

UNIT EIGHT

Developing a school-based care and support plan

Introduction

Throughout this guide we have seen that schools are well placed to play a significant role in the country's efforts to respond to the devastating effects of socio-economic issues such as HIV and AIDS, poverty and violence on children, their families and communities. School leadership can no longer ignore the challenge of responding to the increasing number of vulnerable children who are attending their schools. It is time to take a fresh look at how schools can provide a supportive environment that makes it possible for every learner to participate in learning and teaching.

We started this guide with a reflection on the changing role of schools. We recognise that school leadership can no longer simply focus narrowly on implementing national policies and managing pedagogical processes. They are expected to expand their responsibility and become involved in actions and collaborative initiatives with a range of external partners in an effort to lessen the effects of social issues that prevent learners from participating in learning and teaching. This demands a new vision of how schools can play this role and how they can utilise resources both inside and outside the school in new and optimum ways.

The examples and case studies that we have reflected on in the previous units have shown how principals and their management teams are supporting vulnerable learners and creating beacons of light in otherwise dark and seemingly hopeless situations. By now you will have a good idea of how you might be able to create a supportive school environment in your school that offers vulnerable learners care and support and hope for the present and the future. But being aware of the situation and having an overview of how to respond is not enough. What is needed is a well-conceived strategic plan that is driven by a clear vision of the school as a centre of care and support.

Unit 8 is a planning unit. The insights gained from the previous units and the activities you completed up to now are building blocks that culminate in a well-considered integrated and coherent strategic plan of care and support for your school. Unit 8 is entirely activity driven and each activity is part of the planning process that results in an informed plan to create a supportive environment in your school and start building it as a centre of care and support.

Key questions

This is an opportunity for the principal and management team to get involved in preparing a care and support plan. These are the key questions that guide the compilation of your strategic plan:

1. Where do we want to be? (Vision for your school as a centre of care and support)
2. Where are we now? (Analysis of your present situation)
3. How will we get to where we want to be? (Strategic plan consisting of clear goals)
4. What are our priorities? (Identification of priorities and achievable goals)
5. What is involved in implementing a strategic goal? (Action plan that spells out details of actions to be taken)

Outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Describe the nature and scope of the challenge of dealing with the effects of social issues such as HIV and AIDS, poverty, violence and abuse on your school community.
- Increase your awareness of the purpose of a vision statement.
- Prepare a draft vision statement for your school as a centre of care and support.
- Strengthen your understanding of what a strategic plan is and what it aims to achieve.
- Describe the strategic goals that you have identified in your plan.
- Explain the difference between a strategic plan and an action plan.
- Prepare action plans for realising your strategic goals.

Suggested approach to the planning activity process

This strategic planning activity should be carried out with the entire management team. We recommend that you set aside at least a day for your strategic planning workshop. If you are unable to set aside a whole day, we suggest that you organise 2 – 3 hour sessions on three successive days. This is a large and complex task, but one worth doing and one that is worth doing well!

Overview of the planning process

We are constantly involved in planning for future events in our personal and our professional lives. Some planning activities happen quite informally and require little effort to get results. Take for example travelling from your home to school each day. You don't even think that this is a planning activity but it requires a number of planning steps:

- clear idea of where you are going (location of the school)
- knowing where you are starting from (location of your home)
- understanding how to get from where you are to where you need to be (route between your home and the school)
- choice of a suitable travel strategy (own car, share with others in a pool car arrangement, walk, bicycle, bus, train. The choice depends on the resources you have access to and on the mode of transport that enables you to achieve your goal. For example if your goal is to arrive at school punctually then having access to a reliable car is probably the most effective way of ensuring that you arrive in time.)
- having a good idea of the timeframe (clarity about the time it takes to travel between your home and the school. This determines when you have to leave your house so that you can arrive at school on time.)
- Indicator/s to monitor your strategy (an indicator could be *Arrival at school on time*). By keeping a record of your arrival times at school per week and per month you can determine whether your strategy is working. If you often arrive late, you have to review your strategy and make the necessary adjustments.



How do you plan?

As a principal you are continually involved in informal and formal planning. Stop and reflect for a moment on your planning practice.

1. Think of a planning activity that was particularly successful. Why was it successful? Analyse what made it so successful. Jot down for yourself the elements or factors that made it a success.
2. Think of a planning activity that was unsuccessful. Why was it unsuccessful? Can you identify the elements that caused this activity to fail?
3. How do you go about planning?

Comment

We consider a planning activity successful when the plan we prepare achieves what we set out to achieve. So a plan that has a high likelihood of being successful must have clear and achievable outcomes, suitable methods to realise the outcomes, a clear indication of who is responsible for what, and a way of checking whether the outcomes are being met, so that corrective actions can be taken.

Planning is often messy and may seem confusing. We are usually not aware that we follow a number of steps. Some people like to start with a vision of what they would like to achieve, while others like to start by reflecting on the context to get a better idea of what the reality on the ground is. Whichever approach you prefer to use, it is obvious that planning is a process that is comprised of a number of steps.

But why spend time on planning? The extract that follows reminds us of the benefits of setting aside time to plan now in order to create a caring and supportive school environment and a future of hope for the vulnerable children in our school.



PLANNING OVERVIEW

Planning is thinking about the future so that we can do something about it now.¹

The combination of a good strategic framework (arrived at through strategic planning) and a good operational plan or action plan:

- Provides a clear understanding of what you need to do in order to achieve your development goals;
- Guides you in prioritising and making decisions;
- Allows you to focus possibly limited resources on the actions that will benefit your work the most;
- Keeps you in touch with your context – global, national and local;
- Provides a tool to help you communicate your intentions to others;
- Provides a coherent guide for day-to-day implementation.

