

# PH Annex 7b:

## Guidance Note for Annual Reviews

The DRC Planning and Reporting Framework (PRF) includes a requirement of undertaking Annual Reviews (AR) at the (country) programme level. The responsibility for preparing and convening the Annual Review rests with the Programme Management and the HQ Head of Unit, with support from the Operations and Policy Support Unit (OPSU) at DRC HQ.

In its essence, the Annual Review must be understood as a three-phased process consisting of:

- A) Preparation (at least 3 months before B)
- B) The AR workshop itself and
- C) Processing the required outputs (maximum 1 month after B).

*The present guidance note is written for those responsible for planning and facilitating the entire Annual Review process and is structured as follows:*

*Section 1* provides background for the AR in terms of its objectives, framework and reference documents.

*Section 2* outlines the key components of the AR.

*Section 3* gives recommendations for how to conduct and facilitate an AR.

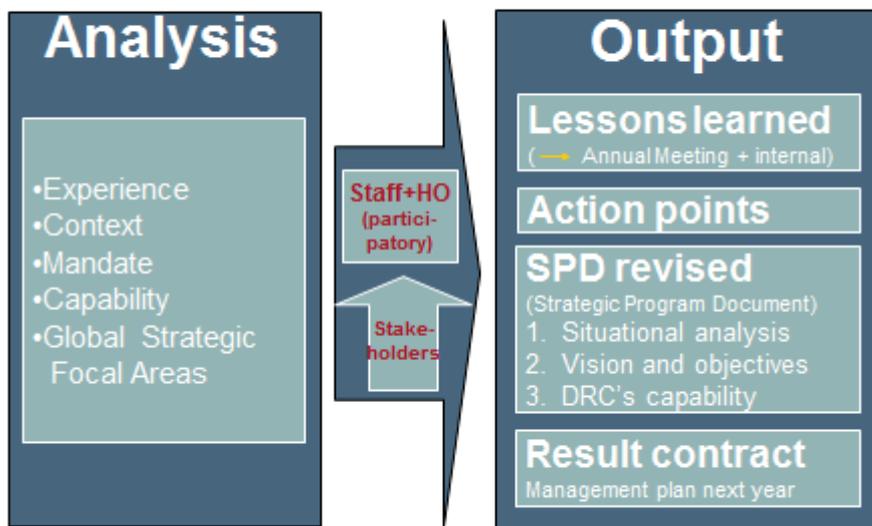
*Section 4* lists what outputs are expected and how roles and responsibilities in relation to planning and conducting an AR are distributed.

### **1. PURPOSE, FRAMEWORK AND REFERENCE DOCUMENTS OF THE ANNUAL REVIEW**

The AR is an annual, joint field and HQ monitoring, reviewing and planning exercise, the objectives of which are to:

- > Review past achievements (since the last AR)
- > Take stock of progress and constraints in both programme implementation and in overall issues related to the programme strategy
- > Report and plan in a strategic, systematic and timely manner
- > Agree on the future key priorities of the programme
- > Provide a link between the particular programme and the DRC's global Strategic Framework 2013-15

As illustrated by the model below, the AR framework consists of two pillars: Analysis and Output.



The analysis part must be well prepared prior to the AR workshop and entails:

- > An analysis of the DRC's past experiences, achievements and challenges since the last AR
- > Revisiting the DRC programme strategy and the coherence between the context and the DRC's mandate and strategic objectives
- > An analysis of how the DRC's 'capability' (set-up, funding and interaction with local stakeholders) supports and enables DRC to achieve its programme objectives
- > An analysis of the link between the programme and the DRC global strategic framework.

The AR will produce the following outputs:

- > The AR workshop programme, as it was actually conducted (the original programme corrected for actual changes)
- > A brief note including the key lessons learnt within the programme, both programmatic and operational, which will be fed into the annual meeting's meta-evaluation and the DRC's global learning initiatives
- > A revised Strategic Programme Document (SPD)
- > An updated annual Results Contract (includes a separate list of identified action points not included in the RC)

The main point of reference for the AR is the Strategic Programme Document (SPD). As such, the AR serves to revisit and revise (as needed) the core elements of the SPD, i.e. the situational analysis, the programme objectives and strategy, and the capability required to achieve the programme objectives. The SPD provides the framework with which the AR and discussions take place.

