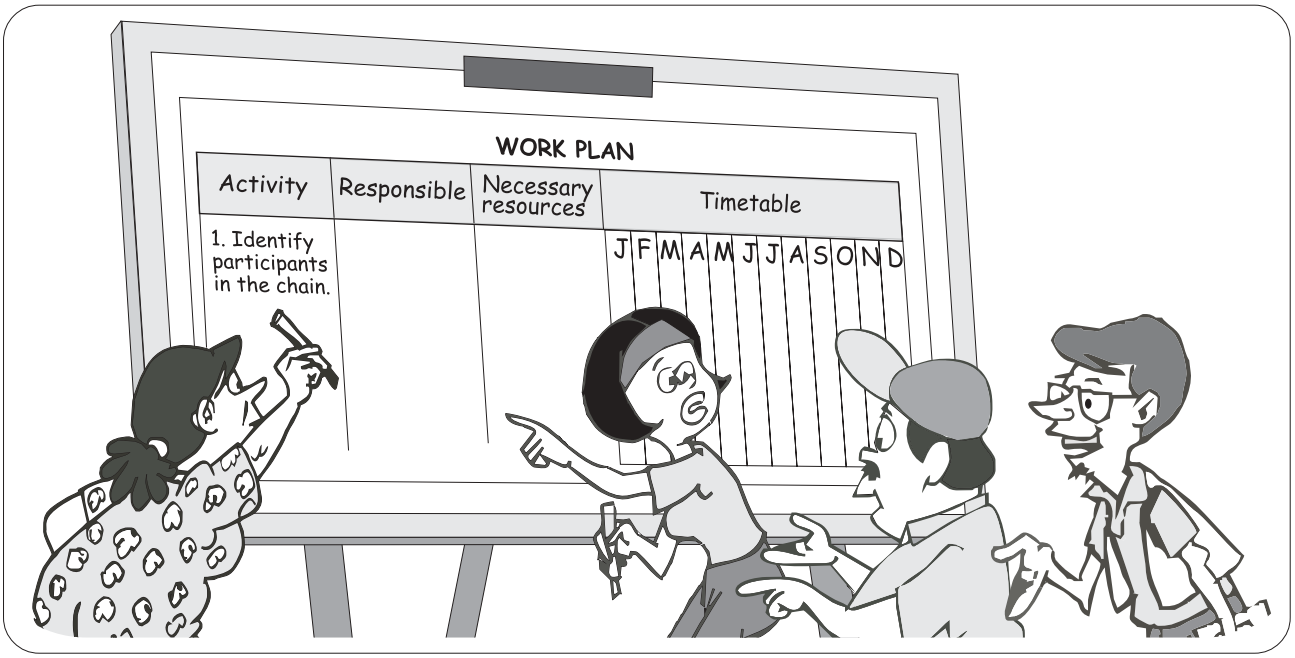
SECTION 4

Planning Together for Joint Action



In the previous section, representatives of the working group carried out a diagnosis of the resources available to support agroenterprise development in an area, taking into account options for zoning the area. This survey will have provided information on:

- Existing endowments of natural, human, productive, and social resources.
- Livelihood strategies for differentiated social groups by area and zone according to local welfare criteria.
- Existing organizations and institutions relevant to processes of rural enterprise development and their relationships in the diverse zones of the area.
- Current and historical processes of innovation in the area.

This information is now used to develop simple action plans to promote agroenterprise development. This section is divided into four parts:

1. Review of working group members and the formation of the group.
2. Analysis of the area's potential for rural enterprise development.
3. Identification of areas of consensus for common action.
4. Generation of a shared action plan.

The implementation of these four steps is focused on the organizations that plan to be members of the working group. The steps can be facilitated by an external or support organization but the discussions and final agreements should be the product of the working group members.

Reviewing the Roles of the Working Group

Before generating an action plan, time should be taken to assess the stakeholders in the working group and to gain a better understanding of their level of interest. In some cases new participants may have been identified from the diagnosis stage. Review the composition of the group; gain an understanding of their expectations, what they can provide and what they may need to play an active role in the group. This is the time to develop some basic ground rules for roles and responsibilities for all group members.