It is important to think about the benefits of planning because there will be many excuses for not doing it and for just “getting on with the work”. Sometimes it seems easier **not** to plan, because:

- Good planning takes time and money. But if you do it well, it is worth the investment.
- Sometimes “effective muddling” can see you through. That is true – if you are lucky. But muddling can be costly and confusing, as well as inefficient (poor use of resources) and ineffectual (not achieving desired results).
- You can’t plan in the middle of a crisis. But if you plan well, you will avoid some crises, and while you may have to deal with your crises immediately, irrespective of your plans, once the crisis is over the plan will give you a way to engage with the work again.
- Planning is useful only if people are committed to implementation. True. But, don’t use this as an excuse for not planning, along the lines of: “No-one ever follows the plan, so why bother?” It is the role of the leadership in the organisation to make sure that the planning is useful and that it gets implemented. People buy into a plan they have been part of developing, as long as it makes sense and is possible.

(Civicus World Alliance for Citizen Participation: <http://www.civicus.org/resources>)¹

Preparing a care and support plan for your school is a **strategic planning** activity and it requires a systematic approach.



What is a strategic plan?

1. Do you have a strategic plan for your school?
2. What is its purpose?
3. How often do you review the plan?

Comment

Compare your ideas about strategic planning with the points made in the extract below.

STRATEGIC PLANNING², OR DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, IS ABOUT THE BIGGER PICTURE.

Organisations often get so caught up in everyday problems that they do not think about the big picture. They are too busy planning “to do things”, something that falls under business/action/operational planning.

It is through strategic planning that an organisation develops a strategic framework. This framework helps the organisation determine its priorities and the strategies that are likely to help it achieve its vision of the future.

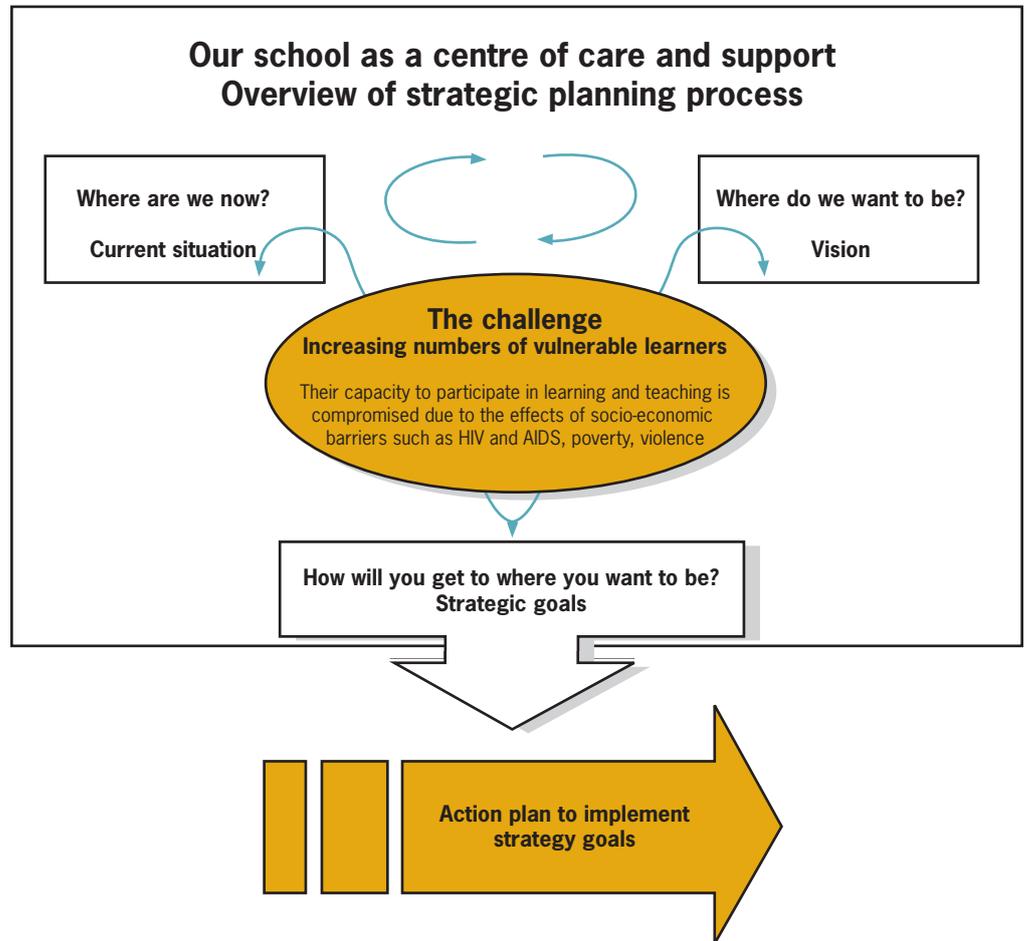
A strategy is an overall approach, based on an understanding of the broader context in which you function, your own strengths and weaknesses, and the problem you are attempting to address. A strategy gives you a framework within which to work, it clarifies what you are trying to achieve and the approach you intend to use. It does not spell out specific activities³

Without the strategic planning phase, it is very likely that you will end up doing a range of activities that may not always add up to a co-ordinated effort. The strategic plan keeps you on track. It provides a touchstone against which to answer questions such as:

- Is this the sort of work we ought to be doing?
- Will this activity contribute to the achievement of our vision and goals?
- Given that we have scarce resources, is this the most strategic action for us to take? Will it have the maximum impact for the investment of resources made?
- Is this the most appropriate way for us to go about achieving our goals?

