

OPERATIONAL PEER REVIEW

GUIDANCE TERMS OF REFERENCE REPORT TEMPLATE

To be reviewed following Philippines and CAR operational peer review missions in early 2014. Revision date: March 2014.

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As part of the Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals introduced the concept of an **operational peer review** as one of the five elements of the revitalized humanitarian programme cycle. It is an **internal, inter-agency management tool** which identifies areas for immediate corrective action, early in a response. It is designed to be a light, brief process. The results are detailed in an internal document.

An operational peer review is forwarding looking, helping Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) determine whether they need to adjust or improve the collective humanitarian response in order to meet its objectives or reduce gaps. Generally, the review focuses on four areas:

1. leadership arrangements;
2. implementation of the other elements of the humanitarian programme cycle, namely coordinated assessments, strategic response planning, resource mobilization, implementation and monitoring;
3. coordination mechanisms;
4. mechanisms of accountability to affected people.

An operational peer review is not a real-time evaluation, and it is not meant to measure results or the impact of the response. It is meant to serve as a “course corrector” for the particular response being reviewed.

An operational peer review looks at the portion of the humanitarian response managed by the HC and HCT. While it does not review the responses of national and local authorities or organizations that are not part of the HCT, the operational peer review will consider the HCT’s response against the broader effort. An operational peer review will also consider the adequacy of headquarters or regional support as well as that of the Emergency Directors and Principals to the HC, HCT and clusters.

The operational peer review concept responds to the IASC Transformative Agenda by seeking **to achieve immediate and rapid corrective action** to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

This document provides general guidance for implementing this approach, which should be applied flexibly to the context being reviewed.

INITIATING AND PLANNING

Review trigger and management

An operational peer review is initiated by the HC/HCT, the Emergency Directors or IASC Principals and should be conducted early in the response. For L3 emergencies¹, it is mandatory and must be conducted within the first 90 days of the L3 declaration.

An operational peer review generally takes place over a five to ten day period, with about three to six weeks required for preparations. It is usually managed by the HC/RC with support from OCHA. In L3 emergencies or other crises as designated, it is managed by the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) with support from OCHA; the HC and HCT are involved in the planning of EDG-managed reviews and feed into the process to the extent possible. OCHA will provide support for assembling the team, finalizing the terms of reference (see Annex I), carrying out preparations and logistics, and assisting the review team with producing the final report.

Audience

An operational peer review is an internal management process; therefore, the audience is limited to those performing management functions. Its findings, and related action plan, are designed primarily to provide timely advice and to assist decision-making and action by the HC and HCT on any required adjustments to the response. Secondary users include members of the EDG and IASC Principals. The review will also engage other actors in the response, including affected people, national and local authorities, donors and sector/cluster partners; a summary of the findings and recommendations may be provided to these actors if deemed appropriate.

Size, composition and responsibilities of the review team

An operational peer review is undertaken by a small group of experienced, external 'peers' of the HC and HCT, usually consisting of senior operations managers from IASC organizations at headquarters or the regional level. L3 operational peer reviews are undertaken by a small group of Emergency Directors or senior operations managers delegated by EDG. The team will review the full response, and not only the priority sectors or activities of the organization which they represent.

It is recommended that no more than five people compose the review team, with at least one NGO representative participating and appropriate gender and geographical representation considerations taken. A government representative may be included as appropriate.

A team leader is nominated when planning begins and is responsible for guiding and leading the team in the operational peer review process, including finalizing the report and action plan by the deadline. Team members should know the Transformative Agenda and its protocols; be familiar with the context, response operations and the strategic response plan; and be ready to undertake the following activities:

- Act as the focal point for a specific focus area of the review, as appropriate;
- Facilitate group discussions, and summarize, analyze and present the findings of those discussions;
- Lead meetings, participate in field missions, and interview partners, including government counterparts and donor/bilateral partners in country;
- Work collaboratively with other team members to analyze findings, gather information, and reach consensus on recommendations included in the action plan;

