



## School Improvement Plans by CRS/Ecuador







# How-to Guide Series

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## *School Improvement Plans*

*by CRS/Ecuador*

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Written by CRS/Ecuador Education Team

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## **Letter from CRS Education Technical Advisors**

Dear friends and colleagues,

We are pleased to present this latest edition in the CRS education “How-to” series, on creating School Improvement Plans, from CRS/Ecuador.

The “How-to” guide series was created as an opportunity for CRS country programs and their local implementing partners to highlight and share an aspect of their work that has been particularly successful. Instead of presenting a detailed description of their program history and accomplishments, however, the focus of the guides is on the practical steps that CRS country programs and partner organizations can take to adopt similar activities. The recommendations will need to be interpreted for each particular context, but the topics addressed in each guide are ones that would strengthen and improve any existing program: how to reduce the number of school drop outs; how to increase child participation in programming; how to use adult literacy to improve rural development.

This guide from CRS/Ecuador addresses school improvement plans and presents a methodology for creating one through the participation of the whole school community. For CRS/Ecuador, the concept of inclusion is an overarching goal. Inclusion is a guiding principle for the process of creating the plan, and achieving a more inclusive school environment through the implementation of the plan is a key objective as well. For CRS as an agency, school improvement plans are a useful tool in achieving our own strategic priority of promoting the transformational engagement of parents and communities in schools.

Best wishes,

Anne Sellers and Eric Eversmann

Education Technical Advisors

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## Letter from CRS/Ecuador Country Representative

Dear friends and colleagues,

Education is pivotal in breaking the cycle of poverty and spreading the benefits of development by multiple pathways: providing a gateway to economic growth for individuals and societies, as it strengthens human capital; improving health and nutrition; enriching lives directly, through the pleasure of knowledge and the sense of empowerment it gives; and furthering social development through strengthening social cohesion, promoting democracy and giving more people better opportunities for realizing their full potential.

We recognize that children from poor households at risk of being forced into the worst forms of child labor will not realize their full potential without effective education programs. CRS/Ecuador together with a consortium of church and NGO partners formed by CARE, Save the Children UK, the Wong Foundation, and the Ecuadorian Bishops Conference, with US Department of Labor funding, strove for several years to ensure that children from poor communities in banana- and flower-growing regions of Ecuador would acquire basic learning and life skills. Achieving the right to education also demands community engagement in gathering, analyzing, and designing action plans for improving school performance; working in partnership with local governments and communities to upgrade the quality of education; promoting a culture of peace and democracy; developing innovative approaches based on local values and culture; and implementing through shared responsibility the school improvement plans, as presented in this guide.

The views and outlines presented here are part of CRS/Ecuador's continuing efforts to ensure a comprehensive approach towards its programs and are in no way final and complete. Thanks in advance for any feedback that would allow us to continue building sustainable program capacity.

Best regards,

Alexandra Moncada

CRS/Ecuador Country Manager

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*“The right to an inclusive and quality education facilitates the realization of other rights.”*

## Introduction

At present in Ecuador and around the world, many people live in situations where they are socially excluded and denied the right to fully participate as citizens. This exclusion is a barrier to a life of dignity.

Children and adolescents in particular face numerous obstacles. Many are unable to access their right to an education because of any of the following reasons: work, gender, age, or their financial, cultural, or ethnic situation.

Children and adolescents who work have to balance their schooling with job obligations, and the result is more demands on their time than for others who do not work. These children are often forced to leave school or, in the best case scenario, forced to lower the quality of their learning. It is not the children and adolescents who decide to drop out of schools; it is the system itself that expels them.

The right to an inclusive and quality education facilitates other rights. Education can be a way to reduce poverty and social exclusion and to strengthen citizenship. An inclusive education is one that guarantees that all children will learn and will become equal participants in their education, so that they can build for themselves a future with dignity. Inclusive education, therefore, implies some changes both in local policies and in schools.

For three years, CRS/Ecuador has implemented a series of strategies to support schools and communities in creating more inclusive schools through Project SOY (Support Our Youth). Central among these strategies has been the creation and implementation of school improvement plans that involve teachers, parents, families, children, adolescents, and Ministry of Education officials. It is Project SOY's experience with school improvement plans that is recorded and shared in this How-to Guide. CRS hopes that this guide will motivate schools and other learning centers to create school improvement plans based on a philosophy of inclusive education that reflects, above all, the principle of a quality education for all.

## About This Guide

This guide was created to support schools and other education centers in their daily work. It presents a step-by-step, participatory methodology for developing a school improvement plan that involves multiple stakeholders. Concrete tools and activities for building awareness of the school improvement plan, conducting a quality

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assessment of the school, identifying the changes to be made, creating the actual plan, and monitoring and evaluating its implementation are all provided. At every step, it is the right of all children and adolescents to a quality, inclusive education that guides our work. In our own context, we are convinced that this work has strengthened our country's own education system.