(Ibid)²

To make it easy for you to follow the strategic planning activities, here is an overview of the main components of the planning process.



The strategic plan is the framework or overall map that is used to guide operational or action plans. Action plans turn the strategy into implementation and give specific answers to questions such as:

- What needs to be done?
- How will it be done?
- Who will do it?
- By when must it be done?
- What resources (human and financial) are needed to do it?

The answer to these questions will also give you a good idea of how much to budget for and how much money to raise or income to generate.

Our focus in this unit is mainly on creating a strategic plan. But you will also get an opportunity to work out action plans for your strategic goals. This will enable you to see the connection between the strategic plan and action plans.

1. What is the challenge?

Before going off to create a vision of the school as a centre of care and support, it is essential to pinpoint accurately what the actual challenge is of responding to the needs of vulnerable children within your school context. Throughout this guide we have encouraged you to get clarity about the nature and scope of the challenge that faces your school, in particular, we asked you to think about nutrition, aftercare and counselling challenges.



Tool 27

The challenge of providing support for vulnerable learners

Use this tool to refine your ideas and to compile a detailed description of the challenge for your school.

2. Where do we want to be? (Our vision)

Now that you have a good idea of the nature and scope of the challenge of responding to vulnerable learners in your school, your next step is to create a picture of what you want to achieve and where you want the school to be in the future.

The word vision comes from the Latin video, 'I see'. This link to seeing is significant: the more detailed and visual the image is, the more powerful it will be. In English we say, *Do you see?* And in IsiZulu, *Uyabona?* when we are asking whether someone has understood something. This illustrates the idea that if we can 'see' or 'visualise' something, we have understood it.

A vision is usually recorded as a vision statement that shows

- where you want to go or be in the future;
- what goals or milestones you expect to reach; and
- what values and ways of working you commit to in order to achieve the vision.

Thus the vision statement is more than just a dream or a set of hopes. It also needs to reflect the actions that are needed to realise the vision. A vision is an image of your desired future. It is not a vague statement. It should reflect choices of what to do and what not to do, and have definite goals.

An example of a vision statement

An example of a vision statement that you are probably most familiar with is your school's vision statement.



What does your school’s vision statement reveal?

- What are your school’s values?
- What are your school’s goals?

When you are thinking about the values or principles that underpin your school’s vision for a caring school, you need to ensure that they are consistent with the values contained in your school’s mission statement.

Now let’s look at an example of a possible vision statement for a school that is committed to creating a caring and supportive environment. As you read it ask:

- What kind of school is envisaged?
- What values does the school promote?
- What are the main goals?
- How does the school intend to achieve its goals?

THE SCHOOL AS A CENTRE OF CARE AND SUPPORT: SAMPLE VISION STATEMENT

Learners, teachers, families, and the community collaborate to make learning accessible for all learners, where the school actively promotes initiatives designed to create a supportive school community free of stigma and discrimination and where the rights and dignity of all are respected.

We are committed to responses to HIV and AIDS, poverty and abuse that result in:

- **A school environment** that is safe, adequately resourced, and is a multi-purpose centre of care, support, hope, learning and service in the community.
- **Learners** who are given equal access to knowledge and skills, health care, and nutrition that sustain them in mind, body, and spirit; and who are aware of and committed to behaviours that protect them from HIV and AIDS infection.
- **Teachers** who are equipped and supported to teach about HIV and AIDS and are role models for responsible behaviour to their learners and communities.
- **Partnerships** with relevant government agencies, non-government and community-based organisations, donors, communities, faith groups, and others that are based on mutual respect and shared commitment to the future of a healthy, caring school where quality education is provided, that is free of discrimination against those living with HIV or AIDS and where the effects of poverty and abuse are diminished.

From the vision statement we can deduce that:

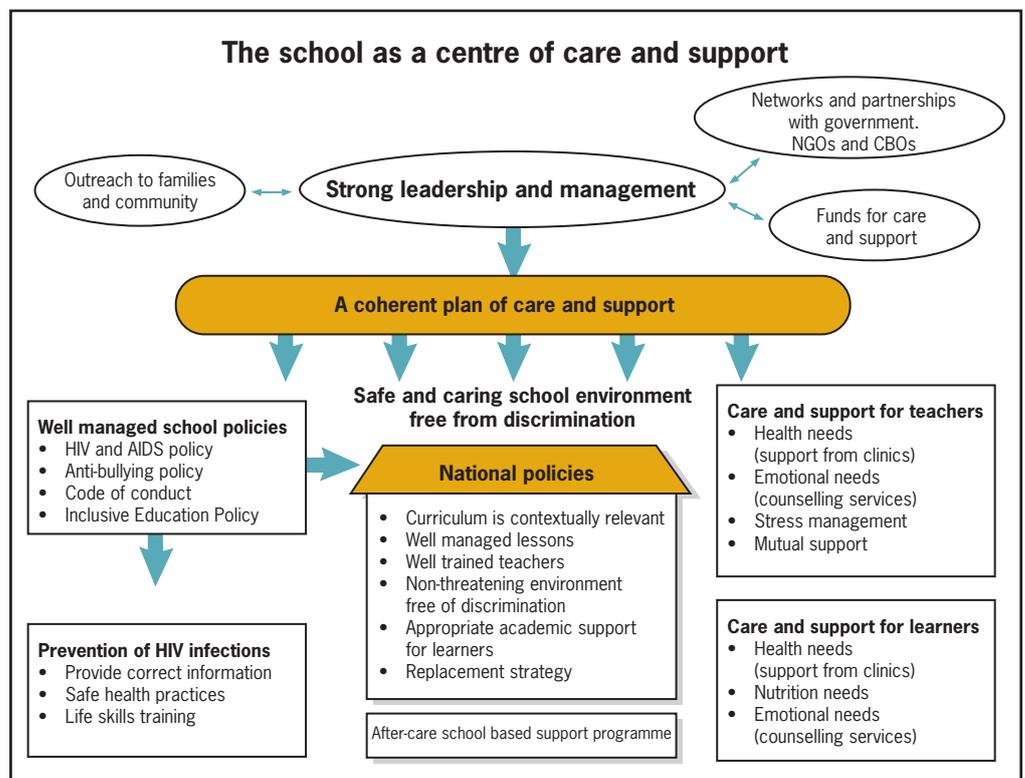
- The overall vision is of the school as a centre for care and support where learners are safe and able to learn.
- Values of respect for the rights of individuals, mutual respect, non-discrimination, and collaboration underpin their way of working.



