



Time allowed: 5 + 10 + 10 minutes

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ASSIGNMENT

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This document presents a fictitious scenario. It has been produced solely for the purpose of this exercise. All references to existing countries, international organisations, private companies, departments and their representatives, etc. have been invented purely as examples. Any views expressed should not be taken to represent the opinions of those bodies or persons.

For this exercise, you will take on the role of audit project manager in the European Commission's (Commission) department for European World Assistance (EWAS). The European Audit Authority (EAA) recently carried out an audit of the Multi-donor Programme for Genosha (MPfG) and has proposed several recommendations that you need to look into. The documentation you need is included in this booklet. It comprises a number of emails, reports and other information that you will have to analyse and digest in order to be able to deal properly with the assignment given to you. This is your first day in your new job.

It is important that you accept the scenario as it is presented. Although in real life you would have access to other sources of information and would be able to consult your colleagues, in this exercise you are limited to the information provided. You are, however, allowed to make logical assumptions where information is missing or incomplete. You may print the documents, rearrange them in any order you wish and add comments or make notes as necessary; these documents and your notes will remain available to you during the Oral Presentation. However, you are not allowed to record your Oral Presentation or to take further notes during your Oral Presentation (except during the preparation time). Also, during your Oral Presentation you cannot refer to any visual aids.

This Oral Presentation aims at assessing the following competencies: Analysis & Problem Solving, Communication, Delivering Quality & Results and Resilience. Your knowledge in the field will not be assessed; therefore, conducting additional research is unnecessary.

Your task will be to present solutions to a number of problems based on the information given by various parties. You should focus on the main challenges and concerns related to the audit of the MPfG and the MPfG's monitoring tool. On the day of the Assessment Centre, you will be given a specific task and 5 minutes in order to prepare for a presentation for the EWAS senior management. After your preparation, you will have 10 minutes to give your presentation. This will be followed by a 10-minute question and answer session, during which the assessors will ask you specific questions about your presentation.

Please note:

Today is Monday 9 April 20XX

Last year was 20XX-1, next year will be 20XX+1

ABBREVIATIONS USED

| | |
|------------|--|
| CA | Cash Assistance |
| Commission | European Commission |
| EAA | European Audit Authority |
| EU | European Union |
| EWAS | Department for European World Assistance |
| MPfG | Multi-donor Programme for Genosha |
| MS | Member State(s) |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| WCO | World Cooperation Organisation |

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many citizens in the developing African country of Genosha live in poverty and face food insecurity. On top of that, the country has experienced consecutive seasons of extremely heavy rains, which have caused rivers across the country to burst their banks, devastating villages and displacing many people who are now living in refugee camps.

In order to help Genosha deal with the consequences of this humanitarian crisis, three years ago the European Union (EU) decided to set up a 'Multi-donor Programme for Genosha' (MPfG), which will run for at least five years.

The programme will be used to support activities in different domains:

- Strengthening resilience by:
 - increasing food security,
 - increasing access to basic services (such as health services, education, clean water, etc.)
 - developing strategies to increase resilience to natural disasters.
- Increasing economic and employment opportunities.

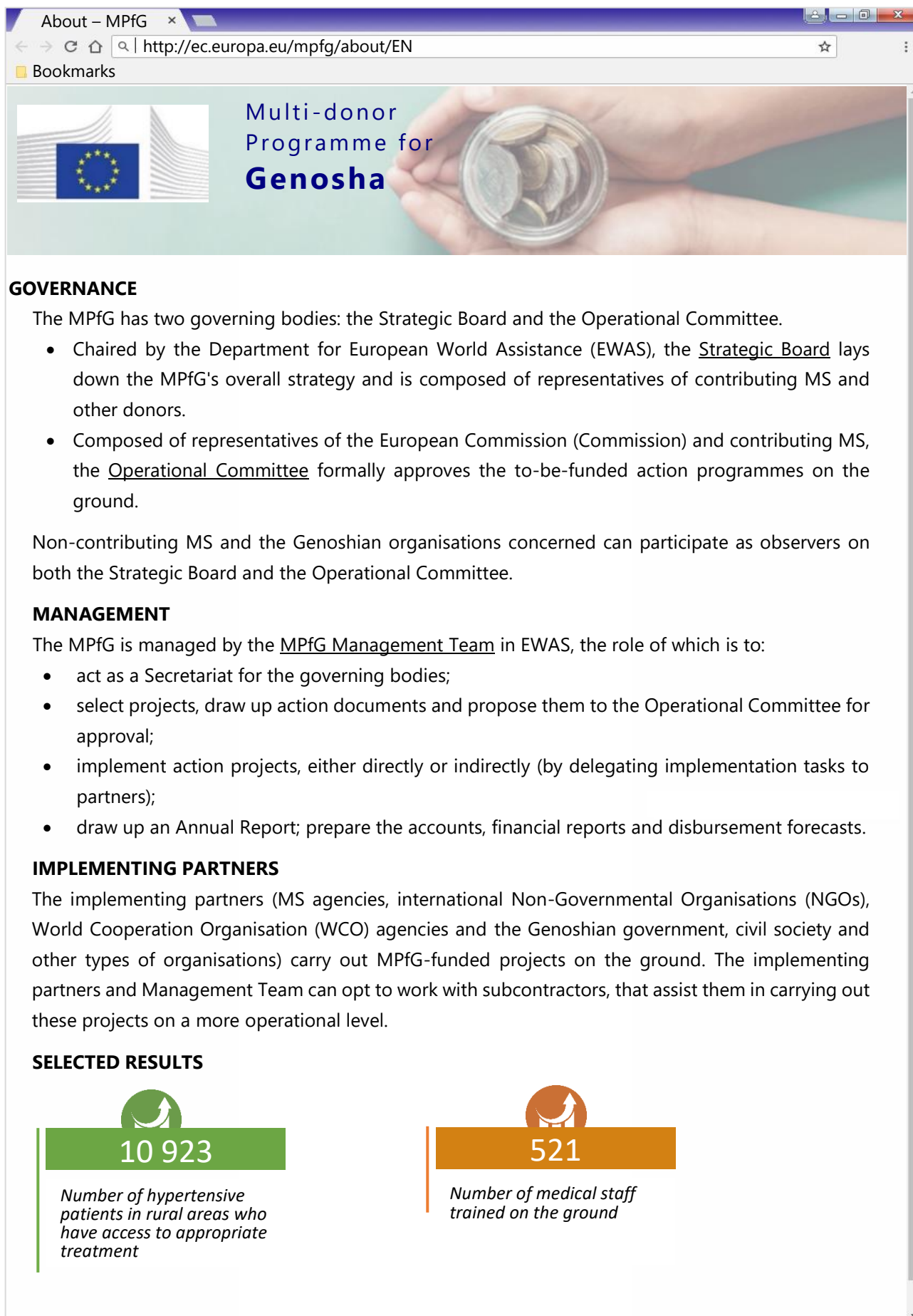
The programme was set up in response to a crisis situation and therefore is designed to instigate rapid action where needed. One of the key domains for the MPfG is building up resilience to natural disasters. However, not all Genoshian families are equally impacted by such disasters. Floods and extreme weather are most prevalent in the southern, western and central parts of the country, while Northern and Eastern Genosha mostly escape the worst of these events.

