

## COMPLEMENT AND EMPOWER

### AN ANALYTICAL SUPPORT FUNCTION FOR ACF

#### 2015 Regional Analysts Network Review

*The overall objectives of the Regional Analysts Network (RAN)<sup>1</sup> are to complement and empower the existing analytical capacity in ACF and amplify its impact. The RAN is a service provider; demand driven by decision makers in the organisation, exploiting not only structural analytical techniques but also quantitative analysis (including predictive analytics) to create analytical products tailored to the needs of the organisation. The RAN was introduced to ACF in November 2014 and was fully staffed and operational, covering four regions of ACFIN's global portfolio, by September 2015. The concept for the RAN project originated in the Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques (IRIS) in 2012 and they continue to be a strategic partner for the team; in 2015 the RAN also linked with two futures oriented organisations to underpin our work. This report marks the first review of the RAN pilot at ACF which is to run until the end of 2017 and reflects on the creation of the department and the first few months of its operations.*

#### *Interacting with the RAN: an ACF international support service*

The RAN was introduced to ACF France as part of the newly created Department of Strategy and Analysis in January 2015. Though originally a dedicated service, the RAN rapidly graduated to working at ACF international (ACFIN) level and the processes and protocols that govern its management were consequently a result of consultations across the network. The RAN is a support service designed to adapt to the needs of decision makers and their teams; it operates on three key principles:

- Consultation: members of the RAN ensure that appropriate staff are included in the design, information gathering, production and review of RAN products and processes.
- Transparency: the work plans of the analysts are circulated every two months to provide an opportunity for staff to see what the RAN is working on and as a result communicate with the RAN if it is something of interest to them.
- Partnership: the RAN will take advantage of existing tools and learning so as not to reinvent the wheel but to build on established methods through a partnership model. Expanding the network is a critical part of our ambition and Regional Analysts will lead on doing this in their areas of operation.

By including input from different branches and levels of ACFIN in determining the way in which the RAN interacts with the teams at field and head quarter (HQ) level, the RAN has created a system where the team's priorities are determined by operations staff (Director of Regional Operations/Heads of Programs/Desk Officers) who have an outlook over the entire portfolio covered by the RAN. This process of prioritization which updates and publically shares the RAN

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<sup>1</sup> The RAN is a multi-year pilot project that builds on the lessons learned from a test conducted at Save the Children in 2012-2014.

work plan every two months ensures that the RAN is responding to the changing needs of the organization and enables us to adapt to shifting organizational priorities.

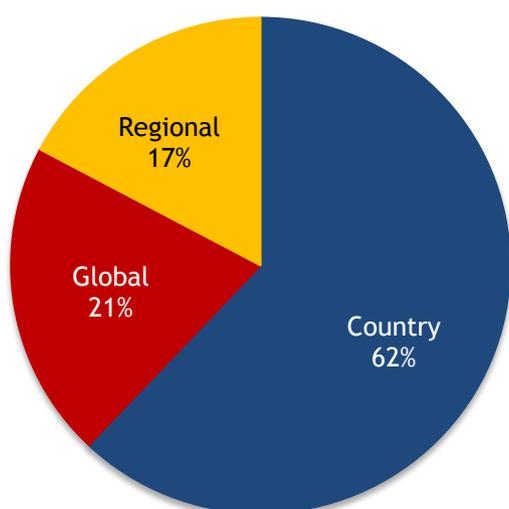
**Lessons learned:**

1. Improve flow of information: It is clear that there is continued uncertainty for staff at HQ and field level on the objectives of the RAN and how they can engage with it. The RAN will work to improve communication flows at each level and endeavor to ensure that documents are cascaded to relevant staff to increase transparency.
2. Provide more guidance to operational team: To increase the uptake and use of analytical products the RAN will work to support teams to identify the topic of analysis that will have the most added value for their work through regular interactions at field and HQ level with those requesting support; in part this will take the form of more consultation and validation of scopes of work.
3. Increase utility: The RAN will develop regular and informal discussion with operations team to share about a topic, beyond the analytical report (share of information, discussion of issues in a specific context, provide briefing for their staff) to improve access to RAN products.

