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SPC Guidelines for Strategic Programme Plans

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to assist staff who are writing or rewriting strategic programme plans. The guidelines propose a structure for SPC strategic programme plans that will help consolidate *results-based* planning and management throughout SPC.¹

Many organisations including SPC have adopted results-based approaches. But there are differing views on exactly how to do it. The guidelines try to simplify a complicated subject by suggesting a common planning methodology, terminology and format for SPC. Once this common approach is reflected in the strategic programme plans, it should flow easily into design documents and reporting. This is an important quality control measure for SPC. It will hopefully make our programmes and projects more consistent and easier for members, donors, staff and other stakeholders to understand.

What is a Strategic Plan?

A strategic plan is a statement of:

- why an organisation or programme exists;
- where it is right now;
- where it intends to be within a given period of time
- how it will get to where it wants to be
- what resources it requires to get there, and
- how it will measure progress and judge its effectiveness along the way.

Every SPC plan should be developed in consultation with key stakeholders or at least clearly be based on the outcomes of prior consultations (e.g. technical/sectoral meetings). Stakeholders should feel that it is their plan as much as SPC's, and that it is a blueprint for them to work in partnership with us to address their most important needs.

Both a planning and a management tool, a strategic plan sets up a structure to guide program managers in making project and activity choices and responding to evolving circumstances. It focuses the programme on allocating its resources to key priorities, measuring results and adjusting activities accordingly, and achieving sustainable outcomes. By generating performance information to share with stakeholders, a results-based approach also promotes transparency and accountability.

How will SPC Programmes benefit from Strategic Programme Plans?

Results-based management requires an organisation to clarify and publish its business and goals and detail how each of its constituent parts contributes to achieving those goals. In SPC this is done through the Corporate Plan and strategic programme plans. These plans should also cascade down into section, project and individual staff work plans so that they constitute a coherent framework embracing all of SPC's activities and staff.

¹ This is a generic term for management styles and systems that emphasise objectives and outcomes as opposed to inputs and processes. Logical Framework Matrices (logframes) are common tools for results-based approaches. Our budget reflects a results-based approach.

Although we all continue to refine our approach, this strategic framework was essentially put in place in 2002. The new Corporate Plan was developed in-house following extensive consultations with stakeholders in the region and approved by CRGA. Practically all programmes developed their Strategic Plans and achieved CRGA endorsement. Until then, SPC's annual management cycle had not really given programmes the opportunity to spell out their medium to longer-term perspectives and goals through strategic plans. Some programmes had taken the initiative themselves, however, without the support of a corporate standard.

Strategic programme plans are the link between the Corporate Plan and lower-level plans such as annual work plans, budget submissions, project design documents and reports to donors. The strategic plans will of course set the parameters for these documents and will also be a key reference document in the staff performance planning and appraisal cycle.

Please note that the introduction of Strategic Programme Plans did not add another layer of bureaucracy. On the contrary, the plans helped rationalise some of the old arrangements. For example, we gained acceptance by Australia, France and New Zealand for the Strategic Programme Plans to replace project proposals for "XB funding", which had to be prepared annually for each donor.

Public Relations and Marketing Tool

While it is a key management tool for SPC staff, a strategic plan is also a communication tool to reach stakeholders and the general public. A strategic plan should therefore be concise, avoiding detail and technical language. The challenge of writing strategic plans is to capture clearly and simply the rationale for the programme by demonstrating the interlocking logic of its analysis, objectives and results focus. We encourage the use of positive and active language (e.g. "challenge" instead of "problem" etc).

The plans will also be marketing tools. They could be professionally laid-out and printed. We expect that the plans will help market new project initiatives (XXB) to potential donors by providing the sectoral framework in which the project is set.

Time Frame Coverage

SPC strategic plans should normally cover a period of three to five years. Projecting any further into the future is generally too speculative. There is no general rule that all plans should cover the same time frame.

Length

The length of the document will of course depend on the layout. However, no plan should exceed 15 A4 pages. Most should be shorter.

