Developing Business Continuity Capabilities in

Ethiopian Public Sector:

End of Assignment Report

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

CHRISTINE BENDEL, LIGHTS-ON! BUSINESS CONTINUITY MADE EASY

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1. Introduction:

This End of Assignment joint report of the two training team members is submitted at the request of the project management of UNDP. It not only focuses on lessons learned (including how to be able to showcase the lessons learned to a wider audience) it also includes a number of important recommendations about how to complete the learning experience of the Business Continuity Focal Persons and how to support them so that they are empowered to implement continuity planning in their Entities. It also provides thoughts about further engagement opportunities associated with business continuity in Ethiopia.

The operations of nearly all Federal and Regional government institutions in Ethiopia have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowledge and skill gaps to plan for and the ability to maintain continuity of critical government functions were identified as an area where there was no defined support to address the impact of the pandemic and was recognised by both the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) and the UNDP Ethiopia Office. Following this realization, the UNDP Ethiopia Office came up with an action proposal "Accelerating the national response to the impact of COVID-19: Enabling continuity of critical government functions". The objective of which is to put in place a minimum level of business continuity planning and preparedness across targeted GoE public sector bodies.

2. Summary of Capacity Building Efforts

The Federal Commission of Civil Service and UNDP partnered "to put in place a minimum level of business continuity planning and preparedness in selected Federal and Regional government institutions and entities within 6-8 weeks, in those cases where they do not have such measures in place already" (Accelerating the National Response to the Impact of COVID-19, Enabling Continuity of Critical Government Functions: An Action Proposal from UNDP, p. 4).

Between 11 June and 24 September the two-person consultant team, International and National, provided on-line training sessions to two cohorts, including 33 (14 in a first cohort, 19 in a second cohort) different Entities of the Ethiopian Government. The selection of the Entities was undertaken by the Government who sought to prioritize those critical Entities likely to be under the greatest pressure in maintaining the provision of public services during the pandemic.

2.1.   Approach

To provide knowledge transfer as well as practical skills to the participants, a blended approach of learning was applied. It combined virtual instructor-led training with virtual social learning supported by expert coaching. Trainees also received guiding documents in the form of a syllabus, a template for a business continuity plan and a facilitation guide, explaining the planning process step-by-step.

The objectives were to empower the trainees to facilitate and guide the continuity planning processes within their Entities to develop and strengthen their Entities' organizational continuity capabilities.

The virtual instructor-led training sessions provided knowledge of

- Business Continuity: what it is, what it is not, the importance of business continuity

- The importance of staff empowerment for successful business continuity

- The process of facilitating the development/strengthening of organizational continuity capabilities

- The process of continuously improving of the organizational continuity capabilities by training, practicing, and evaluating

Trainees also gained **skills** in the application of an iterative methodology of business continuity planning; they were offered multiple opportunities to facilitate and report about group discussions, considered as a safe learning space to practice the facilitation of business continuity planning processes.

To build a community of practice in Business Continuity, virtual group coaching and practice sessions, as well as a document platform "Teams" were provided to stimulate the exchange of experiences.

In addition, trainees received expert coaching and practical support in documenting their continuity processes through virtual means as well.

2.2.   Assessment of Achievements

To be able to assess the level of understanding and whether participants had gained benefits from the training the consultants designed and managed an on line post-training survey requesting participants to assess their achievements in business continuity planning. While the first cohort was requested to complete the survey five weeks after the last session, the second cohort had to complete it within ten days.

The results are summarised in paragraph 3.1.3 Evaluation and shown in Annex 1.

3. Lessons Learned

3.1.   The Capacity Building Efforts

3.1.1. Design

The number of six sessions was suggested to respond to the fact that everybody was pressed for time and needed continuity capabilities as soon as possible. This was also an acknowledgement that this type of virtual training on an unfamiliar topic had not previously been attempted in Ethiopia. Therefore, and in the absence of a comprehensive training needs assessment, the judgements had to be made about the best-estimate of training sessions that would be required. But one of the lessons learned was that six formal training sessions were insufficient to provide all the information about a new topic and the role that the BCP focal points were expected to play within their respective organisations. Also, more time was necessary to counter-check if the participants had understood each step of the process and felt confident enough that they would be able to apply the knowledge gained in their Entities.

