

# 4

## Participatory Goal Setting

Participatory goal setting is a crucial step in creating a joint actions space within a CSO partnership. This section explains the importance of participatory goal setting and describes a process for involving all of the stakeholders in defining the success of the project, setting goals, and building an action plan.



## What happened in the Incubator project?



Participatory goal setting was carried out by the Civil Society Organization Learning Forum (CSOLF) for the Training of Trainers (TOT), the first major stage of the project. The process took place during a weekend seminar in Ramallah prior to the beginning of the project's activities. The participants were directors and key personnel from the four partner organizations: Masar, Sawa, Duroob, and the Anne Frank Center. The action research team facilitated the process, using "Action Evaluation"- a stakeholder-based method for defining, promoting, and assessing success.

Prior to the seminar, each participant was asked to respond in writing to three questions:

1. What is your definition of success for the "Training of Trainers" (TOT) course as part of the development of the "Educational Innovation Incubator"?
2. Why are these definitions of success (i.e. goals) important to you personally?
3. How do you think your goals can be best achieved?

During the weekend seminar, the participants were first asked to talk together about the "why" question – that is, why the success of the ToT, as defined by each one, was important to them. Participants shared very personal stories that illustrated what deeply motivated them to offer such a training for professionals engaged in social change. They voiced values and emotions such as "respect", "vulnerability", "fixing the world", "daring to doubt", "ownership", "new perspectives", and "freedom". Telling their stories and hearing the stories of people from other CSOs brought the participants closer together and established a basis of mutual commitment and trust. In reflecting on the partnership, one of the Directors noted that what differentiated this partnership from other, more superficial, ones was the awareness of shared values.

Prior to the seminar, the project's research team had analyzed the "what"- that is, the definitions of success, or goals, named by the participants. This analysis first identified the goals of the members of the each CSO separately, focusing on the shared, conflicting, and unique goals its members. The research team presented this analysis to members of each CSOs; they deliberated over their definitions of success and agreed on a common set of goals. Then the participants from all four CSOs shared their separate goal statements, deliberated over them, and merged them into a single set of goals.

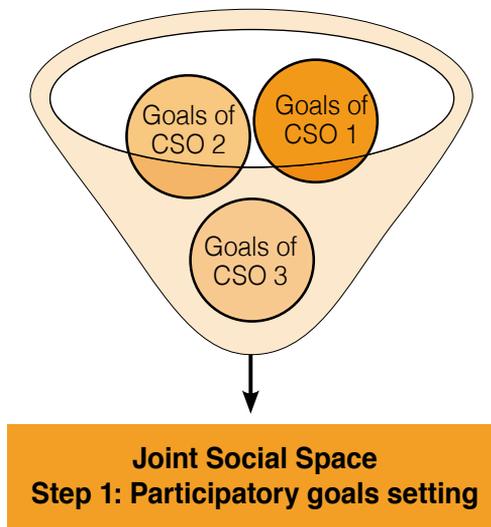
*In this way the participants reached consensus on four common goals for the TOT:*

- *Building a team of trainers, who deeply believe in educational innovation, and develop their personal abilities and professional competencies to lead processes of high quality training and social-educational change*
- *Developing an alternative educational approach and language, based on experience and innovative “theories”.*
- *Developing a coherent model of collaborative learning for training/ guiding practitioners.*
- *Creating comradery and a support network among participants to increase their ability to persevere in this difficult work.*

*After reaching a set of common goals for the ToT, the CSO partners discussed action strategies for achieving these goals (the “how” question). However, responsibility for designing the actions for achieving these goals passed into the hands of the ToT facilitation team, which consisted of the CEOs of Masar, Duroob, and Sawa. >>>*

## **What is participatory goals setting?**

Participatory goal setting is a key process for building a partnership among CSO's. Each CSO is a separate entity that has its own stake in the project, so this process is important not only for developing truly shared vision of the project, but also for opening a new space for joint action. The



purpose of participatory goal setting is to ensure that the project gives true and full expression to the interests and values of each stakeholder organization. However, it is also a relationship building process in which the partners come to know each other better and to understand the deep motivations that move them to join the project. Participatory goal setting fosters shared commitment to the project and to each other. The process may also include clients, funders, experts and other stakeholders who are not members of the partner CSOs if their participation, knowledge, and/or voices are considered important for project success.

