Action plan and implementation

BRIEF 5

Educational planning methodology

The budgeted action plan is sometimes referred to as an implementation plan or operational plan. It outlines detailed activities for a specific period of the ESP, typically a medium-term period of three to six years, with information on timing, roles, responsibilities, and costs. The action plan could be a separate document from the more strategic ESP, or an integral part of it. It effectively translates a vision for learning and quality improvement into practical steps for implementation.

A robust implementation plan increases the probability of achieving ESP goals, particularly when it creates strong linkages with existing national planning and budgetary processes. It will encompass key elements of the logical framework, such as the policy objective and expected programme outcomes, and provide further concrete detail about the main activities for the programme and its annual costs. The level of detail will vary according to country contexts:

- Activity description. This serves as a reference point in developing a work plan.
- Timeframe. This shows when the activity should be carried out, and tests whether budget execution phases are aligned with available funding at given points in time.
- Input quantities. Inputs are the financial, human, technical, and material resources required for implementation. The quantities indicated are used to determine progress in execution, and whether the implementation strategies have been efficient.
- Output quantities. Outputs are the products, goods, and services that stem from the programme's interventions. As for inputs, this is critical information for periodic implementation reports that appraise progress towards set targets.
- Costs. The total cost of a programme will be the sum of activity sub-totals, each determined by unit costs and quantities. Total cost should be aligned with the overall resource envelope.
- Sources of funding. The comparison with costs will enable the identification of potential gaps and resource mobilization needs.
- Lead implementation entities. While several partners will usually be involved in the implementation of any activity, the lead holds responsibility for coordination among them, as well as the timely initiation of funding requests.
- Output indicators and targets. These will usually span several activities within the programme.

The designation of funding sources is critical, based on confirmed commitments and conservative

projections. Sources will likely include the regular national budget – using ministry of finance ceilings, local government contributions, and confirmed contributions and inputs from development partners, NGOs, and other entities.

Action plans should be drawn up with a medium-term expenditure framework and be linked to national budgetary processes, to feed into annual budget preparation and oversight. If financing gaps are identified when costing the plan, it will be necessary to decide whether to revise, postpone, or cancel lower-priority activities. The action plan development process will therefore accompany and facilitate the prioritization among activities and involve trade-offs.

Cost-benefit analysis

Specific programmes to improve learning outcomes must be costed. The logical framework provides space for detailing the projected costs of each activity. These may be straightforward lump sums with little scope for flexibility, or imply highly variable levels of investment, depending on the assumptions retained.

Cost-benefit analysis can help to determine the most feasible scope and approach for a programme.

Responsibilities and accountability should be clearly outlined. Implementation responsibilities, differentiating between the lead agency and partners, should closely match ministries' and ministry departments' usual mandates. It may be helpful to set up new structures: a joint steering committee could assign implementation responsibilities and provide policy-level oversight; a strategic monitoring team could coordinate ongoing activity execution.

Implementation capacity

The education sector's ability to efficiently implement its ESP depends on several factors, including current ministry (at both central and decentralized levels) and partner organizations' management capacities, as well as several other factors that lie beyond the central education authority's control. An analysis of ESP implementation capacities will help to highlight potential risks, obstacles or bottlenecks, by examining the following:

- Public sector management and institutions: the quality of budgetary and financial management; the efficiency of revenue mobilization; the quality of public administration and civil service management; public-sector transparency and accountability; etc.

- Education administration effectiveness: the clarity of roles and responsibilities; links between mandates and structures; communication and coordination mechanisms; crisis and disaster situation preparedness; monitoring and evaluation practices; etc.

- Individual officers' profiles: personal characteristics, including gender; competencies and skills; training and qualifications; motivation and incentives; etc.

- Principles of aid effectiveness: the extent to which external resources and implementation modalities support the development of national systems and capacities.

Depending on the result of the analysis of implementation capacity factors, it may be necessary to

rethink the ESP's objectives and ambitions, and/or to include a capacity-development programme that addresses core constraints. For example, efficiency in revenue mobilization may be a particular concern if the plan relies heavily on the government's ability to raise internal revenue.

Developing and costing an action plan - Illustrated

To ensure that children have more time and opportunities to practice reading in school, a strategic planning team must determine how their chosen programme, Teacher training in incorporating read-aloud and recreational reading time into classroom schedules, will be implemented over the next four years. They decide the best approach is through the delivery of workshops to teachers.

The team conducts a simple cost-benefit analysis to determine how many teachers to target. The following variables are selected to examine the financial implications of different options:

- Percentage of teachers trained: rather than reaching all teachers, a smaller target group could be identified based on (low) school performance.

- Catchment area (workshop size): larger catchment areas mean higher per person transport and facility costs, but lower trainer costs.

- Effectiveness rank: reaching a higher percentage of teachers, through smaller workshops, is likely to be most effective at attaining the objective.

Per unit cost estimates are then input into a spreadsheet, to determine the projected costs in relation to the projected effectiveness, for different possible approaches:

Programme scope, workshop size	# Teachers	P/U Transport	P/U Facilities	# Trainers	Effectiveness	Cost
Universal, small	10,000	2	5	200	1	90,000
Universal, large	10,000	5	10	50	2	155,000
Bottom 50%, small	5,000	2	5	200	3	55,000
Bottom 50%, large	5,000	5	10	50	4	80,000
Bottom 25%, small	2,500	2	5	200	5	37,500
Bottom 25%, large	2,500	5	10	50	6	42,500

Cost-benefit analysis of several Teacher Training Workshop approaches

Considering these cost projections in relation to the relative effectiveness of different approaches, the team decides to offer the workshop to the teachers of the lowest-scoring 50 per cent of primary schools, but on a small enough scale to enable maximum time for interaction and practical exercises.

The team can now plan how much progress towards the overall activity output should be achieved each year, setting milestones. That information is harnessed to estimate annual costs. Finally, by checking against the yearly financial projections for the sector in the logical framework, the distribution of outputs over time can be adjusted to match the funds available each year.

Policy priority 1: IMPROVE EARLY GRADE LITERACY SKILLS AMONG ALL PUPILS, PARTICULARLY THOSE FROM UNDER-ACHIEVING PRIMARY SCHOOLS										
Programmes	Activities	Lead	Outputs				Estimated costs			
			Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4
...	...									
3. Teacher training in incorporating read-aloud and recreational reading time into classroom schedules	3.1. Develop workshop methodology	Ministry Literacy Team	Done				1,000	0	0	0
	3.2. Organize workshops for 5,000 teachers	Ministry Literacy Team	0	500	1,500	3,000	0	5,500	16,500	33,000
	3.3. Sample for follow-up reflection and evaluation	Ministry Literacy Team	0	0	50	250	0	0	500	2,500
	Annual costs						1,000	5,500	17,000	35,500
...	...									

Teacher training in incorporating reading time into classroom schedules – Programme action plan

For clarity, the planning team drafts a narrative component to accompany the action plan table, explaining the activities to be accomplished, the rationale behind them, and the assumptions upon which the cost estimations are based.

Tools

CBA builder: A free resource for teaching, learning and training cost-benefit analysis

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Capacity assessment toolkit

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