

EDITORIAL

Dear readers ...

It is now more than a year since we launched the first 'Aiming for Quality' newsletter, our information and exchange portal on issues of quality in the humanitarian sector and on the COMPAS method.

To improve our support to users, we have decided to make a few changes and the new version of 'Aiming for Quality' will focus specifically on the Quality COMPAS and the Dynamic COMPAS. We have simplified the procedure for taking part in the blog and made certain pages more user-friendly. Anyone can now respond spontaneously without having to identify themselves beforehand. The newsletter will still include user feedback, news and different articles on technical developments and how to integrate the COMPAS quality assurance method. However, the 'Aid and Quality' section, which presented articles on key issues affecting quality in the sector, will no longer be part of 'Aiming for Quality', but will be part of a new newsletter to be launched soon, "Humanitarian Aid on the move".

We are now also able to translate 'Aiming for Quality' into Spanish, so that it will now be available in three languages. Pues bienvenido a los hispanohablantes!

Finally, to come back to the COMPAS, the end of 2008 will see further training courses in Brussels and Barcelona, and the team is beginning to work on a training of trainers module, which should be ready for the beginning of 2009

Jeanne Taisson

DYNAMIC COMPAS

Adapting the COMPAS to adopt it more easily

The new 1.4.1 version of the Dynamic COMPAS allows you to mask phases, chapters and key questions.

Just as a humanitarian response should be adapted to a context, a quality assurance approach should be adapted to the organisation that implements it (see the article [Adapting the Dynamic COMPAS to the needs of NGOs ...](#)).

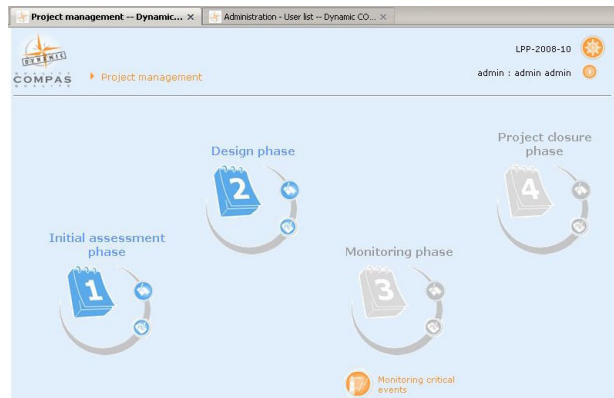
Even though we still recommend using the 12 criteria of the Quality COMPAS, we are aware that adopting the method can be made easier by initially using a less complete version. It was with this in mind that we decided to make version 1.4.1 of the Dynamic COMPAS more flexible.

What is now possible

With version 1.4.1 you can now mask individual phases, chapters and key questions for new projects.

For example, you can work on as many phases of the project cycle as you want, depending on how your organisation functions. If you only want to work on 2 phases, you can personalise the Dynamic COMPAS accordingly.

On screen, this gives:



You can also create your own quality reference framework by selecting the criteria you want to work on amongst those of the Quality COMPAS. In practice, if you select 8 of the 12 Quality COMPAS criteria, the software will only cover the related chapters and key questions.

For the time being, a brief technical intervention, which can be explained over the phone or by email, is necessary to mask phases, chapters and key questions. Therefore, if you wish to adapt the Dynamic COMPAS to your needs, do not hesitate to contact us. The technical support service is free and we will be very happy to help you!

Possibilities for the future...

If there are a large number of requests to mask phases/chapters/key questions, the next step will be to create an administration screen which allows users to carry out this operation themselves.

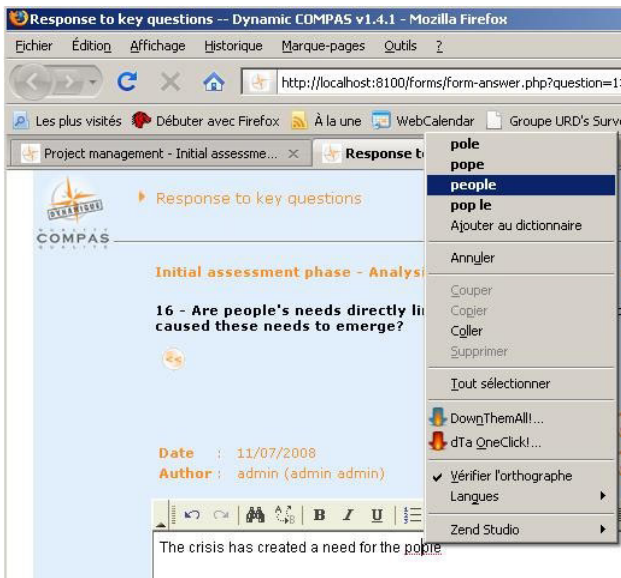
Do not hesitate to contact us with your ideas!

