Learning from Experience and Sharing Knowledge:
A Capitalization Manual

Kristin Lindell
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D. INTRODUCTION:

Acción Contra el Hambre is a professional humanitarian organization committed to fighting against hunger and malnutrition. The following manual, which has been drafted at the ACF-E headquarters, is meant to serve as a capitalization guide for ACF missions and ACF technical departments.

As an organization fighting against hunger and malnutrition, we are very concerned about the quality of our interventions. We think that providing tools for teams working in different countries is essential for improving our technical work and our impact. This manual should help us by reinforcing our knowledge and our capacity to respond to needs on the field through the capitalization of our experiences.

We can determine that this manual represents the synthesis of several components. Firstly, it comes from a series of capitalization initiatives that have occurred over the last few years in both ACF headquarters and from those working in the field. The necessity for the capitalization of experiences was detected by our ACF staff members in the field. From their observations, it was felt that there was a need to improve our learning processes as organization and to reinforce the exchange of experiences and methodologies among different contexts.

Secondly, it reflects the need as an organization to significantly improve our professional work and our impact on beneficiaries through a critical reflection and analysis of our experiences. This knowledge, of course, will not only be useful for ACF, but also for donors, beneficiaries, local partners, and a multitude of other stakeholders.

And lastly, this document is closely related with the ACF’s Research Policy\(^1\). As stated in the Research Policy, ACF is dedicated to ensuring that all of our programs are high quality interventions geared towards improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations. The principal objective of this policy is to positively impact the most vulnerable populations. Additionally, the specific objective of this policy is to better ACF’s technical and operational capabilities on the ground. One of the ways in which ACF has proposed to do this is through its technical development. This development aims to continuously enhance the quality and impact of missions through capitalization, studies and research, dissemination and the exploitation of knowledge.

In short, technical development looks to apply the most appropriate technical solutions to projects based on the development of internal and external methodologies. Each mission plays an important role in this process as they are “at the center of the six stage technical development cycle” (Research Policy ACF-IN).

\(^1\) For more information, please see ACF’s positioning paper “Research Policy ACF-IN” for more information.
Specifically, this capitalization manual is meant to facilitate the second phase of this cycle, where missions engage in capitalization or an experienced based learning process. In this phase, missions are required to document, evaluate and disseminate their lessons learned in order to improve the quality and impact of future interventions. Consequently, this manual plays a fundamental role in technical development by reinforcing ACF’s ability to capitalize its experiences. By assisting us in the construction of evidence, this capitalization manual will help us to demonstrate why and how a specific methodology, intervention, strategy, or activity among multiple other experiences were or were not successful.

In conclusion, this manual stems from the observations of our staff members in the field, the constant need to improve the positive impact on beneficiary populations, and the technical development cycle. By helping us to capture, manage and analyze the experiences and lessons learned from our projects in the field, it represents an important advancement in terms of enhancing our impact and our technical capacities. And finally, its goal is to encourage the dissemination of our results in order to transfer our knowledge and experience to other contexts.
E. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this manual is to provide ACF field missions with a tool that facilitates the capitalization process. In the manual, we will focus on a capitalization method that asks us to analyze our experiences by describing what happened, how it happened and why. The method will also assist us in describing the lessons learned, best practices and recommendations from the experience that we wish to capitalize.

The overall purpose of capitalization is to make knowledge and experiences accessible and useful for our internal staff members and other stakeholders. As a humanitarian organization, the constant reflection and analysis that capitalization requires will help us to achieve our goal of improving our impact on our beneficiary populations.
In this manual we will be focusing on the **Basic Capitalization Method**. Please refer to the visual representation below for a representation of the Basic Capitalization Method:

![Diagram of Basic Capitalization Method]

**Terms of Reference:**
1. Purpose
2. Focus Theme
3. Prioritizing Actors
4. Activities: Collecting and Organizing, Analyzing
5. Timeline and Budget

During the **Preliminary Conditions Phase**, we first need to select a small team and a coordinator of the project. We also need to adapt a critical attitude that will help us to reflect and analyze our experiences. Thirdly, we will need to choose an experience that we can concisely define within a specific timeframe and geographic area. And lastly, we need to describe this experience in terms of the dates, geographic location, key players, phases of our experience, strategy, the objectives and the activities.

After completing the preliminary conditions, we are ready to move on to the **Planning Phase**. During this phase, we first need to select a purpose for our capitalization project. Next, we will formulate a focus theme that will act as our thematic guide during the remaining phases of the capitalization project. Additionally, we will then need to prioritize the actors whose opinions and perceptions we would like to include in our capitalization project. After doing this, we will have to plan for the activities which will help us to collect, organize,
and analyze both the information found in our project documents and from the other actors who we previously identified. Before finishing the planning phase, we also need to decide how we are going to publish and disseminate our results to the appropriate individuals and organizations.

Once we have completed the aforementioned steps, we can then design a timeline and a budget for our capitalization project. When we have completed this, we are ready to put this information in our Terms of Reference (ToR), which will serve as a guide for us during the execution phase of the project.

During the **Execution Phase**, we are concerned with completing the planned activities for collecting, organizing and analyzing information. Here, we need to make sure that the information is centered on our focus theme. Additionally, when analyzing the information, we need to respond to the following six questions:

1. **What** happened?
2. **How** did these things happen?
3. **Why** did these things happen?
4. **What** kind of **lessons** did we **learn** from the experience?
5. **What** are the **best practices** from this experience?
6. **What** kind of **recommendations** do we have for future interventions?

Once we feel that we have properly answered these six questions in reference to our focus theme, we are ready to **publish and disseminate our information**.
F. INTRODUCING CAPITALIZATION CONCEPTS

What is Capitalization?

