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## Assessment of the New Methodology for Regional Programmes



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Methodologies of Projects and  
Programmes of External  
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(SQ2M Project)

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**DRAFT**

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Regional Programmes**

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## Regional Programmes: Feedback from Contractors and Guidelines

In December 2008 Guidelines for Monitors for Regional Programmes (RPs) were produced and distributed by E5 to all LOT contractors. The rationale behind this was to establish a more methodological approach to the way in which Regional Programmes and Projects are monitored. The guidelines do not intend to redefine a new Project Cycle Management (PCM) approach to RP but only to establish some guidance on how to classify RPs, how to programme the monitoring missions, establish broadly when and how reports are written and generally to differentiate them from normal projects in a way that their geographic characteristics are not an obstacle for monitoring them given the wide spectrum variety of them in terms of their components' interdependence, size, area covered and complexity of interventions.

This paper intends to assess the application of the new methodology so far and whether the current guidelines (December 2008) have improved the way in which monitoring missions are carried out and not to evaluate if the RPs that have been monitored have improved as this would have been part of a more ample study where sample data would need to be larger to arrive to more concrete conclusions. The feedback has been primarily obtained from the current contractors (Asia, Central Asia, ENPI East, ENPI South, CMTP, Latin America, Africa and Caribbean and Pacific), the Handbook for Monitors 2009, and the Guidelines for Monitors for Regional Programmes.

**The overall findings** have been a mostly positive and welcome attitude towards the new guidelines with no overriding negative trends. The key recommendations in the guidelines have been largely applied, *inter alia*: to introduce an identification process alongside a desk phase study for certain RP, involve the EU Delegations and maintaining the same principles of the standard ROM methodology but taking into account their regional dimension.

Whilst the new way of dealing with RPs has been mostly welcome, there is an explicit demand for **flexibility** in terms of how missions are carried out, the reporting format, the length of missions and other variables which are characteristic of these types of projects compared to non-regional ones. This is particularly true as not only are projects and programmes very varied but the logistics behind each mission does not necessarily follow an established pattern if they are to be monitored as efficiently and appropriately as possible.

The RPs Guidelines established some key recommendations that addressed the Court of Auditors' recommendations ranging from maintaining the main principles of the ROM methodology, further involving the European Union Delegation staff, introducing a desk and identification phases, to clarifying the role of the Consolidated Regional Monitoring Report (MR). This last recommendation has proven to be less clear and has prompted flexibility in its approach.

Nevertheless, the Guidelines are pragmatic and do not call for creating new templates or adopting a new methodology specifically for RPs but instead adapting the existing tools and mechanisms to better encapsulate the information of ROM of RPs. This has been welcomed by the contractors and whilst the new desk and identification phases consume man hours, no new unfamiliar formats have been introduced. Overall the new approach has been embraced by all contractors with some relatively minor observations pointed below.

- 1. Terminology:** There is a discrepancy that needs to be clarified in terms of the breakdown of RPs. Whilst there is no argument about Regional Programmes being on top of the hierarchy of interventions, some contractors differ on the use of term “Projects” and “Components” (terms also used alternatively in the Guidelines and Handbook for Monitors). For the ones using the term “Projects” there are also “Components” which might merit being monitored (i.e. a visit to the country where that component is taking place). For the ones using “Components” as an immediate term after “Programme” the justification to look deeper into the intervention stops there (i.e. a visit to a country to look into the component=result level). Whilst there is no evidence that the quality of the reports suffers because of this, there is nonetheless a need to harmonise the term in order to compare to what depth programmes are being monitored.
- 2. Monitoring Team:** There is a wide spectre on the use of monitors for RP. Some contractors feel the importance and increased complexity of interventions and opt for senior experts whilst others use a combination of both leaving “easier” components to junior experts and the consolidated report and complex components to senior ones. Others need to be more pragmatic as costs to get to the projects can be disproportionately higher than other areas and combine local and European experts in order to balance expenses. This is more important as some if not most RPs tend to consume more human resources per report than normal projects and thus optimisation and efficiency of resources becomes more important. The key area in this aspect is the quality of reports from different contractors. Whilst it can be assumed that quality will be relatively homogeneous, the fact that price per report differs widely then the quality of the reports could be at stake. A matter to be observed in a future review (pay to monitors-monitors used vs. quality of reports).
- 3. Cost of reports:** The cost ranges from approximately €6,000 to €12,000. This spectrum is wide due to the way in which costs are counted. Some increase the amount of projects per mission, reducing the average costs, and some look into the programme, the projects and the components, delving into more details and increasing the costs per report with an assumed more in depth analysis of the programmes.
- 4. Reporting Format: How many reports?** The guidelines and Handbook for Monitors and Guidelines (4.4 Deliverables for RP) state there should be a MR (BCS and Project Synopsis (PS)) per country or per component (term needs to be clarified as this could result in some cases in several reports as there would be MRs for components of projects within a Programme) and that the MR can be two pages for the component/project and up to four for the consolidated one. However, whilst some contractors have stuck to this

