AGENTS FOR CITIZEN-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION (ACT)

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CSOs

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PURPOSE

This Toolkit will support those CSOs with limited experience in strategic planning. Some CSOs have only been involved in short-term project and activity planning but realise the importance of planning strategically for the longer-term.

This Toolkit has been developed as guidance material to support CSOs[1] in Nigeria; it is not a Training Manual but aims to support CSOs as they develop an Organisational Strategic Plan, to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of their CSO and to endeavour to support their projects and programmes sustainability. It is relevant for CBOs/CSOs from emerging to mature, as well as for CS Networks, and is intended as a practical resource to encourage a participatory planning and monitoring approach.

The Toolkit highlights procedures that will take a CSO through their strategic planning process. It identifies background issues that inform or direct the strategic planning process and also provides a framework for the CSO's overall Objectives and Activities. As in the private and public sectors, it is the Strategic Plan that gives CSOs their coherence and direction.

The ACT Programme aims to support CSOs' capacity to become productive, effective and accountable organisations and ACT Toolkits are intended to provide supplementary support towards this.

In line with the ACT's commitment to Human Rights and Gender and Social Inclusion, it is anticipated that CSOs' projects and plans demonstrate the mainstreaming of Gender and Social Inclusion and the adoption of a Rights-based Approach.

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[1] CSOs includes: CBOs, CSOs and CS Networks

INTRODUCTION

A strategic plan will enable the vision and values of the CSO to be presented clearly, that align with the CSO's Objectives that guide implementation of future programmes and projects. However, many others do have a strategic plan in place which could be a lengthy, jargon-filled document that gathers dust on the office shelf. It is important that the strategic plan is a used and seen as a living document, that guides direction at all levels of decision-making. This ACT Toolkit aims to highlight some of the principles of how to do it well and to identify some tools that can be helpful. The Toolkit should make strategic planning more meaningful and achievable, but the process requires the CSO's commitment of energy and time for its systematic development. The process is as important as the final document.

Every CSO is different, it would be unrealistic to say that this Toolkit is appropriate in every situation – some sections may be, some may not be, based on the user's choice. There is no set process or template, those provided are merely examples. Despite the situational and contextual differences there are important principles to follow and adapt for each CSO, such as:
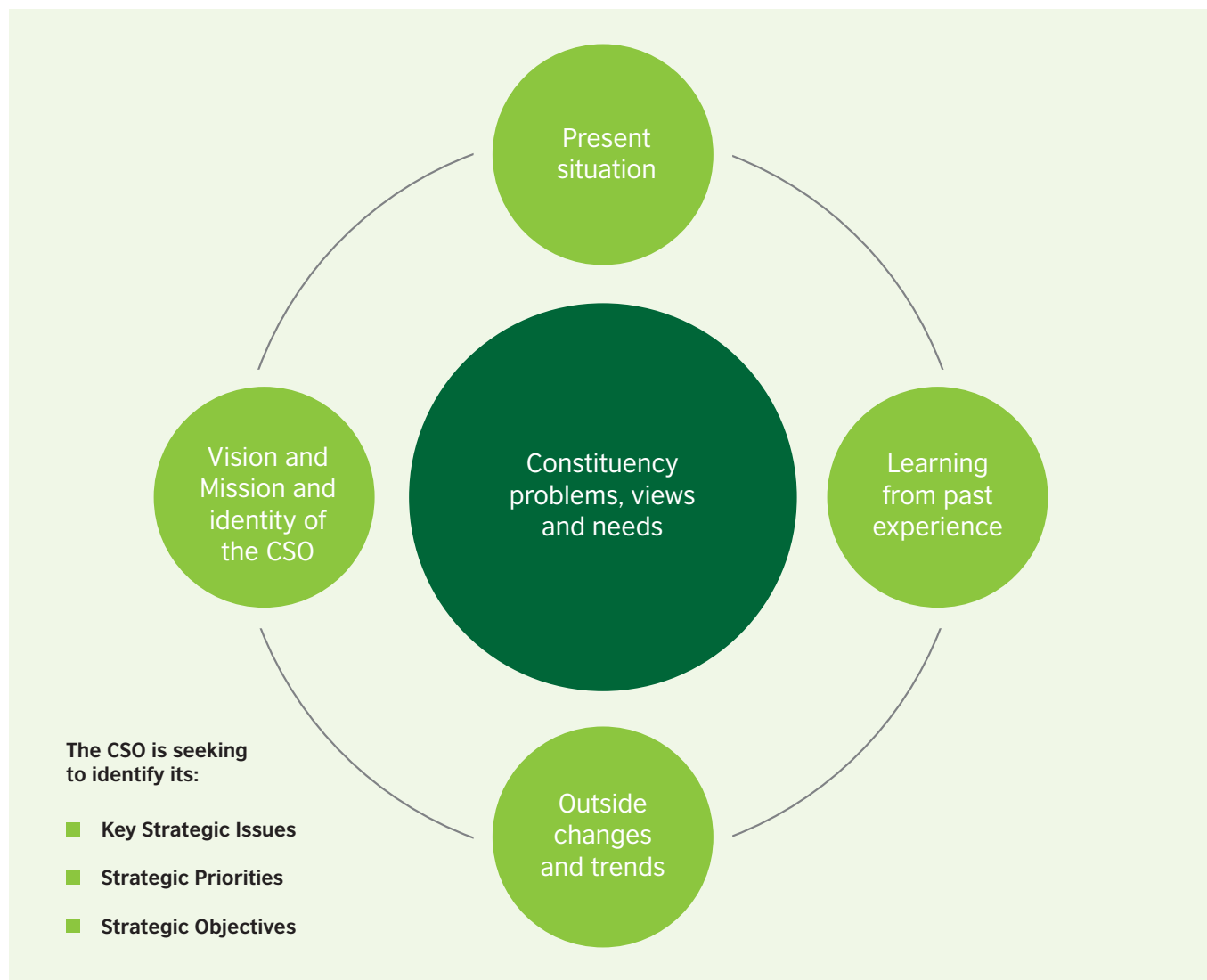
• Identify those key stakeholders worth listening to, to engage in the process

• Appreciate the common dilemmas to address

• Adopt useful tools to help to make decisions

In line with the ACT's commitment to Human Rights and Gender and Social Inclusion, it is anticipated that CSOs' strategy demonstrates the mainstreaming of Gender and Social Inclusion and the adoption of a Rights-based Approach.