The first question that we must ask ourselves here is: what exactly is “capitalization”? In theory, however, this question is not so easily answered and in reality, the terminology can be quite confusing. Perhaps some of you are more familiar with the term systematization rather than capitalization or vice versa. It may be helpful to look at the definitions of systematization and capitalization according to their respective authors in order to help us identify their confluences:

Systematization is the critical interpretation of one or several intervention experiences. Through the process of ordering and reconstructing the experiences, systematization assists us to discover or explain the logic of the intervention process, the different factors that influenced it, and how and why the elements of the intervention related to each other in a particular way.²

The capitalization of knowledge is a process meant to build up a capital from information or knowledge available in an organisation, in order to develop (the organization) by making (knowledge) available to other institutions or actors. It is designed to ensure that every individual’s experience is not confined to him or herself alone, but serves the community in a knowledge sharing movement, which imparts a participatory aspect to its conduct. The implementation of new projects or the conducts of new actions are facilitated by the preservation and transmission of acquired experience and knowledge.³

After reading the two definitions, we can see that the two concepts are very similar and share a global idea of learning from previous experiences and information. In this manual we are not necessarily concerned with the theoretical differences in between the two concepts but rather, we are most interested in the critical reflection of our experiences in order to improve practices. To avoid confusion, we have chosen to concentrate on one definition under “Capitalization” in this manual, taking into account that in the capitalization process, the "systematization process” can be seen as a previous step.

In general, we can say that capitalization is:

- a critical reflection of our experiences in the field
- a process of gathering information and sharing knowledge
- a process that
  - explains what actions were taken during an experience and why they were taken

produces lessons learned, best practices, and recommendations based on a particular experience

improves practices

✓ the dissemination of what we have learned though the creation of methods, manuals, briefs, documentaries and multimedia material based on our experiences

If we take a closer look, capitalization is meant to transform knowledge that is disperse or perhaps contained within a small circle of people into knowledge that is relevant and accessible to all. By performing a critical reflection of our experience, we examine the steps that were taken, what worked and what didn’t and why. In a way, capitalization represents the beginning of a change and its final purpose is to transform and improve the processes and practices of an organization and individuals.

The Relationship between Capitalization and Evaluation

When discussing capitalization, it is equally important to highlight the differences and similarities between capitalizations and evaluations. Let’s begin by looking at a definition of Evaluation in Humanitarian Action according to ALNAP:

[Engineer is] a systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice, and enhance accountability.4

To summarize, an evaluation is normally carried out by external staff, or by internal staff not directly involved in the experience. It looks to analyze if we have achieved certain results and objectives. By defining a series of questions drawn from criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, it helps us to assess strategy and practice. An evaluation may explain the steps that were or were not taken during an intervention, but it will not necessarily do so in detail nor will it give much insight as to why they were taken. Moreover, evaluations look to give us recommendations that can be carried over to future experiences or organizational policies. And finally, it increases our accountability with donors and other stakeholders.

On the other hand, a capitalization directly involves internal staff, or those who have lived the experience. Its aim is to explain to us in detail what steps were taken during an intervention, how they were taken and why our intervention did or did not achieve the planned results and objectives. Another difference is found in the analysis phase of a capitalization process. Additionally, capitalization seeks to underline the lessons learned, best practices and recommendations of a particular experience. In general, however, the capitalization process will look to give us recommendations that are more focused and less numerous than those found in an evaluation.

Nonetheless, it helps to realize that despite their distinctions, capitalization and evaluation are two interrelated processes. We can determine that both, for

4 For more information, please see ACF’s “Evaluation and Policy Guidelines 2007.”
example, contribute to an improvement in practices. Apart from this shared characteristic, in order to complete a capitalization project it helps to know if the objectives and results were successful or not. This information probably comes from the evaluation of the experience we wish to capitalize. Additionally, by understanding how and why things were done through a capitalization, we can contribute to a deeper comprehension of project evaluations. In short, we can determine that the two processes are complementary.

**Why is capitalization important?**

As a humanitarian organization, the capitalization process helps us to reflect on what we have done, learn from experiences, identify good practices and improve weak practices. Through this process, we can ensure that we keep and share important information from our interventions and that we continuously work towards improving our impact on beneficiaries.

Additionally, by disseminating our experiences, we are contributing to the overall learning process of our organization and other stakeholders which hopefully will catalyze a change in practice. Capitalization will help us and others not to repeat errors, and on the contrary, to base the design of new interventions on past experiences.

Eventually, if we continuously discuss and analyze the capitalization of experiences and lessons learned from specific interventions, we will be able to create a general knowledge base, which in turn may help us to create methods that can be adapted to many different contexts. In fact, all of ACF’s technical guidelines, like the “Income Generating Activities” technical guidelines, represent capitalization projects that have developed a series of general methods.
G. INTRODUCTION TO THE CAPITALIZATION METHODS

Now that we have a better understanding of what capitalization is and why it is important, we need to explore a method and a series of tools that we can use to carry out the process itself. The following section is meant to provide us with a flexible method that will help us to capitalize our experiences. Each context, of course, will be different and a universal recipe does not exist; however, regardless of the context, it might be helpful to think of this method as we would of the Project Cycle Management. Just as with the PCM, we need to define the experience we wish to capitalize, plan for it, design a budget and timeline, execute the project, and then disseminate our experience. A basic outline of the method might look like this:

Step 1: Preliminary Conditions
Step 2: The Planning Stage
Step 3: The Execution phase: Information Gathering and Analysis
Step 4: Publication and Dissemination

Additionally, before getting started, it is important to realize that we can think of the capitalization process in three different ways or as being produced on three separate levels.

