

SP Assessment Partnership Agreement

Clarifying the ways of working to develop the SP Assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

Moving from fragmented approaches to harmonized social protection systems is an emerging challenge that the global social protection community has agreed requires focused attention and a dedicated response. The social protection community believes that this can best be completed through an inter-agency partnership, utilizing the best technical knowledge and skill sets from the global community. The SP Assessment tool is one of the means through which this harmonisation will be completed¹.

The SP Assessment is a suite of operational tools that will clarify and provide advice on *how* social protection systems can best be established, based on international good practices of operations. The overall ambition is to ensure that countries can use the SP Assessment tool to build integrated social protection systems and move towards creating nationally-determined Social Protection Floors. The focus of the inter-agency partnership should always be on ensuring that countries are able to use the SP Assessment in a practical, effective and efficient manner. Countries are the end-user of the SP Assessment rather than the agencies contributing to their development.

Genesis of SP Assessment

In 2012, members of the social protection community agreed to work together on the development of a new tool, the Social Protection Assessment of Results & Country Systems (SPARCS). The tool was originally conceived as a means of providing support to countries in building SPL systems. To achieve this objective, SPARCS activities were to be centered on developing common instruments to assess social protection systems and guide their development, supporting their application, and fostering knowledge sharing.

Critically, SPARCS was intended to serve as a platform for collaboration across agencies to help craft a common vision for social protection systems and ensure a consistent, inter-agency approach to system development. It was expected that this platform would be used to develop and apply a common set of core tools and metrics that could be applied across countries, facilitating dialogue and ensuring the countries' social protection system development was benchmarked according to international good practices and standards.

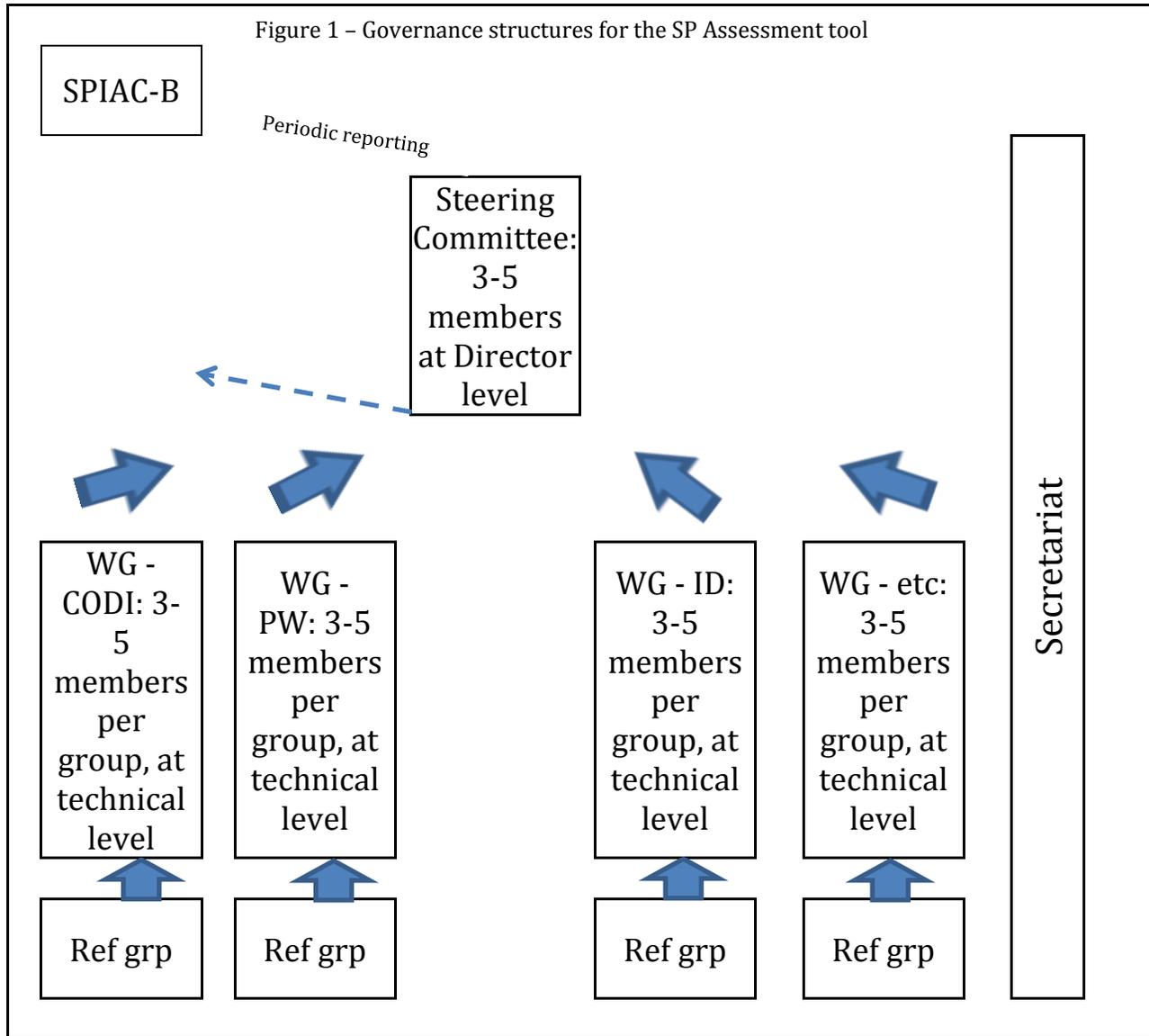
In October 2013, members of the social protection community agreed to change the name of the SPARCS tool to the SP Assessment tool. The tool is expected to fulfil the same function as the originally conceived SPARCS.

