

LEVERAGING KNOWLEDGE INTO THE AFRICA REGION'S QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS

This paper proposes a knowledge-leveraged road map for improving the Africa Region's products and services. It follows on the recent reviews and meetings in the Region to assess the quality assurance process (QAP), and attempts to integrate the knowledge dimension into that process. The goal is to provide the regional leadership team and staff with practical advice on how to enhance the QAP, based on institutional knowledge and good practices in and outside the Region.

There are two indications that the Region's current approach to quality assurance must be reassessed. First, the Region's score on quality at entry is relatively low, although improving (for example, 57 percent in 1997; 82 percent in 1998). Second, the recent client feedback and staff surveys show a major "knowledge adaptation gap" in the products and services offered to our clients in Africa — that is, the difference between client satisfaction with staff's technical knowledge of global good practices and staff's ability to adapt that knowledge to the local setting. The gap is widest (40 percent) in client perception, and narrower, but still significant (25 percent), in staff perception.

Two questions arise: First, is the Region *doing the right things* within the existing country resource envelopes? Second, is the Region *doing the right things right*? The answer to the first question depends on how well the CAS process works in its selectivity and strategic focus. The CAS process ultimately has implications for how many resources the country program can offer for each task to enable the task team to produce high quality work. This paper does not deal with the selectivity issue (are we do-

ing the right things?), since this issue is being addressed separately by the regional leadership team. Nevertheless, it is clear that addressing the selectivity issue is critical for dealing with the QAP. Thus, the present proposal would complement the ongoing reflections regarding the CAS process by focusing on the second question regarding quality — namely, are we doing things right?

The premise of this proposal is that quality assurance depends on installing a process to (i) help staff learn before, during, and after the task; (ii) provide teams with the best advice on lessons learned in thematic, regional, and indigenous knowledge; and (iii) ensure that advice is used.

Eight key questions must then be raised during the QAP: (i) What knowledge or advice is needed for the task? (ii) Is the task budget adequate for the quality enhancement steps? (iii) When is the advice given? (iv) How is the advice given? (v) Is advice considered *and* used? (vi) How is global knowledge adapted to the local setting? (vii) How are lessons and experiences captured and re-used? (viii) How is the QAP process managed?

Under each main question, we propose specific steps and sub-questions, specify the roles of the principal players, and identify the likely constraints. The questions are formulated in terms of a suggested framework, *not a rigid set of guidelines*. The questions are not exhaustive — they only attempt to identify what should be asked consistently in order to change behaviors. The specific circumstance will determine the steps taken and the way in which each team handles these questions. Each unit will have to develop its own practi-

cal path along the general road map. The Team Leaders (TL) must fully own the process, since they will play the key role in its implementation. And the leadership team will play an important role in modeling behavior and promoting an environment that contributes to culture change.

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What knowledge or advice is needed?

Any QAP starts by identifying the task team's key mentoring and knowledge requirements. Two things must be done: (i) assess the complexity of the task versus the capacity of the team; and (ii) identify the kind of knowledge or advice that will be needed at different stages of the task, based on an assessment of the issues likely to arise during the process. To facilitate this step, the two simple matrices on page 3 could guide the Sector Manager (SM). The first matrix is based on the current practice in AFTT1; the second on the knowledge and learning framework that steers the Region's activities in knowledge sharing and learning.

The SM and the Lead Specialist (LS) would make the team/task assessment (Matrix 1) in collaboration with the TL. Matrix 1 would help identify the *main mentoring needs* early in the process. Similarly, Matrix 2 would point to the *institutional or client knowledge* that should be included in the task at different stages, based on an initial assessment of the issues which emerge from the country and sector specific strategies.

