Process-Documentation

A practical manual for development workers
Process-Documentation: A practical manual for development workers

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The path of a development project is often a meandering one. Chance occurrence, unforeseen setbacks, situations that impacted the project positively— all that was not part of the project plan, but is nevertheless essential to the achievements of the project, taken together, make up the story of that particular project.

To gain in learning, it is necessary that the information about a project process reaches out to others. This very important task of documenting processes often falls to the lot of outsiders to the project. Insiders, those who have lived through the project as community members or as facilitators - staff members of development organizations, i.e. those who are the best sources of information about their experiences, sometimes feel documentation is not their forte. And thus the development sector loses out on hearing about a development process from the implementers themselves.

AFPRO presents this manual as an attempt to bring out those hidden strengths of documentation that development workers have, but are often not aware of. As a step towards honing the basic skills towards process documentation, this manual was evolved through a series of workshops in Andhra Pradesh where project staff tried out many of the ideas given in these pages.

The document was then collated and some more exercises added with an aim to make available at one place the basic steps for the writer to start documenting project experiences. The examples are largely taken from experiences in natural resources management, but everyone involved in development projects can use the exercises and ideas.

D.K. Manavalan
Executive Director, AFPRO

Foreword
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Introduction: Process-Documentation

This manual is an attempt to bring together information, questions and tools that are useful for development workers to improve their documentation skills. The idea of assembling methods and exercises from process monitoring, photo monitoring, livelihood analysis and documentation techniques emerged from the insight that there is a gap between the various experiences in development processes and their transfer to others doing similar work. This insight was the result of a process of intensive interaction with more than 40 participants from 19 NGOs in the course of three learning events organized over the period October to December 2001.

Various problems came up when we discussed the problems and possibilities of documenting our experiences. Some typical doubts were:

- "Is documentation useful beyond keeping records?"
- "I don't get time for documentation."
- "Should we use a scientific language or a spoken language, as simple as possible?"
- "Is it necessary to make it as short as possible or can we also write a story like we would tell it?"
- "Shall we use English or our local language? Who assures translation if necessary?"
- "What is the use of documentation beyond fulfilling donors' requirements? We already know what is going on in the project. Anyway our target group will not directly profit from documentation, since they will not read the reports."
- "We have so much information about the project. What is important for outsiders to understand what is going on in the project?"
- "What is process documentation? Our organization produces many kinds of reports - is it not enough? Is it really my work?"
In summary, documentation is a difficult task! Not just from the point of view of tools and techniques, but more importantly, from the point of view of motivation: “Is it really necessary?”

To see its necessity and importance, we must first establish the scope of documentation for self-learning.

Quite often, documentation guidelines, formats or outlines for case studies etc. are oriented at external requirements – funding agencies or researchers, but not the implementing persons themselves. The value of documenting for self-reflection and sharing of learning is often not recognized or does not figure prominently on the agenda of development organizations. An emphasis is put on the documentation of success stories: self-criticism is often difficult, and thus avoided without seeing its potential for learning.

Along with this goes the insecurity about the techniques of documentation and the choice of relevant information.

We present this manual as an attempt to address these problems. The starting point is an understanding on processes, and why they are important in documenting experiences in development.

Why are processes so important?
Learning from results is difficult; they are nearly impossible to repeat. Results may show the performance of the project or an NGO (and that also only in a limited way) but do not show the project’s path of development.

Development projects are about people, especially since the emergence of a participatory focus and the objective of empowerment. And people cannot be reduced to results, be it in income, resource endowment or other quantifiable assets. Only while looking at a life process can empowerment and participation be understood.

Every project is a life-process; to understand it, it needs to be described. Social, technical and ecological processes brought on in the course of a project are invaluable in terms of the learning for development workers and communities.

Yet what we often see is a secondary importance to such experiential learning, as projects and those who work in them concentrate on quantitative achievements. Results measured by quantitative indicators sometimes means that qualitative aspects, such as improved self-help capabilities, are monitored only very inadequately.
Achievements are important, but they cannot be understood as an end in itself. Rather, they can be seen in relation to a process, which perhaps embraces detours, unforeseen twists and turns and learning loops. That is why it is important to focus on processes.

Learning from processes requires observing and documenting the processes concealed by quantitative and qualitative data.

