IYIP 2018-2019 FINAL PROJECT

Tips on Research and Reporting for Civil Society Organizations

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Introduction:

Alternatives:

’’Alternatives' mission is to create a world where international solidarity, environmental rights, democratic rights and human dignity are universally respected.’’

The International Youth Internship Program (IYIP):

“The International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) is part of the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy, which provides Canadian youth with the tools and experience they need to launch successful careers. The IYIP is designed to offer Canadian post-secondary graduates the opportunity to gain professional experience through international development work. The objective of the IYIP is to support sustainable international development initiatives proposed, in partnership with local partner organizations, by Canadian professional associations, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and private companies.’’

Sinar Project:

’’Sinar Project is a civic tech initiative using open technology and applications to systematically make important information public and more accessible to the Malaysian people. It aims to improve governance and encourage greater citizen involvement in the public affairs of the nation by making Parliament and Malaysian Government more open, transparent and accountable.’’

Project summary :

This project will present our work with Sinar Project by detailing the two main spheres of our internship:

1- How to conduct research
2- How to manage a project

As project agents, we were assigned management and administrative tasks. We learned how to effectively coordinate, research, execute, communicate and report within the context of non-profit organizing.
This document is a compilation of insights, templates and supportive resources for NGO program management. It intends to support best practices and effective management for civil society organizing.
The booklet comprises of educational and instructional material on research and programme management, specific to the non-profit sector context.

This practical guide should prove particularly useful for organizations who are just starting out, as it contains introductory information and best practices on how to apply for funding, how to effectively plan and monitor projects, and how to report on programs. In addition, organizations with more experience can use this guide to improve pre-existing practices, and to gain new insights on sector-specific research methods. In particular, we introduce a tool for researching the "digital gender gap", intended to develop evidence and monitor country progress towards closing the gender divide in internet and information technology usage.

Background and justification

During our internship, we realised that some of Sinar Project's partnering organizations were experiencing several challenges. For instance, due to a lack of steady and/or adequate funding, organizations were faced with limited resources and inadequate numbers of full-time staff. They often hired inexperienced interns to compensate (who were unpaid or low-paid). NGOs seemed to frequently be stretched beyond their capacities, struggling to deliver outputs with limited resources.

Funding is a nearly universal challenge for NGOs; however, in Southeast Asia this challenge is made worse by the fact that civil society is often also repressed politically and socially. In Malaysia, it only recently became (relatively) safe to be involved in political advocacy and civil society organizing[1]. The situation is worse in other countries in the region, where civil liberties continue to be suppressed and activism is highly risky[2].

For this reason, we found that many of Sinar Project's partners lacked experience in programme development and NGO management. They comprise of many newly formed NGOs with inexperienced staff. Of the partners that have existed for some time, many haven't had access to training or guidance on proper or effective management practices.

So, in order to make our work more valuable, we decided to create an informative guide on NGO programme management. By providing NGOs with assistive materials such as templates, guidelines and tips, we aim to support organizations with many facets of their work. Moreover, by encouraging standardization and administrative consistency, we hope to help organizations successfully reach their goals.

- ### Research:

  NGOs often conduct research to raise public awareness of certain issues, to pressure government and other bodies to enact changes, or to inform their own work. In general, within the sphere of civil society, research is conducted in order to impact social change. High quality research has a greater impact, thus it is important for NGOs to adhere to internationally recognized standards and to employ ethically and analytically appropriate research methods.

1 https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/united-nations/geneva/3794-malaysia-adoption-of-universal-periodic-review-report
2 https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018

- Reports:

  Reports are tools which allow organizations to learn from project implementation and to share project findings with others. Reports record changes/developments experienced by the project team, project beneficiaries and partnering organizations. By sharing detailed information about a project, reports promote accountability and transparency. They provide evidence of the project development and implementation, helping others to understand the rationale behind the project, the challenges faced, the processes and procedures involved, the solutions provided, and the lessons learned, among other uses. Donors, sponsors and investors use reports as a tool to allocate new funding to organizations, award prizes, etc. so it is in your best interest to produce good quality reports.