formula, others have had to take a more flexible approach as it is noted that replication or duplication of information would almost inevitably take place. The decision to write less MR than what is stipulated in the Guidelines, it was reported, was not taken only by Team Leaders and monitors but in consensus with the Task Managers (TMs) at EU Delegations who stated they did not want to see the information repeated or partially repeated in two or more reports (some evidence of this is the fact that some TMs return only one RS for all the reports within a Programme).

The usefulness of several reports is open for debate as there would be cases where there is a clear advantage for producing one for every country/component/project monitored, especially when there are aspects about the implementing agency that could be addressed here. On the other hand the value added for other interventions is questionable and resources are not optimised as the information could be repetitive and instead a slightly larger MR could be produced (as some have done), encompassing the findings of all components, that would not call for an extra expense on the side of the Commission (paying an extra day for every MR, PS and BCS produced). Additionally, the need for producing a BCS for a consolidated report was also brought up more than once, claiming that the information would be too repetitive from the component/project BCS. Some contractors do not object to this and have adhered to the Guidelines. Again, a flexible approach was called for as it depends on many variables, too many known and unknown ones to be addressed practically in the Guidelines.

**5. How to classify reports:** The Guidelines are comprehensive about how to grade reports. However, the types of projects monitored in 2009 provided a mix reaction from contractors who still had doubts on the typology and therefore on the grading of the MRs and BCS. This is more accentuated when not all of them have produced consolidated reports. Despite guidelines being thorough covering all types of programmes there is disagreement on how the grading should be as stated in them. There was call to avoid “boxing” programmes and keeping a flexible approach in order to fit all different variables. Probably one alternative, already being suggested, is to focus the aggregate report on the implementation modality (who executes the project/implementation agency) and thus avoiding repetition.

**6. Typology use: Appropriate?:** Some call for a reduced amount of type of programmes arguing that C and D are too similar to distinguish and that maybe they could be consolidated in order to avoid confusion (1. Regional, 2. Regional and National, 3. Multi-country- National). On the other hand, others advocate expanding the typology to make room for projects which do not necessarily fit the existing criteria or lie in between them. In both instances calls for flexibility were made, either by fitting all projects into three categories or allowing more categories for the projects to fit in.

Typology as in the text of the Guidelines seems clear. What has prompted questions is the fact that some programmes do not entirely fit either categories C or D. One common comment of those advocating reducing the typology was to merge C and D into one as the difference between them was too faint to differentiate them.

**7. Monitoring According to Typology?** It seems that the criterion used so far has been an extension of the ongoing criteria. In other words the criteria specified in the Guidelines focusing primarily on intervention logic is not evidently demonstrated on the selection of projects monitored in 2009. This could be a result of many of the contractors not carrying out regional missions with the “new methodology” until the second half of the year thus not choosing the programmes on this criterion but rather as “normal” ongoing interventions. Moreover, the fact that the intervention logic typology is not 100% clear or has been declared as too narrow (avoiding boxing programmes in such a way that restricts the way they can be monitored) or too broad (too complex and the typology should be reduced) could indicate that there is no set methodological way of selecting programmes to be monitored. Another reason is that the Delegations select the projects to be monitored with criteria (projects not doing well, strategic projects, by theme, etc) other than typology for RPs. Moreover, even during a desk study phase it is still difficult to identify the typology of the programme and thus the logistics/planning behind it. Nevertheless this task is expected to become less and less burdensome as RPs are identified year on year and as they are monitored the right typology provided and used for subsequent missions. However, it is welcomed that the Guidelines provide besides Configuration A, B and C, “Other” that can be dealt with on case by case basis. Sometimes the true typology is revealed only during or after the field mission.

**8. Format of the missions:** What the new RP modality has provided as benefits for some contractors is the justification for missions to last longer. Some areas of the world (i.e. Pacific) are logistically challenging to get to. Moving around geographical areas can take up valuable resources. Logistics are extremely important for some areas and, in the case of the Pacific, they often combine regular missions with regional ones with 3 or more projects per mission. On the other hand, regions closer to Europe and/or with less complex logistics behind them tend to follow the traditional mission format. However, some contractors feel that after assessing the programme in question (mission structure) the Guidelines constrain them in the flexibility that should be applied as programmes and projects are very distinct from each other.