¹ The IASC Principals have agreed that major sudden-onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization (referred to as Level 3/L3 emergencies) are to be subject to activation procedures to ensure a more effective response to the humanitarian needs of affected populations. L3 declaration activates mechanisms and tools to ensure that the system delivers effectively and can monitor its performance. It sets up adequate capacity and tools for enhanced leadership and coordination of the humanitarian system. It also engages IASC member organizations to ensure that they put in place the right systems and mobilize resources to contribute to the response as per their mandate areas. The activation period will vary but should not exceed 3 months initially. The priority will be to revert as soon as possible to the regular methods of work of the humanitarian system, under a strong national leadership. Ideally, during this period, the system would put in place the required capacities and response would get well underway, such that the activation should not have to be extended. The procedure mandates that an exit strategy be defined to that effect, and outlines steps for deactivation.

- Draft parts of the review report on the last day of the mission.

HC/HCT engagement and establishment of HCT focal points

As the results of the operational peer review are primarily intended for and delivered to the HC/HCT for action, the HC and HCT will be involved in the planning of the review from the outset and for the duration of the exercise. The HC and HCT assist in clarifying the areas of focus of the review and in ensuring an appropriate contextual approach. The success of the review and the relevance and ownership of the recommendations largely depends on the level of engagement and commitment of the HC and the HCT.

To ensure effective engagement with the review team, the HC will identify 2-3 focal points among HCT members with the knowledge, time and commitment to fully support the planning process and the review itself. The HCT focal point will work with the review team during the planning and implementation of the review, including participating in meetings and field visits, recommending partners for discussion, and explaining the modalities of the response. Focal points may also be paired with review team members to ensure greater collaboration. Having HCT focal points as part of the process ensures that the review team's identification of the current practices in country is correct and that the proposed actions are appropriate, relevant and realistic. In addition, this approach aims to create ownership of the review's findings among members of the HCT, which can be further enhanced by the use of the optional self-assessment tool (see below).

Timeline

[Note: When finalizing this draft, and based on the learning in Philippines, consider preparing L3 and non L3 review timelines]

About three to six weeks are required to adequately prepare the review mission and to allow the HC/HCT to fully participate and engage throughout the planning process. Mission dates should be set accordingly, and about 5-10 days are needed in country. Two weeks after the mission is completed, the final report and action plan are disseminated. This means that for a L3 operational peer review, six weeks are needed from planning (three weeks), to implementation of the review (5 days), to delivery of the final report (two weeks). Non L3 reviews can have a more flexible timeline.

In planning and executing the review, particularly in the weeks prior to the arrival of the review team in country, the following activities are recommended:

3-6 weeks before the mission: Team leader and other members are identified. OCHA assigns staff to support the exercise. OCHA facilitates a consultation between the team leader and the HC (by telephone or video-conference) to clarify expectations and discuss dates, methodology/approach, possible focus areas of the review, and the planning schedule. Time and logistics permitting, the entire review team and the HCT may be included in this consultation. The terms of reference are prepared and circulated for comment. The HC may nominate HCT members as focal points to work with the review team.

3 weeks before the mission: Depending on the context, the HCT begins the 'self-assessment' process with support from OCHA. This includes the completion of online questionnaire (ten days are allotted for participants to complete the survey) followed by a HCT retreat or meeting to jointly review the survey results; such a retreat or meeting is recommended even if a survey is not done in order identify good practice, challenges and required external support in advance of the review team's arrival.

2 weeks before the mission: Terms of reference, logistical arrangements, mission/field visit schedule, and focus areas of the review are finalized.

1 week before the mission: HCT retreat/meeting takes place.

Review undertaken (5-10 days, depending on context): For L3 emergencies, it is recommended to conduct a shorter review mission of no more than five day so as to limit disruption of response operations. Longer review missions (10 days) may be required for non-L3 crises. The review mission should include a debriefing session with the HC and HCT to validate the finding and the recommendations in the action plan. The review team should debrief in-country donors and government counterparts separately.

2 weeks after departure of the team: The final report and action plan are submitted to HC and HCT (EDG and IASC Principals as appropriate).

