EU-funded Technical Assistance to OCTA Project: An Overview of Results Achieved

Launched in December 2012, the EU-funded Technical Assistance to OCTA Project had three specific objectives: to increase policy dialogue and cooperation between OCTs and the EU; to increase OCTs’ administrative and technical capacity to manage EU funds; and to enhance coordination and communication among OCTs. With the project about to end, an overview of results achieved is timely.

In the area of policy dialogue, TA involved supporting OCTA in using instruments foreseen under the Overseas Association Decision, namely the annual EU-OCT Forum, Partnership Working Parties and trilateral meetings; institutional support to strengthen OCTA as a partner of the dialogue and training of EU-based Representatives of OCTs to better understand EU institutions; and, finally, studies and conferences on OCT development issues. These inputs have contributed to high-level discussions by OCTs on the selected themes, while institutional support has resulted in a stronger, better functioning association. Inputs from the Project had a direct impact on the delivery of a new OCTA Strategy, the setting up of its first secretariat but also on the Ministerial decision to look into ways of strengthening that secretariat and the creation and sustainable operation of three OCT networks on Renewable Energy (RE), Environment, and Research, Education & Innovation (REI).

As regards capacity-building, OCTs now have EDF training material geared to their needs. The study on EU funding opportunities has contributed to assess the potential for OCTs’ participation in EU programmes. A better identification of their capacities, enhanced visibility of their competences, as well as relevant information to increase EU’s interest in OCT specificities, have enhanced the probability of OCTs accessing such programmes in the future. There is also a better understanding within OCTs of the EU programmes and conditions of access, and an increased interest to participate in calls. The Research and Education mapping study has created the basis for a more comprehensive understanding and better visibility of OCT capacities in terms of research and education. The information made available constitutes a data-base for potential consortium-building with other EU and worldwide partners.

In the area of communication, the regular publication of the OCTA Newsletter and updating of the website, alongside participation in and organisation of several events with project support, have certainly enhanced OCTA’s visibility. Thus the COP21 side-events attracted the participation of VIPs and gave international exposure to OCTA and OCTs. The success of the OCT Energy Summit probably led to the signing of a Joint Energy Declaration with the EU a few months later. The Knowledge Centre developed under the Project has contributed to intra-OCTA communication, although it is more than just a communication tool.

The sustainability of the results achieved hinges on a continuation of the strong involvement of ExCo and OCTA working groups (WGs), and on the contribution of OCTA networks and Local Contact Points (LCPs). Over the medium to longer term, the envisaged strengthening of the OCTA Secretariat will also be significant in ensuring the sustainability of project results.

Pierre BERTHELOT,
Team Leader of the Technical Assistance Team (TAT)
OCTA’s networks: a bridge between OCTA and the Territories

The Technical Assistance support to the development of OCT networks has taken different shapes throughout the project’s lifetime in response to feedback from both OCTA and the European Commission. Finally, three OCT networks on renewable energy, environment, and research and education have been created and are now operational.

OCTA networks are composed of experts and technical staff, and serve as channels of communication among individual territories. The three OCTA networks that have been firmly and sustainably established with TA Project support (Environment; Research & Education; and Renewable Energy) encompass OCT actors on themes that are priorities for OCTA. The new OCTA Strategy and the draft 2016 OCTA Road Map echo these priorities.

Creation of three thematic networks

» The Research, education and innovation (REI) network which is now essentially connected to the Local Contact Points (LCPs) and some leading network actors in the R&E community in the OCTs notably under the longstanding EU funded research network projects targeting ORs and OCTs. The collaboration with these projects has permitted to raise the visibility of OCTA as a technical voice for OCTs. Important connections for future collaboration with research centres and institutions in the Pacific, Caribbean and Isolated territories have also been developed and are on-going. Willingness to better connect and formalise the network with the LCPs in order to strengthen partnerships, bring together complementary skills, expertise and knowledge share, is considered as a clear next step for its future development.

» Renewable Energy (RE) network: This network was established following the endorsement of the recommendations resulting from a 2014 Study on Renewable Energy and Green Policies in the OCTs, which took place during a number of OCT sessions within the Aruba Green Conference of 2014. Composed of experts and technicians, the objective of this network is to serve as a first technical channel of communication among the Territories. This network was instrumental in the consultations leading to the OCT Sustainable Energy Roadmap, and the initial consultations on a joint energy declaration with the European Union (EU).
The Climate Change and Ecosystems network: This network was created following the perceived need for a channel of communication with OCT experts working on climate change and ecosystems, resulting from the OCTA participation at the 2014 Guadeloupe Conference. After different attempts, this network was strengthened through the EDF11 Programming Workshop held in February 2016. Composed by experts and technical staff, the objective of this network is to serve as a first “expert” channel of communication with the individual Territories.

Sustainability of the networks

The contribution of the three networks in ensuring sustainability of project results will depend partly on the commitment of the relevant OCTA Working Group (WG) as coordinators/facilitators, and partly on the continued involvement of LCP at country level. The Project has spent much of its last few months seeking to further anchor LCPs within OCTA, including through the KC and targeted webinars.