- A strong commitment to a multi-pronged strategy to combat the effects of HIV and AIDS and poverty that requires the collaboration and the formation of partnerships with key stakeholders is in place.
- A description of the goals for learners, teachers, and the school environment show clearly where the focus must be.

Picture of a school as a centre of care and support

The examples of support offered to vulnerable learners in the schools we visited as part of our research helped us to create a picture of what a caring school might look like. Do you remember the diagram in Unit 2 that showed the essential ingredients of a caring and supportive school?



We recognise that there are different needs in different communities, and different ways in which each school can interpret and respond to these needs. But this picture can help you to visualise the kind of support that could be available to vulnerable learners and teachers affected or infected by HIV and AIDS at your school.



Activity 1

Create a vision statement of your school as a centre of care and support

Creating a vision and recording it in the form of a statement requires that you think big but remain rooted in reality. The statement must be an ideal towards which your school can strive and it must energise people into action. At the same time your school community must perceive the vision to be achievable otherwise it will not inspire them to become involved.



Tool 28

Creating a vision statement: The school as a centre of care and support

Use this tool to compile a draft vision statement.

Comment

The vision, or image of the your school as a centre of care and support in the future, is a statement of intent and commitment to a set of values, purposes and goals that you have agreed are appropriate for your school. However, it is important to keep the vision flexible because visions are always evolving. As you work towards your vision you learn more about yourselves and your context and other possibilities become clearer.

The draft vision statement that you have created is just that – an initial draft. The challenge is to communicate it to the SGB, your teachers, learners and their parents as the primary role players of the school community and to involve them in refining it.

Having a clear vision means understanding what you want to achieve. But in a school environment, unless there is a shared vision or understanding, the chances of success are limited. To the extent that people understand and are committed to that vision, individuals are in a position to take responsibility, contribute their creativity and work together as a team. You can use diverse methods to involve your school community in contributing and making this vision their own. For example in a consultative approach you can elicit feedback on the draft vision statement and use the inputs made to refine the vision statement. A clear vision guides the development of the strategic plan, and a shared vision gives all members of the school a common direction and enables people to work together.

3. Where are we now? (Our current situation)

The vision gives clarity about the future direction in which you want to move. The next step is to find out what enables you to move towards the vision and what prevents you from doing so. By analysing your internal school environment and the external environment, you are able to determine the forces that you can draw on to achieve your vision and the forces that could jeopardise your efforts. This kind of analysis is often referred to as a situational analysis or SWOT analysis.

What does SWOT stand for?

You may have been involved in a SWOT analysis before and know what the letters represent. (For anyone who may not have encountered a SWOT analysis, it is an analysis of **strengths**, **weaknesses**, **opportunities** and **threats**). Here is a summary of the focus for each component of the analysis.

| Internal environment | |
|---|--|
| <p>Strengths</p> <p><i>Internal resources and capabilities that we can use to achieve our goals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we do well? • What advantages do we have? • What relevant resources do we have access to? • What do other people see as our strengths? • What would we want to boast about to someone who knows nothing about our school? <p>Think about: Your capabilities, resources, assets, people (e.g. a strong champion to drive the interventions), experience/knowledge, systems, processes, achievements</p> | <p>Weaknesses</p> <p><i>Internal forces that could be barriers to achieving our goals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we do poorly? • What can be improved? • What must we avoid? • What do we lack? • What are we not proud of? • What could we do differently? <p>Think about: Disadvantages, gaps in capabilities, low morale, weak leadership, lack of proper systems and processes, work overload, lack of shared vision/buy-in, stigma and discrimination attached to HIV and AIDS</p> |
| External environment | |
| <p>Opportunities</p> <p><i>External forces that enable us to achieve our goals. Favourable situations now and in the future</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which organisations and government departments offer services that we can link up with? • What support is available from the community? • What funding can we obtain? <p>Think about: Possible funding, partnerships, services, support, people, collaboration with other schools, government driven initiatives</p> | <p>Threats</p> <p><i>External forces that could weaken our chances of achieving our goals. Any unfavourable situation in the external environment that is potentially damaging now and in the future</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What obstacles do we face? • What is our biggest threat? <p>Think about: Poverty and unemployment in the community, unsustainable financial funding, support from community not forthcoming/not reliable, rising costs, collapse of partnerships</p> |