## **Who Is It For?**

Teachers, school administrators, community activists, education specialists, and all people interested in education can use this guide. It has been designed for generalists and specialists alike, to help them uphold the rights of children and adolescents. It is also meant to be enriched, extended, and adapted according to the needs of each school and community.

## **Beginning Thoughts**

Everyone involved in education is familiar with the term “planning.” Teachers plan activities for their students, the annual program, work units, class times, etc. Schools and other learning centers also plan their annual or trimester or even monthly schedules.

It is important, however, to think critically and creatively about what is being planned, as opposed to simply doing it as part of a mandatory yearly routine that eventually becomes meaningless paperwork. So, what is the purpose of planning? What is the use of a plan? The fact is that all people involved in education are familiar with planning activities but often plan mechanically without taking advantage of the opportunities that it presents.

## **The following are principles of successful planning that should be kept in mind:**

- School planning from the point of view of citizens' rights involves considering children and adolescents. It means considering what they need to be happy at school. When planning, school activities should guarantee students' well-being, development, and protection.
  - To create a school plan it is crucial to have everyone's participation: teachers, administrators, parents, children, adolescents, and community leaders. When we plan we must ask ourselves what we should do to value and consider others' opinions. This will guarantee genuine participation.
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- Planning demands readiness to change. When planning we need to be honest about our strengths and limitations, and decisive enough to change what we know is not working. If we commit ourselves to improving our schools, we will offer better environments, where everyone will feel comfortable and where students will learn, relate, and grow.
- Planning is above all a cooperative activity. Therefore, when planning, we mainly need to communicate, respect, debate, and reach agreements.

On the next page we present a sequence of planning steps aimed at promoting school change. This change should encourage values such as citizenship and self-esteem, and a learning community in which skills are constantly developed and families and the community participate actively. Ultimately, the goal of the school improvement plan is to create an inclusive school that fosters learning and nurtures participative, responsible children and citizens.



*Students, parents and community members march in support of eradicating child labor in Ecuador*

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## The Planning Process

When creating a school improvement plan, five sequential steps should be followed. Each step is accompanied by a central question that helps to focus the work to be done.

### Steps for Developing a School Improvement Plan

Step	Central Question
1. Building awareness of the importance of a school improvement plan	Why is a school improvement plan important?
2. Conducting a quality assessment of the school	How is our school doing?
3. Identifying the changes to be made	What do we intend to change?
4. Creating the school improvement plan	How do we plan for change?
5. Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan	How well are we implementing the plan?

## 1. Why Is a School Improvement Plan Important?

### *Building Awareness*

Before beginning the school improvement plan, it is essential to build awareness of its importance among the various stakeholders. It is the process of creating the plan that will ultimately motivate most people, but it is also important to prepare one or two activities in advance that encourage a positive environment among all stakeholders. Central to this task is establishing an atmosphere of trust, which means that every opinion is important and deserves respect. A good plan cannot be built by one or two individuals; it must consider and value the perspectives of all.

### How to Proceed

Teachers, parents, and children/adolescents should participate in this process. It is recommended, though, that each group initially works separately, given the pre-existing relationships among them (such as teachers and students, where one group tends to hold a hierarchical advantage and thus does most of the talking). Each group has its own viewpoints and dynamics, and it is important to understand them separately at first.

An initial meeting with teachers is recommended to present the purpose of the plan and to generate excitement around its creation. Because teachers and administrators may see the creation of such a plan as threatening to them, this meeting can help to dispel fears and encourage their participation. Parents also need to be informed about the process that will take place in the school and to be mobilized to participate. Finally, in order to motivate and solicit suggestions about possible changes in the school, children and adolescents should be invited to a meeting.

## Mobilizing Participants

- **Teachers/Administrators:** Depending on the size of the school, the planning process may include all teachers and administrators in the school or just selected representatives. (Schools are organized differently across countries and the titles of teachers and administrators also differ. Throughout this guide the term “teachers” is used to refer to both teachers and administrators. Where specific reference to the school director is intended, the term “principal” is used.)
- **Parents:** In CRS/Ecuador the planning process at each school includes 20 to 25 parents and other community members. If there are multiple parent committees at the school, an effort is made to include at least one member of each committee.
- **Children/Adolescents:** Ideally, the planning process will include up to 20 children representing all grades at the school, with equivalent numbers of girls and boys. It is better for children to volunteer than to be selected by adults. If the school includes upper primary and/or lower secondary grades, it may be good to have two groups: one for younger children (the lower grades) and one for older students. Special care should be taken to identify and invite any school-aged children and adolescents who are not currently attending school.

### Good Practice: Spokesperson for Children and Adolescents

Children and adolescents should participate in most events and meetings and their opinions should be heard. If, for whatever reason, it is not possible or appropriate for them to be present at a meeting, select an adult to act as a spokesperson for the children and adolescents. The spokesperson should be responsible for representing the opinions of children and adolescents when required. This can help to guarantee that their voices and ideas are included in the school improvement plan and that their rights are observed at all times.