*Inundated with requests: delivering analysis in the first phase*

Examining how the RAN has been used during the few months of operation allows us to see what the team has been working on and where there are gaps in our support. Analyzing request data compiled from the four regional analysts and chief analyst, we have examined the provenance and type of requests received in addition to their geographic focus to get a better sense of what ACF needs are<sup>2</sup>, and how we can improve our analytical support within different parts of the organization.

Level of Geographic Scope

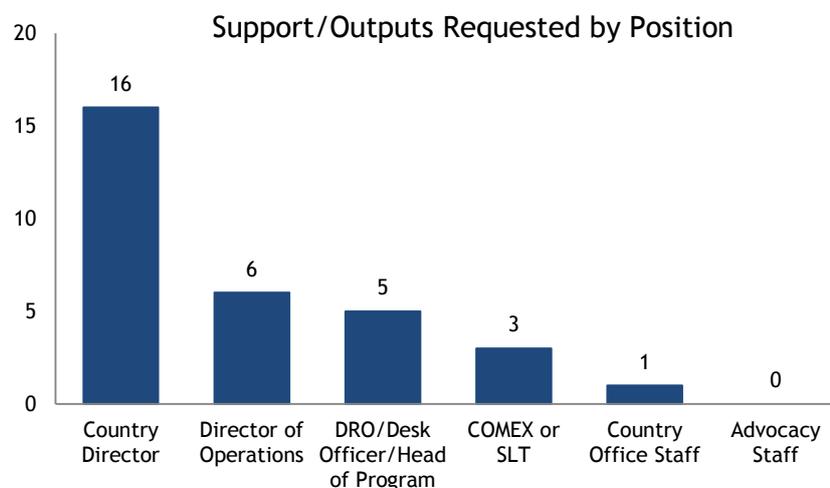


The RAN was fully deployed by September 2015, with analysts based in their regions of expertise to assist at the Country Office and regional level and build their networks. The first priority of the analysts was to introduce the concept of the RAN to the Country Offices in their region and begin assessing how best they could offer support. As a result, the majority of the work undertaken by the analysts in 2015 has been requested by Country Directors and focused on country specific dynamics. At this level the RAN has responded to requests from each branch of ACFIN. Directors of Operations and regional staff (at HQ and regional level) each accounted for approximately one-fifth of all requests. However, all but one of the global requests have been made from ACF France HQ in Paris. This is not surprising as in its original conception the RAN was focused on service provision to ACF France teams, and opens a wider scope of potential

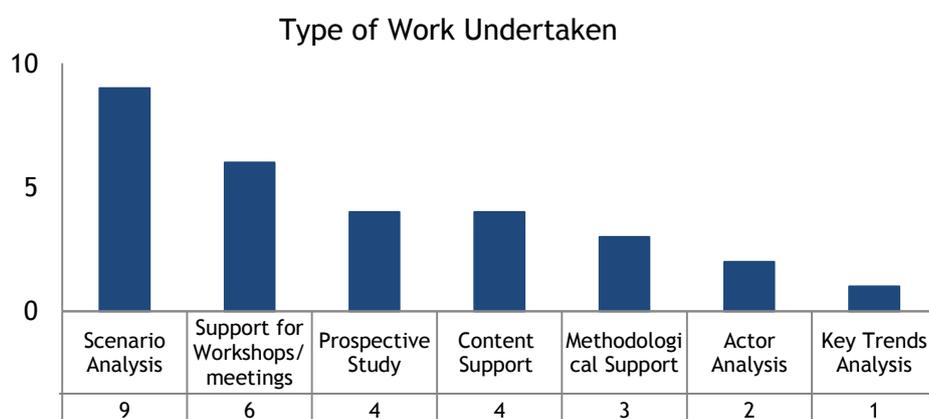
<sup>2</sup> As expressed through the requests made to the RAN in its first months of activity.

future requests coming from other HQs in 2016.