Olivier Sarrat



Mozilla Firefox spell checker!

The free web browser Mozilla Firefox includes a spell checker. If you use Mozilla Firefox with version 1.4.1 of the COMPAS Dynamique any misspelt word is automatically underlined in red. Suggested corrections can then be consulted by right-clicking on the word.



If you use the Dynamic COMPAS in English, but write your answers and chapters in Persian or Malagasy (or even French...) find and install the dictionaries you need at the following address:

<https://addons.mozilla.org/fr/firefox/browse/type:3>

Downloading Mozilla Firefox is free: <http://www.mozilla.com/>

To download the latest Dynamic COMPAS update:

<http://www.compasqualite.org/fr/compas-dynamique/supports-compas-dynamique.php>

Technical support service: collaborative and free!

The Dynamic COMPAS support service has changed! It is still free of charge, but it has now taken the form of a collaborative FAQ: <http://www.compasqualite.org/support/>

What is a FAQ?

A FAQ is a list of the most *Frequently Asked Questions* by users of a service or a software programme. It allows users to find answers to common problems, without them having to send an email.

In addition, the COMPAS FAQ is dynamic and collaborative. Users can ask new questions, and can even answer or translate them.

How is it 'collaborative'?

Certain users have provided answers to their own questions. For example, Laurent Coste of COSI told me that it wasn't possible to

install the Dynamic COMPAS on his PDA using Windows Mobile. In this way, the FAQ is collaborative - anyone can add a question, an answer or a translation...

As a result, the technical support team is made up both of users and designers of the Dynamic COMPAS.

How does it work?

It's simple. There are two steps to follow:

1. Find out if an answer to your question already exists.
 - First of all, the answer may be in the 'Dynamic COMPAS User's Guide'.
 - If not, there is a good chance that you will find it in the FAQ: either go through the list of questions or do a search using a key word.
2. If you have not found the answer, use the FAQ to ask a new question and the whole support team will be contacted by email. You can also propose answers to other users' questions or translate questions.

Can I still contact you by email?

Yes, but go via the FAQ's 'Ask a question' link, and, if possible, after you have looked to see if an answer to your question already exists.

We will still receive an email from you, but dealing with your question will be easier and quicker if we receive it via this interface.

What language is used?

If you need to ask a new question, if possible this should be written in English. However, if this is too difficult, we are also able to read and respond to questions in French and Spanish. If appropriate, we will then translate your question into English so that it can be read by the greatest number of users.

Finally, if you speak French or Spanish, and you have used a question in English that you understand perfectly, click on the 'Translate' link and take 5 minutes to translate it and send it to us - by doing so, you will help others!

Why is the technical support service changing in this way?

Until now, the technical support service consisted of an email address: [compasdyn-usersupport \[at\] urd.org](mailto:compasdyn-usersupport[at]urd.org), which functioned as a sort of email forum, with the archives of discussions published automatically on an external site.

As the main person behind this address, the exchanges that took place taught me several things:

- Many people do not know about the Dynamic COMPAS User's Guide¹;
- Similar questions come up frequently;
- Many people do not know that the technical support service is free and that they should not hesitate to contact us!
- Those who were very brave went onto the site where the archives from compasdyn-usersupport were stocked and told me how useful these were as they constituted an embryonic form of FAQ. But information was very difficult to find because the interface was so complicated.

All these points made us decide to improve the technical support service and its visibility, and particularly underline that it is free!

I think that covers all the most frequently asked questions about our FAQ ... perhaps I will hear from you there soon! <http://www.compasqualite.org/support/>

¹: available among the Dynamic COMPAS 'Printable support materials' or can be downloaded at:

http://www.compasqualite.org/en/images/Dynamic_COMPAS_User_Guide.pdf.

