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Development of a Quality Assurance Project Management System

For Niras International Consulting

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Abstract

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A product's quality may be defined as its ability to satisfy the customer's needs and expectations. In international development cooperation projects, that means reaching the goals and results expected by the financing partner, without exceeding the set costs. For NIRAS International Consulting that is crucial, since they are specialised in implementing and managing international development projects.

This paper presents a project manual for NIRAS, developed as part of the company's quality assurance efforts. The manual contains instructions for project managers at NIRAS, on the implementation phase of projects funded by the Swedish International Developmental Cooperation Agency (Sida). It was developed in cooperation with four project managers at NIRAS, and also incorporates the expectations of the customer (Sida) and tools for quality assurance.

The manual provides a practical tool for NIRAS to apply methods of general quality assurance, such as Total Quality Management, as well as methods specifically used in development cooperation such as the Logical Framework Approach. Furthermore it is a way for the staff to share knowledge and experiences through the possibility to update and add to the manual and thereby making such information available to other project managers. The content of the manual is divided into sections for project start up, communication, monitoring & evaluation, and project close down. Templates for reports are also a part of the manual.

Several of the steps of Total Quality Management and other quality methods are applicable to development projects and the manual have the potential to increase the quality of the projects at NIRAS. A basic condition for that is that the manual is tested, put it use and continuously updated.

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Sammanfattning

En varas kvalitet kan definieras som dess förmåga att uppfylla kundens behov och förväntningar. För att nå en hög kvalitet skall kvalitetssäkring utföras på alla delar av ett företag eller organisations verksamhet, även projektledning. NIRAS International Consulting är specialiserade på projektledning inom bistånd, och står för den tekniska expertisen och det praktiska genomförandet av biståndsprojekt, de flesta finansierade av svenska regeringens biståndsorgan Sida. Hög kvalitet på den produkt NIRAS erbjuder innebär att projektets utsatta mål nås, inom utsatt tid och utan att överstiga givna resursramar.

Syftet för examensarbetet är att nå en förhöjd kvalitet i de biståndsprojekt NIRAS arbetar med, genom att utveckla en manual för projektledare med arbetsinstruktioner för hur de skall nå bästa resultat. Manualen utvecklades i samarbete med en grupp projektledare på NIRAS, och utifrån deras synpunkter och behov. Sida är NIRAS kund och uppdragsgivare och därför gjordes även intervjuer med dem för att kunna ta hänsyn till Sidas förväntningar på NIRAS. Utöver det utformades manualen så att den skulle vara ett praktiskt verktyg för att applicera både generella metoder inom kvalitetssäkring och kvalitetshöjande arbetssätt specifikt utvecklade för biståndsprojekt.

En grundtanke för kvalitetssäkring är att kvalitetsskall arbetas in förebyggande, och inte genom kontroll och åtgärder i efterhand. En framgångsrikt använd ledningsstrategi för kvalitetssäkring är Total Quality Management, vilken bygger på att kvalitet uppnås genom att ett antal så kallade hörnstenar arbetas in i företagets verksamhet, bl.a. att ständigt arbeta med förbättringar och att sätta kunden i centrum. Inom biståndsprojekt används ofta ett projektplaneringsverktyg kallat Logical Framework Approach, vilket syftar till att uppnå lokalt engagemang i projekten.

Manualen är uppbyggt av checklistor, mallar och textavsnitt som behandlar olika delar i projektgenomförandet. De delar som tas upp är projektstart, kommunikation, utvärdering, projektavslutning, samt problemlösning. Genom att ägna mycket energi åt projektstarten blir manualen ett sätt att arbeta in kvalitet förebyggande, och hörnstenarna i Total Quality Management inkorporeras t.ex. genom effektiva rutiner för kommunikation och utvärdering. Manualen är också uppbyggd så att arbetssättet Logical Framework Approach används så mycket som möjligt i projekten, vilket är ett önskemål från Sida.

Projektmanualen har potential för att bli ett kvalitetshöjande verktyg för NIRAS. Utöver det praktiska innehållet som underlättar projektledningen bidrar den också till ett mer enhetligt arbetssätt på företaget och underlättar för projektledare att dela sin kompetens med varandra. En förutsättning för det är dock att manualen börjar användas, och kontinuerligt uppdateras, vilket kommer att bli en utmaning för NIRAS och en viktig del av deras fortsatta kvalitetssäkringsarbete.

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION 3

1.1 OBJECTIVES 5
1.2 SCOPE 6

2 METHODOLOGY 7

3 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION 9

3.1 SWEDISH DEVELOPMENTAL COOPERATION 9
3.2 SIDA'S ROLE IN A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT 9
3.3 ROLE OF THE BENEFICIARY 10
3.4 ROLE OF THE CONSULTANT 10
3.5 PROJECT CYCLE 11
3.5.1 Project planning process 11
3.5.2 Project implementation process 12

4 NIRAS COMPANY PRESENTATION 13

4.1 NIRAS 13
4.1.1 Policy and Strategy Development 13
4.1.2 Rural Business Development 13
4.1.3 Rural Livelihood Development 14

5 REFERENCE PROJECTS 15

5.1 FORESTRY EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN KOSOVO 15
5.2 SEED SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN KYRGYZSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN 15
5.3 AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN LENINGRAD OBLAST 16
5.4 NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN MACEDONIA 16

6 PROJECT QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN DEVELOPMENTAL COOPERATION 18

6.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE 18
6.1.1 Total Quality Management 18
6.1.2 The PDCA- cycle 19
6.2 QUALITY OF SERVICES 20
6.3 METHODS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION 21
6.3.1 Logical Framework Approach 21
6.3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation 22

7 PROJECT MANAGEMENT MANUAL FOR NIRAS IC 24

7.1 INCEPTION PERIOD 24
7.2 COMMUNICATION 26
7.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION 27
7.4 CORRECTIVE MEASURES 28
7.5 PROJECT PHASE OUT AND CLOSE DOWN 28
7.6 TEMPLATES 28

7.7 UPDATING THE MANUAL 29
8 DISCUSSION 30
9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 32
10 REFERENCES 34

Annex I: Project Manual for NIRAS International Consulting

Abbreviations

Sida = Swedish International Developmental Cooperation Agency
ToR = Terms of Reference
LFA = Logical Framework Approach
TQM = Total Quality Management
MFA Finland = Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland
PDCA Cycle = Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle
NGO = Non-Governmental Organisation

1 Introduction

The objective of quality assurance is to ensure that the right things are being done, at the right time, and in the right way. It is based on the idea that every part of a process, such as decision-making, implementation or administration is performed according to best available practice. Even though one of the goals is to avoid unnecessary work, quality assurance can be time and energy consuming, which is motivated by the understanding that spending a little time and energy now, will prevent having to spend a lot in the future.

The quality of a product may be defined as its ability to satisfy, and preferably exceed, the customer's needs and expectations. Since meeting the customer's needs are crucial for any company and organisation, this makes quality assurance an important part of a company's activities, regardless of the branch of trade.

As many companies and organisations carry out activities in the form of projects, skills in project management is another important part of a company's source of competence. Project management is about planning and coordination of a project and is aimed at ensuring completion on time, within cost and with expected results. Such skills have become essential enough to create a line of business where consultancy firms offer management and coordination of project as their product.

NIRAS International Consultants AB is such a company. They are specialised in management of international development projects, in the agricultural and environmental sectors. For them, offering a product of high quality means managing projects so that they reach expected outcomes, are cost-efficient, ensure satisfaction for both funding organisations and beneficiary, and provide a learning environment at both individual and organisational level.

Since NIRAS abandoned their ISO-9000 quality certification in 2003, the routines and practices for project management has lost the controlled structure that is associated with a quality certification, and a need has been identified for a project management manual to provide support to project managers.

1.1 Objectives

The overall objective of the thesis is to investigate how a higher quality level can be reached in international development projects, through identification and optimisation of routines and practises for project management at NIRAS International Consultants.

The outcome will be a project manual, designed to assist project managers in the implementation phase of projects by providing routines, checklists and templates for different parts of the project implementation process.

The manual must be flexible enough to be applicable to projects with varying characteristics in a number of factors, such as organisational set-ups, time span,

budget size, field of objective, etc. However, the manual's level of detail must be precise enough to actually provide support to the project managers and avoid being too general. Therefore, the aim is to develop detailed material, such as checklists, for processes that are more or less identical to all projects. For processes that are more differentiated from project to project, the approach will be to write instructions for how project staff can develop routines for the single project. The manual shall not be a static document that must either be used in its entirety or not at all, but rather dynamic and with the possibility to be used selectively depending on the set-up of the specific project.

1.2 Scope

The project manual will only encompass the implementation phase of the project cycle, and the preceding tendering process is not taken into account. The starting point is a signed contract between NIRAS IC and the Customer, who is financing the project.

The thesis is restricted to projects financed by Sida. The reason for this is that other donors, such as the European Union and the World Bank, have their own guidelines and demands on project implementation, which at parts are significantly different from those of Sida. To develop a manual suitable for all donors would in practice mean to develop several separate manuals. Naturally, there are also similarities between the donors and the manual may selectively be applicable to project funded by other donor as well. The manual is developed according to the needs and work of the office in Stockholm.

Focus is on technical project management. Financial, contractual and juridical aspects are not within the scope of the thesis.

2 Methodology

The background for the manual was based on studying methods and tools for quality assurance, as well as methods used specifically in development cooperation projects. Then a review of earlier quality assurance efforts at NIRAS AB was done, including the former ISO-9000 certification. The next step was to study needs and expectations of the project managers at NIRAS, as well as the client. Based on these needs, the content of the manual was developed.

The development of the manual has followed the ideas and work procedures of a quality management strategy called Total Quality Management (TQM). It is the most widely used tool in modern quality assurance, and has been successfully used in manufacturing and service industries, as well as government agencies. It also fits well with the service production studies for this thesis, as opposed to other methods mainly applicable for manufacturing.

