

DESIGNING MEAL FOR LOCALLY MEANINGFUL CHANGE



Embedding community-led definitions of
success and impact in project MEAL
Oxfam in Timor-Leste

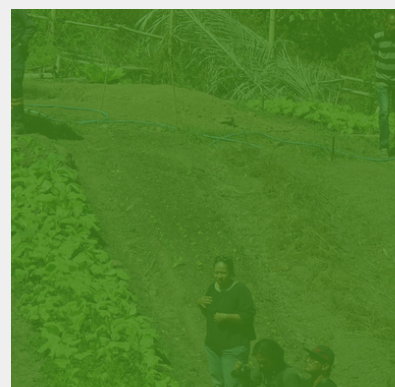
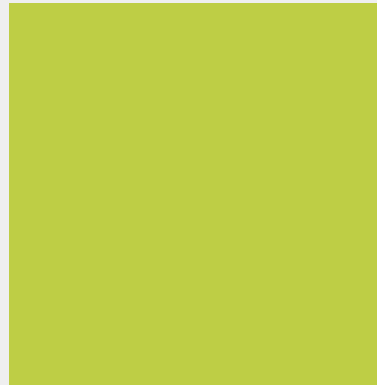


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FOR PROJECT STAFF AND PARTNERS

This guide is for project staff and partners who will facilitate community sessions as part of designing the MEAL for the Sistema Inclusivo ba Mudansa (SIM) project that promotes economic empowerment of women and people with disabilities in Timor Leste. It gives step-by-step instructions for running the indicator design activity with communities in Timor-Leste.

It does not include all steps in the associated guidance note. Instead, it is a worked example of how the guidance was adapted by Oxfam Timor Leste and Partner staff to create a facilitation guide which was used for the community engagement steps.



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STEP 1 | WELCOME - INTRODUCING PURPOSE AND PROJECT

This is the opening of the session. Your job is to make participants feel welcome, generate a safe and inclusive energy, and to explain clearly why you are here.

WHAT TO DO

- Introduce yourself and your team.
- Explain why you are here. Here is an example:

"We are working together to design this project. Today, we focus on one special part. We want to understand what success means to you. Not what we think, but what you think is important. We will talk about:

- *What changes you want to see in your community over the next few years from this project*
- *How you will know these changes are happening*
- *Who from the community might work together and with us to understand if changes are happening.*

This will help us understand if the project is working. We also hope it will help you to understand what is happening and changing in your community."

- Give an overview of the project

"Oxfam will be implementing a 5 year Sistema Inclusivu ba Mudansa (SIM) project that promote economic empowerment of women and people with disabilities. The project will take place in rural communities from Oe-cusse, Ermera and Liquica. It seeks to build towards a future where Women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups enjoy their rights and exercise greater control over their livelihoods and care work through strengthened, enabling systems and accountable structures from national to local levels."

- Explain what you will do today, and what you will do with the results.
- Open space for community questions.



TIPS!

- Make the purpose of the project very clear. This will impact the scope and direction of participants inputs throughout. Do not purely read out official project outcomes, but explain what the project is focusing on, what change it seeks and who it is for. Participants should know how this project relates to their community.
- Keep the framing simple and relevant to people's lives. Be clear that you are interested in changes connected to the project's themes, not change in general, and that the community's perspective, not the project teams, is what matters here.
- Be explicit about the reason for the session. Participants need to understand that this session is about MEASURING change – NOT about designing a project or deciding project activities.

STEP 2 | WARM UP (STORYTELLING CIRCLE)

This step is a warmup. It gives each person a chance to get comfortable speaking in the group, on a topic that is easy for them to talk about. Because the topic is not about the participants themselves or their own community, it feels safe and easy to join in.

It also helps bring out local ideas of strength, dignity and capability, described in the community's own words. This grounds the rest of the session in ideas that already mean something to participants.

WHAT TO DO

- The facilitator introduces the exercise using a locally known example of when people may have experienced storytelling previously in their lives (ie. reading a story as child, hearing your parents talk about a leader etc.)
- They then invite each participant to think of a person from their community, family, history, social media, politics who they deeply respect. It does not matter who they choose.
- Give them a few minutes to think of someone. Do not continue until everyone has confirmed that they are thinking about someone.
- Confirm that they are thinking about only 1 person.