Around half the funding for the MPfG is drawn from other pre-existing European aid instruments, and the remainder comes from the EU Member States (MS) and other donors.

The European Audit Authority (EAA) audited the implementation of the MPfG, and it recently published its final report containing all the audit results and several recommendations. While these recommendations have been accepted by the EU, an action plan has yet to be developed.

The EAA also noted that no effective overall monitoring system is currently in place to keep track of the results achieved by MPfG-funded projects. Computer software and a dedicated database have already been made available for this very purpose but are not yet in use, given the current lack of guidelines on what indicators to monitor and how to do so. The EAA therefore recommends that guidelines be developed to facilitate the use of such a monitoring system to keep track of all MPfG achievements and report these to all stakeholders.

WEB PAGE



About – MPfG x

http://ec.europa.eu/mpfg/about/EN

Bookmarks

Multi-donor Programme for Genosha

GOVERNANCE

The MPfG has two governing bodies: the Strategic Board and the Operational Committee.

- Chaired by the Department for European World Assistance (EWAS), the Strategic Board lays down the MPfG's overall strategy and is composed of representatives of contributing MS and other donors.
- Composed of representatives of the European Commission (Commission) and contributing MS, the Operational Committee formally approves the to-be-funded action programmes on the ground.

Non-contributing MS and the Genoshian organisations concerned can participate as observers on both the Strategic Board and the Operational Committee.

MANAGEMENT


The MPfG is managed by the MPfG Management Team in EWAS, the role of which is to:

- act as a Secretariat for the governing bodies;
- select projects, draw up action documents and propose them to the Operational Committee for approval;
- implement action projects, either directly or indirectly (by delegating implementation tasks to partners);
- draw up an Annual Report; prepare the accounts, financial reports and disbursement forecasts.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS


The implementing partners (MS agencies, international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), World Cooperation Organisation (WCO) agencies and the Genoshian government, civil society and other types of organisations) carry out MPfG-funded projects on the ground. The implementing partners and Management Team can opt to work with subcontractors, that assist them in carrying out these projects on a more operational level.

SELECTED RESULTS



10 923

Number of hypertensive patients in rural areas who have access to appropriate treatment



521

Number of medical staff trained on the ground



MPfG AUDIT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

09/03/20XX

REPORT 1/2

The EAA's work included a desk review of documented evidence, on-the-spot visits to ten ongoing projects in Genosha, and interviews with various stakeholders, both at the Commission and on the ground. Its main points and recommendations are summarised in this extract.

Cash Assistance projects

A Cash Assistance (CA) project provides beneficiaries with a monthly sum of money (usually around €30 per person) to help cover their basic needs. The MPfG is currently used to fund two exceptionally large CA projects – which together account for half of the MPfG's budget – in the most affected regions in Genosha:

- o the Cash for Basic Needs project: (€150 million budget)
- o the Emergency Cash Relief project: (€200 million budget)

Both projects are being implemented by WCO agencies and the funds are disbursed on a linear basis for either 30 (Cash for Basic Needs) or 40 (Emergency Cash Relief) months. Additional CA projects totalling €220 million will be launched in the coming years.

Both ongoing CA projects were audited by the EAA, which felt that better value for money could be achieved. For example, the efficiency ratio (i.e. the amount beneficiaries directly receive divided by other costs of the action) is rather low compared with similar EU-funded projects. Both projects have an efficiency ratio of around 78:22, while other Commission-funded basic needs programmes usually aim to achieve an efficiency ratio of at least 80:20.

[...]

Timeliness

Timeliness is an important aspect of efficiency. Seven out of ten audited projects were delayed and had to be extended, on average by 55%. In several cases, the delays were caused by the unavailability on the ground of either the necessary technical equipment or the correct permits required to implement the projects, which are both factors that implementing partners find hard to predict and difficult to control.

Project delays result in the provision of help being deferred, even when the beneficiaries' lives may depend on it. Moreover, project delays are problematic for the programme's resource coordination and planning, not to mention the fact that they reflect badly on the Commission and the donors. Therefore, the EAA recommends that efforts be made to improve the timeliness of project implementation.

[...]

Local ownership

Local ownership is enshrined as an important principle of the MPfG in its strategic orientation document. However, the audit has established that in terms of project implementation, Genoshian involvement appears to be very limited. Most implementing partners are either MS or WCO development agencies, with local subcontractors involved in only two of the 48 ongoing projects.



MPfG AUDIT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

09/03/20XX

REPORT 2/2

Project selection

To ensure that the funds benefit Genosha, appropriate projects need to be selected. However, a clear process for selecting projects has yet to be decided on, and the project selection criteria have not been clearly documented. Therefore, the MPfG Management Team selects projects to propose to the Operational Committee as it sees fit, e.g. using a bottom-up approach (involving open invitations for proposals) at some times, and a top-down approach at others. This has given rise to questions about the transparency and impartiality of the selection process.

Observers and potential implementing partners have complained about certain cases where they did not understand why certain projects and implementing partners had been selected over others. Moreover, it seems that not all potential implementing partners are aware of the need for projects or of the exact nature of the priorities for implementing the MPfG.

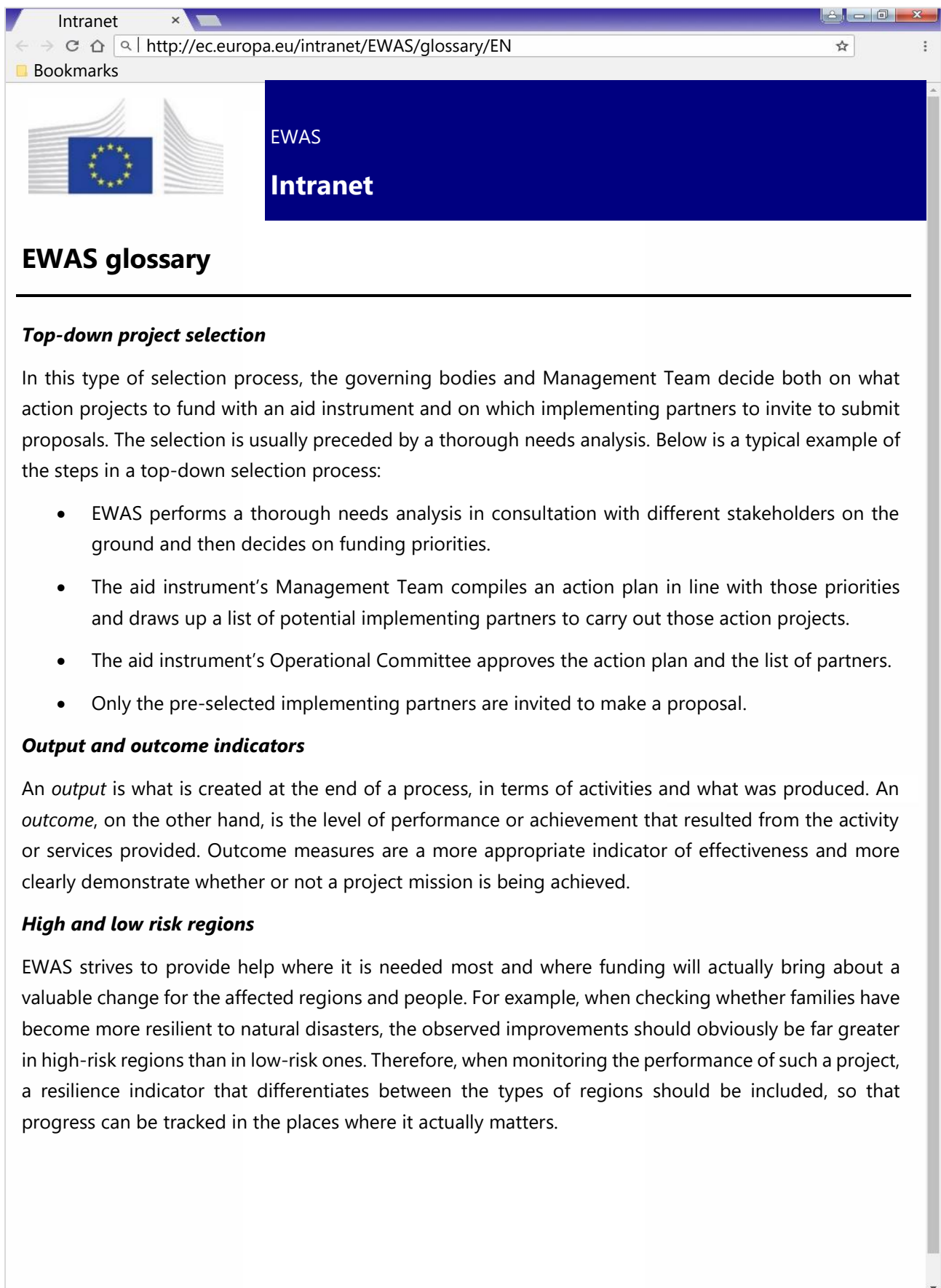
For these reasons, the EAA recommends that a clear project selection process be defined, whereby one fixed approach is established for the MPfG.