DETERMINING THE SCOPE AND APPROACH

Areas of focus

The objective of the operational peer review is to assess and recommend any necessary corrective actions in the four key areas of (i) leadership arrangements; (ii) application of the humanitarian programme cycle; (iii) use of appropriate coordination mechanisms; and (iv) suitable accountability to affected population mechanisms. The review team, IASC Principals, EDG, HC and/or HCT may wish to include other areas of focus which they deem important to a given context, while keeping the focused nature of this exercise in mind. These additional areas may be mainstreamed into the four key areas noted above or addressed separately as a stand-alone topic of the review. Some sample questions are included below for reference to assist with structuring the review:

Key questions for consideration

(to be adapted based on context and feedback from the HC, HCT, EDG and Principals on specific issues to be reviewed)

Leadership arrangements:

- Do the HC/HCT members have the necessary authorities, management tools and resources at their disposal, and support from the EDG and the cluster lead agencies to effectively lead the humanitarian response?
- Does the HCT function in a way that provides timely strategic guidance to the clusters and agencies delivering the response?

Humanitarian programme cycle:

- Are the main components of the humanitarian programme cycle being implemented in a timely way to facilitate an effective, quality response against assessed need?
- Is there an overview of prioritized needs which is regularly updated?
- Is there a strategic response plan which steers the collective response?
- Have collective resource requirements been clearly presented, and funds allocated according to priority needs?
- Is monitoring information being regularly reviewed by the HCT to track results and adjust the response at the sector/cluster levels?

Coordination mechanisms:

- Are coordination structures appropriate to the country context and operational situation?
- Do the existing coordination arrangements clarify the division of labour between organizations and clearly define roles and responsibilities within different sectors?
- Are coordination structures effectively managed and inclusive of relevant operational actors?
- Do the sector/cluster groups effectively contribute to the components of the humanitarian programme cycle to enable the delivery of results?

Accountability to affected populations:

- Have sectors/clusters identified practical entry points for improving accountability to affected populations?
- Are sectors/clusters systematically communicating with affected populations using relevant feedback and communications mechanisms?

Methodology

An operational peer review is a light, rapid exercise, which includes the following components as appropriate to the context:

- **HCT self-assessment:** Prior to the review, the HCT may choose to undertake a 'self-assessment' with support from the OCHA country office. This may be in the form of an online questionnaire and a group discussion on the results, or a retreat/meeting to jointly review response operations in advance of the review team's arrival. Information on the self-assessment should be provided to the review team in advance of their arrival. More detailed information is provided in the box below.
- **Secondary information:** Relevant secondary data, including monitoring data, will be assembled by the OCHA country office, and made available to the team leader prior to the arrival of the mission.
- **Key informant meetings:** The review team will meet with the HCT upon arrival and during the mission, to review key issues and possible corrective action. The team will also meet with cluster/sector coordinators, key government officials, donors, as well as representatives of main beneficiary populations.
- **Field visits:** The team may undertake field visits, as appropriate, to areas where the response is the most intense or problematic, or reflects best practice.

Background information: HCT self-assessment

Time permitting, the HCT may wish to use an online 'self-assessment' questionnaire¹ to collect individual qualitative feedback and perceptions at the national and subnational levels, a few weeks prior to the arrival of the review team. This would allow the HCT to assess their humanitarian response against the benchmarks of the Transformative Agenda; to identify good practice; and to identify specific areas for further development with the goal of delivering humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner.

The ultimate aim of the survey is to prompt the HCT to have a structured discussion and to reflect on the collective humanitarian operation (possibly with external facilitation). The survey results are aggregated and discussed in an extended meeting or retreat of the HCT in order to identify key operational challenges, development priorities, and questions/issues for the operational peer review team to consider. The HCT may decide to review all focus areas together or ask break-out groups to examine selected areas, which would be presented in plenary. The HC/HCT needs to agree whether an area is already in line with the Transformative Agenda; requires further development; or is not applicable in a given context. In the areas that require further development, the HC/HCT should prioritise jointly both the areas and the support requirements. The results of the online survey and the HCT's meeting/retreat will be provided to the review team and will form part of the data collected.

