summarising.** Stating briefly the main points made so far.

Actions to help maintain the good spirit of the group

1. **Encouraging.** Being friendly, responding to and building on suggestions made by others, and showing appreciation of others and their ideas.

2. **Gatekeeping.** Giving a quiet person a chance to join in the discussion.

3. **Setting standards.** For example, “Let’s try to stick to the point and avoid discussing other issues”.

4. **Diagnosing difficulties.** For example, “I think we cannot make this decision until we get more information”.

5. **Expressing personal and group feelings.** For example “I’m getting bored. This is a small point and we have spent half an hour on it”.

6. **Harmonising.** Helping those in conflict to understand one another’s views.

7. **Evaluating.** Creating an opportunity for people to express feelings and reactions towards the working of the group.

8. **Relieving tension.** Putting a problem in a wider context, or making a well-timed joke.

Now list your own group’s task and maintenance needs and how you can best address them.
7. Building a team

During the life of the project it is important to look for opportunities for helping the team to work well together. The following activities are designed to help the team review what sort of team they are, and what things they could do to improve the way they work together.

a) The drawing game

Purpose

To think about what sort of team we are and what sort of things we could do to make it better.

Step-by-step guide

1. Explain to the group that we are going to think about the character and nature of the group or organisation or church.
2. Invite each member to draw a picture of an animal that represents the character and nature of the group.
3. Put the pictures up on the wall and get each person to present their picture and explain why they drew it.
4. Use flipchart or a large piece of paper to write down the common themes and differences.
5. Discuss what this might mean for how the group could work better in the future.

Tips

Make sure the pictures are big enough for everyone to see.

If people are not happy with drawing, or not confident, an alternative approach would be to give them pictures of animals for them to select and talk about.

b) The flipchart exercise

Draw a line down the middle of a flipchart or a large piece of card and head one side, “Things we should preserve about our group”, and the other side, “Things we should change about our group.”

Invite team members to write ideas on bits of paper and stick them on the appropriate side of the chart.

These comments can then be grouped into common themes and a discussion can take place.

c) Team process review

One way of building your team is to encourage them to reflect on how they have worked together. This is a good exercise to do after an event or a particular task has been achieved. After the event, ask your team the following questions and then have a group discussion about the answers that were given.

1. What did your team do that helped complete the task?
2. What things hindered the completion of the task?
3. What would you do differently?
4. What did you learn about team effectiveness?
8. How to have an effective meeting

Sometimes meetings can seem boring and long. This section helps you to think about the quality of your meetings and what you can do to make them more effective, including how to improve decision making and how to observe group dynamics.

The following checklists and suggestions are designed to help you get the most out of your meetings.

a) Drawing your meetings as a form of transport

Think of your meetings in terms of a form of transport. What would it be? Draw it and share it with the rest of the group.

What are the common themes?

Is there anything you need to address?

b) Checklist for having an effective meeting

Before the meeting

- Is everyone clear why we are meeting?
- Has everyone had enough notice about when the meeting is happening?
- Do people need the agenda in advance and any additional paperwork?
- If there are going to be presentations, have the presenters had enough time to prepare?
- Do we need food and drink, and has a break been planned?
- Does the venue need setting up before people arrive?

During the meeting

- Are new members or visitors welcomed and introduced?
- Are people listened to?
- Are the discussions constructive?
- Are decisions made?
- Does everyone participate?
- Does the chairperson ensure the agenda is followed?
- Does the meeting run to time?
- Does the chairperson summarise the key points before a decision is made?
- Is the secretary making a record of decisions made, and who is going to do what actions?

After the meeting

- Are the minutes reviewed by key members of the meeting before being distributed?
- Is there a reminder sent out to all the members about when the next meeting is to be held?
- Are the minutes sent out before the next meeting?
- Is there time allocated for setting the next meeting agenda?
c) A simple guide for making decisions

One of the challenges of running a small project group is making good decisions. Part of making good decisions is having good preparation beforehand and providing people with plenty of information on which to base their decisions. The following questions are designed to help the co-ordinator facilitate a good decision making process.

a) What are we trying to decide? Be sure this is clear to everyone.
b) What are the different possibilities? Consider as many as possible. Brainstorming may be useful.
c) How may each possibility work? Consider the positives and negatives.
d) What suggestion, or combination of suggestions, do we choose?
e) What do we need to do to carry out the decision?
f) Who will do what, when, where and how?

‘A group can never become a community unless it develops the habit of deep, respectful listening to one another’

Ivan Poborvski

d) What to observe in a group

One of the tasks of someone who is facilitating or chairing a group meeting is to observe what is going on in the group so that they can make the most appropriate response in order to move a group discussion on to a successful conclusion.

We need to observe at three different levels:
a) Content. What is the group talking about? What is each person saying?
b) Non-verbal expressions. Apart from what they say, what indications are people giving of their feelings and reactions. For example, gestures, tone of voice, body language, facial expressions or order of speaking.
c) Feelings, attitudes, concerns and hidden agendas. These factors have an important effect on the life and work of a group and must be taken into account. Sensitive observation of the words and non-verbal expressions can give us clues about people’s feelings, but these can easily be misinterpreted and so if they seem important they should be checked with the person concerned.
9. How to keep others informed

As the project develops, it is sometimes useful to share how it is progressing with key groups or individuals. These might include:

- community and church leaders
- local authorities
- other churches in the area
- specialist government departments such as forestry, water and sanitation or agricultural extension departments
- community members and interest groups.

This can be done in a number of ways:

- Formal presentation using flip charts which highlight the key points you want to communicate.
- As an agenda item in a meeting of a government agency or local authority.
- Providing articles and information for local newspapers and radio.
- Where appropriate, using drama and song in a community meeting.

10. Keeping project records

As the project develops, it is important to keep records of the different aspects of the project, which include:

- the baseline survey (this is an account of the needs identified by the community)
- the project plan (this is all the points taken from the minibus exercise)
- the budget and expenditure
- list of who is doing what (roles and responsibilities)
- progress reports (this is the information gathered while monitoring the project)
- the project planner (this is usually a wallchart showing what is going to happen when).

The project records need to be kept by someone who is good at administration and can keep them up to date.
11. Taking specialist advice

It is important to seek specialist advice on areas that the community has identified where there are no immediate skills or experience. In most cases, there should be government agencies or specialist organisations who can provide assistance.

Make a list of the government agencies and other organisations who can offer specialist advice and who may be able to assist your project.

12. Learning and reflection

As you use the tools and activities in Stage 4, it is important to keep looking at the questions below to help you to keep learning and keep improving your community.

1. What have you learnt most from the tools and activities you have used?
2. How could you have used them better?
3. Do you need to adapt them to make them more appropriate to the people you are working with? If so, how?
4. What activities and tools have you not tried? Are there any barriers to using them? If so, how could these barriers be addressed?