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■ **Education Authorities:** While this guide provides practical advice on how to develop a school improvement plan by working with those closest to the school, it is important to remember the critical role of local education authorities. These officials should be involved throughout the process. This can be done by inviting authorities to kick-off events and general meetings, as well as by holding special sessions for the community to update officials on the status of the plan. At each step, think strategically about the value of involving the appropriate education authorities. Viewing these authorities as partners in the process can be a key strategy for building support for the school improvement plan.

## 2. How Is Our School Doing?

### *Conducting a Quality Assessment*

Once sufficient awareness has been generated within the community, it is time to conduct a quality assessment. The quality assessment is an analysis of the school's current situation, based on locally developed standards for a quality, inclusive education. It is an opportunity for all stakeholders to think and reflect collectively, and ultimately to reach consensus on the ways the school is perceived.

Teachers, parents, and children/adolescents should all participate in the quality assessment. It is important to consider times and schedules so that families (including women) can also take part. The quality assessment can be done in a single workshop, which is organized based on the particular characteristics of the school.

The process of conducting a quality assessment starts by organizing three groups: teachers, parents, and children/adolescents. It may be helpful to appoint an adult facilitator to each group who is responsible for moving the process forward.

#### **The three steps to conducting a quality assessment include:**

- A. Identifying the standards of a quality, inclusive school
- B. Assessing the current situation of the school
- C. Synthesizing responses from the different groups

#### **A. Identifying the Standards of a Quality, Inclusive School**

At the initial workshop, each group (teachers, parents, children/adolescents) should brainstorm for itself what it believes to be the standards of a quality and

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## Setting the Appropriate Standards

What is an appropriate standard for one school may be inappropriate for another. Stakeholders should be encouraged to create their own standards for their school. In many cases, participants will discover they need additional information, such as how their school compares to the national or provincial average in terms of student/teacher ratio or test scores. When this occurs, encourage stakeholders to gather any additional data that may be useful.

inclusive school. It is often useful to present an example of existing quality standards, such as those developed by UNICEF or the national Ministry of Education, to stimulate the thinking of the participants. It will probably be easier for them to edit an existing list of standards than to develop one from scratch. When each group has finished this exercise, all the groups should reunite and create a common set of standards for the school.



*Children at a school participating in Project SOY*

The following chart from a school in Ecuador presents a sample set of 20 standards organized into 6 categories. The first column shows how categories are grouped for the creation of school projects.

## STANDARDS FOR A QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL IN ECUADOR

THEMES	CATEGORIES	STANDARDS	
<b>1. REQUIREMENTS FOR LEARNING</b>	Basic educational building	1	Classrooms are comfortable and well-ventilated, have adequate lighting, and remain clean during school activities.
		2	The building has safe drinking water and decent, functioning restrooms.
	Health and recreation	3	Playgrounds are safe and offer recreation space for games for boys and girls.
		4	Children and adolescents receive medical, nutritional, and dental attention at least once a year.
		5	Health education and prevention activities are regularly offered.
<b>2. ENVIRONMENT OF RESPECT AND PARTICIPATION</b>	Atmosphere	6	Students, teachers, and parents are familiar with the school's educational and disciplinary rules.
		7	Boys and girls participate and organize themselves into clubs, government committees or student council.
		8	There is trust, communication and respect between teachers and children. All children's opinions are valued.
		9	Classroom discipline is based on treating children with respect.
		10	Parents and community participate in learning activities both for school support and for children's protection.
	Parent and community participation	11	School and community work to promote schooling, especially among those children who work and do not study.
		12	Teachers attend the school regularly.
<b>3. QUALITY TEACHING</b>	Teachers	13	Teachers receive training and constant teaching support.
		14	Teachers understand the family and cultural situation of children and adolescents, and take it into account.
		15	Teachers communicate children's successes and concerns to their parents.
		16	Teachers plan classroom activities.
	Classroom Teaching	17	Children and adolescents tests are reviewed to make decisions to improve teaching and assess teachers' work.
		18	To facilitate learning and student motivation, children and adolescents work in groups.
		19	When students have missed school for any reason, teachers give them make-up work.
		20	The school has enough and adequate educational materials for classroom work.

## Tips for organizing the workshop

- **Workshop space.** Try to adjust each of the work spaces to suit the participants' needs. Make participants comfortable. Placing chairs ready for group work is a good way to ensure closeness and communication. This creates a more relaxed and collaborative atmosphere.
- **Materials.** Provide a variety of materials: markers, chart paper, games, signs, etc. The workshops should be dynamic, where “doing” connects the participants to thinking. It can be helpful to have board games, stories, puppets, construction paper, paint, paint brushes, glue, scissors, recycled material, etc. Be creative.

## Tips for conducting the workshop with adults

- **Create separate groups according to stakeholder.** One group should be for teachers and one for parents, so that the views of each stakeholder group are voiced and recorded.
- **Stimulate discussion by using a question guide.**

**Start by discussing general feelings:** How do participants feel about each of the quality standards? Discuss each of the categories and standards.

**Continue by discussing how these standards relate to daily life:** What is the daily life of the participants like? How does this relate to the standards?