Project content

How to conduct research

- Purpose

  The purpose of this section is to inform nonprofit organizations and other civil society leaders on effective methods for conducting research. Civil society organizations are uniquely positioned to conduct research which can translate into social change[3]. It is important to conduct research using effective and appropriate methods, according to internationally recognized standards; high quality research is more likely to impact social change.

  We provide guidelines for conducting research based on skills and knowledge we have gained while working with Sinar Project. Specifically, we explain how to conduct a "social audit" and why this is a valuable form of research for NGOs to engage in. Additionally, we present a research tool for monitoring country progress towards closing the "digital gender gap".

- Conducting a Social Audit
  - Overview

    Just as a financial audit verifies how money is being spent, a social audit verifies how programmes and services are being carried out. It involves a systematic evaluation of public records and user feedback. The goal is to expose realities that are not being acknowledged or addressed in order to make services more reflective of social, environmental, and community objectives[4].

[3] https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/Stacie-Traver-working-paper-5-final.pdf
[4] http://civicactivism.buildingchangetrust.org/tools-directory/Social-Audits

Sinar Project is conducting a social audit which will assess potential barriers in access to Internet and information and communications technologies (ICTs) in marginalized communities[5]. Various initiatives have been launched in Malaysia at the state and national levels to address "the digital divide"; for example, the Selangor Government launched a free public WiFi service in 2015 called "WiFi Smart Selangor"[6]. However, the accessibility and impact of such initiatives has not been measured. By conducting a social audit, Sinar Project will compare government commitments and statistics to realities on the ground. The social audit aims to verify whether government commitments on Internet accessibility are reflected in marginalized communities.

- Tool: [Social Audit: A Toolkit](#) (Centre for Good Governance, 2005)

- Phases
  - Phase I - planning

The first phase of any social audit (and any research project, more generally) involves laying out research goals and planning how the project will be implemented. The researcher must identify a research topic, research questions, goal(s) and a geographical focus. Based on community needs and interests, what is it that you want to investigate? Or what is something that is not already known/addressed, that you want to draw attention to? What hypothesis do you want to test?

The Project Document

A Project Document is a necessary tool for this phase of a social audit. See "How to Manage a Project", Phase 1 for more information.

- Tool: ProDoc template (Annex 5)

As explained in "How to Manage a Project", the planning phase of any project involves establishing the project's:

- background and justification
- objectives
- implementation plans, e.g:
  - inputs
  - methods
  - budget
  - outputs

[5] Read more about Sinar Project's social audit project here: https://sinarproject.org/digital-rights/updates/researching-the-digital-gender-gap-in-subang-jaya
[6] http://ipr.selangor.gov.my/category/wifi-smartselangor/

- timeline
- communication plan
- development impact/expected outcomes

Consider what specific costs will be incurred from implementing the social audit, and what sources of funding will cover those costs. Funding applications often require a budget, outlining expected expenses; this budget can be included in a Project Document, to be presented to donors.

“Inputs” include human resources; in planning your social audit, you should consider whether you wish to hire a researcher, or whether you have the resources to conduct the research on your own (i.e. you have the time, budget and capable staff who speak the relevant local language). This may need to be decided after funding has been confirmed.

Planning Research Methodologies

As explained above, the primary aim of a social audit is to assess how programs are being carried out - to verify whether government commitments are being realized in communities. In order to do this, we compare data from secondary research (i.e. found on government websites, etc.) with our own primary research.

Thus, in the case of a social audit, planning project implementation involves planning research methodologies. After planning for initial desk research (by establishing a research question and primary data sources, etc.), the researcher must decide what methods to use to conduct primary research. It is important to carefully consider which questions should be asked, how and by whom. Moreover, you must decide on the level of involvement which partners and research participants will have in each element of the research process.