LCPs play a key role for the sustainability of the networks, and therefore of project results. They can be the relay points of information flow and can continue to provide support in thematic consultations. Recent TA activities have been geared towards empowering LCPs and strengthening their capacities, while providing ownership of the results and tools delivered under the TA project, notably the Knowledge Centre.
Local Contact Points (LCPs) and National Contact Points (NCPs): Improving cooperation with Members States and local authorities

In order to strengthen the institutional and local capacity to participate in European research projects, as well as to address the need to improve regional collaboration in research and innovation (R&I) for the development of the islands, OCTA has nominated Local Contact Points (LCP) within the local authorities to facilitate information sharing at the territorial level.

Their main objectives are to:

- Engage with relevant research and education thematic networks;
- Facilitate and disseminate information on European projects;
- Liaise between EU institutions, Europe-based OCT Representatives and local REI actors: SMEs, research centres, clusters.

LCPs play a key role for the sustainability of the R&I networks as they can be the relays of information flows and support in thematic consultations. It is therefore crucial that OCTA Representatives continue engaging the LCPs network, including through thematic webinars, emphasizing the importance of empowering them and strengthening their capacities while providing ownership of the networks and the results and services achieved through the TAT project.

**REI webinars, best practice of the LCPs’ involvement**

The workspace for Research, Education and Innovation is one of the most visited on the OCTA Knowledge Centre; the online module on funding opportunities has been downloaded over a thousand times. Webinars targeting Local Contact Points (LCPs) have contributed to the success of this workspace. All the most important calls related to EU programmes to which OCTs are eligible are covered in the REI and Renewable Energies workspace providing users with latest information on available funding opportunities.

![OCT Association](image-url)
National Contact Points (NCPs): supports to thematic networks

Follow-up with the four Member States NCPs to raise awareness about OCTs and maintaining contacts with the larger NCPs network has been ongoing throughout the project period. Results achieved under the TA Project such as conferences, webinars, studies and newsletters have been shared with some of these NCPs who have shown interest vis-à-vis OCTs; yet, there is still significant room for enhanced sensitisation about OCTs within the NCP network.

To this end, as part of the final initiatives under this activity, a series of awareness-raising meetings with the National Contact Points (NCP) in the Member States have been carried out aiming to sensitize NCPs on the need for support for OCT and to convey the challenges faced by OCTs, their areas of interests, priorities and needs with regards to their participation in Horizon 2020. ☐

Results achieved by the TAT with the NCPs:

- **NCP awareness raising meetings** - Reinforcement & inclusion of NCP Member States network in OCTA’s activities;
- 6 Face to Face meetings with NCPs on Member States;
- Two fold impact: NCP comprehension of OCTs particularities and getting them on the radar for next calls and, for OCT EU Representatives better understanding on real possibilities for accessing funds.

- **Sustainability:**
  There is a potential collaboration to be developed between NCPs and LCPs which may help in pushing forward the information flow regarding calls and initiatives under non-EDF funded programmes. Capacities are created in the Territories so that this articulation with NCPs can continue in light of post TAT project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE DIRECTORY OF THE LCPs and NCPs, PLEASE CONSULT: http://octassociation.claroline-connect.net/workspaces/16/open/tool/home/tab/500
The Knowledge Centre: A platform to facilitate communication among OCTA members and within networks

The OCTA Knowledge Centre (KC) was successfully developed under the Annual Work Plan 2013. It has been used since to facilitate intra-OCTA interactions and foster a community of practice among its members.

The Knowledge Centre is a web based Learning Management System with a range of functionalities useful for intra-organisation communication. These tools include: dedicated work spaces for working groups/committees, forums, e-learning modules, wiki-type tools for group modification of documents, and a repository of documents. Each user also has a personal working space.

After 3 years of implementation since its development in 2013, the number of users has grown to reach 278 active users in March 2016. Monthly visits increased from 200 in 2014 to over 3000 in March 2016. Nearly 3 000 resources have been uploaded on the KC. These resources include 1875 files, 309 web resources, 102 wiki-pages, 62 lessons and 23 forum. The OCTA KC is being increasingly used by OCTA working groups (WGs) and ExCo for the sharing of information and planning of actions. Taken together, the WG workspaces contain over 1400 resources.

The Knowledge Centre has also become an essential complement for OCTA events. Thus, for the Climate change workshop and the Ministerial Conference in February 2016, the KC has been used both as a means for exchanging information and archiving presentations and other outputs of the events.