	Length (max pages)
Coastal Fisheries	15
Oceanic Fisheries	15
Public Health	15
Statistics and Demography	10-12
Maritime	10
Cultural Affairs	8
Pacific Women's Bureau	8
Pacific Youth Bureau	8
Community Education Training Centre	8
Information Communication Technologies	8
Regional Media Centre	8

Structure and Key Elements

The **Structure** for Strategic Programme Plans is as follows:

A. Introduction to the Programme and its Strategic Plan	Situates the programme organisationally within SPC (which Division), explains what the programme does and the purpose of the Plan i.e. to give the programme a measurable results-focus and notes that it was written in consultation with stakeholders.
B. Pacific Context and Challenge	Identifies the challenges that the sector faces and defines them in the Pacific regional context.
C. The SPC Response	Says how the programme is addressing these challenges, including emerging challenges, referring to lessons learned from programme experience.
D. Priorities	Gives the reader a sense of what is most important for the programme. Lists the top three or four priorities only.
E. Goal and Objectives	The Goal is the long-term impact of the programme. Should refer to the regional or national objectives to which the programme will contribute. The Objectives are the planned set of results, and the consequent change in circumstances, that should lead to the achievement of the Goal.
F. Outputs and Key Performance Indicators	This is the largest section. It groups Outputs and Performance Indicators (where appropriate, under the relevant objective). Outputs are the direct, measurable results of the activities undertaken in order to meet the Objectives. They should be concrete and deliverable. Performance Indicators measure the extent to which you are producing the results you have planned for at each level.
G. Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation	Briefly describes the programme's reporting, monitoring and evaluation cycle (annual progress reports to SPC Executive and donors, monitoring by Conference, CRGA and sectoral meetings, evaluation by independent review).
H. Partnerships and Resources	Describes the programme's key links with partners (e.g. PICTs, other CROP agencies, international organisations and donors) as well as its staffing, assets and financing (i.e. its human, physical and financial resources).
I. Summary Matrix	Summary, in matrix format, of the results-based framework above

The rest of this paper expands on the definitions and offers some tips on how programmes can fully adopt this results-based strategic framework.

Definitions and Additional Hints

A. Introduction to the Programme and its Strategic Plan

This section should give the reader an idea of where the programme fits within the SPC structure, what the programme does (its main activities) and what this strategic plan is for (i.e. it identifies specific results and how to achieve them over the next three years). This provides a structure for the programme's work, management, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. This section should also note that the Plan was developed in consultation with key stakeholders, especially the PICTs. If some stakeholders made significant contributions, specify who they were. If major themes in the plan have been developed from agreements at a technical or other meeting, say so.

Please include the following statement in your introduction

SPC's governing bodies, the Conference of the Pacific Community and the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA), provide the key directions for the programme. Heads of agency and other sectoral meetings play an important role in confirming these directions and identifying emerging challenges.

B. Pacific Context and Challenges

A strategic plan should identify the key challenges, issues, and drivers of change in the sector that the programme operates in, drawing on a few apt statistics and/or diagrams to illustrate main points. It should describe those challenges that remain current in the sector and signal emerging trends. Importantly, it should analyse the current and future impact of these challenges and trends on the PICTs. This part of the plan sets the scene for everything that follows and should grab the reader's interest. A comprehensive and knowledgeable discussion of these issues in the Pacific context gives him/her the necessary base information to appreciate what the programme is going to do to address them and why it has made the strategic choices it has.

C. The SPC Response

Here, the plan follows on from the discussion of challenges and emerging trends and explains how it will meet them. It should convey a sense of continuity, purpose and enthusiasm. The Plan should clearly state what it is going to do and why it has chosen these particular interventions. This should involve a discussion of lessons learned as to what works and what doesn't in the PICTs, based on the experience of the programme and of other developmental actors in the sector. If relevant, a brief explanation of the programme's comparative advantage over other organisations working in the same field would be useful.

No programme will have the resources to address all the challenges in a sector. If there are areas whose importance has diminished (because of past achievements of the programme for example), or where it is impractical for the programme to become involved, say so. Spell out also what new areas the programme will work in and what innovative strategies it will adopt and why. Remember we consider ourselves to be part of a "dynamic" organisation (Corporate Plan).

