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## How to define the goals of a project

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## HOW TO DEFINE THE GOALS OF A PROJECT

Usually a project is initiated because there is an issue which people want to address or there is an opportunity to exploit. For example, a water board needs to regulate ground water levels which different users find contentious. Alternatively, a national authority subsidises the purchase of drip irrigation equipment for small-scale farmers who join together to benefit from this. However, starting a water stress project is not easy because the inherent problems are usually complex. Not only is there is a physical system to be understood, including the effect of potential water stress mitigation technologies on this system, but also a human system that is supposed to apply and use these solutions. The ecological, technical and social systems have to be taken into account when defining project goals. Obviously there is a need here for experts as their initial understanding of the various systems may help predefine what the realistic and desirable goals are. At the same time, a participatory process, which starts within this predefined framework and is open to the evolution of project objectives, may lead to a reformulation of these goals and go beyond the expected solutions.

### 3.1 Expert approaches

#### Objective-oriented planning

According to the definition of Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (2005), 'an objective is the intended physical, financial, institutional, social, environmental or other goals which a programme / project is expected to achieve and which lies in its own sphere of influence'. Objective-oriented planning has been developed as a tool for assisting in the planning of a project and therefore can be applied in any management process, such as a water stress mitigation process. It is part of the Log Frame Analysis (LFA) and, when combined with the DPSIR analysis, can result in a set of indicators which describe each element of the LFA analysis.

Objective-oriented planning is used for defining the goals and the necessary means for achieving the desired situation and/or for solving problems. Its main advantage is that it provides the user with the ability to integrate the

*definition of an objective*

*the objective tree presents goals and means for desired situation*

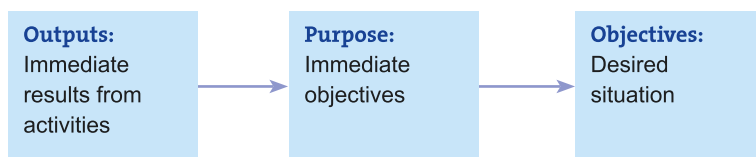


Figure 3.1 Objective analysis (adapted from Örtengren, 2004)

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various aspects of the problem resolution and the flexibility to present them in a logical and easily understandable form, i.e. the objective tree.

The objective tree graphically links the three levels of objectives that are set during the water stress mitigation process, as illustrated in Figure 3.1:

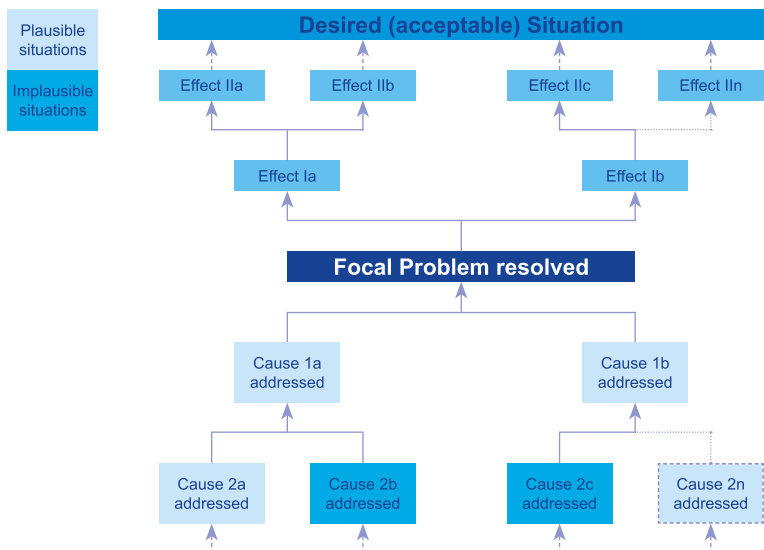
- **Overall objectives**, which state the desired direction of the process;
- **Process purpose** that describes the prevailing situation if the ‘solutions’ are successfully implemented; and
- **Outputs** from the activities that will be implemented during the mitigation process.

Complex problems can be solved with the contribution of expertise from different fields, where the expected results can be fully described from a variety of mitigation options. However, since the solutions will not be implemented by experts but by those who are experiencing the problem, the objective tree should ideally be developed through a participatory process with representatives of key stakeholder groups. This way a shared understanding of the options and the means for achieving the goals will be accomplished and the successful implementation of the solutions will more likely be guaranteed.

**Development of the objective tree**

The objective tree is a reversed representation of the problem tree, described in section 2.4. A tree diagram is developed where each cause has been replaced by its solution, in order to achieve the main objective.

*the objective tree is related to the problem tree*



*Figure 3.2 Construction of an objective tree*

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As each cause has a different degree of impact on the problem, and may be either minor or major, one-off or permanent, it follows that the relevance of and the difficulty in addressing certain causes is also variable. Certain 'solutions' may be entirely implausible or simply beyond the scope of the analysis, and therefore these can be ignored, or removed from the tree. What remains is a set of 'solutions', potentially available for implementation in order to resolve the focal problems and achieve the desired situation.

The process of developing the objective tree is similar to that of the problem tree, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. The analysis could also result in a set of indicators that describe or define the 'solutions' presented in the tree.

An example of the outcome of the participatory objective analysis process is given in Figure 3.3 for the Vecht Case Study.