Sometimes, there is an impression that the two approaches—result-orientation and process-orientation—represent an either/or option. This, however, is not true. Result orientation and process orientation are mutually interdependent for producing effective documentation of change.

**Example**

As part of a project in watershed development, a revolving fund for goats was started for a women’s self-help group. In the documents on project activities, we can see a comparison of how many goats the women owned before the project and how many they own now. Rates of repayment are detailed, as also the income the women get from goats. The document talks of results, and since repayment rates are not so good, the impression one gets from the project document is that the idea of a revolving fund did not work out in this project.

How the idea progressed (the women are among the poorest in the village and faced a second continuous year of drought; forcing them to sell their goats without repaying the loans; in some cases, the goats were killed by wolves) is not written in the document, though it is common knowledge in the village. The outsiders do not get an idea of how the idea of a revolving fund was developed; what the women feel about the revolving fund and its usefulness. The people reading the document are left with an incomplete picture, and often draw conclusions that do not reflect the real situation.

The processes of how activities were successfully undertaken, the processes of how and why certain activities were not so successful or simply not possible; all this falls under the topic of process documentation.

Process documentation should be able to grasp a development and make it accessible to outsiders.

When we talk about process-documentation we do not want to introduce a new variety to be added to the tools and tasks of documentation in development work. What we want to emphasize is how a process orientation (looking at the path of development, at change processes) can be strengthened in existing documentation practices and how these can be improved through writing of stories, case-studies and visualization.
**For whom is documentation?**

This question asks for the addressees of process documentation. Who will benefit from the efforts? Two groups of potential beneficiaries can be found: insiders, people who work in the ‘documenting’ organization or participate in the documentation efforts, and outsiders, who are looking forward to learn from experiences, to gain a better understanding of the situation or to know more about the experience, the project or the community.

Insiders will benefit in the form of:
- Gaining in systematic knowledge about their own project
- Recapitulating and presenting the hidden and sometimes unconscious knowledge about the processes in the project to help in further strategizing and planning
- The learning derived from a writing and documentation process and the efforts and satisfaction of it
- Publicity for the NGO as a learning organization

Outsiders will gain:
- A better understanding of the project context and the livelihood of the people
- Insights in the work of the organization and challenges of a ‘down-to-earth’ level.
- Examples to help in decision making or policies
- Learning from good examples of approach, project process and results
- Knowledge of not so good examples in order to learn which aspects might be problematic and which assumptions might lead to failure and should not be replicated
- An improved capacity to enter into similar projects and awareness of the challenges ahead

It is important to be very clear about the end user of the documentation. This conscious choice of the future readers/users will determine the content, since it will be impossible to cover all aspects of the project process.

**Objective of this manual**

To give development workers ideas and tools to improve the documentation of experiences. The manual focuses on these two key questions faced by development workers:
- How to reduce the huge amount of information, not getting lost in too many irrelevant details, but also without simplifying too much and losing the life-process of a project?
- How to write the document in a readable style/language?

Through questions and exercises this manual attempts to create motivation and find a starting point for a task, which looks complicated and ‘dry’ at the beginning but once begun can be a rewarding, satisfying and even pleasant exercise.
The exercises given in this manual fall in two stages:

**Pre-production**
- The Six Helpers
- Fact, Opinion, Rumour

**Production of text**
- Story writing
  - Writing in plain english
  - Voices from the people: quotations, life-stories, case studies
- Time-lines
- Process histories
- Framework for case-study
- Writing exercise on NRM principles

**On photography**

**Wall magazines and newsletters**

**Create a process document**

The ideas and exercises are divided into the following sections for easy reference:

- Objective
- Method
- Task
- Example
- Discussion
Pre-Production
Before you start writing, it is a good idea to collect information and see what ought to be included in the write-up. Two ideas for good writing are given below: the six helpers; and how to differentiate between a fact, an opinion, and a rumour.

The Six Helpers
The six helpers are the questions what, why, who, for whom, when and how. These basic questions can help us in getting a lot of information about the subject, and help the reader to grasp the complete picture. They can also serve to check whether we have sufficient information concerning the topic.

Objective
- To help writers to collect complete information on the issue they are writing on.

Method
- On any topic or issue of your choice, answer the 5 Ws and 1H:
  - What
  - Why
  - Who
  - When
  - For whom
  - How
Example
Collecting information about a project on Joint Forest Management in Andhra Pradesh
- What is Joint Forest Management?
- When was it started?
- Why is Joint Forest Management useful?
- For whom is the report meant?
- Who all are involved in joint forest management?
- How did it develop?