[...]

Performance monitoring

To monitor project performance and verify whether targets in each area are being met within the set time frames, data on various pre-specified indicators need to be systematically recorded and incorporated in a monitoring tool.

While some types of data are being recorded and progress is being reported in most of the ten audited projects, once again, there are still no clear guidelines on how and what to record. For example, in some instances, the data recorded were not specific enough, which limited their value: one project mentioned the number of households with 'improved housing' without specifying what that actually entailed. For two projects, the reported progress data were unreliable and painted a more positive picture than was actually the case, which has a detrimental effect on the monitoring tool's usefulness.



The screenshot shows a web browser window titled 'Intranet' with the address bar displaying 'http://ec.europa.eu/intranet/EWAS/glossary/EN'. The page features a blue header with the EWAS logo (a stylized 'E' with the European Union flag) and the text 'EWAS Intranet'. Below the header, the main content area is titled 'EWAS glossary' and contains three sections: 'Top-down project selection', 'Output and outcome indicators', and 'High and low risk regions'. Each section includes a brief description and a list of bullet points.

EWAS glossary

Top-down project selection

In this type of selection process, the governing bodies and Management Team decide both on what action projects to fund with an aid instrument and on which implementing partners to invite to submit proposals. The selection is usually preceded by a thorough needs analysis. Below is a typical example of the steps in a top-down selection process:

- EWAS performs a thorough needs analysis in consultation with different stakeholders on the ground and then decides on funding priorities.
- The aid instrument's Management Team compiles an action plan in line with those priorities and draws up a list of potential implementing partners to carry out those action projects.
- The aid instrument's Operational Committee approves the action plan and the list of partners.
- Only the pre-selected implementing partners are invited to make a proposal.

Output and outcome indicators

An *output* is what is created at the end of a process, in terms of activities and what was produced. An *outcome*, on the other hand, is the level of performance or achievement that resulted from the activity or services provided. Outcome measures are a more appropriate indicator of effectiveness and more clearly demonstrate whether or not a project mission is being achieved.

High and low risk regions

EWAS strives to provide help where it is needed most and where funding will actually bring about a valuable change for the affected regions and people. For example, when checking whether families have become more resilient to natural disasters, the observed improvements should obviously be far greater in high-risk regions than in low-risk ones. Therefore, when monitoring the performance of such a project, a resilience indicator that differentiates between the types of regions should be included, so that progress can be tracked in the places where it actually matters.



FOLLOW-UP ON MPfG AUDIT



From Malina Nowakowska, Audit project manager, EWAS
Date 02/04/20XX
To <Your name>

Dear <Your name>,

Welcome aboard. As you will be replacing me, I thought it would be useful to provide you with my preliminary ideas for following up on the EAA's recommendations regarding the MPfG.

Firstly, a 'bottom-up' approach is sometimes adopted for (post-)emergency situations, where potential implementing partners, in consultation with different stakeholders, are free to submit project proposals. After the submitted proposals have undergone legal eligibility and quality checks, the fund's Management Team evaluates them against the programme's objectives, and the projects that best meet these objectives are ultimately selected and approved by the Operational Committee. This is a very efficient way of ensuring that projects are in line with the needs and priorities in the field as identified by the implementing partners, who have a lot of expertise and are very much in touch with what is needed.

Secondly, to secure greater involvement of local organisations, I know that other EU-funded programmes sometimes adopt a quota requirement that stipulates that at least three-quarters of the selected projects need to have been proposed by local implementing partners. Maybe this is something that could also be considered for the MPfG.

Thirdly, I found that for the Emergency Cash Relief project, the Commission made advance payments totalling €160 million a full 13 months before the first round of disbursements was made to the beneficiaries. Because the implementing WCO agency keeps the interest generated on such advances, the Commission is losing a considerable amount of money. If the prefinancing was paid closer to the date of disbursement, the Commission could reinvest some of that interest in the MPfG, for the benefit of the Genoshian people.

Finally, you should also be aware that the Commission tends to grant project extensions fairly easily, as not doing so can seriously jeopardise the achievement of project objectives and may lead to a waste of resources. If the deadline has to be met at all costs, projects might need to be completed prematurely and therefore fail to achieve their ultimate goals, which decreases the quality of the aid provided. Of course, it would be a different story if a delay were indisputably caused by a mistake or negligence on the implementing partner's part; for example, late submissions to obtain the necessary permits, or general poor planning by the partner.

While I realise that a lot of changes will have to be implemented as a result of the EAA audit, I also see this as a great opportunity to make a fresh start and to take the appropriate action where needed.

Good luck,

Malina
Audit project manager



EXTRACT INTERVIEW

EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT NGO ALLIANCE

INTERVIEW 1/2

As part of its MPfG audit, the EAA conducted an interview on 05/02/20XX with a representative of the umbrella association of NGOs involved in the MPfG – the European Development NGO Alliance.

EAA: What is your opinion on the current MPfG project selection process?

The whole process is rather opaque. There are crises unfolding on so many levels in Genosha that it is not clear what the most pressing needs are. The MPfG's objectives are so broadly defined that just about any proposal will meet them, in some way or another. For example, instead of the generic objective of increasing food security, a clearer and more specific objective would be to aim for increasing food production or, even more specifically, increasing the production of basic staples like rice or corn. It is beyond me what criteria MPfG management uses to select projects, as the programme's broad objectives offer little to work with.

