

## EDITORIAL

What if the Dynamic COMPAS were handed over to the humanitarian community?

The Dynamic COMPAS has been in use for a year and a half – it has 600 individual users and has been adopted by two organisations. A number of issues have emerged over this period and one in particular has given us food for thought - the demand for a more flexible tool which could be simplified and adapted to the specific needs of users (see article about GTZ-IS).

We are therefore considering the idea of developing a new and more flexible Dynamic COMPAS, which can be fully 'customised', which would mean that users could choose their own technical features (system for creating project types) and methodology (key questions, criteria, phases, etc).

Of course this would involve the development of new software but Groupe URD is not an IT services company, so it would not be able to take on this kind of work alone. This raises the question of software maintenance and technical support for the long term.

This is why we are considering the possibility of adopting a free software model for the ongoing development and dissemination of the Dynamic COMPAS. Free software is publicly owned, is free and is developed and maintained by a structured community (multi-party management, steering committee, programmers, users, etc.). This development model is popular in other sectors (the web browser Mozilla Firefox is an example of free software and Nokia uses this kind of software for its telephone system in order to reduce maintenance). It has also begun to be used in the humanitarian sector: the 'Sahana' system for coordinating humanitarian action was the first of its kind. The fact that it was used by the Bangladeshi government to coordinate aid during the recent floods shows how far it has come ([www.sahana.lk](http://www.sahana.lk)).

The philosophy behind free software seems particularly suited to the humanitarian sector. It contributes to the common good by pooling collective energy and reduces waste of limited resources.

In practical terms, there are a certain number of pre-requisites. We are currently conducting some preliminary research, to establish who we might be able to work with on this project. Many questions remain: Is there really enough potential interest for this kind of tool? How would each type of humanitarian actor take part? How might it be financed and over what kind of period? Would any donors be prepared to finance the initial phases of such a project? How can a core group of programmers be maintained? How can coordination between users and programmers be organised effectively?

If you have any ideas on this subject, please let us know (using this blog, for example) and we will take them into account in our feasibility study, which should provide some answers to these questions and help us work together on further developments of the Dynamic COMPAS.

## AID & QUALITY

### The "Listening Project" or how listening is an essential part of humanitarian quality.

In line with previous projects such as 'Do No Harm' and 'Reflecting on Peace Practice', CDA Collaborative Learning Projects launched the 'Listening Project' in 2005, which aims to record and analyse the ideas and feelings of people who have been the beneficiaries of humanitarian, development, peace-building and human rights programmes.

The project has involved interviews with aid beneficiaries, staff of local and international NGOs and people who witnessed programmes in a number of locations including Aceh in Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Bolivia, New Orleans and Cambodia.

The first conclusions to emerge from the analysis of these interviews are:

- International assistance has become an 'industry' which focuses more on the supply of goods and services than on human relations.

- The way that international aid functions at present limits actors' motivation and opportunities to listen to the beneficiaries of aid.
- In most cases, the way that aid is provided is of more concern to beneficiaries than how much aid or money is involved.

These conclusions will cast doubts on the pertinence of current plans to reinforce coordination and coherence between actors if the participation of affected people is not reconsidered.

*Read the article by Dayna Brown, Director of the Listening Project, CDA*

## **The Humanitarian Action Strategy Paper for Spanish Development Cooperation, a new opportunity to improve quality.**

### *A little history*

In recent years Spain has contributed significantly to the international community's development efforts. In 2006, the volume of aid it provided was equivalent to the average volume provided by countries in the CAD (Comité d'Aide au Développement). This aid, which includes a large social component, is very decentralised. This has its advantages, but it also leads to numerous coordination problems.

On the other hand, Spain has always devoted a very small proportion of its aid to humanitarian operations and much less than other donor countries. Until the 50s, very few organisations worked in the field and they were given little support by the state. The great changes which took place internationally at the end of the 80s and the major crises of the following decade increased the activity of a number of NGOs. During this period it became apparent that it was not enough to respond viscerally with good intentions to natural disasters of all kinds. Very little funding was made available for these issues and it was only as a result of funding from private sources and from ECHO, which had just been created, that a fledgling humanitarian sector was able to begin specialising and consolidating within the Spanish Cooperation sector.

This lack of commitment to humanitarian issues from the state and a certain lack of understanding of the specific nature of humanitarianism led to the passing of the Law for International Cooperation in 1998, which is still in force and which is based on a confused, limited and out-dated definition of humanitarian aid.

During the 90s, this fledgling Spanish humanitarian community found itself on the sidelines of international initiatives concerning humanitarian aid. It was only Spain's involvement in ECHO (very strong at that time) which opened the Spanish aid sector to the dynamism of the international humanitarian sector and allowed Spanish actors to become familiar with the quality initiatives which had been developed.