Olivier Sarrat

Feedback from the Catalan Development Cooperation Fund

The Catalan Development Cooperation Fund (*Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament*) is involved in development and humanitarian action. It coordinates the activities and policies of 280 local Catalan organisations. In recent years, decentralised development cooperation has been provided with more human and financial resources and has come to occupy an increasingly important place in the Spanish cooperation and development system. It contributes more than any other European region. In such a context, local organisations play an important role due to their closeness to grass-roots social solidarity initiatives.

Due to the type of organisations that operate under the Catalan Fund, their interventions are characterised by close relations with civil society and municipal bodies both in the North and South. Actions carried out via decentralised cooperation have both positive and negative points. Among the positive points is the high degree of involvement with crisis-affected areas, and among the negative is a lack of professionalism. The Catalan Fund therefore decided to strengthen its own technical capacity in terms of evaluating quality and learning by setting up an ad hoc evaluation and learning system for decentralised cooperation. To do this, it established a technical and methodological partnership with Groupe URD, the creators of the Quality COMPAS.

The humanitarian action carried out by the Catalan Fund is part of the relief – rehabilitation – development continuum, where evaluation is a means of learning, which allows projects to be adapted and quality to be ensured. To do this, we feel that the evaluation process should be part of a wider overall learning process, based on the principle of quality assurance, with two, equally important criteria for evaluation: credibility and usefulness.

Following on from our work with Groupe URD, we drew up a preliminary evaluation grid for humanitarian projects based on the Quality COMPAS evaluation criteria, which allows us to select projects to support.

BREAKDOWN OF THE ASSESSMENT	Maximum Points	Minimum Points*	Rating
IMPACT AND RESULT CRITERIA	40	20	
PROCESS CRITERIA	30	15	
STRUCTURE CRITERIA	30	15	
Overall score	100	50	
OPINION	ELIGIBLE PROJECT		

(*) A project is considered ELIGIBLE if it is rated equal to or above the minimum points for each of the three groups.

The Quality COMPAS method, which includes tools and a reference framework based on questions organised by criterion, has helped us a lot and allowed us to improve the process of selecting humanitarian programmes which were proposed in post-emergency contexts such as the Peru earthquake in 2007 and the hurricanes in Haiti and Cuba in 2008.

More generally, it has allowed us to evaluate project proposals systematically. Equally, we have begun to take into account possible critical points and anticipate negative impacts.

Using a reference framework which uses questions, with indicators linked to criteria in sentence form gives greater flexibility when evaluating and rating project proposals. Each criterion can be contextualised, moving away from one-size-fits-all solutions and integrating a holistic approach. This allowed us to take into account the specific characteristics of the contexts in Peru, Haiti and Cuba and to be as rigorous and objective as possible. At the time of writing this article, we are currently using the initial assessment grid

and the Quality COMPAS reference framework to choose post-emergency projects in Haiti and Cuba.

The quality assurance approach we are putting in place, based on the method proposed by Groupe URD, is the fruit of in-depth reflection about quality. It can not be reduced to a series of technical indicators or standards. It implies a holistic approach to all the processes related to an intervention, placing questions about the quality of humanitarian action in their wider context with its external pressures, tensions and interactions.

For our organisation, the quality of the initial evaluation of humanitarian project proposals is very important because of the complexity of local actors and their lack of technical and methodological capacity. We lack rigorous monitoring systems, so identifying projects properly is a way to improve the quality of the actions run by the Catalan Fund.

Using this selection grid is part of a wider objective to promote and develop tools and processes which aim to guarantee quality to the benefit of affected populations and the environment in which operations take place.

Victoria Planas

Feedback from the NGO Jesuit Refugee Service

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organization, founded in 1980, with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people. Currently present in over 50 countries, JRS is providing assistance to refugees in refugee camps, to people displaced within their own country, to returnees, to asylum seekers in cities and those held in detention. The main areas of intervention are in Education, Advocacy, Emergency Assistance, Health and Nutrition, Income Generating Activities and Social Services.

By nature, JRS is a decentralized organization undertaking projects at national level, with support from a Regional Office and the International Office. Based in Italy, Rome, JRS International Office has a role of coordination, leadership and representation.

JRS Programmes Department, as part of the International Office, ensures that programmes are implemented following JRS mission and vision with the overarching principle to promote quality in the services provided. To achieve it, the Department develops tools and guidelines, which are introduced through trainings and closely followed up.