¹ A complementary pillar of developing the social protection systems agenda is an inter-agency data project, which aims at creating a comprehensive and harmonized data on social protection programmes based on administrative data and household data sets together. The SP Assessment tool and the inter-agency data project are complementary tools. They are both practical tools designed to generate accessible and comparable data and to help governments identify the strengths and weaknesses of their current social protection systems and identify action areas for improvement and reform.

Governance

To manage the development of the SP Assessment, ensure that the best technicians from all agencies are working on relevant aspects, and that the appropriate levels of quality assurance are governance structure has been agreed.

These governance structures (Figure 1 below) provide oversight to the SP Assessment development and approve the tools to assure appropriate quality, consistency of application and communications and the utility of the tools by all stakeholders.



2. FURTHER INFORMATION ON SP ASSESSMENT

The SP Assessment requires multi-agency ownership. There is a 'public good' component to the SP Assessment and the intellectual ownership and direction of the development of the SP Assessment should consequently be owned by a broad and representative group of the social protection community. This ownership can be achieved partly through a structured engagement in SP Assessment development, as well as the management and continuous application of the SP Assessment over time.

The SP Assessment is a suite of operational tools that will clarify and provide advice on *how* social protection systems can best be established, based on international good practices of operations.

In particular, the SP Assessment will:

- define and assess system goals and metrics,
- develop a set of benchmarks against which countries can measure themselves, for their design, performance and delivery of social protection systems domestically,
- identify options for countries in the development of social protection systems,
- establish an open source platform for learning across countries.

All governance structures of the SP Assessment (Steering Committee, Working groups and the Secretariat) shall actively work to ensure that there is a broad ownership and use of the tools by the social protection community. Active outreach, continued dialogue and engagement should be the hallmarks of successful governance of the SP Assessment.

Operationalizing SP Assessment

To be able to deliver on the SP Assessment ambition, a number of core activities need to be implemented, principal among them the development of a suite of tools for use in country.

At the outset a Core Diagnostics Instrument (CODI) will be developed to assess the core functions of a social protection system in country, clarify legal and policy issues related to social protection and determine the readiness of a country to develop social protection programmes, which together can comprise a 'system'.

Once those core diagnostics are completed, a government can elect which social protection programmes it would like to invest in based on key development objectives they wish to achieve.

To assist with that election, a set of Programme Tools will be developed as part of the SP Assessment. These programmes may include *inter alia* pensions programmes, unemployment insurance programmes, cash transfer programmes, public works programmes, skills training programmes, wage subsidy programmes, etc.