Other reference documents to the AR include:

- > The current Results Contract (an outcome from the previous AR)
- > Monitoring reports
- > Feedback from beneficiaries and other stakeholders (donors, partners, authorities)
- > Field visits prior to the AR
- > Reports from specific evaluations, reviews or studies
- > The DRC International Strategic Framework (currently 2013-15)

The timing chosen for the AR must first, allow for proper preparation, including compilation of monitoring data and inputs from beneficiaries and other stakeholders, and second, be in accordance with important donor application deadlines requiring an updated SPD.

## **2. KEY COMPONENTS OF THE ANNUAL REVIEW**

In accordance with the *Overview of AR Key Components* in appendix 7b.1, ARs have the following key components:

- > Reviewing the Project Portfolio (Status of Project Implementation) and review of past year's Results Contract including quarterly reports against the RC
- > Situational Analysis
- > Revision of the SPD programme Vision and Objectives
- > DRC Capability
- > Links between the programme and Global DRC strategic priorities.

Below is a detailed description of the purpose and process of handling each of the above key components:

### **2.1 REVIEWING THE PROJECT PORTFOLIO (STATUS OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION) AND REVIEW OF PAST YEAR'S ACTION PLAN / RESULTS CONTRACT INCLUDING QUARTERLY REPORTS**

The purpose of the project portfolio review is to obtain an overview of the status of each project with respect to fund utilisation as well as achieved versus planned outputs, with a view to assess whether the project is on the right track with regard to delivering outputs and achieving immediate objectives. The project portfolio review constitutes the monitoring element of the AR. Therefore, it is important that the status review is done for all projects and not only a selection of projects. Single, very complex projects may require a separate participatory status overview. The Project Portfolio Review must be carefully prepared and submitted in writing prior to the AR workshop. The process is that, prior to the AR, the responsible project managers and finance colleague(s) review the individual projects as per the template for the project portfolio review in annex 7b.2. The project portfolio review is first and foremost based on the individual project LFA and financial records. It is important that the reasons for deviations leading to key lessons learnt are analysed and the main lessons learnt are being noted down and fed into the AR.

## 2.2 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The situational analysis looks at changes and trends in the programme environment in order to confirm and / or adjust the validity of the situational analysis of the SPD. Issues to be covered in this analysis include, but are not limited to:

- > Political and socio-economic trends
- > Changes and trends in displacement patterns
- > Gaps in protection and humanitarian needs
- > Role, willingness and capacity of the duty-bearers
- > Capacity and activities of other assistance actors
- > Security situation and humanitarian access
- > Funding situation
- > Risks to the programme
- > Mapping of Hazards (i.e. potential shocks or new emergencies).

The purpose of the situational analysis session or exercise is to discuss and agree on the major and most likely trends and developments upon which to base future programming, including advocacy, capacity building and service delivery. Again, the situational analysis should be prepared before the AR, and thus entails soliciting inputs to the analysis from beneficiaries and other stakeholders external to the DRC. In the AR, the situational analysis section should be concluded with an agreement of the implications of changes in the programme environment for the DRC programme strategy, including assumptions and the necessary adjustments to be made in the DRC programme strategy. Finally, reference is made to annex 7b.3, which is a template for the situational analysis that has proved to be a useful tool. In terms of facilitation style, a brief presentation to kick start the situational analysis discussion during the AR should be prepared in advance. The discussion itself can be held within groups.

## 2.3 REVISION OF THE SPD - *PROGRAMME VISION AND OBJECTIVES*

The relevance of the overall programme strategy is to be reviewed, based on a) the above situational analysis, b) achievements, challenges and lessons learnt in the programme (including those related to the programme change objectives in the current RC), c) the DRC's envisioned role in providing support to durable solutions to displacement affected people and, d) the DRC's anticipated capability. The review should cover the relevance, validity and appropriateness of key elements such as:

- > Programme objectives (advocacy , capacity building and delivery)
- > Emergency preparedness (review of EPRP )
- > Programmatic risk management
- > Target group(s)
- > Choice of sectors and sector strategies
- > Geographical focus
- > DRC exit strategy
- > Strategies to ensure the DRC's accountability to its beneficiaries and other stakeholders
- > Other programme quality issues

Operational issues related to capacity, coordination, security, logistics etc. (the so-called 'capability factors') The review and discussion of the programme strategy, objectives, target groups etc. (SPD

chapter three) is likely to be dealt with in several sessions of the AR. Exactly how this is done will depend on what the key issues of strategic importance to the programme are. The programme issues can be thematic, sectoral, geographical or methodological. The selected programme issues must be identified by Programme Management and the Head of Unit well in advance of the AR. Similarly, issues may come out of the above situational analysis that would have to be brought into the discussions in the following sessions.

