

The Almanario

SGP The GEF
Small Grants
Programme

A Participatory Project Management Tool for Community-Based Organizations in Guatemala



Description

The Almanario is a project planning and a budgeting tool that allows Civil Society Organizations (CBOs) with low literacy skills to develop their own project proposals to apply to SGP. The Almanario methodology was designed to help CBOs have direct access and participation in development projects without the intervention of external organizations.

The Almanario functions as a project proposal format for SGP and as a planning tool for the community, detailing which activities will take place, what materials are needed, what are the costs, while also appointing a person to be responsible for each of the activities proposed by the CBO.

However, the Almanario is much more than just a planning tool. Based on its empowering capacity and emphasis on reducing gender inequalities, the Almanario represents a new approach to involve stakeholders and beneficiaries, enabling them to lead their own projects and development processes.

Background

The Almanario was designed by SGP Guatemala to allow CBOs direct access to the development of projects, without the external intervention of an external organization playing the role of an intermediary.

The initial idea to create a simplified logical framework that could be used by communities applying to SGP emerged from the staff of SGP Guatemala with the support of the National Steering Committee (NSC). The tool responds to the specific context of the area of intervention in SGP Guatemala, with high rates of poverty, gender exclusion and low education level, among others.

In particular, SGP wanted to avoid the participation of NGOs as intermediaries during the project proposal and implementation, as it usually led to delays and higher costs; as well as poor identification of the needs of the community that resulted in low levels of ownership and empowerment among beneficiaries.





The Almanario allowed SGP Guatemala to increase the percentage of CBO-managed projects from 40% - the average of the overall GEF SGP global portfolio - to 80%.

The tool enables individual and collective empowerment based through three key elements:

1. Decision making through participatory processes directly generated by the CBO itself;
2. Involvement of women in key activities and stages of the project such as their involvement as catalysts of CBO processes (figure promoter) and/or the visits that the CBO has to make to the city as part of the project;
3. Design of activities within the project and implementation without external support (negotiation with external actors, opening bank accounts, direct contact with the municipality, etc).

Concept

The Almanario is a methodology that aims to support communities without experience in the formulation of development projects by providing an easy to use participatory methodology that allows the community to assess the situation, design and plan the key activities of the project and prepare a budget.

The **fundamental principles** of the approach are:

- Community participation in all stages of the project
- Community management and ownership by eliminating the role of the “external expert”

- "Learning by doing" and as an outcome of the process
- Promoting knowledge sharing between communities
- Using native languages
- Including gender considerations from project design and implementation

Gender Mainstreaming

The Almanario is also a tool for **gender mainstreaming** as there are three the fundamental requirements for a project to be approved:

1. The person who represents the CBO and receives information about the project (promoter) must be a woman;
2. The board of the CBO must be composed of at least 50% women and at least one must occupy the post of the president or treasurer;
3. Childcare has to be provided for all women with children when participating in project workshops.

Key outcomes

The main **intended improvements and results** to be achieved among CBO members are:

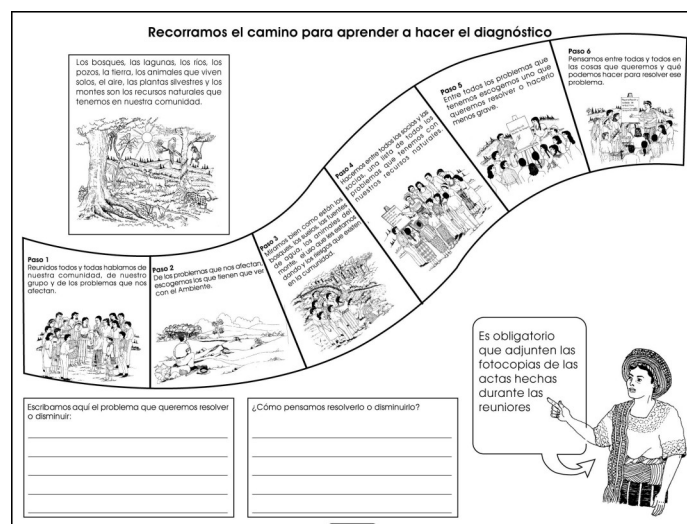
- Empowerment of all CBO members, especially women, to address and develop projects at all stages;
- Shift in gender roles due to the development of roles that were previously inaccessible for women, such as the role of community representative;
- Ownership of the project by beneficiaries: Under this approach, community members evolve beyond beneficiaries and become participants;
- Capacity building, both on an individual and a collective basis, through the power of participating and making decisions independently of the funding entity;
- Strengthening ties within the community through the creation of a formal group and collaborative work as a mandatory prerequisite;
- Collective learning, through the training and exchanges between participants;
- Enhancing self-esteem by enabling community members to self-manage project activities in order to change their own reality without engaging external experts in management roles.