Key Ingredients[2]:

One way of visualising the core ingredients in any strategy development process can be summarised in the diagram below:

Figure 1: Key Ingredients of strategy development

The CSO is seeking to identify its:

■ Key Strategic Issues

■ Strategic Priorities

■ Strategic Objectives

(diagram labels: Present situation; Vision and Mission and identity of the CSO; Constituency problems, views and needs; Learning from past experience; Outside changes and trends)

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[2] Adapted from a diagram by Bruce Britton, INTRAC/Framework Consultants

What is a Strategic Plan?

The strategy document provides the overall approach and plan or direction of a CSO, usually for a period of 3-5 yrs. It facilitates a good CSO management process, providing an overview of the organisation in which the projects and activities are situated. It provides insight into where the CSO is currently, where it is going and how long it'll take to get there. The strategic plan provides clarity on what the CSO wants to achieve and how it will achieve it – it guides all project planning for that period within its organisational vision, mission or parameters (rather than planning on an ad hoc basis, juggling projects and funding proposals without a focus or a clear direction).

A strategic plan should enable you to answer the following questions:

• Who are we?

• What capacity do we have/what can we realistically achieve?

• What key problems are we addressing?

• What difference do we want to make?

• What critical issues must we respond to?

• Where should we allocate our resources – what are our priorities?

Once the CSO have answered all these questions, it is possible to answer the following:

• What should our immediate objective be?

• How should we organise ourselves to achieve this objective?

• Who will do what and when?

A strategic plan is not rigid, it provides those parameters within which the CSO should work; it should be reviewed at its mid period and modified, based on findings. That is why it is important to:

• Base the strategic planning (and strategic review) on a real understanding of the external environment and of the CSO's capacity, strengths and weaknesses.

Why is a Strategic Plan needed?

It is possible for a CSO to have a clear strategy without having a strategic plan. A strategic plan merely puts on paper the long-term direction of the CSO. While a clear direction may exist already inside the heads of a few, writing it down enables it to be better understood by current and new staff, volunteers, board of trustees, constituents, donors, government, and other external stakeholders. The process of consulting with others and agreeing a joint way forward, then documenting it, can be extremely valuable. It provides an opportunity for the CSO to:

• Reflect back on the impact it has had in the past – learning from experience

• Look up from the day-to-day issues and try to see how the CSO fits into the bigger picture, now and for the future

• Build teamwork and expertise among staff

• Listen to and build better external relationships with a diverse variety of stakeholders

• Bring coherence to plans for projects and the different parts of the CSO, making sure they are all pulling together

• Prioritise where to focus the energies and resources in the future to maximise potential for achieving the organisational mission

Checklist - does our CSO need a Strategic Plan?

The ED/Senior Management Team/Board members should work through the following questionnaire:

Figure 2: The CSO's need for a strategy - a checklist

Statement	Definitely (Score 1)	Maybe/not sure (Score 2)	Definitely not (Score 3)
The CSO has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve and there is consensus around this Vision, which forms the basis for planning and is shared with others.			
Values are often discussed in the CSO, there is agreement on the Values base of the CSO and they are used in decision-making.			
The current mission statement of the CSO reflects clearly what the CSO does, for whom, where, and why it is important, and this is reflected in the CSO's Overall Objectives and Programme and Project Objectives.			
The CSO/its programmes/projects, regularly reflect on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (with a gender and social inclusion perspective) in their environment.			
The CSO/its programmes/projects, have clear Goals (Impact), Purpose (Outcomes) and Objectives (Results) which are SMART.			
The CSO finds it easy to prioritise, making a distinction between what it must do, what it should do and what it would like to do.			
TOTAL SCORE			

Scoring: Where a statement has two parts, you should go with the score from the weaker response.

- If your total is 20 or more, then the CSO should undertake a strategic planning process as soon as possible.
- If your total is 15, or between 15 and 20, then the CSO would certainly benefit from developing a strategic plan.

- If your score is under 15, then the CSO is encouraged to undertake strategic planning every 3-5 yrs to ensure that all programmes and projects are managed within its strategy.

Preparing for the Strategic Planning Process

The process cannot happen in an ad hoc way through regular planning or staff meetings. It requires careful planning to set it up so that the process is thorough and comprehensive. When a CSO revises or develops a new strategic plan, it is setting up the parameters for the work of the CSO, usually for the next 3-5 years. It, therefore, makes sense to spend time and energy preparing for the strategic planning process.

Timing: ((Q) Questions… with some suggested (A)answers)

Q: **When do you need to carry out a strategic planning process?**

A: The CSO needs to start the process as soon as possible when there is no strategic plan in place, or when its current strategic plan is drawing to a close

A: Don't do a strategic planning process more than once in every 2-3 yrs, or unless the internal or external context changes significantly.

Q: **How often do you need to undertake a strategic review?**

A: A strategic review can be carried out every 1-2 yrs, or at the mid-term of a 5 yr strategy.

This is a straight-forward process where the CSO (with key stakeholders) should spend a day or two to look at the strategic framework against internal and external change, as a reality check (it is an opportunity to make modifications in the strategy for the remaining period, as necessary).

Q: **How long should a strategic planning process take?**

A: It is not possible to carry out a thorough strategic planning process from beginning to end in less than two weeks in order to gather the information required with a detailed situational analysis, participatory planning and final approval.

Who should be involved?

Key questions here are:

• Who should participate in the strategic planning process?

• Who should facilitate the strategic planning process?

Who should participate in the strategic planning process?