In one large group:

- Invite each participant, going one by one, to share with everyone who it is that they admire and what it is about that person they admire?
- If participants need some help, ask all of the facilitation group to provide a fictional example of a person they admire, focusing on who the person is, what makes them special and what qualities they admire.
- Use the additional questions below as prompts if people need additional help.

KEY QUESTION

→ What is it about her or them that you admire?

IF PEOPLE NEED MORE HELP, ASK

- What do they do?
- How do they carry themselves?
- How do others treat them?
- How do they engage in community life?
- What about their family?



TIPS!

- Find a locally known example or situation where storytelling takes place to use in your explanation - link it to a familiar local practice or idea.

STEP 3 | VISIONING

The visioning exercise is used to imagine and describe what success looks like for the community. The goal of visioning is to help community members articulate - in their own words, images, and concepts - what a good life, dignity, and empowerment looks like for them, women and people with a disability, before any outside framework is imposed. We want to encourage the visioning to be in line with the project's objectives. This becomes the foundation from which indicators are later drawn.

This helps them think about what change looks like in real life, and then they describe a future they want to see, not what is happening now.

WHAT TO DO

The facilitator explains that we will now do a quiet individual activity. This exercise is about imagining the future. We want to imagine a future for the entire community, not just for those present in the session. Encourage participants to think beyond personal interests and consider the needs, aspirations, and wellbeing of all community members especially women, people living with a disability, and marginalised groups, in the context of the project focus.

- Begin by inviting participants to imagine their community.
- Then the facilitator invites participants to sit comfortably, and if they feel okay, asks them to close their eyes or look down softly
- Guide participants gradually through the exercise using a calm, slow and gentle tone as you speak.
- Example script:

"Take a slow breath in...and slowly breathe out. (pause)

Imagine your community in five years... a place where these qualities are everywhere...(pause)

What does your community look like? What is there that wasn't before? What is not there? (pause)

How are people living and going about their lives? (pause)

How are women living? (pause)

How are people with disabilities living? (pause)

How do people treat each other? or "How are people interacting with each other? (pause)

*What **feels** different for you ? (pause)*



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Take a little more time to see this place in your mind (longer pause)

Now, slowly, come back to the group.

You can open your eyes when you are ready"



TIPS!

- Emphasise to participants that closing their eyes is optional and intended to support focus. Reassure participants that it is equally acceptable to keep their eyes open or look down if that feels more comfortable.
- Be mindful of the timing of the exercise to ensure it remains engaging and purposeful. Avoid allowing the activity to run longer than necessary.
- Use guiding questions intermittently, delivered in a calm and gentle tone. Maintain a balance between guidance and silence – giving participants space to think while keeping them gently oriented toward the exercise.

STEP 4 | CARD SELECTION

Once visioning is done, participants choose cards that represent what they imagined for the future.

WHAT TO DO

- Explain that we now want to express that vision/community we imagined through pictures.
- Bring the pre-prepared cards with symbols or images to the group. Lay these down in the middle of the group/circle on a Flip chart.
- Ask each participant to individually select up to two cards which they feel represents their vision for their community, and what made them smile or warmed their heart.
- If they cannot find a card that fits, they can draw their own symbol or describe it in words by writing on a blank card.
- They can take their time looking at the cards and selecting. Once they have selected, they can take the cards back to their seat.
- It is okay if two participants select the same card.

KEY QUESTION

→ Pick two cards that remind you of your vision for your community.



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia



Photo: Aderito do R. da Cunha Mambares/Oxfam



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**TIPS!**

- Make sure you have a diversity of images, as well as duplicates.
- Think carefully about how many cards to offer. Too many options can be confusing. Too few may not capture what matters to participants.
- Tell participants before this step that they will share their chosen card with the full group. This gives them time to think about what they will say.
- Also include "negative" representations of positive changes in your card set (i.e., images that show what things look like when the change is NOT happening). Some participants may choose these - and that is useful information.

STEP 5 | BIG GROUP SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Invite everyone back into one circle. Each person shares their cards and what they mean. As a group, you will start to identify common themes.

WHAT TO DO

- Invite everyone back to the big group.
- The facilitator invites every person up one by one, getting a chance to share the cards they chose and explain what it means to them.
- Start by asking who would like to share first.
- Use the key questions below as prompts, if needed
- Collect the cards back from each individual as they share, but keep these cards separate to the main pile.
- The co-facilitator writes down themes and patterns as they emerge. Write what the community actually says - do not change it into development language.

KEY QUESTION

- Why did you select this image? What does it represent to you?
- How does the image connect to what you imagined for your community in 5 years?