One of the results of the diagnosis was the identification of key actors for the area's rural agroenterprise development. These actors may be similar to those already in the working group or they may be different. This is an appropriate time to review the identified actors and openly discuss the following questions as a group:

- Do the participants in the working group represent the most important actors for rural enterprise development in the area?
- Do they have sufficient information, resources, and access to the market to change the existing situation by themselves, or would it be better to include additional organizations? If so, which organizations?
- Are lead organizations for rural enterprise development adequately represented in the group? Who else is missing or needed?

Typically, the diagnosis identifies several organizations that share similar approaches to agroenterprise development, such as growers' associations, NGOs, public sector entities, universities, and private enterprises, which could strengthen development processes in the area. This is the moment for identifying those organizations that are available and have both interest and capacity to participate as members of the working group. A key recommendation is to look beyond the traditional partners (growers' associations, NGOs, the government) to include new actors who bring other perspectives to the group. If, for example, a dynamic private company or a local Chamber of Commerce is selected, then these could bring a well-developed business approach that would complement the strengths of the other development actors.

More recently, new actors such as large supermarket chains are desirable partners, as they can effectively provide markets for various products from the area and thus "pull" processes of enterprise development from the market.

Once the key actors are identified and motivated to participate, an informal agreement should be developed in which each participant expresses their intention to collaborate in the rural enterprise development of the area. This agreement should include:

- Purpose of the working group's formation.
- The group's objectives.
- The initial work timetable.
- The roles and responsibilities.

Once the working group is convened, the planning process can begin as follows:

Planning for Rural Agroenterprise Development in the Area

Planning begins with an analysis of local capacities, a review of target zones, local partners, and client farmer groups, a review of the more promising enterprise options, based on zonal preferences and resources required to move the process forward. These issues can be addressed using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, methodology, more commonly known as SWOT analysis.

The SWOT analysis should be undertaken in a rigorous manner, so that the results can be used by the working group. Whilst SWOT analysis can be very useful, if done by a dedicated team, but if done superficially, results will be poor and difficult to interpret in a meaningful way. Spend time on this process if you want a useful product. The basic steps are as follows:

1. Ask the working group to list the strengths, *in terms of rural agroenterprise development*, that are evident in the area-based diagnosis. The strengths grouped by topic (e.g., natural resources, business organization, or markets ties).
2. Once identified and grouped, the strengths are *prioritized*. Which are more important—or evident—and which are less important? Which constitute solid bases for generating change and which do not? At the end of the discussion, strengths are ranked.
3. Ask the working group to list and group opportunities, *in terms of agroenterprise development*, that are evident in the area-based diagnosis. Some opportunities may be within the area, others, may have market opportunities beyond the area. This is normal; the key is whether the product can be produced within the area.
4. *Prioritize* the opportunities.
5. Ask the working group to list and group weaknesses, *in terms of agroenterprise*

development, that are evident in the area-based diagnosis. These weaknesses are found within the area.
6. *Prioritize* the weaknesses.
7. Ask the working group to list threats, *in terms of agroenterprise development*, that are evident in the area-based diagnosis. Although threats can be internal, they tend to be external and related to the market or competition.
8. *Prioritize* the threats.

The results of this discussion should be written up in a SWOT matrix and then variables can be combined, or "crossed", as shown in Table 13.

The combination or crossing step is facilitated using the following questions:

- How can we use the strengths found in the area to turn identified threats into opportunities for existing or future processes of rural enterprise development?
- How do we take advantage of our opportunities to improve the weaknesses, in terms of rural agroenterprise development, found in the area?

The results of these two "crosses" are noted in a matrix such as found in Table 14.

Consensus Building

Once the rural enterprise development potential of the area has been assessed, based on the results of the SWOT analysis, the group can focus on concrete activities required. At this stage, we must identify the members of the working group who are committed to working together, discover their common vision in terms of sustainable rural agroenterprise development for the selected area, define how the working group can contribute to the attainment of these aspirations (or mission), and define "rules of the game" (or principles) for action.