People sometimes find it difficult to know what information to include in a SWOT analysis document. The questions and guidelines in the table above should guide you. In addition you may find the following example helpful.

| Example of a SWOT Analysis for a school committed to becoming a centre of care and hope | |
|--|---|
| <p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a positive attitude in the school towards community initiatives. • The principal is good at networking. She has many contacts in the community and supports community initiatives. • The school participates in the national school nutrition programme. Meals are provided to a group of learners every day of the school week. • Two teachers have participated in counselling workshops. • Most teachers keep attendance records up to date. | <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has an HIV and AIDS policy but there is no evidence as to how it works in practice. • Most teachers are overworked and stressed and reluctant to get involved in additional activities at the school. • There is no adequate substitution strategy for teachers who have to take leave because of illness. • There is a high level of absenteeism and drop out. • Learners and teachers complain about the lack of security and many incidents of violent behaviour have been reported. • There is a lot of bullying at the school. • There is no timetable slot dedicated to staff or development meetings. • There is little formal staff development. • Learners who fall behind do not receive academic support to catch up. • Information about HIV and AIDS and safe sex practices are not integrated into the life skills programme. • Teachers are reluctant to teach learners about HIV and AIDS because of the sensitivity around this issue. |
| <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An NGO in the area offers a referral service for accessing grants. • A clinic offers free testing for HIV and provides anti-retroviral treatment. • A church group has started collecting clothes and uniforms that are made available to needy learners. • A school in the area has started an aftercare programme in collaboration with an international organisation. • An initiative called 'Health Promoting Schools' is looking for schools to join the network. | <p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are high levels of unemployment, poverty and crime in the area surrounding the school. • There are few businesses in the area that are able to provide regular funding for community initiatives. • The grant from the department for the nutrition programme is not always available in time. |

The SWOT analysis is a quick way to get an insight into the internal and external forces that will influence your strategic plan. You have a measure of control over your internal environment and can seek to build on your school's strengths and address its weaknesses. While you do not have direct control over opportunities and threats in the external environment your plans need to take them into account.

**ACTIVITY****Activity 2
Conduct a SWOT analysis**

You have already done a few activities in previous units that encouraged you to reflect critically on your internal capacity to manage interventions such as the school nutrition programme, the aftercare programme and the provision of counselling support. You also reflected on the kind of support that might be available to you from external sources. This activity gives you an opportunity to consolidate your understanding of the internal and external school environment.

**TOOLKIT****Tool 29
SWOT analysis**

Use this tool to conduct a SWOT analysis.

Comment

The summary of the resources and capacity that is available to you in your school environment and the support you can expect from your community has a strong influence on what you are able to achieve. The SWOT analysis has reminded you of those weaknesses in your school environment that may prevent you from achieving your goals. They highlight areas for attention and it is in your control to do something about them. One of the biggest threats to your ability to achieve your goals is possibly access to adequate and regular funding. This is not something that you can control directly. But you can take proactive measures by incorporating in your plan diverse sources of funding. This increases the likelihood for continuing with your funded initiatives.

From your SWOT analysis it is possible to deduce a few key critical success factors that have to be in place if you are to achieve your goals and realise your vision. Here are a few that we think are necessary.

SOME KEY CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Committed and strong leadership capacity
- Buy-in from all levels of the school community, i.e. SGB, management, teachers, learners and parents
- Well trained teachers
- Access to required resources and support through collaboration and partnerships
- Adequate funding to support specified interventions
- Effective information system for gathering and analysing data, and generating suitable information that informs decision-making
- Good communication amongst all parties

4. How do we get to where we want to be? (Our strategic goals)

You have the vision of where you want your school to be and you have a good idea of where you currently are. Now is the time to identify how you want to get to your destination. This is where we look at the **goals** that are most likely to help you realise your vision.

But which goals are the most important? How do we prioritise? Have you heard of the Pareto Principle?³ It is also referred to as the 80:20 rule (the **law of the vital few**, and the **principle of factor sparsity**) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. For example, it is a common rule of thumb in business that "80% of your sales come from 20% of your clients." If we apply the Pareto Principle to the strategic plan we must try to identify the most important goals that will have maximum impact.

Five key goals

Our research findings indicate that there are five key goals that potentially have the most significant impact on lessening the effects of HIV and AIDS and poverty on vulnerable learners and their families as well as teachers infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. These are nutrition, aftercare and psycho-social support for learners, care and support for teachers and addressing HIV and AIDS prevention through the curriculum.

In our research we found that four of these areas were to some extent being addressed in various schools, but we found little or no evidence of any systematised support and care for teachers infected or affected by HIV and AIDS⁴. This is a serious cause for concern given that in 2005, the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) found the prevalence of HIV infection among teachers nationally to be 12.7% (which was higher than the 11% national average at the time). Significant provincial variations were also found and reported as follows: Mpumalanga (19.1%), KwaZulu Natal (21.8%), E Cape (13.8%) Free State (12.4%), N West (10.4%), Limpopo (8.6%), Gauteng (6.4%), N Cape (4.3%) and W Cape (1.1%) (Shisana et al, 2005: p59)⁵. These figures illustrate the large scale of the problem in particular provinces, notably KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. Care and support of teachers is clearly an area in need of urgent attention that needs to be prioritised.

