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**REPORT ON THE STRATEGIC PLANNING TRAINING
WORKSHOP FOR MARANG CHILDCARE NETWORK
TRUST**

Submitted by:

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1.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Objectives

Workshop was organised by Marang Childcare Network Trust (MCCNT) for its member organisations as part of its capacity building initiative. MCCNT had realized that many organisations providing services for orphans and vulnerable children were doing so without well defined and documented strategic plans. This has led to many of the organisations delivering services haphazardly without strategic guidance which resulted in poor quality of services, unsustainable interventions, lack of resources and poor management, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. The need to improve programme planning and management systems of organisations for effective service delivery prompted MCCNT to organize this training, which was supported by the European Union Non-State Actors programme. The workshop was attended by about 20 participants who were mainly project coordinators and managers of NGOs/CBOs/FBOs across the country.

The objectives of the training were to:

- To gain an understanding of what a strategic plan is.
- To know why organisations need a strategic plan (need, importance, benefits).
- To know the basic elements and process for developing a strategic plan.

It was expected that the training workshop would help the participants appreciate the importance and value of strategic plans and equip them with the basic knowledge of how strategic plans are developed. Participants would return to their organisations to spearhead strategic planning process with other members of their organisations, governing bodies and other stakeholders, and with the support of MCCNT.

1.2 Workshop Approach and Methodology

The proceedings of the workshop were coordinated by MCCNT and facilitated by an external facilitator, Ms. Philda Kereng; who prepared and delivered the training materials. The approach involved the following:

1.2.1 Presentations

The facilitator presented the training material on MS Powerpoint slides and explained the material to the participants to ensure they all understood. The presentations emphasised on

helping participants to understand the key concepts in strategic planning, basic components of strategic plan and the process of developing strategic plans. These presentations were later discussed with participants to ensure they could articulate the concepts in their own words. The process was participatory and simplified to allow the participants to actively participate in the process, which would also build their long-term ownership of and commitment to the subsequent strategic planning processes. The Facilitator also ensured that consensus was built on the important issues, goals and plans for the strategic plan during the discussions.

1.2.2 Group Work and Presentations

Participants were divided into discussion groups and engaged in some practical group exercises on selected topics of the training. The groups helped participants to share ideas and assist one another to understand issues and processes. The exercises enabled them to practice working on the key steps in the strategic planning process. During the group presentations and discussions, groups had an opportunity to share their knowledge and assist one another in understanding concepts and processes. The group exercises also enabled participants to participate actively in smaller group settings.

2.0 SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

The workshop was conducted over two (2) days on 9th-10th May 2011. The following is an overview of the proceedings and outcomes of the workshop:

2.1 Opening Session

The workshop was opened with a word of prayer, followed by introductions and overview of the workshop objectives and expected outcomes by Ms. Kgomotso Sejoe of MCCNT. The Facilitator introduced the programme of activities for the two days as presented on the training programme agenda. (see attachment).

2.2 Presentation on The Concept of Strategic Plan and the Importance of having Strategic Plans

The Facilitator made a presentation on and explained the definition of *strategic plan* and its importance as a guiding tool for organisations in effective planning and delivery of services. The following are some of the major benefits of a strategic plan:

- It helps organisations to streamline and prioritise their activities.
(Helps them focus their activities and avoid haphazard way of operation).
- Enhance the credibility and visibility of the project which helps mobilising required resources for the project (marketing tool).
- Clarifies roles and functions of the project member, defines leadership & management structures.
- Builds teamwork, consensus, agreement among staff & stakeholders

- Enhances the quality of services and improves service delivery systems (helps solve problems, makes M&E easier-helps achievements of results and desired impacts.

Prior to the presentation participants were engaged in a discussion of what they believed was the need and importance of strategic plan. Their response indicated that they understood the importance of strategic plans and could associate their organisational challenges with the lack of or poorly articulated strategic plans. The basic steps towards developing strategic plans were presented, which include conducting organisational assessments and environmental scan, articulating the organisational vision and mission statements, identifying strategic issues and deriving programme goals and objectives, partnership analysis and activity planning etc. Participants were then introduced to these steps over the two days.

2.3 Presentation: Conducting Organisational and Environmental Assessment

The Facilitator gave a presentation on the importance of conducting an institutional assessment of the project by reflecting and building consensus on the programming environment i.e. political, economic, social and political issues and factors that affect the project either directly or indirectly. The internal review would look at the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Additionally, a reflection on the successes and challenges faced by the organisations was needed in order to provide a picture of the issues and gaps that the strategic plan has to address. The information is required as a guide to the strategic plan, in terms of deciding and prioritising the interventions, planning resources and operational systems and structures. The essence of this review is to ensure that the strategic plan is relevant, suitable, feasible and doable.