**Conclude by discussing the implications of their thoughts:** What do they mean for the participants, their school, and their community?

**In order to obtain as much information as possible, use these questions for each standard:** What? Why? What for? How? When? Where? With whom?

- **Use a “talking map”.** This is a map that can be made by drawing or placing objects on a surface to represent the school and its surroundings. If materials are scarce, this can even be drawn in the dirt. Discussion occurs as the group is building the map and by asking about how the school is doing with regard to each of the map's components.

Use these questions as needed:



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## Tips for conducting the workshop with children and adolescents

- **Get comfortable.** Outdoor games, storytelling, or observation walks may help adjust children to the activities.
  - **Use artistic expression.** Artistic activities encourage discussion. Some ideas:
    - A collage map or talking map.** This is made on a big piece of construction paper, on which participants are asked to draw a picture or a representation of the school. They are also asked to identify actors, spaces, relationships, etc. They can use sad or happy faces to express how they feel. The sad faces would indicate areas to improve, whereas the happy faces would show areas of strength.
    - Dramatization or role-playing.** This can be used to represent daily scenes in the school. This would give an idea of how the school is viewed by children and adolescents.
  - **Try conversation.** While one of the artistic expression techniques is taking place, encourage discussion through the following: questions circle, cards, drawings, or key words.
    - Questions circle.** The facilitator uses a questionnaire to ask children and adolescents for their feedback. A ball or yarn can be tossed to decide who goes next. Questions can include: “What do we like?” “What don’t we like?” “How do we feel?”
    - Cards.** The facilitator uses cards prepared in advance to catch students’ attention. The generating questions can be the same as above: “What do we like?” “What don’t we like?” “How do we feel?”
    - Drawings.** Using drawings, the facilitator brings up topics or questions that are closely linked to the relationships and feelings between parents and children, or between teachers and students. Questions here can be related to feelings in specific situations, places, or relationships.
    - Key words.** The facilitator writes a list of important words such as love, trust, rights, good manners, etc, and posts them in visible places around the room so that they can be used for discussion with children and adolescents.
  - **Remember the product.** The product of this effort is a description of the school, according to the quality standards, by the children and adolescents. Through this process a more rich and complete picture of how the students see the school can be understood and shared with the adult groups. This will lead to objectives and projects in the school improvement plan that better reflect the needs and visions of the children and adolescents in the community.
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*Children pose for a picture following a Project SOY event*



*Goodie bags for the whole class*

## **B. Assessing the Current Situation of the School**

After establishing the standards for a quality, inclusive school, the groups assess their school's situation. This is done by filling out the school assessment form (template 1). Here, they should identify the positives (strengths) as well as problems (weaknesses). It is important to remember that each category has strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths refer to those school activities, procedures, or successes that directly or indirectly have a positive impact on the learning of children and adolescents. For example, ongoing teacher training, the appropriate use of teaching materials, consistent family participation in educational activities, as well as any activities the school organizes to include students who were out of school due to work situations, disability, or any other condition.

Weaknesses refer to anything that may affect children's and adolescents' learning or well-being in a negative way. For example, lack of educational materials, child abuse, teacher absences, unsafe facilities, etc.

The purpose here is to describe the school's current situation by analyzing each category with reference to the particular standards identified for each category. Each category should be assessed and given a rating. Ratings can be qualitative, quantitative, or both, and they should be agreed upon by all members by answering the question: How are we doing? Participants should be encouraged to be specific in describing both strengths and weaknesses; it will be difficult later to address weaknesses that are only vaguely

defined. Each group—teachers, parents, and children/adolescents—should fill out its own school assessment form using the template below. Note that the column for categories should correspond to the categories in the standards chart.






## Template 1: School Assessment Form

Theme	Categories	Description of the School's Situation		Assessment  How are we doing?
		Strengths	Weaknesses and problems	
Requirements for Learning	Basic Educational Building			
	Health and Recreation			
Environment of Respect and Participation	Atmosphere			
	Parent and Community Participation			
Quality Teaching	Teachers			
	Classroom teaching			

## Tips for using the assessment form with children and adolescents

When assessing the school's situation, it may be easier for children and adolescents to provide a qualitative value using symbols such as faces.

See the chart below for examples:

Quite Satisfactory / Absolutely Agrees / Very Happy	
Satisfactory / Agrees / Happy	
Neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory / Somewhat Happy	
Unsatisfactory / Disagrees / Unhappy	
Very Unsatisfactory / Absolutely Disagrees / Very Unhappy	

## **What are the Barriers to a Quality Education?**

Getting out-of-school children into school is one of the primary goals of the school improvement plans in CRS/Ecuador's Project SOY. In order to do this, it is important to identify the barriers that children face in accessing a quality education. These barriers are generally found in the cultural, political, or learning environments.

The cultural context has to do with the vision the local population has regarding education, children's skills and interests, and their learning needs. Cultural attitudes may discourage education for certain groups of children, such as girls or children with disabilities. These attitudes may exist generally in the community or be particular to certain parents or to the school itself.