The strategic planning process helps a CSO to clarify, consolidate and establish its strategic framework. Embedded in this are the Values and Vision of the CSO. This means that it is very important for the whole CSO (staff, volunteers, and if possible board members) to engage in the planning process. We suggest the following:

Figure 3: Process of undertaking a stragegic review

Activity	Who should be involved
Planning the process	**The ED/Senior Management Team of the CSO**
Understanding the context	All staff, long-term volunteers and board members
Vision, Mission, Values, Goal, Objectives, discussion/ agreement	All staff, long-term volunteers, board members (this is likely to involve discussion about operating principles and making it clear why those engaged in the CSO are expected to work in a certain way, it also encourages ownership, thus the need to engage with all staff, etc).
Review of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) (with G&SI cross-cutting all)	ED/SMT and Programme/Project staff, particularly, but it is important to include admin staff also to engage in this session (and board members if possible)
Organisational structure	ED/SMT, following a consultation exercise with the rest of the staff

The ED/SMT and Development staff should be involved throughout the process. To encourage finance and operations staff, even board members, to engage with the development-side of the CSO's work, the CSO may wish to invite them to all stages where development staff are involved. This encourages full ownership and commitment from the outset.

Using an external facilitator

The CSO may wish to use a skilled external facilitator for a full-scale strategic planning process, so that:

- there is a designated person to keep order, to prevent issues from being personalised and to keep the process on track, without becoming emotionally involved;

- everyone else involved is freed up to get involved in the process without worrying about the process issues;

- a skilled person is available to deal with conflict that may arise so that it is handled constructively and doesn't cause any long-term damage or upset;

- someone with specific organisational development expertise is available to raise issues and prevent the CSO from avoiding challenges;

- someone with experience is available to offer insights, ideas and an external perspective.

Checklist for selecting an external facilitator for the strategic planning process

1. An understanding of the development issues the CSO is dealing with

2. An understanding of organisational development issues and the strategic planning process

3. Insight, empathy and credibility

4. Facilitation skills (able to manage conflict and differences of opinion)

5. Ability to be able to draw together, and clarify, ideas objectively

6. Honesty and fairness (ability to be objective)

7. A commitment to the CSO reaching its desired outcome

8. Logic, self-discipline and the ability to operate systematically

9. Commitment to deadlines

10. Verbal and written skills

11. Reasonable rates!

Once the CSO has found the right person, agree on a clear, written brief so that there is no misunderstanding from both sides of what is expected, within a clear timeframe.

Disadvantages have mainly to do with cost. So, if the CSO has a skilled internal facilitator this would work.

The Strategic Planning Process

Figure 4: A typical strategy development process
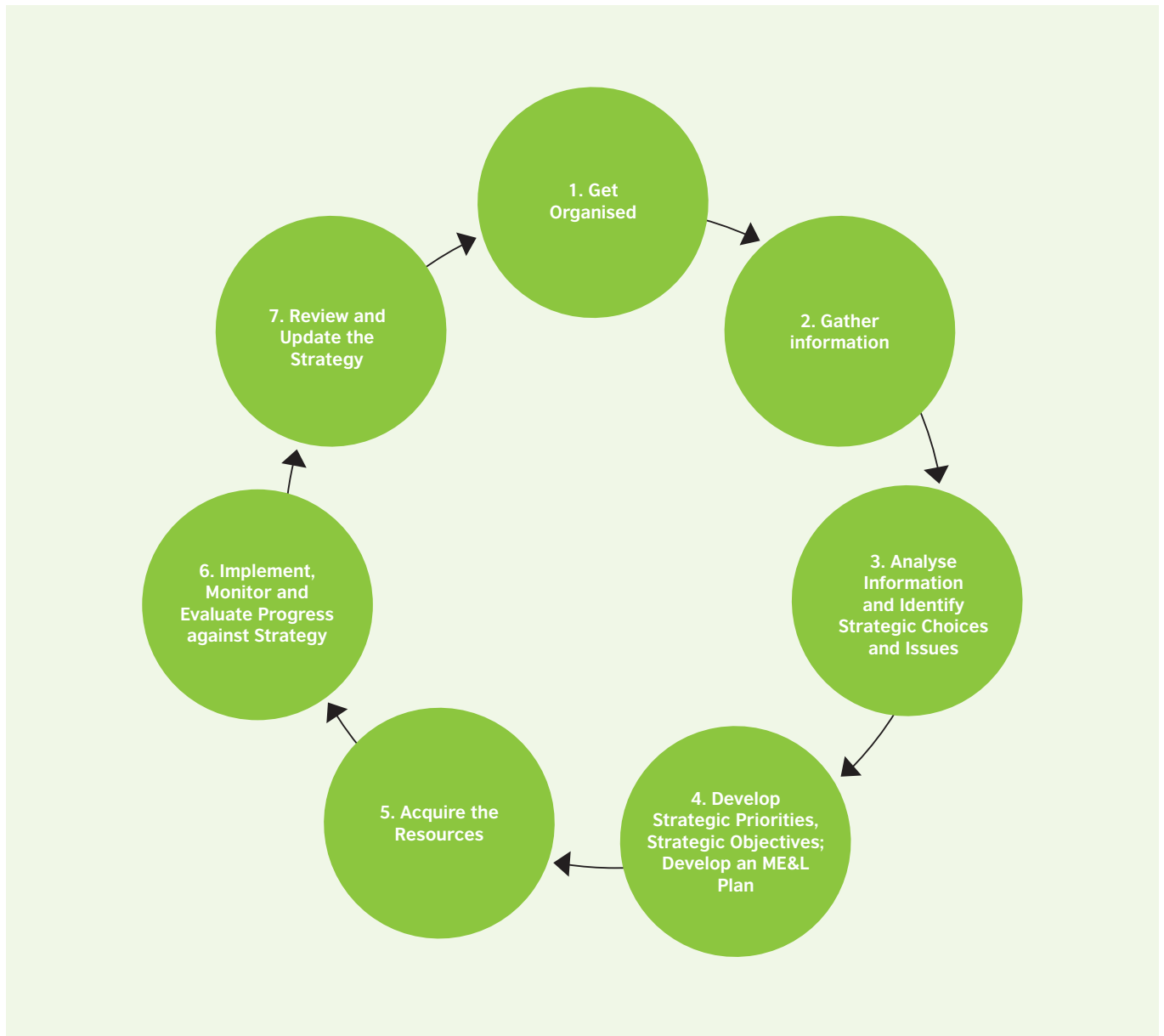
1. Get Organised