This last exercise would strengthen the team's capacity to leverage institutional knowledge into the task. This would mean helping the team at the earliest stage to move from the comfort zone represented by the lower left quadrant of Matrix 2 (i.e., where "we know what we know" as individuals and as teams) and into the lower and upper right quadrants of the matrix (i.e., reduce or eliminate the team's potential knowledge blind-spots). The leaders' (SMs, LSs) role would be to ask the right questions and point to the potential sources of

knowledge in the institution (or among the clients in the form of indigenous knowledge) that would expand the potential choices of design (i.e., what are the right things to do based on our institutional knowledge of good global practices?). The subsequent stages of the task would follow a similar strategy.

This approach will help reveal sources and kinds of advice or knowledge needed at different stages of the task — such as more strategic or conceptual knowledge upstream, and more operational and practical advice farther down the cycle. This process would have to integrate the mentoring resources in the Region with the institutional knowledge sources available through the Networks' thematic groups (TG), including their knowledge bases and advisory services.

Key actors in the process will have to assume the following roles:

- SM assesses the task/team dimension.
- LS advises on where the knowledge is located inside or outside the institution and takes the lead in leveraging the TGs, etc. to help the task team.
- Operations Support (OS) group and the Knowledge and Learning Center (KLC) are catalysts in identifying and disseminating good operational practices in QAP, facilitating region/network links, and designing user-friendly and enabling technology platforms.
- TL creates a team environment open to advice and global knowledge (beyond what is embodied in each team member and in lessons from ICRs) to eliminate blind spots and identify all that we as an *institution* know.

The SM and LS in particular must learn to *ask the right questions* so that signals to teams are consistent with getting the best QAP implemented. For example, regarding "best practices," the following two versions of the question would have different impacts on the team and the QAP: (i) have you considered best practices?; and (ii) what best prac-

I. Task complexity & team capacity		II. What we know & don't know	
strong capacity	<i>strong capacity, simple task</i>	<i>what we know we don't know</i>	<i>what we don't know we don't know</i>
	<i>strong capacity, complex task</i>	<i>what we know we know</i>	<i>what we don't know we know</i>
weak capacity	<i>weak capacity, simple task</i>	<i>what we know we know</i>	<i>what we don't know we know</i>
	<i>weak capacity, complex task</i>	<i>what we know we know</i>	<i>what we don't know we know</i>
	simple task	know	don't know

tices will you consider? Asking the first question will show whether best practices were considered; whereas asking the second question would create greater opportunities for sharing and learning.

In summary, at the early stage of the task cycle (leading to a PCD) the key questions are:

- What are the key issues in light of task complexity and team capacity?
- What global lessons can be applied?
- What global “best practices” should be considered?
- What are the institutional underpinnings of the global “best practices”?
- What key cross-sector issues need to be addressed?
- How will we draw on knowledge of indigenous practices and institutions?
- What are the challenges in adapting global practices to the local practices?
- Who are the best people to contact, both inside and outside the Bank?

Are task resources adequate for the QAP?

In light of the above, there may be resource implications for the task team. The key question that the CD, TL, SM and LS must answer as a group is whether the envelope from the country budget can cover the cost of bringing the best advice at the right time to the team. The OS would advise on re-

gional coefficients and disseminate resource allocation practices of successful QAPs. There may be cases where the TL supported by the SM would have to go back to the CD and raise the issue of additional resources (e.g., if the team’s capacity needs reinforcement and the task is complex, the LS may have to be more involved, and his or her time may not be affordable within a task budget based on average coefficients). At times, the SM and TL may decide that, given the resource envelope, it would be impossible to provide the task team with advice, and therefore it would be best not to proceed. For example, some units have taken the position of not doing tasks whose resource envelopes are inadequate to ensure a quality product.

The main constraint will be the availability of resources in the country program. Given a country program resource envelope, the CD/CT would have to choose between the number of tasks in the country program and the quality of that program. A more selective CAS process would help ensure that more resources are available to deliver quality products. The ultimate objective should be to do the right things right, rather than do many things of questionable quality.