The political context is related to institutional guidelines, public policies, and other formal norms and regulations, which become obstacles to school access for children. The school itself can encourage and promote schooling for all children, but it can also exclude many of them—by, for instance, requiring them to provide school supplies or uniforms, or charging registration and other fees.

The third context is the learning environment. Once they are in school, children's ability to learn and to achieve their potential for growth will depend on the teaching methods in the classroom, on their relationships with their teachers, on the content and quality of learning materials, and on the quality of the educational setting.

When assessing the current situation of the school, it is worth asking: to what extent do the current cultural context, political context and learning environment affect children's access to a quality education?



### C. Synthesizing Responses from the Different Groups

The final and critical step in conducting a quality assessment is synthesizing the responses from all three groups. It is essential that all groups discuss the strengths and weaknesses identified in the previous step and reach agreement together, since the final assessment becomes a link to the next step of the process. Depending on time available, this step can be done at the end of the workshop or during a separate, wrap-up meeting. In either case, it is important that all groups, or at least their representatives, be present.

In the event that there are significant differences of opinion between groups, the facilitators should use this as an opportunity to have an honest and open discussion about differing expectations and perceptions of the school, with the goal of building understanding among groups and respect for each other's opinions. To help resolve differences of opinion, it may be helpful to present relevant data that has been collected about the school. Above all, though, it is imperative that all opinions be respected.

A final, consolidated assessment form should be created from the work of all the groups by synthesizing attitudes and feelings of teachers, parents, and children/adolescents regarding the school's strengths and weaknesses. On page 20 is a sample template which can be enlarged on poster board and used to record each group's assessment.

#### Tips for conducting the group meeting

- The work previously done (posters, collages, maps, words, etc.) by each group (teachers, parents, children/adolescents) should be posted on the walls.



*A troupe of clowns performs for children at an after-school event, organized as part of the School Improvement Plan*

- Each group should present its work and its vision. Children and adolescents should be the first ones to present. Once all groups have presented, review the three assessments and try to find areas in common. Are there any areas that have common comments? Which area has the most weaknesses? Use these two questions to start counting the number of assessments and begin to prioritize with all participants, until consensus is reached.
- Don't forget that even if children used happy faces for their assessment, their responses should carry a value equivalent to the adult assessment.
- The facilitator should use the seven "w" questions to encourage a more in depth discussion. With each topic, he/she should also refer back to the posters or talking maps that were designed in each group.

### **3. What Do We Intend to Change?** *Identifying the Changes to be Made*

Once the quality assessment is complete, it is time to plan which changes will take place. The purpose is to identify those changes that the stakeholders want to stimulate in the school, and that they deem necessary for a quality, inclusive education. It is very important that the proposed changes be concrete and do-able as well as challenging for participants. These changes will, in turn, help to define the objectives that will lead the work during the school year.

#### **Developing Objectives**

The objectives should be developed during a brief work session. This process starts, again, by organizing three different groups: teachers, parents, and children/adolescents. Or, if the school agrees, there can be one comprehensive group.

Once the group or groups are organized, each one must answer the question: What do we want to change in our school during the school year? The proposed changes should be based on the final quality assessment agreed by all participants at the end of the previous step. Using template 3 below, the same question is asked for each category.

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## Template 3

### Objectives Chart

Workgroup \_\_\_\_\_

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>OBJECTIVES</b> School year _____
Requirements for Learning	Basic Educational Building	“At the end of the school year...”
	Health and Recreation	
Environment of Respect and Participation	Atmosphere	
	Parent and Community Participation	
Quality Teaching	Teachers	
	Classroom teaching	

It is important to remember that an objective may relate to one or more categories of a quality education. Each objective should be a concrete result of what is expected in the school year (or longer if the proposed changes demand more effort, time, resources, etc.). Again, try to develop objectives that are both achievable and challenging at the same time. In defining the objectives, participants should base their ideas on the standards of a quality, inclusive education.

It is also very important to consider objectives that focus on the process of improving the school, as well as those that focus on the desired impact of these processes. Below are examples of both types of objectives.

**Objectives created by schools in Project SOY that focus on the *process*:**

At the end of the school year...

- "...The educational center has safe drinking water for children and adults."
- "...Children and teachers complete cultural and recreational activities that promote involvement, respect, participation, communication, and total growth."
- "...The school has offered tutoring and make-up work at least once a month."
- "...The educational center and the community organize themselves to identify those children who are not attending school, and promote actions that stimulate their registration and regular attendance."
- "...Teachers administer a reading comprehension and basic math test once a year, so that they can make decisions to improve class work."
- "...The school has adequate teaching material to facilitate children's learning."

**Objectives that focus on the desired *impact*:**

At the end of the school year...