This experience made obvious that real learning doesn't happen in formal training sessions. While participants receive information, they have to process this information to gain knowledge and anchor it. They also have to learn the skills required to apply their new knowledge. That is the reason why the capacity building effort proposal included coaching sessions, experience sharing among the participants as well as the opportunity to obtain direct support for their work within their Entities. However, the coaching and practice sessions weren't made mandatory, therefore, not all trainees participated in all the sessions provided. It is also acknowledged that the training was rolled at a time of national crisis –

the pandemic is a once in a generation event which could not have been predicted. So as individuals training participants had been selected to participate in a virtual training programme about a topic which they had not prior knowledge or experience about and at the same time were required to continue to work full time on their "real job". So, having the option to take advantage of coaching and practice sessions might have not seemed worthwhile in their view if participants were already very busy.

Due to the late on-boarding of the national consultant, the entire capacity building concept was developed by the international business continuity expert. Therefore the chance to benefit from the expertise in change management and the familiarity with the Ethiopian country context and culture was not feasible.

It would have been preferable if the training team could have established a baseline of the individual Entities' continuity capabilities by measuring staff competency, clarity of procedures responding to a crisis and the availability and accessibility of required resources to support these procedures before and after the capacity building efforts. Such a baseline would have informed the design of the entire capacity building efforts. However, establishing a baseline during the ongoing crisis of the pandemic would have been a challenge, as everybody was already overwhelmed with the responsibility for providing at least basic services.

3.1.2. Delivery

The revamping of the training of the second cohort based on the experience with the first group was the product of an excellent collaboration between the two specialists. The combination of the expertise in business continuity and change management as well as the familiarity of one of the trainers with the Ethiopian reality was very fruitful insofar as the way of presenting the content was better adapted to the reality of the Ethiopian Civil Servants.

Zoom turned out to be a useful tool to hold the sessions, albeit there were connectivity problems in some parts of the country and on few occasions throughout the country. Participants gained more and more confidence in using it. Some participants struggled to express themselves in English. They were assisted by the national consultant to understand some of the presentations.

However, the Teams platform wasn't used the way it was expected. Participants still preferred to receive documents by email and therefore didn't make clear if they had access to Teams or not.

3.1.3. Evaluation

The results of the post-training survey show that the majority of the participants gained the intended knowledge. The answers indicate that they gained a good understanding of business continuity management, business continuity planning and the different steps of this process (For the results, see **Annex 1**). However, the survey also shows the limitations of a short training when it comes to the skills required to guide and facilitate a process of business continuity planning. While the responding participants reported that their Entities achieved a basic level of continuity capabilities, it became evident that they would need additional support – for their management as well as the continuity experts - to be able to continuously improve their Entities' continuity capabilities.

3.1.4. Participants

The selection of the participants was undertaken by the different Entities. The consultants do not know if the Terms of Reference of a BC Focal Person that was developed for the governmental Entities was

used as a guide to choose the participants in the training. At least some of them did not have the direct line to senior management nor had the authority to make business continuity planning happen in some of the departments. This is an important lesson learned which needs to be factored into any further business continuity management support.

Participants of the first cohort were not released from their regular functions, while from the second cohort, some participants claimed that they were partially released. Still, implementing continuity planning in an Entity needs staff capacity of the Focal Persons; some gave the feedback that they didn't have the time to apply what they had learned.

The size of some of the participating Entities is so large that a singleton BC Focal Person, who has additional responsibilities won't be able to maintain the continuity capabilities of the entire Entity and, at the same time, coordinate with the other governmental Entities.

The participants were able to become more familiar with the BC concept and tried to put it into a real-life context within the available time. In order to make BC a standard way of doing things in each Entity, there is a need to provide continuous training for larger groups of participants. Doing so could enhance the capabilities of Entities to respond to any kind of government function discontinuity.

3.1.5. Senior Management

A key lesson learned was that Senior Management did not provide adequate support and oversight to the BC FPs. Some Focal Persons of the second cohort reported that they encountered difficulties in convincing senior management and staff members of other departments about the importance of their work. Some also reported resistance of colleagues to make this investment and strengthen their Entity's continuity capabilities.

3.2. Project Management

It would have been preferable if the Project Management Team consisting of UNDP and the FCSC had a kick-off meeting with the two consultants, explaining the general goal of the capacity building efforts followed by a briefing of Senior Management to clarify the situation in the Entities regarding continuity capabilities. Based on this information the two consultants could have determined the objectives, the structure and design of the different learning efforts. The agreement on these elements could have informed the "meet and greet" meeting between the project management, the senior managers and the participants including the two consultants to ensure they would hear first-hand the reactions, concerns and learning expectations from senior managers and Focal Persons.