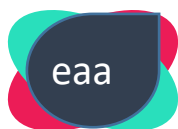
EAA: Should the Commission have performed some kind of needs analysis when setting up the MPfG?

That would indeed have been helpful: a thorough analysis of the situation on the ground would have provided the insights needed to define the programme's priorities. Moreover, such an analysis would have allowed the Commission to determine a starting point or baseline that reflected the situation in Genosha before the MPfG took effect, from which any improvements resulting from MPfG-funded projects could then have been monitored.

However, conducting a high-quality needs assessment is usually very time consuming, and in this case it was essential for the EU to respond fairly quickly to the crisis situation in Genosha. I can therefore understand the Commission's decision to set up the MPfG in the way it did.

EAA: Does the opaque selection process mean that the best lobbyist gets the contract?

It might look that way, because mainly WCO agencies and large development organisations get selected as implementing partners and subcontractors. But the reality is that these organisations enjoy significant scale advantages; often, they are already conducting similar ongoing action projects in the region and so can make use of procedures and resources that are already in place, whereas many smaller or local organisations would have to start from scratch and would therefore require a larger budget for the same action projects. To save time and benefit from their proven capacity, sometimes only a few of the larger organisations are invited to submit proposals. However, a big drawback of this is that some potentially valuable implementing partners might never get consulted, and some good ideas for projects might remain unexplored.



EXTRACT INTERVIEW

EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT NGO ALLIANCE

INTERVIEW 2/2

EAA: Are there any other reasons for the low participation rates of local organisations?

Previous studies have shown that local organisations are often suspected of being corrupt and dishonest, and such preconceptions make outside organisations more hesitant to find and work with local partners. While it is true that there have been some incidents involving disreputable local partners in the past, these have proven to be just a few bad apples in an otherwise healthy barrel. Unfortunately, these incidents have gone some way towards furthering the narrative that local organisations are not to be trusted, which might be an underlying cause for the low rates in local ownership.

EAA: How do you feel about the idea of penalising implementing partners whose projects experience delays?

It is a terrible idea; if partners faced the risk of being fined for delays, very few organisations would be interested in implementing these projects. Extensions are an indispensable mechanism for ensuring and adjusting delivery under the adverse and challenging circumstances in Genosha. Instead of judging projects based on whether or not the deadlines are being met, people should look at the results that are being achieved. This goes beyond merely looking at the direct outputs related to the funded activities (e.g. the number of teachers trained or the number of water supply points installed). An action project's true value becomes clear only when you look at the changes or benefits resulting from those activities (e.g. increased school completion, increased consumption of clean water, etc.), which is also an important consideration to keep in mind when looking at the monitoring tool.

EAA: What is your opinion on the pre-financing of the CA projects?

For CA projects, the Commission pays pre-financing amounting to 80% of the total contracted amount well in advance of any disbursements being made to the beneficiaries. This is necessary, as it allows the partners to ensure that the funds are available when they need them, without having to provide the funds themselves or delay the disbursements. A pre-financing rate of 80% is standard practice and is essential for ensuring the smooth implementation of projects by the implementing partners.

EAA: Would you like to make any further observations on the CA projects?

Overall, the projects are running smoothly. However, the projects use targeting criteria that are related mainly to age and household composition, even though these do not always reflect the actual means that households have at their disposal. Using criteria based on their actual means could result in even better targeting of the cash assistance, and thereby also in the more efficient use of the funds.

Moreover, it would be interesting to determine a starting point or baseline that reflects the situation of the targeted households before they receive any cash assistance, from which any improvements resulting from the MPfG-funded projects can then be monitored.

Another key role of the partners that implement CA projects is to monitor the payment process and to ensure that the intended beneficiaries receive the transfers. This requires the processing of some personal data relating to the beneficiaries, which is subject to data protection rules.

THE GENOSHIAN HERALD

National

International

Culture

Politics

Weather

MPfG management should listen to its stakeholders!

Sergey Mahato

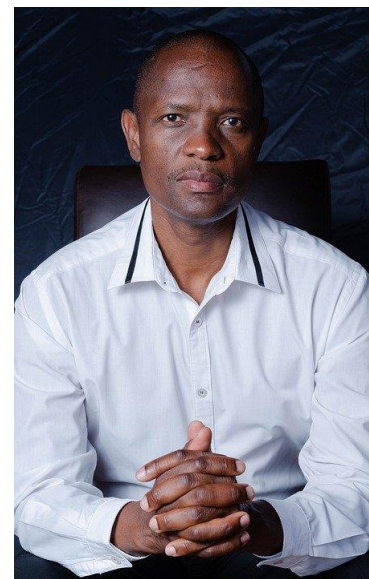
Published: 28/03/20XX

From local and European politicians to a range of implementing partners, subcontractors, fund beneficiaries, etc., the MPfG involves a great number of people, many of whom come from very different backgrounds and have varying needs and wants. It is therefore no surprise that different opinions exist on what approach for the implementation of the MPfG would result in the best outcome for all parties involved. Following the recent audit of the programme by the European Audit Authority, the Genoshian Herald went into the field and interviewed various stakeholders in an effort to get a clearer picture of the prevailing opinions among those whose lives are touched by the MPfG.

Unclear selection process

One such stakeholder is Kito Berhanu, a Genoshian contractor who has built up a sizeable firm specialising in flood-proof housing. Mr Berhanu has unsuccessfully applied to become an MPfG implementing partner several times. "Given both our extensive experience in some of the most affected regions in Genosha and the large scale on which we can operate, you would expect us to be an ideal candidate for selection by the fund's Management Team", said Mr Berhanu. "Sadly, it is entirely unclear to us on what basis implementing partners get selected or turned down, which leaves us grasping at straws when writing our proposals."

When presented with Mr Berhanu's story, Obi Kwame, a local policymaker in Western Genosha, was not surprised. "It saddens me to hear this, but unfortunately, Mr Berhanu is not alone. The common misconception that local partners are out solely for monetary gain might play a role in the low participation rates among local partners. However, the EU seems to forget that local authorities often have extensive knowledge of and valuable ties with local organisations. Establishing strong relationships with these authorities could help create greater trust in local partners, which in turn would increase the willingness of European organisations to look for more opportunities to work together with them. Additionally, these authorities could serve as a solid reference to check the past achievements and reliability of potential local partners."



THE GENOSHIAN HERALD

National

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Ambiguous beneficiary targeting

Besides increasing local ownership, there is also a need to improve the efficiency of Cash Assistance projects. We spoke to Aizah Soto, an administrator who is heavily involved in the operational management of these projects. "To improve the targeting of CA funds, it could be helpful to revisit the criteria used for deciding who is eligible for cash assistance. Both CA projects use a combination of geographical and demographic criteria, which are not very precise; for example, one such criterion is 'being a single parent and the only adult in the household'. However, as you can imagine, exceptions do exist, and many single parents who are perfectly capable of providing for their families are currently receiving support they do not really need. Unfortunately, it is not up to me to decide what targeting criteria are implemented."