Discussion
Depending on how detailed the writing is, the 5 Ws and 1 H can help in getting the complete picture. Getting details might mean asking any of these questions repeatedly in a variety of contexts. (see pages 13, 14 & 17 for examples)

Fact, Opinion, Rumour (FOR)
As writers, we often have a problem with the vast amount of information we have or get from others. Are all figures facts? Judging the validity and reliability of information collected can be made simple if we learn to categorize them into facts, opinions, or rumours. A group exercise to encourage reflection on this is given below.

Objective
- To encourage a differentiation between facts, opinions and rumours: what are facts, opinions and rumours?
- To encourage the judging of responses by informants during field visits

Method
Start by discussing the difficulties of judging information as it comes from informants. Ask participants how they judge the validity or reliability of information. Then define three ways of categorizing information, namely as a fact, opinion or rumour. Ask participants to define these words or, if your time is limited, present the following definitions:

**Fact:** A commonly agreed time and place specific truth (‘verifiable truth’)
**Opinion:** a person’s or a group’s view on a topic
**Rumour:** unsubstantiated information from an unknown source

Task
Every participant gives her/his judgement on the proposed text example:
- Raise hand for fact,
- Put Hands on the head for opinion,
- Cross arms in front for rumour.
The facilitator should note down the opinions expressed and discuss the right interpretations at the end.

**Text example: ‘Biogas’**

1. 3 million biogas plants have been constructed in India (F)
2. With biogas plants 42% of the rural energy requirements can be met (R, O)
3. The villagers are very interested in biogas plants (O)
4. All biogas plants constructed by the government are of bad quality (O/F)
5. AFPRO has given training to 4 masons in Maharashtra (F)
6. As the women are responsible for cooking they should also manage the biogas plants (O)
7. This will have a positive impact on the situation of the forest, as the requirement of firewood will be less (F/O)
8. Subsidised rates for biogas plants makes it more affordable (F), moreover, maintaining a biogas plant is child’s play (O)
9. They say, that with the decline in livestock population not enough dung is available to charge the biogas plants (R, F)
10. The World Bank is going to release big money for construction of 12 million biogas plants (R), so we will all be getting funds easily (O)

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**Text example: ‘Fisheries’**

1. Over-fishing through mechanized trawlers is endangering the livelihoods of traditional fisher folk (F)
2. The fish catch has declined by 53% (R, O)
3. The fisher folk are very interested in salt marketing (O)
4. The artificial reefs launched by the government are of no use (O/F)
5. The ban of shark fishing will affect the fisher-folk negatively (F)
6. The fisher-women are more and more responsible for earning the family income (O)
7. The fishermen benefit greatly from the information on Potential Fishing Zones (PFZs) (F/O)
8. They say, that due to the decline in fish population the only possibility is migration to Chennai (R, F)
9. Mechanised trawlers will exhaust the entire fish pool if not stopped in time (O)
Text example: ‘Forestry’
1. An NGO in Cuddapah is carrying out a JFM project (F)
2. 15 rock fill dams have been constructed and 500 hectares of forest lands enclosed (F)
3. All the rock fill dams constructed by the government are of bad quality (O/F)
4. The forest protection committees are working well (O)
5. This year there is a drought condition as the monsoon was not abundant (F)
6. Due to this, 90% of the farmers will have no harvest (O/R)
7. This will have a negative impact on the situation of the forest, as the availability of fodder is very less (F)
8. Unprotected grazing has a very bad effect on forests (O)

Discussion
- When writing: distinguish openly when writing an opinion, a rumour or a fact
- Some words can give hints for opinions or rumours. These could be:
  - Value statements: good, bad, all, never, etc.
  - Personal statements: I think, I feel, they say, it is said, we believe
  - Conditional statements: it should, it might, it could
- Figures are not always facts!
- Often, there is simply not enough information to judge. Get additional information to know if an information that you hear is really a fact. Also, write in more detailed way, so that readers are able to know if the information is a fact or simply your opinion

Production of Text
Story writing
The experiences of development workers at the grass-root level are most valuable. However, incidents in a particular project-village, happenings during the implementation or stories told by the local people often get lost or forgotten, because they do not find space in the usual report formats.