4. Recommendations

4.1. Continuous Support to the Trainees

To protect and sustain the investments made by UNDP and the participating Entities through the pilot iteration of BCP support covered in this Report, it is important that the trained Focal Persons receive additional back-up support as quickly as possible. The recommendations explained below will provide the support needed by them to further develop the continuity capabilities of their Entities. To implement the recommendations in support of the trainees, it is important that the FCSC strengthens its engagement and takes on a number of key important cooridnatipn functions to make this happen. While UNDP could provide the necessary mandates for their implementation, the FCSC should act as a

promoter, monitor, and link to the Prime Minister's Office and hold Entities accountable for their commitment to continuously contributing to the success of the capacity building efforts.

4.1.1 Brief Senior Management and Request of their Commitment

Based on the experience of this pilot project, it is recommended that any analogous   project would start with a briefing session for senior management of those Entities that are interested in strengthening their continuity capabilities. Under the leadership of the FCSC, the training team should provide basic information about business continuity management. This would help Senior Managers to not only understand the importance of effective business continuity management, but it would also help them make more informed decisions about the best positioned and qualified staff members within their organization to be designated as the two Business Continuity Focal Persons (BCP FPs), one primary function holder and one alternate.

In a perfect situation, where there is no time-pressure and Heads of the Entities could have been informed about the basics of continuity planning, senior management could have been requested to assess their Entities' capabilities of continuing their services to the public to create a baseline that could be compared with another assessment of their continuity capabilities after the capacity building efforts.

After the appointment of the BCF FPs, a joint launch of the project by the FCSC for senior managers **and** BC FPs would facilitate a common understanding of the respective roles of senior managers and BC FPs in business continuity management as well as clarify the accountability lines of all staff members in a situation that requires business continuity measures. Senior Managers are responsible for the provision of the services of their Entities and therefore are also responsible for the development of continuity capabilities to prepare for the continuity of their service delivery in crisis situations. On their behalf, BC FPs facilitate the continuity planning process within an Entity. They should have a direct link to senior management and receive support and oversight and be held accountable.

4.1.2. Direct Support and Coaching for the trained Business Continuity Focal Persons

The Business Continuity Focal Persons could benefit from direct support and coaching by a specialist in business continuity management when they implement business continuity planning in their Entities. Having someone, who reminds them of their responsibilities as the Focal Person, someone with whom they can discuss challenges and successes, as well as someone, who could directly support them when facilitating business continuity planning meetings and practices would be invaluable.

4.1.3. Create a Community of Practice for Business Continuity Planning

Once a month, the FCSC, as the governmental part of the project management, should organize meetings for all Focal Persons of all participating Entities of both cohorts. Each session should focus on the presentation of one Entity's experience in business continuity planning followed by a questions and answers session. Using Zoom, this experience sharing sessions could be recorded and made available to everybody.

With the support from UNDP, the FCSC should ensure that each participant has access to Teams and provide an orientation session on how to use it and where the benefits are.

4.1.4. Translate the basic documents

As tools for the direct support by the national consultant, it may be helpful that the facilitation guide and the template for a business continuity plan should be translated into Amharic, maybe also in

regional languages. Especially in the practice sessions of the second cohort, it was tangible to see how much easier it would have been for the participants to have these conversations in Amharic, instead of English.

4.2. Integrate the individual BC planning efforts

The FCSC should identify one (or better two) entities that will organize coordination and integration meetings to discuss the dependencies on each other and make sure the collaboration between the Entities in a crisis is still ongoing. It is recommended that the Office of the Prime Minister supported by the Ministry of Finance should/could take on this responsibility.

4.3. Continuous Reflection of Capacity Building Efforts

The consultant team appreciated the support and feedback of UNDP's project management team, the support in organizing the Teams platform, the email group as well as the substantive support of the Senior Governance Adviser of UNDP, who participated in the majority of training sessions of the first cohort. Equally helpful was the reflection meeting between UNDP's project management team and the two consultants that took place after the formal training with the first cohort ended. Important points were made that helped improve the training for the second group. All documents and the entire training were revamped and better tailored to the culture and the knowledge of Ethiopian Civil Servants.