- Quantitive and Qualitive Research Methods

Potential research methodologies include, but aren’t limited to, surveys, interviews, focus groups and workshops.

An effective social audit integrates both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data describes phenomenon and often answers questions such as “how much?”, “how many?”, and “how often?”[7]. In contrast, qualitative research uses non-numerical information and is applicable for research questions that ask “how?” and “why?”.

Quantitative research is important in a social audit, as it allows the researcher to make predictions and policy recommendations. On the other hand, qualitative research is valuable for developing a holistic understanding of complex realities.

[7] Bouma, Ling, Wilkinson; Scheyvens, R. (Ed.). (2014). Development Field Work (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

In a social audit, a common way to collect quantitative data is through a survey. However, a survey can also include questions designed to gather qualitative data. Other methods for collecting qualitative data may include interviews, workshops or focus groups. (These methodologies will be outlined below.)

- Participatory Research

Participatory research, or "participatory action", refers to methodologies designed to equitably involve research participants in the research process[8]. Participatory methods seek to give voice to social groups who are marginalized in development decision-making and implementation. Additionally, it is a methodological approach which aims to incite social change and empowerment.

Participatory research is evidently very much inline with the goals of a community-based social audit, which aims to make services more reflective of community needs and objectives. By definition, participatory research centres around local priorities.

By actively involving community members, this sort of research centres those who best understand, and have the greatest stake in the issues at hand; therefore, social audits (and participatory research, more generally) may be more likely to lead to solutions to problems, than other traditional forms of research.

  - Tools:
    A Short Guide to Community Based Participatory Action Research (Advancement Project, 2011)

- Phase II - desk research:

The next stage of a social audit involves researching government policies and existing secondary data. For instance, for Sinar Project's social audit we researched Malaysian policies and statistics on access to ICTs. We drew from the World Wide Web Foundation's Digital Gender Gap Audit Scorecard Toolkit — a tool which was created to develop evidence and monitor country progress towards closing the digital gender gap (see the Digital Gender Gap Scorecard section for more information).

The information collected in this phase of the social audit will be assessed in relation to primary data collected in later phases of the audit (i.e. data collected through surveys and focus groups); the social audit verifies whether government commitments and statistics match realities on the ground.

Analysis of existing secondary data may also reveal evidence gaps where data is missing or not publically available. For example, in Sinar Project's social audit, desk

[8] Desai, V. and Potter, R. (Eds.). (2006). Doing Development Research. Londons: Sage.

research revealed a lack of gender-disaggregated data on digital access as well as a lack of gender targets in national ICT strategies and policies.

- ### Phase III - establishing contacts:

  This next phase of the social audit focuses on partnership and community engagement. It involves identifying research partners and inviting them to collaborate.

  Potential partners and contacts would have ideally been identified in the planning phase of the project, in the Project Document. These contacts may include organizations with whom you plan to partner, in order to share resources and knowledge, and/or increase scope and impact.

  It is important to partner with organizations/individuals who can provide a point of contact with the community in which the research will take place[9]. Unless your staff/organization have a pre-established connection with the community, you will need to find a community focal point - someone with a knowledge of, and rapport within, the community, who can promote participation in the research project. The community focal point will identify and recruit research participants, and will support the researcher in identifying community needs and priorities.

  - Tools: [Community Focal Point ToR Template] (Annex 4)

- ### Phase IV - survey:

  A survey is a common primary research method used in a social audit. The survey should be created in line with international standards, so that the collected data will be as useful as possible.

  A good strategy is to draw from pre-existing surveys conducted by reputable international organizations. For instance, for our digital gender gap social audit, we modelled much of our survey off of the World Wide Web Foundation's "Women and the Web" survey[10]. This purpose/focus of this survey was closely aligned with our research objectives and therefore included very relevant and transferable questions. By drawing from a survey created by a reputable international organization, we ensured that our survey would ask relevant questions and align with international research standards; thus it would be more likely to impact change.