Language and Writing
Writing in a language that is not our mother tongue is sometimes not easy. We feel insecure about the grammar, there might be errors and we may not be able to say everything the way we want to say it. This does not matter. If we make the choice to write in English we shouldn’t bother too much about the grammatical mistakes and not try to use too many scientific words and jargons. The production of text is much easier if we can tell stories, give examples using a simple language.

But English is not compulsory. Documentation can also be done in your mother tongue. Processes, events and examples might be much easier to write down in the local language. If necessary, these examples could be translated afterwards.
It can be a barrier if we try to be perfect in the first attempt. The crucial step is to start with the production of text and try to write down what we have in mind. Improvement and corrections can come afterwards.

**Story writing: An Exercise**

**Objective**
- Realize that every participant is a writer
- Share the experiences that have been accumulated during the project-work with the other participants for cross learning

**Task**
1. Write down a funny or shocking experience; a real-life incident related to the project in a narrative or story form.
2. Read the stories in front of the others in your community, group, workplace or training.

You are free to decide on the length, form, style etc.

Here some considerations on writing in English are added. For those writers who want to write in English, some myths of school writing are clarified. The following should however not be read as a strict guideline, or a barrier for writing, but rather as information for the editing process.

**Writing in plain English**

Most of the official documents we come across are written in ‘officialese’ – characterized by an abundance of unnecessary words and passive voice. The actual meaning of the document is hidden behind this textual foliage, with the result that often official documents are:
- Long and tedious to go through
- Unfriendly
- And often uncommunicative as well.

For these reasons, both reading and writing reports is considered a tedious job. What we require is writing in plain language, be it English or any other language. Plain language is accurate, clear, is faster to read and to write, and uses the right tone.

**Some rules**
1. Keep the reader in mind to set the tone and use of the document. Talk to your reader, and use ‘I’ or ‘we’.
2. Keep your sentences short. Be brief. Long sentences like this one can be used alternately with short sentences like the last one. Cut out useless words. E.g. “I am pleased to invite you in” (Long) “Come in” (Short)

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While writing.....

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1 Adapted from *How to Write Reports in plain English*, Published by Books For Change
3. Active and passives: An active voice is often easier to read than a passive voice.
   E.g. “This work will be carried out by the community.” (Passive)
   “The community will carry out this work.” (Active)

Good uses of passives
- To make something sound less hostile:
  E.g. “The report has not been submitted” (Active)
  sounds softer than “You have not submitted the report” (Passive)
- To avoid taking blame:
  E.g. “This mistake was made” (Passive)
  “We made this mistake” (Active)

4. Sound positive.
   E.g. “If you do not pay the bill, we will cut off the electric supply”
   (Negative)
   “Please pay your bill so that we may continue your electric supply”
   (Positive)

5. Use lists rather than crowd one sentence with too many points.

In order to write in plain English, we need to break some grammar myths:
- You can start a sentence with and, or, but, so, because or however.
- You can repeat the same word in the sentence if you cannot find a better one.

Voices from the people: Quotations, Life stories, Case studies
Quotations, life-stories and small case studies give an added value to the document. Life-stories and quotations have the possibility to ‘give the people a voice’, when quite often their opinions are overlooked. The expression of their views can often make the ground reality more visible, rather than our interpretations. After all, it is the people’s reality that counts.

Life-stories and quotations are written from the perspective of the person recounting her/his experiences. They can be incorporated into the text or presented in boxes. Illustrations can also contribute to the readability of a document.

People’s views can be collected in a formal interview or during any other interaction, depending on the focus.

**Learning within a project:**
“Before we used to stay in our houses, now we go to the towns, to organizations like this and sit on chairs and talk like big people.”
Rama Lakshmi, Kottharupalepalem, Andhra Pradesh

**Quotations**
Quotations are not as complete as life-stories, but they can expose an opinion/view of a person on a certain topic.

For quotations, try to be as exact as possible - without expressing your personal viewpoint. Write what the people are really saying and not what you as the interviewer think they want to say! Use the exact words the interviewed person has used. This might not always
be possible when translating but it is preferable to stay as close to the words as possible.