Following from that programme election, the country can proceed to determining how they should best implement that programme, using a set of core Service Delivery Tools. These service delivery tools will *inter alia* analyse the country's current methods of identifying beneficiaries, targeting beneficiaries, determining beneficiaries eligibility to access programme benefits, delivering payments to beneficiaries, beneficiaries' claiming redress in the event of an error, measuring implementation performance, managing information pertinent to social protection, etc.

Activities needed to make SP Assessment operational

There will need to be a series of rigorous field-testing of each of the SP Assessment tools at a technical level before they can be agreed and finalized. The initial development phase and field-testing of the tools will be carried out in a phased manner, with a rolling agreement and approval of the tools when they are complete.

All tool development will be completed by technicians from a number of agencies specialising in aspects of social protection. Only when the tools are finalized and approved by all levels of the governance structures, should they be shared widely and be made publically available.

Once approved for use, various agencies and country team will need to become familiar with the SP Assessment tools. A series of standardized training modules will be developed to socialize the SP Assessment and ensure that there is a broad body of technical experts, programme managers and decision-makers who have sufficient know-how about operationalizing the SP Assessment tools.

SP Assessment as an open platform

Once the SP Assessment tools have been utilized in country, and with the Government's approval, the analysis from the tools should be made publicly available through an open source platform. In addition, the results of the analysis should be made available in the form of a Country Report and assessment.

The country report will benchmark the social protection programmes and operations against accepted international good practice.

Through a periodic assessment of these country reports, and repeated use of the tools over time, the performance of country systems will improve and be able to be benchmarked.

3. PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP

The scale and nature of the ambition of the SP Assessment is only possible through a harmonised approach among agencies. It is therefore important from the outset that there are agreed principles of engagement in the SP Assessment. All agencies in SPIAC-B are expected to bring about and enhance a positive working relationship and boost levels of cooperation with regard to the SP Assessment.

The principles of partnership are:

- Mutual accountability. Mutual accountability requires a shared understanding of the nature of the partnership and a shared commitment to implement the partnership between stakeholders
- Constructive engagement – recognizing that there is a need to work together but that this requires sustained and continuous engagement. Ad hoc and inconsistent engagement creates gaps in institutional knowledge as well as disharmony among agencies.
- Incremental transformation – the best can often be the enemy of the good, and agencies may need to be prepared to compromise in order to achieve a longer-term change. An incremental approach and ongoing engagement with different agencies will help experience-based learning and the identification of opportunities for improvement of tools moving forward.
- Reduced transaction costs – The motivation for the SP Assessment should be remembered at all times: the level of organisation achieved through the SP Assessment will reduce government transaction costs considerably compared with alternatives, and fragmentation of programmes in-country will be minimised.
- Harmonisation – Harmonisation does not happen overnight and takes time to build the institutional trust necessary for this to take place. The more agencies there are to harmonise the longer it takes – but the end justified the process.

- *Evidence-based SP Assessment* – the SP Assessment will be as evidence-based as possible taking into account the learning-by-doing agenda and that any of the SP Assessment tools are a reflection of the state-of-the-art knowledge at any one time and therefore a work in progress.
- *Accept decisions once made* – decisions relating to the SP Assessment will be made at different times by different governance structures and should be accepted, until evidence and/or consensus suggests that the decision needs to be reviewed.

'Partnership management' is an important aspect of the work of the Secretariat. The Secretariat is the institution that encourages agencies to stick to these partnership principles in the interests of the 'public good'. The Secretariat is a neutral agent, specifically designed to facilitate discussions between agencies and harmonise institutional positions.

The Secretariat is the institution that agencies contact to arrange meetings and discuss issues, when there are agency-specific concerns. Similarly the Secretariat is the point through which all agency communication is managed.

The Steering Committee is responsible for finalizing and signing off on the SP Assessment tools and related strategies, and the Secretariat is responsible for managing all the processes and technical inputs that lead to the 'signing-off' taking place.

The Secretariat and the Steering Committee are to serve the needs of the wider SP community and those engaged in the SP Assessment. Therefore it is necessary to continually gauge the social protection community's, and other external partners', engagement with the SP Assessment.