- "...The number of student absences has decreased."
  - "...The percentage of children passing the leaving exam for primary school has increased."
  - "...The number of out-of-school children enrolled in school has increased."
  - "...The number of teachers and students reporting a positive school environment that fosters respect has increased."
-

## Timing Your Objectives

Communities that are new to this type of planning should aim for objectives with a shorter timeframe. In this way, they will attempt easier projects and see the benefits of their efforts sooner. This will build their confidence and their momentum for taking on more challenging projects in the future. It may also have the benefit of attracting the attention of local authorities or other members of civil society, who may be more inclined to contribute resources or support their work in the future.

## Reaching Consensus

In the plenary with representatives from all the groups, display a list of all the objectives identified by the various groups. For this activity, it may be useful to place the objectives chart (template 3) on large poster board covering a wall so that all can see. Discuss what the groups of adults and children expressed. The goal is to reach a consensus on the priorities and objectives of the whole group.

During this process it is important to guarantee an environment of trust, transparency, and tolerance so that all groups can listen to each other and propose the expected changes for the school. There might be some aspects that make adults uneasy, for example, if children identify any type of child abuse at home or school. In such instances, it is important to listen and to respect everyone's opinion so that an appropriate plan, based on educational standards, can be determined. The role of the previously identified spokesperson will be important here to make sure the opinions of children and adolescents are respected.

## Tips for developing objectives with adults

- Keep the question “What do we intend to change?” on a large and visible poster board to keep participants focused on the task at hand.
- Use the work made during the quality assessment, such as maps or drawings, and have them available to discuss the possible changes participants will propose.
- Distribute blank cards so that participants can write their proposed changes (one per card) and post on the wall.

Guide participants' thinking about possible changes by using a brief questionnaire like the one below:

How can we solve or strengthen...?

Which situations or actions should we change to improve...?

What are our expectations during the first year...?

Where do we expect to be when this first year is over?

How do we want to see ourselves in the school?

How do we want to feel in the school?

### **Tips for developing objectives with children and adolescents**

- Keep the question “What do we intend to change?” on a large and visible poster board, just as suggested with the adult group.
- Use the map created during the quality assessment, inviting children to an open dialogue that will include their feelings, opinions, and suggestions of possible changes. For this activity use small pieces of construction paper with drawings or words that inspire thinking about the future.

Guide participants' thinking about possible changes by using a brief questionnaire like the one below:

How would you like your school to be?

What changes would you make and where?

What else do you need to feel happier?

What would you do to make the school nicer?

Who would you like the support from?

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## 4. How Do We Plan for the Change? *Creating the School Improvement Plan*

Using the work done in the previous three steps, it is now time to create the school improvement plan. Some thoughts and ideas to guide this part of the process are presented as follows:

1. The school improvement plan should consist of three concrete projects, corresponding to the three themes in the templates above. Choose one project per theme. This will help to ensure a more holistic approach to school improvement. Thus, projects should be organized as follows:
  - Project 1 should address the **Requirements for Learning**
  - Project 2 should address an **Environment of Respect and Participation**
  - Project 3 should address **Quality Teaching**
2. A project is a group of interrelated activities put together to achieve an objective (see template 3). A project must be concrete and have influence as many of the standards within a particular category as possible (see standards chart, section 1).



Children after a Project SOY event

“The results of the school improvement plan should be evident by the end of the school year.”

**3.** When planning activities, it is important to consider their purpose. Experience shows that some activities, such as those that have an immediate end, are not appropriate. Examples of this are handing out an application or forming groups.

**4.** The results of the school improvement plan should be evident by the end of the school year. Therefore, the plan’s duration should be one year. If it is convenient for the school, the plan may span several years, but the first year should be more concretely defined than subsequent years.

### **Creating the school improvement plan can be thought of as a two-step process.**

**Step 1: Prioritize one objective within each theme.** Review all the objectives developed by the groups in template 3 and prioritize only one from each theme. Once one objective has been chosen for each theme, it should be recorded in template 4 (see below).

**Step 2: Design a project for each objective.** When designing the projects, it is important to follow the next sequence of steps:

- a. Define the project to be designed.
- b. Review the existing situation, as described during the quality assessment and recorded on template 1.
- c. Decide which activities will be necessary to achieve the objective of the project. These activities should be concrete, achievable, and meaningful (i.e., they will positively impact children’s and adolescents’ lives).
- d. Establish the person(s) responsible for carrying out each activity, and a timeline for completing each activity.
- e. Determine how the activities will be monitored (more guidance on monitoring is presented in section 5: How well are we implementing the plan?).
- f. Finally, be sure to record all of this information on template 4 (see page 30) so that it can be referred to throughout the process.

### **Tips for creating the school improvement plan with adults**

- It is often easy to do assessments with communities as most individuals usually have an opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions within their community. It can, however, be a bit more difficult to engage people in the actual planning of how to address the concerns that come out of an assessment. In such instances, it is helpful to model the process of prioritizing objectives, designing projects and identifying activities. Before doing this with the group, model the process with a sample objective, project and set of activities.
- The methodology recommended for this step is small group work. Divide participants into three groups, one per project, and have them identify a list of activities for their project. Then, each group presents its project and corresponding activities to the plenary and invites feedback and comments.
- Adults should again be reminded of the work done by the children and adolescents (see below) and look for ways to incorporate this work into the overall plan.

