Title of Project: Quality management strategy in FODEPAL project

Participating Organizations: FODEPAL is a Project executed by FAO and funded by the Agencia Internacional de Cooperación Española – AECI (Spanish Agency of International Cooperation), and relies on the academic support of Universidad Politécnica de Madrid – UPM (Polytechnic University of Madrid) together with other prestigious academic Institutions of Latin America. The headquarters of Project are located in FAO’s Regional Office for Latin America and The Caribbean, in Santiago, Chile.

I. About the project

The general purpose of the Project is to contribute in the sustainable development of Latin America by means of capacity building in the Region regarding the analysis, formulation and follow-up of policies, plans and coherent programs.

FODEPAL is aimed to technical personnel and government civil servants involved in the analysis and decision making at central, regional and local level; to managers of civil society (ONG’s, professional and producer organizations, labour unions, etc) and to the “opinion makers” pertaining to the mass media or Universities and other academic Centers.

FODEPAL’s Program is organized according to four thematic priority areas: Rural Development, Food Security, Integral Management of Natural Resources and Agrarian International Trade. The Project applies an educational methodology based on e-learning and on the intensive and collaborative interchange among participants, and their tutors. For this purpose, and with the experience acquired during these years and the contribution of international experts, FODEPAL has developed a proper and differentiated e-learning model, congruent with its purposes, and with the needs and the context of its objective population. This Model includes pedagogical, technological, administrative and operative aspects.

From the beginning, in the year 2001, FODEPAL has organized 84 e-learning Courses, with three to four months of duration each of them, in which 5,000 participants have been trained.

Additional information on the project’s websites: www.fodepal.org, www.rlc.fao.org/proyecto/fodepal

II. Strategy of quality management

FODEPAL educational model gives special attention in ensuring the quality of Courses given. This quality management system includes specific tool design and the implementation of specific actions and processes aiming not only to acquire credibility, but also achieve its goals in a better way.

This quality achievement has been reflected in the acceptance and good evaluation of Courses since 2001.

This quality has also been confirmed with the good results obtained in the “midterm” external evaluation undertaken in 2003 and, in a different context, with the international prize, for the second best e-learning experience in America Latina, received in the framework of the Seminar "International Online Educa" that took place in Madrid (Spain), May 2005.
The following pages will present the main components of quality management strategy of FODEPAL e-learning program. Quality management in e-learning is considered as the organizational strategy and management method aiming to encourage, dynamize and ensure, in a coherent, effective and efficient way, the objectives of the project or program and the educational process undertaken by FODEPAL.

The e-quality in FODEPAL is evaluated through five aspects:

- Educational process quality,
- Learning as a measurement of product quality,
- Satisfaction of participants with the service received,
- Training program effect
- Creation of a quality culture between persons who collaborate with the Project.

This strategic vision of quality has allowed improving FODEPAL Educational Model to the needs of Project’s target group and Project’s objectives.

**Basic guidelines**

In the framework of an appropriate quality management of FODEPAL program, the following guiding criteria are considered:

a) **Preventing management.** Implanting a quality guarantee procedure that allows ensuring that decisions for competent production have the maximum possibilities of obtaining foreseen quality.

b) **Choosing a client approach.** Focusing on the client, in this case FODEPAL’s target group and Latin American institutions related to sustainable rural development, leads to think in the terms of service and the establishment of internal relationships between the target group and FODEPAL. It also allows surpassing efficiency criteria, focusing on whether the client has received the needed service.

c) **Paying a particular attention to Course impact,** since competence quality is also the quality of its implementation. This requires follow-up mechanism to analyze the training impact in participating institutions (Institutional Agreements and Impact surveys).

d) **Seeking quality in the whole educational process.** Managing education quality is not only managing situations and educational actions, as in the field of products and services; it is necessary to think in terms of the process.

e) **Thinking in terms of stakeholders.** The actors involved in quality management are multiple. The participant of a Course is not a unique actor in FODEPAL educational model, since other actors are also part of the system: demanding institutions, participants, educational team, technological and methodological advisors and FODEPAL work team. Quality development should not rely solely on structural models and strategies, but should also
take into consideration the professionalisation of the stakeholders involved in the learning process and in FODEPAL Model (Quality Culture). Quality development in education should also be viewed as the result of the quality competent actions of the involved stakeholders and as a critical factor for success of every quality development activity in education”.

The potential of each one of the actors involved in FODEPAL system is brought out because there are shared values, a trust culture and acquisition of responsibilities that involve everyone (Quality Culture).

f) **Characterizing service quality in terms of competence.** A quality service can only be rendered when produced competences are according to client’s demands. Understanding the concept of competence as combination of knowledge, capacity and behavior that can be directly implemented and used in a professional context. This becomes more complex in the field of policy managers, due to the amount of processes involved in these decisions, and the number of participating actors.

g) **Recognizing that acquisition and application of competences is the result of a co-production.** This implies involving demanding institutions in the e-learning process and in the production and application of competences.

h) **Learning, innovation and continuous improvement.** Project development during these three years has been a planned and progressive process that has evolved gradually, attempting to always include learned lessons and good practices during these three years. This implementation strategy has allowed generating a learning culture within the process, which helps a continuous improvement of the e-learning program and Project’s operation.