Given that installing analysts at regional level and introducing the RAN concept to ACFIN Country Offices was the priority in the last quarter of 2015, the concentration of requests from Country Directors and the focus of these products was expected. The largest proportion of the type of work undertaken was scenario analyses, making up one-third of commissioned



analytical products. Most of these analyses were used to inform the process of annual ACF country strategizing, including Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, Yemen, Somalia and Jordan. Following behind was support for workshops and meetings, in the majority of cases a natural byproduct of the scenario and scenario analyses themselves and their use for country strategizing. Nearly all workshop support was requested by Country Directors. Prospective study<sup>3</sup> and content support came in third place. All prospective studies were commissioned by directors of operations and concerned regional or global-level issues like El Niño, Regionalization and Future SAM Caseload studies. Most content support concerned elements of scenario analysis or country strategies, providing insight for supplemental reports or briefing notes.



The type of work prioritized differed in each region, which reflects the relevance of RAN's regionalised deployment. In West and Central Africa, in addition to scenario analysis, teams were interested in organizing briefings or discussions on specific context issues and also in receiving methodological

support to better utilize RAN tools and approaches within their own strategic operational work. Several requests in the Asia and East Africa regions revolved around the specific issue of the 2015/16 El Niño – as these regions were most affected by the weather phenomenon and consequently have been more regional in focus. The time frame for strategic foresight for West

<sup>3</sup> Prospective study is defined as futures-based analysis often employing more than one method of structural analysis. Analysis for ACF regionalisation, the treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and the effects of El Niño on key regions have been included under this heading.

and Central Africa, Asia and East Africa was also longer in outlook, usually spanning two to five-years. Conversely, projects undertaken in the Middle East region were typically shorter, of one and two-year time periods. This can be explained, in part, by the higher level of volatility in the countries of study in the Middle East.

In the short period of time since RAN's deployment, the team has managed to work on an exciting and wide scope of projects, varying in topic, scope, timeframe and structure. Regarding requests more generally<sup>4</sup>, the RAN has documented requests coming from a remarkable 20 Country Offices, reflecting that from its first deployment, the unit was recognized as a valuable resource to exploit within ACF. Similarly, RAN demonstrated its utility through the number of requests of support separate and apart from prioritized projects. Analysts provided additional support for nine prioritized projects, including briefs, workshops and contributions to follow-up reports. Furthermore, as the RAN works transversally across the ACFIN network, analysts worked on a variety of topics to assist multiple branches of the organization, including on security, DRR, funding and positioning.

### *How can futures analysis be used?*

In addition to tracking the activities of the RAN we have also been learning from the way in which the analysis has been used by the teams requesting support. Every project completed by the RAN provides an opportunity for feedback to help us improve our products. Some cases studies are elaborated here:

At the brink of what experts agreed would be a major El Niño worldwide, the Indonesia Country Office requested an actor analysis. The analysis examined how key actors in the region positioned themselves against a series of specific objectives framing a potential response to the phenomenon's impact in ACFIN countries of operation by mid-2016. Additional focus was given to food security and local resilience in a national breakdown. The report, including six Country Office contributions and the outcomes of external stakeholder consultation, was shared widely in the region with partners and donors, such as ECHO, DFAT (Australia), the UN Agencies, and other INGOs, to improve their understanding of the situation as seen by ACF.

Matthew Parnaby, Indonesia Country Director

Action Against Hunger UK is creating a high level coalition to accelerate the scale up SAM treatment in the next five years; it currently includes ACF, CIFF, UNICEF and ECHO. We have an ambitious plan to ensure that we double the number of SAM cases treated every year by 2020 (from 3.2 million per year in 2014, to over 6 million per year by 2020). In order to establish the contribution of the coalition, and the wider impact of this increase on child health and other indicators, the coalition requires an analysis of current trends and projections on anticipated trends to 2030 to serve as both as a baseline and contribute to developing an effective roadmap for achieving these goals. We requested the RAN and their partners at the Pardee Centre for International Futures to work with us to create model to inform these projections. The initial insights are already being used as the basis to plan an interagency workshop to refine and validate the findings with expert opinion and inform sector-wide discussions on SAM coverage.