Muddled monitoring methods

For the final part of our investigation, we contacted Abbie Rowland, an aid worker with many years of experience and who has recently been involved in distributing food across the regions in Genosha that have been most heavily affected by the floods, a task that has not been easy. "To be able to hand out food to people in need quickly and regularly, we have to monitor food security levels systematically. From my time as a humanitarian worker in many countries, I know that this can most easily be done by incorporating an indicator to check for the negative coping strategies that people use to manage household food shortages. This is a more reliable and much simpler way to collect information than measuring actual household food consumption levels (which requires households to register their daily food intake in a diary). Unfortunately, these diaries are the method we currently use in Genosha, and I've noticed that it slows us down in getting food to the people who need it most."

As these testimonies have shown, the MPfG management and governing bodies have a lot of decision-making ahead of them, which will require a nuanced approach that incorporates the perspectives of many different stakeholders. It is clear that most choices will not be as cut and dried as they may seem at first sight, and the MPfG still has a few more tough nuts to crack if it wants to keep its promises.

In the meantime, the Genoshian Herald, as always, will keep you informed of any new developments.



EWAS Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Commission

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Date and time: | 06/04/20XX – 14:00–16:10 |
| Subject: | MPfG Audit Discussion |

PROJECT SELECTION

| | |
|---|--|
| ◆ | Because it uses open invitations for proposals and therefore does not automatically exclude any potential implementing partners or potentially interesting projects in advance, a 'bottom-up' approach would increase fairness in the selection process. |
| ◆ | Currently, organisations whose proposals are rejected are not informed about the grounds for rejection, which limits their ability to improve future proposals. |

LOCAL OWNERSHIP

| | |
|---|--|
| ◆ | Setting a high quota for Genoshian projects might not be a realistic way to improve local ownership, given that most potential Genoshian implementing partners are smaller organisations, which usually do not have the necessary know-how or capacity to manage projects of the required scale and complexity end-to-end. |
| ◆ | Similar reasoning applies to local subcontractors, who often have less experience in carrying out large-scale projects and who are therefore less suited to being involved in MPfG projects, which require a vast amount of coordination and planning, even at an operational level. |

CA PROJECTS

| | |
|---|--|
| ◆ | Nowhere does the framework agreement with the WCO stipulate that the pre-financing should be paid so far in advance. The transfer of the sums too early every month results in a significant financial loss for the MPfG. |
| ◆ | It might be worthwhile trying to negotiate a lower pre-financing rate (e.g. 60% or under) with the WCO. This would decrease the interest surplus that the implementing partner receives on top of the contracted amount, which the MPfG could then use instead to the benefit of those in need in Genosha. |

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

| | |
|---|--|
| ◆ | Some projects seem to be making only very slow progress; this may be the result of the endless flexibility in terms of the deadlines for reaching the agreed targets. Moreover, project targets are not always clearly specified or well-quantified. One of the main targets of a project that was recently accepted for funding was rather vaguely specified as 'achieving higher quality of social service provision'. |
|---|--|

PROJECT DELAYS

| | |
|---|--|
| ◆ | It should be possible to make more realistic time estimates for projects by paying closer attention to predesign analyses and thoroughly checking the availability of different types of equipment, staff and permits. This step is currently often neglected, leading to unfounded assumptions being made based on incomplete information that should have been checked more thoroughly. |
| ◆ | Last week, EWAS's partner, Hands for Health, informed it that it had not yet managed to make arrangements with the Genoshian authorities to obtain the permits required for enabling the rollout of its project (i.e. the provision of sexual and reproductive health services). This delay might have been avoided if the partner had been better informed during the pre-design phase of the rather slow administrative processes at local government level. |

GENOSHA GAZETTE

National

World

Economy

Politics

Sports

THE EU NEEDS TO GET ITS PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

Keeva Yahaya

Published: Monday 12.03.20XX

It is imperative that crises prompt a quick response, but using the MPfG to fund rapid action projects that overshoot the mark is just a waste of money.

According to Amare Mutombo, Minister for Home Affairs, "Through hasty and ill-considered decision making, the MPfG was used to construct an expensive hospital with state-of-the-art amenities, which proved to be accessible only to the government elite – the very people who need it least. This cannot have been how the EU envisaged the funds being used. Instead of focusing so much on providing a quick response, the EU needs to straighten out its funding priorities and ensure better alignment with Genosha's current needs."

However, our source in the Commission says that valuable time is being lost screening proposals for projects that are completely unsuitable for reaching the funding objectives. Perhaps this is because most proposals come from European organisations rather than local organisations. "Sadly, local organisations are hardly ever involved in the implementation of the funds, even though this could further stimulate the local economy", said Mr Mutombo. "The least the EU could do to maximise the MPfG's benefits for Genosha is to select European implementing partners based on their plans to involve Genoshian subcontractors and authorities in carrying out MPfG-funded projects."



When asked about a regrettable incident involving a local partner a number of years ago, Mr Mutombo spoke candidly: "In the unlikely event that the MPfG does engage an unscrupulous partner, it is true that the costs and damage incurred can be rather high. Therefore, to prevent similar issues from arising again, I have proposed that in-depth background screening checks be carried out on every potential partner, as this would be a sure-fire way to set up successful partnerships with local organisations in the future."

Finally, despite the focus on a quick response, many action projects are still being delayed. "That is indeed the case", confirmed Mr Mutombo, "which is why I feel that the agreements with partners should stipulate that they be penalised for any delays incurred. If they had to pay a fine for every day that implementation went beyond the agreed deadline, or, in extreme cases, if their contracts were terminated, partners would have a greater incentive to work within the set time frame."



Clearly, the MPfG management and governing bodies have missed the mark on many fronts, but it is not yet too late for them to rectify their mistakes. By taking a strong stance and implementing effective action, I am certain that the MPfG can live up to its promises and change the lives of those who need it most."



Commission

EWAS FORUM

DISCUSSION FORUM

| MPfG Audit | | | |
|---|---|--|-------|
| Brian | | 04/04/20XX | |
|  | | What are your thoughts on the 8% flat rate for overhead costs in CA projects? I find it hard to believe that for a project with a budget of € 200 million, the Commission should have to pay four times the amount of overhead costs that it pays for projects with a budget of € 50 million, when the actual expenditure on such costs cannot be that much higher. | |
| | | QUOTE | REPLY |
|  | Naveed | 04/04/20XX | |
| |  | Great idea, @Brian! You could be on to a great way of cutting costs in CA projects! I hear MPfG management is considering setting a quota for the proportion of projects carried out by Genoshian partners. I can see why, but I am not sure whether it would improve things. If the quota is set too low, it won't have much effect; if it is set too high, programme managers would have to select Genoshian implementing partners merely to meet the target, instead of focusing on important criteria like cost-effectiveness. In my opinion, there should be better ways to involve local organisations. | |
| | | QUOTE | REPLY |
| Genevieve | | 05/04/20XX | |
|  | | Hello colleagues! What are your thoughts on the implementation of the MPfG? I think a good way to speed up the project selection process would be to work with lists of pre-selected implementing partners. This would substantially limit the number of proposals received and make the overall process more efficient. | |
| | | QUOTE | REPLY |
|  | Nikita | 06/04/20XX | |
| |  | Good point, @Genevieve – worth considering. I have noticed that project schedules are often over-ambitious, which suggests that more time should be added to the timing estimates established in the project design stage. It should become standard practice for a programme's management to incorporate much more buffer time to cope with unforeseen setbacks. This would inevitably decrease both the number and the length of the delays incurred. | |
| | | QUOTE | REPLY |
|  | Yusuf | 06/04/20XX | |
| |  | @Nikita; in general, more effort should be put into ensuring that projects deliver what they promise, which is why clear and quantified target values need to be established for all indicators. This would greatly enhance the monitoring tool's capacity to measure data and increase its range of applications. Maybe partners should be required to provide documented evidence to prove that they have sufficient experience in managing similar projects. | |
| | | QUOTE | REPLY |



PROGRESS REPORT 20XX-1

EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY PROGRAMME

REPORT

Overall MPfG objective:

Strengthening resilience by increasing food security and access to basic services.