It is important to clearly distinguish between:

- Quotations and interpretations
- Scientific standards and interpretations
- Observations and reflections on processes

**Life stories**

Life stories can be collected from an individual person or from a physical place (a village-life story as recounted by the elders). Both can explain processes of change that have been effected before or within the project period. As a writer, you will have to make a choice which life-story could be interesting and relevant to your topic.

Additional information may be given in the write-up. While documenting a project, it is important to focus not only on the people that might have profited from the project but also on those who were not addressed by the project (they might have been adversely affected!). As far as possible, try to find representatives of different groups of villagers: women and men, landowners and landless, old and young, rich and poor; or of different occupations (farmers, construction workers, fisher folk etc.)

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**Basic question to record a life-story of a development project**

1. How did the villagers perceive their environment and subjectively ‘feel’ their poverty before the implementation of the programme?
2. What made the villagers get interested in and motivated to participate in the project?
3. How did they actively participate and how did they contribute to the success of the project? Which factors made them take up activities and responsibilities?
4. What benefits, if any, resulted from the programme?
5. What did not work as they had wanted?
6. What was the learning for them?
7. What are the villager’s future plans, expectations and aspirations for themselves, their children, and their village?

Source: Lobo/Knochendörfer-Lucius, World Bank: 1995 ‘The rain decided to help us’
The village’s life story as recounted by the village elders

A life story of a village can be a useful contribution to the understanding of a change process. This might be especially interesting in cases where traditional practices of sustainable resource use had existed but were abandoned at a certain point of time. It can reveal traditional knowledge and management practices to be build upon, and may contribute to an easily readable description for documentation. A village life-story should be collected as the elders can tell it. If you conduct an interview with a group of elders, try to find out different perceptions and earmark them as coming from different persons. The story should be treated as a quotation; without using your interpretations.

Basic questions to record the life story of a village

1. How did the village develop? Name? History? Mythology?
2. What were the events that created problems for the village and the villagers?
3. How did this change process happen (say degradation of the resources before the project)?
   What were the reasons? (External, Internal)
4. Who traditionally made decisions concerning management of natural resources and how were they executed?
5. What were the roles of women and men? How are the traditional roles and expectations changing?
6. What is the role of caste in community life?
7. What are the roles of religion and traditional management systems?
8. What were the problems at that time?
9. How will the village develop in the future? (resources, institutions, social system/community, migration, politics, land use and management practices, community values etc.)

How do the people view themselves in the project process?

People who are actively involved in a project necessarily have an opinion about it. In order to give them a voice in the documentation process, quotations can be an appropriate means. Here, it is necessary to be extremely careful not to write what we think the people want to say (our interpretation) but use a quotation. Short interviews can be made to assess the project jointly. The following questions can give a hint which questions can be useful to ask.
People's views on impact of the project - A questionnaire for interviews

1. Are you satisfied with your involvement in the programme?
   - Why? / Why are you a member of the group?
   - Enjoying the meeting?
   - What is usually going on / discussed during and after the meeting?

2. What is the most important change in your life since the project activities have started?
   - More income, higher crop productivity?
   - Reduced migration?
   - Strengthening community?
   - More food, fuel, fodder?

3. How do you personally / how does your family and community benefit from your involvement?
   - Increased income?
   - How and by whom is the money spent?

4. What does your family think of your involvement (siblings, husband/wife, in-laws, children)?
   - Proud, jealous, glad, indifferent?
   - Do they support you in a way?

5. Would you recommend this involvement / membership (programme activity) to other women/men?
   - To whom? - Why, why not?

6. What have you learned (gained knowledge?)
   - In what way is it useful for you, your family, the community?

7. Has everything come true / been realized that was promised or planned in the beginning?
   - What could be improved?
   - How was the coaching, support by the NGO?

8. What will be the situation in the future, say in 5 - 10 years?
   - Your personal situation?
   - How will be the situation for your children? Will they stay or will they migrate to other villages, towns?
   - What do you wish for them?

Source: Verena Albertin (NADEL/Sadguru Foundation)

Time lines
A time line is a visual aid to select important elements of the project process and give an overview on the whole process. That might be an activity or an entire project period.

It starts with the first idea of the project and covers the whole project cycle. If the focus is on the entire project period different elements will figure on the time-line. If the focus is on a single activity or an event, the progress of that element will be given.
Guiding questions for preparing a timeline:
- How to document the project process as a whole?
- How to visualize the project process?
- Which are the important issues to be documented?
- What are the major events worth documenting?