In this view, my colleague, Cecilia Bock (Programmes Coordinator) and I (Assistant Programmes Coordinator) enrolled for the Compas training organised by the Groupe URD last June. Our intention was to get to understand the Compas Methodology and to familiarise ourselves with its practical implementation through the Compas Dynamic. We thus came to Plaisians with a very open mind, looking forward to be exposed to this initiative and to try to get inspiration for our work.

We were satisfied with the training, real eye opener, and returned to Rome with the idea of using elements of the methodology, adapting them to the needs of our organisation which has its own system in place. Although quite enthusiastic with the tool, we did not envisage at this stage using the Compas Software: its implementation at field level would have been quite complicated, requiring having everybody on board and the capacities to follow up at the coordinating level, which undoubtedly we did/do not have at the International Office.

However, to our greatest surprise and satisfaction, shortly after the training, we had the chance to use the Compas Dynamic from the Programmes Department in Rome. JRS Eastern Africa region

contacted us to ask for support in finalising a Needs Assessment in Refugee Camps in the East of Sudan, looking at the possibility of starting psychosocial projects: thorough assessments had already been undertaken by the UNHCR. We were now being asked, based on JRS vision/mission, Regional strategic plan, and capacities to take up the role of an Implementing Partner in this particular area of activities. Our colleague in Sudan was to go to the field to meet various stakeholders in the view of confirming the needs and produce a proper report facilitating decision making at the regional/international level.

We decided to give distant support using the Compas Dynamic. The idea was challenging but we felt confident as we had sufficient data at this stage from previous general assessments, reports, web... This means practically that most of the data was entered into the software by Cecilia and I retrospectively; questions which we could not respond to were left to our colleague to answer. Additionally, as we went on, following thoroughly all stages of the assessment, we saw the need to modify/add questions relevant to the specific area of psychosocial intervention addressing the needs of a refugee population. Indeed, from the reports, we realised that there were discrepancies/lacks in the Compas Dynamic which needed to be corrected so as to reflect the reality in the field. Our way to proceed was thus to complete each session with the information we had. We would then produce the word report from the software adapting some of the questions and inserting few extra points so as to have a comprehensive document adapted to very context of assessment. Therefore, one of our comment as "retrospective users" was that the Compas Dynamic is probably very adapted for a general needs assessments but needs to be adjusted in the case of assessments looking at specific contexts/beneficiaries profile.

On the other hand, one positive aspect of adopting the tool was that we came across questions which we did not see as key from Rome but happened to be crucial from a field perspective, and vice versa. Although we had received the training, we were sometimes confused by questions which we saw as repetitive: this might be due to the fact that we did not have clear in mind the final structure of the report. Added to the somehow time consuming aspect of the exercise, we saw it as a possible discouragement for teams in the field, often under pressure. However, the further we went in the use of the Compas Dynamic, the less of an obstacle it was.

Another weakness we saw was the shallow coverage by the tool of all "supportive aspects" of a programme. The objective of the assessments was as a matter of fact to be able to make a decision looking at our organisation resources and capacities: logistics, human resources, administration capacities were in our opinion a bit weak and we did add few questions.

As both my colleague and I are far from being IT specialists, we had to bother more than once Olivier, the technical referent working for the Groupe URD. He was always extremely fast in reacting, by mail and/or over the telephone and always solved our (too) many issues with very accurate/adapted responses. We felt really supported throughout.

To conclude, I would say that the hands on exercise with the Compas Dynamic was quite demanding, but proved to be useful when adapted to our context, producing a final report extremely comprehensive. We are more than willing to try to use it again for other phases of the Project Cycle, in other countries through our mediation/facilitation.

Pauline Marteil

Feed back of an independent consultant

My experience using the COMPAS ...

For a number of years now, I have been following the activities of Groupe URD, amongst which the development of the quality project. Like many other users, this was how I first came across the COMPAS method.

Initially, I used some of the COMPAS criteria during classes on evaluation that I gave on masters courses on cooperation and humanitarian action in certain Spanish universities.

My work as a consultant with IECAH (The Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action) led me to establish contact with Groupe URD and to find out more about the philosophy behind the COMPAS method and how it and the Dynamic COMPAS were developed.

I now go into greater detail in presenting the COMPAS in my classes. In my module on project cycle management, I present both the COMPAS and the Sphere project and how to use them to manage projects. It is always very interesting to see the results and the reactions of students when I get them to work on a case study and I ask them to use the COMPAS. A few days before the class, I ask them to download the Dynamic COMPAS and to come to class with their computers. During the module we are all able to work together, exploring and getting to know the quality assurance system. They do some very interesting exercises and they see how useful the tool can be.

