

Proposal for ACORD Quality Assurance Process and the Policy and Programming External Review Group (PPERG)

This memo arises out of discussions about how to replace the work of the Policy and Evaluation Committee (PEC) which has not met since 1998. It describes how ACORD will take decisions about its programming in order to ensure the quality of its work. It then describes the roles of the Board and the PPERG. It is a draft that has been consulted on with members and presented to the Board in February. It has been noted by the Board and will be used as the basis for action.

1. Summary

Using the Excellence Model of Quality¹ as its starting point it is proposed to create a quality assurance process which looks at the areas of analysis, strategy, policy, procedures, and how these are reflected in the performance of individual thematic and geographical programmes. The quality assurance process is the responsibility of the executive while the Policy and Programming External Review Group will review its systems and findings.

2. Role of the Executive: managing the Quality Assurance System

Step 1. Definition of new 5 year strategic plan

Building on the 1997 -2001 Strategic Plan and the strategic reflection involved in the work of the 1998 Task Force, the 1999 discussion document and consultations throughout the change process, it is necessary to develop a new strategic plan for the period 2002 - 2006. The areas that need most work are:

- a) Analysis of Africa and the issues that it is facing
- b) Further clarification and articulation of ACORD's assumptions about development
- c) Review of what other institutions are doing
- d) Review of ACORD's distinctive contribution and niche
- e) Defining financial and funding targets and strategy
- f) Defining the ACORD programme portfolio including thematic and geographical clusters of programmes and parameters for new countries and for closing existing countries and programmes

Step 2. Annual Strategic Review

In May/June of each year the Strategic Plan should be reviewed in the light of the previous year's annual report. This would provide an occasion for ACORD staff at programme, country, regional and organisational levels to reflect on the previous year. These reflections would help to identify issues to be addressed in updates to the

¹ The Excellence Model is a self-assessment framework which recognises that there are many approaches to improving quality. The model has nine elements, each of which can be assessed to determine the organisation's progress towards achieving excellence. Five of the elements are **enablers** that are concerned with how the organisation is managed: Leadership, People Management, Policy and Strategy, Resources and Processes. The remaining four elements are **results** that are concerned with what the organisation achieves: People/staff Satisfaction, User Satisfaction, Impact on Society and Impact. (summary based on Managing without Profit, Mike Hudson, 1999 p 194-5)

Strategic Plan and in the following year's Annual Work Plan. The annual update to the Strategic Plan should review the targets included in it.

(The Annual Review could be complemented by the development of an Africa Committee that looks at issues affecting Africa and appropriate responses to them. This could be an occasion for joint action and alliancing with other agencies concerned about Africa)

Step 3. Annual Work Plan

In October / November of each year an Annual Work Plan for the following year should be developed and presented to the Board and Assembly. It should address issues identified in the Annual Review and the Strategic Plan and set out programming, HR and financial targets for the coming year.

Step 4. Strategic Plans for Thematic or Geographic clusters of programmes

Within the context of the organisational strategic plan we need to develop more specific plans for the major components of our programme. This could be for thematic programmes such as conflict, livelihoods, HIV/AIDS or civil society or it could be for geographical areas - probably larger than a single nation state. These plans would be approved by SMT and would provide further material for the PPERG.

Step 5. Approval of new Programmes

5.1. Approval of concept notes by relevant managers and advisors taking into account :

- a) local need
- b) relation to ACORD strategic plan and programme priorities
- c) financial, funding and management implications

.....as basis for giving permission to develop full programme. It should be noted that we in the process of evolving from 45 disparate and largely unconnected interventions to 8 to 12 "Area" programmes (each possibly including a number of interventions but with a common purpose that links the interventions of a programme together) and up to 5 thematic or cross cutting programmes.

5.2. Approval of full programme

Within the framework provided by the concept note the full programme document would be developed with all the necessary detail. This would be subject to full review by a group similar to the current internal Policy and Programming Review Committee (PPRC).

Step 6. Monitoring and Evaluation

6.1. Annual Review of geographical and thematic programmes. Many geographical programmes already conduct an annual review with the beneficiaries they are working with. This is rarely systematised / written up. The PPERG may want to consider the design of these annual reviews. We need to make proposals to staff on how they could be designed and implemented consistently across the ACORD programme to provide regular feedback on performance.

6.2. Evaluations and other sources of information. The review of thematic work will be based on material generated from the geographical programme reviews and triangulated with other formal and informal sources of information. The experience gained from the gender audit will be important in informing this area of practice.

6.3. Annual M&E Plan. An annual plan of monitoring and evaluation should be considered by the PPERG. It should give its views on the issues that ACORD needs to address as an organisation and on the evaluations of particular programmes that will provide the information necessary to address them. It will also take into account that ACORD uses participatory monitoring and evaluation processes as an important developmental tool.

Step 7. Stakeholder surveys.

A range of stakeholders are legitimately interested in ACORD's performance: beneficiaries, staff, peer NGO's in the North and South, governments as regulators in Africa and the UK, members, other allies and donors. Ideally ACORD would like to develop improved accountability to all these groups. This would have time and financial resource implications but we should develop a strategy to be able to deliver it within the coming year.

3. Role of the Board

The Board will:

- a) Approve the Strategic Plan
- b) Review performance against the objectives defined in the strategic plan. This would, if necessary, result in updates to the strategic plan
- c) Approve the annual organisational work plan
- d) Recommend issues that Board sub-committees or the executive should follow up

4. Role of the PPERG - Policy and Programming External Review Group

The purpose of the PPERG will be to provide members, other allies and donors with an external view of the quality of ACORD's work.

The PPERG will:

- a) Discuss and give advice on evaluations and their follow up
- b) discuss and provide external advice on important policy documents including the annual monitoring and evaluation plan
- c) provide advice on how the processes of quality assurance and the content of our programming could be improved

5. Membership and Timing of the PPERG

The PPERG would continue to be made up of external resource people with experience of assessing quality issues and who share ACORD's mission. It will involve members of the Board or Assembly who are interested in this area and others from academia, peer organisations and the diaspora. Ideally the PPERG would involve members from Africa, Europe and Canada.

The committee will include a very limited number of staff (3?) including, costs permitting, a senior person responsible for any programme being reviewed. The reason for keeping the number of ACORD staff limited is to acknowledge that this is primarily a forum providing external advice. The internal learning of programmes, countries and regions will come as they hold their own quality review meetings to deal with programme specific issues. Thematic meetings will be organised as necessary to address cross cutting issues.

The PPERG would initially plan to meet once per year, possibly in the last quarter of the year so that it could input into plans for the following year.

6. Next Steps

6.1. Planning for first PPERG meeting in mid 2001.

7. Conclusion

As recognised by the Assembly, ACORD has a large number of things that it is trying to change at once. The above framework will take some time to implement fully but having the whole thing defined will help to guide that implementation process over the next couple of years.

David Waller
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