Who We Are

Before we define the vision, mission, and principles for the working group, we must be clear on who the participants are. To facilitate information sharing among group members who may or may not know what each other does, each member should briefly describe the organization that he or she represents, the sites where they are active, the products they support, and the needs for support that have been identified. Exiting or desired links with other members of the working group can also be discussed at this time.

The rationale behind this exercise is that of facilitating effective networking among members of the working group through complete information and, at the same time, answering concerns regarding the experience, capacity and coverage of each organization. Table 15 presents a sample format for organizing this presentation.

Table 13. An example of a SWOT matrix with "crosses".

Strengths	Weaknesses
The strengths found in the area's potential for agroenterprise development noted here.	The weaknesses found in the area's potential for agroenterprise development noted here.
Opportunities	Threats
The opportunities for the area's potential for agroenterprise development noted here.	The threats to the area's potential for agroenterprise development noted here.

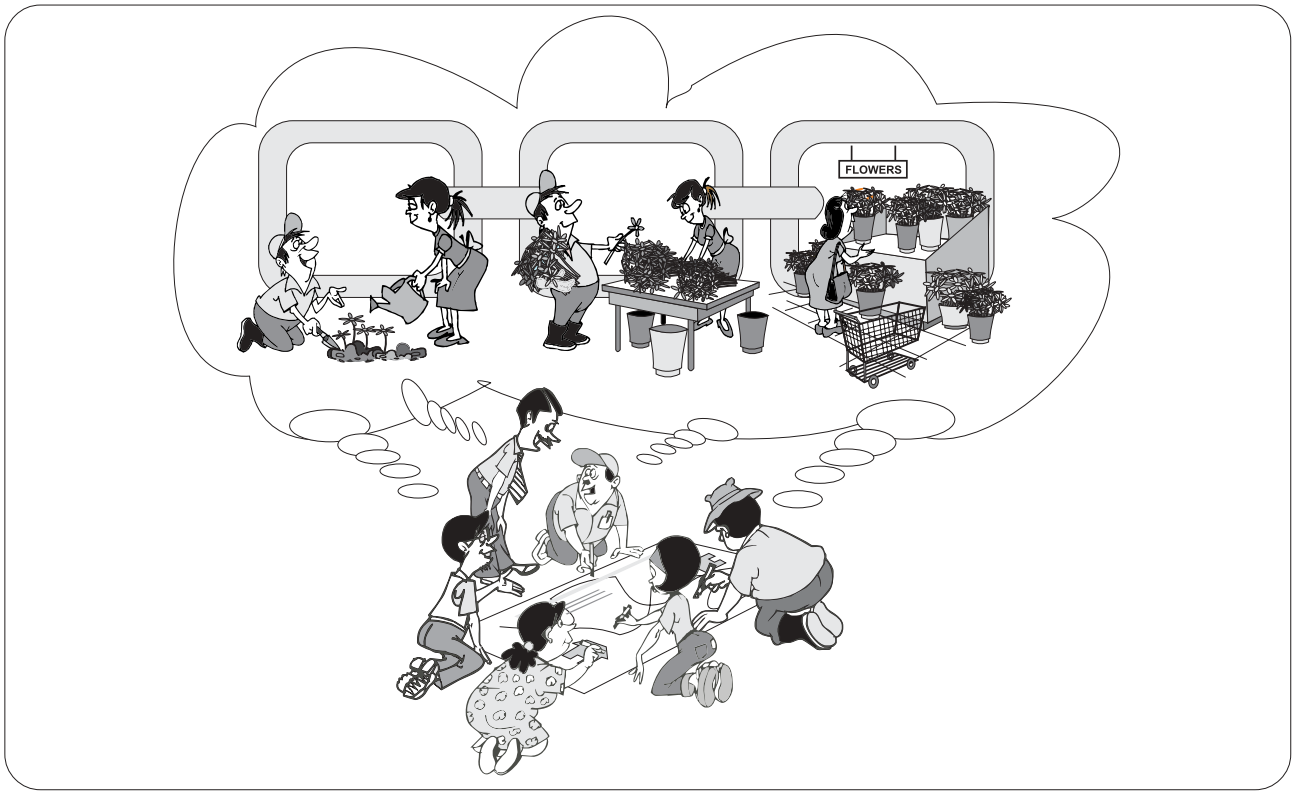
Table 14. Results of "crossing" between strengths and threats.