1. **Activity Capitalization**: The first level would be the most basic and would require the least amount of resources from the team involved in the capitalization on the field. At this level we would be looking to highlight why a specific activity, several activities or an experience from the field did or did not achieve a specific objective, based on a critical review of the methodology. During the final dissemination phase of the capitalization process, a short summary or a brief would be presented as the final product. A good example of this type of capitalization project can be found in *Field Days* from the Bolivia Mission as it captures a concrete experience within a mission.5

2. **Project Level Capitalization**: The second level would require more reflection and investigation and would define the lessons learned, best practices and provide recommendations from the project as a whole.

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5 This capitalization project is known in Spanish as Días de Campo and was taken from an exchange of experiences, knowledge and technical information among Guaraní farmers in Bolivia.
During the final phase of the capitalization process, a longer document or even a manual or field book might be produced. To give a more specific example, the Case Study on Income Generating Activities from Georgia, is a good representation of this type of capitalization as it looks to capitalize the lessons learned, best practices and recommendations from an entire intervention.6

3. **Global Capitalization:** This last and most complex level would involve much more information gathering and analysis of a series of events spanning the course of several years, an entire geographic region, or maybe numerous missions. It would require much more support from the ACF headquarters as a global vision of the experience would be needed. During the last phase of the capitalization process, the final product might be to propose a general method that can be applied to many different contexts. To give a more concrete example, our own Technical Guidelines on “Income Generating Activities: A key concept in sustainable food security,” represents the synthesis of 10 years of investigation and experience in the field.7

Because of this division, we will need to decide what kind of method we would like to use based on the experience we select. **The Basic Capitalization Method** which will be discussed in the next section, is probably best suited for Activity and Project Level capitalizations. In this manual, the more complex Global Capitalization Method will not be described.

Finally, before getting started, it is important to keep in mind that our capitalization project’s **purpose** is to include six components or questions:

To further explain these components it is helpful to turn them into a series of six questions. On one hand we need to show and explain how the particular methodology that we used or the steps that were taken in our experience were efficient, successful, unsuccessful, etc. For this part, we will need to answer the questions below:

1. **What** happened?
   In other words, we need to describe the final positive and negative outputs or results of our experience.

2. **How** did these things happen?
   For this question, we need to reconstruct in detail the steps that were taken that determined the outcome of the experience.

3. **Why** did these things happen?

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6 This capitalization project was performed in Georgia and it reflected the technical best practices in a food security intervention that looked to improve the living standards of those living in Abkhazia and Samegrelo.

7 This capitalization project is taken from a decade of Food Security interventions and looks to highlight a series of different technical tools that can be used for precise projects.
Here we need to describe how the internal and external factors influenced the course of events.

Additionally, we will need to go beyond an this explanation and try to highlight the components of the experience that had a negative impact on the outputs or results, the elements that were most successful, and any kinds of recommendations that we have for future interventions. In order to assure that we take these elements into consideration we need to answer the questions below.

4. What kind of lessons did we learn from the experience?
   We might want to highlight mistakes that we made or incorrect choices that had a negative influence on the outcome.

5. What are the best practices from this experience?
   To answer this question, we will need to decide what methods, techniques etc. had a positive influence of the outcome of our experience.

6. What kind of recommendations do we have for future interventions?
   Here, we should consider the kind of advice that we can offer to those participating in future experiences.

After answering these questions, our job is then to share our findings with our organization and other stakeholders through the publication and dissemination of these results. In this way, we will contribute to the knowledge base of our own organization and of others.
H. BASIC CAPITALIZATION METHOD

STEP 1: Preliminary Conditions

Before we begin, we need to fulfill some preliminary conditions that will help us to get started with our project and that will hopefully assist us in properly planning for our capitalization process.

These are our basic Preliminary Conditions:
1. A capitalization team and its coordinator
2. An attitude geared towards critical analysis and a desire to improve
3. An experience that we wish to capitalize
4. The documentation and a reconstruction of events

The coordinator and the team:
In the first place, it is important to establish a small team whose job will be to work on the capitalization project. This team needs to have a coordinator who will be in charge of defining the objective of the capitalization, managing the resources, making sure that the activities go as planned and that the final objectives are reached.

The group itself should not be too large and prepared to set aside time in order to work on the project. It would be most useful if the members of the team were those who already have some field experience on the same subject so that they can draw comparative lessons from other projects.

The attitude:
As a member of the capitalization team, it is also very important to adopt a critical attitude and to be prepared to reflect and analyze different experiences. We should also be prepared to accept the mistakes made in our experience and to learn from them. Without this desire to reflect on what has been done, we may not achieve the desired output.

An experience that we wish to capitalize:
In some cases, the experience that we are going to capitalize may be the result of several months or even years of implementation, discussion and evaluation of our projects or maybe from a general understanding that a specific experience was successful or in some cases, unsuccessful (because it is also important to understand why certain activities or projects didn’t function properly!). As a way to fill in the “capitalization gap”, the experience we chose could be something that has not necessarily been done before or an experience that was particularly innovative.

The idea here would be to focus on a specific experience, project, multiple missions, a specific timeframe or location or even a certain strategy among a multitude of other options. Regardless of the experience that we chose, we need to keep in mind that the final objective is always aimed at understanding what happened, why and how these things happened, the lessons learned, best
practices, and recommendations and then later, sharing this information with our target audience.

The experience that we select should be chosen based on a consensus reached with our capitalization team. As it is easy to “get lost” among the sheer volume of information that is available, our experience needs be clearly and precisely defined. In general, it may be useful to select an experience that is SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and time bound) just as we do with our indicators in the Project Cycle Management.