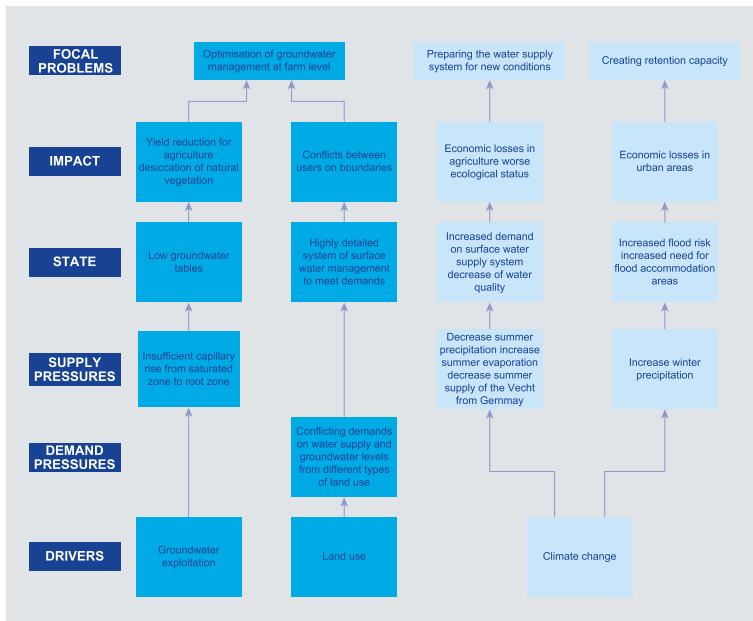


Figure 3.3 Schematic representation of the objective tree in the Vecht Case Study

**Further Reading**

Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (2005), Project Management Handbook: A Working Tool for Project Managers, NOVARTIS

Örtengren K. (2004), The Logical Framework Approach: A summary of the theory behind the LFA method, Published by Sida.

## 3.2 Interactive approaches

*stakeholders are likely to put water-related goals into a wider perspective*

In an 'ideal interactive case' the stakeholders are consulted on their identified water-related issues (as described in section 2.4) and the goals of the project are adjusted based on their perceived needs and interests. The goal would then not only become a widely-supported water management plan but also, for example, ensure economic sustainability of camp sites that use high quality water from a local aquifer, ensure drinking water services for various municipalities (who are also pumping into this aquifer), and give a more broadly developed ecological knowledge of swimming pool owners (who have wells) etc.

*take the time for goal definition*

Practically speaking, it is important to take time for goal definition with stakeholders and to remain open throughout the project regarding the possible development of these goals. In several AquaStress case studies, entire meetings (of a half day or a day) were devoted to elaborate on what the project should focus. In Portugal, for example, researchers and local stakeholders held a day-long meeting on possible joint projects which were eventually proposed by the stakeholders after having listened to the expertise offered by the researchers. Several of these smaller projects were then jointly defined in more detail afterwards.

As has already been discussed, there are several challenges and pitfalls when defining a project goal together in a participatory way. These can also be formulated as trade-offs:

- The needs of the initiators versus the needs of the participants: To ask the stakeholders about their point of view regarding the project goals creates a problem for the initiators. If they do everything the participants want to do, the project may become too large or may not focus any longer on the needs of the initiating water authority. On the other hand, if the needs of the stakeholders are not taken into account, there is a risk that the stakeholders might be lost altogether and that they might possibly realise that they do not agree with the results after the work has been carried out(!). The art then is to accommodate the needs of the stakeholders but at the same time draw realistic boundaries of what the project can and cannot do. It should also be noted that the involvement of certain stakeholders (for example from a higher political level) can mean that there will be more resources available to finance possible solutions.
- Say of stakeholders in the process definition vs. limitations of initiators' resources. Openness with regard to project goals usually entails an expectation by participating stakeholders that they have some influence on how things are done in the project. Giving them a say in the process creates trust and 'buy-in'. On the other hand, making concessions on how things are done may entail new costs for the initiators (for example, because additional consultations are requested or meeting facilitators

*accommodate needs and indicate boundaries*

*give a say and delineate limits*

need to be employed). Again the art is to open up but also to delineate limits. This usually needs to be done early in the process.

- Time: A participatory approach costs time for consultation, for meetings, and for the analysis of all input from the participants. An expert solution is quicker – at least at the beginning. The question to consider is whether it is possible to implement the decision without the contributions and buy-in of the stakeholders.
- Skills: A participatory approach requires considerable skill regarding the handling of the strategic questions that arise (e.g. on what level to involve stakeholders, which decision-makers to consider, how to frame the main issues etc.) as well as skill in group facilitation for assuring high-quality interactive meetings and workshops. A more traditional expert-driven approach needs less socio-psychological knowledge but may fail on the stakeholder involvement aspects. Also, with regard to this point it is important to know if involving stakeholders is required or not.

*a participatory approach costs time in the beginning*

*a participatory approach requires skills*

**Further reading**

Creighton, J. L. 2005. *The Public Participation Handbook: making better decisions through citizen involvement*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California, USA.

von Korff, Y., d’Aquino, P., Daniell, K., Bijlsma, R. Forthcoming in 2008. Designing participation processes for water management and beyond. *Ecology and Society*.

**Experiences in the Guadiana test site (Portugal)**

A participatory approach for defining the project goals was applied here. Researchers and potential stakeholders met to define a project together. An evaluation questionnaire filled in by five stakeholders after the workshop resulted in the following table.

Has the workshop allowed you to assess :	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	A lot	Don't know
The expertise, methods and tools offered by AQS partners				5	
An area for collaboration			4	1	
The implications and responsibilities of each one within the project			3	2	

In: Guidance on water stress mitigation, Experiences and inspirations from the AquaStress Integrated Project