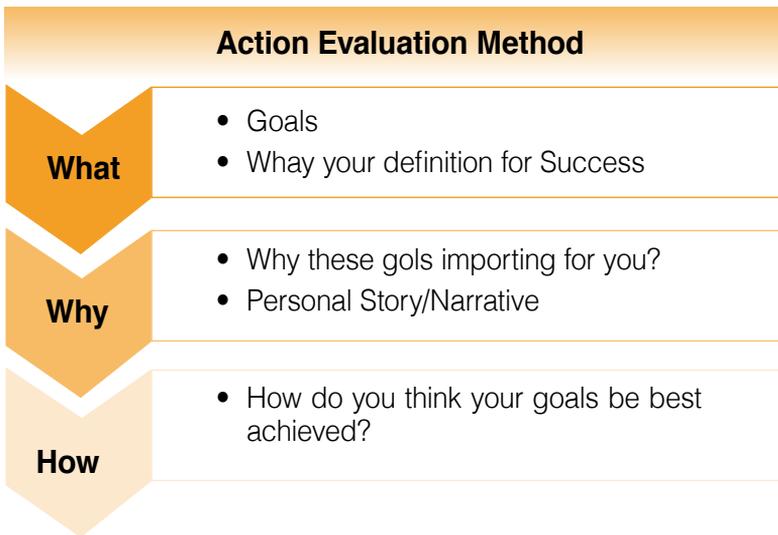
A common vision and well-defined goals are considered essential prerequisites to the success of a project. They are also critical for monitoring and evaluating the project's effectiveness. Ideally, participatory goals setting should take place as a part of the grant proposal writing process so that common consensual goals are set by the time project actually begins. However, a preliminary participatory goals setting process is rare. It requires time, resources, and personal commitments that are not usually available prior to securing funding for the project. In these cases, participatory goal setting should be the very first project action. This process should ensure that formal project goals are aligned with the goals and interests of the different partners/stakeholders.

Participatory goal setting unfolds in response to three questions that stakeholders ask themselves about their joint project: "What?"; "Why?"; and "How?".

- **The "what" question refers to goals.** It is useful for stakeholders to envision goals as the "definitions of success" for the project: "What outcomes do we want to result from this project? What outcomes would constitute the project's success?" Asking these questions stimulates a positive, forward-looking perspective and helps partner CSO's more clearly envision and articulate what they really want from a project. The more clearly they articulate their definitions of success, the better they will be at communicating their aspirations to other stakeholders and setting goals that truly represent the partnership and guide effective action.
- **The question "why" refers to the deeper motivations that bring CSO's together around a common project.** It asks stakeholders: "Why do you care so much about the definitions of success you have articulated? Why do you feel passionate about them?" The question "why" is framed in a very personal way. It is not intended to simply elicit reasons why a project is necessary, but rather to enable stakeholders to articulate the underlying values, feelings, and experiences that drive their commitment to a project. When

stakeholders make these deeper motivations explicit to themselves and to each other, it strengthens the cohesion of the partnership.

- **The question “how” refers to the actions that need to be taken in order to make success happen.** It asks stakeholders: “How should you go about achieving the goals you have defined for yourselves? What concrete steps need to be taken to move from the current state to the desired state?” The question “how” provides a framework for developing a logic model for the project and for action planning. Making the “how” explicit helps build a structure through which values and aspirations become a part of project practice.



A truly participatory process systematically formulates common goals by working at three stakeholder levels: individual, CSO, and project.