For example, the following objectives for capitalizing experiences would not be useful for our purposes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The Field Days in Bolivia} \\
\text{Women who Gained Improved Market Access}
\end{align*}
\]

However, the objectives below are a good example of what we want to capitalize:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Exchanging Experiences, Knowledge and Methodologies among Guaraní Farmers in Field Days} \\
\text{Gender based Methodologies used to Gain Access to the Market in the Sahel Region}
\end{align*}
\]

In general, we want to have a clearly defined target that can be analyzed within a specific time frame and geographic location. For further clarification on defining the experience, please refer to the section below on the Documentation and the Reconstruction of the Experience.

At this point, if we are still unsure about which experience to focus on, it might be helpful to make a short list of different experiences (according to the SMART criteria) that have been lived by the team. We may find it useful to reference the evaluation documents, project proposals and monitoring reports among other documents for specific ideas. We could then select the experience based on criteria as we would in the Analysis of Alternatives during the Design Phase of a project. When selecting criteria, we might want to use the following guidelines:

**Relevance:** How well does the experience reflect the strategies of ACF? Or how important is it to the beneficiaries, donors or other stakeholders?

**Technical Interest:** In this case, we could ask ourselves: will the experience provide technical recommendations to other missions?

**Adaptability:** Do we think that the lessons we learned from this experience could be adapted to other missions?

**Capitalization Gap:** For this element, we could ask ourselves: Has the experience we want to capitalize been analyzed by another team? Is it an example of a particularly innovative project? Did the experience take...
place in a completely new context? In other words, we should try to analyze the added value of our capitalization project.

**Resources: Budget and Time:** Here we should consider if the experience that we wish to capitalize can be realistically analyzed given the human, material, and financial resources that are available to us.

**Feasibility:** Here, we should consider the context of the area that we would like to complete the capitalization project in. We may want to ask ourselves: What is the security situation like? Will I have access to the project sites?

**Other criteria…..**

**The documentation and the description of the experience**
Before beginning, you will need to gather and organize the documents that are available for you to analyze. Depending on the amount of the documents that we have, we may need to consider budgeting and planning a significant amount of time in order to complete this step. The specific documents may include evaluation reports, planning documents, graphs, posters, manuals, technical data bases, monitoring reports and pictures among other sources.

By referencing documents like the project proposal or the final reports we can then write a brief description of the major events that have occurred in the specific experience. As mentioned earlier, it is important to be as concise as possible and here we will clarify even further the details of the experience. The following questions can be quite helpful when describing our experience:

- **Where and when** did these things happen? (dates, description of area, phases)
- **What** were the purposes and goals of the intervention? (strategy, objectives and results)
- **What** actions or steps were followed to reach your results or goals? (activities)
- **Who** participated? (key players: including direct and indirect actors)

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It may also be useful to organize this information into a *Description of the Experience Chart*. Below you will find a concrete example based on an experience with the Income Generating Activities in Georgia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Description</th>
<th>Key Players</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bordered by the Black Sea, Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, mountainous, arid plains….</td>
<td>ACF food security team in the South Caucasus Mission…</td>
<td>Oct 2003- August 2004</td>
<td>Phase 1: Oct 2003- Jan 2004</td>
<td>Market Oriented Income Generating Activities</td>
<td>Phase 1: Group Formation and Establishment of Business</td>
<td>Assess vulnerability level, general training with group members, establishment of business plan……</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 2: Feb 2004- Aug 2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**From this Chart:**

*Title:* This is where we put the title of the experience that we are going to capitalize.

*Description of the area:* Here we will need to talk about the location, the geography, and the seasons of the area where the experience took place.

*Key players:* Here we need to consider all of the actors that were involved in the project, from the local authorities to the beneficiaries to our staff members.

*Dates:* This is where we state when the experience that we are capitalizing began and when it ended.

*Phases:* If the capitalization experience was carried out in different phases, we will need to include these.

*Strategy:* For the strategy, we will need to make reference to the specific orientation that our project had: i.e. gender.

*Objectives:* In this part we focus on what the general and specific objectives that we wanted to achieve were in the experience that we are capitalizing.

*Activities:* In this box, we will need to describe the specific steps we have followed in chronological order to achieve our objectives.

Once we have completed the steps described above, we will be ready to move on to the planning step.
STEP 2: The Planning Phase

After completing the preliminary steps, we will now be able to plan for our capitalization project. We need to consider the following interrelated elements to be able to plan for our capitalization project:

1. The purpose of our capitalization project
2. The focus theme
3. Prioritizing the actors
4. Activities for collecting and organizing information
5. Activities for analyzing the information
6. Publishing and disseminating the results
7. The timetable and the budget
8. The Terms of Reference

1. The purpose

Here we will need to consider why we are going to capitalize the specific experience that we have chosen. It will be helpful to refer to our Description of the Experience Chart to get a better idea of what we are going to be looking for. Usually we are looking to share with others a critical description of what, how, and why certain steps were taken in the context of our experience and to provide a series of tips and recommendations about the specific experience.

At this point it may be useful to highlight some examples.

Example 1: Field Days:

Here we could go back to one of our original experiences that was referenced at the beginning of the document: Field Days in Bolivia. The Field Days are a series of technical and experience exchanges between local Guaraní farmers. They represent some of the activities carried out within a specific project; therefore, the capitalization project represents an Activity Capitalization as it is an experience within a project. In this case, the purpose of the capitalization might be to explain what steps were taking to implement the Field Days and to provide methodological and technical lessons learned, best practices and recommendations for other missions that wish to incorporate these types of exchanges among local farmers.

