HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Project DPro (PMD Pro) Foundation exam preparation

Course handout · Day 2 : Phase 1: project identification and definition

Independent, free preparation for the Project DPro Foundation (PMD Pro) exam: 8 days of 6 hours to master the five project phases (identification and definition, set up, planning, implementation, closure), the logframe, governance, the critical path, risks, change control and the guide's five principles. Guided readings in the free PM4NGOs guide, graded deliverables, quizzes with explanations and three original mock exams, including a full one in the official format (75 questions, 2 hours, 65%). The official exam is taken and paid for with PM4NGOs; this preparation is neither endorsed nor accredited by PM4NGOs.

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Day 2 : Phase 1: project identification and definition

Objectives

- Carry out the needs, stakeholder and problem analysis that justifies a project.
- Move from the problem tree to the objective tree, then choose a strategy through analysis of alternatives.
- Explain what a project proposal must contain to pass the decision gate.

Why this phase is decisive

A well-executed but badly designed project is still a failure: it solves the wrong problem, in the wrong place, for the wrong people. The identification and definition phase answers four questions: **what is the real need? who is concerned? what are its causes? which strategy is most likely to succeed?**

It ends with a decision: whether or not to invest in a project, based on a reasoned proposal. In our sector, this proposal often takes the form of a concept note and then a full proposal to the donor.

Collect data and analyse needs

Data combine **secondary sources** (existing reports, cluster assessments, national statistics) and **primary sources** (interviews, focus groups, surveys, observation). The right reflex: start with secondary data so as not to exhaust communities with repeated surveys.

The analysis distinguishes **needs** (the gap between the current situation and a desirable one), existing **capacities** and specific **vulnerabilities** (women, children, people with disabilities, minorities). Data should be disaggregated by sex, age and disability whenever possible.

Stakeholder analysis

A stakeholder is any person or organisation that influences the project or is affected by it. They are identified, then their **interest**, **influence**, expectations and attitude (supportive, neutral, opposed) are analysed.

The influence / interest matrix guides engagement: **manage closely** (high influence and interest), **keep satisfied** (high influence, low interest), **keep informed** (high interest, low influence), **monitor** (both low). Affected communities often have little formal power but maximum interest: participation and accountability require that they be genuinely involved.

Problem tree and objective tree

The **problem tree** places the core problem at the trunk, its **causes** at the roots and its **effects** in the branches. Example: core problem "high prevalence of diarrhoeal disease among

children under 5"; causes: unsafe water, lack of latrines, hygiene practices; effects: malnutrition, school absenteeism, health expenses.

The **objective tree** turns each negative situation into a desired positive one: causes become means, the core problem becomes the objective, effects become ends. "Cause → effect" links become "means → end" links.

Exam trap: the objective tree does not yet say what the project will do. The analysis of alternatives chooses the branches to keep.

Analysis of alternatives and choice of strategy

Several possible strategies are compared (for example: boreholes, spring rehabilitation, household water treatment) using explicit criteria: needs covered, cost, technical feasibility, sustainability, risks, the organisation's capacities, donor priorities, presence of other actors, communities' views.

A weighted scoring matrix makes the choice transparent. The strategy chosen defines the project's **scope**: what will be done and, just as important, what will not.

The proposal and the decision gate

The proposal brings together: justification and context analysis, theory of change and logical framework, target groups, main activities, estimated budget, risks and assumptions, monitoring and evaluation approach, sustainability. It must be consistent: every activity contributes to a result, every cost matches an activity.

The end-of-phase decision gate asks: is the need demonstrated? is the strategy the best option? does the organisation have the capacity? is funding likely? If the answer is no, the proposal is improved or the project is dropped.

Exercise: from problem tree to objective tree

Situation. In Koro, an assessment shows that 38% of children under 5 had diarrhoea last month. Causes found: only 4 functioning water points for 9,000 inhabitants; 22% of households have a latrine; handwashing with soap is rare. Effects: malnutrition, health costs, school absenteeism.

Task. 1) Write the problem tree. 2) Turn it into an objective tree. 3) Suggest three criteria to choose between a "water" strategy and a "sanitation and hygiene" strategy.

Answer. 1) Trunk: high prevalence of diarrhoea among under-5s; roots: insufficient access to safe water, low latrine coverage, risky hygiene practices; branches: malnutrition, health expenses, absenteeism. 2) Trunk: prevalence reduced; roots: increased access to safe water, increased latrine coverage, improved hygiene practices; branches: better nutritional status, lower expenses, better attendance. 3) Examples: cost per person covered, sustainability (who maintains?), presence of other actors on the same cause.

Key takeaways

- Start with secondary sources, then add primary data disaggregated by sex, age and disability.
- Influence / interest matrix: manage closely, keep satisfied, keep informed, monitor.
- Problem tree: causes below, problem in the middle, effects above; the objective tree is its positive image.
- The analysis of alternatives, with explicit criteria, sets the strategy and therefore the scope.
- The phase ends with a decision gate on the proposal.

Quiz

1. In a problem tree, "lack of latrines" is placed:
   A. At the trunk, as the core problem of the tree
   B. Outside the tree, as a project assumption
   C. In the causes, below the core problem
   D. In the effects, above the core problem

2. What is the best first data source for a needs analysis?
   A. Data from a similar project in another country
   B. A full household survey in every targeted village
   C. The priorities and figures provided by the donor
   D. Reports and assessments already available

3. A local authority has strong influence on the project but little interest in its results. The recommended engagement strategy is:
   A. Monitor it and check its attitude from time to time
   B. Keep it satisfied by informing it of what concerns it
   C. Leave it aside, since it is not a beneficiary
   D. Manage it closely by involving it in all decisions

4. When moving from the problem tree to the objective tree, "cause → effect" relationships become:
   A. "Risk → impact" relationships
   B. "Activity → budget" relationships
   C. "Means → end" relationships
   D. "Assumption → indicator" relationships

5. The objective tree is finished. What remains to be done to define what the project will do?
   A. Recruit the team, who will then choose the activities
   B. Analyse the alternatives and choose the branches to address
   C. Write the detailed budget of each objective in the tree
   D. Nothing: all the objectives of the tree become the project

6. Which of these criteria has no place in an analysis of alternatives?
   A. Sustainability of results after the project ends
   B. Presence of other actors on the same need
   C. The project manager's personal preference
   D. Cost per person helped for each strategy

7. Why should data be disaggregated by sex, age and disability?
   A. Because needs and barriers differ between groups
   B. Because averages are always wrong in the field
   C. Because donors require it in every report
   D. Because it makes focus groups unnecessary

8. At the end-of-identification decision gate, which question is essential?
   A. Is the need demonstrated and the strategy the best?
   B. Have the critical path and floats been calculated?
   C. Has the donor approved the inception report?
   D. Have the main supplier contracts been signed?

Quiz answers : 1. C · 2. B · 3. B · 4. A · 5. C · 6. C · 7. B · 8. C