TRAINING REFLECTION
November - December 2024

Evaluating and strengthening the impact of AIC projects

Part 1: How can we evaluate AIC projects and increase the impact of our activity?

1. Building a project on solid foundations

To measure the impact of our actions, we must first create a project with a solid foundation. Every project is based on an understanding of the problems, a desire to search for solutions and a willingness to plan ahead in order to give life to the project. These three steps are the starting point of every project.

a) Identifying problems

We must first **identify the problem we wish to resolve**. This is a collective task and implies thinking as a group about the situation we wish to improve and looking for the best way to change the situation.

Here are some questions we can ask ourselves to help with this identification process:

- What problem do we want to address?
- What do we know about this problem?
- What are its causes and consequences and how are they related?
- Who are the people affected by the problem, what do they think about the problem, and how do they think it can be solved?
- What initiatives exist and what results have they produced?

These questions can and should be asked throughout the project to be clear about the objectives of the project and to take the necessary steps to achieve the desired change.

b) Taking into account the people interested in the project

Involve the people who will be affected by the project, but also people who may have an interest in or influence over the project. The more you coordinate your efforts, the greater your impact will be.

The following questions can help us to identify the right individuals:

- Who do we work for and with?
- Who are the people affected by the problem?
- With whom could we collaborate?
- Who are the people interested in the project?

Involving these "interested" individuals or "stakeholders" throughout the whole process of carrying out the project will ensure that the project is supported and accepted, and will make it easier to implement it.

c) Outlining the project and the necessary steps to implement it

Once we have identified the problem and the people interested in the project, we must define together the actions to be taken in order to achieve the desired change.

When creating a project, we need to:

- Determine long-, medium- and short-term **objectives** (what is the desired change).
- Plan the **activities** needed to achieve the objective (**strategy**).
- Make a list of what is needed to carry out the actions: **human ressources**, **material resources** and **economic resources**.

2. Evaluating the results and impact of our actions

Once the project, the actions and the actors to produce change have been established, we need to know how to **evaluate** whether what we are doing is succeeding or has already succeeded. We can evaluate our actions through the following steps:

a) Evaluating the process

It is important to measure the results of our activities along the way, in order to be able to know if what we are doing is working and if the established objectives are being met. This constant evaluation makes it possible to learn from mistakes and allows us to make corrective decisions in good time.

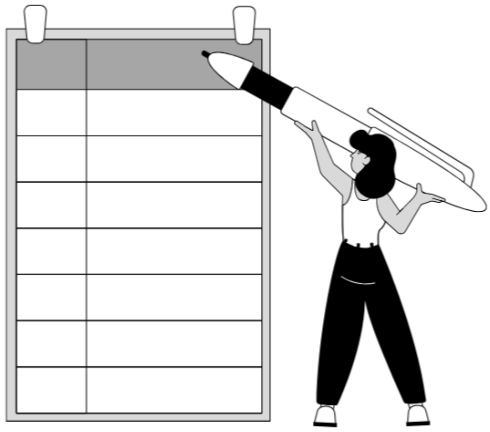
We can ask the following questions:

- Which **beneficiaries** do the actions favor and which ones do they not favor?
- How (and how often) do beneficiaries participate in the activities?
- Do the organized activities correspond to what was set out at the beginning of the project?
- How satisfied are beneficiaries with the actions?
- Are short-term objectives being met?
- Have there been significant changes in the context?

Collecting and periodically reviewing this information will allow us to know if the project is going well or if it needs adjustments. This information can be obtained at different times depending on the components of the project:

- **Proposed actions**: What actions were proposed? What is the frequency of the activities? Who is in charge of the activities?
- **The target group / beneficiaries**: Who do the actions reach, how many people? What kind of relationships do we need to establish to achieve our long-term objectives?

- **Evaluation**: What degree of satisfaction do we want to reach? How can the target group evaluate the activities or actions? What is the role of **volunteers** in the evaluation and what is the role of **beneficiaries**?



This information should be collected on a regular basis and in a systematic and structured way. Both positive and negative opinions should be taken into account. It is therefore important that questions are asked of everyone involved in the project, those who have benefited from the actions and those who have not.

It is necessary to ask for the opinion of volunteers, of beneficiaries and of other people who collaborate and/or who are linked to the project.

b) Measuring our actions

To measure our actions, we should select **indicators** when creating the project in order to be able to concretely evaluate the project.

An indicator is a specific, observable and measurable characteristic that can be used to show the changes and progress a project is making towards achieving a specific **result.**

In order to define indicators, we need to have clear answers to the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- What kind of results do we want to get?
- What is our ability to collect the results?

Evaluating the impact of an action allows us to understand better and to improve what we do, the way we do it and what we want to achieve. We should analyze: whom do our activities benefit and whom do they not? Under what circumstances? In what time frame? And why are these activities beneficial or not?

To determine the impact of our actions, we need to analyze the situation before the actions are implemented but also after a certain period of time has passed. There are four types of indicators we can use:

- **Capacity and skills**: Has the target group gained new skills?
- **Knowledge**: Has the target group gained new knowledge?
- **Opinion and behavior**: Has anything changed in the opinion or behavior of the target group?
- **Policy**: Has the strategy towards the target group changed in any way?