For all these reasons, the Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation 2005-2008 represented an important step towards establishing a formal role for humanitarian action within Spanish international cooperation. In terms of humanitarian issues, it is an attempt to make up for lost time and to bring Spain into line with other donors, and particularly the UN and the European Union. The Master Plan's normalisation process culminated with Spain's integration in the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative in 2004.

### *The approval of the Humanitarian Action Strategy in 2008*

Further specialisation is now taking place with the Humanitarian Action Strategy Paper for Spanish Development Cooperation. It concerns all actors involved in the Spanish International Cooperation sector, such as public administrations, NGOs, academic institutions and a wide variety of civil society organisations. Its goal is to orient the actions of these different actors in order to improve Spain's humanitarian response, and its insertion into an overall humanitarian response, contributing to improving the situation of the most vulnerable populations.

Concretely, it has the following specific objectives:

1. To improve the potential and effectiveness of Spain's humanitarian response by increasing its volume and quality.
2. To improve communication and coordination mechanisms between all actors involved and promote the participation of civil society.
3. To increase Spain's involvement in international initiatives.

4. To contribute to the reduction of risks and the fight against extreme vulnerability, by linking short term responses with mid and long term responses.
5. To integrate humanitarian action into Spain's aid sector in a way that both maintains its specific character and allows synergy with other forms of aid.
6. To help to raise awareness nationally and internationally about the need to adopt more effective means of preventing and responding to disasters of all types.

The Humanitarian Action Strategy Paper for Spanish Development Cooperation was presented in Madrid on 18 February 2008. All Spanish humanitarian actors were involved in its development and it was coordinated by the Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action (IECAH). In the coming months it will be the subject of a large number of promotional events and debates all over Spain.

### *The issue of quality in Spanish humanitarian action*

In addition to fundamental humanitarian principles, the Strategy includes a commitment to certain essential values - gender equity, equality, promotion of local capacities, participation, precaution, accountability and quality. Integral to the Strategy is the commitment made by Spain to the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship. The government and all state administrations will ensure that their humanitarian actions respect these principles and do not compromise the impartiality, neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors. The Strategy therefore seeks to structure all national humanitarian efforts and make them more effective while respecting the mandates and autonomy of each actor.

Finally, the Strategy includes a commitment to using quality standards (those in Sphere and the COMPAS criteria) and promoting good practice in humanitarian action, particularly by encouraging Spanish actors to develop an evaluation culture. It will encourage the use of ALNAP guidelines and handbooks and the carrying out of evaluations at different levels (project, multi-donor, etc.). It will also be subject to evaluation itself in order to draw lessons from experience.

*Francisco Rey*

## **Evaluation and quality assurance practices in the Spanish humanitarian sector**

Groupe URD in partnership with IECAH (the Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action), carried out an analysis of approaches to Quality in the Spanish humanitarian sector, as part of a project funded by the AECI (the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation). In order to support NGOs in their interventions improving and to make progress in the development of a quality culture, being aware of the difficulties and reluctances existing in the humanitarian work is necessary. This is the objective of the present study: *knowing and analyzing the current situation of the practices of humanitarian actors in Spain in terms of quality.*

This document is the result of a various-stages process: firstly, a questionnaire was designed and sent by e-mail to a wide sample of humanitarian actors. The answers (55% of the initial sample) were processed and completed, where possible and appropriate, with individual interviews. A first draft of the study was written to use it as a base for a debate seminar, which was held in the AECID on September 14, 2007: "*The Quality in the Humanitarian Action, a Technical and Ethical Imperative, Perceptions and Practices of the Spanish Actors*".

The summary of the discussions and debates among the numerous participants (a very representative sample of the Spanish humanitarian sector) were included in the study final

version; a study, which, we must clear up, was only based in a series of surveys and interviews, which results couldn't be verified in the field or in the headquarters of the organizations taking part in it. One of the first conclusions extracted from the study was that the quality matter in the Spanish humanitarian sector is seen as something very important (by the actors as well as by the donors) and that it is not necessary any more to emphasize its validity and its imperative nature.


Although it is true that at the international level, Spanish actors continue having low visibility and low participation in the international fora, the Spanish associative movement has not been unaware of the quality debates, but the contrary....

See the executive summary in the blog and the whole document (in Spanish), see: <http://www.iecah.org/cuadern.php>

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## USERS FEEDBACK

*(react on the blog)*

  
croix-rouge française  
**The Quality COMPAS and the French Red Cross: feedback from Nicolas Pazery, Head of Evaluation and Quality, International Relations and Operations Department**

The French Red Cross's budget for international operations is only a small part of its overall budget. This is in keeping with the priorities of every National Red Cross/Red Crescent Society, as our mandate is to conduct operations principally within the national territory and particularly as an auxiliary for public authorities. This said, in recent years it has steadily increased its international activity from 1% to 5% of its total budget. It has therefore adopted an approach which aims to guarantee the quality of its international operations.