How to use it

The Almanario methodology is based on several stages in which the CBO members learn to formulate project proposals using this simplified logical framework. Guided by the “community representative” (the member of the CBO that is trained by SGP and coordinates the process within the community), the CBO makes decisions regarding the development of project strategies and justifies these suggestions to SGP.

Notification of Interest

The first step starts when the CBO announces its interest in participating in the next call for project proposals of the SGP. For this purpose, the respective CBO must select two women from the community to function as the representatives of the CBO, as well as a potential replacement to cover in case one of the elected representatives withdraws from the project. The only requirement for these positions is literacy.



Development of Project Proposal

After the participatory assessment at the community level is conducted and pre-approved by SGP, the community representatives attend a second training on how to develop the project proposal.

In this training, the women learn how to complete the second part of the Almanario and organize participatory workshops in their communities to identify the key activities, select the indicators, develop a timeline with key milestones, and a budget. The resulting document is considered a project proposal and is presented to SGP for consideration in their selection of projects.

Approval and implementation

If the project is approved by the National Steering Committee, the community representative receives a third training on project management. In this occasion, they learn how to administer the project and manage the funds (e.g. handle checks, receipts and invoices, etc). Then, the CBO should open a project bank account where the first disbursement is received and project implementation begins.

Describamos nuestra organización al PPD

Nuestra comunidad o comunidades

Nombre o nombres de la comunidad: _____

Municipio y departamento: _____

Población o culturas: ☐ Maya, indígena ☐ Ladino, no indígena

Idioma o idiomas: _____

En este espacio vamos a pegar una foto de nuestra organización

Nuestra organización

Nombre de la organización: _____

Dirección: _____

Teléfono y fax: _____

Breve historia de nuestra organización: _____

¿Cómo iniciamos? _____

¿En qué hemos trabajado? _____

¿En qué trabajamos actualmente? _____

¿Quiénes nos han apoyado? _____

Vamos a dibujar acá nuestra comunidad

Training on how to use the Almanario

The first training is carried out engaging all the CBOs that are planning to apply for SGP grants. A community representative -and its substitute- from each community interested in applying to SGP attend this training.

The training teaches women how to use of the first part of The Almanario and how to lead the participatory planning process with their Communities.

Participatory Project Planning at the Community Level

Using the Almanario, the community representatives meet with their CBO and organize workshops where the community will identify and prioritize the challenges faced by the community.



Monitoring and Evaluation

During the course of the project, two monitoring visits are conducted: one after 6 months and the another after a year of implementation. The project evaluation is carried out by the National Coordinator and/or members of the National Steering Committee of SGP. In addition, the grantee organization, must provide two reports: one is progress report upon which – if all in order- the second tranche of funds is disbursed; and a end of project report that details the project achievements to SGP. In addition, the reports contains information technical and financial aspects of the project.

Format

The Almanario consists of laminated cards in A2 format where the community representative can fill in the information on the project.

The tool explains the different phases of the project through the use of illustrations and guiding questions that help in gathering the information at the workshops and documenting the decisions made the community.

The large format allows it to be viewed simultaneously by several people grouped around it. The questions are phrased in plural and are simple and tailored to communities with a low level of literacy.

To ensure that the community has been present during the process and agrees with the decision made, there are several pages for signatures, fingerprints and photos of the community.

Lessons learned

- It is key to adapt the tool to the needs and context of the community
- Multiple iterations were needed to adapt the tool and participatory processes to communities with a low literacy level. In the process the Almanario took its shape by using large format, familiar language, illustrations, etc.
- The constant support of SGP throughout the use of the Almanario and the monitoring and evaluation of the project is key for better performance and long lasting results
- The emphasis on women empowerment by giving women the role of community representative and promoting their participation in the board of the CBO was fundamental in generating equity and improving their social status and self-esteem.
- The participatory planning process for community projects is a key element to ensure ownership, efficiency and sustainability.
- The tool not only allowed the communities to learn more about themselves but also how to plan and manage a project without intermediaries

Sources Consulted

- ¹ Facilitando la inclusión social: proyectos agroecológicos en comunidades rurales de Guatemala. Murga, O. 2008
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- ³ El enfoque Almanario como catalizador para el desarrollo de las capacidades colectivas y el fortalecimiento de la agencia fuerte. Estudio de caso en el contexto indígena de Sipacapa, Guatemala. Fariñas, S. 2010
- ⁴ <http://www.planificacionparticipativa.upv.es/wordpress/>

