



Technical Assistance for
Civil Society Organisations
Kosovo Office



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QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

A SHORT GUIDE FOR NGOs

June 2012

Dear civil society organisations,

This short guide is a result of the TACSo project activities in Kosovo in addressing the quality assurance standards for civil society organisations.

In May 2012, TACSo Kosovo organised the national conference “Quality Assurance Standards - What are they and Why do we need them” to discuss the different models of Quality Assurance Standards (QAS) applicable for civil society organisations (CSOs) and how these standards impact CSOs' sustainability. This conference brought together representatives of Kosovo civil society organisations, regional and national experts and served as a discussion platform to learn about contemporary trends of Quality Assurance Standards for CSOs in the Western Balkans region, impact on sustainability and possible application in Kosovo's civil society.

“Quality is when you are doing something good and nobody is watching you” was the definition based on which panellists build up their presentations associated with practical examples from day to day work in civil society sector. In answering what QAS standards are, the panellists and discussants agreed that QAS standards are about principles and rules based on which CSOs function and conference was about having a discussion on the need of standardising these principles.

TACSo Kosovo prepared this short guide **Quality Assurance System, a Short Guide for NGOs** that is drafted by regional expert Aida Daguda with inputs from national CSOs. This document is intended to be a guide for NGOs in thinking on their own internal systems and improving of overall organizational performance.

We hope to find it useful in your daily work.

TACSo Kosovo Office
June 2012.

Introduction

Although the term of quality management may sound like a novelty, that is not the case – its roots originate as far back as the World War I, which triggered mass production, which in turn brought about the need for quality control. However, that concept started developing more seriously in North America and Japan only after 1950. Japanese companies trained their workers to ensure that quality becomes an integral part of routine during the course of production, instead of quality control at the end of the process. Although application of quality assurance system is most frequent in commerce, it has spread to service industry, which includes operations of non-governmental organizations.

The system of quality assurance and management implies introduction of standard and transparent operating procedures designed to contribute to accomplishment of certain goals and fulfillment of mission of any organization, including non-governmental organizations.

Therefore, introduction of quality management system could be perceived as a foundation and first serious step towards promotion, establishment and further development of quality infrastructure within a certain NGO.

Non-governmental organizations aim to provide the best possible services for their beneficiaries and other interested parties. Since non-governmental organizations are getting increasingly frequently involved in cooperation with public and private sectors, they are ever more frequently expected to demonstrate that they provide quality services and that they effectively and efficiently manage their organizations, often under difficult and challenging circumstances. Introduction of quality assurance system by an NGO requires commitment to accomplishment of that goal, planning and investment of certain resources. In turn, it will enable such organization to more easily address the increasingly complex demands.

In addition, most organizations are faced with tough competition with other organizations that provide similar services. They can compete with them for grants, contracts or clients. Commitment to quality is an important way in which an organization may prepare itself to compete with its rivals.

A non-governmental organization interested in fulfilling its mission in a committed manner must provide good services to its clients, and at the same time, demonstrate professionalism, transparency and good and rational management of its resources in its interaction with its donors. Sometimes, even organizations that provide good services to their clients have to work very hard to prove it to the others. A high-quality NGO is an organization which provides variety and scope of services as demanded by the interested parties, through effective and efficient management of its processes, with the intent to accomplish the agreed and desired results.

This document is intended to be a guide for NGOs in thinking on their own internal systems and improving of overall organizational performance. It is based on requirements of ISO 9001:2008, and it provides basic guidelines for self-assessment of different areas of work. This document is not sufficient for introducing quality system, but it is useful literature for any organization thinking to improve its work.

ISO 9001:2008

ISO 9001:2008 aims at guaranteeing the effectiveness (but not necessarily the efficiency) of the organization. The standard is applicable to all types of organizations.

The adoption of quality management system should be a strategic decision of an organization. The design and implementation of an organization's quality management system is influenced by:

- its organization environment, changes in that environment, and the risks associated with that environment;
- its varying needs;
- its particular objectives.
- The products it provides
- The processes it employs
- Its size and organizational structure.

It is not the intent of this standard to imply uniformity in the structure of quality management systems or uniformity of documentation. It is flexible enough to allow each organization to develop its own documentation and rules, as response to standard requirements.