FODEPAL is aware that in order to be in the frontier on-line distance education, it is necessary to accomplish a continuous and annual plan of strategic investments that allow us to achieve Project’s objectives.

i) **Alliance Development.** Since e-learning development is a new way of frontier knowledge, the Project has permanently searched allies with experience and strength in the development of e-learning programs in order to face challenges involved in this Project. Among the allies of this process are Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey – TEC (Mexico) and the group UOC-GEC, from Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain).

This strategic vision of quality has allowed improving FODEPAL’s Educational Model to the needs of target group and purposes of the Project.
III. Key actions in FODEPAL quality management

![Diagram of key actions and tools of quality management in FODEPAL](image)

### 1. Analysis of institutional demand and definition of programmatic FODEPAL offer.

The Project has implemented a training program oriented by the institutional demand by FODEPAL’s target group. This design strategy is a complex process that demands continuous investigation, analysis and contact with target institutions in order to identify training contents and strategies. In this aspect, the Project counts on the following tools:

- Experience of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAORLC). FAO and FAORLC have a wide knowledge of the Region and an important technical experience in the main thematic areas of the Project. Also, the knowledge and relationships of FAO with target group is to be considered, which helps the interchange between the Project and said target group. This element implies an aggregate value to the Project.

- Studies on institutional demand in the Region on each thematic areas of Project (food security, rural development, agrarian commerce and integral management of natural resources) undertaken by a team of experts.
- Thematic or methodological Seminars. These in-class seminars, with a three-day duration, have the purpose of building a knowledge frontier in thematic and methodological areas of FODEPAL; enhancing teaching materials that may be used in training programs; detecting training needs; suggesting a training strategy on the subject; enhancing interchange of experiences, and strengthen professional bonds among participants. These Seminars are attended by experts and main actors from the Region and Spain.

- Virtual learning communities by thematic areas. These virtual spaces are formed by thematic experts, participants of FODEPAL Courses and other members from target group.

2. Training for Coordinators
Due to Project’s characteristics and the strategy adopted for its implementation, on-line courses are given by a team of professors from different Universities and Educational institutions in Latin-American Region and Spain, with different experiences in the implementation of e-learning.

The Project has always been aware, since the beginning of activities, of the difficulties that a teaching team with these characteristics implies for the development of an on-line program. In order to overcome these difficulties and take advantage of the richness and experience of all the teaching team, the Project has implemented a strategy for teacher’s training on the design and implementation of learning processes in virtual environments, following the Educational Model built by FODEPAL. Main actions of these strategies are:

- Annual distance Course on on-line Distance Education Methodologies and Tools

- Annual in-class Workshop for Coordinators. This in-class activity has a duration of three days, and its main objective is to interchange experiences, train coordinators in methodological and technological aspects and, in general, all those technical aspects that may help to improve the quality and articulation of the educational program and its importance for the target group.

- FODEPAL Practice Virtual Community of Coordinators. This virtual space is formed by coordinators of Courses and experts in distance education. It will is one of the components that encourages other aspects of this strategy, with the purpose of not only ensuring quality and development of FODEPAL’s educational model, but also keep feeding the process of FODEPAL’s teaching community building.

The participation in all these activities is a necessary condition to coordinate a FODEPAL “on-line” distance Course. This allows creating an e-Quality Culture between those that collaborate in the Project.

3. Forming an institutional structure in the Project around quality management
Project quality management is supported in the existence of an institutionally that guards its fulfillment. The most important elements of this institutionally are:
– Institutional Agreement. These agreements are being signed with institutions from the target group in order to ensure an adequate learning environment for participants of Courses and to achieve a bigger impact of the Project.
– Technical support groups in FAORLC
  – Project Management
  – Technical Committee
  – Board of Directors

4. Careful and standardized Course production process

- FODEPAL has created some standards for Course design in the framework of its educational model.

Course design process in FODEPAL implies the participation of a multidisciplinary team that works both in the design and in the development of the Course:

- Coordinator of Course, the expert in the discipline, trained in on-line distance course design under FODEPAL’s standards. The coordinator is in charge of preparing the first Course design proposal.
- Fodepal’s work team. This team is in charge of revising the relevancy of the contents and the basic aspects of the design prepared by the Course coordinators.
- Advisor in educational design, expert in pedagogic issues and, in particular, in those issues involving distance education. This advisor is in charge of revising the educational design prepared by the Course coordinators.
- Programmer of Course

In this process, there are different quality controllers that ensure the fulfillment of FODEPAL’ educational model standards.