Saul Guerrero, Director of Nutrition UK

<sup>4</sup> Requests include those that were not prioritized.

Our experience with the RAN has been positive, we understand that the RAN unit is working progress, and the support will improve as soon as the tools are further tested and modified according to findings and feedback. We found the process and the support provided very smooth and we believe that the RAN unit could have an important value to help systematize information and also provide a fresh external view on topics of interest for the Country Programs. I think for a context as Palestine where a lot of documents are already out there, we need to select very carefully what we really need.

Gonzalo Codina, occupied Palestinian territory  
Country Director

The office in Côte d'Ivoire requested a five-year scenario analysis in an exploratory approach. In light of recent evolutions, the Country Office wanted to challenge its vision of the context and be supported to think out of the box after years of major interventions in the country. The participatory approach used by the analyst was an opportunity for the team in country to take a step back and challenge their own visions. The report analysis delivered is good quality and has been used as context analysis in the first step in the strategic process. The report and the approach used by the analyst will also serve to the elaboration and the test of the mission strategic options in relation to each scenario.

Andrea Dominici, Côte d'Ivoire Country  
Director

The RAN is a new project in ACFIN and within three months of being staffed the team received over 50 requests for support. At the current rate of output the RAN is able to meet only a third of the demand however, as the team becomes more established and we continue to refine the analytical tools and methods that we are using we will endeavor to increase our response rate while maintaining a high level of satisfaction<sup>5</sup>.

#### Lessons learned:

1. Attract requests from advocacy: As there were no requests made from advocacy staff in 2015, the RAN will gather specific feedback from advocacy teams on existing reports to discover how products can be made more useful to them and how we can improve our engagement to ensure that ACFIN is getting the most utility from its investment.
2. Meet the demand: Increase the level of production of briefs/shorter reports/verbal briefings in an effort to meet more of the requests that come to the RAN but are not prioritized<sup>7</sup>.
3. Using data: Though the RAN includes a quantitative element this has not been exploited to the extent that was originally envisioned in the first months of operation. The analysts will receive additional training in 2016 to enable them to better hybrid quantitative and qualitative tools<sup>6</sup> in delivering support.

<sup>5</sup> Of the projects that have conducted a quick review upon conclusion (only 4 of 17 projects completed) the satisfaction rate has been 4.25/5 (5 = excellent)

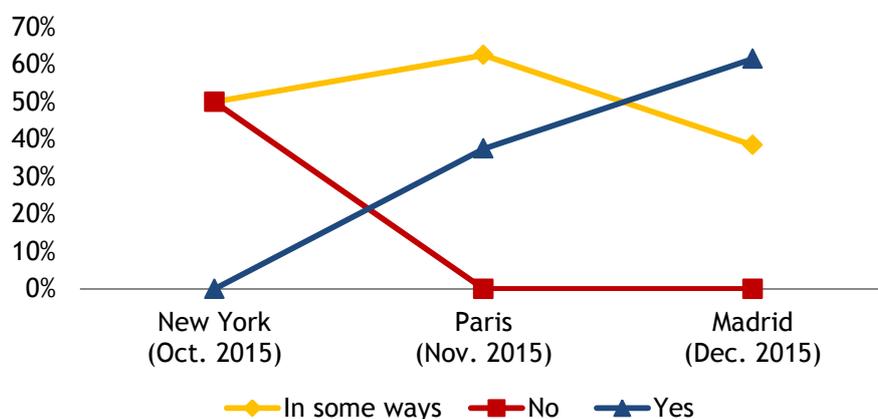
<sup>6</sup> Access to robust, continuous data – particularly at sub-national level continues to be a significant challenge to using quantitative data in forecasts. However, the RAN will endeavor to improve our use of available datasets particularly for regional and global projects.