By the end of the process the CSO (and its board/staff/volunteers) needs to have a comprehensive understanding of the context that informs the strategic planning process. Preparatory work for the strategic planning process:

A. Thinking about the context:

a.   Look at the development context: globally and nationally; the CSO's sector globally, nationally and locally; the CSO's area of expertise globally, nationally and locally – to get an overall perspective, not just from one point of view.

b.   What has happened in the past three years in the external environment that could affect the work of the CSO?

c.   What are the challenges and threats facing the CSO from the external environment?

d.   What are the opportunities to take advantage of in the environment, in order to:

   •   Help achieve the vision?

   •   Make the work more sustainable?

g.   What information is there that is important to share with others from the strategic planning process?

B. Thinking about the CSO

a. What weaknesses are preventing the CSO from achieving its vision?

b. Is the CSO clear about its vision, mission and values?

c. What challenges has the CSO failed to meet in the past 2-3 years and why?

d. What challenges has the CSO met well in the past two to three years and what helped it to meet them?

e. What is the most important outcome that the CSO would like to see emerging from this strategic planning process? Why is it so important?

2. Gather Information

Carry out a Situational Analysis (on the key issues faced by the CSO's constituents)

Guiding Principles:

• Participatory

• Outward looking

• Learning from others

• Data-based, not anecdotal

In advance, it is important to consider:

WHAT?

• What do we want to achieve?

• What would happen if no decision was made or solution found?

• What do we need in order to find a solution?

WHY?

• Why do we want to achieve a solution?

• Why did the problem or opportunity arise?

• Why do we need to find a solution or a way forward at all?

HOW?

• How will the situation be different?

• Why did the problem or opportunity arise?

• Why do I need to find a solution or a way forward?

WHERE?

• Where did the issue arise?

• Where does it impact?

• Is the 'where' important?

• If so, why?

WHO?

• Who are we trying to please?

• Who cares about this situation? Who is affected?

• Who is involved (Information? Help? Action? Stakeholders?)

• Who needs to be involved

WHEN?

• When did the issue arise?

• When do we need to act?

Who needs to be involved in gathering information?

The strategic planning process is an excellent opportunity to gather the views and wishes of the CSO's constituents, senior staff, staff, volunteers, donors, other CSOs, other stakeholders of the CSO and its projects. Acknowledging the different views of the stakeholders during the process of strategy development, even if they are not closely linked, can lend legitimacy to the exercise. A participatory approach to strategy development can lead to significant 'spin offs', such as team building, better collaboration, improved communication, and it can signal a commitment to changing the organisational culture. Participation creates a sense of ownership in the process of strategy development, and ownership encourages commitment. Commitment to the strategy makes its achievement more likely.

Strategy development should involve partners (constituents/beneficiaries) of the CSO in some way. Often their voices are excluded when deciding what a CSO should focus on and how it should work. If this is the case, then development remains 'top down' or 'donor driven', where others are driving the process. The critical question is 'how do we involve our partners (constituents/ beneficiaries) in a meaningful, but cost-effective way?' It is essential that these voices are clearly heard.

There is also the question of the role of the board of trustees in developing strategy. It is important for ownership and governance that the trustees should be involved from the outset, but the degree of involvement will depend on the situation. In the end the board has to approve the strategy, but this does not mean they have to develop it themselves. There is a risk that if the board are too distant from the realities on the ground they will remain out of touch, and their expectations could be unrealistic. Project staff obviously have the best view of what would work, but may be too closely involved to think 'outside the box'. In the end, making hard strategic choices is a leadership decision.

Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis

Using a 'brainstorming' exercise, map out the CSO's Stakeholders, it may look something like this, but ensure that this contains relevant stakeholders to the sector, work and location of the CSO.