Indeed, the KC has contributed not only to improve intra-OCTA communication, but also to:

- Capacity-building when used for training purposes;
- To greater understanding of and access to EU programmes; and finally
- To policy dialogue too by being the preferred medium to circulate and exchange on draft documents developed for the recent MC/Forum and working party meetings (PWP)
Studies commissioned under the Technical Assistance to OCTA Project

During the 42 months of the TA to OCTA Project, several studies have been commissioned at the request of OCTA’s Executive Committee. These studies fall in two categories, both in line with project ToR: (i) those initiated to promote “an increased understanding of issues related to development between the EU and OCTs”; and (ii) studies undertaken to enable greater access of OCTs to non-EDF EU-funded programmes.

In the latter category, the rationale for the first study conducted by Mr. Germain Gultzgoff on EU horizontal programmes was OCTs’ desire to better understand the range of programmes to which they were eligible. The study identified the ones more likely to be relevant to OCTs in the light of their profiles, and spelt OCTs’ conditions of access. It was complemented by the study on “Mapping OCTs research and education landscape” in which Mr. Fabio Nascimbeni brought out OCTs’ assets as potential partners in research and education projects. The study findings will be useful for potential consortium building with scientific and academic stakeholders in the EU and beyond.

In the first category of studies, the project funded three concept notes or discussion papers in support of deliberations of OCTA’s Ministerial Conferences, as well as three studies. The 2013 Concept Note by Professor Michel Lacave dealt with OCTs and innovation. It identified issues that OCTs must address in seeking to enhance their competitiveness through innovation, bearing in mind the changing global context and the very specific context of island economies. Discussions on the Note helped shape OCTs inputs to the TSI Project that was about to be launched.

Towards the end of 2014, OCTA decided that a background paper on the international development scene would be a valuable input to inform deliberations of the 13th Ministerial Conference. The paper presented at the Ministerial Conference by Mr. Edwin Laurent was welcomed as an informative input on challenges facing OCTs and on the global context in which OCTs would have to develop their post 2015 Strategy.

In line with the theme of the 2015 EU-OCT Forum, the third discussion paper was on "Enhancing Growth and Investment Opportunities in the OCTs". Its objective was to assist in preparing OCT ministers for the high-level Forum exchange. Among other things, the paper authored by Dr. David Luff identified the provisions of the OAD that are directly relevant to enhancing growth and investment in OCTs and the conditions for these provisions to become fully operational.

The first of the three studies funded by the project looked into the integration of OCTs in their respective regions. It outlined how “regionalism” can assist OCTs in overcoming their structural handicaps, by pooling together markets, creating economies of scale, and sharing resources. The authors, Mr. Sacha Silva and Marc Tissot-Favre, propose a six-point action plan for closer regionalism between OCTs and their neighbours which, inter alia, calls for an enlargement of the RAO mandate to cover regional issues and the strengthening of OCTA so as to backstop individual RAOs and TAOs on programming and regional engagement.

The objective of Mrs Anna Ansmits’ study on OCTs’ statistical systems activity was to analyse and prioritise the recommendations of an earlier study and to propose an action plan, in order to improve
OCTs’ statistical systems. The ensuing report made recommendations scheduled over the short, medium and longer terms and led to language in the Political Declaration of the 13th Ministerial Conference that called upon the EU to “Support OCTs’ efforts to implement the recommendations of the 2011 and 2014 studies on OCTs’ Statistical Systems”.

The third study requested by ExCo was on the post-2020 Debate and its implications for OCTs. In this framework, the authors Ms Veronica White and Mr Carlos Illan: a) identified some of the major issues in the development landscape that will influence post-2020 discussions; b) analysed the implications of some of these trends for the future of the OCTs as a group and; c) underlined which elements will be required further reflection by OCTs in the run-up to the post-2020 discussions.

All of the forgoing studies can be consulted on OCTA’s Knowledge Centre.
Final Project Steering Committee Meeting
12th of May 2016 – Brussels

The Steering Committee of the Technical Assistance to OCTA Project held its last meeting in Brussels on 12th May 2016 to examine the Final Report of the Technical Assistance Team (TAT). The meeting was chaired by Mrs Chloé Calvignac, Vice-President of the Project Steering Committee (PSC). Also present on OCTA’s side were Mrs Janice Panton, MBE, President of OCTA’s Executive Committee, Mr Cedrick Tilma, Representative of Aruba and Representative of the OCTA Chair in Brussels; the newly appointed Head of the Greenland Representation in Brussels, Mr Mininnguaq Kleist, as well as the Secretary of the Representation, Ms Mira Kleist, and Mrs Carol Voges, Treasurer of OCTA. Mrs Inès Huwe from ICON also attended the meeting. The European Commission was represented at the meeting by Mr Paul Schildkamp, Mr Antonio Crespo-Moreno and Mrs Bardaji de la Torre.

Following a presentation on project achievements by the Technical Assistance Team, discussions focused on the sustainability of project results and the implications of OCTA’s legal status for access to EU funding. When closing the meeting, the Chair thanked the TAT for its support to OCTA whilst regretting that full use was not made of all the resources available under the project. In its final report, the TAT ascribed this situation to a number of factors including the absorption capacity of the project beneficiary, OCTA’s decision-taking procedures and difficulties related to use of short term experts.