



Recognizing land rights and enhancing capacities of smallholder farmers in Pangantucan, Bukidnon, Philippines

LEARNING MATERIAL

A Guide to Doing Operational Planning for Local Community Organizations

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Introduction

This article is about how local community organizations – such as those of farmers or indigenous peoples – prepare their operational plans. In doing operational planning, an organization maps out the specific activities, resources, and personnel needed to achieve its objectives or to complete a project, within a given timeframe of one year or less. This paper is written primarily as a working guide for leaders and facilitators of local organizations.

“ If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. ”

Why do we need to do planning?

The advantages of planning are many. Planning helps us fulfill the following:

- **Gives an organization a sense of direction.** Without plans and goals, organizations merely react to daily events without considering what will happen in the long run. For example, the solution that makes sense in the short term does not always make sense in the long term. Plans avoid this drift situation and ensure that short-range efforts will support and harmonize with future goals.
- **Focuses attention on objectives and results.** Plans keep the people who carry them out focused on the anticipated results. In addition, keeping sight of the goal also motivates members of an organization.
- **Establishes a basis for teamwork.** Different people and groups cannot effectively cooperate in joint

projects without an integrated plan. For example: plumbers, carpenters, and electricians cannot build a house without a blueprint.

- **Helps anticipate problems and cope with change.** An organizational plan can help us forecast future problems and make any necessary changes upfront to avoid them. For example, organizations can prepare and plan for the rainy season. Of course, there are surprises — such as an exceptionally strong typhoon — which can always catch us organization unguarded, but many changes are easier to forecast. Planning for these potential problems helps to minimize mistakes and reduce the “surprises” that inevitably occur.
- **Provides guidelines for decision making.** Decisions are future-oriented. If management does not have any plans for the future, they will have few guidelines for making current decisions. If an organization knows that it wants to introduce a new crop next year, then they must be mindful of the decisions they make now. Plans help both leaders and members to focus on the big picture.

Strategic and operational planning

There are two general types of planning: (1) *strategic planning* and (2) *operational planning*.

Strategic planning. In a strategic planning process, the organization clearly describes or affirms its purpose for being (vision-mission), determines what it wants to achieve over the next few years, and then decides on a set of maybe 3-5 strategic priorities (goals) to guide the organization towards achievement of the vision.

This “strategic framework” provides the general direction for the organization. It is then linked to specific objectives that can guide the development of annual work plans or operational plans. Examples of strategic plans:

- Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP)
- Barangay Development Plan
- Vision-Mission-Goals of an organization



- manpower, expertise or skills needed, and an assignment of tasks;
- timetable or schedule; and,
- organization.

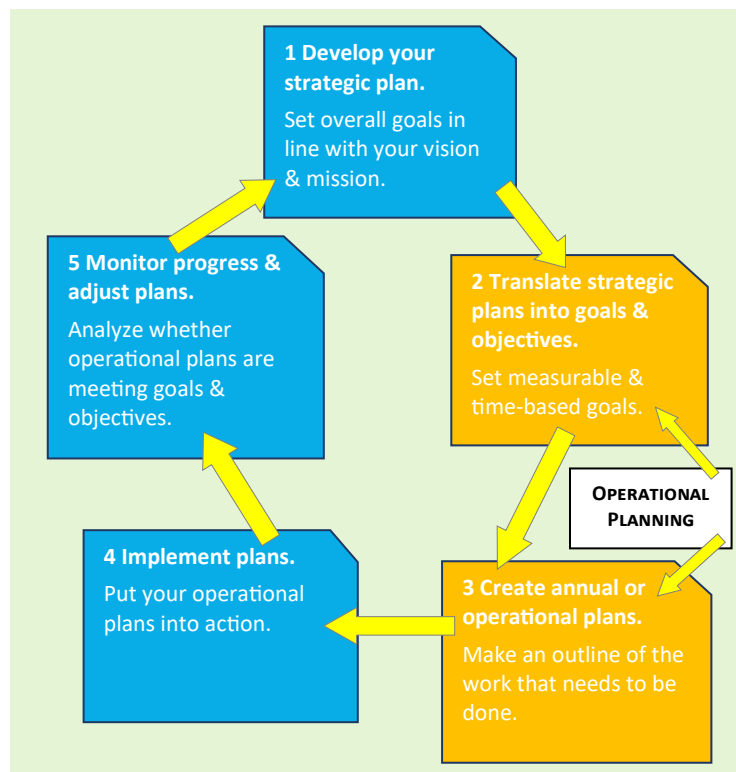
Examples of operational plans include annual organizational plan and project implementation plan.

