REFLECTION WORKSHOP HANDBOOK

# Purpose – WHY have a Reflection Session

A reflections workshop is a tool of capturing the learning during the project’s lifetime to extract important learning points which are to be put into practice going forward. The objective is:

* Look deeper than targets and achievements and look at ***how*** it happened and ***why*** a particular strategy or implementation idea worked better than expected.
* Analyze experiences so far and identify successes in project management that are to be shared with others
* Identify weaker project activities and take countermeasures to strengthen them.

In short, a stitch in time saves nine, and a day of reflection saves months of hardship later.

# WHEN to have Reflection Session?

Reflection sessions can be held as frequently as necessary and feasible for the project.

**Thumb Rule: When**

Best time to have a project reflection session is **after Project results** (monthly, quarterly, yearly, mid-term etc) have been captured and **before implementation planning** for next phase of project activities. In case of project-end, reflection session can assist in designing proposals for next phase of your project

# WHO should be in a Reflection Session?

Ideally, everyone involved in implementation of your project, from donors to beneficiaries and community stakeholders should practice reflection. However, the participation depends on resource and people available. Given below is a prioritized list of who should be involved:

* 1st: M&E personnel, Project Manager, PNGO’s implementation staff (one), PNGO manager, Communication or KM personnel (if any), external evaluator from CARE BD or other (if any)
* 2nd: All above, Project frontline staff (interact directly with beneficiaries), important stakeholders (community leader, one group leader etc), market or governance actors who directly worked with beneficiaries
* 3rd: All above, external stakeholders (Local governance representative, DAE or other govt. official who assisted project execution), market actors (if relevant)

# Basic Reflection Session (After Action Review)

This is best for monthly reflection within 2-3 team members for quick informal discussion.

**Thumb Rule: Basic Reflection Question**

1. What worked?
2. What did not work?
3. How would we do things differently?

**Thumb Rule: Start with Project Goal**

Project Goal should be written for all to see and all reflection discussion *must* build towards the Project Goal

## Actions related to 3 questions

Reflections are incomplete and ineffective without action:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Question | Detail | Action |
| What Worked? | Which project intervention/activity worked exceptionally well?  Why was it successful? What was unique?  How did it contribute to Project Goal? | Share evidence of success (M&E)  Share what is unique about your implementation with others [Donors, CARE-B, etc] as “best practice”  (Communication /KM) |
| What did not work? | Which project intervention/activity did not work as planned or could be done better? Why did it not work? | Share challenges and lessons of project intervention with suggested corrective measures with project superiors |
| What would do differently? | What should we change about the intervention/activity to better achieve project goal? | Share corrective or improvement measures with project superiors and CARE-B |

# Advanced Reflection Session (Project design and planning)

This is best for major project reporting events (Eg: Annual Report, Mid-term Review, Project-end evaluation)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Session | Question | Use |
| Project Success | Successful interventions: Evidence of success, success factors, uniqueness | Best practices extracted for communication and replication |
| Project Challenges | Underperforming interventions/ activities, problem analysis | Implementation challenges identified and analyzed for solution |
| Future Needs | Suggested interventions for enhancing project outcome in future phase | Designing future project proposals or extension phases |
| Project Performance/ Quality Strategies | Challenges to Project performance or implementation quality and solutions | Lessons for other projects facing similar challenges |
| Key Lessons Learned | Key lessons in project implementation, partnership, project design and stakeholder engagement | Key lessons for PNGO, CARE-B Program, Donor, Influential Stakeholders |
| Sustainability | Strategies for post-project sustainability of impact | Incorporate sustainability enhancing strategies into future project design |
| Other Comments |  |  |