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) has been used within international development cooperation since the 1960'ies as a project-planning tool. Several donors and development organisations use it, and recommend their partners to use it in development projects. The project manual has been developed so that the principles of the LFA can be implemented in the projects as easily as possible.

Four ongoing projects at NIRAS were selected as reference projects for the study. Besides the insight on developmental projects gained from studying them, they provided examples and the events in the projects gave ideas for what to include in the manual. To reduce the risk that the manual would be to focused on a special type of project, the reference projects were selected with the aim to provide as diverse information as possible, meaning they had different objectives, activities and were in different points of time in the project cycle.

The four reference projects were:

- Agriculture and Environment in Leningrad Oblast
- Forestry Education and Training in Kosovo
- Development of Seed sector in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan
- Strategy for Sustainable Development in Macedonia

The project managers for these projects formed a group assisting in the development of the project manual. Besides their immediate knowledge of the reference projects, their opinions and general experience of working in developmental projects proved important for the design of the manual.

The first step was to gain knowledge of the reference projects, and the implementation of developmental projects. This was done by studying reports from the projects produced by NIRAS AB and when available, evaluation reports produced by other parties. Interviews with the project managers were also important for this step.

In a start-up workshop, where all the project managers participated, differences, strengths and weaknesses in the projects were discussed, as well as the content of the project manual.

Based on the workshop, and with continuous support from the project managers, a first draft manual was developed. The draft was discussed in a second workshop, which resulted in an improved and extended version. This was later reviewed by all project managers at Niras, before final completion.

To get a broader picture, especially regarding customer satisfaction, two interviews were held at Sida; Peter Herthelius, handling officer for the project in Tajikistan/Kyrgyzstan and Helene Holm, handling officer for the project in Macedonia. The interviews were focused on Sida's expectations on NIRAS, and included questions on reporting, communication, monitoring & evaluation, and the application of the Logical Framework Approach.

A course arranged by Sida also gave a better understanding of the Logical Framework Approach, which is a project-planning tool that is widely spread in the developmental business.

The NIRAS office in Helsinki has developed a manual for project implementation, which was created in line with the needs and requests of that office's main client, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Finnish manual has provided useful inspiration and information while developing the manual for the Stockholm office.

NIRAS was earlier certified according to the quality standard ISO-9000, the standard was abandoned in 2003. The old quality system contains documents such as descriptions of processes, certification routines and checklists. This material assisted in understanding the activities at NIRAS and parts of the checklists could be used even though they were out-of-date. However, due to the old quality systems structure being adapted to the strict requirements of the ISO-9000 standard, not much of the material could be used in the project manual.

Benchmarking is a tool within quality assurance that is based on comparing one's own processes with those of competitors and other organisations with similar activities, and learning from studying them[1]. This method did not provide much due to difficulties in acquiring detailed information from competitors and the big differences between the activities of other donors (such as the Red Cross) and Sida. However, from studying project reports produced by NIRAS competitors a few ideas were gained, mainly for monitoring and evaluation.

[1] B Bergman, *Kvalitet från behov till användning*, Studentlitteratur, Lund , 2001, p. 415.

3 International Development Cooperation

A development project normally involves cooperation between a donor, a beneficiary (often a governmental agency in the project country) and a consultant. The following section is a brief overview of Swedish development cooperation, the different stakeholders involved in a project, as well as the project cycle.

The roles of the donor and beneficiary in a project vary depending on the setup of the project. Is it a priority of Sida to transfer as much responsibility as possible to the beneficiary country, meaning that functions such as financial control and progress review may be performed either by a local Sida representative, or preferably by the beneficiary.[2] Also, all development projects are different and there are no standard roles and responsibilities that are applicable to all projects. What is described below is common for projects at NIRAS AB.

3.1 Swedish Developmental Cooperation

Sida, Swedish International Developmental Cooperation Agency, is the Swedish Government's executing body for international aid, with activities in approximately 120 partner countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. It is the Swedish Government that stipulates the budget, what countries should be included in the development cooperation and the focus of the cooperation.

The overall goal for Sida is to contribute to making it possible for poor people to improve their living conditions. An important point of departure is that each partner country is responsible for its own development, while Sida creates opportunities for change and development.

Sida rarely works with the projects directly. Instead they are implemented in practice by Sida's cooperation partners, such as non-governmental organisations, government agencies, and consultants.[3] The following description of roles in development projects concerns projects where the cooperation partner is a consultant. For NGO's and government agencies, the setup is different.

3.2 Sida's role in a development project

As the funding institution for the project, Sida will take part of the planning process of the project and review the project initiative both in relation to Swedish priorities and in the perspective of the receiving country. The final decision on allotment of funds is taken by Sida, and Sida will also administer the tendering process in cooperation with the beneficiary.

[2] Helene Holm, Sida, 061109
[3] http://www.sida.se 070109

During the implementation of the project, Sida reviews progress and quality, has the ultimate decisive power on changes of the project activities or budget and will also perform evaluations during and after the project.[4]

3.3 Role of the beneficiary

The beneficiary is normally the organisation that first identified and described the problem. In cooperation with the donor, the beneficiary will formulate the Terms of Reference for the project, which describes the background and setup of the project. The beneficiary owns the project and its results, and appoints a steering committee which role may be compared to a board of directors for the project. Arranging premises for offices and other administrative needs for the project is usually the responsibility of the beneficiary.

During project implementation, the beneficiary cooperates with the donor in reviewing progress and quality, and may also work with the consultant in performing project activities. When the project in finished, the beneficiary will take over project assets and the responsibility for eventual ongoing activities.[5]

3.4 Role of the consultant

The consultant company provide the expertise for the implementation of the project, is responsible for the technical content and the project management services. When funding have been approved by the donor, a tendering process is started and consultant companies submit project proposals based of the Terms of Reference.

Both long-term and short term project staff is employed by the consultant and during project implementation they work on the execution of project activities in cooperation with the beneficiary.

The local project team consists of both national (residents of the project country) and international staff and experts. Besides support from the Project Manager in Sweden, it is also common that short-term consultants are hired to provide specific expertise during a limited time in the project. An international long-term expert is hired as Team Leader, who is responsible for detailed planning of the project plan, facilitation of execution of activities and co-ordination of daily work in the country.

As the project finishes, the consultant will also ensure a smooth handing over of the project to local stakeholders and the beneficiary.[6]

[4] K Örtengren, Sida, 061117
[5] P Herthelius, Sida, 061109
[6] K Örtengren, Sida, 061117

3.5 Project Cycle

The project cycle is a model of the lifespan of a development project, from identification to evaluation and lessons learned. Based on information from different phases, a decision can be made to continue as planned, change the course of the project or repeat a given phase. For example major political events in the project country during the planning phase may be cause for a re-appraisal of the project.[7]

The planning process is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is briefly described here to provide a background of development projects.

This cycle is a common model but the exact sequence of phases and events varies for each project.

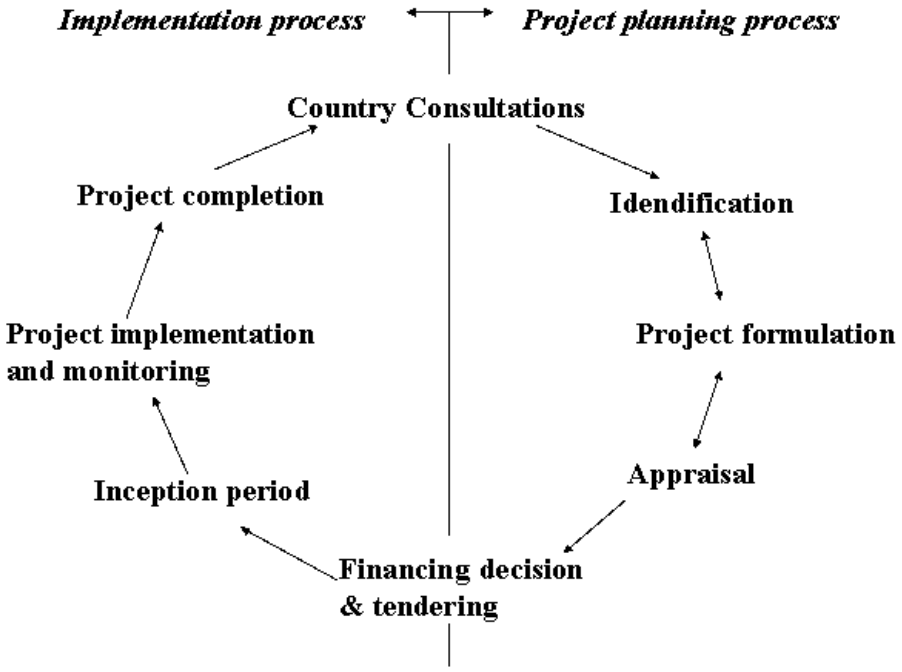

Figure 1. A model of the project cycle.[8]

3.5.1 Project planning process

The partner country's participation and engagement in the planning phase is important to ensure local ownership and sustainability in the project. Dividing the process into periods of identification, formulation, and appraisal assists in recognising the different stakeholders and their roles.

Participatory planning indicates that the initiative and leadership is taken by the beneficiaries. This is the ideal case, but not always feasible. The need for technical expertise may complicate local participation, and in such a case the planning phase

[7] Sida, *Sida at work*, 2005, p. 58.
[8] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Guidelines for Programme Design, Monitoring and Evaluation*, Helsinki, 1997, p 10

must be complemented by collaborative or participatory methods in the following phases.[9]

3.5.2 Project implementation process

The project implementation begins with project start-up and ends with project close-down, but may also include after-project activities. It is a linear process that consists of three parts:

- Inception period	Project start-up. Usually a three-month period, involving all practicalities such as setting up an office and hiring local staff in the project country. Initial project activities should be started during this period. In the end of the inception period an Inception Report shall be written, including a revised project work plan and budget
- Implementation and monitoring period	The main phase of the project, where all project activities are being carried out and monitored. Progress reports are written continuously to show results and project advancement.
- Phase out period	The final period of the project, involving phase-out activities with the purpose of achieving sustainable effects and practical issues of leaving the project country.[10]

[9] *Guidelines for Programme Design, Monitoring and Evaluation,* p. 8.
[10] *Guidelines for Programme Design, Monitoring and Evaluation,* p. 9.