Example 2: Women’s Organization:

Let’s imagine that one of our projects focused on strengthening the livelihoods of a women’s agricultural organization. In this case, we may decide to investigate how, through this project, they were able to gain direct access to the crop market. Because we are focusing on the project as a whole and not a particular part, this type of capitalization would be a Project Level Capitalization. Here, the main purpose could be to learn from this preliminary experience in order to transfer the knowledge and practices to other crops or to other groups of producers in different countries.

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9 During the planning phase, you may find the Capitalization Form in Annex 2, page 52, to be quite useful.
2. The focus theme

Based upon the specific event, mission, activity, strategy or time period that we wish to capitalize, we will need to formulate a specific focus theme that reflects the purpose of our capitalization project. The question should be simple and direct and it will act as a thematic guide for us during the entire capitalization experience. It will be especially useful during the execution phase, when we need to collect, organize and analyze information. Below you will find two examples of focus themes:

Example 1: Field Days:
What actions and techniques were successful in implementing the activities for Field Days and why?

Example 2: Women’s Organization:
What actions were successful or unsuccessful in improving access to the markets and why?

It may also be useful to refer to the tool below to help us formulate this question:

Focus Theme of the Capitalization Project:

Objective:
To define the main question of our project, we should respond to the following question: Why do we want to capitalize this experience?

Procedure:
Ask yourself: Why do we want to capitalize this experience in particular?

Answer:
A. It was a successful experience and I would like to know why and how the achieved results were so positive.
B. The experience did not go as planned and I would like to know why and how.
C. I am not sure whether the experience was successful or not, but it has utilized some innovative methods and I would like to understand how and why they worked.

If you have answered A:

Then you will formulate your question on the specific aspects that were successful:

Example: If the project was successful because 90% of the women have gained access to the corn market, then our question would be: Why have 90% of the women gained access to the corn markets? What actions were successful or unsuccessful in improving access to the markets and why?

If you answered B:

Then you will formulate your question based on the specific aspects that were failures or did not achieve the desired results.

Example: Why and how was this “strengthening of livelihoods project” unsuccessful in terms of generating incomes?
3. Prioritizing the actors

The purpose here is to select and prioritize the additional actors besides our project team that we would like to include in our capitalization project. This step will later help us during the Execution Phase where it will be important to consider the perceptions of other relevant actors in regards to the events that have transpired and to help us analyze the events.

These other actors could be the beneficiaries, donors, or our local partners depending on the complexity of the experience that we wish to analyze. By referencing the Description of the Experience Chart, we will be able to get a good understanding of what individuals or groups of people will help us to analyze why things happened the way that they did and to answer our focus theme. If we are very limited on time, we will need to consider what actors will be most important for answering our focus theme.

You may want to consider using the following tool:

**Objective: Identify and Prioritize the Actors**

**Procedure:** Identify all of the actors that participated directly in the project.

These could include but are not limited to:
- actors involved in the decision making process of the experience
- the beneficiaries
- actors who have provided human resources, materials, financing during the experience

When we are doing this, it is important to be concise; for example, instead of "local farmers" we should say: "300 local farmers from the Cordillera Province in Santa Cruz, Bolivia."

Once we have identified those directly involved, we should try to select several representatives if we are dealing with larger groups of people. The representatives could be selected based on the following criteria: gender equality, role in the experience, availability to participate in the interviews/ workshops, leadership status within the group, and the vulnerability level among other criteria that we deem important.
In order to make the list as concise and relevant as possible, we may need to prioritize whose viewpoints are most important depending on our purpose and our focus theme. We can therefore group the representatives into different categories based on the level of participation priorities:

1. Extremely important
2. Helpful
3. Only if there’s enough time
4. Not necessary

Once we have done this, we need to repeat the same steps for the indirect actors. Indirect actors are neither those who were the beneficiaries, nor those who were involved in the decision making process, and they have not provided any kind of resource to the project. However, these indirect actors have had an influence on the project.


4. Collecting and organizing information

In this part of the planning stage, we need to decide how we are going to collect and organize information about the experience from our documents and the other actors we have previously identified.

As mentioned earlier, these are the types of documents that we will need to plan to review:

- monitoring documents
- project evaluations
- technical databases
- project proposals
- surveys
- social audits
- other relevant project documents….

Below you will find an example:

**Example 1:** List of Documents from Field Days:

- Project proposal
- Description of Activities
- Monitoring Reports
- Beneficiary Interviews
- Section of the Evaluation Report focusing on Field Days
- Written Testimony of Activities’ Coordinator ……

**Example 2:** List of Documents from the Women’s Organization:

- Project Proposal
- Technical databases
- Market Strategy Handbooks used in the project
- The project Evaluation
- Accounting Books from the beneficiaries…..
of the information found in the documents. It will be important to include the time needed to do so, who will review the information, and how it will be done. For example, will one person be assigned to read the documents and organize the information? Will several team members do so as group in a series of meetings? The answers to these questions will depend on our capacity as a team, our resources, and the complexity of our project. For more information about how to organize the information, please see page 25 of the Capitalization Project Execution Phase section.

Additionally, we need to plan to **collect** and **organize** information from the relevant actors that we have identified in the previous step.

When we plan the activities for collecting information from the other actors, we will probably be focusing on qualitative information about the experience that we wish to capitalize. So, we need to consider how we are going to perform the activities, who is going to be in charge of them, and the time needed to complete them. For example, the activities could be in the form of individual interviews, group discussions or workshops, with special attention to how we are going to include the voices of the most vulnerable populations. While planning, we should also take into consideration when and where these activities are going to take place, as this may later influence our budget.