If unresolved between the CD and SM/TL, resource issues may have to be passed to the RVPs to make them aware of real risks to quality at entry in the Region. The goal should be to avoid an envi-

ronment where task teams have neither the time to apply their own brains, nor the resources to “buy” others’. Instead, the RVPs should encourage the TL and SM to “ring the bells.” The RVPs need to hear the team’s concerns and send consistent messages to reinforce a quality culture.

When is advice given?

Advice is most effective if it is just-in-time and just enough. The SM, LS and TL have to ensure that the knowledge sources offer their knowledge at the time when it can make the most impact on the choices that the team must make. Typically, advice is most useful early in the task cycle. The challenge for the leadership team is to make that happen consistently, especially if the task team/complexity mix calls for special mentoring/knowledge inputs. SM/LS would have to be responsible for mentoring the team and ensuring that the identified institutional knowledge sources deliver just-in-time what is expected by the QAP.

The main constraint under this step will likely be the availability of the LS and the knowledge sources from outside the Region. It would be up to the TL to “ring the bells” in such circumstances so that the SM is aware of the risks to the QAP. The SM/TL would have to deal with such issues on a case by case basis. Depending on whether the sought after advice/knowledge is critical to the integrity of the QAP, the TL, with the support of the SM, would have to raise the issue with the CD, and take appropriate steps — such as, forego the advice or delay the task until the advice is available).

How is advice given?

Experience suggests that the old system of formal reviews as the vehicle through which advice or knowledge is given or shared is ineffective in ensuring high quality at entry. Usually, advice is not provided on a timely basis to have a positive impact on quality. Also, this system often implies control and a supervisor-subordinate relationship, rather than a constructive exchange among peers

to solve real problems faced by the task team. Formal reviews may still be necessary, especially at the final stages of the task cycle, but their objective would be to ensure that nothing has fallen between the cracks during the process.

The environment in which early stage advice is given is key in determining how much of the advice the task team uses. For example, the current peer review system does not always work well in this respect, because (i) of the tendency to select peers based on the “buddy system”; and (ii) the peer reviewers often do not spend enough time working proactively with the team. Instead, by resorting to merely sending comments on a document, the reviewers fail to provide the just-enough advice needed by the task team when it is deciding on design and implementation. And under the present process, peer reviewers generally react to a specific document (usually at the downstream stage), instead of reacting to the complete history of the task’s evolution. So, the current processes — especially peer reviews — must be changed. What is needed most is a process, even if informal, that does not promote knowledge sharing because it is mandatory, but because it can improve work quality. However, such a process would require a more proactive stance by the TL, LS, and other knowledge holders. The SM/LS would have to ensure that the most appropriate people provide quality support and mentoring.

The main constraint will probably be the lack of quality support when the team needs it most. Factoring the expected inputs of various potential knowledge into the QAP — including, when necessary, allocating resources to buy the team’s time — would help deal with these issues.

Is advice considered and used?

Advice is of little value if not considered, and, unfortunately, this is often the case. Therefore, the recipient — for example, the TL — should be held accountable for demonstrating whether the advice was considered, how it was used or, if such be the case, justifying why the advice was not used. The SM should ensure that there is a systematic monitoring of the process of giving and using advice. The more this monitoring is done by asking the right questions at the right time, the more it will avoid bureaucratization of the process and instead will promote a learning environment for the benefit of the teams.

The main constraint will likely be the inability of SMs to be substantively involved in several tasks at a time. This raises issues about: (i) delegation; (ii) capacity of LSs within units; (iii) the number of tasks managed by the unit relative to the number of senior staff in the unit; and (iv) support functions (e.g., role of Task Team Assistants in the QAP). While the impact of the proposed QAP on such issues is unclear, there would have to be a learning period to identify practices to deal with them — for example, AFTU1 has developed quality assurance teams. The Sector Directors (SD) would play the key role in identifying and dealing with sector family-wide issues that might emerge (such as, size of unit, number of LS and other senior staff per unit, etc.) as well as issues of the quality and relevance of advice from institutional knowledge sources through the Networks.