Strengths versus threats	Opportunities versus weaknesses
Results of the group's discussion on comparing strengths against threats in terms of the area's potential for agroenterprise development.	Results of the group's discussion on comparing opportunities against weaknesses in terms of the area's rural agroenterprise development.

Table 15. Format for information exchange among members of a working group.

Name:	ACELY (Asociación Campesina de Enlaces de Ladera de Yoro) [*Rural Association for Liaisons for the Yoro Hillsides*]
Sites:	Yorito, Sulaco, and Victoria.
Products:	Basic grains.
Services:	• Monitoring visits on soil conservation. • Survey of demand. • Facilitate access to improved bean seed for members.
Needs:	• Marketing. • Financial and credit support. • More training in micro-business.
Name:	AGASUL (Asociación de Ganaderos y Agricultores de Sulaco) [*Association of Sulaco Livestock Owners and Farmers*]
Site:	Sulaco.
Products:	Coordinate activities in favor of region's livestock and agriculture.
Services:	Orient and train members on how to increase and diversify production.
Needs:	• Shorten the marketing chain for produce: basic grains or milk. • Support in acquiring agricultural and livestock inputs. • Financial support → soft loans. • Training on processing produce, which would then have aggregate value.

Developing a Common Vision for Agroenterprise in our Area



Once working group membership is clear, we can begin the planning process with the group with a visioning exercise. This exercise requires that each member define a 'preferred future' for the rural agroenterprise development of the area. This exercise is completed through the following steps:

- Each participant indicates, in one or two short phrases, the key elements of their 'preferred future' for the rural agroenterprise development of the area. Key elements might include phrases like, "I see producer groups working with local processors, NGOs, and traders from the

capital city to develop new value-added products for supermarkets" or "I see market information reaching farmers and NGOs in a timely and useful manner and crop patters shifting based on market demands". These ideas should be written on cards using large letters, using a maximum of three lines and one idea per card. Each member then shares his or her ideas with the other members of the group.

- As each participant defines and shares her desired future, the cards are placed on a wall, so they remain visible to all participants.
- Once all the preferred future cards are presented, they are then grouped according to common themes (i.e., market information, value added products, improved relations between chain actors, etc.).
- For each common theme, one or more phrases are written down that summarize the sense of the dream cards generated by the group members. These phrases may come either from the existing cards or be a summary of several phrases from different participants.
- The summary phrases are then grouped into one or more paragraphs that describe the desired future for rural agroenterprise development in the area as defined collectively by the group. This final desired future (or vision) should be written on a large sheet of paper and placed so that it is visible to all participants.

What is the working group's mission?

Once we have a clear idea of the desired future, we need to ask, "how can the working group contribute to this future?" The group must determine what it can realistically contribute towards achieving the desired future, in the knowledge that the desired goal will also depend on other local and external actors not yet part of the working group.

The working group's mission should reflect the area-based diagnosis, the analysis of agroenterprise development potential of the area, and the capacity, knowledge and coverage of the working group members. The mission should be aligned with the group's capacities. Grounding the mission of the group in reality is important because it is easier to broaden a mission that is too limited than to focus a more ambitious one.

The steps for achieving this process are similar to those used to define the desired future:

- Each participant writes one or two short phrases with their key ideas on what the working group could contribute to the desired future for the area's agroenterprise development. The phrases are written on cards in large letters, with a maximum of three lines, with one idea per card. Later, each member of the group presents their cards to the other members of the group.
- As each participant defines and shares how the working group could contribute to the desired future, the cards are placed so that they remain visible to all participants.
- Once all the cards are presented, they are grouped according to common themes.
- Once the common themes are identified, one or more phrases are written down that summarize each theme and then fed back to the group for discussion and approval.
- The summary phrases are then grouped into one or more paragraphs that describe the role of the working group in bringing about the desired future. This final expression of the role (or mission) of the working group should be written on a large sheet of paper and placed so that it is visible to all participants.