Group Exercise: Conducting Organisational and Environmental Assessments

Following a presentation on conducting organisational assessments, which helped participants to review their organisations and services in relation to the environment and needs, participants did a group exercise reviewing their organisational objectives, services and programmes to identify gaps and limitations which strategic plans would address. The following questions guided the discussions:

1. *Who are we as an organisation? What do we stand for? why do we exist and what do we do?*
2. *What have we been doing since the project started and what have we achieved?*
3. *What gaps and challenges have hindered the achievement of project objectives?*

Participants were also introduced to the process of conducting an organisational assessment of Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis), which helps them appreciate their strength and limitations to be considered in developing strategic plans.

2.4 Stakeholder Analysis

The Facilitator gave a presentation on the importance of listing and reviewing the existing project stakeholders. The purpose is to assess their value to the project and vice versa. Discussions and comments on the presentation indicated that participants did not have the knowledge of how to manage partnerships for the benefit of their organisational success and sustainability. A group exercise on stakeholder analysis was done and participants well understood and valued the key stakeholders they needed to work with in their localities, which included Government agencies, donors, other community structures and their beneficiaries.

2.5 Deriving Vision, Mission and Values

Participants were assisted to refer to the above problems and come up with what they believed were the mission and objectives of their organisations. The Facilitator defined the vision as a guiding image of success formed in terms of a contribution to society or community. It is a statement which describes the picture of the ideal situation we want to see for orphans and vulnerable children. The mission statement was described as a statement which describes a project in terms of its purpose, role and function towards the attainment of a set vision. They were requested to come up with key words and thematic statements that could be used to coin a mission statement. The Facilitator reviewed the vision and mission statements which had already been developed by some of the participating organisations. The observation was that most of the statements were not clearly articulated, some read like objectives, some did not clearly state the target group and most of them needed to be revised.

2.6 Defining the Project Target Group

Participants were asked to define the principal target group for their services, being the primary and direct beneficiaries of the project. They were taught that a clear definition of the primary target group helps in shaping the project interventions and facilitates the design and monitoring of the project's interventions. Target groups were defined in group exercises.

The participants were also assisted to articulate their organisational values and principles which would guide their design and delivery of the services. The values covered issues of staffing to ensure that the organisations hired the right personnel to take care of vulnerable children. Strategic plans ought to define systems and procedures for recruitment of staff and principles for working with the children in a protective environment.

2.7 Presentation: Problem Analysis and Identifying Strategic Issues

Participants were briefed on the importance of and steps in analysing the problem that their strategic plan would address. From this analysis, strategic issues were to be derived as the basis for the decisions on what activities were to be planned for.

Group Exercise: Identifying Strategic Issues

Participants worked in their groups to identify the main problems and issues concerning orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers faced, which the strategic plan sought to address. They answered the following question: 'What are the problems that are faced by orphans and vulnerable children, which your organisations plan to address in the next three years?'

2.8 Deriving Objectives and Activities

Based on the strategic issues identified participants were taught how to derive strategic objectives and design the appropriate activities to meet the objectives. Objectives are to be measurable, have a time frame and be realistic and relevant. In this session, participants were assisted to develop the objectives and activities in extended group discussions. The exercise also involved the participants in developing activity plans which indicated the activities per objective, time frame, implementing body and partners. The exercise was to give the participants a practical experience of the process which they would initiate after the training.

2.9 Determining Resource Requirements and Management Structure

Participants were taught that a strategic plan ought to determine the resources and management systems required to make sure that the planned activities are implemented effectively, efficiently and on time and in the right manner. They were informed that a properly developed and documented strategic plan was a good resource mobilising tool and helps in organisational development processes. They were made to appreciate the link between the strategic plan training with the upcoming trainings on monitoring and evaluation and resource mobilisation and to understand that the latter require a well developed strategic plan.

3.0 CLOSING, WAY FORWARD

The participants, having appreciated the need for strategic plans and having gained basic knowledge of the planning steps, were encouraged to return to their organisations and facilitate planning processes. In delivering her closing remarks, Ms. Sejoe of MCCNT acknowledged that the organisations would need further assistance in preparing their strategic plans, and promised that MCCNT would find ways of providing technical assistance.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNT

We observed that most of the organisations do not have strategic plans and their services are not properly guided by a comprehensive framework. Most of the the participants do not have the knowledge aand skill of developing startegic plans and would require external techncial asistance which needs funding. With the general financial challenges faced by the organisations, this means that many of them would find it difficult to engage external consultants unless MCCNT assists them. The Facilitator is satisfied with the selection of the

participants for the training i.e the project coordinators and managers, which was critical for the training outcome.

The time frame for the course was short, however, it gave the gave participants sufficient knowledge needed to work on strategic plans at a later stage. It is recommended that MCCNT considers mobilising funds to assist the organisations with further technical assistance to ensure that strategic plans are completed within reasonable time.

ATTACHMENTS:

Workshop Programme

Participants

PPT Presentation