

## Defining Objectives

**O**bjectives are the specific goals that a project is designed to achieve. Clearly defined objectives make it much easier to identify expected results and design project activities. Ideally, project objectives are based on a sound situation assessment and lead to relevant project activities and results, as laid out in the project cycle (tips 101).

Of course, this does not mean that all projects are designed this way, or follow a straight path from situation assessment to project evaluation. However, well-defined objectives can be a helpful transition from describing the problem (perhaps using tools such as the problem tree – tips 103) to identifying parts of a solution, including the inputs, activities, and expected results.

### Broad Purpose

Before defining specific objectives, it is important to state the project's overall goal: its broad purpose. Many things may determine the broad purpose, including the focus of the organization designing the project, the context, and the culture. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank has defined some categories for ways in which food assistance can promote food security. These may assist organizations in defining their own broad purpose:

1. **Availability:** Increasing the availability of locally appropriate food through external food assistance.
2. **Access:** Local market access to food through fair market pricing and/or improving purchasing power including job creation, income generation etc.
3. **Local food production:** Increasing local food production on a sustainable basis.
4. **Environmental investment:** Agroforestry, soil and water conservation projects etc., which protects, rehabilitates and/or restores local environments.
5. **Post-harvest technology:** Improving methods of post-harvest/shipment food handling and storage.
6. **Social context:** Reduction and/or resolution of conflict and/or building community infrastructure.
7. **Community organization** that empowers local populations.
8. **Co-operative formation that strengthens the** community's ability to enhance its own well-being.

**'SMART'** objectives are:

Specific  
Measurable  
Achievable  
Relevant  
and  
Time-bound.

### Specific Objectives

In order to accomplish the broad purpose, it is necessary to decide on some specific objectives. These objectives should refer to what is expected as a result of the project and not just focus on the activities themselves. This way, objectives help people understand **why** the activities are being done.

Many organizations use the SMART guidelines for objectives. In other words, objectives should be:

**Specific:** Clearly defining exactly what the project should accomplish helps to focus activities. Use verbs that are clearly understood. e.g. *'reduce'* or *'increase'* instead of *'change'*. If possible, include specific information on who is involved, and where. e.g. *'reduce the sale of household assets by subsistence farmers in Tana River.'*

**Measurable:** Think about how the objective might be evaluated. e.g. *'reduce the number of people who said they were hungry'* instead of just *'reduce hunger'*. It might be useful to state how much change is expected. e.g. *'reduce malnutrition by 20%'* instead of just *'reduce malnutrition'*.

**Achievable:** Is it reasonably possible to achieve the objective? e.g. *'eliminate poverty'* is a bit *ambitious*.

**Relevant:** Does the objective really reflect the priorities of the communities and organizations involved? **participation** in the planning process helps to ensure that your objectives are truly relevant.

**Time-Bound:** Objectives that have a clear time frame are more likely to be met. Think about when it might be possible to see change in the community. e.g. *'reduce the incidence of diarrhea among children under 5 by December 1999.'*

A complete objective should answer the questions *'who'* *'what'* *'when'* and *'where'*. For example:

*'Reduce the incidence of diarrhea [what] among children under 5 [who] by December 1999 [when] in Lofa county [where].'*

Clearly defined objectives lead to sensibly planned project activities (the *'how'*) and evaluation.

### Resources

For more information on the defining objectives, or other issues related to planning, monitoring, and evaluation, contact the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (crgb@foodgrainsbank.ca).