- **Individual:** Each individual stakeholder in a CSO partnership should have an opportunity to articulate the goals of the project as he or she sees it.
- **CSO:** The members of each CSO should build on the individual goals in order to come up with the CSO's goals for this project. These goals should be reached by consensus and should incorporate the goals to which individual members are truly committed.
- **Project:** The project's goals should incorporate the goals of all partner CSOs. Representatives of all the CSO partners should

come together to share their goals for the project and deliberate until they reach agreement, by consensus, on a common set of goals at the project level.

The following chart summarize the Action Evaluation Levels:



The participatory goal setting process highlights differences among the way stakeholders, at each level, define success. This process may seem counter-intuitive because it entails surfacing potential conflicts among stakeholders precisely when partners are anxious to get to work. However, the desire to smooth over differences and potential conflicts at the outset of a project by avoiding conflict, sets the stage for serious difficulties later on, when stakeholders discover that they have very different expectations about “what, why, and how.”

Participatory goal setting enables partners to put their differences on the table early on so that conflicts can be openly resolved or at least managed, rather than festering beneath the surface. Engaging conflict constructively strengthens partnerships by fostering mutual appreciation of difference and finding ways of exploiting the relative strengths, as well as compensating for the weaknesses, of each partner.

**A method for participatory goal setting:**

There are many different methods that can be used for participatory goals setting. In this handbook we present one relatively simple action research method called “Action Evaluation” (AE). For examples, detailed

descriptions of the process and how to facilitate Action Evaluation please visit:

[http://www.ariagroup.com/?page\\_id=7](http://www.ariagroup.com/?page_id=7).

The AE process can be facilitated by an outside consultant or by a facilitator from within the organizations initiating the project. The following is a brief overview of the steps in Action Evaluation for a CSO partnership:

1. **Identifying the key stakeholder groups to be included in the goal setting process:** Naturally the CSO partners should be included in the process. However, it could also include funders, clients, experts, and other stakeholders. The decision how to define stakeholder groups is also significant and requires careful thought. For example, stakeholders could be defined by their organizational affiliations but also by their identification with an ethnic group, gender, location, etc. The number of stakeholder groups is an important consideration. While it is important to be inclusive, the more stakeholder groups, the more complex and costly the process will be.
2. **Defining the three research questions:**
  - What are the definitions of success for (this project)?
  - Why are these goals important to you?
  - How should we go about achieving these goals?
3. **Preparing a questionnaire and eliciting responses from individual stakeholders:** The key to this step is to enable individuals from the different stakeholder groups to make their voices heard in setting project goals. The implication is that the individuals involved in the process should have sufficient time to respond in writing either through a web-based platform, by email, or in print form to the questionnaire.
4. **Analyzing the “what” question at the CSO level:** The individual responses to the questionnaire should be analyzed for each CSO or stakeholder group separately. The goals of all the individuals in each CSO should be pooled and then organized into three categories: goals expressed by more than one member of the group (common goals), goals expressed by only one member (unique goals), and goals that appear to conflict or reflect some underlying dilemma (conflicting goals).
5. **The “why” discussion:** Representatives of each CSO and/or stakeholder group meet in order to share their responses to the

“why” question. The “why” discussion can be a very powerful experience because enabling people to talk together about what is truly meaningful to them stimulates “resonance” among them. Such a conversation is new even for people who have worked together in the same organization for years. Although it seems counterintuitive, it is advisable to discuss the “why” before discussing the “what” (the goals themselves). When people hear and resonate with each other’s deeper motivations, it makes it easier for them to accept differences and manage conflicts in both ends and means. If there are more than ten participants from a particular CSO, it makes sense to divide into sub-groups for the “why” discussion so that everyone can be heard.