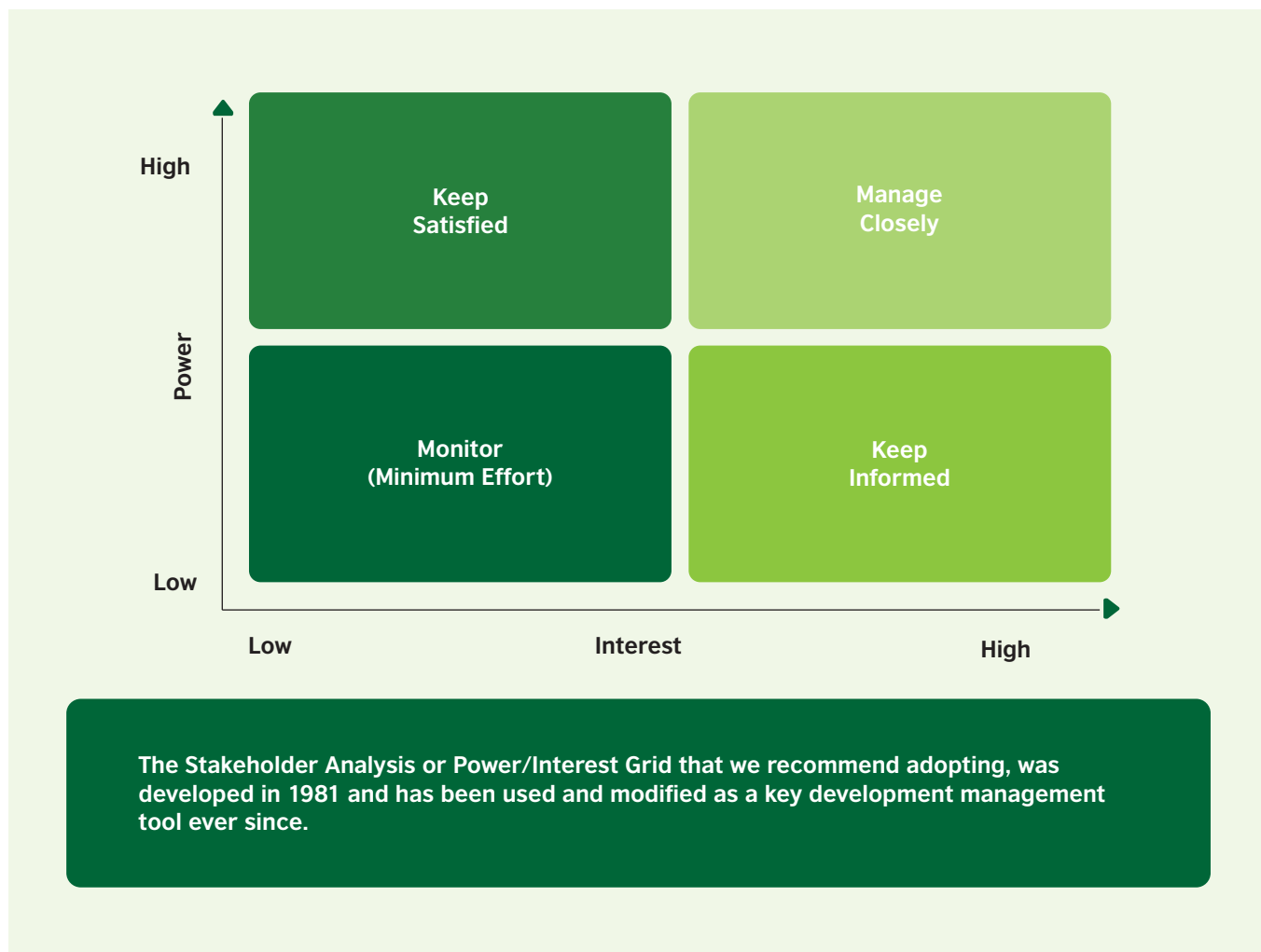**Figure 5:** Sample Stakeholder mapping exercise

Once the details of the people and organisations that are affected by, or affect, the CSO are pulled together in a map – it is important to identify those that the CSO needs to engage with closely, and those who have to keep informed about the CSO's work, by asking the questions:

• Which ones have influence or power over the CSO, positively or negatively?

• Which ones have an interest in its successful or unsuccessful conclusion?

For the Stakeholder Analysis, now the CSO should match the stakeholders with the appropriate box in the Power/Influence Grid below:

Figure 6: Stakeholder Analysis tool

The Stakeholder Analysis or Power/Interest Grid that we recommend adopting, was developed in 1981 and has been used and modified as a key development management tool ever since.

[3] Power/Interest Grid for Stakeholder Prioritization

The position allocated to a stakeholder on the grid indicates the actions needed by the CSO to take with them, (eg: The CSO's constituents/beneficiary group will appear in the High Power/High Interest box.) Although the details provided here, and the actions taken to influence these relationships, are critical for the success of the CSO, for the Strategic Planning exercise it also provides guidance on who should be involved in the process.

3. Analyse the information gathered and the key issues, and make strategic choices

In order to develop a strategic plan, a CSO must begin by developing it parameters. No CSO can operate in a completely limitless or boundless way. There are certain parameters that define or limit what it can and cannot do, based on what it can (and cannot) do well. A strategic plan enables a CSO to work within its agreed parameters that are defined by its understanding of the problems it aims to address, and what causes them – as well as by the expertise within the CSO. Those parameters will be defined by:

The Problem Analysis: The strategy must aim to solve significant problems, or address the root causes of those problems; these need to be identified through building evidence-based knowledge and understanding from those affected by the issue. The intention is to make a significant positive and sustainable difference to the lives of the proposed constituent group, in line with the CSO's Vision and Mission, and expertise.

[3]   Model adapted from MindTools: Mendelow, A.L. (1981)

The Stakeholders (see stakeholder analysis above) Who they are – partners, constituents, donors, LGAs, other CSOs in the sector, etc. Knowing who they are, and their roles and responsibilities, influences what the CSO does and how it does it.

The CSO's distinctive competencies (and vision): This term is borrowed from business, but it is useful in the development context. It refers to what the CSO is particularly good at – it might be through working with community health workers, producing media, support the rights of people with disabilities, etc. Knowing its distinctive competencies helps the CSO to clarify its planning parameters.

The CSO's competitive advantage: This is another term borrowed from business but useful in the development context. What makes the CSO preferable/more appropriate than others doing similar work? Does the CSO have a good track record in their sector? Knowing what the competitive advantage is and exploiting where possible, should be part of the strategy.

The CSO's Values: These provide clear parameters to the strategic options. If the CSO, for example, believes 'nothing for women, without them' then its strategic options will be bound by this belief.

Access to Resources: It is important for the CSO to be aware of what resources they need for the achievement the strategic plan. It may not affect the CSO's Vision, Mission or Values, but a realistic understanding of the resources required will influence how to define the achievement of Goals and Objectives. Resources include money, people and expertise.

Assumptions: Analysing information requires an understanding of underlying assumptions. Assumptions are external conditions that the CSO cannot control but which it assumes will exist and which are necessary to the success of the CSO, eg: a CSO may assume that the

Government will support their sector through legislation and support. To make this assumption the CSO must have a good reason to believe it – if it does, it becomes one of its planning parameters – "we can rely on Government support at the legislative level". Assumptions are always written as a **positive statement;** other assumptions might be, for example:

• Government continues with its policy on inclusive health care

• Local business is keen to cooperate with CSOs in this matter

• There is no increase in the current level of violence

• There are no floods this year and we can reach our constituent groups in rural areas

It is important for the CSO to keep monitoring their assumptions in case external circumstances change and plans have to be adjusted.

