**STRATEGY FOR EXPLOITING LESSONS AND SYNERGIES**

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# 1. Background and objectives

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) experience in the Western Balkans (WB) has grown considerably since 2007 and it is now necessary and appropriate to fully exploit it. This experience has to be assessed and compared with the even richer experience in territorial cooperation that EU Member States have. Therefore, it is important to establish a strategy for exploiting lessons learnt and synergies to be followed throughout the implementation stage of CBIB+2.

The strategy will aim:

* to obtain, distil and disseminate lessons learnt and knowledge gained from different sources; and
* to promote a best practice culture and the sharing of knowledge and experience, with a view to enhancing capacities and technical skills, and generally improving the effectiveness of the CBC programmes in the IPA beneficiary countries.

The strategy will cover different sources of lessons and knowledge, as well as various tools for getting feedback from a number of distinct target groups. It will be completed by sharing and dissemination activities.

The sources of lessons and other relevant knowledge will range from formal evaluation and capitalisation exercises to feedback obtained from study visits and exchanges from three broad strands:

* knowledge transfer from the EU / European Territorial Cooperation (ETC);
* distillation of lessons and knowledge gained from the 2007-2013 IPA CBC programmes, including the database of best practices and the recently launched overall evaluation;
* ongoing feedback from ETC programmes and the 2014-2020 IPA II CBC programmes, such as the new INTERACT capitalisation initiative[[1]](#footnote-1) for 2014-2020.

The outcomes of the strategy are expected to bring multiple benefits. At one end, a significant increase could be achieved in the knowledge of programming bodies about cooperation gaps, territorial needs and/or potentials in the programme areas. At the other end, projects could be empowered to improve the quality and sustainability of deliverables, strengthen their communication to common stakeholders, and the process could enable the reinforcement of existing cooperation networks and projects or forming of new ones.

CBIB+2 considers this strategy as a “live” document which should be updated on a regular basis until the completion of the project, incorporating any knowledge and experience gained not only through the implementation of the CBIB+2 activities but also the ones gained and shared by the operating structures (OSs) and the joint technical secretariats (JTSs) in the region.

# 2. Capturing “new” lessons

Lessons are usually insights based on the evaluation experience. Lessons learned from a programme evaluation usually highlight the design or implementation strengths and weaknesses that affected the overall performance of the programme[[2]](#footnote-2).

## 2.1 Types of lessons

The table below is summarising the different types of lessons[[3]](#footnote-3)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Type of lesson** | **Comments** |
| 1 | Generalised | They are valid or relevant to other contexts |
| 2 | Significant and important | Institutional memory remembers them distinctly and has the possibility to distinguish them from other findings |
| 3 | New | They represent a knowledge that is expected to be possessed before the start of a project or a programme |

## Attention should be paid to the fact that a result is not a lesson learned.

## 2.2 The process of lessons learned

There are four levels which can be used to identify new lessons that stakeholders may have learned[[4]](#footnote-4). The figure 1 below is illustrating the capturing process.

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**Figure 1: Process of capturing lessons**

This approach to identifying "lessons learned" is different from simply asking the stakeholders what lessons they have learned in the last xx months. The latter tends to produce generalisations, which then have to be tied to the ground by asking for examples.

# 3. Overall approach

In view of the wide range of sources of information and knowledge, the multiple mechanisms for sharing them and the variety of target groups, it will be suitable for the strategy to follow a flexible approach. This approach will make it possible to exploit and benefit from different sources of knowledge and the use of established and new tools for sharing and dissemination. Some of these tools could be brought in, as necessary and appropriate, during the course of project implementation.

The basic concept of the strategy is illustrated in Figure 2 below and is based on linking three components:

* sources of lessons and other relevant knowledge;
* mechanisms for sharing and dissemination; and
* target groups.

**Figure 2: A strategy for exploiting lessons learnt and synergies – Concept**



The interactive nature of this approach is illustrated in Figure 1, including the importance of feedback from the target groups.