**Example**

**Artificial Reef Launching in Coastal Andhra Pradesh**

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<tr>
<td>Ban on Seed catch</td>
<td>Arrangements for launching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Good opportunity for additional fishing time - 2 or 3 months.
- Resource regeneration.
- Check on mechanized trawlers.

December 1994-March 1996
Series of failure meetings
- People expressed doubts about the technology.
- Doubts about the weight-bearing and transportation during launching of artificial reefs.
- Fear of problems from other villagers.
- Unscientific launching due to haste shown by villagers.

**Discussion**

**Advantages**
- The time-line is a good starting exercise.
- It facilitates a perspective on the whole project process.
- It can help focus the important steps in the project and select the examples for documentation.
- A choice should be made as to which aspects of the project should be focused on, in order not to overcharge the time-line.
- Several time-lines could be used for different processes in the project.

**Dangers**
- A time-line is a very limited tool to express a complex process, it gets easily overcharged by too many elements.
Another inconvenience is the linear representation, where turns, barriers and limitations are not obvious.

**Process-Histories**
By reconstructing process histories we want to make the progress of a project transparent and learn from the way we approached problems in the past. Then we were confronted with uncertainty and less knowledge than we have now. Expectations at the start of the project may have been different to the expectations we have now. During the course of the project changes of expectations have occurred. We have learned during the project. When we describe our past expectations and decisions we might see errors and unrealistic expectations. Instead of seeing these as obstacles we can try to look at them as a creative potential and try to reconstruct them in a process history.

When looking back at the selected processes undergone, we can ask ourselves some questions.

---

**Guiding Questions: Expectations, Process history, Decision making**
- What decisions did we take at that time?
- Which decisions proved to be of major importance in retrospect?
- Why did they prove important?
- What information did we base the decisions on?
- What did we expect to happen at that time?
- What was the actual outcome?
- What was the level of acceptance of the decisions at that time?
- Where did we make mistakes and end up in dead-end situations?
- What detours were necessary? What did we learn from that?
- What were decisions that faced much resistance?
- What were decisions that were not popular but turned out positively?
- What did we forget? What did we not want to acknowledge, and what did we put out of our minds?
- When were we blocked, with none of us knowing what to do next?
- What and who helped break down these blocks?
- How much weight did we attach to formal decisions? Where did self-steering take place?
- Why did something take longer than expected?
- Why did some actors remain committed and others drop out?
- What alliances were formed between the actors, and how did they affect the decisions?
- What do we see differently now than then?
- What can we do to ensure that the lessons from the past are not forgotten?

Source: GTZ, NARMS Process Monitoring. Work document for project staff T-07-3

Not all these guiding questions have to be answered for a process history; they should only facilitate reflection on what might be interesting.
One important point must be repeated here. The examples should not only be positive, it is also important to describe negative happenings and conflicts.

Process histories can be combined and visualized with a time line.

**Note on Self-criticism**

Why should we document negative examples, errors and failures?

Most of the time it is very difficult to admit that we have made a mistake or that an expectations did not turn out as we would have liked or imagined. This might not necessarily be our own fault; it could be a structural or seasonal event or an unforeseeable shock. Or it might be that we did not foresee something or forgot to do it ...that happens!

We fear that others could use our weaknesses against us, if they were to know them. And of course we want to appear as perfect as possible.

So we try our best to present our organizations and ourselves well and show good examples only.

But we should also recognize that:
- Errors occur in every project. A report with only positive examples make the reader suspicious (hidden agenda?)
- Being able to show own mistakes implies having already learnt from them
- Hiding negative examples show a lack of self-confidence
- Learning from mistakes is often more effective than learning from best practices.

**Framework for case study**

Before starting to write a case study, it might be useful to assemble the different contents, thoughts or examples in a mind-map (see drawing on page 19) and then structure them in a logical sequence. That does not only help to find a starting point but also prevents getting lost during the writing process.

Keeping regular records of events and processes in a journal or a field diary can prove to be a very useful habit. We have the rough data and ideas ready at hand when we sit down to write. Often, indicative notes and figures jog our memory and can be added in a story or process history to make it more comprehensive or simply more interesting!
A basic framework for designing a case study could be based on the following questions:

(O one example is taken up and each step elaborated with the help of the same example)

1. What is the issue/theme to be investigated?
E.g. “Launching Artificial Reefs to increase the fish catch for a traditional fishing community in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, problems and prospects”

Note: The title of the case study may be shorter. A catchy title (in this example, something like “Launching resource regeneration for fisher folk in coastal Andhra” is sometimes effective in grabbing the attention of the reader, but the case writer should focus on the appropriateness of a title more than attractiveness. It is more effective to focus on the title after the case writing is over, so that we have the whole picture in front of us.