Risks: Analysing the potential risks that the CSO will need to overcome or mitigate against in order to achieve its goal. Commonly risk is considered as a cause that might make something go wrong within a CSO's environment or its projects. A definition of risk is: "the effect of uncertainties on an organisation's objectives". Potential risks come and go as dynamics change, and as the operational environment changes. Keeping on top of the risks that may affect your CSO is an ongoing activity, and identifying (and monitoring them closely) during Strategic Planning is crucial. Risks are usually worded in a negative statement. Developing a **Risk Management Matrix and a Risk Management Policy** is strongly advised.

Risk Register (See ACT PCM Toolkit for more information)

For Likelihood and Impact: H (high), M (medium), L (low)

Figure 7: Sample Risk Management and Mitigation tool

Nature of Risk or Uncertainty	Likelihood: High/ Medium Low	Scoring of Overall Impact (if it were to happen) High/Medium/Low	Actions required and who will take responsibility to manage the risk
Eg: The LGA feels challenged by CSOs who take forward economic development initiatives in this location	M	H	Engagement with LGA during planning Strategic Planning to ensure collaboration and ownership from the start (or they could threaten the project).

Identifying the 'Critical Issues' the CSO needs to address: The assumptions and risks have looked at the context of the CSO. At this stage, the CSO should be in a position to identify critical internal and external issues which need to be addressed. What is a critical issue? It could be one that meets most of, or all of, the following criteria, for example:

• It affects the effective governance of the CSO

• It affects the CSO's compliance with legal regulations

• It can be addressed through strengthening the competencies of the CSO's staff

• It needs to be addressed if the CSO is able to progress its Vision/Mission/Goal

• It affects the depth of understanding of the sector across the state

To proceed with your strategic planning process, it would be helpful to identify issues that need to be addressed before the end of the process. Once identified, consider:

• Which critical issues must be prioritised within the next 6 months in order for the work to progress effectively?

• Which critical issues must be dealt with in the next year to ensure the long-term ability of the CSOs to do it work?

• Which of these should be dealt with in order to improve our work environment?

Key strategic choices, based on the CSO's analysis of information, for example:

1. The choice of location – should the CSO focus on one or two LGAs, and increase based on learning, or spread itself more thinly across more locations from the outset?

2. Does the CSO provide a little support to many, or more intensive support to a few?

3. How is the CSO ensuring the mainstreaming of Gender and Social Inclusion?

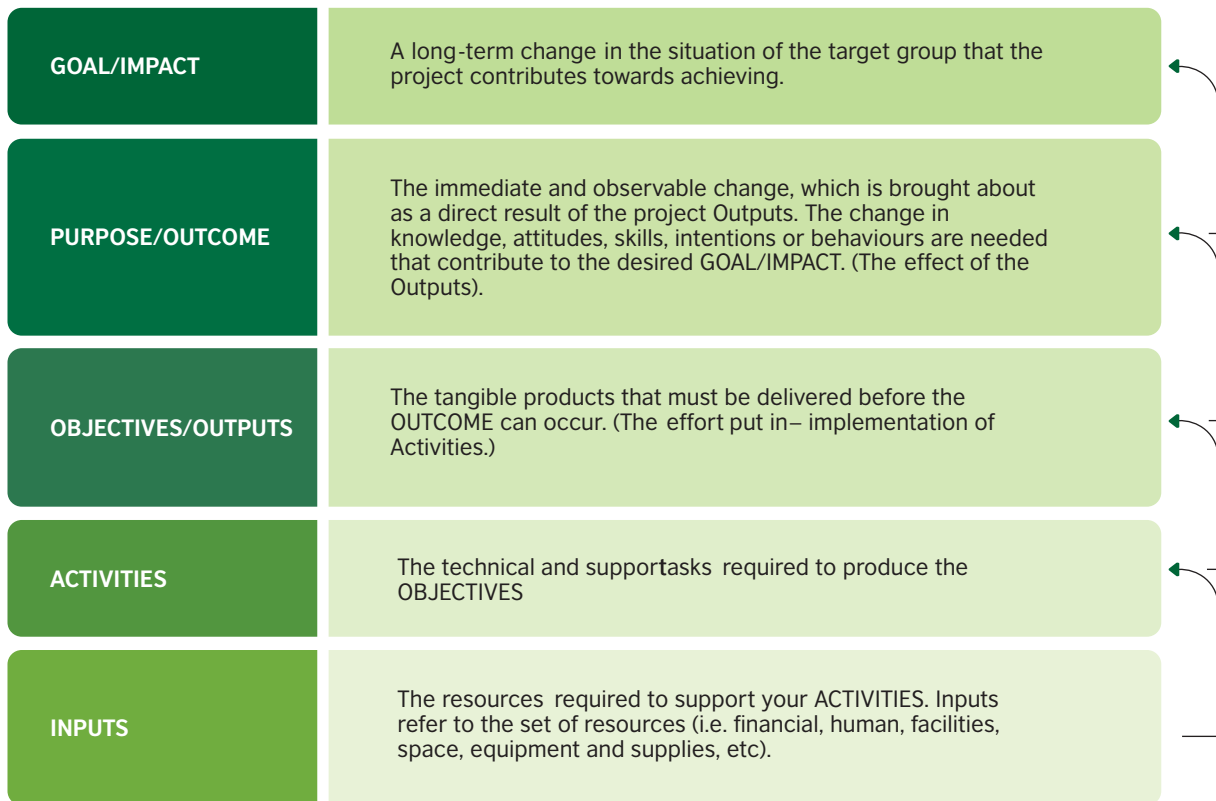4. Is the CSO treating the symptoms or the cause? (Is the approach sustainable?)