The strategy will seek an efficient use of resources by making maximum use of established tools and planned activities. It will also rely on maximising synergies with other CBIB+2 activities and especially on benefiting from the communication strategy of the project. Conversely, it is expected that it will be making a contribution to the monitoring of the implementation of the 2014-2020 IPA CBC programmes and the measurement of results and impacts.

# 4. Sources of lessons and knowledge

The strategy is expected to tap a number of diverse sources of lessons and other relevant knowledge. The main sources will be as outlined below, but it is assumed that other opportunities could arise during the CBIB+2 implementation period. Therefore, the actual and potential sources should be kept under review by the CBIB+2 project team and the proposed Technical Working Group (TWG) – see sections 4.1 and 6, below.

***EU/ETC capitalisation and related activities***

Overall, there will be an active promotion of linkages with ETC and other EU-supported initiatives in the field of territorial cooperation to share knowledge and exploit synergies, including participation of WB CBC stakeholders in INTERACT, EC DG REGIO and other ETC seminars, and other relevant activities.

Particular importance will be attached to making systematic use of structured capitalisation exercises, undertaken under relevant programmes. Recent capitalisation activities include transnational cooperation programmes of direct relevance to the WB, such as the SEE[[5]](#footnote-5) and MED[[6]](#footnote-6) programmes.

***Best practice – databases and other documentation***

During the first phase of CBIB+, the project developed a database with some 46 examples of best practices drawn from intra-WB, EU-EU and EU-non EU borders, using a structured approach based on defined criteria and indicators, and assessment by OSs/Contracting Authorities (CAs) and JTSs. The CBIB+ database will be expanded further with new examples drawn from recent calls for proposals and, particularly, from thematic priority fields which are prominent in the 2014-2020 IPA II CBC programmes. This can be undertaken in conjunction with the preparation of information items for the CBIB+ newsletter ‘Yellow&Blue’ and other CBIB+ publications.

However, priority will be accorded to offering links to a broader range of documentation of good and best practices, including those of INTERACT and other EU/ETC sources. Indeed, individual ETC and IPA CBC programmes offer a wealth of such information and knowledge including databases, various publications, such as programme and project brochures[[7]](#footnote-7), conference presentations and proceedings[[8]](#footnote-8), etc.

***Feedback from study visits and/or exchanges***

A significant number of study visits or tours are planned in the framework of technical assistance provision in individual IPA CBC programmes, under the new TA service contracts. It will therefore be appropriate to seek and obtain feedback in a systematic way from such activities and to share it within the region. In this respect the CBIB+2 developed a template to be used for reporting on the implemented study visits, under the technical assistance service contracts (TASC) (see annex 28 of the handbook/toolkit for the TASC management).

It is not envisaged that the CBIB+2 project team directly organises any study visit. The team will focus instead on encouraging and supporting direct knowledge transfer through staff exchanges, under the relevant activity (i.e. activity 2.3 under component 2 ‘Assistance for new CBC programme development and transition between management modes’). This is based on the experience gained from a pilot exchange organised during CBIB+ Phase 1 on the process of accreditation for the conferral of management powers under the IPA component II between the Operating Structures of Serbia and Albania.

***Evaluation activities***

The main thrust will be on distilling and disseminating lessons from a growing body of relevant evaluation exercises.

Evaluations at WB-level will be of central importance, especially the overall evaluation of all 2017-2013 IPA CBC programmes which was expected to be completed by the end of 2016 but lasted longer due to the replacement of the framework contractor team in October as a consequence of their poor performance. This overall evaluation covered achievement against objectives in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and EU added value. Following a consultation in three working groups at the 4th CBC Consultative Forum held in Belgrade on 23 and 24 February 2017, its final report became available on 4 April 2017[[9]](#footnote-9). The evaluators came down to 40 recommendations structured in three groups, namely: programme management, technical assistance and performance framework. DG NEAR's first considerations about possible follow up actions concerning mostly the recommendations for the current programming period (2014-2020) as well as the strategic ones for the post-2020 were addressed during the 5th CBC Consultative Forum held in Struga on 17 and 18 October 2017. At this event, DG NEAR invited the participants to share their views on the proposed follow up actions and to provide additional information where needed. The follow up action plan is due to be agreed by DG NEAR management before the end of the year (2017).

