

GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF ARTICLES FOR THE SFLP BULLETIN

1. BACKGROUND

NEVER write your article sitting in an office far away from the project activities. You should go out into the field with a member of the National Coordination Unit (NCU) who will explain the project and its technical details.

The article should include relevant excerpts from interviews with (1) the community, (2) the NGOs working in partnership with it, (3) officers from local administrative departments, and (4) other people. Exact quotations should be given as far as possible. Draw up a list of the quotations and then choose the most appropriate to include in the article.

During your visit to the project, decide whether you want to write an article on the whole community or a group within it (e.g. a women's initiative). They are all potential subjects for the article.

Write the article as simply as possible, in a logical sequence. This will make it much more attractive and easier to read than if it is poorly structured with long complex sentences.

The article should have a central theme (see point 3 below). Your main concern should be to highlight the strong points. Firstly, identify the relevant elements, the key points you want to highlight. The objective of an article is not to give all the details, but to give the readers enough information to decide whether such a project would meet one of their own needs. You can then tell them how to obtain more detailed information from another source (e.g. a technical report).

The article should mention the **original situation** and the **current situation**, that is, how things were before the project and how the project has helped change the situation, and reduce poverty.

The article should focus on **what the beneficiaries have learned** from the project activities and what they will be better able to do after the project has ended. The beneficiaries are generally the community or a group within the community, but may also be NGOs or other people working with the project.

You should also mention the sustainability of the project beneficiaries' livelihoods, as well as the **sustainability of activities** after the project has ended. Has the NCU or the administration planned any follow-up to the activities with another partner? Has any interest been shown in repeating the activities elsewhere?

The article should, as far as possible, highlight the link between the project results, the various national institutions and the decision-makers involved in the project. In other words, it should explain **how the partnership that has been established can have an effect on the way in which a local or national institution works or a local policy.**

We have a team in Cotonou who will read through your article and, if necessary, ask for more information to reinforce its message before it is published in the SFLP Liaison Bulletin.

2. PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs are important in illustrating your message and describing the situation in a community. Photos should be explicit and **lively** !

If you are not a professional photographer, make your photos simple. Avoid too much detail. The reader may become confused if there is too much to look at. And avoid photographs of people sitting in meetings; these are not interesting.

Take photos of **people doing something** related to the subject of the article. This will be much more interesting for the readers as it will help them visualise what you are describing in the article.

Make sure your photos are related to the subject of the article.

Take **a complete film** for the article. Send all the photos and the negatives to Cotonou. The photos to be published will be chosen once the article has been edited.

3. SUBJECTS FOR ARTICLES

All SFLP-supported community projects fall within one of four main topics:

- Natural resources development
- Markets and marketing
- Community development
- Livelihoods diversification

The Regional Support Unit will discuss with the NCU the **messages to be conveyed** in the article on the basis of the project results and impact, in terms of livelihoods improvement and changes to institutions and policies.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE ARTICLE

The suggested structure below is a general framework for reference that may be adapted according to the article.

Introduction to the project site

- Explain the community's geographic location
- Context of vulnerability to poverty – causes of poverty which affect the community (drought, disease, ecological issues, others)
- Existing infrastructure in the community (schools, health centres, access to clean water, etc.)
- Initial livelihoods situation – strengths and weaknesses of the fishing community
- How the community lives – the survival strategies its members have developed

The project

- Origins of the community project: why was it drawn up? What community needs/concerns/aspirations is it intended to meet?
- What are its objectives?
- Who are the beneficiaries and other main participants?
- Partnerships established. Were there any problems in setting up these partnerships? Explain in detail.
- Description of the establishment process. Activities and contributions by the beneficiaries. Were there problems in establishing the project? How were these dealt with?
- Give the names of the support bodies (NGOs, other organisations or national institutions) and their role in the project.

Results and impacts

Results are the improvements made, the good practices and impacts (positive or negative) on the context of vulnerability, the beneficiaries' capacities and competences, livelihoods strategies, existing policies, etc. In other words, how the community project has helped respond to the demands of the poverty alleviation policy.

Find out what they all think: the community, the NGOs working with the project, local government officials and the NCU. This will mean conducting interviews and noting down some quotations to be used in the article.

The impacts go beyond the results of the project. They are the effects produced and the influences which come of the project and which may affect other communities and participants. This is known as the knock-on effect. For example, if a more favorable national policy promoted by the project is introduced, it is likely to benefit a larger number of communities. The impacts also cover the benefits enjoyed by the

community which help to strengthen its autonomy and open up new horizons and other partners.

The lessons

- What are the most important lessons a reader should remember from the article?
- What are the key elements in the success of the community project (e.g. partnership, etc.)?
- What was not properly thought out when the project was identified and implemented and should be remembered in the future so as to avoid repeating the mistakes?
- What problems/obstacles appeared during implementation and how were these overcome?
- Which areas of community organisation or beneficiaries need more attention, judging from their poor performance?

Several lessons may be learned from a project, depending on the activities conducted, but also depending on the participants interviewed (each participant draws his or her own lessons).

Viewpoint of the National Coordination Unit

- What is the NCU going to do with the results now in order to make use of the experiment? Will its future strategy be:
 1. To inform the decision-makers in order to bring improvements to (i) a policy (poverty alleviation, fisheries) or (ii) the way in which an institution works on the basis of the project results?
 2. To extend activities to a wider area?
 3. Other.
- With which other partners? With which other programmes?

5. THE GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM SFLP PROJECTS

This section includes some information to help the NCU better identify good practices in its development projects and lessons learned that could be of interest to other NCUs or partner NGOs.

What are “good practices”?

These are not just the “success stories”; they can also be activities which did not work or did not produce the expected results. Good practices are the result of a process of accumulation and application of knowledge of what works and what does not. In other words, good practices are partly the lessons learned and partly the process of learning through action,

feed-back and analysis (what works and why, depending on the different participants and contexts).

Good practices are a better way of doing things, both in technical terms (fishing, processing, marketing) and in the organisation of an association (making it operational). But they are also the processes which need to be established to achieve lasting partnerships, to encourage the communities, to reduce conflicts, to involve the community and women more in local development, etc.

Why should good practices be written down? What is the advantage of this?

Writing down good practices and sharing the lessons learned not only helps build up the NCU's capacity to identify, document and make use of good practices in its own country, but also helps other NCUs and NGOs interested in doing something similar avoid the mistakes and cut down on time and costs. This means that other NCUs and NGOs can use the information to improve the way they design and implement their activities.

Moreover, if they are properly used, good practices can feed the process of developing policy formulation.

Where do the good practices come from?

In SFLP, the sources of good practices are the community projects and pilot projects. Good practices help us learn lessons. We each learn the lessons in our own way, from our own point of view and drawing our own conclusions. For example, the lessons learned on marketing by a fish monger will not be the same as those learned by a government official. Their interests and concerns are different and depend greatly on the way they want to make use of the experience and the lessons.

In order to identify good practices, we must be involved in the activities and listen to the beneficiaries. A good practice can be written down in the form of a simple description of useful results or a detailed analysis of the strong and weak points of the activity.

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