The consultant team would have appreciated a continuous reflection of the training, as it was stated in the Inception Report of the international consultant: "The Task Team comprised of representatives from the Federal Civil Service Commission, the Ministry of Finance and UNDP provide at least two dedicated (not necessarily full-time) project managers to give feedback and make suggestions for adjustments. To enable them to assume this responsibility, it is recommended that they participate in the training sessions" (LIGHTS-ON! Inception Report, 20 May 2020, page 8). This proposed continuous reflection might have provided the opportunity to make adjustments to the formal training of the first cohort.

4.4. Professionalise Business Continuity Management cross the GoE

Drawing on the lessons learned from the pilot BCP support, the consultancy team recommends that UNDP opens up discussions with the GoE about the lessons learned and offers thoughts about how the Government might want to continue adopting and mainstreaming a modern approach that focuses on development of continuity **capabilities**, such as the approach of Adaptive Business Continuity (https://www.adaptivebcp.org/). COVID-19 showed around the globe that business continuity management efforts aiming at developing Business Continuity Plans, applying the traditional method of business continuity management, were not helpful at all. COVID-19 made obvious that a Business Continuity Plan in itself does not help an organization to survive a crisis. It is only when those staff members, who deliver the services or manufacture the products of an organization know **what** they have to do, **how** they have to do it and have the resources available to perform their tasks in a crisis situation that the benefits of having a sound, well-articulated system of business continuity management reaps beenfits . A Business Continuity Plan can serve as a memory aid, documenting the planning efforts of these staff members.

To be better prepared for any upcoming crises, it is recommended that the different Entities create positions of BC Managers to maintain, continuously improve, integrate and coordinate the continuity planning efforts of the different Entities of the GoE. Participants of the pilot project could be chosen to

participate in a more intense training with a certification programme that could qualify them to become the new BC managers and train BC FPs in the Entities' different departments.

An important opportunity to strengthen continuity capabilities within the GoE consists in the ongoing civil service reform of the GoE, especially the strategy of E-government providing a digital platform for governmental services to the public. When planning the digitalization and infrastructure requirements, it would be useful to mainstream continuity management and its prerequisites in the strategic thinking.

4.5. Professionalise BC Management in Ethiopia

To strengthen Business Continuity Management in Ethiopia, it is recommended, drawing on global best practices and experiences efforts are made to encourage Universities and other higher-level schools to include the concept of Business Continuity Management in their curricula. As for the GoE - mentioned above - it is highly recommended that it should opt for a modern approach of BC management aiming at improving and strengthening organizational continuity capabilities, such as the adaptive BC approach (https://www.adaptivebcp.org).

Adopting a long- term view, business continuity management could be promoted beyond the public sector, namely to the private sector and civil society organizations. The capabilities to deliver services or manufacture products and continue these business activities during crises will become more and more important. It could be the function of the Job Creation Commission in partnership with the Investment Commission to develop guidelines for new and existing businesses to include business continuity management in their strategic planning as well as guidelines for providing that should enable the businesses to survive a crisis, such as the one caused by COVID-19. Sometimes, the need to become more creative and innovative to maintain the survival of the business, creates an opportunity to realign products, services or at least revisit the best way to manufacture or deliver the business services thus promising better business results in general. The need to pivot the organization's business more creatively, can result in a wider offer, or in the ability to enter a new market, or in developing more efficient and effective ways to provide one's services or products.

Another advantage of business continuity planning is the conversations needed about delegated authority. In a crisis situation, staff members often do not have the time to ask supervisors for permission to decide and act to safeguard assets of an organization. These important agreements on the delegation of authority can be very useful and help the organization become more effective and efficient in "normal" times, without the urgency of a crisis, because they shorten the decision making processes and allow staff members to become active very quickly.

If business continuity management is mainstreamed in strategic planning of the Entities' of the GoE, the private sector and civil society it can be a means to build-up not only the survivability of these organizations during and after any kind of crisis, but also their economic strength in general.

4.6. Case Note

UNDP also stated its intention to devise a Case Note that would capture the key lessons learned about the pilot BCP support. The intention was that such a Case Note could help and guide others across UNDP and also help the GoE to see the added value of BCP/M. This would also help frame any possible further BCP support as part of a Phase II programme of BCP/M support.