Even if the online survey is not undertaken, at a minimum, the HCT should meet prior to the review team's arrival to discuss key challenges and the management of operations. Such a meeting/retreat can provide the basis for more in-depth discussions during the review team's mission and for the development of the action plan jointly agreed between the HC/HCT and the review team at the end of the review.

IMPLEMENTING THE REVIEW

Sample mission plan

Although each mission plan should be adjusted to the context and length of time in country, the table below provides a suggested schedule for consideration:

Time	Event	Objective	
Day of arrival	Evening	Informal get-together between HC, OCHA head of office and review team (if possible joined by HCT focal points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review the mission schedule and logistics - Clarify expectations
1st day	Morning	Meeting between the review team and the full HCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outline the objectives and approach - HCT to present results of the self-assessment and the HCT retreat/meeting (as applicable)
	Afternoon (min 4h)	Meetings per focus area composed of review team, HCT focal points, and key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-depth discussion of the focus areas - Identification of potential steps for improvement
2nd -4th day	All Day	Review team splits in groups and departs for field visits, joined by the HCT focal points (as appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion with partners about focus areas - Review team to identify current practices in country and potential for improvement vis-à-vis the Transformative Agenda protocols
5th day	Morning (min 4h)	Meeting between review team and HCT focal points in focus groups <i>(could also be done in the afternoon of the day before)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Validation of field mission findings and discussion of recommendations
	Afternoon	Meeting of review team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop action plan and prepare for the HCT retreat/meeting on the next day
6th day	Morning (min 4h)	HCT retreat/extended meeting <i>(could also be done in the afternoon of the day before)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint validation of current practices and proposed actions - Prioritise actions for further development by the HC/HCT
	Afternoon	Debrief with the HC and OCHA head of office and other partners if requested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss outcome of the review and agree on follow-up action and next steps
7th day	Morning	Review report drafted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team members draft report in country prior to departure, as feasible.
	Afternoon	Departure of mission team	

Debriefing the HCT

Based on the HCT discussions, stakeholder interviews, and field visits, the review team will draft an action plan for discussion during a HCT retreat/extended meeting on the last day of the mission (see table in Annex II). The matrix lists the key issues per focus area; identifies the current practice in country; and proposes actions for how the country team – potentially with external support – can move closer to achieving these.

For retreat facilitation, it is recommended that either an external, independent facilitator be engaged or that a member of the review team act as facilitator, on the condition that s/he is not an active participant in the discussions. The objective of this retreat/meeting is to jointly discuss, validate and agree the findings/current practices and validate the recommendations/proposed actions. Once all the actions and recommendations are

agreed, the HCT will then prioritize them. The outcome of the meeting is a set of final, prioritized recommendations as well as target dates and responsible entities for taking forward the agreed action. Areas needing external support are identified as required.

Results

The review team will document the results of the operational peer review in an internal narrative report and accompanying action plan, which will be discussed with the HC and HCT (see Annex II). If feasible, review team members may wish to draft individual parts of the narrative report prior to leaving the country. A first draft can then be shared for comment with the HC/HCT two days after the mission; this quick turn-around is essential to keep the momentum of the discussions. The final report will be shared no later than two weeks after the end of the review mission. It will be shared with the HC/HCT, partners consulted during the mission, the EDG, IASC Principals, and IASC regional and headquarters fora as appropriate.

Next Steps

The EDG or Principals will request a status report against the action plan 30 days following its submission to the HC/HCT. The HC/HCT will need to complete the last column of the action plan (see table in Annex II). Systematic follow-up will ensure the effectiveness of the operational peer review.