How is global knowledge adapted to the local setting?

Some advice in the form of global good practices may not have an impact on the ground, unless the practice in question is adapted to the local setting. For example, where the know-how (global practice) is robust and the local context predictable, the adaptation process may not pose a problem. But in most areas of development assistance, know-how is not robust, and the local context is often unpredictable. Hence, the knowledge of the local context and local know-how becomes very important, particularly in Africa.

For the adaptation process to work well, the task teams need to ask several questions:

- What is the institutional underpinning of the global practice?
- What are the institutional realities where this practice will be replicated?
- What indigenous knowledge (IK) can be included so that the adapted practice is relevant to the beneficiary community?
- What essential adjustments will need to be made either to the practice, or to strengthen or modify the local institutions so that the global practice works in the new setting?

The main constraint will be identifying and learning from local practices. This demands action on two fronts: First, it requires a change of behavior from the task team, including:

- listening to and hearing what beneficiaries are saying;
- learning from the client practices; and
- adapting the global practice (technical “first best”) in order to make the knowledge relevant to the client, even if in the process the adapted practice may become a technical “second best.”

Second, it demands an enabling environment that provides user-friendly information on IK to the teams:

- Resident Missions and their networks of local civil society groups would have to help identify relevant local knowledge sources to supplement the Bank’s institutional knowledge of indigenous practices.
- KLC would provide a clearing house for IK practices under the Region’s IK initiative, including pointing to the relevant data bases containing syntheses of IK, and the potential local sources which may help broaden the horizons of the task teams in the field — including financing the cost of local IK sources to interact with task teams.

This way of doing business may be costlier in the short term — it may require teams to spend more

time in the field. The sector leaders (SM, LS) would need to ensure that the task teams behave accordingly and not cut corners on issues that affect quality because of tight resource envelopes. Similarly, SM/LS/TL would have to ensure that the technical “first best” does not become the “enemy of the good.” The role of the CD/Resident Representative would be to provide the country context and information about local know-how. This strategy will likely increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the product and thus be more efficient in the long term.

How are lessons of experience captured and re-used?

To improve the quality of our work we must also build a culture of ongoing reflective thinking and sharing of experiences. This calls for taking stock regularly of what has been learned during the preparation and implementation process, and then to disseminate and re-use those lessons. To promote such practices, the Region should allow task teams to spend a few days after a mission for that purpose (e.g., include the cost in the QAP, facilitate physical “isolation” as needed, etc.). In general, the de-briefing process would be done in virtual space. For more complex tasks, however, where there may be unique opportunities for learning and disseminating further what worked and didn’t work, a separate physical space (e.g., working out of another building) for the de-briefing process would ensure that there is a minimum of interruption during the de-briefing period.

The basic objective would be to do a quick de-brief after every significant activity — such as preparation mission, appraisal, supervision— based on the following questions:

- What did we set out to achieve?
- What did we achieve and not achieve?

- What happened?
- How can we avoid old problems while replicating successes in the future?
- What will we do differently next time?
- How and with whom should we share lessons?

Key actors will have to assume the following roles:

- TL ensures that the task team spends some time in a debriefing mode, and prepares a brief record of the findings.
- SM monitors the process, including the expectation that a task — or in special cases, even a mission — is considered incomplete, unless the debriefing has taken place (except when the SM believes that the debriefing is not cost-effective).
- LS ensures that lessons are brought to the attention of communities of practice inside and outside the Region, and builds on the institutional knowledge for further use and re-use.

The main difficulty will be creating an environment that makes the process user-friendly and quick. The KLC would facilitate the debriefing process by (i) designing the enabling technology platforms (e.g., Notes-based module for debriefing, with electronic links to the TG knowledge bases for easy transfer of lessons); (ii) disseminating lessons, of content and process, across the sectors; and (iii) identifying and following up cross-sector issues in collaboration with the SD/OS.