The methodology known as **PDCA** (Plan-Do-Check-Act) can be applied to all processes. It is an iterative four-step management method used in business for the control and continuous improvement of processes and products. It is also known as the Deming circle/cycle.

It can be briefly described as follows:

PLAN

Establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with the expected output (the target or goals). By establishing output expectations, the completeness

and accuracy of the specification is also a part of the target improvement. When possible start on a small scale to test possible effects.

DO

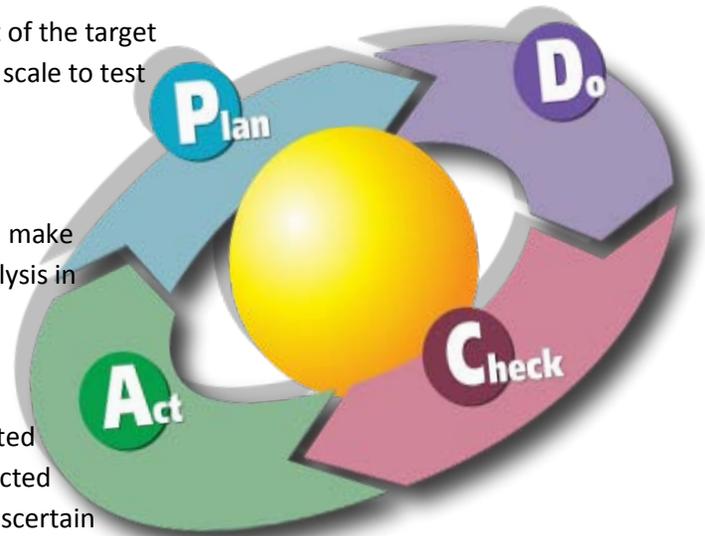
Implement the plan, execute the process, and make the product. Collect data for charting and analysis in the following "CHECK" and "ACT" steps.

CHECK

Study the actual results (measured and collected in "DO" above) and compare against the expected results (targets or goals from the "PLAN") to ascertain any differences. Information is what you need for the next step "ACT".

ACT

Request corrective actions on significant differences between actual and planned results. Analyze the differences to determine their root causes. Determine where to apply changes that will include improvement of the process or product. Take actions to continually improve process performance.



Quality management systems

- The organization shall establish, document, implement and maintain a quality management system and continually improve its effectiveness in accordance with the requirements of this standard.
- Organization has mechanisms which ensure its functioning in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations (knowing all the laws and regulations applicable to work of the organization; information on legal requirements and legislative changes timely and adequately communicated to all employees and other stakeholders; changes in everyday way of working are made in accordance with changes in legislative environment)
- Organization has quality manual, a document which is main pillar of so called 'quality documentation' – it contain the scope of the quality management system, procedures (or reference to them), and a description of interaction between processes of the QMS. Its purpose is to outline the general policies and procedures for staff, customers, accreditation bodies and/or legal bodies to provide an overview of the organization's quality system. The

manual can be the only thing needed, or it may be just a component of documentation. Good quality manuals are very different. Information that is well designed and clearly presented has measurable benefits. Quality manual has to be simple, practical and flexible document, written in simple language, using the words that users know and use.

- The organization has determined responsibilities for documentation management. 'Documentation' means anything written down or captured in some form: written procedures, policies, checklists, forms, or graphics, drawings, flowcharts, diagrams, etc. It can be in any media, hardcopy or soft, including intranet, online, internet or wiki. All of documents should be clear and as short as possible. There are two types of documentation: determined by laws and donors, and internal documentation that is not regulated by law and serves for organizational internal needs.
- There is an organized documentation management, with centralized register of all documentation, procedure on updating, distribution of updated documents, ways of documents marking and storage places, approval of new and updated documents, assurance that relevant versions of applicable documents are available at points of use etc.

Management Responsibility

- Management providing evidence of its commitment to the development and implementation of QMS and continually improving its effectiveness
- Management is ensuring permanent development of the organization, development of its employees and volunteers, and increase of satisfaction of all stakeholders
- Organization has mission and vision statement, which are based on needs of its stakeholders. Also, organization agreed on values that leads all employees and volunteers in their work.
- Organization has strategic and operational plans, which are directly connected to mission, vision and values of the organization. There is also defined procedure of development and updating strategic and operational plan.
- Annual report is important element of communication with all stakeholders and public in general. Annual report include information on achieved results (connected to goals), sources of financing, financial report.

