

Association for Progressive Communications Programme Development Methodology

APC was founded in 1990 but only began to work in specific programme areas in 1993 when the Women's Networking Support Programme (WNSP) was founded. The APC WNSP was established as a part of APC, but also as network in its own right with its own membership. In 1997 the APC Council (member body) approved three other programmes (policy, tools, and content) and in 2000 an Africa programme.

This unwieldy programme structure was refined in 2002 when the board approved staff's proposal of three primary programmatic areas: Communications and Information Policy, Women's Networking Support, and Strategic ICT Use and Capacity Building.

In principle this programme structure can be revised if needed, with the approval of the membership.

How APC's Programme's Relate to Social Change

APC believes that civil society can make a critical contribution to changing the conditions that perpetuate cycles of poverty and disempowerment. We work at three primary levels:

- To enable civil society organisations and networks to make strategic use of ICTs in order to be more effective in their work, thereby having more impact on structural poverty.
- Working for enabling policy environments that contribute to affordable and effective access to information and communications services and technologies for poor communities, with a strong emphasis on effective access for women
- Working for women's empowerment, which is fundamental to challenging the structural conditions of poverty.

Strategic Planning

APC programme development is framed by APC's overall strategic priorities in the context of APC's mission and vision. The latter are considered, and if needed, revised. APC's current mission statement dates back to 1997 and its vision statement to 2001.

APC started to work with longer term planning in 2000. APC's planning cycles runs for 5 years with an overlapping year in between each cycle during which we work on a new plan, and finalise implementation on the earlier plan.

Thus we had an APC action plan for 2000-2004 and one for 2004-2008. The 2000-2004 cycle was meant to be shorter, but when doing the first assessment, at the end of 2001, members decided that the priorities were still relevant, and that we should continue to focus on those goals for a further 2 years.

APC will start the process of producing the next plan for 2008-2012 at the 2007 APC Council meeting.

The process consists of the following steps:

Preparatory steps:

- some form of assessment of progress on achieving existing priorities
- assessment of regional priorities at regional member meetings

Step 1: Members identify key strategic goals (also called priorities and 'action areas') and cross-cutting themes for the network

Step 2: Staff and board develop key result areas in which we should achieve results in order to realise the strategic goals

Step 3: Staff develop an activity plan based on the key result areas

Step 4: Plan presented to members for feedback

Step 5: plan and budget approved by the board

This process produces a detailed action plan which forms the basis of APC's resource mobilisation activity.

Step 2 creates an opportunity for APC staff to contribute their insights and experience to the planning process. Each programme team develop their own plan, which is then integrated into the overall plan.

A degree of flexibility is important. There is no guarantee at the beginning of a cycle that resources will be available to implement all the activity in the plan.

New activities are also often introduced in response to challenges and opportunities in APC's sector, and to feedback from members. As a central APC goal is to develop activity in partnership with members, additional activities will be planned during a planning cycle in collaboration with members, and with partners, as long as these activities relate closely to APC's primary strategic priorities and key result areas.

How the Current Strategic Plan Relates to the Previous Plan

When members identify 'new' priorities they do so in the context of:

- an assessment of progress on earlier priorities
- the current relevance of earlier priorities
- assessment of their own national/regional and thematic environments

There has been continuity in the last two cycles with priority areas such as ICT policy, and civil society networking, featuring in both the 2000-4 and 2004-8 plans.

Assessment of Implementation

Since we started longer term planning (2000) APC has done regular assessments of progress with the board (annually) and with members at council meetings (at least once within a cycle and at the end of a cycle).

The basis of the assessments have been to rate perceptions of progress in achieving the key result areas and against the primary strategic goals. For the 2000-2004 plan assessments with members were done in 2001 and 2003. The mid-term assessment of 2004-2008 commenced in 2006 and the final report will be presented to members in November 2007.

As the organisation's budget and scope has grown, we have had to modify this process, but in principle it follows a similar trajectory. The current mid-term assessment is far more sophisticated, involves staff and members, makes use of data analysis tools (SPSS) and is built into APC's project management procedures and database.

Assessing Member's Contributions to the Network's Strategic Goals

In 2006 APC introduced a process for members to assess **their** organisation's contribution to realising APC's strategic priorities. This is done through members using a shorter version of the assessment form staff and board use.

Links With Performance Management

APC has a performance management system which links to programme implementation. Each programme manager's key performance criteria includes a measure that relates to implementing programme priorities as defined in the strategic plan, and one that relates to member participation

Successful implementation of the strategic plan is one of the executive director's key performance measures. The executive director's performance is evaluated by the executive board and his/her peers. Effective participation of members in programme development is also one of the ED's key performance criteria.

The network development manager's performance criteria relate to various aspects of member participation in programme development and members' satisfaction with their membership of the APC.

END