Five key areas of focus for which goals in your strategic plan should be included.

| | | | | |
|---|------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Nutrition for learners | Aftercare for learners | Psycho-social support for learners | Support and care for teachers | Prevention of HIV/AIDS |
| A system for data collection and management (cross cutting priority goal) | | | | |

What do you associate with the word *goal*? If you are a soccer fan you may associate the word with the game of soccer. The aim of the game is for teams to score as many goals as they can in order to win the game. Each team has a clear idea of what constitutes a goal and they plan and execute a strategy on the field to enable them to score as many goals as they can within the duration of the game. They also know immediately when they have been successful because there is an agreement between all parties about what constitutes a goal.

Let's look at an example of a strategic goal for nutrition. It will help you to see the kind of detail included in a goal statement.

GOAL STATEMENT

Goal 1

The school nutrition programme is well managed and provides vulnerable learners with a nutritious meal every day of the school week to enhance their capacity to learn.

Objectives

1. Establish and maintain an up to date list of vulnerable learners who need nutritional support.
2. Find identified additional funds to supplement the grant from the Department of Education.
3. Monitor that the meals provided meet accepted nutritional criteria.
4. Assign clear roles and responsibilities to the appointed persons who run the nutrition programme.
5. Conduct a monthly review of all aspects of the nutrition programme.

The **goal statement** describes in precise terms **what** the end result or achievement will be. In this example the goal states clearly:

- **who** the nutrition programme targets (vulnerable learners)
- **what** is provided (nutritious food)
- **when** the food is provided (every day of the school week)
- **how** the programme is run (well managed)

Because goals are something you want to make happen in the future, it is wise to have some more immediate checkpoints along the route. These checkpoints are objectives: they describe the short-term steps, which you must reach along the way to achieve your goals. Note that each objective starts with an action word.



Which goal statements and objectives are the most effective?

Think of the practical day-to-day activities that you have to manage to give expression to your strategic goals. Which goal statements are the ones that are easiest to implement and monitor?

You have probably heard of SMART goals. This acronym stands for **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**ttainable, **r**ealistic and **t**ime linked. Here is a checklist you can use to guide the development of goals and objectives to increase the likelihood of achieving them.

| How effective are your goals and objectives? | ✓ |
|--|---|
| 1. Are your goals specific and measurable? Do they spell out in enough detail what exactly you want to accomplish? A clearly stated goal gives direction about what is expected and makes it possible to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving the goal. | |
| 2. Are your goals attainable? Goals need to be challenging without being discouraging. Sometimes a goal can seem overwhelming because of its size. However, if you divide it into smaller steps (objectives), it becomes easier to manage and possible to achieve success. As ability, success and confidence grow you may decide to aim for more challenging goals. | |
| 3. Are your goals realistic? You have to take into consideration the opportunities and constraints within your school environment. Goals must be manageable so that you can be successfully implemented. | |
| 4. Do your goals have timeframes? You are likely to take action when you set a realistic time frame for accomplishing the goal. Schedule enough time to reach the goal, but not so much time that you lose interest in it. | |

The above criteria apply to all the planning components, i.e. the strategic goals, objectives and the action plan that gives detailed descriptions of the implementation activities.

Based on the SWOT analysis, you will be able to identify key areas for change. It is not wise to undertake change in too many areas at once since it may be difficult to find all the resources needed to accomplish the change, such as time and money. (Remember, apart from physical resources such as money, you also need to budget for the time spent on managing the change process.) It is therefore necessary to prioritise a few key issues to work on. Once these are achieved, you move towards achieving the next set of objectives and so on.

The key issues you prioritise must be in line with your vision for a caring and supportive school. Your priorities must build on your strengths and opportunities, address the main weaknesses and deal with the threats.

Some questions to bear in mind when choosing priority areas

Choosing priorities may be more difficult than you think. In order to help you choose your priorities, you will need to answer some difficult questions for yourselves. These include:

- What resources are available?
- Where should the emphasis in the allocation of resources be?
- What *should* be done now? What should be done later? And what should not be done at all?
- What *can* be done now?

The choices are about what is most important to deal with first, even if there are other valid and important concerns. The problem usually comes down to the fact that there is simply not enough money or time to do everything. Effective prioritisation helps you to focus on how to overcome these constraints and to work out the best way for working within them.

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING PRIORITIES TO BUILD A CARING AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL

- Select priority areas that are in line with policy statements on Inclusive Education and HIV and AIDS. For example, setting up a school based support team to help identify and refer vulnerable learners to various government agencies for support. Because these are the kinds of interventions that are nationally recognised as contributing towards the alleviation of the negative effects of HIV and AIDS on vulnerable learners, when you report back, progress is quickly recognised.
- Choose priority areas in which you believe you will be able to make rapid and visible progress. For example the national school nutrition programme is an initiative that has the backing of the department of education and with minimum effort you could ensure that it runs well at your school. You could also easily find ways of enhancing its impact by, say, starting a food garden.
- Select priorities which, when they have been achieved, are likely to help you address other priorities later. For example ongoing training and development of teachers is essential for you to achieve the goals you set.
- Address weak areas at the school such as security. Since this is an issue which the whole school community is likely to feel strongly about, you will most probably find a lot of people who are committed to becoming involved in a project to make the school a safe environment.
- Differentiate between concerns that are important, but which can wait, and those that are pressing and critical.
- Include data collection as a priority activity. Without accurate data, you will not be able to prepare a care and support plan properly.
- Check the financial sustainability of the priorities identified before going ahead with implementation.



If people can clearly see the benefits of a particular action or project, it is easier to secure their buy-in.