**TIPS!**

- Make sure every participant has a chance to speak. Do not let the discussion move on until each person has shared.
- Remind participants that while some symbols may be similar, what matters most is the meaning each person attaches to their chosen or drawn symbol. Encourage them to focus on explaining their own vision and interpretation. Emphasise that even if others have selected a similar symbol, it is important to share their unique perspective.
- If someone has dominated the conversation so far, the lead facilitator should manage this carefully, tactfully, and respectfully. I.e. leave the person who is dominant to the end for the sharing.
- Ask follow-up questions to clarify but be aware that the community members are standing up on their own, this can be quite vulnerable, so do not probe too much.
- Capture what people actually say, in their own language, rather than translating it into development terminology. Make sure everyone has a turn before moving on.
- At this stage, things that emerged may feel more like indicators themselves, rather than changes - that is completely fine. Just note them down, so you can bring them into Step 9.

STEP 6 | IDENTIFYING PATTERNS (FACILITATORS ONLY)

This step happens during a break. It is for the facilitation team only. In it facilitators synthesise and identify key themes of future that emerged.

WHAT TO DO

- Tell the group it is time for a short break (or lunch, depending on timing).
- During this break, the lead facilitator, co-facilitator, and interpreter talk together.
- Looking through the notes, agree on the most common themes from the group discussion.
- You want to choose no more than 8 key themes
- As you make this selection, ensure the themes that you are selecting align to the project outcomes, in this case, Decision Making and Leadership, economic empowerment and Social Norms and Behaviour.
- Choose an image cards that represent those themes from the pile that the community members had selected (if working in locations where literacy is a challenge) / Alternatively you can just write the themes on cards.
- Arrange the cards in a row on flip charts on the ground or on a wall, and write above or below the card a word or phrase in the most appropriate language that represents that theme.



TIPS!

- Some themes may not on the surface feel like they relate, for example, women being able to send their children to school. Whilst this could easily be discarded as an education outcome, and therefore not related, the way it emerged in our pilot was that this signalled economic empowerment and decision making.



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia

STEP 7 | CO-FACILITATOR SHARES BACK COMMON THEMES

The co-facilitator shares back what they heard. The group checks if anything was missed.

WHAT TO DO

- The co-facilitator lays the key theme cards in a line on the ground or places them on the wall.
- The co-facilitator explains what theme each symbol represents, reflecting the themes that came from the group.
- Once these themes have been explained, the co-facilitator asks if there are any questions
- The facilitator then asks if there is anything important that is missing, or if the group feels these represent their vision for the future.

KEY QUESTION

- *Did we miss anything important?*
- *Is there something we saw or felt today that we have not named yet?*

Add more image cards from your pre-prepared set if the group identifies additional themes.



TIPS!

- When reporting back, you could frame this as the community 'checking that you were listening', that puts them in a position of power to correct the facilitator.
- Keep your remaining card deck or blank cards on hand so the group can physically add anything missing.
- Keep your questions genuine and unrushed. It's better to move at the pace of the participants.

STEP 8 | PRIORITISING THEMES AND AREAS OF CHANGE

The group votes on which themes matter most to them. This step is done as one big group.

WHAT TO DO

- The theme cards from Step 6 should still be in a line on the ground/or on a wall.
- The Facilitator explains that we are going to be voting on these.
- Check everyone understands the images/words.

KEY QUESTION

- *Do we all understand what each picture represents? (Explain any images if needed.)*

DOT VOTING

- Give each person 3 sticky dots. Explain that we are asking you to vote on the theme that feels the most important to you to change in your community (the most/first).
- Participants can place their votes across all different themes, or they can put all their votes on one theme.
- The Facilitator can pretend to vote as an example.

- The facilitator should ensure that some participants are not necessarily influencing others on what to vote for or not.

KEY QUESTION

→ *Which of these themes matters most to you right now?*

- Ask each person to place their dots on the card or cards that matter most to them.
- Once everyone has voted, the facilitator then ranks the cards from most votes to least.
- Allow space for brief group conversation to confirm the ranking. But do not let one person's opinion change the ranking.

STEP 9 | IDENTIFY OBSERVABLE SIGNS AND WHO WOULD KNOW

The group explores what change looks like in real life. What would people see, hear, or feel if this change was happening? The responses in this step inform the project's indicators.