Classifying results according to their importance in the short and long term is a good starting point for developing indicators to measure these results.

There are different methods for collecting the information from which the results of the indicators will emerge:

- **Questionnaires**: they should not be too long, should be understandable for the beneficiaries and should provide relevant and analyzable data.
- **Individual interviews**, **focus groups**, participant **testimonies**, **observations** during activities are also ways of collecting valuable information.

When collecting information, we need to take into **account the abilities of the people** who are going to fill out the questionnaires, participate in the interviews or share their testimonies. It is also important to collect information in a systematic way so that it can later be analyzed.

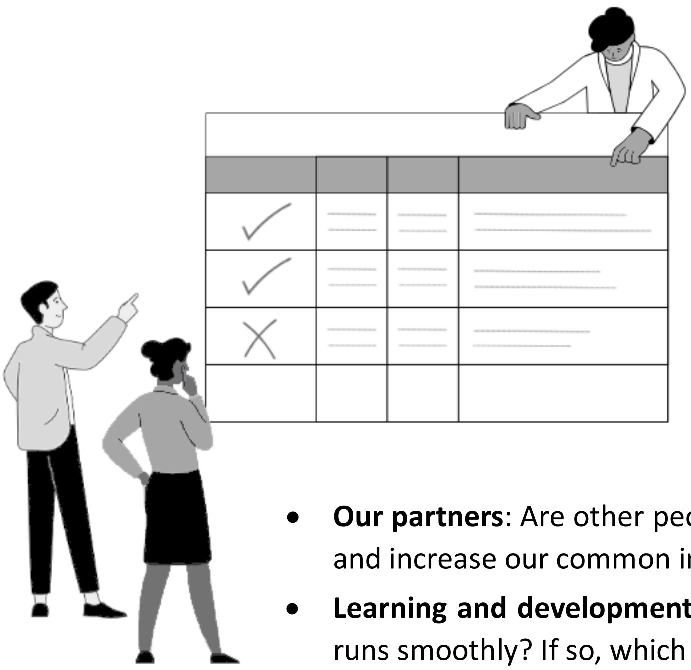
Measures can be **quantitative** (a numerical approach to data collection), or **qualitative** (providing quality information). It is important that the indicators go hand in hand with the **strategy**, and that they reflect in a clear and transparent way the objectives that the actions are intended to achieve.

For quantitative indicators we can ask: How many participants are there? How many actions are carried out? How often?

And for qualitative indicators the questions can be: How have our activities made a difference? Is anything changing?

c) Drawing conclusions and sharing what we have learned

After the evaluation, the **successes** and **failures** of the activities will become evident. With this in mind, the project can be continued, changes can be made, or it can be ended.



In order to **innovate**, we have to evaluate and test, continually asking new questions and finding new answers about:

- **Our mission**: Does it fit with the activities? Has the context changed? Are other activities necessary?
- **Our strategy**: Does it have to be adapted due to changes in the context or target group? How can we further emphasize the factors that have contributed to success? How can we remove obstacles?
- **Our partners**: Are other people involved? How can we reinforce each other and increase our common impact?
- **Learning and development**: Do we need other skills to ensure the project runs smoothly? If so, which ones? How can we improve the project further?

Analyzing project failures and sharing these results with other organizations helps us to learn innovate. We should examine what went wrong and why: Was there something wrong with the strategy? Did the project take too long? Have major changes influenced it? Have we underestimated the resistance to this project on the ground?

3. Communicating effectively throughout the project

The entire process of creating, developing and evaluating a project or action must go hand in hand with adequate communication. In order to communicate in a **clear and transparent way**, we must define the **specific objective of our communication**.

To do so, we must ask the following questions:

- Does the information seek to influence or encourage action?
- Do we seek to showcase the work of the organization and the volunteers?
- Are we looking to attract volunteers?
- Are we looking to collect funds?
- Are we looking to change a political reality?

Based on the responses, we should identify the **recipients** of our communications actions. Once the recipients have been defined, we must reflect on:

- The **type of message**
- The **language** that is to be used
- The **information** to be transmitted
- **Communication channels**: documents, testimonies, videos, photos, among others. Depending on the communication channel, the format of the message will be adapted.

To ensure our communication is effective, we also need to carry out an **evaluation**, and to:

- Measure the coverage of information
- Find out how the information has reached the recipients
- Request a reaction to the communication, through an action or a response

Steps to increase the impact of our AIC actions:

1. **Building a project on solid foundations**
   a) Identifying problems
   b) Involving all stakeholders
   c) Developing a strategy with clear objectives
2. **Evaluating the results and impact of our actions**
   a) Evaluating the process
   b) Measuring our actions
   c) Drawing conclusions and sharing what we have learned
3. **Communicating effectively throughout the project**
   Maintaining good communication with stakeholders

Sources consulted

- “Réfléchir et agir pour avoir de l’impact. Quelles solutions pour votre initiative ?” (in English: “Thinking and acting to make an impact. Solutions for your initiative”, Roi Baudouin Foundation, 2018)
- “Introduction to project work” (AIC, 1994)
- AIC Diploma, module VI

Reflection compiled by: Ximena Cañón Dorado, Tayde de Callataÿ,
Milagros Galisteo, Marcela Rodríguez Vassallo