

Building the future on strong foundations: Evidence-based regional priorities for the RCA

Best Practice Description:

Description

The RCA Regional Priorities for 2012/2017 constitute the underlying strategic directions for the RCA Programme over the next several TC cycles.

This project description has been constructed in accordance with the guidelines for Best Practice Selection and Validation. This is demonstrated, for example, in the following sections on "How/Who" and "Approach".

Problem/issue

The motivation for the establishment of the RCA Regional Priorities stemmed from the experience gained during the progressive implementation of the RCA Medium Term Strategy 2006/2011. This indicated that the RCA programme could be further improved if decisions were based on a detailed review of the outcomes from all previous RCA projects and insights on the current status of technical capabilities and capacities in each Member State.

In the past, decisions on projects to be implemented under the RCA Programme had been made at the Regional Meetings of National RCA Representatives and in the absence of previously agreed regional priorities. This process was considered rather ad hoc, and the National RCA Representatives, guided by the recommendations made by the Standing Advisory Group on Technical Assistance and Cooperation (SAGTAC), therefore, decided that a more strategic approach should be utilized in deciding on future priorities for the RCA Programme.

TC project: RCA

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Category:

- C.1: Country Programme Framework/ Regional Profile Process
- C.2: Programme Cycle Management (PCM)
- C.3: Logical Framework Methodology
- C.4: Coordination Arrangements
- C.5: Regional and Interregional Cooperation
- C.6: Partnership
- C.7: Project Results

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Best Practice Description: cont'd:

It was also realised that a long-term strategy extending over several TC cycles would be crucial in overcoming the limitations that stemmed from planning for only one TC cycle at a time.

How/who

The identification of the focus of the future RCA activities were carried out by Working Groups for each of the four RCA Thematic Areas (agriculture, environment, human health, industry). Each of these Working Groups consisted of two technical experts and one RCA National Representative who provided background and advice at the policy making level. The Working Group members' knowledge and expertise in each of the thematic areas were supplemented with inputs from IAEA staff.

Approach

The Working Groups used the criteria for RCA projects adopted by RCA Member States, the TC Strategy and criteria for TC projects, inputs from IAEA staff and their own knowledge and experience. Furthermore, they were particularly guided by the RCA Regional Profile which had previously been developed by a consultant, based on the information obtained through a survey and documentation of past RCA activities. A detailed analysis of all 119 RCA projects was carried out and the report also identified strengths and weaknesses, gaps in the technology transfer achieved through these projects, the extent of end-user involvement and other information relevant for planning the future RCA Programmes.

How effective

The approach taken in developing the RCA Strategic Priorities proved to be highly effective in providing guidance for all activities in the RCA Programme over the next several TC cycles. The RCA Strategic Priorities 2012 to 2017 now constitute the underlying principle of all future activities under the RCA Programme.

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Sub Categories:

- Supporting medium term development objectives
- Meeting current and emerging country or regional needs
- Planning, concept and project design
- Evaluation
- Comprehensiveness
- Sustainability of outputs: outreach towards end-users and beneficiaries
- Effective and efficient management of planning and management of the TC Programme between different Member States entities and IAEA.
- Coordination arrangements supported by guidelines on established quality criteria, workflows, and IT structure
- RCA
- Strategic
- Sustainability of a transferred technology
- Adoption and utilization of technology by end-users
- Educational impact
- Impact on decision and policy makers
- Safety, environmental and/or economic results

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Best Practice Description: cont'd:

Lessons learned

The lessons learned from the process of developing RCA Regional Priorities were that a rigorous analysis of past activities, in combination with the identification of regional priorities under technical and policy considerations are vital for a meaningful regional programme that provides maximum impact. It was also widely realised that this could only be achieved because RCA Member States were inspired by a high sense of ownership for the RCA as 'their programme', which benefits from contributions at all levels.

Key success factors

Key success factors in developing RCA Regional Priorities have been:

- The commitment by all RCA National Representatives to use a more strategic approach in deciding on the future priorities for the RCA Programme.
- The rigorous analysis of past RCA activities and identification of their gaps, strengths and weaknesses.
- The availability and use of technical and policy expertise from within the RCA Agreement.
- The close collaboration with, and input from, IAEA staff.

Beneficiaries

A wide range of RCA stakeholders have been able to significantly benefit from clear and concise RCA Regional Priorities:

- RCA Member States have been able to put their national priorities into a regional context, thus facilitating efficient regional collaboration and sharing of expertise and capabilities, e.g. TCDC, Regional Resource Units.
- RCA National Representatives have been able to base their approval of RCA projects on a rigorous analysis of past RCA activities and forward-looking strategy.
- The RCA Regional Priorities provided guidance to RCA Lead Country Coordinators so could ensure that the projects developed by them would indeed address agreed regional priorities.
- The RCA Regional Priorities provide vital information to the IAEA Secretariat for making their support for the RCA as effective and efficient as possible.

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Best Practice Description: cont'd:

Quality criteria

The RCA Strategic Priorities 2012-2017 have been seminal for the RCA activities over the next TC cycles. As such, this proposed Best Practice addresses all quality criteria as outlined in the Best Practices Survey Guidelines; in particular:

- **Relevance:** The RCA Regional Priorities put individual Member States national needs into a regional context. They also ensure that the use of nuclear technical infrastructure is based on a rigorous analysis of its advantages over non-nuclear technologies.
- **Ownership:** The RCA Regional Priorities is an excellent example of the strong sense of ownership the RCA Member States have for their Agreement and Programme. The decision to develop the Regional Priorities was made by the RCA National Representatives, and the development of Regional Priorities was largely done by expertise from within the RCA, with input from the IAEA Secretariat.
- **Sustainability:** The RCA Regional Priorities constitute a priority plan based on a forward-looking analysis of the specific needs within the RCA region over several TC cycles. This provides a solid basis for exploring partnerships with non-agency donors such as international development agencies. They are also particularly targeted towards enhancing the use of TCDC through knowledge transfer and access to technical infrastructure (Regional Resource Units).
- **Efficiency:** Overall, the development of RCA Strategic Priorities took no longer than six months. The first step was an analysis by a consultant of past RCA activities based on historic documents and questionnaires (October 2009 to January 2010). This constituted the basis for an in-depth discussion and planning by RCA technical and policy experts, with input from Agency staff, during a one-week meeting (February 2010). The draft RCA Strategic Priorities were approved by the National Representatives in their subsequent meeting (April 2010). This process provided a highly efficient approach to defining and agreeing on the strategic directions of a regional cooperative agreement.
- **Effectiveness:** As stated above, the RCA Regional Priorities have been seminal for shaping the RCA Programme over the next several TC cycles. They now constitute the underlying principle of all future activities under the RCA Programme.

Special conditions

There are no special conditions that had to be taken into account when developing this proposed Best Practice. We believe that our process can be seamlessly adopted by other regional agreements if they consider it useful for them. The RCA would be pleased to share its experience and provide support.