5. Does the CSO provide services, or campaign for change through the adoption of a Rights-based Approach?

6. Does the CSO commit to its beliefs, or is it willing to be tempted by new resources beyond our remit?

4. Develop strategic priorities, overall strategic Objectives and an ME&L plan

With the groundwork done, the CSO is ready to develop the content of the strategic plan, by developing the 'strategic framework', which includes:

• A clearly stated **Vision**

• Clearly articulated **Values**

• A clear **Mission Statement** (this should fit with the Values and the Vision of the CSO and should address the key needs of its constituents)

• The overall **Goal** of the CSO (Impact)

• The **Purpose Statement** (Immediate Objective or Outcome) of the CSO

• Key **Result areas** (Objectives/Outputs) of the CSO (these should, accumulatively, enable the Purpose and Goal to be met and should contribute to the achievement of the Vision. These should be SMART, in order for progress to be monitored and measured. *(The Activities will be outlined in the* Annual/Operational Planning*, which respond to the Objectives in the Strategic Framework)*

• Outline the gaps between where the CSO is now, and where it needs to be to achieve its Goals and Objectives and take note of issues that may help or hinder progress

All these elements need to align – they should fit together to complement each other. The strategic framework should give coherence and clarity to the work of the CSO. Providing the planning has been efficient, the Causal Pathway should show evidence of the coherence of the framework (see the rational below).

Figure 8: Causal Pathway framework

GOAL/IMPACT	A long-term change in the situation of the target group that the project contributes towards achieving.
PURPOSE/OUTCOME	The immediate and observable change, which is brought about as a direct result of the project Outputs. The change in knowledge, attitudes, skills, intentions or behaviours are needed that contribute to the desired GOAL/IMPACT. (The effect of the Outputs).
OBJECTIVES/OUTPUTS	The tangible products that must be delivered before the OUTCOME can occur. (The effort put in– implementation of Activities.)
ACTIVITIES	The technical and support tasks required to produce the OBJECTIVES
INPUTS	The resources required to support your ACTIVITIES. Inputs refer to the set of resources (i.e. financial, human, facilities, space, equipment and supplies, etc).

Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning (ME&L) Plan

The purpose of an ME&L plan is **to encourage project or programme staff to think clearly about what they intend doing in the way of ME&L before** implementation of a project or programme begins, and to ensure those plans are adequately documented.

The ME&L Plan should provide the collection of Indicators against each of the statements in the strategic framework. This should ensure that firm plans are in place to monitor progress by collecting information based on the Indicators; this is often shown in a grid that may include the following:

- The Objective/Output statements
- Indicators against each one (not too many – 1-2 x qualitative and 1-2 x quantitative)
- The source of information used to collect the indicator information
- The person responsible for collection
- The timing – when the information should be collected
- How often the indicator information should be collected

For the ACT Programme, and the majority of donors, indicator grids should also show any disaggregation required (eg: gender/disability). There may be other columns added for baselines, milestones and targets.

Figure 9: Sample ME&L plan

Objective/Output	Indicator	Source	Who collects?	When?	How often?
To enhance the agricultural productivity of farmers in X LGAs of Sokoto State	Average yield of X crops	Survey of Farmers	M&E staff	End of harvest season	At baseline, mid-point and end point
	No. of Farmers using of new technology	Focus group discussion with farmers	Project Officer	During reviews	Quarterly
	Engagement of LGA officials with Farmers' Groups	Discussions with LGA officials

Feedback from farmers | Project Officer/ Evaluation team | Mid-term and end of term evaluation | Twice |

5. Resource Planning

The Strategic Plan is a very useful document that can be used to provide information to donors and wider stakeholders – it can give legitimacy to a CSO. It is important for CSOs to continually reassess their ability to generate funding – adapting their fundraising approaches and introducing new income streams where possible. The fundraising climate is tough and, while training can provide support to deliver fundraising, CSOs are encouraged to develop a Fundraising Strategy to focus their cause.

Step 1: From the Strategic Planning exercise it should be straight-forward for the CSO provide an engaging reason as to why a donor should support your work – this is the first step and it needs to explain:

- What the problem is
- What is the CSO's solution to the problem
- The difference the CSO will make if project is successful
- What will happen if the CSO either doesn't engage with the problem, or it the project fails
- Why the CSO is uniquely qualified to tackle the problem

Step 2: Decide on the sources of funds the CSO will focus on, ideally this should be a mixed portfolio so you are not dependent on any single source, for example.

- Trusts and Foundations
- Institutional donors, such as EU; FCDO; DANIDA, etc
- Companies
- Individuals
- Local, such as churches and groups which may raise money (for or with the CSO)

Step 3: Structure

When the CSO knows which funding sources to approach, it can explain how it will structure its fundraising. (The CSO might recruit a Fundraiser, or choose to create a fundraising committee.)

Step 4: Research

This step takes choices from Step 2 a stage further and identifies the specific donors the CSO plans to target. The key here is explain how to go about finding donors and supporters that will have a reason to support the CSO. It is important to plan how to reach supporters – sometimes this can be done through previous experience, close contacts, or internet searches. It is important to gain a clear understanding of the donors' interests, and not just to expect that donors will be interested in the work of the CSO.

Step 5: Creating a proposition

The CSO should explain how it will match its needs with the donors interests as well as to the level of funding you can expect from them. For example, if fundraising from the local community the CSO will need to be able to explain what difference a lower level of donation will make to their constituents, whereas with a larger institutional donor or a large foundation, the focus will be on the long-term change their donation can make. (The CSO may wish to outline which potential donors it will share the newly developed Strategic Plan to provide an introduction to their work.)

Step 6: Ask for money

In most cases, institutional donors and foundations (and in some cases companies) will have a written proposal templates and guidelines to be followed. Some corporates may request a face-to-face 'pitch'. There are many ways to asks individuals from organising events, to writing to them. Crowdfunding may be another opportunity to fundraise for a specific tailored activity. Often the personal approach has a greater chance of success – eg: making a presentation about the CSO in a Church or Mosque with an opportunity for people to ask questions and to learn more. Consider Fundraising training needs.

Step 7: Relationship building

Think about how to build long-term relationships where possible; reporting back on progress and the difference their contribution has made, continuing to involve them in the CSO where possible (eg: sharing updates or stories of change), to encourage further donations.