# HOW to schedule a Reflection Session

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Time | Topic | Method | Facilitator |
| 15 min | Opening remarks and objectives  Setting the scene | Ppt | 1 |
| 1hr  30 min | 1. What are some of the successful interventions you see have potential to replicate in future design[[1]](#footnote-1)? Why they are going well? Identify few of the uniqueness. 2. What are those interventions you see do not going well? Why they are not going well? Identify few reasons. 3. What are some of the challenges that hindered the performance/program quality? What strategies did we adopt to overcome/mitigate those challenges/hindrances? | Group exercise | 2 |
| 15 min | Refreshments |  |  |
| 30 min | 1. What are the missing pieces/elements you would like to see in future project to enhance Project Impact? | Plenary  Discussions | 2 |
| 30 min | 1. Identify few areas (5-6) and strategies to build a greater synergy with other CARE projects and beyond? | Plenary Discussion | 1 |
| 1 hr | 1. What are some of the key lessons we have learnt?   6.1 Program implementation  Key activity/intervention 1  Key activity/intervention 2  6.2 Partnership  Assessment of Key partnerships  Achievements of Key partnerships  6.3 Monitoring, Knowledge Management and Learning  6.4 Advocacy and governance (if any) | Group exercise | 2 |
| 30 min | Lunch |  |  |
| 30 min | 1. What strategies you would recommend to apply so that our work sustain after project end? | Plenary Discussion | 1 |
| 15 min | 1. Any other comments/ideas you would like to add? | Q&A | 1 |
| 45 min | Recap the day | Flipchart | 2 |
| 15 min | Closing | - |  |

# Session Details:

The process takes a full day with 10 sessions taking 5.5 hours in total. Given below are details and assist materials for each session:

## Session 1: Opening

Aim of this session is to set the reflection session for focused productive action-oriented discussion. The session should be conducted by both the project manager and M&E person jointly. It poses key queries to reflect upon, to step out of nitty-gritty implementation details and look at the bigger picture of project goal and results. The session covers:

* Key project goal
* Key challenges project will address
* Key Strategic objectives
* Key activity relevant to each strategic objective
* Key M&E indicators and project performance

**Use the attached template presentation for convenience and then add your own touch**

## Session 2: Success, Areas of Improvements, Challenges and Solutions

Too often reflection sessions devolve into fault-finding and challenges as ‘complaints’, losing out on all the good the project does and positive learnings to share and promote the project work. With the discussions and exercises in this session, your project will have *equal* focus on improving project and promoting good work of the project and consequently problem-solving skills of your team.

### **Successful Interventions and Success Factors**

**Question: What are some of the successful interventions you see have potential to replicate in future design? Why they are going well? Identify few of the uniqueness.**

**TIPS – Capturing Success:**

* Best facilitated by Project Manager/Team Leader with support of M&E
* Choose 3-5 key successes based on strongest evidence of success against to project goal
* Summarize the activity or intervention process in 3 sentences
* Capture what is unique about its implementation that led to success
* **Remember: Capture success in Clear, Concise and Communicable manner**

**Group Exercise**

Split into groups each containing one frontline (PNGO or NGO), one M&E person and one in management role. After each group brings back their choices, collate to remove duplication and narrow down to 3-5 successes. Commit on a plan to highlight these successes for promoting project’s work within CARE-B, with donor and others. Eg: Case study, Process documentation, Special Learning Newsletter for Donor etc.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Successful Project Activity/Intervention | | |
| Evidence of Success | **Success factors (Unique aspects)** | **How to highlight the success** |
|  |  |  |
| Successful Project Activity/Intervention | | |
| Evidence of Success | **Success factors (Unique aspects)** | **How to highlight the success** |
|  |  |  |

### **Areas of Improvement**

**Question: Which intervention/activity did not work as planned or could be done better? Why did it not work? OR what changes were made to implementation plan to make it work and achieve project goal?**

**TIPS – Understanding Areas of Improvement:**

* Discuss challenges with the aim to solve them. Do not to place blame, rather focus on how to move forward
* Capture implementation challenges and how it was overcome to appreciate problem-solving skills of your team. This is also a good opportunity to appreciate work of PNGOs to help them develop their strengths
* Incorporate findings of this discussion into subsequent activity plans and share with CARE-B Program Team