- Organization has organizational structure; responsibilities, authority and competences needed for each working position and needed for quality assurance management. All employees and volunteers are informed on organizational structure, and their own responsibilities and authorities.
- There is organized system of internal and external communication. Management is monitoring communication and its effectiveness, and reacts timely in cases of inconsistency in relation to stakeholders' expectations.
- Employees and volunteers agreed on ethical code of the organization.

Resource Management

- The organization has defined procedures for engaging new employees and volunteers (announcement of vacant position, selection procedure, orientation of new personnel), monitoring of development of employees, and their satisfaction.
- The organization determined the necessary competence for employees and volunteers, and where applicable, provide training and take other actions to achieve the necessary competence. Capacity building is organized in accordance to plan of employee education. The organization maintains appropriate records of education, training, skills and experience. There is procedure for monitoring of employees' training efficiency.
- Job performance is evaluated on an annual basis. Fundamentally, the annual appraisal is designed to serve as a tool that helps supervisors increase productivity, communicate expectations, establish goals for the coming year, and report the employee's success in meeting the past year's performance expectations. In its most productive form, performance appraisal is actually a continuous, year-round practice of exchanging information between the supervisor and employee that begins and ends with the formal annual performance appraisal meeting.
- There is a defined procedure for financial management, with focus on respecting legal requirements. Annual budget (financial plan) contains information on estimated costs and incomes.
- Internal controls exist, as well as procedure for monitoring of budget consumption and informing stakeholders on management of financial resources.

- The organizations determines, provides and maintains the infrastructure needed to achieve conformity to product requirements, as applicable – buildings, workspace and associated utilities, process equipment (both hardware and software), and supporting services (such as transport, communication, information and security systems, firefighting systems). Maintenance of equipment (which requires regular maintenance) has appropriate records and it is in accordance with producer’s instructions.
- The organization has defined procedure for protection of confidential data, with highlight on personal data.

Product Realization

- The organization has defined principles of work with beneficiaries, and among them equal opportunities and prevention of discrimination and exclusion of some groups.
- The organization reviews beneficiary involvement across the whole organization and develops a strategy to promote and improve it. Beneficiary feedback is used to anticipate and plan future service delivery/projects.
- Service provision activities are defined, including input data and resources, execution and monitoring and evaluation. Also, defined responsibilities and tasks of employees and/or volunteers in implementing and improvement of services. Example of services in NGO sector: consultancy, free legal aid, safe houses, conducting researches, SOS phone, organizing events and training sessions etc.
- Systematic project management, as main process in NGO sectors, is defined, and include way of defining project objectives, project staff, partners and associates, deadlines and needed resources, timeframe, monitoring and evaluation. Process of writing project proposal is also defined.
- There is written complaints and suggestions policy and procedure.
- The organization is an active member of relevant networks, and joint working adds values to planned activities; it develops partnerships strategically. Networking activities are reviewed for their effectiveness.

- Joint initiatives with other organizations are planned, mutually agreed and documented (memorandum of understanding, action plan etc).

Measurement, analysis and improvement

- The organization conducting processes of monitoring and evaluation, covering all projects, programs and services; efficiency of annual plan realization and satisfaction of stakeholders. The organization assesses its influence on local groups or society in general.
- The organization monitors information related to beneficiary perception as to whether organization meeting requirements of stakeholders. The methods for obtaining and using this information are determined.
- Internal audit is conducted at planned intervals to determine whether the quality management system is effectively implemented and maintained. Internal audits are done by educated and competent internal auditors. The management ensures that any necessary corrections or corrective actions are taken without undue delay to eliminate detected nonconformities and their causes. A record of the audits and their results is maintained. Auditors shall not audit their own work.
- The organization continually improves the effectiveness of the quality management system through the use of the quality policy, quality objectives, audit results, analysis of data, corrective and preventive actions and management review.
- The organization takes actions to eliminate the causes of nonconformities in order to prevent recurrence. Corrective actions are appropriate to the effects of the nonconformities encountered.
- The organization determines actions to eliminate the causes of potential nonconformities in order to prevent their occurrence. Preventive actions are appropriate to the effects of the potential problems.