## **2.4 REVISION OF THE SPD – DRC/DDG CAPABILITY INCLUDING REVIEW OF THE OPERATIONAL PART OF THE CHANGE CONTRACT / QUARTERLY REPORT**

‘Capability’ relates to the DRC/DDG’s local operational and institutional capacity that must be in place in order to accomplish the DRC’s programme objectives. A review of capability entails discussing issues such as staff capacities, coordination arrangements, finance management, fundraising strategies, security systems, quality systems, administration systems, logistics, links to other institutions, etc. in order to identify constraints and opportunities for further planning. The question guiding this discussion should be: *what will it take to implement the programme strategy and achieve the programme objectives and how will we work and organise our operation to get there?*

Reference is made to Annex 7b.4, which provides an overview of what the capability factors are as well as a checklist for their review. This must be done in preparation for the AR, in order to identify selected capability factors that require specific discussion and action during the AR itself. During the process of drafting the updated SPD after the AR workshop, care must be taken to carefully align SPD programme objectives with the DRC’s capability.

## **2.5 Discussing the link between the programme and THE DRC’s global Strategic Framework 2013-15**

Apart from re-visiting programme-specific issues, the AR also serves to ensure coherence between the programme in question and ongoing work with respect to the DRC’s *Global Strategic Framework 2013-15*, many of which were initiated at the 2012 Annual Meeting and subsequently confirmed, prioritised and resourced.

Specifically, the AR should be used as an event to provide information about and discuss the progress made in terms of current strategic priorities. This is to ensure that:

- > The Global Strategic Framework is known to key programme staff;
- > The programme itself as well as the DRC as a whole is able to benefit from ongoing global efforts with respect to the strategic framework and especially from specific SFAs.

## **3. PREPARATION AND FACILITATION METHODS**

A robust preparation is a prerequisite to a successful AR. For discussions to be well informed and pave the way for grounded and well-informed decisions, a careful and participatory preparation process beginning several months prior to the AR is an absolute must.

### **3.1 SOLICITING INPUTS**

Given the diversity of the DRC’s programmes, the scope and depth of the AR will obviously differ from programme to programme and from one year to the next. Notwithstanding, as preparation for

the AR itself, inputs and feedback should be compiled, processed or produced, principally by way of:

- > Normal project monitoring that provide information about the realisation of objectives, outputs as well as fund utilisation
- > Feedback from beneficiaries, key authorities, donors and other stakeholders, compiled by way of meetings specifically for this purpose, ordinary feedback during implementation, overview of received complaints etc.
- > Specific studies or reviews (if deemed necessary);
- > Field trip with field and HQ staff, across programme sections prior to starting the AR or as an input during the AR. Apart from collecting input, such field trips also serve to establish common ground amongst the AR participants.

Questions to beneficiaries, partners, donors and other stakeholders would obviously differ according to the audience, but could focus on:

- > Relevance and quality of DRC assistance
- > Opportunities for participation
- > Perceived benefit of the interventions
- > Beneficiary selection criteria and process
- > Availability and quality of information from the DRC
- > Opportunity to give feedback to the DRC
- > The DRC's mode of operation
- > Issues of coordination and collaboration

### 3.2 AR WORKSHOP METHODS THAT HAVE WORKED WELL

Having a good SPD in place has greatly facilitated the preparation and convening of ARs. It has worked well to convene the Annual Review workshop as a three-day event, as this provides sufficient time to go in depth with selected operational and strategic issues and yet it does not take too much time out of day-to-day operations. The AR workshop may be combined with field visits, training sessions, meetings with external partners etc. Likewise, more specific sector and/or operational issues will often need to be addressed outside the actual AR workshop.