5. Evaluation of Program, Courses and Coordinators

In the scope of quality management, quality evaluation of FODEPAL program has a preventive approach. The e-quality in FODEPAL is evaluated through five aspects:

- Educational process quality,
- Learning as a measurement of product quality,
- Satisfaction of participants with the service received,
- Training program effect
- Creation of a quality culture between persons who collaborate with the Project.

For them, different mechanisms have been implemented for internal or external evaluation: Course Evaluation Surveys, Program, Impact Evaluation Surveys (one year after), monitoring indicators, reports, among others.

IV. Role of technology to support the Quality management strategy in FODEPAL Project
The implementation of a complex project like FODEPAL and its quality management strategy, characterized by the active coordination of different stakeholders of various countries and different kind of processes, demands the intensive use of different technological tools (ICT). These technological tools that enable FODEPAL to manage quality learning are:

- **Web learning system management (LMS).** It is a software package that enables the management and delivery of learning content and resources to students. This LMS is web-based to facilitate "anytime, anywhere" access to learning contents and administration. FODEPAL, after a 6 months selection process, selected the Blackboard Enterprise Learning System and Community System, because the LMS was better adapted to their educative Model. This tool allows developing the distance Courses offered by FODEPAL. In addition, allows implementation same processing related to FODEPAL quality management strategy, as per the academic coordinators (tutors) and FODEPAL team training program, the annual distance Courses about Distance Education Methodologies and the FODEPAL Virtual Practice Community of Coordinators.

In addition, because of the LMS statistic module, the Project can follow up the student's participation in the courses.

- **E-mail service.** The system of actors that support the FODEPAL Quality management strategy in different ways needs not just talking to each other, but acting together. These tools allow the permanent coordination and communication between all stakeholders.

- **SIGMA.** It is an "ad hoc" management software package that provides different services related to the management of the participants and the quality management strategy. Between the services, they stand out:
  - Participant’s management module. This module allows managing all the information related to the public objective of the Project, applications, registered, their personal, professional and institutional profiles, learner’s results, etc...
  - Surveys module. This module allows managing the information and following up, related to the Course Evaluation Survey and the Impact Evaluation Survey. FODEPAL hopes that this system, in the future, articulates all the information systems and management of the quality management strategy of the Project.

- **Fodepal web Portal.** It is a FODEPAL site on the World Wide Web that provides different services (virtual Library, Practice Virtual Community, etc.) and useful information about FODEPAL to the objective public of the Project and its institutions. In addition, provides a pathway for the participants in the courses to different tools that FODEPAL uses for quality evaluation as the Course Evaluation Survey and the Impact Evaluation Survey. Also it allows easily to access to Academic coordinators (tutors) and directive and technical FODEPAL team to the results of these surveys.

FODEPAL eQuality Maturity Model

FODEPAL eQuality Maturity Model - using technology to improve the quality and organizational relevance of learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Managing and implementing eQuality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. eQuality platform implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
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1.2. eQuality strategy planning and implementation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>An eQuality action plan has been published. eQuality tools, systems and procedures are established in some parts/sectors of the organization. Some parts of the strategy and action plan are being implemented but others are not.</td>
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1.3. Partnerships

<table>
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<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early stages / awareness</td>
<td>There are some informal links between teams in relation to eQuality.</td>
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1.4. Monitoring and reviewing implementation

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>Some aspects of the strategy and action plan are monitored and reviewed, but this is not done in a sufficiently systematic way. There is no reference to other organizational strategies, and not all stakeholders are involved.</td>
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1.5. Sustainability and return on investment

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<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embedded / advanced</td>
<td>The quality system facilitates the transformation of the organization into &quot;learning organization&quot;. The quality system promote accessibility, equal opportunities and inclusion</td>
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2. Vision and strategic planning

2.1 Clarity of vision for the development of eQuality within the organization

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<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Direction and FODEPAL technical team share a clear and detailed vision of how eQuality will develop in the next few years and how it relates clearly and closely to the organization’s overall mission and aims, in particular innovation. The vision for the development of eQuality is shared with partners, clients,</td>
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contractors and the community at large.

### 2.2 Integration of eQuality strategy in other strategic plans

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<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>There is some cross-referencing between the eQuality strategy and other strategic plans.</td>
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### 2.3 Strategic management of eQuality within the organization

<table>
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<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>There are some links between different team in terms of the management of eQuality. Communicating the vision to staff, the system of actors that in different ways support the FODEPAL Quality management strategy and learners has started, but as yet only the staff is committed.</td>
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### 3. Encouraging individual and organizational learning through eQuality

### 3.1 Managing staff competencies development with ICT

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>There is a central system to plan learning and development in line with the need for competencies within the organization. The system is mainly used by the Direction and FODEPAL technical team.</td>
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### 3.2 Recording individual progress and achievement with ICT

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<th>State</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>Electronic means of recording individual progress and achievement are spreading across the organization.</td>
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### 3.3 Sharing knowledge across groups and communities with ICT

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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Developing / commitment</td>
<td>There are systems supporting the recording and sharing of knowledge across communities. Staff is encouraged to share tacit and explicit knowledge.</td>
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