In short, a strategic plan looks farther out into the future, maybe from three (3) years to as many as five (5) years – to determine what it is you hope to accomplish and then prioritizes these strategies. On the other hand, an operational plan looks at these strategies and develops shorter-term work plans (say, six months to annually) that include detailed action plans (who, by when, and how).

Your strategic plan and your annual work plan go hand-in-hand. The annual work plan provides the nuts and bolts of how the necessary work will get done, but without the strategic planning framework to guide you, the annual planning process will not be strategic.

The diagram below shows how operational planning fits into the overall planning cycle.

Diagram 1. The Planning Cycle



Operational planning or annual planning. On the other hand, operational planning refers to the activity for preparing a plan by an organization. Such plan seeks to define clearly the actions the organization will take to accomplish its strategic objectives and plans. In an operational planning process, the organization determines the specific activities, resources, personnel, and organization needed to carry out a strategic plan or a project, within a given timeframe. It usually covers a one-year period or less.

The operational plan answers 4 questions:

1. Where is the organization now?
2. Where do you want it to be?
3. How do you get there?
4. How do you measure progress?

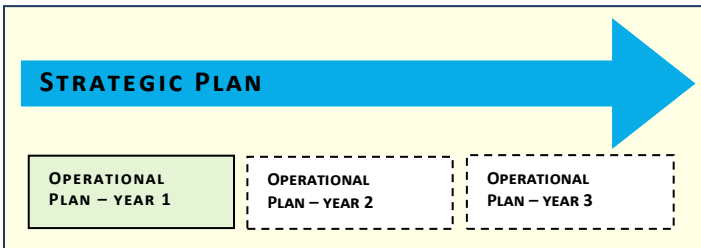
Usually, an operational plan shows:

- milestones, or what conditions need to be fulfilled for success;
- activities to undertake;
- budgets or resources needed;

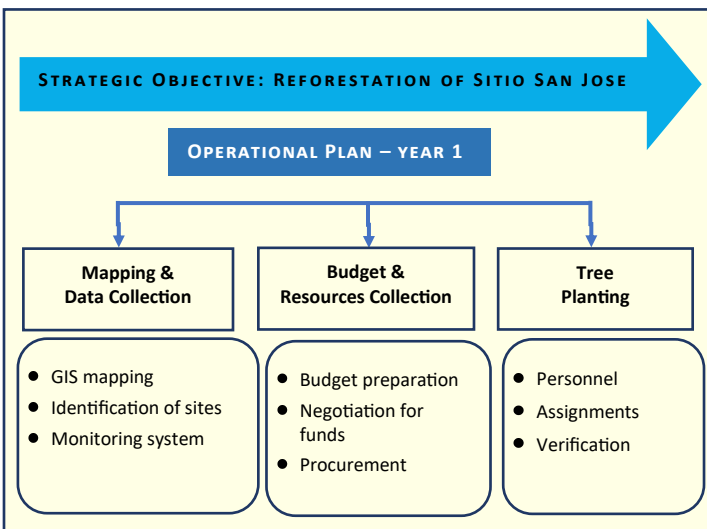
Differences between strategic and operational plans

The main difference between strategic and operational plans, therefore, are:

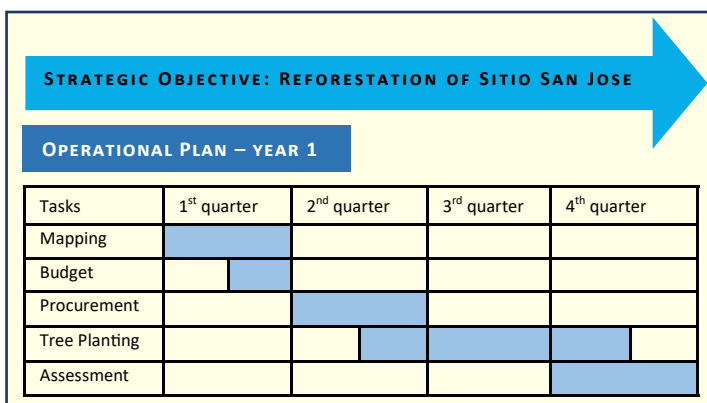
Period. Operational planning is for a shorter given period:



Details. Operational plans are more detailed in terms of the tasks that need to be done:



Scope. Operational plans can also be more focused in terms of scope over a given period – especially if you are able to divide the work into specific phases or timeframes. This will help you focus better on 1-2 key activities for each time period.



Ten Steps for doing local community planning

- Look at your vision-mission-goals.
- Assess the external and internal situation.
- Hear from stakeholders.
- Set clear goals and objectives.
- Translate the goals and objectives into specific steps or activities.
- Assess the risks and prepare for contingencies
- Write the plan.
- Act on the plan.
- Monitor progress and adjust the plan.
- Acknowledge results and celebrate achievements.

1. Look at your vision-mission goals

Before an organization can plan a course of action, it must first determine what it wants to achieve. *Objectives*, the end results desired by the organization, are derived from the organization's mission statement. The mission statement explains what the organization stands for and why it exists. The mission statement is the basis for all goals and plans outlined throughout the organization.

2. Assess the external and internal situation

The first step in any community planning process is collecting information. Gather up the necessary information, data, maps, etc.

In planning for a reforestation project, for example, volunteers might manage to collect needed data from the local government unit (LGU), the *barangay*, or even from the web. (You can obtain quick, useful maps complete with aerial photos at varying scales using an Internet-based service such as [Google Earth](#)). Oftentimes, it is useful to consult with local residents to note which sections of a landscape may experience flooding or erosion. You can also do a quick survey of your own by doing a *transect walk* across a given area, and count the number of fallen trees after a typhoon.

But do not collect data just for the sake of having numbers. Make sure there is a purpose in how you use your volunteers or do your own data collection.

Analyze the planning information you have collected. What does the information mean to you? Is there need to other people who might be able to help interpret the data at a professional level? Make a first pass at what information seems significant to you, but then ask knowledgeable people what else they see.

3. Consult with stakeholders.

Some good questions are:

- If money were no object, what would you recommend we do in our community? (A follow-up question is: what one intervention would you recommend that would not cost any money?)
- Do you see the economic situation of individual households in this community improving or declining in the next 10 years? Why?
- If we could get rid of one problem in our community, which one would you choose? Why?
- Who needs to change for our area to be better?

Consulting with stakeholders helps us generate community choices and develop alternative scenarios.

Defining alternatives is hard for most do-it-yourself groups because by now, you think you know the answers. See if you can discipline yourselves to spend some time thinking up alternative ways to reach your goal or goals. Sometimes generating alternatives means entertaining the idea that your goals themselves are suspect; this may be particularly true if you have been pointing to the same goal for 30 years and yet nothing has changed.

If possible, hold a public forum, discussion, or open house where you ask the community at large to comment on each alternative. Your aim should be a list of pros and cons for each alternative.

Discuss and debate, but at some point, choose your direction. If you genuinely can combine two or more desirable alternatives into one, do so.