What are our principles?

The final step prior to drafting a concrete action plan is the definition of basic principals that will guide the working group. The intention of this exercise is to define some general principles that can be adapted to each organization's activities and guide the overall thrust of the working group. They can be generated by following the steps described previously, but with a change towards the end.

- Each participant nominates one or two key principals (the idea plus a short description). Examples of working group principals include things like "participatory decision making" or "sustainable management of natural resources". Each principal is written on a separate card in large letters with a maximum of three lines. Later, the cards are shared among group members as in the previous exercises.
- As each member describes their contributions, the cards are placed so that they remain visible to all participants.

- Once all the contributions are presented, they are grouped according to common themes.
- With the common themes identified, a discussion is conducted to name each group of cards. When consensus is arrived on the name of a group of cards (the principle for this group of ideas), the name is written on a different colored card and place above the others.
- Once all the principles are named, a brief description of this principle is written. This description seeks to clearly define the group's understanding of the principal and how it relates to the promotion of agroenterprise development in the area.

At the end of this process, the working group will posses a common desired future (vision), a clear idea of what the working group will contribute to this desired future (mission) and shared principals to guide the activities of the working group towards the future. With these inputs, the group is ready to design an initial work plan.

Writing a Joint Work Plan

An effective work plan is similar to a map, it provides a clear idea of where we want to go and some key signposts or indicators tell us whether we are heading in the right direction. To construct an adequate map, four methodological steps are proposed:

1. Identify specific areas for intervention, and who to work with.
2. Prioritize areas according to their importance, feasibility, and impact potential.
3. Identify short-, mid-, and long-term activities that can be done with the existing resources and those that require external support.
4. Construct an action plan with a timetable, showing clear responsibilities for the working group members.

The information below outlines the contents of each step.

Identifying key areas for intervention

This first step aims to generate, by means of a brainstorm, the largest number of ideas and possible concepts on what the working group should do within the area. To carry out this exercise:

1. The working groups should name a facilitator for the exercise.
2. A general question is put to the group to initiate discussion. In this case, the question could be something like, "what activities should the working group develop during the next 12 months?"
3. Each participant writes down the two best ideas that s/he has.
4. The ideas are shared among all participants and common ideas are sought and grouped together. At this point, if any of the group members have additional ideas that are not adequately represented in the emerging list; these can be shared and incorporated if necessary.
5. Once similar concepts are grouped, each concept needs to be defined clearly. For example, for a group of cards relating to "training", what kind of training are we talking about? What are the themes or topics? Who will train whom? Does this activity need external support or can it be undertaken by working group members?
6. At the end of this exercise, the working group should have a list, not yet prioritized, of key areas of intervention, clearly defined and written in a common language.

Prioritizing key areas of intervention

Once the key areas of intervention have been identified and defined, the working group needs to rank them by importance. Often, all the issues seem important and, as result, we do not know where to begin. This exercise helps to orient the working group in this regard. The steps for ranking areas of intervention include:

1. Organize a pair wise ranking matrix, where the title of each key area of intervention is placed both on the vertical and horizontal axis. Each pair of ideas will be compared only once so the bottom half of the matrix is not used. In the example, this section is shown in dark gray in Table 16.
2. Each pair of options is then compared to decide which of the two key area of intervention is most critical to develop first. In this case, the facilitator should ask the group "is it more important that we train ourselves in accounting or organize a meeting with microfinance institutions? Which comes first?" The group should decide which of the two key areas under analysis is more important, and place this idea in the matrix as shown in Table 17.

Table 16. An example of how to construct a pair wise ranking matrix.

