

ALASTAIR AGER

Training in Project Design and Management as a Tool for Health Development

Pressure on resources means that health projects need to demonstrate that they will be efficient in translating inputs – principally staff expertise, physical resources and finance – into targeted outputs of health gain. The principles of project management are thus increasingly being deployed in planning health delivery worldwide.

The Project Design & Management module at Queen Margaret University College has been running for over ten years and equipped over three hundred health workers with skills for the design and management of health projects. It focuses principally on issues of the effective design of projects, on the understanding that project management itself is more straightforward where the planned intervention appropriately considers local needs, resources and constraints. With a heavy emphasis on multi-disciplinary team working – given the reality of project design and implementation as a shared activity – the module is based upon a core of learning material (on such topics as project cycle management, project appraisal, budgeting and scheduling etc.) and a group project. The group project involves the development of formal project proposal of a quality submissable to an international funding body. Projects are chosen to reflect the interests of the group, and have in recent years included interventions to promote safe motherhood in Nepal, community-based rehabilitation in Sri Lanka, youth-friendly reproductive health services in Malawi, enhanced water quality in Nigeria, psychosocial support to street children in Guatemala and enhanced health management skills in NGO workers in Europe. Versions of the module have been developed to meet the needs of specific agencies, including the World Health Organisation.

The aspects of the module that participants most frequently comment upon includes the groupwork and the emphasis on the logical framework as a basis of programme planning. Giving participants responsibility to develop their own projects means that expertise from different disciplines and continents needs to be effectively pooled. Participants can gain

deep insights into the experience of others, but also learn to develop skills of dealing with potential conflicts. The logical framework forms the basis for project planning within many development agencies, but is often experienced as a complex and restrictive approach. However, the module seeks to show how the discipline of the logical framework can be used to liberate participants to develop transparent and flexible project designs. The processes of appraisal of projects – from social, technical, financial, economic, institutional and environmental perspectives – is shown to be key to the identification of risks and assumptions, the management of which forms the core of effective design.