However, do not force yourself to combine contradictory ideas together just to make everyone happy. This may make you more comfortable in the

short run, but it will make the plan much less likely to be implementable. At this stage of choosing an alternative, you may alienate some people. But be nice to all people.

4. Set clear goals and objectives.

Determine the general goals first before getting bogged down in the details. State the goal in the first language that comes to mind, so you can play with the ideas and see if you want to rally behind that goal. Do not allow outsiders or consultants to set your goals for your organization.

To illustrate this, let us try an experiment. Say, your goals for the next year are:

- You will not enter public forest lands.
- You will save P5,000 more than you did this year.
- All members will stop drinking alcohol.

Did that work? Are you inspired? Are these now your goals for real? Unlikely!

These sample goals might be based on outside regulations because DENR prohibits people from entering certain forestlands. Studies say that families should save more money, and spend, and drink less alcohol. And yet, these are not goals that you, the decision-maker, brought forth, and therefore they are not goals that you feel strongly about pursuing.

Thus, your organizational goals should be defined by its members. No matter how elegant a plan is, it will not work unless these are genuinely your goals. Your goals and objectives should be relevant and inspiring to you.

Moreover, goals and objectives **should be:**

Specific (Malinaw at Tiyak): For example, it is difficult to know what someone should be doing if they are to pursue the goal of "work harder." It's easier to recognize "Plant trees."

Measurable (Masusukat): It is difficult to know what the scope of "Planting trees" really is. It is easier to appreciate that effort if the goal is "Plant 6,000 trees in Sitio San Jose."

Acceptable (Katanggap-tanggap): If a community will take responsibility for the pursuit of a goal, that goal should be acceptable to them. For example, people will not follow the order of someone telling them to plant trees, when they have other work to do. However, if they are involved in setting the goal, they will adjust other work schedules, or else modify the goal, they will more likely to accept the goal as well.

Realistic (Makatwiran): Even if people do accept responsibility to pursue a goal that is specific and measurable, the goal will not be useful to them if, for example, the goal is to "Plant 6,000 trees in Sitio San Jose in one day."

Timeframe (May takdang-oras): Our goals may be more realistic if we commit to a goal to "Plant 3,000 trees in Sitio San Jose in one month." This timeframe may mean that people plant a total of 200 trees per day over a 30-day period. The timeframe must be achievable.

Rewarding (May pakinabang): People will be motivated to plant trees if there are early incentives (meals, allowances) or they see long-term benefits (protection against soil erosion, support for livelihoods). Rewards are not just material things; rewards can also come in other forms such as recognition, increased camaraderie, and stronger community spirit.

5. Translate the goals and objectives into a "plan" that outlines specific steps or activities

The actual planning activity might take one day or a series of sessions spread over a few days. The resulting plan itself should specify what should be done, by whom, where, when, and how. Here are some of the steps and tips for conducting this planning activity:

5.1 Review each objective.

Objectives are the specific activities that must be completed to achieve goals. Plans shape the activities needed to reach those goals. You must examine plans initially and continue to do so, as plans are changed and new goals are developed.

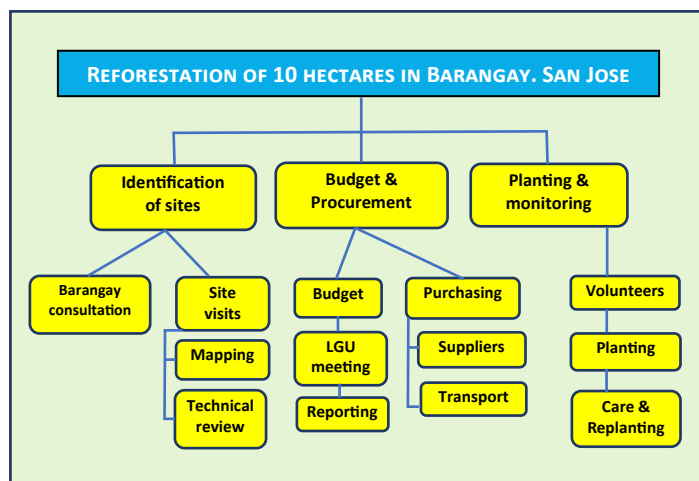
5.2 Determine the work activities necessary to accomplish each objective.