WHAT TO DO

- Sit the whole group around the ranked theme cards. This session will be a group plenary conversation.
- Explain that:

"These themes/changes are what the project is wanting to work with the community to achieve. However, projects often have what we call 'monitoring', ways to see 'early signs' if these themes/changes might be happening. Sometimes 'monitoring' happens by project staff coming and interviewing you, or sometimes through a survey, where you are asked a lot of questions. Has anyone been involved in anything like this, for any project?"

What we are wanting to do on this project is a little different, rather than us coming and checking if anything is changing, we want to work with you to work out the best 'signs' of knowing that something is changing, and for a group of people in your community to work with us in looking out for these changes.

This is similar to how we know when the rains are coming, when the manu udan calls loudly or repeatedly, you know that big rains are coming soon."

- Ask if the group has any other examples? Keep discussing these types of examples until it is clear that the group understands the concept of 'signs of change'.
- Explain that *"We want to do the same thing for this project. That the cards in front of us are what we hope will be achieved, we now need to try to understand how we would know / what we would look for, to see if the change is happening"*
- Ask if there are any questions, or check if people understand the concept, otherwise keep discussing it.
- Once you are confident people understand
- Take each card one by one, starting with the card that got the most votes.
- For each card, ask 'How would you know if this is happening?', use prompt questions below if needed.
- Facilitate an open conversation across the group in understanding what we might see if the change was happening.

KEY QUESTION

→ *How would you know if this was happening?*

IF PEOPLE NEED HELP, ASK (ONE AT A TIME)

- *What would you actually see?*
- *What would be different?*
- *What would you hear?*
- *What would you feel?*
- *What would other people be doing differently?*

For example, If the card represents "women speaking up in meetings," ask:

- What exactly would we see?
- Would she raise her hand?
- Would she finish speaking without being interrupted?
- Would men listen when she speaks?

Each answer helps to make the indicator more specific.

BEFORE MOVING TO THE NEXT CARD,

- Explain that now you want to think together about who in this community would be best placed to watch for these signs. Ask:
- *Who in your community would be most likely to notice this change happening?*

IF PEOPLE NEED HELP, ASK

- *Who is best placed to see this happening?*
- *Who sees this every day or every week?*
- *Who spends time in the places or spaces where this change would happen?*
- *Is there anyone who is already keeping an eye on things like this in the community?*



Photo: Nelia Menezes/Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia



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Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia

For example: a women's group leader, a health volunteer, an elder, or a young woman. Think about who is closest to that particular area of change. It will be different for each indicator.

BEFORE MOVING TO THE NEXT CARD, ASK

→ *Is there anything that would make it difficult or unsafe for this person to watch for this change and share what they notice with others?*

- The co-facilitator takes detailed notes on all the indicators per theme and who would notice each change first.



TIPS!

- This step requires very strong and adaptive facilitation. We recommend it is conducted by the strongest facilitator in your group.
- Pay attention to people sitting at the back of the group. Call on them and encourage them to contribute.
- Be flexible and patient. If participants start talking about the next card or move ahead in the discussion, it is OK to adapt, and jump to a card later in the ranking, and then come back.
- Try to get through as many cards as you can in the time available. If you don't get through them all that is fine, as you have started from the changes the community felt were the most important.
- If signs of change have already been spoken about in Step 5, you can bring these in, and use them as a prompt to start conversation.

STEP 10 | DESIGNING THE COMMUNITY MONITORING TEAM

In Step 9, the group identified who in the community is best placed to notice each change. These are the people who might be best placed to form the community monitoring team. This step is a facilitated group conversation about how that team will work in practice. You are now designing the monitoring system together.

WHAT TO DO

- Remind the group of the people that could identify changes in Step 9 and the role they would play. Repeat the list of people that were mentioned.
- Explain the concept of a community monitoring team. For example:
"If these people worked together as a team we could call them a 'Community Monitoring Team'. A Community monitoring team is a group of people within the community that regularly checks on signs that things are changing within the community. This helps us all know if the project is making progress towards the things it set out to do. The community monitoring team will reflect on this progress and communicate changes and share any concerns with Oxfam and Partners."
- Ask if there are any questions
- Continue discussing until the idea is clear
- Open the conversation with the whole group using the topics and questions below. You do not need to ask every question. Let the conversation flow naturally and use the prompts to go deeper where needed.

HOW WILL THE MONITORING TEAM WORK?