4 NIRAS company presentation

NIRAS International Consulting, formerly Scanagri, is part of NIRAS A/S, a consulting and engineering company based in Denmark. Scanagri was incorporated into the NIRAS group in 2006. Besides the office in Stockholm, the Scanagri group consisted of offices in Helsinki, Copenhagen and Warsaw.

From this point an onward, NIRAS refers to the Stockholm office of NIRAS International Consulting.

4.1 NIRAS

NIRAS provide consulting services for international development projects. The areas of competence are agriculture, food, rural development, environment and natural resource management. They provide management, training, planning and technical advice purposing at:

- enhancing agricultural productivity and competitiveness
- encouraging non-farming economic growth
- improving social well-being, managing and mitigating risks as well as reducing vulnerability
- enhancing sustainability of natural resource management
- fostering and enabling environment for sustainable rural growth

The main client for the Stockholm office is Sida, but projects from other donors such as the European Union and the World Bank are also undertaken. Geographically the main areas of competence are Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The number of staff at the office in Stockholm is 15.

NIRAS provides services in 3 sectors; policy and strategy, rural business, and rural livelihood.

4.1.1 Policy and Strategy Development

Projects in this area aim to advice national governments and donors on how to create an enabling environment for rural and agricultural stakeholders. Introducing changes in management principles among public service providers, land policies and tax and trade policy development are examples of activities in this sector.

4.1.2 Rural Business Development

Outcomes of projects in this sector are to modernize the agriculture in the project country by introducing new technologies, changing production patterns and more market oriented production. Projects may include activities such as introducing higher value crops, assisting local producers in export promotion and development of local environmental management plans. To secure a sustainable development for the use of natural resources are often a parallel goal.[11]

[11] NIRAS, http://www.scanagri.se, 061203

4.1.3 Rural Livelihood Development

Projects within rural livelihood development aim to improve production and harvesting methods through activities in the field. This is achieved through dialogues directly to the farmers, facilitation of educational activities in villages and advisory services. Empowerment of farmers is also an important factor.[12]

[12] NIRAS AB, http://www.scanagri.se 061203

5 Reference projects

Out of NIRAS' ongoing projects, four were selected as reference projects for the development of the manual. This section will give a brief introduction to the projects.

5.1 Forestry Education and Training in Kosovo

The project *Support to the Forestry Education and Training in Kosovo* is the latest in a row of projects funded by international donors aiming to increase the contribution of the forestry sector to the Kosovo economy. This is achieved through capacity building in all levels of the forestry sector, from Government institutions to the forestry workers.

The project objective is improved capability in managing and utilising resources in a cost efficient and sustainable manner, and the project is expected to produce three main outputs:

1. An educational strategy and structure capable of driving forest education in Kosovo
2. Upgraded skills of existing personnel
3. Sustainable domestic educational programme for forestry personnel on vocational and technician levels and established upgrading opportunities for BSc, MSc and PhD levels at a Forest Faculty abroad.

The cooperation partner (beneficiary) in Kosovo is the Kosovo Forest Agency, and NIRAS IC implements the project in a joint venture with the Norwegian Forestry Group.

The implementation dates for the project are April 2004 - December 2006.[13]

5.2 Seed Sector Development in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

The seed sector development projects are in fact two separate projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan but with very similar objectives and activities. A project aiming to develop seed production in Kyrgyzstan was originally funded by the EU. A prolongation (and extension of project activities) was then funded by Sida who also copied the concept for a the project in Tajikistan.

The overall objectives of the projects are to create seed sectors that can support the national seed demand as well as being internationally competitive. The projects consist of two components. The first is capacity building, and strengthening institutional and regulatory structures. This includes improving routines for certification and quality control of seed production, as well as strengthened

[13] NIRAS, *Inception report, Forestry Education and Training in Kosovo*, Stockholm, 2004 p. 2

legislation. The second component consists of developing a seed breeding programme, producing new commercial varieties in a few selected crops.

The implementation dates for the project are December 2003 – December 2009.[14]

5.3 Agriculture and Environment in Leningrad Oblast

This project was started because of the Russian agriculture's high contribution to the eutrophication and disruption of eco-systems in the Baltic Sea, problems primarily related to leaching of plant nutrients. Hence, the overall objective of the project is to decrease the environmental load from agriculture on the Baltic Sea and enhance sustainability.

The immediate objectives of the project are:

- Increased understanding of the problem and its solutions through capacity building among farmers and farmer organisations.
- Introduce practical solutions for reduction of pollution.
- Introduce a programme for monitoring of environmental status in the area.
- Further development of the agro-environmental legislation.

For this project, NIRAS AB cooperate with the Rural Economy and Agriculture Society in Halland[15], the Federation of Swedish Farmers[16] and the Norwegian Centre for Soil and Environmental Research[17].

Sida uses an intermediate for their part in the project, meaning that the role and responsibilities that Sida normally would have as the donor is filled by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. The project was implemented from October 2003 to December 2005, but an extension was made and a second phase will continue until October 2008.[18]

5.4 National Strategy for Sustainable Development in Macedonia

The aim of the project is to assist the Republic of Macedonia to prepare a national strategy for sustainable development, including economical, social and environmental factors. The strategy should fulfil obligations made by Macedonia to the European Union and the rest of the international community, but the primary purpose is to provide a framework for sustainable development that offers practical guidelines for

[14] NIRAS, *Inception report, Seed Sector Development in Kyrgyzstan,* Stockholm, 2004, p. 4.
[15] Hushållningssällskapens Förbund i Halland
[16] Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund
[17] JordForsk
[18] NIRAS, *Inception report, Agriculture and Environment in Leningrad Oblast*, Stockholm, 2004, p. 6.

the public and private sectors and serves to encourage domestic and external investments.

The co-operation partner (beneficiary) in Macedonia is the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and local stakeholders include organisations in both the commercial and civil society sectors.

Examples of specific objectives of the project are:

1. Increased awareness of sustainable development among project stakeholders and the general public of Macedonia.
2. Strengthened capacity among policy makers for planning and management.
3. Strong partnerships between private and public sector stakeholders
4. Increased foreign investments in Macedonia.

The implementation dates for the project are February 2006 – February 2008.[19]

[19] NIRAS, *Interrim report, National Strategy for Sustainable Development in Macedonia* (2006), p.4.

6 Project Quality Management in developmental cooperation

6.1 Quality Assurance

As written in the introduction, quality may be defined as a product's ability to satisfy the customer's needs and expectations. Quality assurance encompasses all processes and activities aiming to secure, or increase the quality of a product. The dimensions of quality may be many, such as performance, price, durability, cost of maintenance, environmental impact and safety.[20]

6.1.1 Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management is a management strategy aimed at embedding awareness of quality in all processes within the organisation or company. It is focused on engaging all employees in the efforts of increasing customer satisfaction at continually lower costs. The strategy is built on the census that quality should be achieved through preventative measures, as opposed to controlling and inspection. [21]

Total quality management comprises five steps:

1. Continuous improvement
   Customers' demands on product quality constantly increase, and new solutions and methods are developed, often by competitors on the market. To be able to provide a competitive product, a company must strive to continuously improve one's own activities and products. The basic point of view is that there is always a way to achieve increased quality at a lower cost – the difficult part is to figure out how. This also includes the way the attitude that mistakes are not always negative, as long as they provide an opportunity to learn and improve.

2. Customer in focus
   Putting the customer's needs first implies to realise that quality is not a constant concept, but lies in the eye of the beholder, the customer. Getting to know the customer, and its expectations and needs is essential for companies and organisations. Market surveys, close customer relations and cooperating with customers in development of new products are methods which help understanding the customers.

3. Decisions based on correct information
   Changes in products and activities (or refraining from changes) should be based on facts, not results of random events or factors. This calls for the ability to retrieve, structure and analyse information. A common problem is that step 2, focusing on the customer, becomes a slogan rather than a reality, due to difficulties in getting relevant information about the customers.

[20] Bergman, p. 29.
[21] Bergman, p. 34.

4. Working in processes

A process is a number of connected activities that are constantly repeated. The process transforms inputs such as material or information to outputs, such as products or services. By identifying and describing a company's processes, and dividing them into main processes and supportive processes, more effective ways for a company to perform its activities can be found.

5. Creating conditions for participation

Successful quality assurance calls for staff that is engaged in the efforts for improvement. Staff that has a possibility to influence and get feedback of results will be more motivated and perform better, which ultimately results in higher quality.[22]

6.1.2 The PDCA- cycle

The plan – do – check – act (PDCA) cycle is a four-step model for carrying out a change, which should be repeated again and again for continuous improvement.

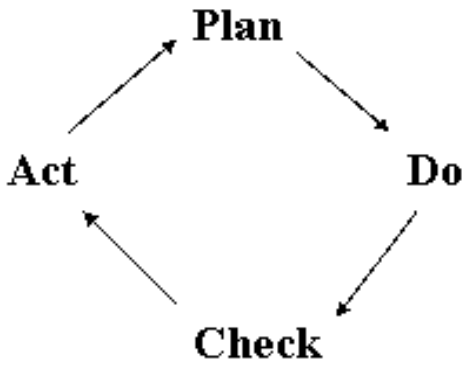

Figure 2. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle

The model can be used when starting a new project, when improving an existing procedure or design, or when implementing any change. The basic procedure when following the cycle can be described as follows.