There are three specific objectives:

- 1/ to improve the quality of its internal procedures (headquarters and field) and its partnerships (*organizational management*);
- 2/ to improve the quality of its evaluations (from initial diagnoses to the assessment of project impacts) and its management of humanitarian and development projects (*project management*);
- 3/ to improve the technical quality of its projects through the continual management of knowledge (*knowledge management*).

Without using it systematically, we use the Quality COMPAS regularly for specific projects to meet specific needs. It is one of the project management methods that expatriate delegates are shown before they go into the field. The COMPAS's 12 Quality criteria go much further than the classic criteria and we find them particularly suitable for our international operations.

### *Using the Quality COMPAS for the evaluation of projects*

For initial assessments, the question-based approach of the COMPAS is one of a number of tools that evaluators can use. Depending on the time available and the constraints involved, the evaluator can then refer to the COMPAS's analytical framework to ensure that the most important evaluation questions have been treated during the initial assessment. However, so far, it has not been used very often.

### *The Quality COMPAS as a framework for managing and monitoring projects*

For some of our international operations we have begun to use a monitoring system which includes both logical framework indicators and the 'monitoring of critical events' function from the Quality COMPAS. It is currently being used in 12 countries (Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Djibouti, French Guiana, Colombia, Haiti, Dominica, Jordan, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) for both development and disaster preparedness projects. Based on the COMPAS's 12 quality criteria, one of the system's functions is regular monitoring to identify problems which have the potential to compromise a project.

Of course, the monitoring and evaluation tools which we have implemented, including those which incorporate elements of the COMPAS method, have not been in place for very long. More time is needed before we are able to evaluate their impact and pertinence in the mid term.

### **Using the Dynamic COMPAS at COSI**

We have been using the Dynamic COMPAS at COSI for several months now (cf newsletter n° 1), so we are in a position to give some feedback about our collective experience of using it, and to make some suggestions about how we would like it to evolve.

I first found out about the COMPAS on the internet. The idea of the 12 criteria which could be applied to any programme and the central position of the beneficiary immediately struck me as being both sensible and essential. I then did a Dynamic COMPAS course to learn how to use the software application which then allowed me to train users within COSI. At first I felt that anyone would be able to use it. I felt that it was a tool that could be used as much by people who were just beginning in the humanitarian sector as by those with experience – a way of marking out the territory for the former and a kind of aide-mémoire for the latter, a tool which would allow experience to be shared at all levels and provide a common framework to aid reflection. Unfortunately, things are not as simple in practice. There have been contrasting opinions depending on the profile of users as well as the part of the application being used (evaluation or management).

Some are very enthusiastic, others much less so. I would attribute this rejection to resistance to change and maybe concern that it will increase the amount of administrative work. Typical criticisms are that it is a tool for head office rather than for the field, or that it is for large organisations. It is often those who have been in the sector a long time who reject it the most bluntly, even if they are conscious that the method is quite valid.

Even though everyone subscribes whole-heartedly to the twelve criteria, the problems begin when we move from the theory to the practice of the phases. The most common criticisms are that there are too many questions and that some of them are not clear. I think it would be possible to improve clarity by reducing the number of questions, by making them more concise and by avoiding words which need to be explained or have several interpretations (like '*resilience*').

On the other hand, users find it very easy to use the evaluation module and the monitoring of critical events, even if there are some adjustments to be made to the text. It is not yet possible to evaluate how effective the monitoring of critical events is, but the teams appreciate it. Some questions remain, in particular about how often critical events reports should be produced.

In general, each person who has taken part in a project carries out an evaluation of it. The Dynamic COMPAS does not allow evaluations to be compared as is the case for the monitoring of critical events, so we summarise the answers to each question, then they are entered and organised by team or by period. This procedure is fully accepted by staff and they look forward to

hearing the conclusions. We are often surprised by the comments in the evaluations, with precise and relevant issues being raised by people even if this calls into question their own actions. This shows that the evaluations allow everyone to question their own behaviour without feeling judged, which is extremely positive both for the beneficiaries and the programme. Even those who are the least enthusiastic about the tool recognise the benefit of such results.

In the evaluation section of the COMPAS, it is very helpful to go through the 12 criteria, which clarify the reasons for our actions. There is less clarity during the project management phases. What is more, filling in several evaluation forms is not laborious, whereas completing a phase can be. There is a risk that users gradually stop answering each question, that they only read them and answer the chapter titles instead. As a result, beneficiaries and the 12 criteria around them are further from the user's mind and what remains is just a standard report writing procedure. Perhaps if each phase was organised around the 12 criteria, as is the case in the evaluation section, entering data would be simpler for the user. It would also be a good idea if the software then organised the data for the production of phase reports.