Then, we will need to take the same criteria (how, who, and time) into consideration when we **organize** our findings from these actors. In the following boxes, you will find two examples of the types of activities we might wish to include:

**Example 1:** Activities for Field Days with other actors:
- Interviews with 3 Representative Farmers who shared their techniques
- Interviews with 5 Representative Farmers who learned the new techniques
- Meeting with Project Team
- Interview with Representative from the Local Authorities
- Internal team meeting to organize findings from the interviews

**Example 2:** Activities for the Women’s Organization with other actors:
- Interviews with 5 Representative Beneficiaries
- Group Workshop to Reconstruct the Experience
- Group Workshop to Identify lessons learned and best practices
- Internal team meeting to consolidate and organize the results
5. The analysis

In order to plan for the analysis phase, we need to include activities that help us to analyze, compare and discuss the information that we have collected and organized based on our focus theme. Then, we need to plan for activities that will assist us in reaching a consensus about the six questions or components that were mentioned earlier on pages 13 and 14 of this manual:

1. What happened?
2. How did these things happen?
3. Why did these things happen?
4. What kind of lessons did we learn from the experience?
5. What are the best practices from this experience?
6. What kind of recommendations do we have for future interventions?

When planning for the analysis, we will need to evaluate the human, financial and material resources that will help us to later on answer these questions in the execution phase. First, just as in the information gathering and organization, we will need to think about the time, who will do the analyzing, and how it will be done. The time will depend on what we can realistically dedicate and the complexity of our experience. In our examples, the experience with the Women’s Organization would require much more time than the Field Days project. In terms of who will be analyzing the information, usually these people will be our team members. We will additionally need to include one or several activities that help us to reach a consensus with other actors. And furthermore, depending on the complexity of the capitalization process we have chosen, we will need to hold several or many brainstorming sessions, discussion groups, and meetings with our team members and other actors.

As in all projects, we may also need to plan for the unforeseen. For example, during the execution phase, we may need to continue going back and forth between clarifying opinions and facts amongst ourselves and other actors and analyzing our information. The object here would be to reach a general consensus with our team and other actors about what and why things happened the way that they did and to generate lessons learned, best practices, and recommendations for future projects. So, when planning for our capitalization project, it would be useful to set aside some additional time to complete the analysis phase. On page 27, we will discuss this phase in more detail during the execution phase.

6. Publishing and disseminating the results

Another important aspect of the planning phase involves deciding how and when to publish and disseminate the results of the capitalization.

When planning for this step, we will need to take two things into consideration:

First, who will be our audience? Will it be the beneficiaries of our project? Our local partners? Internal staff members?
The answers to these questions will determine the means of communication that we chose to use i.e.: CD, manual, pamphlet, poster, report etc. It will also influence the type of language that we use in our document. In some cases, if we are going to gear our results towards several different actors, we may need to consider including more than one type of publication.

Secondly, we will design our publication based on the purpose of our capitalization project. It will be helpful here to demonstrate a more concrete example:

**Example 1: Field Days:**

The target audience might be other ACF Project Technicians. Therefore the language, length and the means of publication would be directed towards their particular context. The purpose in this case was to be able to highlight best practices, lessons learned and recommendations for Field Days in other contexts; therefore our end product might be a short description of the experience that includes the aforementioned elements.

**Example 2: Women's Organization:**

The target audience here might be other women's organizations. This would condition the language that we would use, as any published materials would have to be presented in accordance with the particular context of the women's organization. Since the purpose of this capitalization project was to convert a successful experience into one that could be used in other circumstances, the end product could be perhaps a manual or a field book as well as a CD that explains the general steps and methods to follow in order to gain access to the market.

Moreover, it is extremely important not only to plan for the type of document that we want to produce but also to design a strategy to assure ourselves that the information is distributed to the relevant actors. In other words, we will need to ask ourselves, how is this information going to be distributed? We will post it on the intranet? Are we going to deliver paper copies? We will be mailing out CDs? The answers to these questions will depend on the level of education of our target audience and the technology available to them. Also, we may find that we need support from headquarters, as they may have a better idea of the other stakeholders that will find the documents relevant. Once again, please find two examples below:

**Example 1: Field Days:**

In this case, it might be most useful to post this short description on the intranet and to hand out printed copies to other missions that have decided to implement similar workshops.

**Example 2: Women's Organization:**

In this example, we might want to ensure that several paper copies were turned over the leaders of other women's organization and we also might want to include a few CDs as well. This information will probably be useful as an internal document, so we could consider posting it on the intranet and handing out CDs or the actual paper copy of the document to staff that participate in similar missions.
7. The time table and the budget

Finally, in the last stage of the planning phase, it is important to try and estimate how much time we will need to spend on the project. This all depends of course on several different factors.

First, the amount of time required to work on a capitalization process depends on how complex your project is. The time can vary from several hours to ongoing projects of several years. For example, are you analyzing why a particular workshop went well or are you looking for lessons learned over 10 years of experience in Income Generating Activities in Latin America? The complexity may depend on the amount of documentation that is available for you to work with, or in some cases, how much documentation you decide to work with. Additionally, the complexity is influenced by how many actors will be involved in the capitalization process and what kind of activities you decide to plan for. And last but not least, it depends on the amount of time that we are able to dedicate to the project. It is very important to keep in mind these elements when we write up our initial planning document.

Apart from the timeline, the budget itself will also depend on the size of the capitalization project. If we only need several hours to reach an agreement and write up a brief that reflects the lessons learned from a specific activity, then it’s quite possible that we will not need to budget this capitalization project; however, if our project aims to focus on the lessons learned from a specific mission or the events over a longer period of time, then we will probably need to budget in some or perhaps all of the activities.

As resources are also important to consider, we might need to plan to include our capitalization project as a final activity of the experience itself, usually completed after the after the evaluation. Depending on the experience we select, its budget should be included in our project’s budget as an additional activity.