<sup>7</sup> The process of prioritization will continue to be based on the RAN collating all requests for support and the regional leadership (Director of Regional Operations/Heads of Program/Desk Officers) assessing the overall utility and relative urgency of each submission. The criteria will be determined by the Operations teams making the decision and as a result varies across the portfolio.

## Enhancing existing skills: strategic foresight training

In 2015 the RAN, together with its partner Futuribles, created a training on Strategic Foresight for ACF Staff. This was run in New York (Oct. 2015), Paris (Nov. 2015) and Madrid (Dec. 2015) and included participants from HQ (including operations, advocacy and Senior Leadership Teams) and Regional/Country Office staff. The objectives of the trainings were for participants to understand how information gathering and organization works for analysis, be introduced to several tools (MICMAC, MACTOR, Framing tool, Actor Analyses, Robustness etc.) and look at how to use analysis in strategy. Building on the RAN’s commitment to continuous learning, the team conducted a feedback survey at the end of each training session and worked to integrate the feedback to improve the next iteration<sup>8</sup>.

### Did the training meet the objectives?



There was increased satisfaction demonstrated over the course of the year as we improved the training at each stage (for the first training 50% of the respondents felt that the objectives were not met, for the last training the majority felt that the training met the stated objectives). Though most participants felt that they would still require support in using many of the tools

demonstrated, the vast majority of respondents felt that they could see the value of the tools explored for their work and felt that the training increased their understanding of what the RAN does. The feedback gathered and lessons learned will be used to create an updated training curriculum for 2016.

#### Lessons learned:

1. Gather homogenous groups: We will endeavor to disaggregate participants based on their job profile as we will be better able support operations staff, advocacy staff, and Senior Leadership Teams if we can create a dedicated training for each group.
2. Facilitate the trainings: Trainings should be led by RAN staff directly so as to make the exercises and examples more relevant for the participants and to focus on how new tools fit in with the organization’s existing analytical capacity and approaches.
3. Use a humanitarian hypothetical: We will redesign the overall format to take participants through how to use multiple tools to have a comprehensive look at a single pertinent issue for the group (e.g. a Country Office’s strategic process).

<sup>8</sup> Rate of responses varied between 44-48% of all participants for all three sessions.

## *Essential partnerships: a working model*

The RAN is as an experience that is focused on learning, innovation and collaboration. This experience has been underpinned by IRIS from its inception and initial incarnation at Save the Children (2013). The continuity provided by IRIS as an incubator for testable ideas, a repository for project learning, and a pool of expertise continues to support the project at ACF.

In 2015 the RAN focused on creating partnerships with futures oriented organisations that could support us in developing the methods, tools and approaches used by the analysts in creating analytical products for ACF. The RAN has cultivated very rewarding relationships with Futuribles (a French think-tank dedicated to interdisciplinary, future-oriented studies) and the Fredrick S. Pardee Centre for International Futures at the Joseph Korb School of International Studies, University of Denver, the creators of International Futures (IFs) tool, a large-scale, open source global modelling system. Their contribution to our work is essential as it provides a foundational approach and base tools that we are working together to adapt and refine to better respond to the humanitarian context while keeping the integrity and rigor required for quality.

These partnerships have not only directly supported the RAN in the training of the analysts but they have opened new avenues for us to explore in delivering on operational requests, such as the SAM Future Caseload study. Though there are clear advantages to ACF in nurturing these relationships, the benefits extend to our partners as well.

*“Futuribles is glad to engage a partnership with ACF/humanitarian sector to adapt its foresight tools to emergency cases, thus to build faster and simplified processes /tools allowing risk anticipation and possible strategic answers within a 2-3 month timeframe, these tools also allow people to work together at distance.”* Véronique Lamblin, Foresight and Strategy Studies Director Futuribles

In 2016 the RAN will focus on coordination and building partnerships with other operational agencies investing in their analytical capacities to ensure that the learning gathered as part of the RAN pilot is contributing to the wider sector development towards enhancing NGOs analytical capacity.