The main[[10]](#footnote-10) previous WB-wide exercise covering all IPA CBC programmes was carried out in 2010-2011 and was of an interim nature addressing two particular aspects: ‘governance structures’ and ‘performance of the assistance’. However, there were some more specific evaluations during 2016, such as the one undertaken under LOT 11 FWC “Technical Assistance for Evaluation and Assessment of the effectiveness of the Cross Border and Transnational Co-operation Programmes (IPA Component II) on the territory of Serbia, implemented and financed by IPA Programmes in Serbia”.

There could also be valuable points to be drawn from other evaluation experiences, such as the ex-post evaluation of the SEE Programme[[11]](#footnote-11) which covered the WB and the one being carried out for CBC in the ENI area, or broader ones, notably, the recently completed ex-post evaluation at EU level of all 2007-2013 ETC programmes and the ex-post evaluations of some individual ETC programmes.

***Monitoring activities***

The need for a more systematic approach to monitoring was emphasised in the conclusions of the evaluation of the 2007-2013 IPA CBC programmes. The CBIB+2 team has, accordingly, developed a full set of indicators for each of the IPA II CBC Programmes incorporating the indicators which were already included in the adopted programmes and adding to them many more.

For each specific objective of each programme there are now five sub-sets of indicators:

* General output indicators
* General impact indicators
* (Specific) output indicators
* (Specific) outcome or result indicators
* (Specific) impact indicators

The monitoring system also includes aggregated indicators.

The CBIB+2 team has been working closely with the DEUs and the relevant OSs/JTSs in order to implement this monitoring system, initially, in the MK-AL, XK-MK, AL-XK, BA-ME and ME-AL programmes. This work included checking the relevance and revision of indicators for projects selected for financing under these programmes to ensure adequate representation of sets of indicators that were developed for each programme as described above. The revision was made in close cooperation between the programmes’ structures and the CBIB+2 team. The MK-AL, ME-AL, RS-BA and RS-ME programmes have already benefitted from special tailor-made capacity building events, targeting the respective assessors and/or evaluators per programme, while for the MK-AL, XK-MK, AL-XK, BA-ME and ME-AL programmes additional capacity building events were organised for grant beneficiaries and programme management structures (DEU, OS and JTS) focusing specifically on the implementation of the monitoring system on project and programme levels.

***Revised AIR and final report templates***

The CBIB+2 team has worked on a revised template of the annual implementation report (AIR) as well as a revised final narrative report for grant contracts that the new grant beneficiaries would have to follow. Both revisions are aimed at improving the monitoring and the collection of data and at assisting any future evaluations.

DG NEAR consulted the DEUs on the proposed AIR template and in January 2018 issued a formal communication to the CAs requesting them to use the revised template starting, if possible, with the AIR for 2017 (due by 15 February 2018).

The revised final narrative report template is still under consideration by DG NEAR.

***CBC programme-level and IPA-wide reporting***

The presentations delivered on the implementation of CBC programmes and the ensuing discussions during the 4th CBC Forum held on 23-24 February 2017 in Belgrade highlighted the importance and usefulness of a more systematic and consistent reporting at CBC programme level, as well as at IPA-CBC level.

The CBIB+2 team has therefore developed a template for programme-level reporting using readily available data sources, such as grant project reports and AIRs, as well as JTS specific inputs.

These programme-level reports can be compiled on an ongoing basis but they should be published at least once a year.

A further template has been developed for reporting on CBC IPA-wide for all programmes. It is based on data obtained from programme-level reporting and further calculations. The template consists of three parts:

1. Programme inputs and performance
2. Programme outputs & outcomes
3. Programme objectives and achievements

***Surveys of grant beneficiaries***

CBIB+ actively supported during its Phase 1 the use of such surveys. One of the surveys concerned the 2007-2013 CBC programme Serbia – Montenegro[[12]](#footnote-12) targeting only the first two calls of the programme. The questionnaire covered project and programme indicators, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact.