1. Recognise an opportunity and plan a change/action.
2. Carry out a study and test the change.
3. Review the test, analyse the results and identify what was learned.
4. Take actions based on what was learned. If the action was not successful, go through the cycle again with a different plan. If it was successful, use the results and what was learned into wider changes and new improvements.[23]

The PDCA-cycle can be applied to projects and project management. In the planning stage, the scope, objectives and outputs of the projects is determined. The project team should be formed, sequence of activities and tasks be planned and required

[22] Bergman, p. 34-44.
[23] N Tague, *The Quality Toolbox,* ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, 2004, p. 390.

resources determined. In the next do-stage, the plans are implemented and the outputs delivered. This is followed by the check-stage, where the project is monitored, status of the outputs reviewed and the results measured. At the final stage, act, the information from the check-stage is evaluated, lessons learned are discussed and decisions on future actions taken.[24]

6.2 Quality of services

Services differ from products in several ways, which results in differences in managing quality for them. A few common differences between services and products are:

- Services are not a concrete as products and it may not be as easy to describe the content of a service as of a product.
- The customer is often participating in developing the service.
- A service is consumed at the same time as it is manufactured; it can not be stored or transported.
- The customer does not become owner of a physical object after the purchase.
- A service can not be tested before purchase.

These differences call for other priorities when it comes to measuring and managing the quality of a service rather than a product. The overall quality of a service is determined by the customer's satisfaction, as with a product. However, since the service may not be as easy to describe a product's, the service provider's ability to communicate and describe the service is an important part of its quality. That also relates to that the customer will take part in the planning of the service, hence a high quality service takes full account of the customer's needs and requests.[25] In developmental projects, a special methodology has been developed to ensure the beneficiary's full participation in the planning process, the Logical Framework Approach, which is further described below.

Since the service cannot be tested before purchase, it is necessary to put extra energy into determining whether the service will be successful for the customer. A service provider of high quality need to have that ability.[26]

[24] R Westcott, Simplified Project Management for the Quality Professional, ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, 2004.p.11
[25] Bergman, p. 30.
[26] Tague, p 390.

6.3 Methods for quality assurance in development cooperation

There are two main methods within the development cooperation context which specifically serve quality assurance; the Logical Framework Approach which is a project planning tool, and the processes for monitoring and evaluating projects which serve both to improve project quality and increase customer satisfaction.

6.3.1 Logical Framework Approach

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) is a tool for objective-oriented project planning, which also may be used for implementation and evaluation of projects. It is based on the idea that the beneficiary assumes the main responsibility for planning the project, assisted by the donor, and thereby local ownership of the project is ensured.

In most projects, LFA is applied through participatory workshops, where the main participants are the project's local stakeholders. In the initial workshop the problem, activities, and expected outcomes of the project are analysed and discussed. A full objective-oriented project planning process is made in the following 9 steps:

1. Analysis of project context
2. Stakeholder analysis
3. Problem and situation analysis
4. Objectives analysis
5. Plan of activities
6. Resource planning
7. Indicators / Measurement of results
8. Risk analysis and management
9. Analysis of assumptions

In practice, the project will be pinned down to a matrix – the logframe, which gives a simplified but structural overview of the project's activities, expected results, indicators and linkages between them.[27]

Sida encourages the use of the Logical Framework Approach in project planning, implementation and evaluation, since if properly used and adapted to existing conditions it will increase the quality of project[28]. In brief, the advantages of the method are that it can:

- Facilitate a dialogue between all stakeholders
- Offer a tool for identification of problems
- Contribute to clarifying the projects objectives and specifying activities
- Facilitate production of reports and evaluations
- Ensure that the ownership of the project ends up with the beneficiary

[27] K Örtengren, *The Logical Framework Approach*, Sida, Stockholm, 2003, p 5-11.
[28] *Sida at Work*, p.73.

- Make project implementations more efficient
- Improve conditions for relevance, feasibility and sustainability of the project [29]

LFA has similarities to Total Quality Management, especially regarding the concept of participation, which in development context often is referred to as ownership. TQM use the term for ensuring motivated staff, while in LFA the objective is local ownership, meaning cooperating partners in the project country which are engaged and take responsibility for the project.[30]

The method has also been criticised, mainly because of to much simplifications and that it rests on a very linear logic which does not agree with the situations in development projects. However, the heaviest criticism is not directed to the LFA itself, but to the way it is being used. Many organisations use the logical framework matrix to give a structured overview of the project, but do not consider the participative processes that make the LFA an approach, not only a way to structure information.[31]

6.3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

To monitor and evaluate a project are important in result-oriented project management. Monitoring refers to keeping continuous records of project progress while evaluations aim to provide in-depth analysis of the project's design, implementation and results. The two are interdependent and information from monitoring activities is important, if not necessary, for evaluations.[32]

Monitoring and evaluation serve three purposes:

- problem detection
- improving project quality and results
- providing information on results (accountability to client)

A system for monitoring and evaluation should:

- support a learning environment, to enable project improvement.
- be integrated into every day work
- be simple, rather than overambitious
- be participatory, engaging local stakeholders in the process.[33]

Monitoring and evaluation processes are related to the Logical Framework Approach in the sense that while following the LFA, indicators for the project shall be developed. The indicators should be designed to measure results of projects activities, as well as project advancement towards outcomes and if possible the overall goal.[34] Relevant indicators that do not need large resources to be measured are difficult to

[29] Örtengren, p. 24.
[30] K Örtengren, Sida, 061109
[31] O Bakewell, *Use and abuse of the LFA*, Sida, Stockholm, 2005. p 10.
[32] S Molund & G Schill, *Looking Back, Moving Forward*, Sida, Stockholm, 2004, p. 10.
[33] I Guijt & J Woodhill, *A Guide for Project M&E*, IFAD, New York, 2002, p 20-24.
[34] Örtengren, p. 15.

develop. For an indicator to be useful there is also a need to decide who is responsible for its measurement, a time plan and allocation of resources for it.[35]

Monitoring and evaluation can be problematic and time-consuming, which is why it should be kept as simple as possible. Common problems that may occur are:

- inadequate understanding of and attention to M&E in project design
- lack of commitment to monitoring by project staff and implementing partners
- monitoring is seen as an obligation imposed from the outside
- poor quality information produced through monitoring focused on physical and financial aspects instead of outcome and effect
- very few internal reviews or ongoing evaluations
- overambitious monitoring systems
- poor use of participatory and qualitative M&E methods, due to limited capacity
- M&E staff with insufficient experience and skill
- external evaluations being to separated from internal monitoring activities.[36]

However, properly managed monitoring & evaluation routines provides an effective method for improve project results in the long run.[37]

[35] C Ohlsson, 061012
[36] Guijt, p. 5.
[37] Guijt, p. 8.

7 Project Management Manual for NIRAS IC

The following chapter is a description of the project management manual that was developed for NIRAS International Consulting in Stockholm. Below is a brief description of the different sections, the full manual is provided in an annex.

The manual is structured in the following way:

- Inception period and project start-up
- Communication
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Phase out and project close-down
- Templates for reports and Term of Reference

The first section, inception period and project start-up, consist of a number of checklists with references to the other sections which contain more text.

7.1 Inception period

As the inception period is the start up of the project, it is an intense and demanding period, which is crucial for successful project implementation. Even though documents such as Terms of Reference and contracts between the stakeholders state responsibilities and expectations, these might need to be clarified and discussed. Routines, relationships and roles are formed whether deliberately controlled or not and it is therefore important that the project manager addresses such issues during meetings in the inception period. There are also a number of practicalities that need to be taken care of during project start up.

In the manual, the section for the inception period contains several checklists for meetings and workshops to be held in the inception period, as well as a few other important aspects during project start-up.

7.1.1 Practical issues for project start up

In the very beginning of the project there are a number of practical issues that must be arranged for, such as accommodation, office and transportation, which are listed in a checklist.

7.1.2 Client (Sida) and beneficiary

Even though Sida is the funding organisation and therefore the Client, the relationship and division of responsibilities between Sida and the beneficiary in the project country may differ. Sida strives to hand over as much responsibility as possible to the beneficiary to ensure local project ownership.

Routines for reporting, communication, etc. to the client and/or beneficiary shall therefore be clarified in a meeting. A checklist for such a meeting is provided in the manual.

7.1.3 Team leader and project team

The team leader and other project staff are representatives of NIRAS in the project country. They must be briefed on NIRAS code of conduct (such as no corruption) and routines and practises regarding the project itself.

In the Leningrad project it was discovered that a lot would have been gained if international staff would have met in Sweden prior to departing to Leningrad, to discuss expectations on the project.[38]

7.1.4 Joint venture partner

In the case of a partner cooperating with NIRAS in the implementation of the project, the relationship and expectations on them may need to be clarified.

7.1.5 LFA-workshop

The Logical Framework Approach is used as a planning tool and helps to ensure local ownership of the project. A workshop is held during the inception period, with project staff and other stakeholders.

The workshop may be problematic because of the material provided by Sida before project start-up. Since the idea of LFA is to engage local participants in the planning process, beginning to use the method when the project has already started contradicts the fundamental ideas of the approach. This makes it difficult for NIRAS to use LFA to its full potential.[39]

The workshop can be more effective if the first part of it is run with participants who are directly involved in the project, and other stakeholders are invited for the second part only. This was successfully done in the project in Leningrad.[40]

7.1.6 Terms of reference

Terms of references or a work description should be prepared for project staff, both international and national. A template is annexed to the manual.

7.1.7 Inception report

A report is to be handed in to Sida at the end of the inception period. The report is frequently handed in to late due to the heavy workload in the inception period, hence completing the report must be planned for well in advance. A template is annexed to the manual.

[38] N Bergman, NIRAS, 061012
[39] K Örtengren, Sida, 061109
[40] N Bergman, NIRAS 061114

7.2 Communication

Well functioning communication is naturally essential to any successful project. Bottlenecks that hinder project advancement may arise due to poor communication and the fact that the project manager and the client are based in Stockholm while project operations are being carried out in any country in the world puts greater pressure on close communication. If assumed that the best things would be if the project manager could visit the project on a daily basis, which of course is impossible, then the physical absence of the project manager must be compensated through intense communication.

The manual recommends that a plan for communication is prepared for each project, with strategies for internal as well as external communication. The project manual includes instruction for communication regarding the following topics.