Now that we have spent some time using the Dynamic COMPAS, I feel that some simplification and rationalisation needs to be done before we can convince greater numbers to use it.

For the method and software to be successful and beneficial, they need to be embraced by users, which is not something you can impose. It is also important to remember that users, whether at headquarters or in the field, only have a limited amount of time that they can spend on the COMPAS.

It seems to me that the most important quality of the COMPAS is that it encourages reflection amongst users. The challenge now is to make it more accessible.

*Laurent Coste*

## **The NGO Solidarités tests the DC in Thailand**

Solidarités began a project in Thailand in May 2007 after an initial diagnosis carried out in October 2006 and a project proposal presented to the European Commission and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. From the outset, this project struck us as being an ideal test case for using the Dynamic COMPAS at every stage of a project. We wanted to assess its potential and how it could be used on our operations in general. Solidarités had already begun to adopt a quality approach and this test case was an opportunity to determine how this might be taken further.

In October-November 2006 the decision was made to go back over the work which had already been carried out and to enter the information into the Dynamic COMPAS. Phases 0, 1 and 2 (preliminary phase, diagnosis and design) were therefore entered into the software after having been written. We encountered a number of difficulties in doing this and particularly during the design phase: the Dynamic COMPAS is adapted to the ECHO format whereas the project proposal for Thailand was in the Europaid format. But this did not prevent us from entering the project details into the software and it soon proved to be very useful, highlighting certain aspects which needed particular attention during the monitoring phase. It was also decided that changes would be made to the tool in response to the feedback, suggestions and needs of the team involved in the operation. The operation has now been running for 10 months. Monitoring, both of the project and of critical events, has been carried out on several occasions using the Dynamic COMPAS.

The COMPAS's monitoring exercise is a very useful step before writing a report for donors. Even if it is adapted to the ECHO format and the texts written during a monitoring exercise can not be directly transposed to a Europaid format, which has its own particular sections and approach, it nevertheless helps users to organise their ideas before writing a report. The monitoring of critical events (MCE) has proved to be extremely useful to share and analyse knowledge at a particular moment of the project. The

MCE does not take long to write, helps users to reflect on the problems identified and when it is done in a team, it helps to establish collective understanding of a situation and reach concerted decisions about what attitude or reaction to adopt.

It is clear that the COMPAS can be of real use, but it can also create frustration amongst users when it is perceived to be a constraint. Some people just see it as a source of more work. There is a need for someone, whether they are inside or outside the operation, to be a catalyst and to remind and push the team to use the software.

What is more, expatriates need to have good understanding of the project cycle in order to use the COMPAS. This is not given in many operations where beginners working in the field do not have this basic knowledge. The approach is even more problematic for local teams. Before going into the field, the expatriates on the Thailand operation were all trained in using the COMPAS method and software and so were prepared. Of course, the situation was more difficult for the Thai team which was recruited in the first months of the project. Most of them had no experience of working for an NGO and so did not know about the project cycle. Regarding the integration of local staff, the expatriate team began teaching them about the project cycle with a view to subsequently train them to use the COMPAS. This is a time-consuming but interesting process. The fact that the expatriates train local staff allows them to take on responsibilities and learn new skills which can open doors for them in the future. In this context the COMPAS is an excellent tool for transferring skills.

The language barrier also proved to be problematic. Not only did some staff not understand English, but what is more, Solidarités used French on the Dynamic COMPAS. It is possible to change from the French to the English mode, but all texts previously written remain in French.

It is probably still too early to come to any conclusions about using the COMPAS more generally in the future. In a previous contribution, the necessary conditions for using the tool properly were outlined. There needs to be a desire for improvement which begins with internal training. However, this is not enough because it is also necessary to build loyalty among expatriate staff in which the organisation has 'invested'. French NGOs are faced with the issue of high turnover, which will obviously compromise any attempt to improve and use the COMPAS. The COMPAS needs to be tested on the project in Thailand, but also on other projects in order to have a clearer idea of what it can bring to projects in different contexts.

One concern is that the Dynamic COMPAS will become a tool which is only used by a project management 'elite' within an organisation if all future users are not provided with a minimum level of knowledge about the project cycle. Our understanding is that the COMPAS is, by its very nature, an inclusive tool and that using it in an exclusive way would be contrary to its objectives.

*Frank Lavigne*

## **Islamic Relief France uses the COMPAS in Kousseri, Cameroon**

The fighting which took place in N'Djamena between rebel factions and President DEBY's regime in February led to a massive influx of refugees into northern Cameroon. Following initial reports which estimated their number at 50 000, Islamic Relief France mounted an operation which began on the 6th of February. The operation had two objectives – to provide emergency relief and to carry out an analysis of the refugees' needs for subsequent assistance projects.