In the case of the CBC programme the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Albania two surveys were carried out in conjunction with two programme events held in Tirana and Struga[[13]](#footnote-13). One questionnaire covered procedural and managerial aspects of grant application, project implementation and related challenges and lessons. The other questionnaire mainly focused on substantive matters, such as the change in tourism related economic development or change in environmental development addressed by the projects, impact on target groups, as well as models of good practice and sustainability.

The conclusions drawn from these surveys suggested that they should be replicated under as many as possible of the IPA II CBC programmes. Accordingly, the CBIB+2 team has helped all OSs to conduct surveys of project beneficiaries by offering appropriate model questionnaire(s), advising on how to customise them and on how to analyse the results obtained.

*Questionnaires for 2014-2020 CBC programmes*

As of March 2018, the CBIB+2 team had developed and offered to CAs a full set of questionnaires, as follows:

* Questionnaire for **unsuccessful applicants** under the first call for proposals – a template and customised questionnaires initially for the programmes which have completed all steps in project selection, i.e. AL-XK, BA-ME, MK-AL, XK-MK and ME-AL. For the time being, this questionnaire was distributed by the JTS to the unsuccessful applicants of the MK-AL programme at the end of April 2018 and the collection of the filled in questionnaires is in progress (already around 30 replies have been collected).
* Questionnaire for **potential beneficiaries,** i.e. participants in info sessions, PCM training and other such events – several questionnaires and accompanying reports have already been prepared, namely, for RS-BA, RS-ME, MK-AL, BA-ME, XK-MK, AL-XK (see also below);
* Questionnaire for **JMC members** – a template and customised questionnaires have been developed for AL-XK, BA-ME, MK-AL, XK-MK and RS-MK;
* Questionnaire for **grant beneficiaries** – proposed to be integrated into the new final narrative report (see section 4).

*Questionnaires for 2007-2013 CBC programmes*

During September-October 2016, the CBIB+2 team sought the opinion of the relevant OSs on tailor-made questionnaires for every 2007-2013 CBC programme, encompassing grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants. The table below illustrates the state of play with these questionnaires in May 2018:

| **IPA CBC programme** | **Background** | **Status** | **Comment** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **RS-ME**  **(first round)** | Questionnaires dispatched in October 2015 to grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants of the two calls of the programme at that time | Analysis of responses and preparation of a report carried out in November-December 2015. | * Pilot test of this initiative. * Report incorporated to the 2015 AIR. |
| **RS-ME**  **(second round)** | On 5 December 2016, the CBIB+2 project team circulated for comments the questionnaires for both unsuccessful and successful applicants of the last call of the programme. The questionnaires contained additional questions proposed by the OS in RS.  These questionnaires were dispatched on 2 February 2017 to grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants of the third call for proposals of the programme. | 134 questionnaires were dispatched to unsuccessful applicants (out of which 11 could not be delivered). The questionnaires are encompassing the unsuccessful applicants of the three calls of the programme. By the deadline for the return of the filled-out questionnaires by unsuccessful applicants (13 February 2017), 14 questionnaires were completed. CBIB+2 received the questionnaires on 21 December 2017. | CBIB+ prepared a report on the responses during the first semester of 2018. |
| **MK-AL** | Questionnaires dispatched by the JTS on 16 June 2016:  94 questionnaires to grant beneficiaries and 216 to unsuccessful applicants.  The JTS sent four reminders in total in June, July, August and November 2016. | The collection of questionnaires from grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants of the three calls of the programme was concluded: 51 questionnaires have filled out by grant beneficiaries and only 12 by unsuccessful applicants of the last call for proposals. | CBIB+ drafted the analytical report in May 2017. |
| **ME-XK** | Questionnaires sent for comments to the OSs on 23 August 2016.  The DEU in ME issued some comments on 29 August 2016. The questionnaires were revised after the DEU ME comments and resent to the OSs for action on 31 August 2016.  On 16 September 2016, in Podgorica, the CBIB+2 project team delivered a presentation on the purpose and benefit of collecting information via the questionnaires. The OS positively received the initiative. | The questionnaire to GBs should have been dispatched in summer 2017 when the implementation of the projects would have ended, while the questionnaire for the unsuccessful applicants could have been dispatched at any convenient time.  CBIB+ dispatched a reminder on both types of questionnaires on 7 September 2017 & the same day the JTS confirmed that the questionnaire for grant beneficiaries was dispatched after receiving the reminder. The deadline for receiving responses was set on 22 September 2017. On 29 September the JTS returned 9 questionnaires received from GBs (9 out the 9 projects) as well as 6 questionnaires from the unsuccessful applicants (out of the 44 in totals). | CBIB+ drafted the analytical report in the first semester of 2018. |
| **MK-XK** | Questionnaires sent for comments to the OSs on 23 August 2016. | Twelve questionnaires (one per contract) were dispatched in spring 2017 to the six pairs of grant beneficiaries under the sole call of the 2010-2013 programme.  Ten questionnaires have been collected to date (out of 7 projects implemented). The JTS staff is trying to obtain a 100% response rate. | CBIB+ has drafted a preliminary analytical report. A draft final report prepared on 14 September 2017.  One project finished the implementation late summer and they were asked to update their questionnaire. This update is taken into consideration and the draft final report has been revised accordingly. |
| **RS-BA** | Questionnaires sent for comments to the OSs on 28 September 2016.  The original questionnaires were not dispatched to grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants of the two programme calls by 1 December 2016.  On 5 December 2016, the CBIB+2 project team circulated for comments an upgrade version of the questionnaires for both unsuccessful and successful applicants of the two calls of the programme. These questionnaires contained additional questions proposed by the OS in RS | These questionnaires were dispatched on 31 January 2017 to 72 grant beneficiaries (out of which 13 emails were not delivered) and 374 unsuccessful applicants (out of which 79 emails were not delivered).  The questionnaires are encompassing the grant beneficiaries of the first and second calls for proposals and the unsuccessful applicants of the three calls of the programme.  The deadline for the return of filled-out questionnaires was 14 February 2017.  The OS in RS sent to the CBIB+ team 11 questionnaires (5 from grant beneficiaries and 6 from unsuccessful applicants) on 14 July 2017. | CBIB+ drafted the analytical report in the first semester of 2018. |
| **BA-ME** | Questionnaires sent for comments to the OSs on 28 September 2016.  On 1 November 2016, in Sarajevo, the CBIB+2 project team delivered a brief presentation on the purpose and benefit of collecting information via the questionnaires. Both the OS and the DEU in BA positively received the initiative. | The questionnaires were dispatched to the grant beneficiaries of three calls on 28 December 2016. The OSs decided not to circulate the questionnaires amongst the unsuccessful applicants of any call.  14 questionnaires were received duly filled out by the cut-off date (16 January 2017). The JTS sent a reminder to those who had not delivered any questionnaire on 29 January 2017. In the end, the exercise offered 16 questionnaires filled out by the grant beneficiaries and two completed by the JTS after monitoring visits. | The first draft of the analytical report was prepared on the 22 September 2017. This report was dispatched to the JTS end of October, with some minor comments. |
| **AL-XK** | On 15 September 2016, in Tirana, the CBIB+2 project team delivered a brief presentation on the purpose and benefit of collecting information via the questionnaires. The OS positively received the initiative.  Questionnaires sent for comments to the OSs on 28 September 2016.  On 30/09 the OS replied with some suggestions on the approach, prior to the submission of the questionnaires to the recipients.  An update to the questionnaire for the GBs as well as further instructions on how to proceed was emailed to the JTS on the 22 November 2016.  We were informed on 6 December 2016 that the OSs, with the assistance of the JTS, were trying to retrieve the list of unsuccessful applicants with no success. | On 14 December 2016, 14 questionnaires were dispatched to the grant beneficiaries and 3 to the unsuccessful applicants.  The questionnaires are encompassing the grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants of the sole call of the programme.  By the cut-off date (23 December 2016), 6 questionnaires were received from grant beneficiaries and no questionnaire from the unsuccessful applicants. Another questionnaire (the last one) from a grant beneficiary was received later. | CBIB+ with the support of the JTS AL-XK prepared on 19 June 2017 a draft report. The draft final report was drawn in September 2017. |
| **AL-ME** | Questionnaires sent for comments to the OSs on 28 September 2016. | It seems that over 130 questionnaires to grant beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants were dispatched by the JTS at the beginning of February 2017.  Although the deadline for responding was extended in one occasion, the JTS of the programme managed to collect only 29 questionnaires in two rounds (up to July 2017) with the following distribution:   * 1st call: 3 questionnaires from a pair of grant beneficiaries and 2 questionnaires from unsuccessful applicants * 2nd call: 4 questionnaires from a pair of grant beneficiaries and 2 questionnaires from unsuccessful applicants * 3rd call: 6 questionnaires from a pair of grant beneficiaries and 12 questionnaires from unsuccessful applicants.   In short, out of the 24 operations funded under the 3 calls, only 13 questionnaires from grant beneficiaries have been received. | Due to the low rate of returned questionnaires, the first draft of the analytical report was prepared in November 2017, after discussion with the MNE and AL OS during the CBC Forum held in Struga in October 2017.  CBIB+ drafted the final analytical report in the first semester of 2018. |