8. The Terms of Reference:

Once we have completed the pre-conditions and established the purpose and focus theme, what actors will be involved, what activities we will use and how much time and money we need to spend, we should then write up the Terms of Reference (ToR). These ToR will act as our guide during the capitalization process and remind us when and how to complete the different stages. It will also assist us with the redaction of the final product during the publication and dissemination phase. Below you will find an example of a general outline:

I. Introduction:
   a. An explanation of the experience we wish to capitalize (taken from the Description of the Experience)
II. The Capitalization Team and Coordinator
III. The Main Purpose of the Project
IV. Focus Theme
V. Methodology
VI. Means of Publication
VII. Dissemination Strategy
VIII. Timeline
IX. Budget
STEP 3: The Execution Phase:

Now that we have finished our planning phase, we are ready to begin the execution phase. Essentially, in this phase we are concerned with:

- Gathering and organizing the information about the experience.
- Analysing this information

Collecting and Organizing Information:

The purpose of this phase is to:

- **First**: gather information that is geared towards answering our focus theme from the available documents and other relevant actors during interviews, emails, workshops, focus groups, etc.

- **Second**: organize the information contained in our Description of the Experience, the documents we have and the opinions and perceptions of the direct and indirect actors involved in the project.

When we **collect information** from our **documents**, we must remember that the idea is **not** to review every document that is available to us. So, it is important to only focus on those that are directly related with the experience we wish to capitalize and our focus theme. We may also find that certain parts of documents are more important to us than others and it will be important once again to separate the information that relates to our experience. For example, if we are doing an Activity Capitalization project, we might only need to focus on certain elements of the project proposal and on specific monitoring reports. Additionally, it will be important not only to highlight qualitative information, but also quantitative information as both will be useful in terms of the analysis phase.

When we **collect information** from other **actors**, we will try to focus at clarifying several elements. Firstly, we will want to reconstruct the sequence of events that took place during the experience based on the actors’ perceptions.
This will help us determine what happened, how it happened, and why things happened in relation to the context. In terms of referencing the events that took place, it is important to remember that our perception of the sequence of certain circumstances may be very different from the perception of others. Secondly, we will want to know the actors’ opinions about the lessons learned, best practices and the recommendations for future experiences.

Finally, we will collect our information by following the activities that we have planned such as biographical reviews, group workshops, email interviews, face to face interviews, and surveys among the numerous other activities that we have already planned.

Once we have finished our investigation we are ready to organize the information in a way that facilitates the answer to our focus theme. As mentioned earlier, in order to correctly answer our focus theme, we must try to include the six questions of a capitalization project.

It is important to remember that when organizing this information, we will always have to take into consideration how the context of the experience we are capitalizing may or may not have affected the sequence. In other words, external events and time are two very important factors. Additionally, we will want to know who participated in the particular part of the experience and the source that we will be collecting information from.

Below you will find a useful tool that can be used to collect and organize information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This table can be adjusted to many different contexts. Depending on our capitalization project, we may want to define different criteria such as the source and the results of the experience that would facilitate the organization process. For example, if we are doing a Project Level Capitalization or an Activity Capitalization, we may want to use a different chart for each source according to the different project results of the experience that we are capitalizing. In other words, for each source we would need to fill in several different charts according to each result.

Depending on the source, we may or may not be able to fill in the entire chart. For example, from the evaluation document of our experience, we may be able to include certain recommendations that comply with our focus theme; however,
from the Project proposal document of the experience, we may not be able to include any kind of recommendations.

In addition to using this chart, we should also organize the information in various **graphics** that will help us to visualize several elements of our experience. In order to do this, we should think of these visual representations as tools that aid our understanding of the processes that have taken place in our experience. The idea here would be to create them in such a way that those outside of the experience would be able to understand the message we are trying to communicate. These tools that we design will later be used during the publication phase. Below, you will find an example that has been taken from a “Markets for the Poor” capitalization project. As you can see, this particular example illustrates how the components of each intervention impacted different levels of society:

![Diagram illustrating the impact of interventions]

After completing the activities designed to collect and organize information, we are ready to move onto the next stage.

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10 For more information, please see “Implementation of the Market for the Poor Approach: Capitalizing on the Experience of the South Caucasus.” 2010.
**Analysing the Information**

As we all know, capitalization is not just about collecting different versions of the chronology of events; therefore, the purpose of this phase is to analyze how and why specific events took place and their impact. Additionally, it looks to include lessons learned, best practices and recommendations for future interventions.

In order to complete this step, we will need to have all the information at hand that we collected and organized. Then together with our team, we will need to read the results, discuss, formulate conclusions and reach an agreement with the other actors involved in terms of our interpretation.

As mentioned earlier, the final goal is to reach a consensus about:

- **What** happened?
  In other words, we need to describe the final results of the experience we have selected. Were the results positive? Negative? Both?

- **How** did these things happen?
  For this question, we need to reconstruct the steps that were taken that determined the outcomes of the experience. We will need to do this clearly and in detail so that those who were not part of the experience can understand the description.

- **Why** did these things happen?
  Here we need to describe what internal and external factors influenced the course of events. In other words, was the failure of our project partially influenced by the unusually heavy rains? Or was it influenced by internal mistakes from the project team?

From here, the following tool may help us to analyze the information that we have gathered in the previous step. This tool is meant to be used as a guide to facilitate the answers to the questions above.

**Indicators of Success (or Failure)**
This activity is also meant to be a participative activity and we would probably want to try and include as many relevant actors as possible when we perform it.

**Objective:** Define Criteria to Analyze

**Procedure:**
The idea here would be to define a series of criteria that would help to analyze what steps were taken that contributed to the success or failure of our experience. The criteria, of course, would have to be related to our focus theme.
Next, we will need to reach a consensus about the following information:

- **What** kind of lessons did we learn from the experience?
  