2. Why are you investigating it? (Need for the study, a macro perspective or view of the larger reality, regional viewpoint)
   - The threats to livelihoods of traditional fisher folk because of declining catches
   - Threats to the coastal ecosystem
   - Effect of mechanized trawlers on fishing in coastal Andhra
   - Need for artificial reefs, their uses, previous experiences

3. Who are the people from whom you will collect data?
   - Villagers in 2 coastal villages
   - Development workers from around the area
   - People engaged in mechanized trawling in the area
   - Scientists and village-level innovators
   - Government officials

4. Where is the study located?
   Villages Krishnapuram and Bangaramapalam district Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

5. Operational definitions for the terms used in the study - terms that need explanation, including scientific terms, terms used locally or by organizations
   What do these terms mean for the purpose of our study:
   - Marine fishing
   - Traditional fishing
   - Mechanized trawling
6. How are you going to go about conducting the study?
A framework for analysis and methodology
- Indicators to show the status of fish catches in coastal Andhra (Statistics from fishing departments, life-stories related by villagers)
- Indicators to show the effect of mechanized trawling on coastal fishing resources (interviews with villagers and those involved in mechanized trawling, statistics on fish catch, etc.)
- Experiences with artificial reefs in other parts of the country, scientific innovations and villagers’ innovations

7. Findings

8. How does the study illustrate (prove or disprove) the main assumptions?

9. The case-writer’s analysis of the main findings and opinions, future prospects, etc.

However, the contents of your case study cannot be determined by any format. Rather the content should influence the way of writing. With some practice, we can learn to evolve our own sequencing and logical flow.

Writing exercise on NRM principles
In what way does your project address the guiding principles of NRM?

Objective
- Through writing on these principles a reflection and learning process can be encouraged, which is useful in further strategic planning.
- The experiences in NRM can be shared with organizations working in a similar field.

Task
- Produce a small document incorporating photos, boxes and quotations on NRM guiding principles.
- The questions given in the box on the facing page are only examples. Many other questions can be useful or appropriate in a varying project context.

On photography
Photo observation is a part of the systematic collection of data for documentation. It helps to visualize the project components and helps the reader in understanding the text.

Using photographs it is possible to:
- Show the original situation in a project
- Record important changes or events (project memory)
- Support statements in reports (illustrations)
NRM guiding principles

Livelihoods: How does the project understand and promote the livelihoods of the rural populations with whom they work? How does the project address vulnerable sections? (Social, cultural, psychological, economic, ecological factors)

Equity: How does the project address social injustices and access and control over resources, human rights (Poorest of the poor, Dalits, etc.)?

Gender: How does the project address women’s issues and male-female relationships (equal participation in planning and decision making, access and control over resources, practical/strategic gender needs)?

Autonomy: How does the project promote increased self-reliance and independence (local political institutions, food security...)?

Economic viability: Are the economic alternatives that the project encourages really beneficial to the people, who undertake them, once the project withdraws?

Ecological sustainability: How does the project promote the regeneration or slow down the depletion of resources? Are the economic activities, those that promote secure livelihoods, compatible with the ecological environment in the long run?

(Source: Inspired by SDC NRM-A concept paper, 1999)

- Put learning processes in motion (teaching aids)
- Plan new activities

Photographs of physical and natural features can help explain the issues that the project is confronted with (for e.g. trawlers fishing within zone, traditional and modern crafts, cyclone shelter, shrimp-farm development...)

Taken over a time interval from the same viewpoint, photographs can document changes in land use over a long period of time. It is crucial to choose the same viewpoint and have similar light-conditions and season (for e.g. shrimp-farm development, shelter belt plantations). Photos to document seasonal differences in land use can be taken in the same way.

Photographs representing people’s activities based on project interventions (for instance, fish marketing, salt marketing, pump repairing, use of fish drying racks, buffalo rearing etc.) can help in explaining the related project processes (such as planning, approach, results, impact, difficulties etc.)