6. **Defining the goals for each CSO:** After the “why” discussion, the analysis of the “what” question (goals) is presented to representative of each CSO separately. They deliberate on their goals and come to consensus. When people have unique goals, they should be given an opportunity to make the case for including their goals. It is important to be parsimonious in setting goals and only add goals when the truly represent common commitment. When there are too many goals (more than four) they begin to lose meaning and efficacy in motivating and guiding project action. When conflicts are revealed, each side should be given an opportunity to make its case. If consensus on a goal cannot be achieved, the group should decide on how they will manage the differences. In any case, members of a CSO should only set a goal to which they are truly willing to be held accountable.
7. **Analyzing and merging the CSO partner goals:** After each CSO defines its goals, it is helpful to do an analysis that merges the goals in to in a single set of common, unique, and conflicting goals at the project level.
8. **Meeting to agree on common project goals:** Representatives from each CSO meet to discuss the merged goals and to come to consensus on common goals, following the same procedure described for the CSO level goal setting. During this process, it is also useful to briefly revisit the “why” question as well.
9. **Action planning:** This step makes use of the responses to the “how” question in order to determine the concrete steps that need to be taken in order to achieve each of the project goals. These responses provide a database from which to choose particular actions and to arrange them in an order that logically leads from

one to the next until a particular goal is achieved. An action plan, or logic model, represents a kind of theory that explains how particular outcomes will be achieved. It should specify each step in chronological order, the organization and/or role that should carry out each step, and when it should be completed. In this way, the plan not only guides action but serves as a basis upon which to monitor and evaluate progress.

The process of participatory goals setting for a CSO partnership can be compared to a fruit tree. The “what’s” (goals) are the fruit that can be picked and eaten after a long process of growth and ripening. The “how’s” (action plan) are the trunk, branches and leaves that transmit nutrients and use them to stimulate development and growth. The “why’s” (values and motivations) are the roots. They reach down deep to both absorb nutrients and to hold the tree steady in the face of environmental challenges. It is easy to ignore the “why’s” because they lie beneath the surface of the earth- invisible to the naked eye. But without them a tree could not exist for long.

**Summary:** Participatory goal setting is a CSO partnership building process. It focuses on defining the “what”, “why”, and “how” of a project. It builds commitment to the partnership by enabling all the partners, at both the individual and organizational level, to have their voices heard so that project goal gives expression to their values and aspirations. It enables partner CSO’s to identify potential conflicts and to either resolve them or design ways of managing them before they have a negative impact on the project. Action Evaluation offers one method for participatory goals setting.

# Rules of the game (Strategies)

<b>Masar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To selectively challenge and break through the “paradigm”.</li><li>• Knowing what you don’t want and leaving space open for something different to emerge.</li><li>• Never copy others.</li><li>• Not just acting differently but also explaining your uniqueness (your “theory”).</li><li>• Political “mobility”.</li></ul>
<b>Sawa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tightly focusing on three fields: hotline (psychological first aid), awareness, training.</li><li>• “To be like a spot of olive oil on a piece of cloth” (Producing information that pushes back the boundaries and revealing what can not be seen, acknowledged, or discussed).</li><li>• Questioning social assumptions/paradigm</li><li>• We don’t copy but adapt Western professional models to the Palestinian reality.</li><li>• Filling in gaps.</li><li>• “Negative actors in the field”.</li></ul>
<b>Duroob</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting social change by working with the individual: Am I satisfied with myself? Who are we? What do we really want?</li><li>• Identifying the “frames” that trap us, findings ways out, and then applying them.</li><li>• Bringing political consciousness into the educational setting.</li><li>• Getting to theory through experience.</li><li>• Look “mainstream” but act/be radical.</li></ul>
<b>Anna Frank (AFEC) Frankfurt</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using a historical perspective to deal with contemporary problems.</li><li>• Conflicts as an opening to learning. Critical reflection on self as part of the problem.</li><li>• Becoming aware of, and changing, how you perceive and interpret situations of racism, anti-Semitism, conflict, violation of rights.</li><li>• Look “mainstream”, but act/be radical.</li></ul>