As head of project, I was responsible for carrying out the needs analysis and proposing ideas for operations which could be carried out in accordance with our mandate. The decision was made to use the COMPAS to ensure that quality would be taken into account in the operations we ran. Having already used the method

in other contexts, this was an opportunity for me to test it in a real humanitarian emergency situation.

The COMPAS proved to be extremely useful for this job. As this was my first emergency operation, I did not really have a clear strategy before arriving in the field. Using the COMPAS helped me to ask myself the right questions. It allowed me to save time and improve the effectiveness of my analysis. After three days in the field, I was able to generate my diagnosis report using the Dynamic COMPAS. The COMPAS ensures that you cover all the main points which contribute to a quality diagnosis and the report was positively received by the head office.

However, even if the COMPAS allowed me to save a considerable amount of time, I had to skip certain questions. This was due both to the large number of questions and to the fact that certain questions could only be answered by head office or necessitated in-depth analysis which was not really possible in an emergency situation.

We also encountered a technical problem in installing the COMPAS on the head office computers which meant that head office could not access the information that I entered. This prevented the responsiveness between head office and the field which the Dynamic COMPAS should have provided.

Despite these details, it was a very positive experience, and we intend to use the COMPAS again for our future operations.

*Modou Diaw*

## **B. Sokpoh, Groupe URD researcher and evaluator, writes about using the Quality COMPAS reference framework in evaluations**

In the past three years, I have taken part in and led numerous evaluations of emergency and development projects using the Quality COMPAS method. These include the evaluation of Christian Aid's response to the 2004/5 food crisis in the Sahel and the evaluation of Senegalese – Catalan co-development operations. What lessons can be drawn from these experiences?

### The Quality COMPAS vs the DAC/OECD reference frameworks

In the majority of cases, the terms of reference we are given for the evaluations we carry out at Groupe URD are based on the 7 "classic" DAC (CAD: Comité d'Aide au Développement in OCDE): criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, connectedness, coverage and impact. However, since 2005, we have responded to these terms of reference by proposing to use the Compass Rose, the reference framework of the Quality COMPAS, which is based on 12 criteria. These cover the 7 CAD/OECD criteria but go further. Terms of reference often include certain cross-cutting themes. These are directly taken into account in the Quality COMPAS reference framework. For example, questions related to linking relief, rehabilitation and development are raised by criterion D (the project aims for positive impacts beyond implementation) and coordination between actors is covered by criterion H (the project is integrated in its institutional context in an optimal manner).

At first, those who commission the evaluations often find that 12 criteria is a lot. But then, when it comes to deciding which of the 12 should be removed, they are unable to decide! In general, we decide to work with the 12 criteria, looking at some in more detail than others. When we present the evaluation report, they are often impressed by its comprehensive nature, covering all the major issues involved in programme and project management.

The organisations that are evaluated, and particularly partners working in the field, like the COMPAS criteria because they are easy to understand. In contrast to the DAC criteria, which are single words, the 12 criteria take the form of full sentences, which make them much easier to understand.

Partners in the field have often expressed their satisfaction with the reference framework of 12 criteria. As the director of a Malian NGO once told me, "*This reference framework is like a summary of everything we have to deal with when managing programmes and projects. It's just common sense*".

### Can this reference framework be used for development projects?

During our evaluations we have had discussions with the structures being evaluated about how the Quality COMPAS criteria can be used. Of particular interest were discussions about the criteria used to decide who the beneficiaries of a project will be and what the main focus of the operation will be (water, agriculture, professional training, literacy...).

*Criteria used to select beneficiaries:* The COMPAS was designed for humanitarian operations which target the most vulnerable people but development programmes can have other objectives. For example, one food security programme which we evaluated included certain conditions which had to be met before an operation could take place in a village: the village had to apply in writing to the NGO and had to participate financially to the project. The national organisations were federations of farmers' groups or village communities and a village or group had to be a member of the organisation before they could benefit from its actions. The evaluation team decided that this selection process did not ensure that the most vulnerable villages were targeted, as promoted by the COMPAS method. The issue of targeting the zones and people most in need was the subject of lively debate between the evaluators and the organisations we evaluated.

*Responding to priority needs versus responding to donors' calls for proposals:* The COMPAS is based on the selection of priority needs within the zone where an operation takes place. In one food security programme in the Sahel, the issue of nutrition was not taken into account at all. One of the main reasons given for this by the organisations running the programme was that the donor's call for proposals did not mention nutrition. Malnutrition, though, is a serious problem in the Sahel and the evaluation team felt that it was important to take it into account when dealing with food security. The issues that the programme team was able to tackle were therefore limited by the call for proposals.