### **Tips for creating the school improvement plan with children and adolescents**

- Before developing the plan with all stakeholders in a single meeting, it may be worthwhile to first hold a separate session with children and adolescents where they can feel free to raise their own ideas in a safe environment.
  - Use the “talking map” (from Section 2: Conducting a Quality Assessment, where children recorded their assessments with happy or sad faces) as a starting point.
  - Invite participants to close their eyes and imagine their school with the proposed changes.
  - Present the work done by children and adolescents during the adult workshop to develop the plan, objectives and activities.
-

## Template 4: School Improvement Plan

NAME OF SCHOOL:	
SCHOOL YEAR	
PROJECT 1	
THEME	Choose the appropriate theme.
CATEGORY	Choose the appropriate category.
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	Record the relevant conclusions from the quality assessment (from template 1)
OBJECTIVE	Record the corresponding objective that has been prioritized for this theme.

ACTIVITIES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		

ACTIVITIES FOR  
MONITORING  
THE PLAN  
NOTE: more guidance  
on monitoring is  
presented in section 5:  
How well are we implementing  
the plan?

## Sample Projects

Below and on the following pages are three sample projects, one for each theme.

### Sample Project 1: Recreational Environment

THEME	Requirements for Learning
CATEGORY	Health and Recreation
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The area where children play at school is not safe.</li> <li>■ There is no border around the school to protect them from passing cars in the street.</li> <li>■ There are no games for children and no green spaces to brighten the area.</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVE	The school has a recreational environment that for this theme includes a safe playground, outdoor games and green areas for both boys and girls.

ACTIVITIES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
1. Hold meetings to define recreational space and design with teacher, parent, children and adolescent participation.		
2. Build fence around school grounds for safe protection of children during recreational activities.		
3. Plant trees and garden to make space appealing.		
4. Meet with community members to request donations of games and recreational equipment.		
5. Establish rules for the use and care of the space by adults, children, and adolescents.		
6. Train adults in appropriate supervision of recreational space.		
<b>ACTIVITIES FOR MONITORING THE PLAN</b> NOTE: more guidance on monitoring is presented in section 5: How well are we implementing the plan?		

## Sample Project 2: School Government

THEME	Environment of Respect and Participation
CATEGORY	Atmosphere
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Children and adolescents currently are not given the opportunity to take on leadership roles within their school and community.</li> <li>■ Within the community and school, there is not enough understanding of and experience with democratic processes.</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVE	Children and adolescents in the school have organized themselves into a student government and participate in the institutional life of the school through democratic decision-making.

ACTIVITIES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
1. Train teachers in how to form a student government from a child's rights perspective.		
2. Hold awareness meetings with students by class to sensitize them to the roles and responsibilities of a student government.		
3. Work with student volunteers to organize elections for student government.		
4. Facilitate the election process with student involvement.		
5. Identify adults (teachers and/or parents) to mentor students elected to student government.		
6. Explore opportunities for children to participate in field trips, community events, fairs that develop their skills as student government leaders.		

ACTIVITIES FOR MONITORING THE PLAN  
NOTE: more guidance on monitoring is presented in section 5:  
How well are we implementing the plan?

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## Sample Project 3: Quality Teaching

THEME	Quality Teaching
CATEGORY	Teachers
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Teachers are often not as well-connected to the community as they could be.</li> <li>■ Teachers often do not understand the challenges faced by their students at home (economic conditions, family illness, household responsibilities) which may inhibit children's learning in the classroom:</li> </ul>
OBJECTIVE	The school has confidential files with family information and general information for every student.

ACTIVITIES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
1. Hold an awareness/training session with all teachers on the importance of understanding children's family and cultural backgrounds/ situations in order to tailor their teaching to individual students' needs.		
2. Train community members in how to conduct a census to gather important information on children's households (and on the importance of confidentiality).		
3. Conduct a community census.		
4. Create a simple database for storing the information gathered during the community census.		
5. Create a system for sharing relevant information with teachers on students who may have special needs that are related to their readiness to learn in the classroom.		
6. Sensitize teachers to the need for confidentiality when accessing student files. Have teachers sign confidentiality forms.		
<b>ACTIVITIES FOR MONITORING THE PLAN</b> NOTE: more guidance on monitoring is presented in section 5: How well are we implementing the plan?		

## Guiding Principles

The projects undertaken as part of the school improvement plan are intended to benefit the school, but they also have another important benefit: they promote collaboration and strengthen community. As multiple stakeholders work together to achieve the desired objectives, they are also building and strengthening community bonds. This, too, is a valuable outcome of the school improvement plan.

Keeping this in mind, it may be worthwhile to reflect on the following three principles. Community members can be reminded of these principles by having them displayed on posters created by children and placed prominently for all to see.

**Sharing and Participation:** Projects should promote positive values and encourage participation among teachers, parents, and children. Projects that do so will ensure that children are raised in an environment of learning, respect, communication, and tolerance—and an environment where children’s rights are observed.