***Comparison report***

The CBIB+2 team has already prepared several versions of a comparison report which is based on the analyses carried out after the collection of responses to the ex-post surveys of the 2007-2013 BC programmes. The report is focusing on the part of the questionnaire dealing with qualitative data provided by the respondents on effectiveness, impact and conclusions and recommendations. So far data from six programmes have been inserted. Once all programmes’ analysis reports will be ready, CBIB+2 will make available an advanced working version of the comparative report.

***Surveys of potential beneficiaries***

The above surveys have been extended to cover would-be beneficiaries, focusing on their awareness, capacities, potential and needs. For this purpose, the JTSs should maintain suitable and updated databases of potential beneficiaries, e.g. with contact details of those participating in info days and information sessions during calls for proposals. These contact details can be used for online surveys. Programme administrators should conduct such surveys for reasons of ownership, proximity and specificity, with support provided by the CBIB+2 project team. Surveys like these have been already tested under the first round of IPA II CBC calls for proposals and draft reports on potential beneficiaries have been prepared for the following programmes: MK-AL, MK-XK, BA-ME, AL-XK, RS-BA and RS-ME with the support of the respective JTSs.

Regional-level surveys could also be considered given the fact that the mailing list used for the distribution of the CBIB+ newsletter already contains thousands of email addresses. The mailing list is due to be updated and upgraded during the Phase 2 and, if information on location and type of organisation were to be added, it would open the possibility of WB-wide online (sample) surveys. It would be appropriate to carry out pilot survey(s) before attempting any widespread application of these regional ones.

***Opinion polls of local population***

Surveys of the local population in the programme area(s) have not been attempted so far either by the CBIB+ or the individual programme administrators, but they could prove invaluable especially in establishing the degree of awareness, getting feedback regarding issues that should be addressed by CBC and obtaining information on the likely effectiveness and visibility of the programmes. The last point could, furthermore, be linked to impact assessment.

Technical and financial issues will have to be considered and resolved before piloting this approach, preferably at programme level for the same reasons as for the surveys of potential beneficiaries. In this case, too, the CBIB+2 project team will be encouraging and supporting the OSs and JTSs.

# 5. Mechanisms and priorities for sharing and disseminating

## 5.1 Technical Working Group

A range of tools will be available for capturing, distilling and disseminating lessons and other relevant knowledge, and for fostering synergies between projects, programmes and stakeholders. This whole process requires clear guidance and legitimacy, and for this reason a Technical Working Group (TWG) should be assigned the role of facilitator and catalyst for the implementation of this strategy since October 2017. The TWG could contribute by:

* defining the thematic areas and issues to be addressed;
* making recommendations regarding the use of different sources of lessons and dissemination tools;
* distilling key lessons and key messages on a regular basis;
* reviewing the strategy and contributing to its updating.

Practical arrangements for the setting up and operation of this TWG have taken into account the creation of different TWGs under CBIB+2 and their relationship with the Regional Forum. Thus, the TWG, dealing with this strategy, has been integrated into a TWG formed in October 2017 to deal with performance management and an impact assessment methodology.