Another point which emerged was how the funding process influences results. There can be a significant gap between a project proposal based on priority needs and the version which is finally funded by donors (certain aspects which might be important for the local population might not be funded if the donors do not consider them to be a priority). Certain actors feel that looking for funding could be considered a separate phase of the Quality COMPAS. They are interested in the idea of adapting the Quality COMPAS to development issues.

### Using the Quality COMPAS method for evaluations

For my evaluations, I do not only use the COMPAS reference framework – I use the whole method. For example, the themes covered in each phase (e.g. For the initial assessment phase: characteristics of the context and developing hypotheses; analysis of the political and legal context of the crisis, etc.) and the related key questions are sources of inspiration to decide what information to collect and how to analyse it. The corresponding key processes<sup>1</sup> are very useful to assess the extent to which each criterion has been met.

<sup>1</sup> Definition of key processes in the COMPAS: a set of activities which need to be carried out to ensure that project results match the relevant quality criterion.



## Dynamic COMPAS - latest developments

Since the launch of version 1.2 last September, there have been a number of changes made to the Dynamic COMPAS. The latest version, version 1.4, came out in mid February and includes the following main improvements.

### All the pages of the Dynamic COMPAS have a title!

In the past, some pages did not have an individual title at the top of the window or in the thumbnail. Yet, when you use the Dynamic COMPAS it is very common to have several pages open at the same time. The new titles make it easier to find your way around.

### A more compact COMPAS!

Up to version 1.3 the size of the installation file was 25Mo. A great number of users who do not have access to a broadband Internet connection complained about having difficulty downloading the software from our site. For example, using a classic modem with a good connection, it could take up to 3 hours to download.

We have therefore compressed the file drastically to 14Mo, a reduction of more than 40%, which will reduce download time to the same extent.

### More and more bugs corrected!

Over forty anomalies have been corrected since version 1.2 was launched last September, having been identified by users or during training sessions.

Of these corrections, the most important concern file attachment and data import/export functionalities and the logical framework. These have been made more flexible and reliable.

It is therefore very important to download and install the latest COMPAS updates. The size of these files is kept to a minimum (less than 1 Mo) so that they can be downloaded and installed rapidly and easily. If you do not install them you run the risk of losing data.

Please continue to let us know about any anomalies that you come across, no matter how small!

## New translations to meet user needs

The **COMPAS board** is now available in **Spanish**, thanks to funding from the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID). It can be ordered from Groupe URD or The Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action (IECAH). It is also currently being translated into **Portuguese** by the Platform of Portuguese NGOs and will soon be translated into **Dari** by our Afghan colleagues in connection with the KAIFIAT project, with funding from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The **Guide to Adopting the COMPAS** is now available in **English**. This is a guide for humanitarian actors who are planning to adopt (or considering adopting) the Dynamic COMPAS and the Quality COMPAS method. It includes information about how to adopt the method successfully by respecting certain key principles and how to apply quality assurance to humanitarian programmes and projects.

A simple, user-friendly **tutorial** for self-training is also available in French, English and Spanish.

To download these support materials, go to:

<http://www.compasqualite.org/en/dynamic-compas/supports-dynamic-compas.php>

or : <http://www.compasqualite.org/en/dynamic-compas/use-dynamic-compas.php>



## Noah' top tip: a "user-friendly" way of creating your logical framework

Did you know that the Dynamic COMPAS provides a methodical and user-friendly system for creating a logical framework<sup>2</sup> and allows you to monitor indicators during the running of a project?

### 1) Creating your logical framework during the design phase of the project:

Step 1: progressively define your general objective, your specific objectives and your expected results.

Step 2: create your list of indicators with their reference values and their means of verification.

Step 3: attribute an indicator to each of your objectives and expected results.

You can also export your logical framework in Word or Excel format.

### 2) Monitoring your logical framework indicators:

Once your project is running, you can enter data collected during monitoring exercises for each of the indicators you defined in the logical framework. To do this, each time that you begin a new monitoring exercise, your list of indicators is presented in a table - one column shows the reference value which you recorded when you created your logical framework and another allows you to record the value observed during the monitoring exercise. You are able to see what progress is being made towards objectives and expected results at a glance.

Give it a try!

## Adapting the Dynamic COMPAS to the needs of NGOs

*The need for practical and adaptable tools which help to improve the quality of humanitarian action.*

In the past ten years the humanitarian sector has gone through some major changes. Software, guidelines and methodology have been produced for project management. Certain NGOs have devised their own variations, created Excel or Word 'templates' or have developed their own software, etc. Others have adopted existing software, which rarely has a specifically 'humanitarian' approach, and which sometimes deals only with part of project management such as monitoring progress being made on activities, financial monitoring or reporting.