7.2.1 Internal and external information

The difference between information that are meant for internal use only and external information should be distinguished, since spreading for example unapproved reports may damage the project.
In the project in Macedonia, a problem arose because there was no common view on the distinction between internal and external information. The problem could possibly have been avoided if there had been a discussion on the matter beforehand.[41]

7.2.2 Project management and project team meetings

A schedule and possibly a standard agenda should be set for meetings between team leader and project manager (in person and by phone/skype) and project meetings handled by the team leader.

7.2.3 Joint venture partner

In case of a partner cooperating with NIRAS, communication and reporting practises should be set. The need for this will depend on the size of the partner's task in the project.
An example of communication difficulties with a partner is in the project in Macedonia where it resulted in severely delayed payments of salaries to project staff.[42]

7.2.4 Information sharing

Information, such as reports and other documents need to be available to both the local project staff, the team leader in Sweden and possible other international consultants.
In the seed-projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, there have been discussions or developing a project website with such information, as a solution to the problem of international availability[43].

[41] A Sandell, NIRAS, 061012
[42] A Sandell, NIRAS 061114
[43] K Mastroianni, NIRAS, 060910

7.2.5 Client and beneficiary

To ensure customer satisfaction, communication to the client and beneficiary is essential, and especially to be able to communicate the correct information at the right time, depending on the client and beneficiary's role in the given project.

7.2.6 Language problems

The language barrier may be a bottle neck for the project. Enough translator availability should be ensured, and it should also be decided what documents are to be translated into the local language(s) if this is not stated in the terms of references. Project stall shall as far as possible be fluent in English.

In the Leningrad-project, there have been communication difficulties because of the staff not speaking English well enough. The project budget does not permit an international team leader, who would normally be fluent in both Russian and English. In such a situation, attention to language aspects is extra important.[44]

7.2.7 Documentation

Documentation is communication of project results and methods to future projects, and thereby enabling others to learn from the project. Such information should be made as available as possible, and both the digital and paper archive should be cleaned from unnecessary documents.

7.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) are often overlooked in the projects, it is not urgent and there always seem to be something more important to consider. This is especially true in the inception period, the most demanding time of the project, which is when the monitoring processes ideally should begin. This call for M&E activities that are simple and easily performed, since an overambitious system is more likely to fail. It is also important that the responsibility is spread among all project staff, M&E should be a natural part of all project activities – not the responsibility of the project manager alone.

The manual covers the following areas of Monitoring and Evaluation:

- *Problem detection*
  Simple factors which indicate that a problem may exist in the project provide an early warning system. Such an indicator may be that reports are frequently not handed in on time.
- *Assumptions*
  Project advancement depends on a set of assumptions which are outside of project control, such a political and economical stability, which should be monitored.

[44] N Bergman, NIRAS, 061114

- *LFA-indicators*
  Part of the Logical Framework Approach is developing a set of indicators to measure project results. They may need to be adjusted, or complemented with practical routines for measurement. Indicators also need to be measured at the very start, (or rather before) project activities begin, in order to have a baseline to compare results to. In the project in Leningrad, the first measurements were done too late, making it difficult to measure outcomes of the project.[45]
- *Short-term consultants*
  Short-term consultants provide professional expertise for their mission in the project, but their experience is also valuable for evaluating the project.
- *Sida's overall goals*
  Besides impact on the project objectives, there may be other side-effects in line with Sida's goals, such as human rights, gender equality and sustainability.

7.4 Corrective measures

If a problem arises there should be follow-up mechanism to find a solution, and ensure that the project is affected as little as possible. Such mechanisms include studying the problem to find cause and solution, intensive support, detailed monitoring, and negotiation. If the problem is caused by a staff member, the ultimate mechanism is to give warnings.

In the project in Macedonia, a conflict with the Team Leader forced an extra meeting with him in Sweden to negotiate a solution and discuss future expectations.[46]

7.5 Project phase out and close down

Even though sustainability should be an integrated part of the project since day one of the planning process, the phase out period offers a last chance for efforts to maximise sustainable effects of the project. Capacity building, handing over responsibility to local organisations, and finding continuous financing of project activities are examples of what can be done.

The close down of the project also requires a number of practicalities, similar to project start-up. Actions such as handing over inventories owned by the project, ending contracts, final meetings etc. are listed in the manual.

7.6 Templates

Results are mainly presented to Sida in progress reports, which make them important for ensuring customer satisfaction. The manual includes three templates for reports, which are built on the same structure so that the same material is easily transferred

[45] N Bergman, 061012
[46] A Sandell, 061012

between the different kinds of reports. They are also design to follow the Logical Framework Approach as much as possible. There are templates for short-term consultant report, inception report and progress report. By using the same standard for reports in all projects, a uniform image is communicated to the client, and the templates also provide a guarantee for that important information is not left out. The manual also include a template for writing Terms of References for project staff.

7.7 Updating the manual

The final section of the manual covers the importance of updating the manual, and the linkage between updating and using it. It also states instructions for how the manual should be stored and administered.

8 Discussion

It is part of the manual's nature that it will never be completely finished, since if it is it will become out of date. It must continuously be updated and improved to be of use for project managers and others at NIRAS.

It will be a challenge for NIRAS to put the manual in use, and for the project managers to get in the habit of updating it. The most accessible part of the manual is the checklists, which are easy to use and follow. Other parts, such as developing a system for monitoring and evaluation and putting that in use demands more time and energy from the project management and staff, and the results are in a longer perspective and will not be as obvious.

Time will probably show that parts of the manual are not being used because they are less important, and as such they will become obsolete. This is not a problem, rather a natural part in the process of developing a manual. So far, the project manual has not been tested in a real project, it is rather a desk product derived from the project managers' earlier experiences and opinions on good project management. Therefore, when the manual is put in use a need may arise for modifications, removals and most probably amendments of parts that were originally not included, either because they were not thought of, or lack of time.

During the process of developing the manual, the following suggestions for the manual came up, but were not prioritised to be included in the version:

- *Checklist for project manager's visit to project country*
  When a visit to the project country is conducted it is normally for a specific mission, but there are a number of things that either should or may be done on every visit, such as monitoring check-ups, stakeholder visits, reporting etc.

- *Team leader manual*
  Parts of this manual are of interest also for team leaders (working in the project country), and parts should not be accessible for them. It would be useful to have a specific manual for team leaders, which would give them detailed instructions in writing. However, the content of such a manual would vary a lot depending on project characteristics.

- *Relation to the offices in Helsinki and Copenhagen*
  The operations in Stockholm have a lot in common with those carried out by NIRAS IC in Finland and Denmark. A similar project manual has already been developed for the office in Helsinki, which even though is it suited for projects funded by the Finish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided some inspiration and ideas for the Stockholm manual.
  To increase cooperation, exchange of experiences and competence between the offices, a common manual for all offices could be at help, perhaps with one common part and other parts being individually adapted to each office's needs.

- *Project implementation manual*
  A concept that has been used in the Helsinki office is to develop a project implementation manual for each project, containing routines and practises specifically adjusted for the individual project. If such procedures were to be used by the office in Stockholm as well, it would be useful if the general project manual contained templates and instructions.

As already mentioned, for project managers to accept and engage in the further development of the manual will prove a challenge. One future of the manual, which may be both positive and negative, is that it is difficult to start using it in an ongoing project. The checklists are mostly useful in the inception period and to start new routines for processes such as monitoring & evaluation in an ongoing project is not feasible.

This results in that the manual is likely not to be used until NIRAS IC begins to work on a new project funded by Sida. If that takes too much time, there is a risk that the manual will be forgotten. Parts of the manual, such as templates for reports, can be used in all ongoing projects without problems.

9 Conclusions and recommendations

Quality assurance practices include a number of methods and strategies, such as Total Quality Management and the Logical Framework Approach, as described in chapter 5. The project manual will be a tool for NIRAS to assist implementing such methods in the projects.

One of the main points of departure for quality assurance is that quality should be ensured as a preventive measure, by improving and adjusting activities aiming to prevent mistakes and errors to happen in the first place. This as apposed to finding corrective actions as a result of an error. Transferred to implementing development projects it could mean ensuring that good routines are established in the start-up of the project, and clarifying roles and responsibilities to avoid future confusions. The manual instructs project managers to go over such issues with all parties involved in the project in the inception period, and provide checklists for such meetings so that nothing is forgotten.

The meetings in the inception period shall clarifye the roles of Sida and the beneficiary in the project, in terms of for example accountability, reporting and communication. This will assist in ensuring their satisfaction, and working towards focusing on the customer which is one of the four steps of the Total Quality Management (TQM) strategy. The second step of the strategy is to strive for continuous improvements. Monitoring and evaluation processes as stated in the manual will create a learning environment and promote improvements in the projects. Proper monitoring and evaluation activities will also provide valuable information about the project, which is essential for making decisions of changes in project activities. That decisions are to be based on correct information is the third step of TQM.

Using the Logical Framework Approach promotes local responsibility, engagement and participation in the project, the fifth step in TQM. Local ownership creates more motivated cooperation partners in the project country, and will lead to better results for the project. The manual gives instructions for the opening LFA-workshop, as well as how to use LFA-indicators in monitoring and evaluation. The TQM-method refers to engaged and motivated co-workers, which for NIRAS AB would be the staff in the Stockholm office, but the same ideas can be applied to the project itself.

The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle used for continuous improvements has clear similarities to the project cycle in development projects at NIRAS, even though NIRAS is mostly active in the Do and Check phases. However, it should be a priority to take as much part as possible in both the Plan and Act phases. This would give NIRAS a chance to get engaged in future projects and thereby improving the chances of winning the tendering process for them.

There are plenty of way in which the manual could have been designed differently, and plenty of material which could be added to it. One way would have been to focus more on the needs and views of the team leader in the project country, who is directly affected by the way the project is managed by the project manager. However, since the views of one Team Leader to another differs even more than the setup of different projects, using information from Team Leaders would risk making the manual to specifically adapted to one type of project.