The members of the TWG have been provided with extensive documentation and discussions within this group are starting. To obtain systematic feedback from the members of the group and stimulate discussion, a questionnaire was developed in March 2018 with the intention of using it as a pilot for obtaining online responses.

In January 2018 another TWG was established to deal with the post-2020 IPA CBC programmes. The purpose of this TWG is to contribute to the debate on the strategic orientations of IPA-IPA CBC programmes in the post-2020 period based on professional exchanges and best practices and other relevant experience of WB stakeholders.

The participants will:

* explore the advantages and disadvantages of the available options, compile its observations (and formulate additional options or variants, if appropriate);
* agree on a number of practical suggestions of relevance to the realisation of the (emerging as preferred) options;
* if appropriate, put forward proposals regarding the planning of the preparation of IPA III CBC programmes.

Background documentation and a questionnaire elaborated by the CBIB+2 team were sent out to the group members on 22.02.2018 to set the exchanges and discussion in motion. A further questionnaire was developed by the CBIB+2 team and was issued at the JTS event on 8/9.03.2018 to obtain practitioners’ inputs. These exchanges and discussions are expected to culminate at a workshop planned for September 2018 on the post-2020 options, with the participation of DG NEAR and Interact representatives. Moreover, questionnaires on the strategic orientations of the post-2020 IPA CBC programmes were filled out by members of the JMC BA-ME (April 2018, Podgorica) and RS-MK (May 2018, Leskovac), as well as for different CBC stakeholders participating in a workshop for programme, project and procurement management during May 2018 in Podgorica, Tirana, Skopje and Pristina.

## 5.2 Sharing and dissemination tools

The project should make full use of established tools available since Phase 1, such as the CBC Regional Forum and the CBIB+ website. Additionally, other possibilities should be explored to ensure that all target groups can be reached effectively and feedback is obtained and valorised.

Overall, the range and efficacy of the tools will need to be kept under review by the CBIB+2 team and the TWG, and adjustments are expected to be made throughout the implementation period (see Section 6).

***CBC Regional Forum***

This is the central forum for key stakeholders from all IPA CBC programmes and can play a crucial role, including: receiving and debating reports on key lessons; reviewing strategy implementation/adaptation; and fostering synergies. In terms of target groups, the CBC Regional Forum is strongly focused on programme administrators.

This forum has already been used for similar debates in Phase 1. For example, the 2nd Forum (11-12 September 2014, Sarajevo) proved to be a very useful platform for discussing issues of regional importance linked to the upcoming steps in programmes implementation as well as ‘spin-off effects, impacts and visibility’.

The forum is also used systematically in Phase 2 for such debates and for drawing lessons. For instance:

* In the 4th Forum (23/24 February 2017, Belgrade) there were several sessions on the **Evaluation of IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programmes 2007-2013**: presentation of the final evaluation report; working groups led by DG NEAR on follow up of evaluation's recommendations; feedback from the working groups and plenary discussion.
* In the 5th Forum (17-18 October 2017, Struga) there was a session dedicated to **Monitoring system – Performance Framework:** characteristics of the system, collection, administration and usage of data, planned capacity building for grant beneficiaries and JTS staff.

***Website***

The ‘CBIBplus’ website (<http://www.cbibplus.eu/>) is also a well-established tool, covering explicitly ‘sharing knowledge for IPA CBC’ and including sections on best practices and e-tools (e-publications, e-library, e-directory, e-multimedia). It can be actively used for pursuing the objectives of the strategy practically vis-à-vis all target groups. The CBC programme websites can be used similarly, and the CBIB+2 team can also encourage other stakeholders to publish relevant information on their websites.

***Publications***

The CBIB+2 will continue with different types of publications in print and/or electronic form: newsletter (‘Yellow&Blue’), flash news, and leaflets. These will offer many opportunities for presenting lessons and other information and knowledge, in ways appropriate for dissemination to different target groups.