Key areas of intervention	Bookkeeping training	Organize a meeting with credit providers	Analyze markets for products in high demand	Negotiate support from the government
Bookkeeping training				
Organize a meeting with credit providers				
Analyze market for products in high demand				
Negotiate support from the government				

3. Once the matrix is completed, the facilitator counts the number of votes that each area of intervention has received and tallies up the totals. As in any election, the areas of intervention with the highest number of votes are the most important. The results can be documented in a table as shown in Table 18.

In the examples shown, it is now clear that the working group should start by analyzing the market chains for products in high demand, followed by arranging for funds from the government and organizing a meeting with microfinance institutions, with training in accounting coming later.

This exercise can last an hour or more, depending on the number of activities that must be analyzed and the discussion generated around this process.

Table 18. Final results from a pair wise ranking exercise.

Key areas of intervention	No. of votes	Rank
Bookkeeping training	0	4
Organize a meeting with credit providers	1	3
Analyze market chains for products in high demand	3	1
Negotiate support from the government	2	2

Building momentum with local activities

For the prioritized activities the working group should analyze whether or not the skills and resources needed to move forward are available locally or not. Working group activities should be initiated with interventions that depend principally on existing local knowledge and

Table 17. An example of a completed pair wise ranking matrix.

Key areas of intervention	Bookkeeping training	Organize a meeting with credit providers	Analyze markets for products in high demand	Negotiate support from the government
Bookkeeping training		Organize a meeting with credit providers.	Analyze markets to identify products in high demand.	Negotiate support from the government.
Organize a meeting with credit providers			Analyze market chains for products in high demand.	Negotiate support from the government.
Analyze markets chains for products in high demand				Analyze market chains for products in high demand.
Negotiate support from the government				

resources. This helps to focus interventions in areas where rapid change can be achieved with minimum effort and generates a positive dynamic among group members. Establishing a solid base of local capacity does not mean that the working group should ignore opportunities for external support. In fact, working groups with strong internal dynamics tend to be more effective in linking to external technical and financial support and when this assistance arrives more effective in transforming it into sustainable processes of rural agroenterprise development.

To assess local capacity to implement key intervention strategies, the working group lists the resources or knowledge it needs for each intervention strategy and compares that list with what exists locally (Table 19).

The time needed for this exercise will vary according to the number of activities and the steps that are required to develop each one.

Building an action plan for the working group

With the inputs previously constructed, the last step of this process is to generate an action plan for the first 12 months of working group activities. The matrix can include information such as that found in Table 20.

If the working group wishes, the action plan can also include the financial needs for each activity and thus generate a budget that complements the action plan.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the resources available and potential market options, the members of the working group can start to build a consolidated plan for enterprise development that will engage various local actors.

The planning process therefore serves several purposes. It raises the profile of income

Table 19. Identifying local and external resources required for a prioritized activity.

Activity: Analyze market chains for products in high demand			
Steps	Resources required	We have them here ☺	We have to get them from outside ☹
Identify key market chain actors	Information about the chain People	✓ ✓	
Review how the chain is working now and identify critical points	Information from people More general information People Training in this field	✓ ✓ 	 ✓ ✓
Analyze data generated, etc.	People Advisory services	✓ 	 ✓

Table 20. Building a simplified action plan for the working group.

Activity	Steps	People responsible	Dates (months)											
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Analyze the chains of the prioritized products	1. Identify product areas for further analysis.	John and Mary												
	2. Undertake a Rapid Market Survey.	John with the working group												
	3. Analyze the data.	Maria with the working group												

generating methods, based on agroenterprise development within a defined geographic area, it provides a basic platform for dialogue with diverse partners and an approach that is inclusive, that seeks to build relationships rather than operate in isolation.

The approach is long-term and one of the basic principles of this approach is to include local actors in a participatory manner, so that they are able to learn new skills, put them into action, reflect on their level of success, and adapt them to the local context.

Although the final outcome of this *guide* is a basic planning tool, much social capital will have been gained in the process and this will allow for greater sharing of roles and responsibilities in the future.

The following two sections raise issues of monitoring the process and the final writing up and dissemination of results from the activities undertaken in this *guide*.