In preparation for the AR workshop, it has proved useful for most sessions or themes to request a responsible person(s) to provide a brief presentation or status note. In most cases, the presentation is to focus on the issue in question with regard to:

- > Past achievements (successful and less successful)
- > Current challenges
- > Plans and recommendations for the future.

Each session should conclude with agreement on key action points and priorities for how to move forward; write on a flipchart displayed during the entire event. Where relevant and possible, group work and discussions in smaller groups foster stronger real participation. Similarly, SWOT analyses and small Open Space sessions have been effective in generating more discussion and broader participation and ownership.

It can be a challenge to ensure the link between the AR session discussions and then the subsequent revision of the SPD. A prerequisite for overcoming this challenge is that the AR participants are sufficiently familiar with the current SPD under review, which may make it necessary to translate the SPD from English into the working language of the programme. Methodologies that have worked well include group work and/or sessions that are structured around the individual chapters of the SPD as well as a final session with the management team or even between the Director and Head of Unit, focusing on the AR recommendations and their implications for the SPD. Finally, the external resource person can play a role in the AR by being tasked to pay specific attention to which recommendations that need to go into subsequent revision of the SPD.

Large regional programmes operate with country ARs that go into detail with operational and programmatic issues, which then feed into a more strategically-oriented Regional AR. During the Regional AR itself, it has worked well (in e.g. MENA and HoAY) to use SWOT analyses of thematic issues, e.g. local integration and sector analyses as this has the potential to facilitate discussions, sharing of experiences and cohesion across country operations.

### 3.3 PARTICIPANTS IN THE AR WORKSHOP

The Annual Review workshop should have participation of at least one DRC staff that is external to the programme. This can be from OPSU, a Head of Unit with no prior affiliation with the programme in question, or a field colleague from another program working with similar issues. In addition to purposes of review and facilitation, this also facilitates institutional learning across programmes.

The number of participants should not be more than what will work in a workshop format, as opposed to a conference. It is recommended to have participation from key senior management and technical staff. Not all sessions may be of equal relevance to all participants. However, it is critical to acknowledge the capacity development element in the AR exercise as well as the potential for strengthening a shared understanding of organisational priorities and values, programme issues and administrative constraints across the organisation as a whole.

### 3.4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The outputs from the AR are defined under section one of this guide. They provide a key reference for the programme's management and HQ – and even (the SPD) for external stakeholders – during the period. Hence, programmes must commit themselves to follow up on the change points as specified in the Results Contract and report their progress by means of the Quarterly Report. The Results Contract must be revisited and reviewed during relevant events such as management meetings, performance appraisals, monitoring visits, and regional meetings.

Likewise, it is important that programmes commit themselves to collate and conclude on the key learning points and key achievements during the year in review, and that these learning points are captured and disseminated internally in the programme as well as communicated beyond the individual programme to e.g. the DRC Annual Meeting (in the meta-evaluation).

For the AR process as a whole, it is of key importance that tasks and responsibilities are delegated in a clear and transparent manner.

*Preparation of the AR:* The Country / Regional Director and Head of Unit are responsible for preparing the AR, supported by their staff. OPSU must always be part of the preparatory phase in order to provide advice and ensure quality of the AR process and cross-programmatic linkages.

*Facilitation during the AR workshop:* External resource person and staff responsible for individual sessions. It has proved useful to delegate the responsibility for facilitation of sessions, thus creating more ownership of the individual sessions; OPSU may be part of the AR itself if deemed necessary by HoU, CD and / or OPSU.

*Note-taking:* Preferably the same persons who will be involved in drafting the final outputs. Note-taking should focus on decisions and learning points that feed directly into the three outputs of the AR, Lessons Learnt Note, revised SPD and Results Contract (the RC includes a separate list of those action points that were identified but not included in the RC proper).

*Drafting of the Lessons Learnt Note and the Action Plan / Results Contract:* The drafting and finalisation of the Lessons Learnt Note and the Action Plan / Results Contract is the responsibility of the Head of Unit and Programme Management, possibly assisted by the external resource person.

*Revision of the SPD:* The revision of the SPD, following the recommendations from the AR, is the responsibility of the Director together with the Head of Unit, with support from the external resource person, as required and agreed.

The outputs of the AR, including the revision of the SPD, must be finalised no later than one month after the AR workshop and shared with the team accordingly.