Although this task may seem overwhelming to some people, it does not need to be. Simply list and analyze all the tasks that need to be accomplished in order to reach organizational goals.

Some key questions to ask are:

- What are the key activities needed to accomplish the objective?
- Are there existing opportunities or barriers to accomplishing the objective?
- What are the resources, workforce, skills, and capacities required to undertake the activities and tasks?

As you analyze each objective, you will come up with a list of activities. Continue to dissect each of these activities into workable tasks and sub-tasks. For example:



Assess your options. For instance, if you need seedlings for a reforestation project, you may choose to purchase these from commercial nurseries, or you may opt to grow the seedlings yourself by setting up your own nursery. Each choice will entail a different set of activities and plans.

Moreover, define short-term goals – quarterly goals are common (every 3 months) – that support the larger strategic plan.

5.3 Classify and group the necessary work activities into manageable units.

Think through the plan implementation and whether it should be divided into work units or implementation phases. This will help to organize the work better, making it more systematic and efficient.

Oftentimes when organizations do their planning, they just stop after reciting a list of activities to do -- DO NOT let this happen.

Insist on making an estimate of how much implementing the plan will cost, or what policies may have to be changed so that so you can implement the organization's plans, what new groups will have to be created to implement the plan, and how you can implement the plan step-by-step.

You can group activities based on different models, such as:

- Function and needed skills;
- Geographic area;
- Phases of implementation; or,
- Others: product and customer.

5.4 Assign activities and delegate authority.

If the plan is not clear about who is to take the lead in each component of the plan, and worse yet, if that department or agency disagrees with the plan, it is unlikely that the plan will ever change circumstances.

Managers assign the defined work activities to specific individuals. Also, they give each individual the authority (right) to carry out the assigned tasks.

5.5 Prepare a timetable.

5.6 Design a hierarchy of relationships.

A manager should determine the vertical (decision-making) and horizontal (coordinating) relationships of the organization as a whole. Next,

using the organizational chart, a manager should diagram the relationships.

6. Assess the risks and prepare a plan for contingencies.

Before finalizing the plan, assess the risks to whatever you are planning to do or to achieve. Ask yourself: Are there any potential events or factors that might cause your plans to fail? What will you do if your working assumptions turn out differently from what you had expected? Make a list of all potential events or factors that could affect your plan, then brainstorm on each one for possible solutions.

Keep in mind that events beyond your control may cause even the most carefully prepared plans to fail. Unexpected problems and events frequently occur. These may include, for instance, unexpectedly strong typhoons or flooding, sudden shifts in public policy, or changes in local political leadership.

Or else our plans may depend too much on functioning machines like a jeepney, a threshing machine or a water pump, but do not prepare enough for contingencies – such as when the machine breaks down, or when it needs repair.

When unexpected events do happen, organizations may need to shift or adjust their plans. Anticipating changes during the planning process is best in case things do not go as expected. Organizations can then develop alternatives to the existing plan and ready them for use when and if circumstances make these alternatives appropriate.

Contingency planning involves identifying alternative courses of action that can be implemented if and when the original plan proves inadequate because of changing circumstances. It also involves addressing the risk factors, in order to prevent disasters or emergencies from occurring. These may include, for example, instituting safety measures, health protocols, conducting regular maintenance check-ups, or adjusting schedules to fit in with potential weather disturbances.

7. Write the plan.

A plan document does not need to be elegant or very-well written. This has no correlation with the degree to which a plan will be helpful or implemented. Rather, a plan should be well thought-out, easily understood, and accessible. If the plan is able to identify milestones, then it will help people to monitor the progress of implementation.