From this discussion, the programme's strategic priorities and approaches for the next three years should emerge logically, clearly linked to the challenges identified in the previous section, and foreshadowing the Goal, Objectives, Outputs and Activities that will be developed in later sections of the plan.

D. Priorities

This section is here to ensure that not just the programme's priorities, but its key priorities - no more than four even for a large programme - that it sees as absolutely essential to achieve over the period of the plan, are documented for all stakeholders to see. This statement of absolute priorities will be important when you manage and monitor the programme, and it will be a key reference for an independent reviewer evaluating the programme's performance and the way it has responded to changing circumstances.

E. Goal and Objectives

For most programmes their highest-level statement of intention or direction will be a goal. However, some programmes may choose to adopt a mission or vision statement. This would be more aspirational than a goal and it would convey the role the programme wants to play in helping realise the SPC Corporate Plan. (See for example the Regional Maritime Programme's mission: Safer shipping, cleaner seas, improved social and economic well-being of seafaring communities within the Pacific region).

A goal is at the higher level of the logical hierarchy but should be quite specific nonetheless. It is a statement of intention, describing the planned, long-term impact of the programme. An example of a goal is: *Healthier Pacific Island Communities* (Public Health Programme).

There should be one goal only per programme, and some programmes may share the one goal (as do the different programme clusters within the Social Resources Division).

Goals, objectives and outputs should be expressed as results that have been achieved - i.e. in the past tense – this helps you make them specific and achievable when you are deciding what they will be. Remember, you are projecting three to five years into the future, to the end of the strategic plan period, by when your programme is expecting to have delivered the results.

Objectives are even more specific than goals. Programmes, in particular those with a number of sections, may have a number of objectives. Objectives are the link between the goal and the specific activities carried out by a programme. The choice of objectives will determine what activities a programme will undertake.

Objectives are at the heart of any results-based framework because a programme's performance will be judged by whether it achieves its objectives or not. Deciding on objectives is a balancing act between, on the one hand, setting ambitious targets to achieve maximum development impact, and on the other hand, setting realistic targets because you will be held accountable for achieving them. Objectives should be measurable by the programme and verifiable through external reviews and feedback received.

F. Outputs and Key Performance Indicators

This section groups outputs and performance indicators under the relevant objective or objectives so that both the logical hierarchy, and how the results are going to be measured, are clear. Although not mentioned in the heading, you can also discuss or describe typical activities.

Outputs

Outputs are the specific results of a programme's activities. If they are achieved, the cumulative effect should be that the programme meets its objectives. Try to make your outputs concrete and use strong, results-oriented terms. Try to think of an output as something that your programme is entirely or largely responsible for. Outputs are the results that your programme's performance should be measured against.

Activities

Normally, every output is the result of an activity or activities. Activities are the numerous but specific and practical tasks that the programme carries out as part of achieving the outputs. A general description of activities is sufficient. Do not include them all. (A full list should be found in the programme work plan, not in its strategic plan.) Make sure that you only list activities that illustrate how the programme will go about its business. Leave the rest out. For example, if an activity is producing technical manuals, most people would guess that it involves writing, layout and publication.

Key Performance Indicators (also known as Objectively Verifiable Indicators)

Performance indicators should be objective, specific and reliable units of measurement, and concise statements of the quality, quantity and timing of expected results. They may include specific targets, milestones, and deadlines. Indicators can be measurements of the successful completion of an activity (e.g. training course curriculum developed), the quantity (e.g. 30 courses delivered) or the quality (positive course assessment reports obtained).

Please note that, strictly speaking, indicators and targets are not the same thing. An example of an indicator may be "percentage reduction in infant mortality rate over relevant period". If you add your expected result e.g. a "10 per cent reduction", you will have a target. If you can, use targets.

Examples of Indicators and Targets

- For a goal of improved health of children – percentage reduction in infant mortality rate over relevant period
- For an objective of increasing women's income – at least 10% significantly higher household expenditure on six essential items
- For an output of increased crop yields – 25% rise in average yields on farms of 2 hectares or less between 2001 and 2004.