This was the context that existed when the Dynamic COMPAS was created - a management tool for humanitarian actors which covered all the phases of an operation

GTZ-IS asked Groupe URD to help them on one of their projects (PAL in Eastern Afghanistan) where there was a need to manage information about results and changes for about 200 projects, to programme and carry out monitoring based on a single analytical framework which would help to make the necessary adjustments to ensure that the projects ran smoothly.

This request from GTZ showed once again that there is a need for management and quality assurance tools. It also revealed certain limits and constraints with which NGOs are confronted in accessing project management tools.

*Expressed needs*

The Dynamic COMPAS proved to be useful and adapted to the needs expressed by GTZ, but the following types of adjustments nevertheless needed to be made:

- Functionalities which allow the Quality COMPAS method to be adopted in a way that is 'made to measure' (partially adopted or customised) - changing the number of phases in

<sup>2</sup> Design phase: definition of objectives, results and indicators.

the project cycle, using only part of the 'Compass Rose' and questions of quality assurance.

- New criteria for filing, characterizing or identifying each project.
- Functionalities which allow model projects to be generated, which simplifies the process of creating projects of the same type or sub-type (i.e. when you repeat the same agricultural project in several zones).
- Reports and forms generated by the Dynamic COMPAS, adapted to the specific needs of the organisation.
- Functionalities which make it possible to have a common list of indicators, so that each project can include them in its log frame.

*"The software is simplified and adapted not only to lighten its contents to the basic elements of the Quality COMPAS method, but also to allow the programme to be aggregated (...)"<sup>3</sup> (O.S.)*

*"(...) The Dynamic COMPAS was the right tool for their needs: monitoring and evaluation of their operations in the field by defining, centralising and exploiting data related to specific indicators. Some adjustments were needed to simplify the interface and to generate reports which were specifically suited to their needs." (L.R.)<sup>4</sup>*

The need to make such adjustments is not specific to GTZ. Ideally, it is best to have a complete quality process and to take into account all the quality criteria in the Compass Rose, but adopting a quality assurance approach is a gradual process, and, as a consequence, the accompanying tools (software, manuals, procedures) should make it easier to appropriate a quality approach within each NGO by allowing the approach to be adopted partially or dynamically and allowing adjustments to be made.

#### *Constraints*

##### NGOs do not often have the human resources to develop software

*"In the specific context of humanitarian aid, where technical know-how in computing is not a central issue, it is preferable to think in terms of configurable software rather than having to carry out new developments. Adapting the Dynamic COMPAS to the specific characteristics of each NGO should be done via the interface (choice of parameters, options) and not by modifying the software code (which can only be done by a qualified computer engineer). (L.R.)"*

##### The issue of cost can limit the possibility of adopting the Dynamic COMPAS

*"The organisations which might be interested in using the Dynamic COMPAS do not necessarily have the technical competence to adapt software, nor the means to finance specific developments. The GTZ project is symptomatic of this situation. Following an evaluation by Groupe URD, the organisation wanted to adapt the COMPAS. Though attractive on paper, it was not possible to make the adjustments due to the high cost of developing the software (L.R.)"*

#### *The future*

##### Software which can be customised is essential

For each NGO to adapt the Dynamic COMPAS would prove costly. It would be preferable to ensure that the software allows users to make strategic choices (particularly between methods) via parameters.

*"Due to the present state of the Dynamic COMPAS, the adjustments that GTZ wanted to make would have involved software development of a particular nature. The majority of this would have been sufficiently generic to be easily used by other projects (via parameters). If the software can be customised, the technical service for adopting the Dynamic COMPAS would be less time-consuming, and therefore less expensive".(L.R.)*

Towards software which can be customised, « *The adjustments which we proposed to make for GTZ-IS were not conceived technically as a single transformation to be used for the sole purpose of their programme but as a number of ways of providing flexibility to the Dynamic COMPAS. It would then have been customised in one particular way for their Afghan programme. As such, the tool which is available to all would have been improved.* (O.S.)

##### Free software, a financially and technically effective way to allow the Dynamic COMPAS to continue to develop and remain relevant

How is it possible to develop software which is flexible, adaptable and which can evolve in a sector such as the humanitarian sector, where there is little funding and few people who are specialised in software development? One possibility we have looked into is 'free' software.

In simple terms, free software is public property, which is created and maintained by a community of developers and users. More specifically, it is software which has a licence which guarantees certain freedoms: the freedom to use, study, modify, duplicate and give the software. It is these freedoms, which are guaranteed by its licence, which give it the status of public property.