Project-specific objectives:

- (1) Improve access to quality learning opportunities for 75 000 children in Genosha;
- (2) Improve the nutritional status of primary learners through daily school meals.

Interventions:

Key interventions to ensure access to quality education include increasing the availability of adequate teaching materials and professional training to teachers, focusing on learning achievements. Through financing of local contractors and civil society organisations, new school buildings were constructed and existing buildings rehabilitated.

School meals help keep children in school during ongoing crises. After the performance of 216 education programmes in 52 low- and middle-income countries was analysed, school meals programmes were found to be one of the few interventions that had a positive impact on both school participation (enrolment, attendance, completion) and learning achievement. During future projects, SOS Youth International will perform similar analyses, as this has proven to be a valuable method to identify the best indicators to include for monitoring and tracking performance.

Obstacles to implementation

The time frames set in the project design phase turned out to be unrealistic, given the technical and administrative constraints that existed on the ground.

For example, the project initially suffered from a lack of experienced staff and internet connectivity issues. Moreover, from the beginning, it was difficult to obtain (a) the authorisations from the Genoshian authorities to operate in the initially planned locations and (b) the cooperation permits necessary to work with local NGOs. All the delays experienced were attributable to problems beyond the partner's control.

20XX-1 in numbers:

101

Number of school buildings constructed/rehabilitated

100 505

Number of children receiving nutritional assistance

891


Number of staff from local authorities benefitting from capacity building



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying <http://eu-lens.org/blogpost/EN>. The browser's address bar includes navigation icons (back, forward, refresh, home) and a search icon. Below the address bar is a bookmarks bar. The webpage content features the 'eu lens' logo in orange and black, a magnifying glass icon, and the tagline 'Influential. Investigative. Independent.' in black text. The main heading of the article is 'The MPfG implementation: there is still a lot of work to be done!' in bold black text. The author's name, 'Moriss Ozols', is displayed next to a small orange square icon with a white letter 'B'. Below the author's name, the publication date 'Published on 07/04/20XX' is shown in a smaller, lighter font. The body of the article consists of several paragraphs of black text. The first paragraph discusses the challenges of providing humanitarian aid to Genosha, mentioning the remote population centres, punishing climate, and lack of infrastructure. The second paragraph discusses the EU's consideration of using the 'bottom-up' approach for selecting projects to fund with the MPfG. The third paragraph discusses the challenges of monitoring the impact of MPfG-funded projects, mentioning the 'Sustainable Growth' programme and the need for more output indicators. The fourth paragraph discusses the challenges of ensuring the trustworthiness of local organisations, mentioning a thorough analysis carried out by an independent think tank. The fifth paragraph discusses the challenges of using household income as a targeting criterion for MPfG-funded CA, mentioning the need for reliable data about people's income from the Genoshian government. The sixth paragraph discusses the challenges of ensuring the levels of inclusion and exclusion errors for both MPfG-funded CA projects are below the initial upper limit, which was set at 10%. The final paragraph concludes that the above-mentioned arguments (and others that come into my inbox weekly) make it clear that the MPfG still has a lot of work to do in order to keep its promises, and that the author will inform readers of any future updates, so be sure to check back regularly!

eu lens Influential. Investigative. Independent.

The MPfG implementation: there is still a lot of work to be done!

 **Moriss Ozols**
Published on 07/04/20XX

Tasked with providing humanitarian aid to Genosha, the MPfG has been in operation for a number of years now. However, given the country's remote population centres, punishing climate and lack of infrastructure, delivering aid to where it is most needed has proven rather difficult. But these factors alone do not account for everything, as the MPfG's management and policy also leave much to be desired. Once in a while, a critical eye is needed, which is why EU Lens is here to report on the matter.

As a solution to the current arbitrariness, the EU is considering using the 'bottom-up' approach as the standard for selecting projects to fund with the MPfG. This would mean basing ourselves completely on the needs and priorities as identified by the implementing partners in their project proposals. Of course, it is in those partners' own best interests to emphasise those 'needs' that best fit their specific projects.

It cannot be a coincidence that many action documents from MPfG-funded projects are riddled with mysteries. For example, the 'Sustainable Growth' programme promotes 'inclusive green growth in Genoshian agriculture'. Sounds promising indeed, but what does this mean in practice, and how is it being monitored? Other projects report only output indicators but fail to address the value or impact of the reported activities. Like most people, I am not interested in the number of condoms distributed, but I do want to know whether the incidence of HIV has decreased. Another implementing partner received funding to set up an integrated electronic healthcare information system but failed to achieve this objective. Hopefully, the partner in question will be excluded from any future assignments – it is high time that partners are held accountable!

With regard to the trustworthiness of local organisations: thorough analysis carried out by an independent think tank has shown that across EU-led humanitarian programmes, an equal number of incidents occur with local and European organisations, but that those involving the latter are underreported and less talked about. Furthermore, in cases where background screening was performed, it was perceived as being rather invasive and as adding to an atmosphere of distrust, souring the relationship with both European and local partners.

Lastly, there have been calls to use household income as a targeting criterion for MPfG-funded CA. However, I doubt whether it is possible to obtain reliable data about people's income from the Genoshian government, given the country's notoriously weak data collection systems. Furthermore, no targeting system is ever perfect, and the levels of inclusion and exclusion errors for both MPfG-funded CA projects are below the initial upper limit, which was set at 10%. These results look rather good when compared with those of similar EU-funded projects.

Overall, the above-mentioned arguments (and others that come into my inbox weekly) make it clear that the MPfG still has a lot of work to do in order to keep its promises. I will inform my readers of any future updates, so be sure to check back regularly!

THE PACIFIC

NEWSPAPER

National

World

Economy

Politics

Sports

SAVING LIVES IN GENOSHA

Christie Amanpour

Published: Tuesday 20.03.20XX

As part of our 'Back to Africa' series, volunteer Friso Peeters talks about his experiences in Genosha, where he spent the last few months helping small-scale farmers in the poorest regions.

Despite the foreign aid being offered, Genoshians still face numerous challenges on a daily basis. Many people struggle to feed their families and therefore have little choice but to adopt negative coping strategies to survive. While the luckier ones can just about manage by taking less drastic steps like food rationing, others are forced to sell their assets or even have to resort to child labour to survive. The available aid is much needed, but I also feel that some improvements could be made, as the funds are not always directed to where they are most needed. For example, the website of the



MPfG (editor's note: the programme that finances Friso's project) proudly shows the number of new medical staff that have been trained, but I would question how relevant that figure actually is, given that Genosha does not have the necessary hospital infrastructure for them to work in.

