Data Quality Assessment (DQA) Implementation Guide

AM/PM/Development Objective (DO) Team M&E Person or DQA Assessor Responsibilities

1. Identify indicators that need DQA in coordination with OPM.
2. Gather key documents of the projects: PMP of the Development Objective team, Project Monitoring & Evaluation Plan, Portfolio Reviews, Activity M&E Plan, monthly, quarterly and annual reports from the IP (especially those covering the period starting from the last date of the DQA) and Mission spreadsheets or tools that contain reported activity data against the indicators.
3. Complete relevant sections of DQA checklist before IP visit.
4. Read and note relevant questions on indicators for discussion with IPs and develop a short interview guide
5. Visit the IP's main office where M&E staff are located, reports are prepared, data are stored, etc.
6. Meet with the IP (Project Managers and M&E staff of the IP) and review data collection, entry, cleaning, analysis, reporting and storage procedures for reported data.
7. Complete the DQA Checklist and provide a quick debriefing of the DQA findings with the IP management team.
8. Draft the Summary DQA report (template is available).
9. Share the draft report with the DO team, COR/AOR/AM, OPM and with the IP for comments and formal acknowledgement of the report's findings.
10. Make changes to report based on feedback, including IP acceptance of findings and agreed upon action items and finalize.
11. Develop a tracking system in coordination with OPM for monitoring implementation of DQA recommendations
12. File the DQA report in the official award files and send to the Mission's M&E Specialist for OPM files

Recommendations for Conducting Data Quality Assessment

Prior to visiting the IP

1. Individual (s) conducting the DQA should decide in detail the methodology that will be used to conduct the DQA. This is required for each indicator. This information should be discussed with other team members as necessary.
2. DQ assessor should have a copy of the PIRS for each indicator in hand before assessing the indicator. This information should be in the USAID PMP file for each indicator at the Mission

level and in AMEPs for Activities/Projects. *If the AMEP does not include PIRS for the targeted indicators, the DQ Assessor should ask the partner to complete one for the indicators to be assessed before visiting the IP offices.*

3. DQ assessor should make sure that they understand the precise definition of the indicator as intended in the Mission PMP and/or F-indicator PIRS. The assessor should also take time and review relevant activity reporting and Mission planning documents to assess completeness and utility of reported data and the indicator itself. If required or desired the DQ assessor should discuss the indicator and potential issues with their colleagues and OPM before conducting the assessment.

4. The DQ assessor should notify the partner several weeks in advance of the DQA site visit indicating which indicators will be assessed, the staff that need to be interviewed and the details of required documents and data files that will be reviewed and that should be ready at the time of the DQA. This communication should encourage the partner to think about potential weaknesses in their data management systems in preparation for the meeting. The communication should share the Mission PIRS for the relevant indicators, the most recent data that USAID has reported or received for that indicator for the specific IP and a copy of the data quality checklist.

5. DQ assessor should carry multiple copies of the DQA checklist with them to IP visits.

At the IP offices

The DQA assessor should be able to review the implementing partner files/records against the methodology for data collection laid out in the AMEP. All data quality concerns should be documented.

1. The Data Quality Checklist is not written as a detailed interview guide. The assessor should read the items below in advance to understand how to ask the various questions required to complete the checklist.

2. Assessor should record the names and titles of all individuals involved in the assessment.

3. Assess IP data collection system and processes:
   - Compare Activity PIRS to Mission PIRS and note any differences in definitions and/or data collection and analysis methodologies.
   - Conduct interviews with IP senior management to assess utility of indicators and data, knowledge of data quality issues and data management and reporting processes.
   - Start with general questions about how the project uses M&E data in reporting and performance management then move to specific questions related to the DQA checklist.
   - Assure all IP staff that the purpose of the DQA process is not to find fault but rather to improve understanding of reported data and identify potential areas of improvement where required.
   - Conduct interviews with IP M&E staff to fully understand all aspects of data collection procedures and tools/forms, data entry, cleaning, analysis, storage, verification, quality checks and reporting for relevant indicators.
   - Start with general questions about the project's M&E systems and related protocols then move to more specific questions corresponding to the detailed items in the DQA checklist.
   - Ask for and review relevant written M&E procedures, guidelines and tools.

- Based on interviews and review of documents, assess for differences between written PIRS and M&E SoPs and actual practice, including differences between individual staff members of the IP.
- Using data reported to USAID for the relevant indicators, work backwards from the final figures to the origins of the data to assess each step of the process for potential differences from written guidance and potential threats to data quality.
- ***If field office site visits are conducted***, interview staff and review data management systems to compare with descriptions and SoPs from main office.
- Compare a randomly selected sample of the data provided by the IP's Headquarter Office with the data found in the field office.

4. Assess the data storage systems:
    - Review electronic files and see if controls exist for access to stored data.
    - Find out the number and the responsibilities of people authorized to access the data storage system.
    - Review the archived or stored files.
    - Assess the vulnerability of the electronic data storage system in place (risk of massive loss of data for example).

5. Complete the DQA Checklist for each indicator:
    - This can be done once the interview is complete or as the assessment is being done.
    - It may help with ensuring that no questions are missed to complete the checklist as answers are identified.

6. Prepare a short debriefing for IP staff:
    - Schedule a 30-minute discussion with key personnel of the organization.
    - Discuss orally key findings with the IP.
    - Review more data and/or make adjustments to findings based on IP feedback
    - Discuss options for capacity building or improving data quality.

Documenting DQA Findings

The DQA checklist includes a summary of all data quality issues found, the significance of these and recommendations for addressing the findings. The report can also include important areas of strength in IP data quality controls and M&E systems if so desired. A plan of action for addressing the weaknesses and/or explaining why the weaknesses cannot be addressed should be made by the IP and included as an annex to the report. The DQ Assessor and IP should agree on a follow-up date for reassessment.

1. **Draft the DQA Checklist and share it with the IP, DO Team and OPM:**
   - Outline the overall approach and methodology used in conducting the DQA;
   - Highlight key data quality issues that are important for senior management; and,
   - Summarize recommendations for improving performance management systems.
2. **IP Response to DQA and Implementing Recommendations**
   - The AOR/COR/AM/PM should ensure that the IP agrees with the final version of the report and has prepared action items for key data quality gaps before sharing it with OPM.
   - The IP should review the checklist and respond to each finding/recommendation with action items or explanations as to why the IP cannot implement recommendations (personnel and cost are most frequent responses).
   - USAID and the IP should continue to follow up on recommendations during future site visits and in periodic reporting.
3. **Share the Final Version of the completed Checklist including soft copies of all required documents with the Office of Program Management (OPM) for official filing**
   - The OPM will file DQAs conducted at the Mission. At any time, OPM should provide auditing teams with proof of Mission compliance with Agency data quality standards.
   - A summary report for indicators reported on by multiple Activities will be prepared by OPM based on individual DQAs
   - The official COR/AOR/AM/PM project files should also maintain DQA records.