Effective prioritisation enables you to create a plan that has a high likelihood of succeeding. We suggest that you include in your plan the five priority areas that our research has shown to be essential for building your school as a centre of care and hope. But within these areas you will have to prioritise and identify the level of care and support that you will be able to implement. (For example in Units 6 and 7, we talked about phased or incremental approach to implementation of aftercare and counselling support.) We suggest that your plan follows a three-year cycle. So you will have to ask yourself what you can realistically achieve in each of the five priority areas in three years. Since nutrition is such a basic need, you may want to identify this as a goal that receives comprehensive attention. In schools where the nutrition programme is going quite well the focus may be on specific aspects that will increase its effectiveness. In each of the recommended areas, select those objectives that are important for you and that you are convinced you are able to achieve.

The importance of accurate data for planning

A good strategic plan relies on accurate information to make it relevant and appropriate. For example, if we know how many learners in the school are vulnerable, we know how many meals we have to plan for, what kind of venue we need for aftercare, and how many helpers we have to appoint in the aftercare facility. Reliable information enables us to draw up an accurate budget for our care and support interventions.

Setting up and maintaining a basic information system to gather data about vulnerable learners is therefore a cross cutting strategic goal. As a prerequisite for any initiative to succeed, a process for collecting data for proper planning is essential. The task of systematising data collection must therefore be included as a priority goal when you draw up your priority list.



Proper planning prevents poor performance



Tool 30 Identifying and describing strategic goals

This tool focuses on prioritising goals in key areas of support identified in this guide. Also exemplified as priority areas are support for teachers infected or affected by HIV and AIDS and the importance of including data collection as a priority goal.



Tool 31 A guide to managing an information system for vulnerable learners

This tool consists of a *set of templates* that you can use to collect and collate relevant data about vulnerable learners and it provides guidelines on how to set up a basic information system.

Are you ready to start identifying your priority goals?

**ACTIVITY****Activity 3**
Identify and describe the strategic goals for your school

This is an activity that initially needs to be undertaken by the principal and SMT. If your school has a school based support team (SBST) you may want to involve the members of this team or some SGB members as well. Once you have developed your strategic goals, you can cascade the process of sharing these with the rest of the teachers and later with learners and parents too.

To assist you in compiling a set of strategic goals for your school, we have prepared a set of sample goals and objectives in the 5 key areas identified as essential for creating a caring and supportive school environment.

Engage critically with the set of goals in **Tool 30** and adapt them into achievable goals for your school.

Comment

Strategic goals must be prepared and owned by those who are responsible for implementing them and making them happen. As the SMT it is your core responsibility to compile a strategic plan that you are committed to implement. This is why your involvement in adapting the sample set of goals and objectives is so essential. You now own a plan that you are confident you can translate into activities that will enable you to achieve your intended goals. Most strategic plans are made for 3 – 5 years. Since developments in society are changing so rapidly, it may be more feasible to look at a strategic plan for 3 years. You can then review the situation and start the planning process again.

Since all schools are expected to already have a strategic plan, it is important not to end up with another separate care and support plan. We therefore suggest that it is useful to incorporate the goals of your care and support plan into your overall strategic plan. Or, you may choose to attach this set of goals as a supplementary section of your school strategic plan. Whichever method you choose, the idea is that the focus on a caring and supportive environment must not be seen as an extraneous or separate set of activities but rather as a core focus that is integrated into your school system and practice.

5. Plan of action for a priority goal

Once you have conducted an analysis of your current situation, identified priority areas and set goals and objectives, much of the initial planning phase for building a caring and supportive school environment is complete.

The next stage is to draw up a detailed *action plan* to implement the process towards achieving the goals you have identified. Action plans help you to identify the necessary steps or a series of specific activities needed to reach your goals and objectives. In an action plan you must be able to answer questions such as: Who is supposed to do what and by when?

Although there is a variety of ways in which one could write up an action plan, there are certain elements that any action plan should include for it to be effective.



What information must be included in an effective action plan?

Think of the actions plans that you have compiled over the years. What information is essential for the action plan to achieve the stated results? Compare your ideas with the elements listed in the text box below.

ELEMENTS OF AN ACTION PLAN INCLUDE:

- The *objectives*, results or outputs that must be achieved in order to achieve a goal
- The *activities* that must be undertaken to achieve those objectives, results or outputs
- How will you know that the objective or activity has been completed? An *indicator* will verify your achievements. Clear and measurable indicators can be linked to both process and outcomes. For example, a report can be an indicator that an evaluation or research process has taken place. A drop of 10% in absenteeism can be an indicator that efforts to keep learners at school are working.
- The *time frames* for the achievement of the objectives, results or activities must be established. Be realistic and give yourself manageable deadlines.
- The *person* or persons (e.g. individual, team or committee) who will be *responsible* for each task and/or activity must be decided upon.

These elements are covered by five basic questions:

1. What must be done?
2. How will it be done?
3. How will we know that it has been done?
4. By when will it be done?
5. Who is responsible for doing it?

Answering these questions will give you the basis on which to plan a budget and raise money or generate income.



Activity 4 Create an action plan

Preparing an action plan challenges you to look at the practical activities and resources required to achieve your specified strategic goals. We have prepared a template to assist you with your planning.



Tool 32 Developing an action plan

Use **Tool 32** which is based on the 5 questions outlined above to develop your action plan.

You will notice that the action plan starts off with a sample set of activities for one of the nutrition objectives. This is merely to illustrate the kind of detail required. Your first task is to interrogate this set of activities and modify them to suit your own context. Once you have completed the action plan for the nutrition goal, you can proceed with action plans for each of the other strategic goals.

Comment

Plans in themselves, no matter how detailed they are, have no particular value unless they lead to the desired action. In fact, when plans involving considerable effort have been produced, but have not been implemented, this is demoralising to everyone concerned.