ANNEX 1:

TERMS OF REFERENCE TEMPLATE

Terms of Reference for an Operational Peer Review of [country]

(To be adapted based on the nature and complexity of the crisis)

Date: dd month yyyy

Time period of the review: dd month – dd month yyyy

Background

In line with the Transformative Agenda protocols, an operational peer review is an internal, inter-agency management tool which identifies areas for immediate corrective action, early in a response. It is designed to be a light, brief process. The results are detailed in an internal document. An operational peer review is forwarding looking, assisting the Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) with determining whether they need to adjust or improve the collective humanitarian response in order to meet its objectives or reduce gaps.

An operational peer review is not a real-time evaluation, and it is not meant to measure results or the impact of the response. It is meant to serve as a “course corrector” for the particular response being reviewed.

An operational peer review looks at the portion of the humanitarian response managed by the HC and HCT. While it does not review the responses of national and local authorities or organizations that are not part of the HCT, the operational peer review will consider the HCT’s response against the broader effort. An operational peer review will also consider the adequacy of headquarters or regional support as well as that of the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) and IASC Principals to the HC, HCT and clusters.

Context

(Add 1 paragraph describing the crisis and the response)

Initiating and supporting a peer review

An operational peer review is initiated by the HC/HCT, the Emergency Directors or IASC Principals and should be conducted early in the response. For L3 emergencies, it is mandatory and must be conducted within the first 90 days of the L3 declaration. It is usually managed by the HC/RC with support from OCHA. In L3 emergencies or other crises as designated, it is managed by the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) with support from OCHA. OCHA will provide support for assembling the team, finalizing the terms of reference, carrying out preparations and logistics, and assisting the review team with producing the final report.

Scope of the review

The operational peer review will examine the collective response being managed by the HC and HCT. While the review will not consider the response of national and local authorities or organizations that are not part of the HCT, it will consider the HCT’s response against the broader national effort in terms of aligning objectives and filling gaps. The review will also consider whether the HC and HCT are receiving the necessary enabling support from their respective headquarters, the EDG and the IASC Principals.

Objectives

The objective of the operational peer review is to assess and recommend any necessary corrective actions in four key areas: (i) leadership arrangements; (ii) application of the humanitarian programme cycle; (iii) use of appropriate coordination mechanisms; and (iv) suitable accountability to affected people mechanisms. It is remedial and aimed

at immediate and rapid corrective action early in the response. *(To be adapted based on feedback from the HCT/EDG/Principals on specific issues to be reviewed.)*

Key issues to be addressed

[To be completed based on context. At a minimum, this section should include the questions referenced on page 4 of the guidance. The questions may be refined in consultation with the HCT, EDG, Principals and/or review team as appropriate.]

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the review is to identify areas for immediate corrective action, early in a response. It is designed to assist HCs and HCTS to determine whether they need to adjust or improve the collective humanitarian response in order to meet its objectives or reduce gaps. It will involve senior representatives of the IASC working closely with the HC, HCT and other partners in-country to support them in assessing their own progress in achieving the Transformative Agenda protocols. The team will also assist the HC/HCT to identify training, technical support and/or additional resources required to achieve these.

[The terms of reference should detail the specific methodology being followed for the review. It may include the following components: a HCT self-assessment; collection of secondary information; key informant meetings; and field visits. In advance of the mission, through a series of preparatory tele- or video-conferences between the review team and the HC/HCT, participants will collectively agree on the areas of focus and contextual approach of the review, and the need for HCT focal points to work closely with the review team. This information should be included in the final terms of reference.]

Review team and support

The mission will be composed of [number] representatives of IASC organizations, consisting of 'peers' of the HC and HCT. *[include names/titles/organizations of members and team leader]*

The team will review the full response, and not only the priority sectors or activities of the organization which they represent. The team leader and members should know the Transformative Agenda and its protocols; be familiar with the context, response operations and the strategic response plan; and be ready to undertake the following activities:

- Act as the focal point for a specific focus area of the review, as appropriate;
- Facilitate group discussions, and summarize, analyze and present the findings of those discussions;
- Lead meetings, participate in field missions, and interview partners, including government counterparts and donor/bilateral partners in country;
- Work collaboratively with other team members to analyze findings, gather information, and reach consensus on recommendations included in the action plan;
- Draft parts of the review report on the last day of the mission.