HOW, WHERE AND WHEN TO START?

Actually, you have been already started with introducing quality system in your organization, since day of its foundation. You have recognized already many aspects and requests of standard that you already have or implement in your office(s). Standard presented in previous section serves to position yourself toward its requirements - it is just different levels and stages of different aspects of standard that you have in your organization. But, let's see overall process of introducing quality system, step by step.

Step 1: Determine what is to be the organization's commitment to quality.

Is this quality thing just a formality to get your organization's project proposals/product acknowledged by donors/clients? Is it to make sure you don't make any bad products? Is it to please your beneficiaries/potential customers? Or is it to ensure that your processes are capable and producing to their best capability?

The organization's commitment to quality will be the foundation for the systems and implementation to follow. The selection of the proper tools, personnel and processes will all be determined on the basis of your organizational quality vision.

Identify and assign quality personnel. The best solution for NGOs is to form small quality teams, and to determine its composition, responsibilities, and authorities.

Step 2: Identify the quality systems that you are most likely to certify to as your business needs mature

You have to choose and plan carefully, and to explore different possibilities that you have. Currently, NGOs in Balkans region have three possibilities in regard to quality systems: SOKNO in Croatia, NGO quality standard:2008 in Slovenia (based on ISO, but also applicable to other countries), and ISO 9001:2008 (applicable to all types of businesses/NGOs, in all countries). You can decide to have more than one standard implemented in your organization – i.e. quality system can include combination of ISO 9001:2008 and standard related to specific type of activities (work with children, victims of violence etc).

Identify preliminary goals for the quality system to be followed. Purchase manuals or find support by intermediate organizations in your country (if such organization exists). ¹

¹ Civil Society Promotion Centre from Bosnia and Herzegovina would publish a manual related to quality system for NGOs, in August 2012. All information you can find by email info@cpcd.ba or website www.civilnodrustvo.ba

Step 3: Map your business processes

Before you implement a quality program, it is critical that you define the products or services that you provide. Do this not just for production of certain products, such as projects, training programs, certain goods, but also for administrative, planning, and beneficiary related service processes. Example of level of processes that should come out of this stage is:

1. The quality system
2. Product and service development
3. Product and service delivery and operations
4. Planning
5. Financial management
6. Human resource management
7. Administration.

Step 4: Document your process.

Now that you know what to do, it is time to document your processes. Documenting procedures ensures a common understanding and provides standard work instructions and references. It also provides a means of both process control and audit traceability.

Procedures are all about doing things. Procedures telling you what to do, when and how to do it and why you are doing it. Procedures ensuring consistency of results. If everyone follows the same procedure they will be doing things in the same way.

Document what you do, do what you documented, and audit what you do to what you documented—this is the PDCA cycle applied to quality assurance.

Step 5: Train and review

Once you've reached this step, developed procedures are available for trainers and all employees and volunteers. These standard instructions are the keys to consistent quality. Procedures sitting in a book have no value in and of themselves. Their value is realized when they are employed to standardize the methods used by all employees and volunteers.

Step 6: Audit now that you have a system in place

Pre-audit internally to the quality system. Internal, external and beneficiaries' satisfaction reports should be used to further improve the methods and processes employed. Review of stakeholders' feedback against control plans and work instructions will identify opportunities for further improvements. Assign

follow-ups and corrective actions to appropriate personnel to ensure that the issues identified are reduced or eliminated.

Step 7: Monitor performance and schedule registration to your chosen quality system standard

The experience and data from your efforts to date now provide you with the evidence to show an outside registrar that your quality system meets requirements. Perhaps reformatting documents to meet the auditors' requirements will be needed. Perhaps some new procedures will be required to cover an area that was overlooked. The registration of your quality system (certification) provides an important assurance to your current and potential partners, donors, beneficiaries and customers about your standards of care and execution in your business.

Step 8: Continuous improvement

Improving process capability and gauging methods and eliminating non-value-added steps are never-ending tasks. An ongoing quality improvement process is a key component to improving operations and employee morale. You will never really end a job on quality system in your organization – the point of the system is continual improvement.



Literature:

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