Drawing on the lessons learned in the first iteration of business continuity planning/management support, a simple checklist of key tasks or issues to be considered in the business continuity planning/management effort included but is not limited to;

- Conduct a BCP baseline survey,
- Assess the ICT skills of participants pre-training,
- Prepare briefing session for Senior Managers,
- Revise the BCP FPs ToRs,
- Appoint the training team simultaneously,
- design the training and delivery (and all documents) in both Amharic and English (plus a local language),
- Make the coaching/practice sessions mandatory,
- Build in adequate self-reflection opportunities between the trainers and FCSC,
- Develop accountability mechanisms to ensure that BCP efforts are fully integrated and understood,
- M&E and learning mechanisms,
- Links to the wider GoE Civil Service reforms ongoing
- Links to the private sector (JCC) so there is the economic link made about businesses continuing to employ and operate during a crisis,
- Links to academia and possible development of BCP/M courses for Public Servants,
- Devise & support a Community of Practice

5. Conclusions and Key Lessons Learned

The implementation of the Pilot Project not only increased the continuity capabilities of the participating entities, but provided important lessons learned that will guide the continuation of the efforts to strengthen business continuity management within the GoE and beyond, as elaborated in the previous paragraphs. The three most important lessons learned are to be summarised and highlighted.

The most important lesson learned is the fact that formal training alone is not good enough. To strengthen the learning of participants, it is needed to provide **a conducive environment**. The different supportive measures have been elaborated in paragraphs 3 and 4.

Equally important is the communication and coordination between the project management and the training team **before** the capacity building effort is launched to ensure it reflects the expectations and is adapted to the actual situation.

Last but not least, it is highly recommended that the FCSC and UNDP **quickly** provide additional support to the trained BC Focal Persons. The pilot project created a momentum that may be lost if this support is not provided very soon.

6. Congratulations to UNDP

This report wouldn't be complete if the courage of UNDP wasn't mentioned: UNDP initiated a capacity building effort for the GoE during a painful crisis. UNDP chose business continuity management, a totally new topic and thinking for the civil service in Ethiopia, because it was obvious that continuity management would only become more important taking into consideration the world-wide

developments. Last but not least, the fact that trainees and trainers could not come together in person due to the COVID-10 situation, did not hinder UNDP to move ahead and ask trainers and trainees to learn and teach virtually.

Annex 1

Results of Self-Assessment Survey

N= 8 (first cohort); N=14 (second cohort)

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Please let us know if your Entity determined its Essential and Time-Sensitive Services that will be supported by Business Continuity Measures		
Yes, Senior Management approved the suggested essential and time-sensitive services	75%	71%
Yes, but the approval of Senior Management is still missing	13%	29%
No, we haven't been able to determine the essential and time-sensitive services	13%	0%
Please tell us if you analysed the current procedures and determined if they could be affected by a Business Continuity crisis, means by loss of staff, loss of location/s and/or resources (equipment/materials/suppliers)		
Yes, we analysed the current procedures and identified those that need revision to respond to the loss of staff, location/s and or resources	88%	64%
No, we haven't yet analysed the current procedures and therefore haven't identified those that need revision to respond to the loss of staff, location/s and or resources	13%	36%
Please tell us if you revised the current procedures that may be affected by loss of staff, location/s and/or resources in a way that you could continue the delivery of your essential and time-sensitive services after you lost staff, location/s and/or resources (equipment, materials, suppliers)		
Yes, we revised all procedures that help deliver the essential and time-sensitive services that they can continue also after we lost staff, location/s and/or resources	50%	14%
Yes, we revised some of the procedures that help deliver the essential and time-sensitive services that they can continue also after we lost staff, location/s and/or resources	50%	71%
No, we haven't revised any procedures yet.	0%	14%
Were you able to identify the required equipment/materials /ICT systems and applications you will need to apply the revised procedures?		
Yes	63%	57%

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
No, we haven't yet identified the required equipment/materials /IT systems and applications we will need to apply the revised procedures	13%	43%
Did you determine the vital records of your Entity? Vital Records are those documents you need to survive a crisis, to be able to continue the delivery of your services during and after a crisis		
Yes	63%	64%
No	38%	36%
Have you trained staff members to apply the revised procedures and use the new equipment/ materials?		
Yes.	0%	29%
No, there is no training need	25%	29%
No, but staff members would need some training	75%	43%
Have you given opportunities to staff members to practice the application of the revised procedures and the use of the new equipment/materials?		
Yes, all staff members already had the opportunity to practice	0%	0%
Yes, some staff members already had the opportunity to practice	25%	57%
No, we haven't started yet	75%	43%
Were you able to institutionalise business continuity planning within your Entity?		
Yes, in my Entity, colleagues understand what Business Continuity Management is and why it is important	25%	21%
Partially; some of my colleagues understand what Business Continuity Management is and why it is important	38%	57%
No, not yet.	38%	21%