

Organisational Assessment of CANADEM

Draft Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Universalia is pleased to submit to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) the draft report of the Organisational Assessment of CANADEM. An organisational assessment provides managers and other key stakeholders with information about the performance of an organisation to facilitate continued learning and improvement. CANADEM, a non-profit organisation established in 1996, has a mandate of recruiting, screening promoting, and rapidly mobilizing Canadian experts for deployment to areas of the world in need of development and/or urgent humanitarian assistance

Today, CANADEM manages a wide array of projects, most of which are based on the use of its roster. CANADEM's Consolidated Civilian Reserve Roster (CCRR) contains over 13,500 Canadian and international experts, who can be quickly deployed to a variety of organisations, including the UN, international elections monitoring organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to assist them in their projects. Members of the roster are typically experts in international humanitarian and disaster relief, human rights, peace building, rule of law, governance, democratization, policing security, administration-logistics, and reconstruction. Created as a rapid-response mechanism, the CCRR allows information on screened members to be forwarded within 48-72 hours of a request for assistance, and oftentimes facilitates recruitment of members within 3-7 days. The general roster is sub-divided into more specialized rosters to support project-specific activities within CANADEM.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provides a significant proportion of the project funding received by the organisation. Three (3) CIDA branches maintain the largest active projects/programs with CANADEM: The Afghanistan Pakistan Task Force (APTF), Partnership with Canadians Branch, and the Multilateral and Global Programs Branch (MULTI). CIDA's three (3) major projects with CANADEM represent over 60 percent of CANADEM's overall revenue.

Rationale for the Review

Over the years, CIDA's engagement with CANADEM has increased in quantity, scale, and scope. In light of this increase, a comprehensive organisational assessment was requested to assess the organisation's performance and capacity to deliver cost-effective results. In addition, CANADEM's financial capacity was assessed through a Financial Risk Assessment (level 2) that was conducted by CIDA's Financial Risk Assessment Unit (FRAU). This study complements the organisational assessment (OA). The clients of the Organisational Assessment are CIDA and CANADEM. The specific objectives of the assessment are to:

- Provide an accurate picture of CANADEM's performance and capacity to deliver cost-effective results within its various mandates, as well as the factors and changes that are affecting that performance;
- Identify areas of competence and strength, as well as areas for improvement and possible risks to CANADEM and/or CIDA;
- Complement planned project evaluations of individual CIDA-CANADEM projects while avoiding duplication; and
- Afford an opportunity for mutual learning and provide strategic guidance for future CIDA-CANADEM cooperation.

Methodology

The methodology for this assessment was developed based on consultations carried out by the reviewer with various representatives of CIDA's Steering Committee, CANADEM, and on a preliminary document review in August 2010. A qualitative methodological design was used to conduct the assessment, focusing on providing CIDA with information on the performance of CANADEM (its major projects) and the major factors that are affecting CANADEM's performance. This included the examination of principal documents, articles, reports, and previous assessments; surveys conducted with both RAP experts and election monitors deployed between 2008 and 2010; interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders including CIDA, CANADEM, CGSO, DFAIT, Elections Canada, deployed personnel, UN Cluster Leads, elections monitoring organisations, NGOs, other deployment organisations, and other key informants as identified; and an assessment of CIDA's October 2010 Financial Risk Assessment Unit (FRAU) results. There were no field visits during the period of the review. Data was collected through the use of a participatory, multi-method approach, and included a significant degree of collaboration between CANADEM, CIDA, and Universal Management Group.

Limitations to the review process included the lack of any field data, which resulted in a reduced ability to describe "results on the ground"; the absence of an independent assessment of CANADEM's elections monitoring work, which reduced the amount of information available on this aspect of CANADEM's work; delays in contracting an independent assessment of the CGSO project, which resulted in the OA lacking any independent data on the CGSO subsequent to the 2009 assessment; and insufficient resources to obtain data from persons who were not deployed. Notwithstanding the limitations that have been outlined, the analysis and interpretation of collected data has been conducted in accordance with the scope for the review, as specified in the Terms of Reference (TORs).

Major Findings

This Organisational Assessment of CANADEM has resulted in thirty-nine (39) substantive findings on the organization's performance and factors affecting its performance. A summary of these findings is presented:

- 1. CANADEM was assessed as effective in its ability to meet its project objectives related to selection and deployment assignments. The lack of articulated strategic organizational objectives militated against assessing its organizational effectiveness.**

This evaluation, as well as a review of the independent evaluations of CANADEM, suggests that CANADEM is most effective in providing roster, deployment, and logistical services. The data provided by interviews and surveys of clients and stakeholders support this claim. Areas outside of this niche, such as managing development projects, were assessed as less effective.

Since its inception nearly fifteen (15) years ago, CANADEM has become very effective in providing roster, deployment, and logistical services. In addition to our data, an analysis of independent evaluations conducted by funders since its CANADEM's inception support this contention. In fact over the past 10 years, CANADEM has met most of its project objectives.