4. WAYS OF WORKING FOR AGENCIES ENGAGING IN SP ASSESSMENT

To ensure that there is a consistent and transparent process for the SP Assessment development and management, an agreed set of Ways of Working has been established. These ways of working are provided for clarity and to guide the process of SP Assessment development and management. Clarity about this Partnership Agreement will also ensure that there is predictability once a process has been started and no decision can be circumvented or challenged 'after the fact'.

3.1 Tool identification

- 3.1.1 While the selection of the SP Assessment tools to be developed should be demand driven, there will need to be a manageable number of tools under development at any one time.
- 3.1.2 Proposals for which tools to be developed should be made to the Secretariat and Steering Committee, who should then make a determination of the timeframe for development of the tools proposed.
- 3.1.3 The final selection of the SP Assessment tools to be developed over a 12-month period, should be included in the Secretariat's Annual Workplan.

3.2 Tool development

- 3.2.1 Each tool has a standardised set of instruments: a What Matters guidance note, a Questionnaire and a Country Report template
- 3.2.2 The development of each tool will be led by a Working Group, comprised of technicians from a number of agencies. The membership of this Working group can be as small as 3 and as large as 10, but should include the Secretariat.
- 3.2.3 The Working group will be supported and advised by a Reference group, comprised of as many interested agency representatives as desired. Membership is voluntary.
- 3.2.4 The purpose of the Reference group is to provide the Working group members with as much documentary information as possible pertaining to the tool in question.

- 3.2.5 The Working Group will assimilate these documents and prepare drafts of the What Matters Guidance note and the questionnaire.
- 3.2.6 The reference group members should review these drafts periodically for content and accuracy
- 3.2.7 The Secretariat will facilitate the process of reaching consensus on the draft tools and arrange for field testing of the tools
- 3.2.8 Once field tested in at least two locations, the members of the Working Group and Reference Group should reconvene to review the experiences from the field test and revise the tools. This revision should be completed in a workshop environment facilitated by the Secretariat and ideally representatives from the two country locations where the tool has been tested should be in attendance.
- 3.2.9 The purpose of this workshop is to reach consensus on the draft tool and reach agreement on a 'Version 1' of the tool. If agreement is reached on 'Version 1' the tool should be submitted to the Steering Committee for ratification. If agreement on 'Version 1' cannot be reached at the workshop, areas for further discussion and agreement should be referred to the Steering Committee by the Secretariat.
- 3.2.10 Members of the Working group or Reference Group who are not in attendance at the workshop should not be entitled to retrospectively argue against the content of 'Version 1'. The short-term purpose is to develop a tool that is as technically sound as possible given all the information available at that point in time and which all agencies can agree to – the Steering Committee cannot let 'the best' be the enemy of 'the good' in the short term.
- 3.2.11 The tool development process is iterative and organic. Version 1 of any tool is not the final version; all tools are a 'snapshot' in time of the current state-of-the-art thinking in the sector. The tools will remain a work in progress and should be periodically updated and revised, taking into account emerging good practices and experiences once Version 1 of the tool has a broader base of evidence from a range of different country contexts.

3.3 Quality assurance

- 3.3.1 The members of the Working Groups, Reference Groups and Steering Committee have mutual responsibility to ensure that there is due diligence completed on the technical completeness and robustness of the tool itself.
- 3.3.2 These Groups have agreed responsibility to ensure the appropriate technical quality of the tools during each step of every review process.
- 3.3.3 However, the Secretariat has ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality of the tools under development. Therefore the Secretariat should be as engaged as possible with the development of all tools, to ensure that there is uniformity of development, and the process of development is regularised.
- 3.3.4 The Secretariat will retain a roster of 'peer reviewers', whose time can be drawn down periodically to review the tools (1) before the workshop to reach consensus on Version 1 (2) during the workshop (3) post workshop at the request of the Steering Committee and/or (4) after different versions of the tools have been in use for some time and refreshment/updating of the tools is necessary.
- 3.3.5 Should there be a divergence of opinion between the peer reviewers and the Working groups that cannot be resolved consensually, the Secretariat will prepare a note of the differences and submit to the Steering Committee for due consideration and decision.