  We might want to highlight mistakes that we made or choices that negatively influenced our results. We will need to ask ourselves, what went wrong and what wouldn't I do next time. These answers could come from a personal reflection, from an interview with a beneficiary or from the evaluation document in addition to other sources. Below we have given you a short example:

  **Example 1: Field Days Lessons Learned:**
  
  - The choice to have an activities facilitator who could not speak the same language presented some obstacles during implementation of the activities.
  - It was not ensured that the host communities had adequately prepared their presentations and this caused some frustrations amongst the visiting communities.

- **What** are the **best practices** from this experience?
  
  To answer this question, we will need to decide what methods or techniques had a positive influence of the outcome of our experience. Once again, the ideas for best practices could come from any number of sources such as the perceptions of other actors, the capitalization team and the monitoring reports. Please review the text box below for a specific example:
- What kind of recommendations do we have for future interventions?
  Here, we should consider advice that we can offer for other experiences in other contexts. As mentioned earlier, the recommendations will not be as numerous as those used in an evaluation and perhaps it would be useful to select a series of criteria that will help us to limit the recommendations. The criteria could be based on internal human resources, food distribution, beneficiary selection and strategies among other topics that we select.

Field Days Best Practices:

- The decision to implement sessions about household irrigation systems was extremely popular amongst the local farmers.
- The activities designed specifically for women were especially successful because they included community “babysitters” for their children while the session took place.

Field Days Recommendations:

Methodology recommendations:
- These exchanges should be didactic, dynamic and participative.
- These exchanges should be done on a regular basis to maintain the dynamics of the process.
- These exchanges should end in a compromise by the visiting farmers to implement the new techniques.

Beneficiary selection recommendation:
- When choosing the visiting communities, it is best to take into consideration the most economically vulnerable populations.

Human resources recommendation:
- The field days facilitator should be someone who has prior didactic training and experience.

To answer these questions, we will need to read, compare, and combine the information we have gathered in collecting and organizing information phase. Then, we will need to discuss our findings amongst the project team and other actors. We will also have to perform a personal reflection. As we are the ones who have lived the experience, we should be able to propose these questions to ourselves and answer them personally. And finally, we will need to reach a conclusion with our team and other actors.

As mentioned earlier on, you may realize that you have to go back to the information collecting stage to clarify any doubts. Finally, once you feel that you have reached a consensus about the answer to your focus theme, taking into account the aforementioned criteria about the experience, you will be finished the analysing phase.
STEP 4: The Publication and Dissemination Phase

In this final phase, the goal is to make our knowledge available and relevant to other actors. Basically, we will be writing up the conclusions of our critical analysis and we will need to complete the following steps:

- Publish the information
- Implement our Dissemination Strategy

If we remember from the planning stage, our audience and the manner in which we have chosen to present our knowledge will determine the writing style and means of communication. Within the document itself, we should try to include the graphic representations of our experiences that we designed earlier like charts, tables, pictures and other images that we deem relevant.

Apart from including these images, we have to make sure that we write in the clearest and most concise way possible. In order to do this, we will need to ask ourselves if someone outside of the experience would be able to understand what we are trying to communicate.

In terms of the means of publication, we will often choose to write up a brief report that summarizes our findings. If we have selected this option, the following outline, which is based on our ToR, might be useful (please refer to Annex 1 for an electronic sample):

1. Summary of the Document
2. Introduction:
   a. The Main Purpose of the capitalization project
   b. Focus Theme
   c. Brief description of the capitalization method used
3. Body of the Document:
   a. Chapter 1: explanation of the experience we capitalized
      i. What happened
      ii. Where, when and how these events happened
      iii. Why they happened
   b. Chapter 2: Lessons Learned
   c. Chapter 3: Best Practices
4. Recommendations
5. Bibliography
6. Annexes
   a. Useful methods
   b. Pictures

Once we have finally published our results, we then must make sure to follow our dissemination plan so that it reaches the intended actors. And finally, after we have completed all four steps in the Basic Capitalization Method, our job is to transfer our newfound knowledge to our future experiences.

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I. CONCLUSION

In order to continue fighting against hunger and malnutrition, Action contre la Faim is constantly improving the quality of its projects and programs. By providing tools like this manual, we are strengthening our ability to respond to the needs of the beneficiaries. Moreover, we are contributing to an increased positive impact in our actions. Therefore, this manual aims to encourage an overall improvement in our interventions that take place in a variety of different contexts.

More specifically, this document should enable each mission involved in a capitalization project to save time in identifying, formulating and executing a capitalization project. It should also facilitate the drafting of scientific and technical documents. And last but not least, it reminds us of the importance of publishing and disseminating our information so that our valuable experiences and knowledge can be applied to new interventions.
J. BIBLIOGRAPHY


K. ANNEX 1: Example of Format for capitalization documents

See attached document:

N:\Dpto_Tecnicos\Seguridad Alimentaria

Or click at for the PDF document.
L. ANNEX 2

Form for Completing the Basic Capitalization Method

Instructions: This worksheet is not mandatory. However, it can be used during the Preliminary Conditions and the Planning Phase to make sure that all of the steps are completed. Please reference the manual for more detailed information about the Preliminary Conditions and the Planning Phase.

Preliminary Conditions:

1. Name of Coordinator:
2. Names of team members:
3. Title of the Experience:
4. Description of the Experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Description</th>
<th>Key Players</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Planning Phase:

1. What is the purpose of your capitalization project?

2. What is your focus theme?

3. List of other actors that will participate during the execution phase:

4. List of documents that will be organized and analyzed:

5. Description of activities for collecting and organizing information:

6. Description of activities for analyzing the information: