

INTERNAL GUIDANCE ON PROJECT PERFORMANCE TRACKING

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Background

PBF's work across the globe is supported by four regional programming teams in New York, typically comprised of a Programme Officer and an Associate Programme Officer. Each programme team handles a large portfolio and ensures projects' oversight, providing guidance and support to country-based PBF Secretariats and focal points as well as project teams as relevant. The programming teams utilize a project performance rating approach to assess the progress of each project and the attention it may require at any time in order to support project and portfolio management. This guidance note provides an overview of the modified project performance tracking process to take into effect in 2024.

To track project performance, PBF uses the information from bi-annual narrative progress reports submitted by active projects in June and November each year. Each project self-reports whether the project is on track or off track, which is then summarized in the PBF project reporting dashboard. After a Programme Officer has reviewed the progress report and verified or corrected the assessment by project, they assign the overall performance status to the project as *on track* or *off track*. Additionally, projects with a start date 12 months or more prior to the reporting deadline (15 June and 15 November) are asked to report whether they have generated evidence of peacebuilding results during the reporting period, i.e., results achieved at the societal or structural level, including changed attitudes, behaviours or institutions. These projects are then also captured by the PBF Programme Officers in the reporting dashboard as projects that generated peacebuilding results.

The assessment of project performance by PBF HQ programming teams needs to be a quick and light-touch process, without requiring extensive exchanges with projects, or adding to their reporting burden. This guidance seeks to codify the practice to ensure a consistent approach to project performance tracking across geographic portfolios, and to help clarify to PBF Secretariats and focal points as well as funds' recipients the unified tracking criteria to be used during reporting periods. It aims to promote simplicity over complexity, sets out some parameters while leaving flexibility in their application.

Process of reporting and reviewing project performance

Active PBF-supported projects submit bi-annual progress reports (by 15 June and 15 November) which are drafted by recipient entities, quality assured by in-country PBF Secretariats (where these exist) and reviewed by PBF Programme Officers in New York. Along with a narrative report, project teams also submit uncertified financial reports by aforementioned dates. Since 2022, narrative reporting takes place via Kobo online platform, while project teams typically work in the Word reporting template file in order to consolidate inputs from all recipient entities and implementing partners, and ensure the review of the report by PBF Secretariat staff or relevant Resident Coordinator's Office focal points, such as Peace and Development Advisor. Both the Word template (in three languages) and Kobo link are available on [PBF website](#). Responses can be submitted in English, French and Spanish. Projects that have a start date (i.e., receive their first tranche) within 3.5 months from the reporting deadline (i.e., projects that start after 1 March for 15 June semi-annual reporting deadline, and projects that start after 1 August for 15 November annual reporting deadline) are exempt from submitting first reports.

Cross-border or multi-country projects submit only one report per project. For annual reporting cycle, those projects that are nearing their end date can choose whether to submit an annual report (covering only the latest year) or a final report (covering the entire duration of the project, and is typically informed by the findings from the independent project evaluation), as long as one of these reports is submitted by 15 November deadline.

The bi-annual narrative progress report includes a self-assessment of the project based on the level of implementation. The projects undertake an assessment of progress against project workplan and results framework to determine whether the project is *on-track*. Additionally, projects that were implemented for a year or longer should also identify whether the project is providing evidence of peacebuilding results.

During the review process at PBF in New York, PBF Programme Officers review the performance rating and may adjust it in order to flag both the projects that require increased attention and projects which provide evidence of impact. The Fund-wide summary of the performance of all active projects is also integrated into external reporting of the Fund.

Part One: Determining if a project is *on-track*

Rating a project as '*off-track*' provides an important flag for the Fund to maintain a closer watch on these projects and to provide support as necessary. Projects can be *off-track* for various reasons, ranging from internal / operational to larger contextual/political reasons. Assessing if a project is *off-track* or *on-track* is slightly different for projects under start up compared to projects under implementation, as there are very specific processes that need to be completed during the start-up phase: Box 1 sets out the guiding questions for projects under inception stage, and Box 2 sets out the guiding questions for projects under implementation. All information provided in the boxes is for guidance only and the overall assessment is the prerogative of the PBF Programme Officers.

Box 1: Criteria to determine if a project is '<i>off-track</i>' or '<i>on-track</i>' in inception phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is recruitment completed? • Is the project steering group established and has it begun to meet? • Is the workplan established and approved by the project's steering committee? • Is the ratio of planned expenditure in proportion to what is stipulated in the workplan, within a margin of 20%? • Are the implementing agencies working collaboratively? • Have beneficiaries been identified or a preliminary conflict sensitivity assessment completed which will inform targeting? • Are the target locations confirmed? • Have the project programmatic activities officially launched? • Is the project's baseline complete?
<p>Assessment Not all of these must be met for a project to be rated as <i>on-track</i> but collectively they can guide Programme Officers on assessing the status of the project and identify areas where corrective measures need to be taken.</p>

The checklist of project implementation readiness¹ provides an important basis to enable the project to proceed as *on-track* through start-up phase.

Box 2: Criteria to determine if a project is 'off-track' or 'on-track' during implementation phase
<p>Operational and design issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all preparatory activities completed? (contracting of partners, staff recruitment, baseline data collection, identification of beneficiaries) • Are programmatic activities implemented according to planned sequencing by outcome (if relevant)? • Are project results in line with the project milestones, targets and multi-year workplan? • Is data being collected for project indicators? • Is expenditure proportionate to what is stipulated in the workplan, within a margin of 20%? • Are implementing agencies working collaboratively? • Are flaws in the project design becoming apparent? If so, are they being addressed? • Is the originally envisioned risks matrix still relevant? • If some risks materialized, did the originally envisioned mitigation measures appear to be effective and relevant? <p>For projects within 6 months of completion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can final activities be achieved in the planned timeframe? Is there an acceleration plan in place?
<p>Contextual issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has there been a major change in the political / operational context that affects project implementation? • Is project design still suitable for achieving the desired change? • Is there sufficient collaboration with government and other key project stakeholders?
<p>Assessment</p> <p>For projects under implementation there is more nuance to the rating. In-depth knowledge of the project and discussions with the implementing entities on workplan and challenges faced can significantly influence the assessment. PBF Programme Officers determine how to weight the different criteria above. Important considerations would be the complexity of the delay, and the expected resolution of any issues, among others. There may be sequencing constraints or issues: some activities may be dependent on other preceding activities, and thus slow pace of certain activities may influence the rating of the projects.</p>

Bringing off-track projects back on-track

The PBF is a high-risk fund, seeking to achieve change in complex locations around the world. The contexts are volatile, and so projects in the portfolio are highly likely to face challenges and constraints, requiring projects to adapt significantly, which takes time. There can be major reversals due to uncontrollable factors such as a spike in violence or unconstitutional changes in government. Peacebuilding is still a relatively nascent field and achieving change is complex, often involving innovative approaches, which also involves some level of risk. While PBF maintains oversight for off-track projects and facilitates changes as necessary, the overall accountability for ensuring the projects are back on track lies with the PBF funds' recipients.

¹ Annex A.1 in PBF Project Document Template <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/project-document-templateeng-2022>

Given this high-risk appetite, embracing significant contextual and programmatic risks, it is to be expected that some proportion of the portfolio would be off-track at any time. The PBF works hard to be an adaptable funding instrument, and the strength of its approach is demonstrated by the pace at which off-track projects are shifted back on-track by its recipient organizations. An examination of the current portfolio as of October 2023 that followed the scoring approach based on a three-tier system (off track, on track, and on track with evidence of peacebuilding results) showed that out of all the projects that had been off-track at some point during their lifespan, 48% were back on-track within 6 months and 82% were back on-track, or on-track with peacebuilding results, within 12 months. Thus, the portfolio has a very strong performance in shifting off-track projects back on-track. Given the agile nature of the Fund, and the approach of self-reporting, it does not deem relevant to set a target for percentage of projects being on-track or off-track at any point in time.

Box 3: Getting off track projects back on track

Strategies for getting off-track projects back on track vary according to the internal and external causes of the problems. Following are a range of approaches that may be useful:

- In depth discussion with the implementing agencies to unpack issues and explore options, often involving actions to enhance government engagement
- Review of the workplan/development of a new implementation plan or accelerated strategy
- Change in the project outcomes if no longer relevant to context
- Monitor the pace at which to expedite recruitments and procurement processes
- No cost extension
- Regular contact established with the implementing agencies, possibly shifting to quarterly reporting
- Joint mission to help elevate the discussion and trigger meetings with national counterparts
- Engagement of the Peace and Development Advisor in-country to provide accompaniment support
- Engagement with the Resident Coordinator in country to elevate conversations, including engagement with government or UNCT
- Engagement with implementing agency focal points in New York to increase internal focus among implementing agencies

Part Two: Determining if a project is showing peacebuilding results

While all projects should demonstrate peacebuilding results by completion, some projects that are one year or more into implementation may show early peacebuilding results. Evidence may be quantitative or qualitative but needs to demonstrate progress against outcome indicators in the project results framework, such as:

- New conflict resolution mechanisms are in place (a project activity is completed) and are being used to resolved conflict, with # cases already referred to it;
- Entrepreneurial youth who participated in capacity building activities (a project activity) have begun to collaborate in small scale cross-border trade and business activities, indicating increasing trust or increase in income;
- Youth who participated in capacity building activities (a project activity) have engaged in a sustained dialogue with local municipal authorities, to raise issues relevant to youth with the authorities. The local authorities have made adjustments reflecting the inputs from the youth;

- A national platform to identify and respond to hate speech is established and capacitated (a project activity) and was able to identify and respond to hate speech incidents surrounding a recent election;
- An early warning system was established to track agropastoral movements (a project activity) and has provided early warning information to support the peaceful movement of cattle during the recent rainy season;
- Revitalised dispute resolution mechanisms (a project activity) have been utilised to resolve local conflicts, including those relating to land, which is a key conflict driver. A small number of cases have involved claims to land by women;
- Traditional and religious leaders who were trained and accompanied (a project activity) have made public pledges to uphold the rights of women and some specific actions have emerged;
- Women have become active participants in community dialogue processes, indicating the increased acceptance of women in conflict resolution and community decision-making processes;
- The staff of the police complaints and response unit were trained and provided with equipment to handle complaints. While the complaints tracking system faced data loss (a project outcome indicator), a perception survey on attitudes to police performance was undertaken showing significant shifts.

Box 4: Questions for reflecting on whether an observable change is a peacebuilding result

The following questions might assist with the assessment, in particular to help shift from thinking about project activities being completed to thinking about the effects of those activities, and specifically if they are showing peacebuilding results:

- Are there changes in attitudes or behaviours relating to key conflict drivers among key target individuals and groups?
- Are there changes in interactions and relationships among groups in conflict?
- Are there changes in systems and institutions which manage or drive conflict?
- Are there changes at a cultural level – such as a significant and widescale shift in attitudes towards GBV?

Sources of relevant evidence can come from the project progress reports, surveys, monitoring reports, government documents, or from other knowledge products that have been developed by the project, or through deeper knowledge of the project gained through engagement with the implementing agencies. An explanation for the assessment that a project is generating peacebuilding results needs to be captured by the programming team in the project reporting dashboard. The Programme Officer should capture the reasoning to elaborate on this rating with sufficient detail for other readers to be able to understand the rationale. This would include providing key information on the context, particularly if the rating is different from the self-rating of the project, or if the project is off track. It is also important to cite financial, operational, political and/or contextual reasons impacting the assessment. Programme Officers are not expected to verify evidence provided by implementing agencies but should determine if the provided evidence is sufficient.

Part Three: Reporting on Fund-wide performance

One of the main external uses of the project performance tracking includes highlighting the total share of on-track projects, as well as the share of projects that generated peacebuilding results, in the annual

Secretary-General's report on PBF. Ratings from all annual project reports (submitted in November) that are verified by PBF Programme Officers comprise the data for the SG Report table.

To calculate the share of on-track projects, the following formula is used:

$$\textit{On track projects} / \textit{All active projects}$$

To calculate the share of projects that generated evidence of peacebuilding results, the following formula is used:

$$\textit{Projects which are demonstrating results} / \textit{All active projects over a year of implementation}$$

The data from the Fund-wide calculations according to the aforementioned formulas is then disaggregated by PBF Priority Area and compared with the preceding year.²

² Priority area 1: Security sector reform, the rule of law, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and political dialogue.

Priority area 2: Reconciliation, democratic governance and conflict prevention/management.

Priority area 3: Employment and equitable access to social services.

Priority area 4: State capacities, extension of State authority and governance of peacebuilding resources