The project manual aims to improve quality assurance for the internal quality of the projects and the implementation of them, not the company's quality assurance activities in its entirety. Naturally they are related, and if monitoring and evaluation in a project brings an idea of an improvement, that can lead to an improvement on a higher level in the company as well. One of the most important roles of the manual is also to gather and communicate the staffs' experiences and competences. A new knowledge from a lesson learned by one of the project managers should as far as possible be shared to the colleagues, and the manual has the potential to assist that process.

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PROJECT MANAGEMENT MANUAL

For the home office

NIRAS / Scanagri AB
Stockholm
2006-12-06

1. INTRODUCTION 3
1.1. The project management manual 3
2. INCEPTION PERIOD 4
2.1. Practical issues during the inception period 4
2.2. Meeting with the Client/Beneficiary 4
2.3. Team leader meeting 5
2.4. Joint venture partner 6
2.5. LFA – workshop 6
2.6. Terms of Reference 8
2.7. The inception report 8
3. COMMUNICATION 8
3.1. Internal - External Communication 8
3.2. Project management and project team meetings 9
3.3. Joint venture partner 9
3.4. Information sharing 10
3.5. Steering Committee 10
3.6. Sida and beneficiary 10
3.7. Other stakeholders and spreading the word 11
3.8. Language problems 11
3.9. Documentation 11
4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION 12
4.1. Problem detection 12
4.2. Assumptions 12
4.3. LFA-indicators 13
Baseline 13
4.4. Short-term consultants 13
4.5. Sida's overall goals 13
5. CORRECTIVE MEASURES 14
6. PROJECT PHASE OUT AND CLOSE DOWN 14
6.1. Phase out 15
6.2. Project close-down checklist 15
7. TEMPLATES 16
8. UPDATING THE MANUAL 16

Annex I Template for ToR for short term consultants
Annex II Template for short term consultants report
Annex III Template for inception report
Annex IV Template for progress report

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of quality assurance is to ensure that the right things are being done, and being done in the right way, at the right time. It is based on the idea that every part of a process, such as decision-making, implementation or administration is performed according to best available practice. Even though one of the goals is to avoid unnecessary work, quality assurance can be time and energy consuming, which is motivated by the understanding that *spending a little time and energy now, will prevent having to spend a lot in the future.*

Project management, in the development cooperation context, refers to the support to project activities and is carried out both in the project country and in the home office. The objective of project management is to ensure high quality project performance, and therefore quality assurance should be a cross-cutting theme in all aspects of project management. High quality management provides conditions for reaching expected outcomes, is cost-efficient, ensures Client satisfaction for both donor and beneficiary, and enables continuous learning at individual and organisational level.

1.1. The project management manual

This manual is developed to assist project managers at the home office as a guide for technical backstopping activities but may selectively be useful to team leaders and other staff as well. The manual encompasses the implementation part of the project cycle, from the start of the inception period to the final day of the project.

The manual is structured in the following way:

- Inception period and project start-up
- Communication
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Phase out and project close-down
- Templates for reports and Term of Reference

The manual is designed for projects funded by Sida and in accordance with their guidelines and instructions, to ensure that they are taken into account both in the project country and in the home office. However, it may also be selectively applicable to projects funded by other donors.

The text has deliberately been kept brief to facilitate application. On certain subjects, references are given to documents with further information.

Every project has different conditions and prerequisites and the manual is not designed to be followed unconditionally, it must rather be adjusted to fit each project. The manual itself cannot change or improve project management – it is only a tool that may be used by project managers as a guideline to ensure quality assurance.

2. INCEPTION PERIOD

Routines for project implementation and management are set during the inception period. It is therefore important that NIRAS (via the project manager), the Client, team leader, beneficiary and possible joint venture partner agree upon practices at project start-up that will ensure smooth project implementation throughout the entire project. Clarification of roles and responsibilities are of specific importance.

There are also a number of practicalities that must be handled during the inception period to prevent bottlenecks and hindrance to project advancement. Through proper preparations and division of responsibilities beforehand, problematic situations can be avoided.

2.1. Practical issues during the inception period

Much of the following can be arranged for, or at least prepared for before project start-up. A local contact which is knowledgeable and can prepare different options for resolving these issues before the team leader and/or project manager arrives will save valuable time and energy.

- Visa requirements (concerning all international staff)
- Transport / car in project country
- Accommodation for long-term staff
- Office, including furniture, computers, Internet, telephones etc
- Set up list of project assets and equipment
- Contract additional local personnel
- Ensure availability of translators
- Insurance (office, accommodation, car, local staff)
- Medical care, hospital contacts in case of emergency
- List of important telephone numbers, including home country contacts for international personnel
- Pay visit to project related organisations
- Contact the Swedish embassy and embassies of long-term staff's countries of origin
- Inform media, other donors etc of project start-up.

2.2. Meeting with the Client/Beneficiary

Objective: To clarify issues which are not covered in the ToR, contracts or other instructions from the Client, in order to avoid problems and misunderstandings in the project. The Client in this sense may be Sida, an intermediate, the beneficiary, or a combination of them.

Sida's connection to the project may be both through the handling officer in Sweden, and the local Sida officer in the project country. The two of them must therefore either take part in the negotiations of the following issues, or at least be informed of what is decided.

Proposed agenda:

- Reporting practices
  Formats, approvals, timing, invoicing
- Timing of meetings
- Communication practices
  See section 3.6
- Short-term consultancies
  If additional to those specified in the contract
- Project Manager visits to project country
- Procurement policy
- Purchasing of equipment
- Allowance policy
- List of project assets and handing over at project close down
- Logical Framework Approach
  How was the logframe matrix developed? Was there a participative process?
- M&E
  Planned evaluations
- Phasing out – project sustainability
  See section 5
- Role of the Steering Committee
  What decisions is the Steering Committee authorized to take? How shall budget changes be handled?
- What kind of issues need Sida's involvement/advice/consultancy
- Division of responsibility between the Sida Desk Officer and the National Program Officer (NPO) in the beneficiary country

2.3. Team leader meeting

Objective: To ensure effective project start-up and mobilization of the team, as well as establishing good project management and administration routines in the field. The roles and responsibilities between the project and the home office should also be clarified before the project starts.

This meeting can be held in Sweden prior to departure or at the project managers first visit to the project. If possible, it is useful if the meeting is attended by other members of the project team. The decisions should be recorded in writing and communicated to all concerned members of the project team.

Proposed agenda:

- NIRAS company briefing
- The project
- LFA as a project planning tool
- Financial Administration
- Decision making
- Reporting
  Progress and financial reporting practices.
- Communication practices
  See section 3
- Procurement
- Contracts
- Fixed assets register
- Division of tasks and responsibilities
- Monitoring & Evaluation
  See section 4
- Phasing out – project sustainability
  See section 5
- Inception report
- Sida's goals and how they relate to the project
- Sida's code of conduct
- NIRAS Business Integrity Management System

2.4. Joint venture partner

In the case of a partner cooperating with NIRAS in the implementation of the project, the relationship and expectations on them may need to be clarified, as a complement to the Joint Venture Agreement. Division of responsibilities, communication and reporting should be addressed but depending on the nature of the partnership and the extent of the partner's role, the list for the team leader meeting may also be used for the meeting with the joint venture partner.

2.5. LFA – workshop

Objective: To have all project stakeholders agree on a common view on the project's activities, results and limitations and ensure the beneficiaries ownership, engagement and responsibility of the project. To introduce the Logical Framework Approach as a project planning tool and management tool that will be used throughout the project.

Comments:

- If the logframe matrix already has been done, consider how it was developed. Who participated? Is a workshop required? If yes, is its purpose to develop, modify or present the logframe?

- The moderator of the workshop should preferably not be one of the project staff members, since this will ensure that staff members and beneficiaries discuss at an equal level
- The workshop should take place at least one month before the end of the inception period to allow enough time for completing the inception report.
- Plan well in advance to ensure good attendance
- All project staff, Sida, beneficiary and steering committee should if possible attend the workshop
- Invite persons from universities and ministries that are not directly related to the project but can hold an advisory function for the project
- Keep the number of participants to a maximum of 24 to ensure good dialogue
- If the venue is large and the project structure allows it, divide the attendants into smaller groups to discuss some elements of the logframe (e.g. activities) for higher efficiency
- divide the attendants into smaller groups for higher efficiency
- Use a venue separate from participating organisations offices to reduce the level of disturbance and the risk of participants leaving in the middle of the workshop in order to attend other tasks
- To use the time as effectively as possible, focus on analysing the problem, the results, and plan of activities during the workshop. Resource planning, indicators and risk analysis can be prepared by the project team after the workshop. Make sure that the full group gets a chance to review the document afterwards.
- End the workshop by planning for how and when the LFA matrix is to be updated during the project.
- If there is no budget allocated for the workshop, make a plan for how to finance it, possibly by consulting Sida/beneficiary

The Logical Framework Approach does not end with the workshop. It is a tool that should be used through-out the project. The material produced at the workshop should be updated and the LFA matrix should be incorporated into monitoring & evaluation, reporting etc.

For further information and reading on LFA:
- The Logical Framework Approach, a summary of the theory behind the LFA method (2004), www.sida.se
- Guidelines for the application of LFA (Sida 1996) http://www.sida.se
- The use and abuse of the LFA (Sida 2005) http://www.sida.se

2.6. Terms of Reference

All project staff, including both national and international, long term and short term, should be given a description of duties and expectations on them during their assignment.

In the beginning of the project, it might prove difficult to write Terms of References for experts since the work plan and project set up may change during the inception period. For this reason, they can be prepared in a later stage of the project, but a better solution is to write temporary Terms of Reference's for the inception period, to clarify expectations on staff during project start-up.

A template to be used for Term of Reference is at section 6.1.

2.7. The inception report

The inception report is an important document for both the project itself and for the relationship and credibility towards the Client. The completion of the report is often problematic and time consuming, and it is frequently handed in too late. It is the responsibility of the team leader to write the report and the project manager is to provide support. However, it is a good idea to schedule the project manager's second visit to the end of the inception period to assist the team leader finishing the report.

Clarification of the responsibility for the report, and a time plan for completing the report should be set during the first days of the inception period.