The easiest way to present a plan would be in the form of a *calendar of activities* – identifying *key activities*, the *dates* when they should start or be completed, and the *assigned persons* responsible for each task.

If you are able to write a full plan, start it with the description and analysis that led you to these conclusions, a description of the community planning process you followed and the people who were involved, the alternatives you considered, and why you chose the one you did.



8. Implement the plan.

It is time to put plans into action. Activities carried out on a day-to-day, or week-to-week basis should help reach the established goals, which in turn supports the overall strategic plan.

9. Monitor progress and adjust plans.

Even here, the planning process is not finished. You need to monitor how the plan is being implemented, updating it periodically, and continuously attempting to

advance the plan. Included in the plan are periods of reflection and adjustment. For a one-year plan, for example, you might want to conduct a review at the end of each quarter (every 3 months) or the short-term goal period, to examine whether or not you have hit the benchmarks established.

Depending on the outcome of those reviews, your organization may wish to adjust parts of its operational plans.

10. Acknowledge results and celebrate achievements.

It is easy for planners to become tired of the planning process. One reason for this problem is that the emphasis is placed on achieving the results. Once the desired results are achieved, new objectives are quickly established. The process can seem like having to solve one problem after another, with no real end in sight. Yet when one really thinks about it, it is a major accomplishment to carefully analyze a situation, involve others in a plan to do something about it, work together to carry out the plan, and actually see some results. So this is important -- *celebrate your accomplishments!* □

Selected references:

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This knowledge product is published by ANGOC and XSF, with support from the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) as facilitated by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). This publication is produced under the Secure Access to Land and Resources (SALaR) Project, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of GLTN, UN-Habitat, and BMZ.

Citation:

Quizon, A. (2021). *A Guide to Doing Operational Planning for Local Community Organizations*. ANGOC, XSF and GLTN. [Learning material prepared for the project Recognizing land rights and enhancing capacities of Smallholder Farmers in Pangantucan, Bukidnon Philippines]. The Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), Xavier Science Foundation, Inc. (XSF) and Global Land Tool Network (GLTN).

Concerns over food insecurity in developing countries are reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030. Given that land plays an important role in the livelihoods of most people in developing countries, food security and poverty reduction cannot be achieved unless issues of access to land, security of tenure, and the capacity to use land productively and in a sustainable manner are addressed.

Thus, the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) is implementing "Secure Access to Land and Resources (SALaR)" through the support of Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), with the overall goal of improving land and natural resources tenure security of rural smallholder farmers in Uganda, the Philippines, and Laos.

In the Philippines, while a number of land laws are being implemented, several gaps need to be addressed to improve the situation of their intended beneficiaries. Hence, ***Recognizing land rights and enhancing capacities of Smallholder Farmers in Pangantucan, Bukidnon, Philippines*** aims to contribute to the goal of SALaR. This project is implemented by the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) in partnership with Xavier Science Foundation, Inc. (XSF), with technical and financial support from Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and Germany's Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).



The Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) is a regional coalition of national and regional CSOs in Asia actively engaged in promoting food sovereignty, land rights and agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture, participatory governance, and rural development.



The Xavier Science Foundation, Inc. (XSF) is a legal, non-stock, non-profit, non-government organization advocating programs and projects that will alleviate poverty and promote social empowerment. XSF serves as a conduit of funds to support development projects, innovative programs, fora, and dialogues.



The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) is working towards a better urban future. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.



The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) is an alliance of global, regional, and national partners contributing to poverty alleviation through land reform, improved land management, and security of tenure particularly through the development and dissemination of pro-poor and gender sensitive tools.



The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is the primary State development body in Germany. BMZ's governing principle is the protection of human rights, which includes the right to live in peace and freedom, and to help address the poverty issues in the world.

For more information about this project:

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