However, as you start implementing your action plan for creating a caring and supportive school environment where the needs of vulnerable learners and teachers infected and affected by HIV and AIDS are addressed by specific interventions, it is important to remember that this is a process. Introducing something new means new routines and new ways of doing things. It is also often necessary to go through a period of trial and error until new practices become integrated with existing aspects of thinking and practice – all of which takes time.

Moreover, attempts to introduce some of the interventions can easily be frustrated if the necessary resources and capacity are not available. It is therefore important that you and the management team give careful thought to the implementation process and to creating the necessary climate at the school for supporting it.

Budgeting for care and support interventions

Throughout this unit, with its focus on strategic and action planning, we have referred to the need for financial planning and budgeting. Clearly, proper budgeting for care and support interventions needs to be *integrated* into your action plan, rather than being seen as a separate activity. However, we think it may be useful to highlight some important aspects related to fundraising. Unfortunately without some funding, schools are often so constrained that they are unable to act at all. On a positive note, we found that in many instances, “volunteers” such as parents and community based youth workers, were prepared to offer their services for relatively small stipends. In this way many of the schools in our study were able to offer the kind of support that they did to vulnerable learners. From working with food gardens and cooking to assisting with helping orphans and vulnerable learners to access government grants, “volunteers” were enabled to carry out these activities because they were being financially supported albeit very modestly. (In some instances volunteers were compensated with food rather than with money.)

To start with, we advocate that SMTs engage various local government departments and seek information about grants and any other support (support in kind if not in monetary terms) that is available from the state and that can assist vulnerable children.



TOOLKIT

See the section in Toolkit: Some useful resources

Check this list for contact details of the SASSA regional office as well as details of other government departments. SMTs need to be proactive and to make it their business to know what other kinds of support are available from the various state departments (e.g. technical support, tools and seeds from the Department of Agriculture), as well as from non-government organisations.



STOP THINK

Fundraising is a people business.

Much success in fundraising is linked to being proactive about establishing a network of contacts and maintaining good relations with *individuals*, be they government officials, businessmen and women or individuals working in external organisations such as NGOs or CBOs. It's about tapping into people and understanding their reasons for wanting to support a particular cause or venture. When you meet a potential donor, it is wise not just to talk about money. Take time to get to know them as a person and understand why it is they want to be involved with your school. Funding proposals that appeal to the donor's personal motivation are likely to have the best chances of success.

Successful fundraising begins with careful and realistic planning. The task of principals and SMTs (or a sub committee of the SMT/SGB) is to make sure that the fundraising work supports the objectives set out in the school care and support action plan. The actual fundraising, therefore, must be seen as a plan within a plan. A fundraising plan in particular needs

- a compelling motivation that is linked to the vision of the school as a site of care and support
- clear and realistic goals that can be achieved (as set out in your action plan)
- a funding proposal
- a list of all possible funding partners (state, organisations, individuals)
- a time frame, with deadlines and follow-up meetings
- a list of up-front costs that must be covered by the school.



Tool 33 **Guidelines for fundraising**

This tool will help you to plan and manage your school's fundraising and help you to think about the specifics of formulating funding proposals.

Key points

You have been involved in an intensive planning process that has culminated in two linked plans: a strategic plan of priority goals to build your school as a centre of care and support, and action plans that deal with the more practical aspects (including funding) and provide the details of how you will achieve these goals.

In Unit 8 we explored:

- Where we want to be. (Vision for your school as a centre of care and support)
- Where we are now. (Analysis of your present situation)
- How we will get to where we want to be. (Strategic plan with clear goals)
- What our priorities are. (Identification of priority and achievable goals)
- What is involved in implementing a strategic goal. (Action plan that spells out details of actions to be taken).

Some important insights we gained:

1. A strategic plan gives a framework within which to work. It clarifies what you are trying to achieve and how you will achieve it. The strategic plan consists of a set of priority goals that provide the overall direction in which the school can move forward in order to build the school as a centre for care and support.
2. A strategic plan consists of a number of key components:
 - A detailed description of the nature and scope of the challenges that are created by the impact of HIV and AIDS, poverty and various types of abuse on the school community and in particular vulnerable learners and teachers infected and affected by HIV and AIDS;
 - A vision statement that shows where the school wants to be in the future;
 - A SWOT analysis of the internal and external school environment that indicates the resources that can be drawn on to achieve the vision and the forces that could jeopardise your efforts;
 - A list of priority goals that describe in broad terms how the school intends to get to the destination described in the vision statement;
 - A detailed action plan that specifies what activities will be done, by when, who is responsible and how we know when we have achieved the intended results. These include having a proper budget and funding plan.
3. The five goals that potentially have the most impact on lessening the effects of HIV and AIDS and poverty on the school community are in the areas of nutrition, aftercare, psycho-social support, care for teachers and an awareness programme for the prevention of HIV and AIDS.
4. Accurate and reliable information is needed to develop relevant and appropriate plans. Establishing and maintaining a basic information system to gather and manage data about vulnerable learners is a cross cutting strategic goal. It is a prerequisite for proper planning and must therefore be prioritised.
5. The SWOT analysis enables you to identify key areas for change. Although you may have included strategic goals in the five key areas of impact, the level at which you respond in practice depends on the capacity and resources that are available to you from the internal and external environment. It is not wise to undertake change in too many areas at once since it may be difficult to find all the resources needed to accomplish the change. Prioritising actions remains a challenge in the implementation phase.