A template to be used when writing the Inception Report is at section 6.3.

3. COMMUNICATION

A plan for project communication should be established for the project, stating what communication channels should be used, when, and for what type of information. The objective is to set good and effective routines for communication and information sharing already during the inception phase and the early stage of the implementation phase. The communication plan should include routines for meetings, communication by phone/skype, information sharing and external communication.

3.1. Internal and External information

It is important to distinguish between information that should be considered internal and external (official) information. Internal information should be kept within the boundaries of the project management or the project team. Examples of internal information are:

- Staff/personnel issues
- Contractual issues

- Minutes and reports before official submission

Spreading information such as an unapproved report may damage the project. Determining what is and is not internal information generally builds on common sense, but it is a good idea to discuss the issue with the project team to establish a common approach.

3.2. Project management and project team meetings

A schedule and possibly a standard agenda should be set for meetings between team leader and project manager (in person and by phone/skype) and project meetings handled by the team leader.

Communication between the team leader and project manager should be formalized at least during the inception period and first months of the project in order to secure good communication between the home office and the project from the beginning. A weekly phone/skype meeting, with a set agenda is recommended. If possible the deputy team leader and the co-project manager should also attend the meetings, to provide a wider base for input. An example of an agenda for such a meeting is:

1. *Report of implemented activities and deviations from plan*
2. *External contacts (Sida, beneficiary, cooperation partner, other projects etc.)*
3. *Problems encountered*
4. *Report of planned activities the coming next two weeks*
5. *Budgetary and administrative issues*
6. *Actions needed and division of tasks*
7. *Other issues*
8. *Time for next meeting*

Minutes should be recorded in writing.

The need for project management and project team meetings, and the level of formalization depends on the project set-up and the project staff. Adaptation to the individual project is necessary.

3.3. Joint venture partner

In the case of a joint venture partner in the project, it is a good idea to clarify their and the project manager's expectations on one another. Since the level of the partner's participation differs greatly from one project to another, so does the need for communication with them. Contact persons, and reporting practices should be established in the meeting mentioned in 2.4 to ensure smooth communication between NIRAS and the partner.

3.4. Information sharing

Information such as work plans, reports and templates should be made available to all staff in the project. This can be achieved in several ways; most important is that everyone is instructed how to store and retrieve information. Examples of solutions are:

- Intranet. This is usually the best option.
- Updated information is stored on a computer in the project office. Access to the documents must be ensured for the project manager.
- A project website where the documents are stored is a possible solution and has accessibility advantages, but will only work if all staff gets accustomed to use it and have internet access.

3.5. Steering Committee

The Steering Committee generally meets four times a year. Meetings need to be scheduled well in advance and materials for the meeting should be sent out to the participants a few weeks beforehand. Since the function of the Steering Committee may be very different from one project to another, so does the purpose of its meetings. Preparatory material may include:

- Invitation to the meeting
- Agenda for the meeting
- Minutes of the previous meeting
- Progress report to be approved
- Work plan or budget changes for approval
- Term of References for short term consultants
- Any other reports or issues for approval

During the meeting, responsibility for following up each decision made should be divided, and date for the next meeting should be set.

3.6. Client and beneficiary

To ensure customer satisfaction, communication with the Client is important both in Sweden and in the project country. Even though Sida is the financial donor, the communication partner might be Sida in Sweden, Sida in the project country, an intermediate for Sida, the beneficiary or any of them depending on the specific issue.

Who to communicate to is very much depending on the conditions in the project country. It is an objective of Sida to transfer responsibility to the field, and the project should therefore primarily communicate to the local representative. In some countries this is not adequate and frequent contact with the officer in Sweden is necessary.

The conditions for the relationship with the Client should be established in the inception period, with respect to:

- What type of issues/action need advice/approval from Sida?
- What type of issues should be handled by the Embassy/Sida representative in the project country?
- What is the role of the beneficiary?
- Who to contact at Sida (if not handling officer)?

3.7. Other stakeholders and spreading the word

Other stakeholders include ministries, universities, media, organizations, other donors etc. whose line of work relates to the project activities and overall goals. They may prove important for advice and contacts. Spreading news about the project activities will also help achieving sustainability since methods developed by the project will be adapted outside the project more easily. Press conferences, visits from universities, cooperation with organizations etc. will contribute.

Keeping a logbook of communication to stakeholders, with contact persons, and what was said facilitates the contact with stakeholders who are not communicated to on a day to day basis.

3.8. Language problems

Language issues are a potential problem for all projects, which may restrain project progress. The Terms of Reference normally states a number of documents that must be translated according to the contract. It should commonly be decided if any additional documents are to be translated to ensure that important information is accessible to everyone. The need for translators may vary during the different stages of the project. It should be made sure that there is enough translation manpower available if the need arises, to ensure that language problems do not limit project progress.

3.9. Documentation

Proper documentation is important to ensure easy access of information during project implementation, and is also essential in case of the project manager being replaced.

Digital documentation should follow the structure of the template folder for project implementation available on the G:, the common disc on the NIRAS intranet. When a report is finalized, earlier versions of the same report should be deleted.

At project close down, both the digital and physical archive should be cleaned and only contain necessary information. One copy of each report is enough.

For further reading on communication:
- Dialogue and Strategic Communication in Development Cooperation (2006), http:// www.sida.se

4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation are important aspects of project management quality assurance, as a means of ensuring results and customer satisfaction. The two aspects are intertwined and complement each other, but generally monitoring comprises the project's continuous internal auditing, while evaluation refers to episodic externals reviews. Information from monitoring activities is important, if not necessary, for evaluations.

Monitoring and evaluating a project serves three purposes:

- Early detection of problems and issues
- Improving the quality of the project
- Providing information to show project impact and results (accountability)

To secure these purposes, a plan for M&E should be developed for each project with routines and division of responsibilities for the monitoring process.

4.1. Problem detection

To ensure early detection of problems in project implementation a set of warning indicators should be specified for the project, in respect of project activities and objectives. A critical level, after which the project starts to be seriously affected, should be defined. If an indicator reaches the critical level, home office need to carry out corrective measures to ensure that project advancement is not compromised.

The set of warning indicators may include:

- Progress reports show that the project activities are not advancing according to schedule.
- Team Leader is unable to provide sufficient answers to questions regarding project advancement.
- Meetings with the Project Team or implementing organizations are not held on schedule; internal teamwork is not satisfactory.
- Reports and other documents are not delivered according to agreed deadlines.
- Indicators are not followed up properly.

4.2. Assumptions

The progress of the project is often depending on a set of assumptions, which are outside of project control, are fulfilled. If one or several of these assumptions differ from what is assumed, it may cause damage to the project. Therefore, is it important to monitor the status of the assumptions, to analyse what factors affects them and in some cases, to have a plan for how to adapt project activities in the case of one or more assumptions not being fulfilled.

4.3. LFA-indicators

A simple approach for creating a basic system for project monitoring is to use the indicators in the LFA-matrix. They are designed to show achievements and progress in reaching the project objectives and outputs. A way of monitoring the project in the field is developed by adding detailed instructions on how the indicators are to be measured. This should be an integrated part of the LFA-process. Questions that need to be answered for each indicator are:

- What information is necessary to measure the indicator?
- How often should the indicator be measured?
- Who is responsible?
- What scale is used? (yes/no, floating)
- Is there a critical level which needs actions?

Analysing these questions can lead to changes of indicators, due to them being impossible or too costly to measure, irrelevant etc. If this is the case, new indicators should be developed as replacement.

Baseline

A baseline provides information on the status of the indicators before the project activities start, which makes it possible to compare the progress with the initial conditions. A baseline may be more comprehensive than merely the present level of the indicators, and include for example a discussion of development of the indicator in the years up to project start-up. It may also be very simple; the first measurement of the indicator is often adequate as a baseline. For some indicators it may prove impossible or unnecessary to do a baseline. A relevant question to ask may also be how the status of the indicator would have developed if the project activities were not carried out.

4.4. Short-term consultants

Short-term consultants are a useful mean of evaluating the project, as they are knowledgeable and come from outside the project environment with “open eyes”. They should be requested to provide input on how to improve project activities and outcome. By having them use the report template available at 6.2 when writing mission reports, they are to analyze the activities and results of their mission based on the LFA matrix.

4.5. Sida’s overall goals

The overall goal of Swedish development cooperation is *to help create conditions that will enable poor people to improve their quality of life*, i.e. poverty alleviation. In addition, there are 8 central elements:

- Respect for human rights
- Democracy and good governance
- Gender equality
- Sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment

- Economic growth
- Social development and social security
- Conflict management and human security
- Global public goods

The project's indicators are aimed to measure progress towards the projects overall goal, for example economic growth. In addition there may be side effects that have positive impacts on other of the central elements. It is important to consider and measure possible side effects as well, and to present these to Sida.

For further reading on Monitoring and Evaluation:

- *Looking back, moving forward. Sida evaluation manual (2004), http://www.sida.se*
- *A guide for M&E, IFAD (2001), http://www.ifad.org*

5. CORRECTIVE MEASURES

If project proceeds according to plan and activities are executed on schedule, home office support is relatively easy. However, for quality management purposes there must also be clear follow-up mechanisms. Corrective measures are carried out in order to improve project implementation which is not progressing as it should. The proper actions are heavily depending on the context of the problem but general corrective measures are:

- Studying the basis of the problem in detail: why is the project not progressing?
- Provision of intensive support and guidance to the project from the home office
- Requesting monthly monitoring reports on specific issues
- Develop a detailed plan on how to carry out activities that are behind schedule, and if the limiting factors are external discuss the matter with the Client
- Making additional support visits to the project to provide backstopping and try to clear the problems
- If the problem is caused by one or some of the team members trying to solve it by means of negotiation
- An ultimate mechanism it to give the person in point a first warning, and if this does not help, up to two more. After three warnings the Client should be contacted and an appropriate way of proceeding agreed.