  Please note that it is important to consider copyright when borrowing/adapting ideas from others. Before drawing ideas from the "Women and the Web" survey we verified that the survey was licensed under a CC Attribution 4.0 International License, which allows for content to be reused, with attribution.

[9] https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/Stacie-Traver-working-paper-5-final.pdf
[10] "Women and the Web survey"

Another important consideration is the matter of informed consent. See “Research Ethics” below for more information; among other things, this section will discuss the importance of providing participants with an “Letter of Information/Consent” prior to conducting the survey.

- Tools:
  Social Audit Survey Example (Annex 2)
  Letter of Information/Consent Template (Annex 3)

○ Phase V - workshops/focus groups (*optional):

Workshops and focus groups are optional elements of the research process. They can be useful for collecting qualitative data and identifying participants' priorities[11].

A focus group may occur after a survey has been conducted, with the questions designed based on survey results. Alternatively, a focus group may be conducted prior to a survey, with the aim of gathering overarching perspectives and community priorities, to guide the creation of the survey.

An important consideration is who will be the moderator(s) of the focus group. This may be the researcher or community focal point (discussed above), or community members themselves. Researchers may train individuals as moderators and assistant moderators for focus groups (all of whom are hired as paid research associates). In some cases the assistant may be the researcher (i.e. the hired associate who conducted surveys).

In community based participatory research, researchers typically collaborate with community members to develop moderator's guides for the focus groups; community members may address community concerns and the cultural appropriateness of potential questions.

Another key consideration for focus groups is gender stratification. You will have to decide whether focus groups should be gender stratified or not. There are various benefits to gender stratification. However, Sinar Project has previously faced resistance to gender stratification in workshops, as men felt excluded from an initiative which they felt they should have been included in. One strategy may be to hold two groups in at the same time, one with men and one with women; this allows husbands and wives to attend groups at the same time, but still results in gender disaggregated data.

Workshops can also be a tool for translating findings into social change, after the research has been concluded. See Phase VIII for more information.

[11] Daley et al., 2010 https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7BVHpQAoqclaTY1LTlrQkxUeXc/view?usp=sharing

- ### Phase VI - data analysis:

  Though it can be a time-consuming process, proper data analysis is integral to the success of a social audit. It involves converting raw data into results which can effectively be communicated and used to make predictions and recommendations.

  Data analysis requires returning to your initial overarching research question(s) and research objective(s). Were your questions answered, your objectives met? If you had a research hypothesis, was it proven or disproven?

  It is advisable to enter survey results into a data analysis software, or simply an excel spreadsheet, through which answers can be easily summed and converted into charts and graphs.

- ### Phase VII - reporting on and communicating results:

  A social audit serves to elevate voices which may not otherwise be heard, and shed light on social issues that are not being appropriately addressed; the ultimate goal is to make services more reflective of social, environmental, and community objectives. Thus, the way in which results are communicated (to the public, social service organizations, funders and government bodies) is highly important.

  This phase of the social audit involves reporting on and communicating results to funders (which may impact whether future funds are granted).

  It also involves communicating results to government officials, typically through policy recommendations in reports and press releases. The media and the public play important roles in the bridge between research findings and government action.

  - Tools:
    Progress Report Template (Annex 7)
    Meeting/Event Report Template (Annex 9)

- ### Phase VIII - impacting change in the community:

  The final phase of the social audit involves creating a Plan of Action to translate research findings into social change.

  In order for research to be truly ethical, it should ‘give back’ to the participants in some way. This is especially true for a social audit, which ultimately aims to contribute to effective policies and services, by elucidating community members concerns and priorities.

  This phase is evidently interconnected with Phase VII, “reporting on and communicating results”. Indeed, in a social audit, the primary way to “give back” is to communicate research findings with policy makers and lobby the government for change.

However, if funding allows, the researcher and partnering organizations can undertake their own follow-up initiatives to bring about change. For instance, a social audit on the digital gender divide may include workshops to provide women with ICT skills training.

Follow-up initiatives of this sort should, of course, be decided on based on research findings. What did research participants identify as their priorities, needs and ideas?