[if applicable: While in-country, the review team will be joined by the pre-identified HCT-level focal points, forming small groups around identified thematic areas to work together for the duration of the mission.]

Stakeholder involvement

As the results of the operational peer review are primarily intended for and delivered to the HC/HCT for action, the HCT will be involved in the planning of the review from the outset and for the duration of the exercise. Secondary users are the members of the EDG and the IASC Principals. The review team will also aim to engage other actors with a stake in the response, including local, government and cluster partners, donors and beneficiaries.

Review dates and tentative mission schedule

The review team will be in [country] for a total of [number] days, with a provisional mission schedule as follows:

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Results

The review team will document the results of the operational peer review in an internal narrative report and accompanying action plan. The report will include a summary overview of the key findings of the review, identified good practices which could be replicated elsewhere, and recommendations for next steps at both country and global levels. The action plan will be discussed with the HC and HCT on the last day of the mission. The plan lists the key issues per focus area; identifies the current practice in country; and proposes actions for how the country team – potentially with external support – can move closer to achieving these. The objective of this meeting is to jointly discuss, validate and agree the findings/current practices and validate the recommendations/proposed actions. Once all the actions and recommendations are agreed, the HCT will then prioritize them. The outcome of the meeting is a set of final, prioritized recommendations as well as target dates and responsible entities for taking forward the agreed action. Areas needing external support are identified as required. The final report will be shared no later than two weeks after the end of the review mission. It will be shared with the HC/HCT, partners consulted during the mission, the EDG, IASC Principals, and IASC regional and headquarters fora as appropriate. The review team will de-brief in-country partners as well as regional or global fora as required.

Next Steps

The EDG or Principals will request a status report against the action plan 30 days following its submission to the HC/HCT. The HC/HCT will need to complete the last column of the action plan. Systematic follow-up will ensure the effectiveness of the operational peer review.

ANNEX 2: OPERATIONAL PEER REVIEW REPORT AND ACTION PLAN TEMPLATES

OPERATIONAL PEER REVIEW

Country name

Month year



Prepared by [insert participating organizations]

- Summary
- Background.....
 - Rationale.....
 - Composition of Team.....
 - Mission Schedule.....
- Methodology
- Context
- Mission Findings and Overview of Recommendations.....
 - Focus Area 1
 - Focus Area 2
 - Focus Area 3
 - Focus Area 4
 - Focus Area 5
- Next Steps
- Annex I. People and Organizations Consulted
- Annex II. Action Plan

Summary

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BACKGROUND

Rationale

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Composition of Team

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Mission Schedule

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METHODOLOGY

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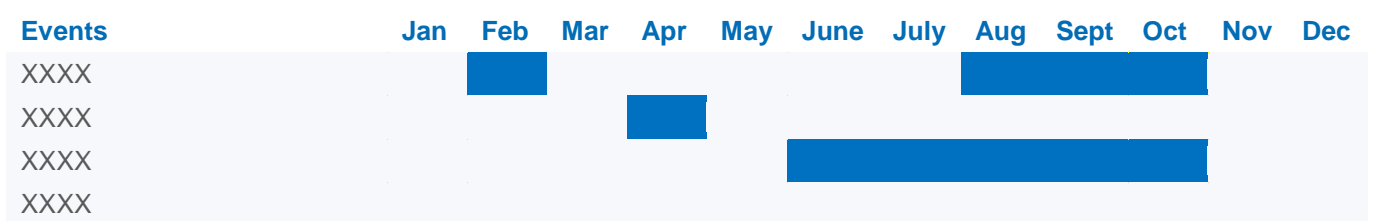
CONTEXT

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Figure 1: Timeline of response



Source: XXXX

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ANNEX I. PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

Location	Name	Title	Organization
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OPERATIONAL PEER REVIEW: ACTION PLAN

Country:

Date:

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#	Focus Area	Current Practice	Recommended Action	Responsible Entity	Target Date	Status Update [as of mm/yyyy]
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