Kangsa-ka-Bagdia, Rajasthan in 2000
Pictures of people and groups may support the explanation of SHG, VSS, etc. formation and functioning; photographs representing individuals can help to explain their livelihood system or a special role in the project process.

Photography of events can help in recording unrepeatable situations (for e.g. Artificial reef launching).

One thing to mark here is that meetings, project visitors, and events not directly related to the project are not so important for project documentation.

The photographer should work with a checklist of the photos he/she would like to take. He/she should choose photos that have the potential of storing data for later interpretation or support telling an interesting story. Date, place, activities, names should be written on the back of each photograph in order to recognize them later, along with the name of the photographer.

**Photography to document change processes in a project**
- In what area is the project? (i.e. typical view of project area)
- In what sectors/activities is the project working?
- What was the initial situation in the sectors and activity areas concerned? (if old photos are already available)
- What were the most important external influences and change processes?
- What traditional production and processing techniques or cultural peculiarities exist in the project area?

(Source: SDC, Photography in project work,1992.)

**What is worth a photo?**
- Landscapes, natural features, land use
- Resources
- Changes in land use
- Technical processes
- Pattern of settlements
- Project activities
- Social processes (i.e. decision mechanisms, participation during a village meeting)
- Dynamic situations (i.e. conflict situations)
- Close-ups of people
• Close ups/details (i.e. pest infestation of a plant, cuts for gum tapping, oyster development in canal)
• Symbolic things (which may get meaningful with explanation).

**What is not so important**
• Visitors
• Government officials
• Other official occasions

* Photography is not only a means of documentation but also an art.
  Try to be as creative as possible!

* Always accompany photos with an explanation or a story which is related to the project!

* A good mix of photographs makes viewing interesting: close-ups of persons and activities should be combined with overviews of villages and landscapes.

**Wall Magazines and Newsletters**
Producing wallpaper or a newsletter is often one of the ways in which development workers and organizations tell others of their work. Wallpaper or a newsletter exercises our creativity and is good for practicing writing skills. A wallpaper or newsletter need not necessarily be printed - it can even be handwritten. A simple format would be:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masthead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

**Create a Process-Document**
How to bring all the information collected into order?

The following structure can only give hints which elements might be considered.

Not all proposed elements have to figure as headlines in a report.
In respect to what the NGO considers important, choices should be made. Only some structural elements (i.e. Table of Contents, Introduction, Conclusion) are common to any report.

## A proposed structure for creating a process document

### Possible Elements

- Title page
- Executive Summary
- Table of Contents
- Introduction

- Profile of the Organization (incl. changes in profile during the project)

- Presentation of Context (e.g. village, population, socio-economic context)

- Presentation of issues (e.g. poverty, water scarcity, deforestation, erosion, discrimination of women, caste discrimination...)

- Change processes affecting Livelihoods (before project and during project)

- Macro-Micro Linkages (market prices, migration, middlemen...)

- Traditional coping strategies

- Expectations (at the beginning of project)

- Time Line

- Activities

- Status of resources

- Roles of Stakeholders

- Management practices

- Conflicts

- Policies (Government rules/regulations, practices, panchayats...)

- Outcomes/Results (benefits, skills, capabilities)

- Limitations (internal and external), hurdles to overcome

- Impact

- Learning

- Visions

- Boxes:
  - Quotations (voices of the people), life stories, drawings, photos, observations, small Case-Studies, tables with explanation, events, special moments.

- Conclusion

- Annexure
We started this manual with several questions, the most challenging of which was, “How to design a tool to improve documentation of experiences in development projects that is useful without being too complicated, something that would generate interest and lead to action?”

The booklet is an attempt to answer that question from our experiences with AFPRO and other agencies (please see acknowledgements). In the course of our work and discussion with colleagues from AFPRO and outside, obstacles and working patterns in documentation became clear. These interactions were invaluable in helping us to narrow down the scope of this manual to ideas and tools that are to the point and useful.

What must be emphasized is that the contents of this booklet are to be considered as an invitation: each development worker would have something to add, substantiate (or perhaps contradict) to this manual.

We learnt a lot in the course of our work, and this booklet is an attempt to share some insights. We look forward to hearing about your experiences with this manual.

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Bidisha Fouzdar
AFPRO
Process-Documentation
A practical manual for development workers