During most of its existence CANADEM provided deployment and logistical services to clients. More recently, it began providing implementation services for CIDA's Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force (APTF). This is a new services aimed at providing technical assistance for capacity building within the Government of Afghanistan. This is a significant shift away from CANADEM's core area of roster and deployment services towards the implementation of development projects. In 2009, CIDA commissioned an independent review of CANADEM's work in Afghanistan, one year after its inception. The review suggested that significant change and learning needed to occur within CANADEM to effectively implement the project. Many of the changes were made and a follow-up review to the 2009 assessment was recommended as part of this review. Unfortunately it has not yet occurred.

2. CANADEM receives high ratings for its efficiency. It keeps its indirect costs low at less than 20 percent of project costs and focuses on its core areas of operation (selection and deployment).

Multiple sources of evidence indicate that CANADEM is an efficient organisation. It keeps its administrative costs low at 18.5 percent; has recently invested in an efficiency-maximizing IT tool to manage its roster; and makes a visible effort to direct resources towards its core areas of operation (roster selection and deployment). In fact, CANADEM's stakeholders believe that it is much more efficient to house a roster like CANADEM's outside of the Government of Canada rather than within.

Although CANADEM makes concerted efforts to prioritize efficiency, it may sometimes come at a cost to the non-core areas of its work. CANADEM claims that gender equality is one of its top organisational priorities. However, CANADEM's roster and sub-rosters remain over-represented by men and deployed personnel indicate that increased gender sensitivity in training and deployment is desired. Additionally, public engagement and information sharing is often included as key components of CANADEM's projects. However, minimal work in these two areas has been pursued. In fact, a review of CANADEM's actual versus estimated budget for its Phase II RAP project indicated that resources were actually diverted away from these areas towards roster and deployment activities, even when the initial budgeted amount for gender and public engagement and information sharing was quite minimal. The dilemma for CANADEM is whether it should add to its overhead costs by providing these non-funded areas or remain focused on its priority services –and thus be deemed as efficient.

3. The actual and perceived utility of CANADEM's roster is fundamental to the relevance and sustainability of the organisation.

CANADEM's core work and comparative advantage revolve around the use of its roster. Therefore, the success and sustainability of CANADEM's work is highly dependent on the perceived relevance of its roster. Interviews with UN Agencies as well as GOC (Government of Canada) interviews, suggest that the roster is relevant and useful.

However, some data indicates that CANADEM's selection criteria and processes are perceived to be opaque, favouring a small number of individuals deployed on a regular basis. This is particularly the case with elections monitors sent to EU missions. Interviewees thus wonder whether the roster is needed if only small numbers of people are actually used in projects. These same interviewees wonder whether a large roster is a relevant tool in an age of social networking. These comments demonstrate how the relevance and perceived relevance of rosters is evolving and this major asset of CANADEM needs to be regularly assessed.

4. Without a workable business model, CANADEM's ability to manage its long-term viability is threatened, especially given its present level of reliance on CIDA as a source of funding.

CANADEM's basic business model is to obtain support from the Government of Canada for roster and deployment services in order to provide Canadian human resources to international organisations. The demand for CANADEM's services comes from international agencies and the funding comes from the Government of Canada. The challenge in this business model is for the GOC to provide enough funding for CANADEM to survive. This is tricky. First, CANADEM's history indicates that sometimes this does not occur. Secondly, CANADEM believes it should be a preferential supplier, when the GOC frowns on preferential suppliers. Finally, the funding model is supply driven and tied which is also frowned upon internationally. While CANADEM has shown itself to be resilient over the past 15 years we question whether this model is viable in the medium to long-term. With CANADEM being over-reliant on CIDA funding (63 percent of CANADEM's resources are generated through CIDA), we have assessed this model to be risky. Our contention is that CANADEM's history with this business model dictates a significant review and probably a change!

5. CANADEM is at a crossroads in terms of its strategic direction and leadership. The lack of a written strategic plan reduces its ability to focus its efforts and energy.

Strategies provide a framework for organisational choices. Although CANADEM does not have an explicit strategy, its strategic direction has been historically led by an implicit strategy, presented in its “Canada Corps” concept paper. In this concept paper, CANADEM sees itself as a partner with the Canadian Government, supporting the use of the vast Canadian citizenry interested and capable of influencing major global institutions. However, due to contextual circumstances, this strategy no longer seems appropriate to guide CANADEM’s work. This has led CANADEM to enter into a strategic crossroads where it is experimenting with a number of ideas which in some instances expands its existing services while in other instances moves them into new program areas..

CANADEM’s senior management has acknowledged the necessity to create a strategic plan to guide the organisation’s future work. Its Executive Board consists of highly qualified individuals who could be able to help guide CANADEM’s strategic direction. Furthermore, CANADEM’s work is currently project-oriented rather than program-oriented. A key component to a strategy, however, is to ensure that projects come together to support a program-oriented vision. A program-oriented approach also must include sound logic models that clearly link outputs to outcomes. Currently, CANADEM could improve the way it defines its outcomes to facilitate the attribution of results to CANADEM’s activities.