→ *When the team notices something, how would they tell us what they have noticed? What would work best for them?*

Help the group think about practical ways that fit their context. For example:

- Monthly group discussions led by the community monitoring committee
- Marks or tallies on a tally stick
- Photo documentation
- A regular check-in meeting

Explain that this information will also be useful for communities, to understand where change is happening and where it is not

→ *How often would you like to sit down together and look at what has been noticed - to see whether the changes are happening?*

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CHANGES ARE NOT HAPPENING?

Explain that sometimes projects do not lead to the changes that were hoped for, at least not at first. It is important for the community to have a way to raise this. Ask the group:

→ *If the monitoring team is not seeing the changes we hoped for - what should happen? What would you want Oxfam and our partners to do?*

IF PEOPLE NEED HELP, ASK

- If things are not changing, who would you want to tell first?
- Is there a community leader, a women's group, or a trusted elder who could carry concerns to the project?
- How could the monitoring team raise concerns if they feel the project is not doing what it promised?
- What would you want Oxfam/Partners to do differently if something is not working?

HOW DO WE KEEP THE MONITORING TEAM GOING?

Being part of a monitoring team is a commitment over time. It is important to understand what would help people sustain this role through the life of the program, and what might make it hard. Ask the group:

- *What would help someone stay in this role for the whole project, not just at the start?*
- *What would make someone want to stop? What could we do to prevent that?*
- *If someone on the monitoring team is no longer available, they move away, or their situation changes, how would the community find someone to take their place?*



Photo: Nelia Meneses/Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia

IF PEOPLE NEED HELP, ASK

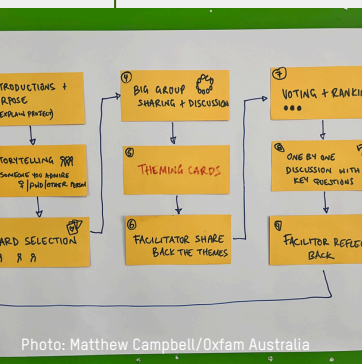
- Would practical support help, for example, phone credit to report back, help with transport costs, or a small stipend?
- Would recognition matter, for example, being publicly acknowledged, having a formal role or title, or receiving a certificate?
- Would training or ongoing support from the project team make a difference?
- How would your family or others in the community feel about you continuing in this role over time?

Record any commitments, concerns, or support needs that are raised. These will be discussed and addressed by the project team before the monitoring system is finalised.



TIPS!

- This is a conversation, not a checklist. You do not need to cover every question, let the group's energy guide you. Some communities will have strong views on accountability, others will focus on the practical. Follow what matters to them.
- This conversation will also require strong facilitation. If the previous facilitator is tired, it can be useful to swap facilitators for this step to inject new energy.
- The co-facilitator should take careful notes throughout, including any specific concerns that emerge.
- The questions about accountability may feel uncomfortable to ask, facilitators sometimes shy away from it. Do not. Communities have a right to know how they can raise concerns.
- When asking about motivation, be genuinely curious, not leading. Do not assume that payment is the main motivator. Recognition, training, or simply being asked and valued can matter more.
- Be aware of power dynamics throughout this step. Quieter participants may have the most important things to say, make sure they have space to speak.



STEP 11 | CO-FACILITATOR REFLECTS BACK: CLOSING THE SESSION

This is the closing of the session. The co-facilitator summarises what the group has produced and the session is brought to a close.

WHAT TO DO

- The co-facilitator gives a short verbal summary of the indicators the group has identified.
- Photograph everything before anything is moved: the cards, the ranking, and any written notes.

CLOSING THE SESSION

- Re-state the purpose of the project and the important role the group has played.
- Explain clearly what happens next: how this list will be used and who will see it.
- Explain the next steps in the project.
- Thank the community for their time.
- Open space for any final questions.



TIPS!

- Make sure participants leave knowing that their contribution matters. Remind them of the purpose of the project and what the group achieved today.
- Finish the day with the energy and hopeful enthusiasm that you started it.



Photo: Matthew Campbell/Oxfam Australia

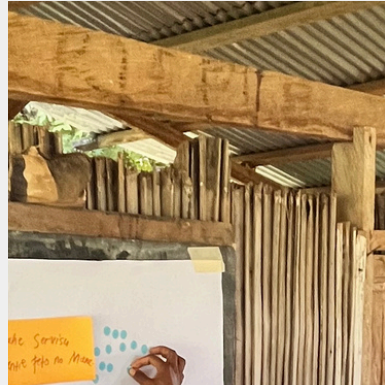


Photo: Matthea Campbell/Oxfam Australia

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