It is very pleasing to hear students who have had experience in the field making comments such as, "If only I'd known about this tool before!", whereas those who have no former experience say things like, "I'll definitely take the COMPAS when I go into the field". Others go further with comments such as, "This should be compulsory for all NGOs". The students then discover for themselves the different possible uses of the COMPAS - individual use, whether in the field or not, and adoption at organisational level.

In addition to these classes at university, I evaluate programmes. Even if I have never conducted what one might call a 100% COMPAS evaluation, I always use the COMPAS board to plan my work and prepare my field missions. I use the criteria, the key processes and different relevant questions to explore each phase of the project life. The tool has also helped me a lot in the field to prepare interviews and conduct workshops.

I recently used the COMPAS to brief someone with a very technical background who was due to go into the field to carry out the evaluation of a water and sanitation project and who needed methodological information and tools. This worked very well and it helped the person in question to grasp how to get the most important information during their evaluation mission.

Ana Urgoiti

Quality COMPAS and Dynamic COMPAS training course in Barcelona, from 9th to 12th December 2008

After a recent session in Brussels, Groupe URD will provide a Quality COMPAS and Dynamic COMPAS training course in Barcelona from 9th to 12th December 2008, in partnership with IECAH (Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action). The course will look at the principles of Quality management in humanitarian action and the COMPAS method and will be held in Spanish.

Drawing its content from the COMPAS method, the course will cover subjects such as:

- conducting a situation analysis which goes further than a simple needs analysis,
- designing a project beyond the logical framework,
- defining objectives and indicators which correspond to quality criteria
- developing and implementing a monitoring system,
- understanding the difference between monitoring and evaluation, etc.

For registration and further information, please contact IECAH, (+34) 91 377 3009

E-mail : sede@iecah.org

Training course « Evaluating the quality of humanitarian projects » (Plaisians, 17th to 21th November 2008)

This training course will be held at Groupe URD's head office in the south of France (Drôme Provençale) and the training will be conducted in French.

It will focus on :

- Quality insurance & humanitarian aid (introduction)
- Terms of reference (design and response)
- Conducting an evaluation
- Writing a report

Intended audience: Aid workers with at least two years of experience and an appropriate level of French.

For further information about Groupe URD training activities, please contact:

Pierre Brunet (formations@urd.org)

Groupe URD's new quality expert

We are very pleased to present Pierre BASTID, our new Quality Advisor, who took over from Karla Levy in mid October and who is here to provide you with support on quality issues.

A very big thank you to Karla for everything she brought to Groupe URD over the last six years. Her dynamism, rigour and convictions were essential to the creation and development of the Dynamic COMPAS.

All the best for the future Karla!
Welcome aboard Pierre!

PS: to contact Pierre Bastid: pbastid@urd.org
+33 (1) 42 28 14 12

Quality issues at the heart of the 3rd National conference on humanitarian action in Spain

Organised by the Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action ([IECAH](http://www.iecah.org)) in partnership with Cordoba's municipal delegation for cooperation and solidarity, the 3rd National conference on humanitarian action took place in Cordoba on 6th and 7th October 2008. This new edition built on the work carried out during the previous two editions in 2004 and 2006, bringing together a large number of representatives from local authorities and Spanish NGOs. The theme this year was improving the quality of humanitarian action.

During the first work session a number of specialists presented an overview of the principle international quality initiatives including Groupe URD, the Sphere Project and OCHA. The following session dealt with the different quality management models used by organisations (EFQM, ISO...) and showed that the management tools developed by the business world needed to be adapted. The objective of the third round table was to look at a number of practical experiences of quality management within Spanish organisations. The sector is relatively new in Spain compared to other countries, and it is clear that quality management remains a challenge for the majority of Spanish NGOs. The following session focused on the local financing of humanitarian action - a subject which is particularly relevant in Spain. In the highly decentralised Spanish context, this was an opportunity to review the different mechanisms already in place (solidarity funds, regional and municipal grants) and to analyse a number of successful cases. The final round table emphasised the importance of evaluations in guaranteeing quality and improving the quality of humanitarian projects and programmes.

For more information, please see the last BIAH, N°8 (Boletín IECAH de Acción Humanitaria):

http://www.iecah.org/accion_boletin.php

If you want to subscribe : <http://www.compasqualite.org/blog>