**Group Exercise**

Split into groups each containing one frontline (PNGO or NGO), one M&E person and one in management role. After each group brings back their choices, collate to remove duplication and narrow down to 2-3 key areas for improvement and any challenge that was overcome by project. Incorporate corrective measures into future activity plans and share improvement measures taken successfully with CARE-B Program Team.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Project Activity/Intervention requiring improvement | | |
| Challenge | **Corrective Measure taken Successfully** | **Corrective Measure to be taken** |
|  |  |  |
| Project Activity/Intervention requiring improvement | | |
| Challenge | **Corrective Measure taken Successfully** | **Corrective Measure to be taken** |
|  |  |  |
| Project Activity/Intervention requiring improvement | | |
| Challenge | **Corrective Measure taken Successfully** | **Corrective Measure to be taken** |
|  |  |  |

Corrective Measures taken successfully get shared with Donor, PNGO and CARE-B while corrective measures to be taken get incorporated in next activity or implementation plan

## Session 3: Components for future projects

The underlying causes of poverty are dynamic and interlinked and rarely can a single project address them all. Identifying key elements missing from your current project that is crucial to addressing your project goal is how the program team and your project lead can work together with your current donors or others to carry forward in future phases. Gathering evidence of need for these components from current project will make future project proposal that much stronger and likely to win.

**TIPS – Future Components:**

* **Project Goal-focused:** *Only* suggest activities/interventions that directly impact or improve project goal
* Establish logic how the component is crucial to achieving/improving project goal or impact
* In subsequent activity/implementation plan, find evidence of need for these components to be shared with CARE-B, Donors and Project Lead.

**Plenary Discussion**

Discussion should lead from outputs of last session. Jot down all components mentioned and rank by level of impact on project goal, to choose most relevant 3-5 components. Should be facilitated by Project lead, project manager or similar.

## Session 4: Synergy and Multiplying Effect

CARE Bangladesh believes in multiplying impact by bringing together all stakeholders in development. It’s up to your project to find points of mutual benefit with surrounding projects and influential stakeholders (namely local governance, public institutions and private sector actors). Thus creating opportunities for greater impact on your beneficiaries in a cost-effective manner, enhancing project value to CARE-B, implementing partner and Donor.

**TIPS – Future Components:**

* **Project Goal-focused:** *Only* suggest activities/interventions that directly impact or improve project goal
* Establish logic how the component is crucial to achieving/improving project goal or impact
* In subsequent activity/implementation plan, find evidence of need for these components to be shared with CARE-B, Donors and Project Lead.

**Plenary Discussion**

Collate suggestions from project and implementing partner. Then rank by feasibility and level of impact on project goal to choose 3 activities most likely to succeed. Given below is the summary table with suggested stakeholders.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Stakeholder | Activity/intervention | Mutual Benefit |
| NGO |  | Project Impact:  Stakeholder’s interest: |
| Public Institution |  | Project Impact:  Stakeholder’s interest: |
| Private Sector |  | Project Impact:  Stakeholder’s interest: |

## Session 6: Key Lessons Learnt

A summary of previous discussions, identify key lessons learnt by the project that would be carried forward and shared with others (CARE-B, other projects, Donor). The lessons can be captured in the following key areas:

* Project Implementation
* Partnership
* Multiplying Impact (Lobbying and Advocacy, if any)

## Session 7: Enhancing project sustainability

This session grows in importance as the project nears its end.

**TIPS – Enhancing Project Sustainability:**

* Identify key project activities/intervention with strongest contribution to Project Goal/Impact
* Plan how these activities/intervention will continue post-project or the impacts will continue
* Identify who will ‘takeover’ these activities/intervention and how the project can help them

## Session 8: Other Comments

Include any other comments that might have been missed in discussion or in this schedule

## Session 9: Recap and Way Forward

Combining all the exercises and plenary discussions done till now will provide a clear indication of which actions to take in light of the reflection session immediately, in the next quarter and within the project duration.

## Session 10: Closing

In the closing session, summarize key reflections of day, taking the opportunity to appreciate and energize the project team and especially the implementing partners. Link this session to the next activity/implementing planning session and assign people responsibilities in drafting the reflection session report. The template for which is attached here.

1. It doesn’t necessarily mean we are doing this for writing a funding proposal rather it is mostly to improve program quality. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)