

SECTION 3: RAPID ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (RAC)

PRESENTATION OF THE RAC

The challenge

The challenge is to find a non-invasive approach that allows an evaluation of CD outcomes responsive to sound methodological criteria, but at the same time still achievable with relatively accessible means and capable of being combined with other project management activities such as standard programme evaluations, high-quality instruction and monitoring. According to the Backbone strategy and the TC reform, the EC needs to increase the CD outcomes of most of its cooperation interventions and not merely test advanced CD assessments in a few programmes. This is why establishing and testing a suitable RAC approach is a key objective of the present evaluation study.

The Rapid CD Assessment

Different components

As emphasized above the RAC is not a special methodology. It is only a simplified application of the comprehensive methodology discussed so far. This is why the proposed RAC procedure is based on standard EQs and JCs and follows the criteria of the 3-Step methodology described above.

The assessments relating to EQs 1, 2 and 3 (see paragraph 7.1) should, according to the QSG, be included in the current instruction and monitoring procedure; and they should be available for each programme. This is the standard approach considered for the RAC. In the event that they are not available, a specific quick exercise may be undertaken to address these questions, using the available documents and the informed opinion of the EUD and the national counterparts.

The assessments relating to EQs 4 to 17 (see paragraphs 7.2 and 7.3) and the analyses relating to STEP 3 (see paragraph 7.4) will be addressed through a specific exercise in two parts: (i) a questionnaire, (ii) a workshop.

The administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire should be administered through guided interviews by a duly instructed local consultant, as follows:

- The interviewees should be selected from among a few relevant persons (or groups of persons) within and outside the targeted institution. Within the institution the interviews should involve the heads or key staff of the few departments involved in the targeted areas of the support programme, plus other staff with more general responsibilities. Outside the institution, representatives of civil society (users) and the political world (parliamentary commissions) who have opportunities for interaction with the institution, should be interviewed.
- The number of interviews for a standard support programme (say a €M 1-5 project) may vary from 4 to 8 internal staff and from 3 to 6 external persons, that is a total of between 7 and 14 interviews.

- The duration of the interview should range between one and two hours so as to allow one interviewer to complete the whole task within between three and five days, aside from preparation and processing.
- The modality of the interview should be *adapted* to the situation. In those situations where expression of opinions is supposed to be relatively free, the interviewees may be grouped - after a short individual briefing - so as to extend their number and to apply group-coaching techniques to facilitate stimulation and cross-checking of answers. Where there are counterparts who are particularly reserved or even reluctant, individual interviews to reassure the reluctant partners will be preferable, and interviews with new counterparts (e.g. civil society) should be increased.

The contents of the Questionnaire

The standard version of the Questionnaire, as presented below, needs rapid adaptation to the specific countries and programmes, and includes two parts: one on the CD outputs and another on the CD outcomes. The questionnaire uses the standard EQs in a simplified version.

Questionnaire on capacity outputs:

- a- STAFF: during the last X years, has the institution shown any significant change in terms of staff competences?
 - more and/or better trained staff (provide details)
 - new sectoral/ thematic competences (provide details)
 - knowledge of and links with the experience of similar institutions in other countries (provide details)
 - better career opportunities (provide details)
- b- ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONS: during the last X years, has the institution shown any significant change in terms of organisation, procedures and responsibilities?
 - new or strengthened units or functions for data processing, policy and financing (provide details)
 - improved consultation of stakeholders: surveys, consultation with civil society organisation, dialogue with political representatives and parliament (provide details)
 - other significant changes in organisation, procedures, functions (provide details)
 - any change in the decision-making process, such as improved evidence-based decisions (provide details)
- c- UNEXPECTED: during the last X years has the institution shown any other significant change in terms of competences and capabilities acquired? (provide details)
- d- CAUSALITY: do you think that any of the changes mentioned above is related to the Support Programme YYY? If so, please specify:
 - what change (just mention one of the changes mentioned above)?
 - why (synthesised description of the contribution provided)?
 - do you think that external factors, such as the political support (specify), internal leadership (specify), other external support programmes (specify) have contributed to or limited such changes and how?

Questionnaire on CD outcomes:

- a- INITIATIVE: do you think that, compared to X years ago, the institution is:
 - capable of producing more initiatives (plans, laws, operations)? (Y/N and examples)
 - capable of creating and managing more financial, technological and technical means? (Y/N and examples)
 - appearing socially and institutionally stronger? (Y/N)
- b- RESULTS: do you think that the institution, compared to X years ago, is capable of:
 - better monitoring of development results? (Y/N and examples)
 - better maintenance of performance records? (Y/N and examples)
 - playing a stronger leadership in policy development, buttressed by its effectiveness? (Y/N and examples)
- c- NETWORKING: do you think that the institution, compared to X years ago, is capable of:

- being better recognised and trusted by stakeholders and relying on decentralised participatory networks? (Y/N and examples)
 - having regular relationships with political counterparts (especially the Parliament)? (Y/N and examples)
 - establishing better relations and networking links inside (other institutions, e.g. universities, other ministries) and outside (sister institutions abroad – excluding donors) the country? (Y/N and examples)
- d- ADAPTATION: do you think that the institution, compared to X years ago, is capable of:
- better learning from the experience (feed-back mechanisms: results are analysed and discussed and decisions are taken accordingly? (Y/N and examples)
 - better negotiating, selecting and managing donors' inputs? (Y/N and examples)
 - more efficiently identifying changes in the context and proposing 'innovations' (reports, policy proposals, raising awareness) to address them? (Y/N and examples)
- e- COHERENCE: do you think that the institution, compared to X years ago, is capable of:
- better adapting the management structure to the policy mission and tasks, by increasing staff dynamics, results-based careers, decentralisation, etc.? (Y/N and examples)
 - better governance, in terms of accountability, transparency of decisions, coordination, human resources management? (Y/N and examples)
 - a better systematised and transparent strategic, regulatory and operational framework? (Y/N and examples)
- f- UNEXPECTED: do you think that the institution, compared to X years ago, has acquired other new capacities apart from those you have mentioned above?
- Can you briefly mention and explain the most significant changes that you would like to stress, apart from those mentioned above?
 - Apart from the mention of any additional change, can you briefly express an overall opinion on capacity change responding to the following question: can you mention one, two or more important things that the institution can now do that it could not do X years ago?
- g- CAUSALITY: can you cite the key internal or external factors that have most contributed to the main changes identified so far? (if necessary the interviewer may facilitate the reply by citing factors relating to the capacity outputs and to the OF – provide details). The interview should highlight whether a cause is referred to one specific change or to the overall improvement of the capacity. The causality link should be discussed and justified and examples should be provided.

The Questionnaire will include space for mentioning the required examples and possible stories relating to such examples, which may be annexed by the interviewers or interviewees when needed.

Preparation and processing

The Questionnaire should be adapted by the consultants to the specific context, and the questions should be better tailored to the specific institutions. In some cases, the emphasis on predefinition of the outputs and outcomes may be reduced and the interviewees may be helped to identify changes in a freer way (especially when coaching is possible). The adaptation of the Questionnaire should take no more than one day of work following examination of the relevant documentation and preparatory meetings.

The interviews have to be organised in collaboration with the EUD. To identify and brief the interviewees and fix the appointments, not less than one week will be necessary, with two working days for the interviews themselves.

Following the interviews the findings will be analysed and classified in accordance with the various capacity outputs and outcomes. For each group of outputs and outcomes, findings will be presented in a tabular form and ranked according to the strength of the evidence (strong, medium, weak). Examples will be highlighted as a complement to the tabular presentation. The findings will be

presented in an anonymous manner, although the distinction between findings inside and outside the institution will be maintained.

The processing of the Questionnaire and the preparation of the material for the workshop will require about five working days, as the consultant may need to check with the relevant interviewees the information collected through the Questionnaires.

In some cases the Questionnaires may be processed during one or more coaching sessions, with the participants contributing to validation and ranking. Such sessions may or may not be limited to people from the same institution.

Restitution

The consultant will present the results in a half-day workshop, with extended participation by the targeted institution (5-10 persons), its external interlocutors (2-5 persons), and the EUD.

The workshop will discuss the main findings (first part), and the causal links (second part). The latter include and expand the assessment as per point 1(d) of the Questionnaire (STEP 1) and point 2(g) (STEP 2), including the role of the factors linked to the OF and the facilitating or limiting influence of the quality of the support programme (QC).

The workshop will not draw out consolidated conclusions (STEP 3), but will discuss and verify the STEP 1 and STEP 2 assessments, so as to draw out substantial hypotheses in the context of STEP 3. The latter will be systematised by the consultants after drawing together the conclusions of the workshops. This will require another five working days, including the drafting of the RAC report.

Summary of the inputs and times necessary for a standard RAC

Based on the experience carried out by the evaluation team the three selected countries, an average RAC exercise should require the following operations and the related inputs (at least until broad practice has been consolidated):

Once the local consultants have been trained, the support from the external consultants would be reduced, if not terminated. Therefore the time needed for the whole exercise could be reduced to an average of thirty working days for each RAC.

TABLE 6: TECHNICAL INPUTS FOR A STANDARD RAC

Activity	Description	TL *	National expert	Place of duty
Pre-mission work				
Programme rationale	Reading of basic programme documents	2		Home
	Elaboration of the programme's Intervention Logic			
Agenda	Identifying and organising the inception meetings	1	1	Country
Subtotal		3	1	
Inception phase				
International traveling				
Training	Training of the local expert on the application of the methodology	1	1	Country
Enabling Factors	Completing with the available data the findings on the Enabling Factors and the inputs of the support programme	1	2	Country
Preparatory meetings	Explain, adapt and test the methodology with the key stakeholders	2		Country
Adaptation of the questionnaire	Adjust formulation and plan the adequate mix of individual and working group	1	2	Country
Inception note	Drafting, discussion, approval	1	1	Country
Subtotal		6	6	
Administration of the questionnaire				
Administration of the Questionnaire.	Preparation of the meetings agenda		1	Country
	Administering max 15 Questionnaires to the interviewees		10	Country
Summarising the findings	Summarising and classifying in tabular form the findings. Structuring the examples. Preparing and organising the workshop		3	Country
Subtotal		0	14	
Synthesis Phase				
International traveling				
Cross-checking the Questionnaires	The Questionnaires and their synthesis will be cross-checked	3	3	
Validation meetings	Possible validation meetings (with groups or individuals) will be organised	2	1	
Workshop	Preparation of the invitations		1	Country
	Elaboration of workshop material	2	2	Country
	Effective implementation	1	1	Country
		8	8	
Final Report	Drafting of the RAC report	4	2	Home
TOTAL		21	31	
TOTAL P/D		14		
*In areas where the participatory level is relatively high, in the first tests of the RAC, it might be opportune to associate one senior expert to the team leader.				
In specific cases a local expert with specific expertise in group-coaching techniques would be advisable.				

THE THREE TESTS

The standard RAC procedure, as already illustrated, should be adapted as much as possible to the characteristics and opportunities of the different situations. The three tests have shown that the procedure works in very different contexts.