The Dynamic COMPAS is already a free of charge, open source software. If it became free software, this would allow it to evolve and be maintained more easily thanks to the active participation of users and developers within a 'Dynamic COMPAS community'.

A free and flexible Dynamic COMPAS would constitute a unique piece of public property for the humanitarian community as a whole. This solution would ensure that the community's limited resources would be used to maximum effect. However, it is important to remember that *"free software is only useful when users have the competence or the means to finance its development"*. (L.R.)

The Dynamic COMPAS should eventually become customisable, which would allow it to be adopted with little or no software development. *"Humanitarian actors have limited funds and only the main donors could finance the major developments which would be needed to make the Dynamic COMPAS more flexible"*. (O.S.)

<sup>3</sup> Olivier Sarrat is an information systems engineer, responsible for developing the Dynamic COMPAS.

<sup>4</sup> Ludovic Roux is also an information systems engineer, who has worked on the Dynamic COMPAS on a voluntary basis.

### The first Dynamic COMPAS course in English at Groupe URD headquarters

A Quality COMPAS and Dynamic COMPAS training course will be held at Groupe URD headquarters in Plaisians (Drôme provençale, south of France) from the 23rd to the 27th of June 2008. For the first time, due to demand, this in-house session will be conducted in English. The course is aimed at heads of programme, heads of project, M&E managers, evaluators and all other positions within the humanitarian sector concerned with project management.

The course will be given by Groupe URD researchers who specialise in quality.

The course looks at quality management for humanitarian projects using the Dynamic COMPAS software and includes:

#### THE BASICS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT FOR HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS:

- Module 1: Introduction to Quality in humanitarian aid and the main concepts involved (criteria, indicators, quality assurance)
- Module 2: Basic principles of project management with the Quality COMPAS (project cycle, quality criteria, key questions).

#### MANAGING A PROJECT WITH THE DYNAMIC COMPAS (based on a case study):

- Module 3: Diagnosis and project design (evaluating and targeting needs, designing the logical framework, identifying negative impacts, etc.)
- Module 4: Monitoring system (definition, critical event monitoring tools, project monitoring, adjustments).

#### EVALUATING A PROJECT (based on a case study) :

- Module 5: Self-evaluation of a project (definition, using criteria and indicators)

For more information and/or to register, please contact Pierre Brunet ([formations@urd.org](mailto:formations@urd.org))

### Workshop on “Quality and accountability in Afghanistan - lessons learned and challenges ahead”, 12 March 2008

On 12 March 2008, Groupe URD and the Church World Service, in partnership with HAP and the Afghan government, have organized a workshop on the quality of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, which was attended by over forty participants.

Having for a long time applied a quantitative approach, covering humanitarian needs as broadly as possible, humanitarian actors



have started to realise that it is necessary to adopt a more qualitative approach to the service delivered to crisis-affected people.

On their own, evaluation, training and participation can not have a significant impact on the quality of

aid. This is the collective responsibility of all actors in the field and of donors, whose lack of coherence, flexibility and coordination has been highlighted on many occasions.

How can the quality of aid be improved? What tools exist? How can these quality approaches be institutionalised so that there is a real impact on practices? What can be done to improve skills and to control and monitor how the situation evolves so that actors can fulfill their responsibility?

The workshop has been a chance to explore these questions and had three objectives:

- To stimulate interest in the quality and accountability of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan (Why is it important? Why is it difficult? What are the current initiatives in Afghanistan? Etc.);
- To discuss what a shared vision/definition of ‘Quality’ in the Afghan context might be;
- To instigate dialogue between donors, UN agencies, International and national NGOs about these issues, and specifically about how donors can influence the quality of aid. What needs to be improved? How? Propositions?

### Training of Portuguese NGOs in Lisbon and translation of the Quality COMPAS into Portuguese

As part of a project run in partnership with the Portuguese NGO platform, GAHE (Grupo de Ajuda Humanitaria de Emergência), the Portuguese equivalent of Coordination Sud, a training course on the issues involved in quality management and the Quality COMPAS was held at the beginning of January 2008 in Lisbon. Over five days, representatives from some of the main Portuguese NGOs looked into the Quality COMPAS, multi-scenario planning and evaluation. Certain of the method’s functions, such as the monitoring of critical incidents and the ability to produce reports based on a quality assurance process proved to be very popular. A presentation of these tools was also made to the heads of humanitarian action at the Portuguese Development Support Institute (IPAD) which is run by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The Quality COMPAS and the COMPAS board are currently being translated, which will make them accessible to Portuguese speakers.

This training course was part of a wider project of several months with two main elements:

- Support to build Portuguese NGOs’ humanitarian response capacity, with particular emphasis on quality (method and approach), via a sector diagnosis and the above-mentioned training course;
- Analysis of the idea of creating a fund specifically for humanitarian action managed by the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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