Then there is the argument that the low local ownership of the MPfG is due to the large budgets local subcontractors would require. However, most of the cost advantages that large subcontractors have over local ones are offset by the fact that local organisations are fully attuned to the Genoshian way of working and are therefore more efficient in carrying out projects, whereas larger, European organisations often lose a considerable amount of time and resources acclimatising to the local work environment and culture.

Furthermore, mandating background screenings of local organisations seems like a poor idea, as it increases the risk of local partners being treated more strictly than European ones, at a time when European organisations are notoriously already subject to less thorough checks. Any such measure is therefore bound to come under heavy public scrutiny.

To increase the cost-effectiveness of MPfG-funded projects, the programme's management needs to ensure that funds are used only for the benefit of those who really need them. I have heard complaints about undeserving Genoshian households receiving cash assistance. The targeting for cash assistance was carried out once at the start, and the identified beneficiaries have been receiving allowances ever since. Fortunately, however, the status of some families has improved since then. I have personally met a (former) single father of three, who informed the authorities that he no longer needed the assistance, as his eldest child had married and left the household, and he himself had found a new partner with an income.



European
Parliament

EMAIL

MPfG AUDIT



From Amina Eunice Nnaji, Member of the European Parliament
Date 29/03/20XX
To info@EWAS.eu

Dear colleagues at EWAS,

It was with great interest that I read the EAA report on the MPfG audit. Given that I used to work for Aid for Africa in Genosha up until last year, I feel obliged to share some thoughts on the EAA's recommendations.

Firstly, I heard that all the investigated projects that had suffered a delay were extended without any consequences for the implementing partners. It should therefore be no surprise that there are delays if partners are not held accountable, as there is no incentive for them to try to deliver within the set time frame. It has been suggested that it should become standard practice to design projects with very comfortable timelines and artificially long deadlines in order to mitigate delays. However, 'Parkinson's law' has taught us that work usually expands to fill the time allotted to it, i.e. including more buffer time will just result in people using it all up. It would be more useful to try to find out first the exact reasons why initial ambitious timelines so often turn out to be unrealistic and then do something about them. Monitoring projects and breaking the process up into smaller steps could be helpful too, as it would make it easier to verify that everything was still on track.

Secondly, as the Genoshian authorities act merely as observers in the MPfG's governing bodies, it is little wonder the MPfG lacks local ownership. Moreover, our analysis of ongoing projects revealed that MPfG management keeps turning to the same subcontractors that it already knows, seemingly oblivious to all the local potential partners out there that could handle the implementation of many operational aspects of a project. Making the degree of involvement of local subcontractors and authorities one of the selection criteria for MPfG-funded projects would be a good way to combat this problem.

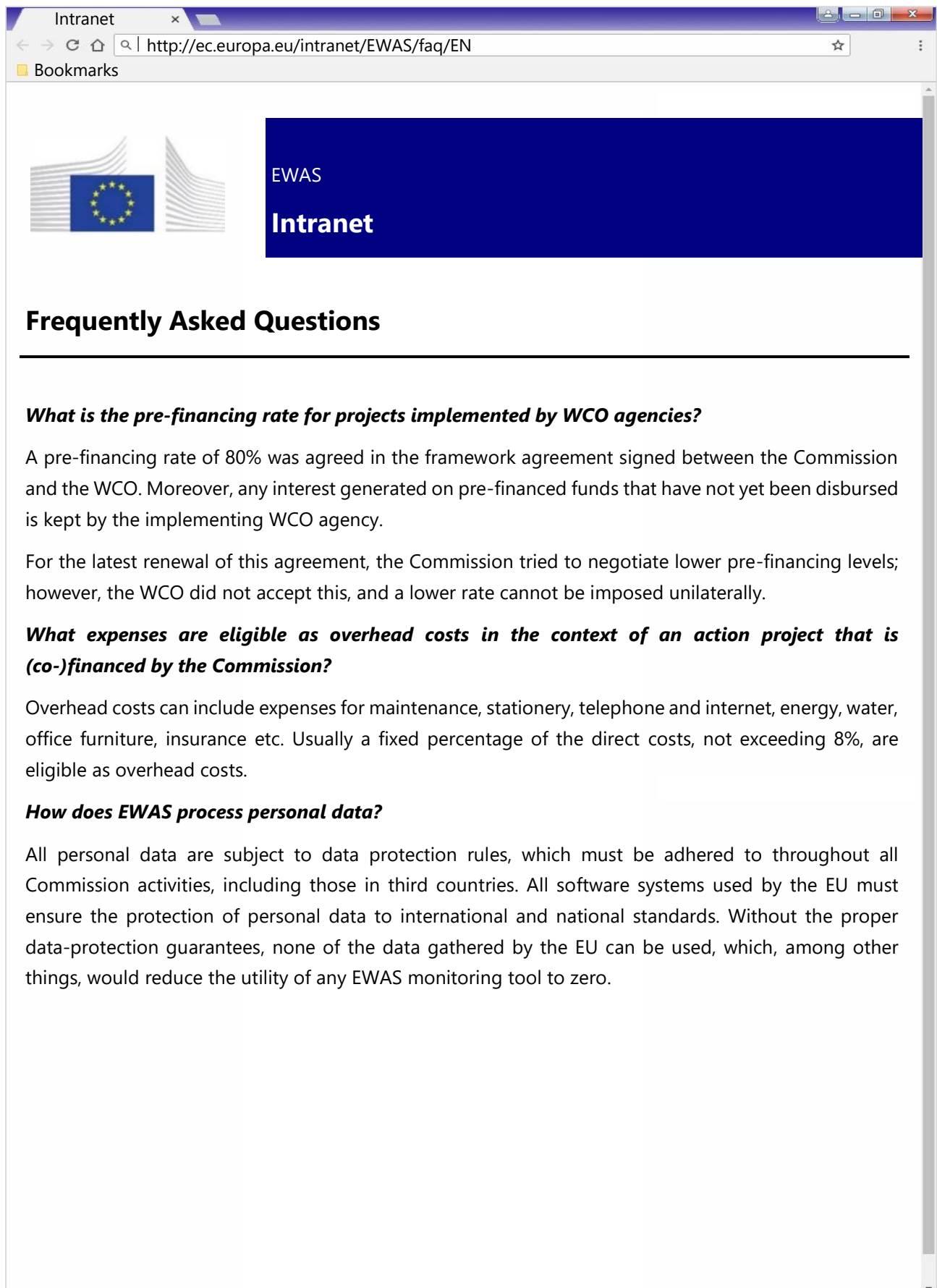
Thirdly, as regards project selection, a needs analysis would undoubtedly result in much better alignment of MPfG-funded action projects with Genosha's true needs and priorities than would be possible if projects were always selected based solely on the implementing partners' input. A top-down approach would also guarantee that the quality level of submitted proposals was higher than is currently the case.

As regards the CA projects, it is important to keep in mind that household composition changes over time: people age and eventually die, children grow up, people find new partners who can help provide for the family, etc. Therefore, some kind of re-evaluation will be needed to verify that the selected households are still in need of assistance. Furthermore, a lot of undeclared labour is carried out in Genosha, which generates household income that is not recorded anywhere.