**9. Role of the EU Delegations:** Whilst it has been customary in previous years to attempt to visit the local Delegation of the country where a project is executed (not necessarily where it is being managed from) in reality this exercise is

complex as time is of essence and visiting the EU Delegation can take up one morning or afternoon from an already tight agenda. Whilst the Audit Report on the Financial Management of Regional Projects in DG AIDCO (18 June 2008, IAS) recommend that such action needs to be made in order to involve the Delegations in Regional programmes, in practice this might prove more difficult to implement.

**10. Benefits or value added:** Response Sheets (RPs): A sample (from 2009) was used to see any tendencies in the production of the RPs. It could be observed that most of the RSs have a positive feedback from the reports although less than a handful in the sample provided an answer to the very last question (Section IV- referring to, amongst other things, the organisation, ROM methodology, logistics of the mission...) thus blurring the link between the new format/approach and the overall feedback. On the other hand, a negative tendency observed of generating more than one (similar) report per programme is for the EU Del to write only one RS for the entire set of reports under the same programme. This has the disadvantage of reducing feedback on important/large components/projects which might otherwise receive constructive criticism or confirmation of mission reports.

So far RS are the only measurement instrument at hand. However these can be flawed as the field experience by the respondents is not always optimal and comments may not be suitable or objective. Another factor is that some project managers may feel a negative view (not favourable MR) of the project s/he overviews merits a negative response sheet.

From the contractor's point of view the value added lies on being able to produce conclusions on the aggregate information produced by being able to look at different aspects/components/projects of a programme. However, this value added being limited to certain projects and not so much to those which fall into the C or D categories as their lack of "regionality" converts them into "normal" projects which are bound together only by a title and a budget, but not by their operational interlinkages.

The comparative advantage of having the current Guidelines is the justification for extending missions when clearly a RP needs more time than the standard days allocated for a typical ongoing mission. In theory the reports should be more analytical as they can encompass the intervention more thoroughly and in turn provide a value added which otherwise would not materialise. Time alone will not provide the solution for an enhanced report but also thinking about the regional implications and the aggregate of the components/projects as a whole. Whilst a new approach is not needed to look into the RPs more efficiently their regionality and the larger picture will play an important role when examining them under the present flexible format. The



only way to appreciate this will be by doing an analysis of, not only feedback from Delegations but of the MRs themselves alongside the BCS.

### **Recommendations:**

Prior to 2008 there is little information on Regional Projects. The annual report does not mention them until 2009 and even then programmes are wrongly classified as projects (“384 programmes” were reported on). Prior to 2009 RP were monitored largely as ongoing or ex-post projects and in some instances a horizontal or “cross cutting issues” report was created. However, this was not always the case. Therefore, in order to present a statistical analysis where changes or tendencies from previous years could be appreciated more time needs to elapse to use 2009 as a baseline year.

**Reporting:** The largest predicament with RP is double counting their budget as the total budget is input and then (if available) the budget of the individual projects or components. At MR level the consolidated report should bear the total budget for the Programme. The Project or Component MR should either have the sub-budget or the total amount of the Programme if the former is not available. In either case, in no other place (internal database and CRIS) should the amounts written in the Project/Component budgets should be taken into consideration. At present the MR format has two options for inputting the “Project”: “Single Country / National Project or Multi Country / Regional Project”. Instead of the second option there should be an alternative second and an additional third. The second could be Multi Country / Regional Project/ Consolidated and the third Multi Country / Regional Project/ Project (or Component). In this manner CRIS does not have to be altered (hope) and it will be a field that can be used to ignore the Project/Component budgets altogether, avoiding double counting.

**Terminology:** a) The hierarchy between programme, project/component, component/results (Guidelines and Handbook for Monitor are ambiguous as well). This ambiguity has resource allocation consequences due to the depth with which a programme is monitored.

No **new methodology** is needed. But some core added value points of the Guidelines may not be making it to the MRs or BCS. They need to be addressed in each report as per the Guidelines:

- Regional integration: To what level if any, does the intervention or programme contribute to this end.
- Promotion and optimisation of common resources and capacities. How the Programme creates synergies or economies of scale that allows resources to be used more efficiently.

- Solving a common problem (water, environment, migrations...). If a common adverse situation exists (interlinked or isolated), how the intervention helps to mitigate or eradicate it.

Leave the **Typology** unchanged. It might be unclear to a couple of the contractors but it is almost May and some projects have already been “classified” with the present methodology. Any changes (to simplify it either by augmenting it or shorten it) would need to start on a new year and ideally with a new set of contracts for the LOTS.

NB (Link on page 9 should be: [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/delivering-aid/funding-instruments/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/delivering-aid/funding-instruments/index_en.htm))