**Skills-Building:** Projects should build skills that help the school and the community to function more independently, using their own strengths and resources to solve problems. Useful skills include practicing teamwork, making transparent decisions, taking responsibility, and participating in local networks, among others.

**Promotion of Children’s Expression:** Projects should encourage the participation of children and ensure that they are given a central role. The interests, ideas and perspectives of children should be considered when creating projects.

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## 5. How Well Are We Implementing the Plan?

### *Monitoring and Evaluating*

Once the school improvement plan has been developed, it is the responsibility of all stakeholders—teachers, parents, children and adolescents—to ensure that it is properly implemented. Executing a fully developed plan takes place by identifying actions families can be responsible for, activities children have to develop, and events teachers, administrators and community leaders will carry out.

Everyone should be reminded that the execution of the school improvement plan must be monitored and evaluated, not only to verify that activities have been accomplished but also to identify successes, difficulties, and necessary adjustments. Most important, regular monitoring and evaluation can help to identify whether the plan is moving the school to where all children and adolescents have quality educational opportunities that will improve their lives.

### **The Follow-Up Notebook**

To monitor the school improvement plan, a follow-up notebook to record pertinent information every two or three months is recommended. This will allow stakeholders to see progress and make decisions in case changes or adjustments are necessary.

### **The Follow-Up Team**

Depending on the school's size, a follow-up team can be created. Representatives of teachers, parents, and children/adolescents should form the team. In addition, it may be worthwhile to include in this team some external members of the school, such as local education or municipal authorities.

### **The most important responsibilities of the team are the following:**

- Identifying which segments of the school improvement plan have been achieved.
  - Creating monthly or quarterly follow-up cards.
  - Supporting the completion of activities.
  - Proposing changes and recommendations for those activities which were not developed or which are past their due date.
  - Informing the entire learning community about the progress of the school plan.
  - Celebrating successes along the way.
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Children and adolescents can also be encouraged to actively participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the plan. One way this can be done is by using a journal where they can record activities, changes, successes and problems that they themselves see. This journal can also be integrated into the follow-up notebook of the school. In this way, children and adolescents participate meaningfully in monitoring and evaluating the school improvement plan.

Template 5 provides a monthly monitoring chart that can be used by the follow-up team.

## Template 5: Monthly Monitoring Chart for School Improvement Plan

Period (Months)	
Members of the follow-up team	
Meeting Date	

### **Project 1: Requirements for Living**

Objective:

GAINS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS (regarding planned activities)	PROBLEMS (regarding planned activities)

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**Project 2: Environment of Respect and Participation**

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Objective:

GAINS AND ACCCOMPLISHMENTS (regarding planned activities)	PROBLEMS (regarding planned activities)

---

**Project 3: Quality Teaching**

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Objective:

GAINS AND ACCCOMPLISHMENTS (regarding planned activities)	PROBLEMS (regarding planned activities)

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## Final Recommendations

- The present guide is just that: a guide for the responsible facilitator to organize and lead the meetings and planned workshops. Therefore, it is critical that all explanations and discussions that arise are fine-tuned to the different groups that take part in the process. If concepts, templates, or activities are not entirely suitable to a particular context, they can and should be adapted.
  - The duration of the meetings or workshops should be adjusted to the parents' time and availability. It is important to try to guarantee their participation in all phases of the school improvement plan.
  - It is recommended that teachers, parents, and children/adolescents become familiar with the guidelines of a quality, inclusive education before the workshops begin. Having brief activities to spread the news about the guidelines will improve the development of workshops.
  - The development of a school improvement plan is neither the beginning nor the end of a process of change in the school. It is just an important step where teachers, parents and children/adolescents agree on objectives and activities to accomplish. The key is the completion of those activities and the follow-up.
  - Many schools already have planning practices and make their own institutional plans to present as official documents to the Ministry of Education. These tools may enrich and expand the processes that are already implemented.
  - The follow-up process includes all that we do to promote and facilitate the completion of specific activities in the plan. It does not mean control. Follow-up means accompanying, observing, and learning.
  - School characteristics need to be considered when forming the follow-up team. For instance, in a school that has only one teacher, that teacher, the parent committee, and children representatives should form the team.
  - The follow-up is, above all, an enduring process of accountability. As long as we inform and communicate about the planned activities and the ones accomplished, we are explaining the results of established agreements among teachers, parents, and children/adolescents.
  - Consider the numerous vehicles and resources that are available to inform stakeholders of progress: bulletin boards, local newspapers, fairs, open houses, forums, photographs, etc.
-

- It is crucial to go beyond simply creating the school improvement plan. Only if we execute and complete the activities to achieve the guidelines for change will we make the plan real; otherwise, it becomes merely a list of intentions.
- When deciding on and carrying out activities in the school improvement plan, it is always important to reflect on the central goal of the entire endeavor: creating an atmosphere that promotes learning and respects children and adolescents. Those activities that do not contribute to this goal have no relevance.

## **Notes**