Lastly, the EU attaches great importance to gender equality and to ensuring that all EU-funded action is inclusive towards minority and disadvantaged groups. Providing equal opportunities is a cornerstone of all EU policymaking and for EWAS. Therefore, indicators that check for equal opportunities should always be included when tracking the performance of EWAS-led projects.

Amina Eunice Nnaji

Member of the European Parliament




The screenshot shows a web browser window titled 'Intranet' with the address bar displaying 'http://ec.europa.eu/intranet/EWAS/faq/EN'. The page features a header with the European Union flag and the text 'EWAS Intranet'. Below the header, the section 'Frequently Asked Questions' is highlighted. The first question is 'What is the pre-financing rate for projects implemented by WCO agencies?'. The answer states that a pre-financing rate of 80% was agreed in the framework agreement signed between the Commission and the WCO. It also mentions that any interest generated on pre-financed funds that have not yet been disbursed is kept by the implementing WCO agency. The second question is 'What expenses are eligible as overhead costs in the context of an action project that is (co-)financed by the Commission?'. The answer states that overhead costs can include expenses for maintenance, stationery, telephone and internet, energy, water, office furniture, insurance etc. Usually a fixed percentage of the direct costs, not exceeding 8%, are eligible as overhead costs. The third question is 'How does EWAS process personal data?'. The answer states that all personal data are subject to data protection rules, which must be adhered to throughout all Commission activities, including those in third countries. All software systems used by the EU must ensure the protection of personal data to international and national standards. Without the proper data-protection guarantees, none of the data gathered by the EU can be used, which, among other things, would reduce the utility of any EWAS monitoring tool to zero.

Intranet

http://ec.europa.eu/intranet/EWAS/faq/EN

Bookmarks

 EWAS
Intranet

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the pre-financing rate for projects implemented by WCO agencies?

A pre-financing rate of 80% was agreed in the framework agreement signed between the Commission and the WCO. Moreover, any interest generated on pre-financed funds that have not yet been disbursed is kept by the implementing WCO agency.

For the latest renewal of this agreement, the Commission tried to negotiate lower pre-financing levels; however, the WCO did not accept this, and a lower rate cannot be imposed unilaterally.

What expenses are eligible as overhead costs in the context of an action project that is (co-)financed by the Commission?

Overhead costs can include expenses for maintenance, stationery, telephone and internet, energy, water, office furniture, insurance etc. Usually a fixed percentage of the direct costs, not exceeding 8%, are eligible as overhead costs.

How does EWAS process personal data?

All personal data are subject to data protection rules, which must be adhered to throughout all Commission activities, including those in third countries. All software systems used by the EU must ensure the protection of personal data to international and national standards. Without the proper data-protection guarantees, none of the data gathered by the EU can be used, which, among other things, would reduce the utility of any EWAS monitoring tool to zero.



Commission

EMAIL

MPfG AUDIT SUGGESTIONS



From Martina Galloway, Non-contributing MS Representative
Date 03/04/20XX
To <Your name>

Dear <Your name>,

I have heard that you will be replacing Malina as the audit project manager. I have been closely following the MPfG developments myself, and would like to share my thoughts and suggestions on the recent audit.

Firstly, when trying to improve the efficiency of CA projects, we should shift our focus to the implementing partners, who, in my opinion, seem to be the biggest gluttons with respect to the MPfG. Take, for example, the exorbitant overhead costs they charge. Even for the two exceptionally large CA projects with budgets over €100 million, the WCO sticks to its flat rate of 8%, which it usually applies only for projects with much lower budgets (i.e. €15 million or less). There is no evidence to suggest that such a high rate is reasonable for large projects, as overhead costs do not increase linearly with budget. On the contrary, large projects, like the Cash for Basic Needs and the Emergency Cash Relief, achieve significant economies of scale, which help reduce the proportion of costs involved.

Secondly, I think that the best way to ensure more local ownership would be to introduce a quota to increase the participation of Genoshian organisations as implementing partners. This approach would still allow action projects to be initiated quickly, but it would also force MPfG management to look for Genoshian implementing partners instead of always opting for the obvious solution with organisations it knows.

Thirdly, the deployment of the monitoring tool should be sufficiently well thought out to ensure that the partners can be held accountable for their performance, as this is not always the case at present. For example, the MPfG website states that over 10 000 hypertensive patients in rural areas have access to treatment. However, four years ago this number was higher! Does this mean that not all hypertensive patients in rural Genosha are receiving the treatment they need, or has the condition just become less prevalent? Without a clear reference point, it is difficult to tell whether any progress has been made, nullifying the utility of the monitoring tool. Moreover, considering that partners will benefit more from showcasing themselves in a positive light in their progress reports, I doubt whether the reported data are always trustworthy.

And then there is the issue of the many delays. Advising implementing partners to draw up a very comfortable project schedule with lots of built-in unspecified buffer time could be an easy workaround, but it would not incentivise them to optimise their planning or to apply themselves to the best of their abilities.

As a representative of a non-contributing MS, I have to watch from the sidelines as the Strategic Board and Operational Committee make decisions and take action. I hope that this email helps to get some of our ideas and recommendations on the table, as I am sure they could prove to be very valuable to both the MPfG and the Genoshian people.

I look forward to any future developments.

Kind regards,

Martina Galloway



Commission

MPfG INVITATION 02/20XX

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SOUTHERN GENOSHA

EXTRACT

Total estimated cost: EUR 10 000 000

As is standard practice, an overhead cost rate of 8% will be charged for all WCO agency-implemented projects with budgets of up to € 15 million.

Project-specific objectives:

- Improve access to affordable and adequate (drinking) water supply
- Improve food security and build resilience through effective safety nets among vulnerable households

Indicative implementation period

The overall implementation period will not exceed 20 months. This estimate takes into account, among other things, consultations with relevant bodies on the ground to verify and confirm the availability of staff and the permits needed to implement the project.

Approach:

- The first phase will entail in-depth research and a needs analysis in key districts to identify and analyse underlying causes, identify resilience needs and develop priorities. The needs analysis, which will be performed once, will allow time savings in getting aid to where it is most needed and also ensure that no time is wasted on irrelevant action. Because households can be vulnerable in very different ways depending on whether they are located in an urban or a rural area, specific resilience needs will be identified in key districts.
- Building up strong foundations with local authorities will serve as a stepping stone towards increasing the participation of local organisations, and will, in itself, result in an increase in local ownership.

Evaluation and audit:

- The implementing partner will be required to provide data regularly to the MPfG monitoring system.
- The partner will have to report in reference to a selected number of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) output indicators, which improve the overall measuring capabilities of the system:
 - MPfG-level indicators:
 - Number of people receiving food-security-related assistance
 - Number of people with improved access to basic services
 - Project-specific indicators:
 - Number of additional people – disaggregated by gender and age – with access to improved water supply by the end of the project
 - Additional water production in m³ per day
- Because improving food security is one of the project's main objectives, the level of food security is an important outcome for the monitoring tool to track. However, measuring household food consumption (e.g. by having people keep food diaries) has proven to be a difficult and rather unreliable method for monitoring food security. Therefore, other methods will need to be explored.