6. PROJECT PHASE OUT AND CLOSE DOWN

The objective of phase out and close down is to ensure a sustainable continuation of the project's impacts, and a smooth handling over of responsibility to local implementing organizations. By planning the close down in advance, administrational problems can be avoided. This phase should also include a reflection of the results of the project, and lessons that can be learned from it for future similar projects.

6.1. Phase out

Ensuring sustainability should be part of the project from the very beginning of the planning process, but it is also a good idea to start planning specifically for project phase out a few months in advance. Important points to consider throughout the project are:

- Capacity building and training of local personnel
- Local responsibility, possible other partner than the beneficiary
- What activities should continue after close-down, and how
- Possibilities for local financing of continuous project activity after close-down[1]
- Enabling legal framework that supports project activities and outcomes
- Spreading results and methods developed by the project

6.2. Project close-down checklist

Ending the project involves a number of practical issues that need to be handled, some of which need planning well in advance.

- Update inventory list of project assets and include what should happen to each item at project close-down.
- Archive and possible translation of documents in project country
- Archive documents in home office and clear the archive from unnecessary items. One copy of reports is enough, drafts should be removed
- Clean up the digital archive (G:) from drafts and other unnecessary material
- Payments of last invoices in the project country
- Set the final date for last possible day for withdrawal of checks from the bank
- Termination of contracts: employment, service, software licenses, leasing of machines, insurances, accounts, accommodation, office, electricity, water, telephone, internet
- Notice to local employees and preparation of letters of recommendation
- Last salaries and end-of-work compensations according to national laws
- Help consultants, experts and staff find other employment
- Last steering committee meeting
- Eventual wrap-up seminar, end of project activity
- Preparation of final report
- Information on project completion, press release
- Final accounts to the home office
- Final invoice to Sida
- Contract a person to check mail, payments etc. for 2-4 weeks after closing down
- Discuss the project and it’s results at the home office

7. TEMPLATES

Reports are the most important way to present results and progress to the Client, and are therefore essential to ensure customer satisfaction. By using the same format for reports, it is easier to compare one report to another, and the reader will learn to subtract the information more easily.

The following templates have been designed to follow a logical structure based on the Logical Framework Approach. They may be changed or amended to fit project needs, but if so, all project reports should still as far as possible follow the same format.

The following templates are available:

Annex I. Template for short term consultant ToR
Annex II. Template for short term consultant mission report
Annex III. Template for inception report
Annex IV. Template for progress report

8. UPDATING THE MANUAL

For this manual to be applicable it needs to be continuously updated and improved, and in a similar way, it cannot be updated unless it is used and tested in practice.

Currently in charge of the manual, with the responsibility to administer changes and amendments is *Mr. X*.

The manual will be stored and accessible to all office staff on the common area on the G-drive. When an update is to be made, the person making the changes should save the new version of the manual as a separate copy and point out the suggested changes to *Mr. X*. who either will make the change directly or bring it up in a monthly meeting if the change is extensive enough.

The fundamental idea of this manual is that the only eligible reason for a project manager to not use it is that it is incorrect. If this is the case, it is the responsibility of the project manager to ensure that the proper corrections are made to make it applicable for the next project manager in a similar situation.

Annex I

Template for Terms of Reference, short-term consultants.

Terms of Reference

NIRAS AB
Project:
Name of Expert:
Position:

1. Background / Introduction

Brief introduction to the project, including main activities and objectives.

2. Job description / Activities

Description of the activities and work expected from the consultant, based on the LFA-matrix.

3. Results / Outcome / Objective

Description of the results expected from the consultant's mission, based on the LFA-matrix.

4. Reporting

The expert should give a detailed report on the performed mission. The report shall follow the attached template. NIRAS consider short term experts as an important part of the monitoring and evaluation process, and request extra attention to questions of problems encountered during the mission and what can be done to improve project progress.

Annex II

REPORT TEMPLATE FOR SHORT-TERM CONSULTANTS

The following is suggested as a standard format for mission reports of Short-Term-Experts.

These may be amended if required and agreed with the Team Leader. Reports should avoid excessive verbiage but at the same time provide a full accurate reflection of the mission. All material must be submitted in both hard copy and electronic formats.

Notes
1. Avoid the use of personalisation and the use of, “I, we”, etc. Use “it” instead.
2. Where possible use positions, avoid the use of names except where there is no alternative.
3. Avoid the use of “will, must,” instead use “would, could, should” etc.
4. Keep the main report to ten pages or less. Use annexes to support the main text.
5. Unless tables contain calculations, present them in Word format. Excel tables should be imported into text as RTF.
6. Please note that all reports and documents should be in Arial 11 point.
7. Text to be left aligned, not justified.

The following structure is proposed.

Cover page
Title, Date
Name of Expert:
Category of Expert:
Duration of input: from date to date,
Number of working days:

Table of Contents

List of Annexes

A. Introduction
Describe the report and its context. (Including mission objectives)

B. Activities undertaken
Describe the performed activities with direct references to the activities in the LFA-matrix.

C. Results achieved
Describe and analyse the results with references to the outcomes/outputs sections in the LFA-matrix. What indicators have been affected by the activities and in what way?

Also give an overview of how the results relate to these key subjects:
- *poverty alleviation*

- *environmental impacts*
- *gender equality*
- *vulnerable groups*

E. Critical issues

Critical issues in terms of non-controllable and controllable factors affecting the project performance should be reported under this headline. Any deviations from the implementation plan and the contract are also important to report here. Identify any deviations in terms of time-schedule and other technical issues.

F. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions, recommendations or proposals of both technical and economic nature should be reported under this heading.

Annexes

All documents and tables supporting the main text.

1. Terms of Reference
2. Work programme and schedule
3. Lists of participants
4. Course contents
5. Training material
6. Evaluation forms
7. Persons met
8. Other subjects as necessary

Annex III

REPORT TEMPLATE FOR INCEPTION REPORT

The following is suggested as a standard format for inception reports

These may be amended or modified if required. Reports should avoid excessive verbiage but at the same time provide a full accurate reflection of the activities and outcomes of the inception period. All material must be submitted in both hard copy and electronic formats.

Notes
1. Avoid the use of personalisation and the use of, “I, we”, etc. Use “it” instead.
2. Where possible use positions, avoid the use of names except where there is no alternative.
3. Unless tables contain calculations, present them in Word format. Excel tables should be imported into text as RTF.
4. Please note that all reports and documents should be in Arial 11 point.
5. Text to be left aligned, not justified.

The following structure is proposed.

Cover page, Title, Date

Project Cover Sheet

Executive Summary

List of abbreviations

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
Describe the report and introduce the project.

2. Project context
- General facts about the project country and environment
- Project specific facts
- Other relevant projects

3. Activities during the Inception period
Describe the start-up of the project and activities performed.

4. Proposal for changes
Changes in the work plan and budget that has come up due to experiences during the inception period. Make sure that the reader understands why the changes are necessary.

5. The project
- Overall objective / outcomes

- Activities
- Assumptions and Risks
- Organisation
- The consultant
- The steering committee
- Stakeholder analysis

D. Work plan

E. Sustainability and Quality
- Participation
- Ownership
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Assumptions and Risks
- Reporting
- Relevance to Sida's overall goals

F. Suggestions and recommendations

Annexes
All documents and tables supporting the main text.

1. The Logical Framework Matrix
2. Work plan
3. Project Manning Schedule
4. Revised budget
5. Project organogram
6. Meeting schedules

Annex IV

REPORT TEMPLATE FOR PROGRESS REPORT

The following is suggested as a standard format for progress reports

These may be amended or modified if required. Reports should avoid excessive verbiage but at the same time provide a full accurate reflection of the activities and results during the period. All material must be submitted in both hard copy and electronic formats.

Notes
1. Avoid the use of personalisation and the use of, “I, we”, etc. Use “it” instead.
2. Where possible use positions, avoid the use of names except where there is no alternative.
3. Unless tables contain calculations, present them in Word format. Excel tables should be imported into text as RTF.
4. Please note that all reports and documents should be in Arial 11 point.
5. Text to be left aligned, not justified.

The following structure is proposed.

Cover page, Title, Period, Date

Project Cover Sheet

List of abbreviations

Table of Contents

Summary

A. Introduction
Describe the report and its context.

B. Project Context
Major political, legislative or economic events which are relevant for the project, including other donor initiatives. This section should be brief and give a general picture. More details about effects at project level and how to react should follow in the analytical part of the report.

B. Activities undertaken
Based on the work plan and the LFA-matrix, record what activities has and has not been performed compared to plan. The matrix itself should be annexed and the text should be descriptive with references to the matrix.

C. Results achieved
Based on the LFA-matrix, with references to the outputs/outcomes sections, describe the results over this period.

Also give an overview of how the results relate to the following key subjects:
- *poverty alleviation*
- *environmental impacts*
- *gender equality*
- *vulnerable groups*

E. Monitoring and evaluation
Presentation of indicator development from project start-up until present date, including explanatory comments if needed for better understanding.

Describe what monitoring and evaluation activities have been performed in the project during the period.

F. Critical issues and assumptions
Critical issues in terms of non-controllable and controllable factors affecting the project performance should be reported under this headline. If an assumption is no longer valid due to changed conditions this should be reported here (a table of assumptions status should be annexed). Any deviations from the implementation plan and the contract are also important tools for reporting under this headline. Identify any deviations in terms of time-schedule, manning-schedule or other technical issues.

G. Budget follow-up and cost efficiency
This section should be built on the financial reports, but not duplicate it. It is the link between the narrative and financial reporting.

H. Conclusions and recommendations
Identify success and failure and discuss major problems, risks and bottlenecks. Deviations from plan should be explained and actions to resolve possible problems described. Based on the Results and the M&E sections, the impact on the objectives of the project should be analyzed.

D. Upcoming period
Describe the planned activities and anticipations for the project during the upcoming period. If there have been changes in the work plan, give extra attention to these.

Annexes
All documents and tables supporting the main text.

1. LFA-matrix
2. Table of indicators
3. Table of assumptions status
4. Work plan for last period
5. Work plan for upcoming period