There are other important components that CANADEM could consider when developing its strategy. For instance, successful organisational strategies typically include plans to ensure funding diversity. They often include a monitoring and evaluation function within the organisation, which CANADEM currently does not have, which can help create organisation-wide performance reports (such as annual reports). A strategy also typically includes a human resource (HR) component. Although CANADEM’s staff is highly motivated, the organisation needs to decide on an HR strategy either to provide staff with professional development opportunities or accept high staff turn-over.

Another area for consideration when creating a strategy is an organisation’s approach to dealing with the succession of its leaders. CANADEM’s senior management is led by its founders and its Board consists of many members who have been present since the organisation’s inception. Leadership succession is another strategic issue that needs thought as CANADEM moves forward. In conclusion our findings in this area suggest that the lack of a strategic organizational approach and plan presents important shortcomings for the organization as it moves into the future.

6. CANADEM has historically relied on the Government of Canada to be its primary partner. However, even though CANADEM views itself as a partner with the Canadian Government, interviewees suggest that CANADEM is a service provider—a contractor. This causes some confusion between CANADEM and its primary funder. In addition to its partnership with the GOC, our data suggest that it has not adequately invested in thinking through what and how partnerships can help build CANADEM strategically.

CANADEM has had a long, evolving history with the Government of Canada. However, the rules governing this relationship have not been seen in the same way between the two entities. CANADEM sees itself as a partner, while the Government of CANADEM sees it as a service-provider. This has led to differing expectations between the two groups and has caused some tensions and frustration. Additional tension and confusion is caused by the fact that CANADEM is governed through CIDA by different types of service arrangements depending on the project being funded. Interviews with members of CIDA have demonstrated that this is a cause of tension and concern. Some members within CIDA suspect that different branches are being charged different rates for CANADEM’s services. Although this appears not to be the case, the differing funding arrangements appear to lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

Since its inception, CANADEM has been highly dependent on the Government of Canada as its primary partner. As a result, it has made little effort to establish formal inter-organisational relationships

(partnerships) with other like-minded organisations, besides the Canadian Government and the UN. There may be other NGOs or organisations of some type that would be interested in partnering with CANADEM. Partnerships can often help strengthen an organisation's capacity and performance. This could be a useful area for CANADEM to explore.

Recommendations

As mentioned in the findings, CANADEM is currently at a strategic crossroads. Ten (10) substantive recommendations have emerged from the findings of the organisational assessment of CANADEM. They revolve primarily around three issues: CANADEM's need for a strategic plan and some necessary elements to be included in the plan; the nature of CANADEM's current relationship with other organisations, including CIDA, and the need for increased and improved partnerships; and the need to continue assessing CANADEM's performance and that of other Canadian NGOs.

We recommend that CANADEM's Senior Management and Executive Board develop a strategic plan that would 1) provide a valid business model for the organisation which would match supply and demand; 2) transfer the organisation's approach from a project-oriented approach to a program-oriented approach; 3) include a succession plan with respect to leadership transition both at the operational and Board levels; and 4) institute a monitoring and evaluation process and/or a function within the organisation. This should also include the monitoring of the actual and perceived relevance of its roster within a constantly changing external environment.

In terms of partnerships, CANADEM has historically focused on developing a partnership with the Government of Canada. However, its relationship with the Government of Canada is currently poorly defined, which has led to unmet expectations and frustration from both sides. Additionally, CANADEM is currently governed by CIDA using different funding arrangements for each of its projects, which leads to confusion and misunderstanding. This assessment recommends that CANADEM's senior management and the senior officials of the Partnership with Canadians branch use the findings from this organisational assessment to clarify the institutional expectations and arrangements that make up their current relationship. It also recommends that CANADEM build more robust partnerships with like-minded organisations (such as Canadian and international NGOs) in order to support the outcomes and goals of the organisation.

The final area of recommendations is focused on CIDA's use of evaluation tools to continue to understand the performance of CANADEM and other Canadian NGOs. In order to fully understand CANADEM's work in Afghanistan, we recommend that CIDA conduct, as planned, a follow-up review to the 2009 CGSO Assessment. Such an assessment could be incorporated into this report. Additionally, we recommend that CIDA's Partnership with Canadians branch assess the utility of using Organisational Assessments as a tool to more intimately understand the development and organisational performance of Canadian not-for-profit organisations. Such a tool should be explored from the perspective of providing knowledge to CIDA's Partnership with Canadians branch, as the branch requires detailed knowledge about Canadian NGOs to share with the rest of the Agency.

Conclusion

The OA concluded that CANADEM was providing a quality service to its clients at a reasonable cost. It has a strong and positive organizational culture supported by a quality Board and dedicated and strong leaders. The analysis suggests that as CANADEM matures as an organization it needs to clarify its strategy, strengthen its programming, build a more sustainable business model. The combined findings and recommendations of the review are presented to CIDA and CANADEM, with the expectation that they will serve as points of discussion, for future cooperation and an opportunity for CANADEM to provide more and better services to the international development community.