Of course you need to document that you have the necessary **base data** to make these changes over time (the indicators) measurable and therefore meaningful. The approaches or tools that you will use to measure or determine changes are called the **Means of Verification**. Some means of verification may be available at outside sources e.g. PICT statistical offices; other means of verification should be established by the programme itself as part of its information monitoring system.

G. Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation

This section briefly describes the management and accountability cycle of the programme. Every plan should contain the following wording:

Annual progress reports and workplans are provided to SPC Executive and donors, where applicable, with a six-monthly update. (This is in addition to specific project reports and any exception reporting.) Heads of agency and technical meetings have the opportunity to examine and comment on the programme's work and the programme is monitored annually by Conference or CRGA. Independent reviewers evaluate the programme every few years as part of SPC's programme of regular reviews. (Evaluations will be looking particularly at results at the Goal and Objective levels.)

Many logframes reflect uncertainty about how the indicators will be used at the objective level. The emphasis for the strategic programme plans should be on the development of indicators and performance information that the programme itself will use to assess and report on its own progress especially at the output level (in the context of annual and six-monthly reports, CRGA presentations etc). At the objective and goal level each programme may only be able to generate limited data internally, but this will be complemented by external means of verification such as feedback from technical meetings and independent reviews.

H. Partnerships and Resources

This section lists the Programme's main dialogue partners and briefly notes how the Programme works with them. PICT government agencies and donors will always be key partners. Other partners may include: CROP agencies, international organisations, other SPC programmes and civil society.

This part should also cover the resources that the Programme will require to perform the functions set out in this plan. This will include human resources (staffing), physical resources (assets such as IT Section's equipment or the Library's holdings) and financial resources. Discuss how the programme is financed (from core budget and/or donor sources). Say who major donors are and if donor-funded projects will continue through all or most of the plan period, briefly mention them. Finally, if there are significant funding gaps over the plan period, say where they are and roughly how much is required.

I. Summary Matrix

Please include a summary matrix of no more than one page, listing objectives, outputs and key performance indicators. Please also include a description of how you are planning to go about measuring your results ("means of verification").

And Finally - Keep it Simple

If a strategic plan, or any other form of results-based planning, is to win wide acceptance it must be simple and direct. Try and limit your mission and goal, and each objective, output and performance indicator to one idea and one sentence only. Make each sentence as succinct, specific and concrete as possible. This will make the strength of your analysis, and the cascading logical flow of your strategy, show through clearly.

If you have any queries don't hesitate to ask the Planning Unit. We certainly don't have all the answers but we are happy to try and help.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I make changes to my programme's approved Strategic Plan?

Yes, you can. At its November 2002 meeting CRGA chose to approve plans as “living documents” in recognition of the fact that the region is changing and that the capacity of programmes to respond to challenges may also change during the lifespan of a strategic plan. Note, though, that planned changes other than editorial modifications should be brought back to CRGA for information or, if they are significant, for the committee’s consideration. Significant changes would normally include changes to objectives, outputs and key performance indicators.

Bear in mind that the performance of a programme is supposed to be measured against the approved strategic plan. This task would be very difficult if significant changes were made without consultation with your key stakeholders (or indeed in the case of CRGA ‘shareholders’).

How do I make sure that I have the latest version of my programme's plan?

I am new to SPC/My computer crashed/I can simply not identify the approved Strategic Plan.
The Planning Unit’s Public Folder is the repository for Strategic Programme Plans. Here, you will find the CRGA approved English and French versions. Please advise us of any changes that you plan or have made.

I would like to my plan to be professionally laid out and printed. What do I need to do?

Some programmes are perfectly happy with a simple Word or PDF document. Others prefer a flash document. Should you decide that your needs are better served by something fancy, please talk to the staff of the Publications Section who will be happy to assist. Please note that your programme will need to fund the printing cost. Please also note that the text of your strategic plan needs to be reproduced in full. Do not leave out sections that you may consider unnecessary. The structure of our plans was the outcome of long discussions and each section has its purpose.