Finally, for advice to be used effectively and lessons of experience applied systematically as appropriate, there

How is the quality assurance process managed?

must be a system that (i) tracks the advice; and (ii) holds the recipient accountable for considering the advice. There has to be a record of the nature of the advice, its timing, whether it was useful, and if not why, and whether global knowledge was adapted (in the light of local institutional constraints and indigenous practices) to render the final product more relevant to the local setting. This storyline must be part of a task's record. In addition, an ongoing process must be able to periodically ensure that advice given is used, or, if it is not used the reasons are justifiable. With such an approach, the ROC meeting, or final task reviews, would focus more on the real issues that have to be resolved at the final stage of the task.

This approach would show staff that the leadership team takes the process of quality enhancement seriously and is ready to intervene to ensure that quality is assured at entry — not only during the portfolio implementation

process as an ex-post review process. The TL should be accountable for maintaining a record, and the SM should be accountable for the record's accuracy and availability as a key management tool. The role of the LS would be to (i) confirm that the best institutional advice was made available and that, under the circumstances, the task team used that advice; and (ii) identify the eventual knowledge gaps on the basis of the questions raised during the process — that is, “what we know we don't know” in the upper left quadrant of Matrix 2). This would also help to decide where additional country-specific ESW or region-wide sector studies are needed — completing one learning process and starting another one — in collaboration with the CD and SD. The following matrix summarizes the key questions and principal roles in the proposed QAP.

Leveraging Knowledge into the QAP: Key

Lead Role/ Key Question	Team Leader	Lead Specialist	Sector Manager	Country Director/ Resident Rep.
What Knowledge/ advice needed ?	Promote team environment open to seeking institutional K	Advise on relevant global practices and sources of institutional K	Assess team's mentoring/knowledge requirements	
Are resources adequate for QAP?	Prepare realistic cost estimate for QAP	Advise on costs of leveraging best institutional K	Ensure task budget is adequate for QAP	Allocate resources in line with QAP needs
When is advice given?	Contact identified sources of institutional K	Ensure K sources deliver just-in-time		
How is advice given?	Identify method for knowledge transfer to team	Advise team on optimal method for K transfer	Ensure appropriate person(s) used for quality support	
Is advice considered and used ?	Ensure team considers/ uses relevant institutional K	Advise team on relevant institutional K to leverage task	Monitor process by asking follow-up questions	
Is global K adapted to local settings?	Consider IK & adapt global K to local setting	Advise on institutional underpinnings of of global K	Monitor process by by asking follow-up questions	Advise on country context & know-how
How are lessons captured and re-used?	Ensure team debriefs debriefs & prepares lessons learned	Ensure lessons are shared with Networks	Monitor process and decide task debriefing method	Facilitate dissemination of lessons to CT
How is QAP managed?	Accountable for using best global K & adaptation to local setting	Accountable for bringing best institutional K to leverage QAP	Accountable for over- all management of QAP	Accountable for adequate QAP resou allocation

Note: the first four columns refer to the four key roles in the QAP with specific accountability. The second set of columns identifies regional policy setting, monitoring and facilitation roles.

Questions and Principal Roles

	Sector Director	Operations Support	Knowledge & Learning Center	RVPs
	Manage regional sector knowledge base (BPS)	Provide pointers on cross-sector issues	Facilitate AFR/Networks links; support BPS maintenance	
		Advise on regional trends in QAP costs		Resolve QAP issues SM/CD
			Facilitate team links to institutional K	
			Provide clearinghouse function for IK practices	
on	Disseminate lessons within sector family	Disseminate AFR operational practices	Facilitate capture and dissemination of lessons (AFR)	
orce	Manage sector family QAP issues	Monitor implementation of QAP policy guidelines	Manage IK initiative; design enabling technical tools in support of QAP	Establish QAP policy guidelines