## *A way forward: RAN ambition for 2016*

In 2016 the RAN will focus on consolidating its learning from the first months of operation, further embedding itself into the existing systems at ACFIN and increasing our rate of delivery. The RAN currently meets 29% of requests made for support, indicating that there is a very high level of demand from within the organization which we must adapt to meet.

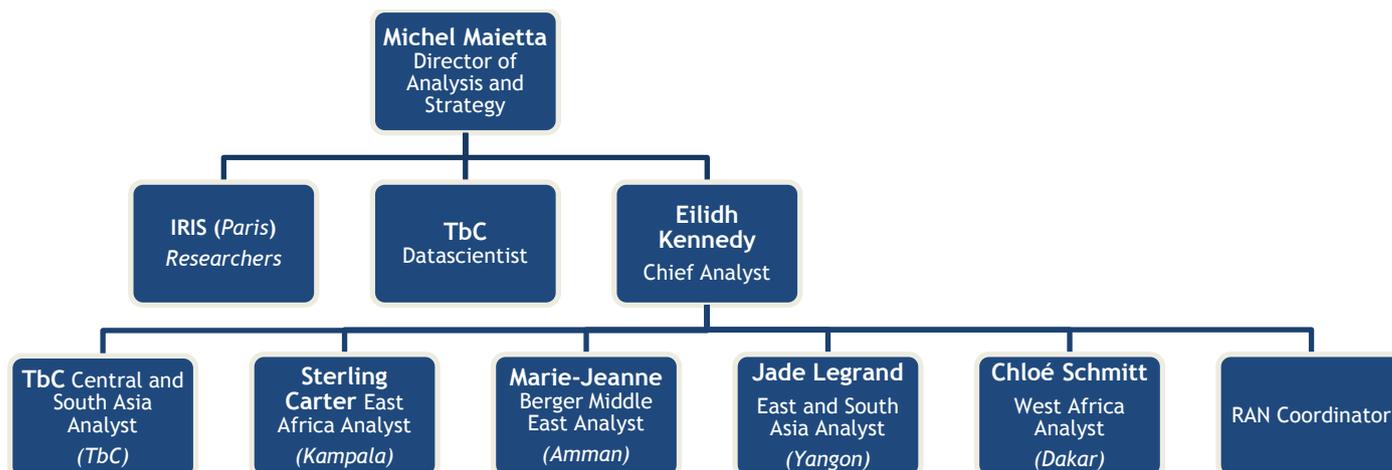
Training decision makers in ACFIN will continue to be central to the work of the RAN and a renewed curriculum will be developed, tailored to the needs of different sections of the organization.

Our goals for 2016 are:

- Strengthening the RAN in continuing to develop the concept of an inter-agency network
- Adapting strategic foresight methodologies and tools to the humanitarian sector
- Finalizing the RAN deployment phase by introducing a quantitative component

- Increasingly integrate the RAN into each ACFIN structure to better serve needs across the network
- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation strategy that measures RAN progress against its objectives and gathers more qualitative data on the use of RAN products
- Continuing to build up relationships with academic and think tank partners

## 2016 ACFIN Regional Analysts Network Staffing plan



## Full list of completed reports in 2015:

- Regionalisation: A geopolitical and geo-economic outlook
- Europe's Migrant Crisis: A Scenario Analysis
- 2015/16 El Nino Event
- El Nino 2015: East Africa
- 2015/2016 El Niño in Asia- an Actor Analysis
- Boko Haram à l'Horizon 2020 : Analyse Prospective Régionale
- Analyse Prospective Côte D'Ivoire 2020 : Une Période Décisive
- Bangladesh Country Scenarios: A Five Year Outlook (2016-2020)
- Somalia Prospective Analysis: A Five Year Outlook
- Jordan Two Year Scenario Analysis: Deteriorating Resilience and Increasing Vulnerabilities
- 24-month Yemen Scenario Analysis: No Easy Solutions
- Uganda: An 18-month Outlook
- Djibouti: Briefing Note
- North-Eastern Kenya: A Prospective Analysis