3.4 Tool management and application

- 3.4.1 The Secretariat is responsible for ensuring that the tools are managed and communicated to stakeholders in the sector.

- 3.4.2 The sequence of tool application should be demand driven, but there is a tacit agreement that the appropriate sequence is for the CODI tool to be used in the first instance, with programme tools and Service delivery tools to follow.
- 3.4.3 Once 'Version 1' of any of the tools are developed, the Secretariat will ensure the tools are available for use from the SP Assessment website as well as in country.
- 3.4.4 The Secretariat shall ensure there is a rolling programme for updating the tools with the latest 'state-of-the-art' lessons from the field, using the existing SP Assessment structures (updated with new members, as necessary) for consistency.

3.5 Training

- 3.5.1 The Secretariat will prepare a strategy for how training on the SP Assessment should best be rolled out.
- 3.5.2 The Working groups will be invited to contribute to the strategy in the draft stages and be engaged in the training of stakeholders in-country and in the regional offices of partner institutions.
- 3.5.3 The Steering Committee will sign off this strategy.
- 3.5.4 Wherever possible, and in the spirit of partnership, all training sessions should be completed with a number of agencies in attendance, wherever the training occurs. This will allow for a greater understanding between partners in country, and a greater harmonisation of efforts to support each country's system development agenda.

3.6 Communications & advocacy

- 3.6.1 The Secretariat will prepare a strategy for all communications and advocacy relating to the SP Assessment.
- 3.6.2 The Secretariat should be the only official means of communicating any messages, product or other material relating to the SP Assessment.
- 3.6.3 The communications & advocacy strategy will include, but not necessarily be limited to:
 - The development of the 'brand', which will help to market and easily identify the SP Assessment as a technically sound, practical, credible and reliable 'go-to' suite of instruments for social protection system development globally,
 - the preparation of materials explaining the SP Assessment tools and methodology
 - the development of an agreed 'open-source' website,
 - the utilisation of new technologies to promote the SP Assessment,
 - identifying how the SP Assessment tool can best be communicated to country Governments to encourage use,
 - identifying opportunities for how and where the SP Assessment can be showcased to agencies, Governments and other stakeholders in the SP and broader development arenas.
- 3.6.4 The Working groups will be invited to contribute to the strategy in the draft stages and to periodically review progress and suggest improvements to the means of communications
- 3.6.5 The Steering Committee will sign off this strategy, as well as periodically review progress and suggest improvements to the means of communications
- 3.6.6 Like all strategies, this is a 'living' document and should be refreshed and updated periodically.

3.7 Coordination

- 3.7.1. The role of coordination of all aspects of the SP Assessment is given to the Secretariat. To do this effectively the Secretariat needs to be, and be seen to be, an honest, independent broker (not aligned to any agency).
- 3.7.2 This means that the Secretariat will:

- facilitate the development and application of the SP Assessment tools, including facilitating the meetings of the Steering Committee and Working groups, the field tests, and all aspects of the knowledge management
 - Coordinate the agencies working on the SP Assessment tools and harmonise practices related to tool development and application
 - Ensure the smooth implementation of this Partnership Agreement
 - Advise the Steering Committee in relation to all aspects of the SP Assessment tool and its governance
 - Manage the implementation of all aspects of the selection, development and utility of the SP Assessment tools,
 - Assure the quality of the SP Assessment tools and applications
 - Manage the data and knowledge relating to the SP Assessment tools.
- 3.7.3. All agencies in the Partnership Agreement will ensure that the Secretariat is involved in all aspects of the SP Assessment tool development and application and will use the Secretariat for the functions outlined above.

3.8 Dispute resolution

- 3.8.1 For any issue that requires clarity relating to the above, or if an issue requires resolving, the Secretariat should be approached in the first instance.
- 3.8.2 If the Secretariat is unable to clarify the 'Ways of Working' and/or broker an agreement between agencies, the issue should be referred to the Steering Committee for further clarification and resolution.

* This list will be updated as part of the annual workplan for the SP Assessment Secretariat