- ## The Digital Gender Gap Scorecard
  - ### Overview

The Digital Gender Gap Audit Scorecard is a tool which was created by the World Wide Web Foundation (WWWF), with support from UN Women. The Scorecard aims to develop evidence and monitor country progress towards closing "the digital gender gap".

What is the digital gender gap?
Recent statistics show that 56% of the world's population are not using the Internet and the majority of this offline population are women[12]. In fact, poor urban women are 50% less likely to be connected to the Internet than men (in the same age group with similar levels of education and household income)[13]. This is a major issue considering the increasing importance of technology in facilitating access to information and public participation.

The Digital Gender Gap Audit Scorecard aims to fill the evidence gap in assessing the digital gender divide through the use of 14 simple indicators for which reliable empirical evidence exists; the user-friendly tool aggregates existing secondary data and proxy indicators to monitor government commitments and implementation of gender-equitable ICT access and digital equality online. It is intended to be used as a monitoring tool in the interim until national gender and ICT indicators are developed and data is regularly collected.

The Scorecard aims to support the development and implementation of policy measures to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on women and technology, including:

- Goal 1.4: Ensure equal access to basic services [and] appropriate new technology for all women and men by 2030;
- Goal 5b: Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology (ICT), to promote the empowerment of women;
- Goal 9c: Achieve universal, affordable Internet access in least developed countries by 2020.

[12] https://a4ai.org/affordability-report/report/2015/#gender_inequality:_exacerbating_affordability_challenges
[13] https://webfoundation.org/research/digital-gender-gap-audit/

In summary, the Digital Gender Gap Audit Scorecard aims to:

I. Aggregate existing secondary data and proxy indicators to monitor government commitments and implementation of gender-equitable ICT access and digital equality online;
II. Hold governments accountable for progress on the SDG gender and ICT targets;
III. Identify evidence gaps where data on women and ICTs is missing or not publically available.

- Digital Gender Gap Audit Scoring Process:

The scorecard is based on 14 indicators across the following five themes:

I. Internet Access & Women's Empowerment
II. Affordability
III. Digital Skills & Education
IV. Relevant Content & Services for Women
V. Online Safety

The first step involves reviewing and scoring indicators. Each indicator is scored on a scale of 0 - 10. The criteria was developed such that the benchmarks for scores of 0, 5 and 10 are comparable across all indicators.

Next, the scores in each of the five themes are averaged to calculate thematic sub-scores.

Finally, scores across all indicators are averaged to calculate the country score (note that this is not an average of thematic sub-scores).

- Tools:
  - The Digital Gender Gap Audit Scorecard Toolkit
    - *For additional resources on making ICT policy gender-responsive see page 4.*
  - WWWF Digital Gender Gap Audit Information
    - *More information on the Digital Gender Gap Audit and country-specific findings can be found here*

Research Ethics

Various ethical issues should be considered when conducting research. This is particularly true if you plan to conduct a social audit, which involves interacting with and collecting information from community members. Ethical research must ensure participants' dignity, privacy and safety. Confidentiality and informed consent are important considerations; participants should be given an information sheet which informs them of what they are being asked to participate in, and of any harm or benefits which may come to them as a result of their participation. (See our “letter of information/consent” template below.)

International norms for research ethics should be thoroughly studied and implemented in your social audit project. In Canada, the three federal research agencies have created a joint policy to guide ethics principles for research involving humans. The policy, called the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans,* has been informed by leading international ethics norms. It may guide research in Canada and abroad.

The Canadian Government’s Panel on Research Ethics also provides an online course for which you can receive a certificate of completion. See the link to the Course on Research Ethics (CORE) below.

- Tools:

  Letter of Information/Consent Template (Annex 3)

  Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans

  TCPS 2 Course on Research Ethics

- Other Tools
  - Social Audit Survey Example (Annex 2)

How to manage a project?