6. Implement, Monitor and Evaluate progress against Strategy

It is now time for the CSO to start implementing its Year1 Implementation Plan, and to use its ME&L Tool to learn, to adapt, and to monitor progress closely against is strategy. Gathering information to report progress, including learning, and evidence of change that can directly be attributed to its actions, is now underway.

7. Review and update the Strategy

Based on an agreed timeframe, it is recommended that the CSO holds a 1-2 day session with staff and key stakeholders to review the progress of its strategy towards its agreed objectives. This is an opportunity for the CSO to revise its approach and plans, based on learning. This often takes place mid-way through a strategic planning period. Alternatively, an annual review against its strategy is a very useful exercise for the CSO – the strategic plan is not carved in stone, it can be amended, based on learning, but in a controlled and planned way.

(Sample) Template for a Strategic Plan

These are some of the expected elements in a good strategic plan:

- Executive Summary (one page only)
- Background: When the CSO started and its development (one page only)
- Key supporters and funders (No more than half page)
- Achievements to date
- Identity of organisation
  - Vision
  - Mission
  - Values
- Strategy Process (an outline of the process)
  - Briefly how was it done and who was involved
  - Analysis of external environment
  - Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the CSO (outcomes of SWOT and PESTEL)
- Strategic Priorities
- Choices made - Prioritised core roles/programmes/approaches over next 3-5 yrs, based on findings from participatory findings
- Strategic Framework:
  - Vision; Mission; Values
  - Goal
  - Purpose
  - Objectives
  - Key Activities
- Implications for CSO – e.g. structure, staffing, capacity building
- Strategic Budget

In addition, the CSO is encouraged to develop the following guiding documents, in line with its Strategic Plan:

- A Strategic Budget
- A Fundraising Strategy
- A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (ME&L) Strategy
- A Staffing and Resources Plan

GLOSSARY

Assumptions

When developing a strategy or a project it is important to consider the assumptions that are being made, eg: statements that are accepted without proof. These set the foundations of the planning; an example in the CSO's development context may be the assumption 'that the Local Government Authority will be keen to engage with the communities on issues of healthcare'. The assumption is always written as a positive statement.

Causal Pathway

The Causal Pathway in the development context shows the logical sequence of steps that lead to the achievement of the Goal of a Project, eg: Inputs (resources) lead to Activities, which lead to the achievement of the Outputs (Objectives), which lead to the achievement of the Outcome (Purpose), which contributes to the achievement of the Impact (Goal).

Competitive Advantage

The competitive advantage of a CSO are those attributes that make it better placed to achieve its Objectives over another CSO. It could relate to the skills that it holds, the knowledge and understanding it has of the sector or issue it is aiming to address, and how it is positioned to bring about positive change.

Constituents

In the development sector, a CSO's constituents are those it represents or supports to bring about sustainable change. Other relevant terminology includes: beneficiaries, target groups.

Gender and Social Inclusion

Gender and Social Inclusion (G&SI) is a concept that addresses improved equal access for all, including women, girls, youth, poor people, people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, older people, children, LGBTQI+, etc – those people who are often traditionally excluded from development initiatives. It supports more inclusive policies and mindsets and increases voice and influence by all.

Human Rights Based Approach

A human rights-based approach (or a rights-based approach) to development) means that all forms of discrimination, based on human rights, must be prevented. It also means that priority should be given to people who are often the most marginalised or excluded from development, and who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights

Participatory Approach

A participatory approach to development requires the CSO to involve its constituents and key stakeholders in designing a project that directly addresses their problem. Participatory methodology includes activities that enable communities to play an active and influential role in decision-making that affects their lives. This means that the constituents are not just listened to, but they are heard to the extent that their voice shapes the outcomes of the project. Their full engagement contributes to sustainable change that they 'own'.

Problem/Issue Analysis

Problem/issue analysis during strategic or project planning is a process used to identify the cause and effect of a key problem identified by the constituents. By identifying the negative causes of a problem it is possible to consider positive solutions, and by identifying the negative effects of the cause, it is possible to plan for positive effects. This process of analysis is the foundation for developing an organisational strategic or project framework.

Risk Analysis

Analysing the potential risks for a CSO or specific project in advance is necessary in order to prepare and plan the means to mitigate against those risks. This provides the CSO with the opportunity to consider the effects of potential obstructions. Risks are generally written in the negative, eg: An outbreak of Covid-19 in X Community in X State. Mitigation may involve the CSO being prepared in advance to carry out their training or advocacy activities remotely.

Situational Analysis A situational analysis helps the CSO to develop a basis of understanding of the culture and environment in which their strategy or projects will be delivered. It can relate to political, economic or social conditions. It helps the CSO to make decisions as to the most appropriate approach to their work, as well as location, and who they should engage with. Their knowledge from this analysis will help them to prioritise plans and actions.

Stakeholders A stakeholder is an individual or a group that has an interest in the CSO or its projects. A 'primary stakeholder' in development is usually the constituent group or community that the CSO is working alongside to support, who will directly benefit. 'Secondary stakeholders' can include other CSOs, relevant Ministries, Local Authorities, Traditional Authorities, Religious Leaders, etc. In order for a project to succeed and to be sustainable, it is important that there is an analysis of the stakeholders to ensure that the CSO involves them in the project appropriately and builds alliances based on trust and accountability.

Strategic Objectives Strategic objectives are the big-picture Goal and Objectives for the CSO. They describe what the CSO will do to try to fulfil its mission. All of the projects a CSO undertakes should align with the strategic objectives.

Strategic Plan A strategic plan is a document that is used to communicate the CSO's strategy, or direction. The content of the strategy helps the CSO to make decisions on project planning, staffing needs and the seeking and allocation of resources. It will guide the implementation of its work for its lifespan. The strategic plan is also a very useful promotional and advocacy tool to share with key stakeholders, such as Government and donors.

Strategic Priorities Strategic priorities are the objectives which are developed to align with the CSOs mission, values and sector, and form the focus of its work over a designated period of time.

References/Sources of Information

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INTRAC:
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Strategic Planning: PLP programme

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The Guardian, UK:
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