- Purpose

A project life cycle has different phases during which essential management materials are needed in order to, efficiently and effectively, carry out the project.
From expressing a project idea until reaching a goal, every step has to be planned, funded, monitored and reported on. Thus, we created standardized templates for different kinds of reporting needed throughout a project life cycle.

- Phases
  - Phase 1: Project initiation

    This is the start of the project, and the goal of this phase is to define whether the project is feasible and if it should be undertaken. To organise and anticipate the future requirements and steps of the project, it is necessary to create a project document (ProDoc), that outlines the purpose and requirements of the project. It should include the justification and background of the project, as well as all the project implementation essentials; from the planned inputs to the expected outcomes.

  - Tools:
    ProDoc template (annex 5)

A ProDoc is the project document that will include all the necessary information to be able to write a proposal and create a grant agreement. When an NGO has a project idea and needs funding, a ProDoc has to be the first step. The ProDoc also helps internal coordination efforts, by outlining important facets of the project and anticipating projet requirements.

- Phase 2: Project planning

  In the planning phase, the project solution is further developed in detail. By focusing on processes and operational issues, the team identifies all of the work that needs to be done. The project's tasks and resource requirements are identified, along with the strategy for producing them. Project planning also includes establishing baselines or performance measures, like indicators.

At this time, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, so everyone involved knows what they are accountable for. During this phase of the project, a Grant Agreement should be created and signed by relevant parties. A Budget Document should also be prepared for internal use, indicating the cost of all project inputs and allocated funding as agreed upon in the Grant Agreement.

- Tools:
  Grant Agreement Template (annex 6)
  Progress Report Template (annex 7)
  Multi-Donor Budget Template (annex 8)

- Phase 3: Project execution/monitoring

  During the third phase, the project plan is put into motion and the work of the project is performed. It is important to maintain control and communicate as needed during this step. Progress is continuously monitored and appropriate adjustments are made and recorded as variances from the original plan. During this stage a lot is happening so it is necessary to report on spendings, meetings, updates, difficulties, performances ...

- Tools:
  Progress Report Template (annex 7)
  Meeting/event Report Template (annex 9)
  Financial report template (annex 10)
  Terms of Reference Template (annex 11)
  Workshop ProDoc Template (annex 12)

- Phase 4: Project closure

  During the final closure, or completion phase, the emphasis is on preparing a financial report and a final project report. The last remaining step is to conduct lessons-learned studies to examine what went well and what didn't, which will help future project teams.

- Tools:
  Progress Report Template (annex 7)
  Financial Report Template (annex 10)

Additional Resources

- Resources for effective communication

It is important for NGOs to establish consistent and effective communications both internally and externally. Effective internal communications (i.e. “behind-the-scenes” communications) facilitate programme delivery and management, and are necessary for coordination. External communications (i.e. communications with funders, beneficiaries, the public, etc.) play a key role in civil society organizing and NGO programme management.

- External Communications
  - Newsletter Template (annex 13)
  - MailChimp

- Internal Communications
  - Trello
  - Slack
  - Signal
  - Thunderbird
  - Encrypting Messages in Thunderbird

Sources

Bouma, Ling, Wilkinson; Scheyvens, R. (Ed.). (2014). Development Field Work (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Desai, V. and Potter, R. (Eds.). (2006). Doing Development Research. Londons: Sage.

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http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

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es

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https://www.smartsheet.com/blog/demystifying-5-phases-project-management

Annexes

Annex 1: Digital Gender Gap Scorecard

Annex 2: Social Audit Survey Example

Annex 3: Letter of Information/Consent Template

Annex 4: Community Focal Point ToR Template

Annex 5: Project Document (Prodoc) - Template

Annex 6: Grant Agreement Template

Annex 7: Progress Report Template

Annex 8: Multi-Donor Budget Template

Annex 9: Meeting/Event Report Template

Annex 10: Financial Report Template

Annex 11: Terms of reference - Template

Annex 12: Workshop ProDoc Template

Annex 13: Newsletter Template