***Cooperation days/fairs***

Such events have been organised on an ad hoc basis in some of the beneficiary countries. The CBIB+2 team will encourage and support OSs/JTSs so that future cooperation days or fairs are held more systematically in all beneficiary countries. Generally, all CBC programmes offer opportunities for disseminating information on lessons learnt. In addition, one specific event each year, under the European Cooperation day celebration (September/October), is extremely useful, especially with adequate national media coverage.

These events will offer an important opportunity for reaching and informing a broader audience of potential beneficiaries.

***Other possibilities***

The CBIB+2 project team and the subject-related TWG should explore other options. ***Communication and*** ***visibility activities*** of different IPA CBC programmes and of the CBIB+2 project itself with the aim of raising awareness of the local population should be one of these options. Another one could be the use of ***social media*** to reach the programme administrators. Moreover, as discussed during the Steering Committee meeting of the CBIB+2 project held in Struga on 17 October 2017, the project team will revise an DG NEAR paper on “Communication Guidelines” to adapt it to the needs of the IPA countries when implementing CBC programmes.

Other possibilities to be explored should aim to complement and strengthen two-way processes of informing target groups and receiving feedback. They could include:

* establishing systematic ***links with umbrella organisations***, such as associations of cities/municipalities, professional chambers and NGOs;
* promoting a ***‘CBC quality circle’***[[14]](#footnote-14) of individuals and/or organisations drawn from all groups of stakeholders[[15]](#footnote-15), who will be able to identify CBC obstacles and other issues, and will explore and follow up solutions, beyond the confined scope of the IPA CBC programmes and with a longer-term sustainability perspective.

## 5.3 Priorities

In defining sectoral or thematic priority areas the CBIB+2 project team, the TWG and from time to time the CBC Regional Forum will need to take account of the thematic priorities selected in the IPA CBC programmes. As shown in Figure 3, two such priorities have been adopted by all programmes, namely, ‘protecting the environment, etc.’ and ‘encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage’. Three other thematic priorities are followed by some of the programmes and concern ‘promoting employment’, ‘enhancing competitiveness’, and ‘investing in youth, education and skills’.

**Figure 3: Thematic priorities selected in CBC Programmes**

| **No.** | **Thematic priority/programme** | **AL-MNE** | **AL-KSV** | **BiH-MNE** | **MK-AL** | **MK-KSV** | **KSV-MNE** | **RS-BiH** | **RS-MNE** | **RS-MK** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TP1 | Promoting employment, labour, mobility and social inclusion across the border |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP2 | Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and migration, risk prevention and management |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP3 | Promoting sustainable transport and improving public infrastructures |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP4 | Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP5 | Investing in youth, education and skills |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP6 | Promoting local and regional governance, planning and administrative capacity building |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP7 | Enhancing competitiveness, business and SME development, trade and investment |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TP8 | Strengthening research, technological development, innovation and ICT |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

In seeking to prioritise the procedural and management issues that are of central interest in the lessons sharing process, the recent[[16]](#footnote-16) CBIB+ questionnaires for grant beneficiaries of the CBC programme MK-AL could be used as a reference point. These *inter alia* covered:

* Preparation of grant applications (partner search forums, info sessions, co-financing, etc.)
* Implementation of projects (assistance received, relations with the CA, monitoring visits, challenges, lessons, etc.)
* Improvements to calls for proposals
* Assessing the impact of actions on target groups or population of programme area
* Good practice in use of indicators to measure success
* Good practice in project management and lessons learnt
* Internal monitoring mechanisms
* Adapting to changes and remedial actions
* Changes/improvements in partnership
* Sustainability.

Regarding the format of the information to be disseminated, it should be assumed that there will be two possibilities: dissemination of relevant raw material and dissemination of the analysis processed by the CBIB+2 team and the TWG. The most appropriate dissemination tool(s) and format will be decided on a case-by-case basis taking into account the needs of particular target groups.

# 6. Target groups

The strategy will need to deal with different target groups, some of which will have distinct requirements, as outlined below.

***Programme administrators***

This is a fairly broad group of, mostly, officials engaged in different aspects of CBC programme management, including calls for proposals, project selection and contracting, monitoring and impact assessment. Their focus tends to be at national/programme level (OS, CA, JTS and Delegation of the European Union - DEU) but in some cases it is at regional level, notably in the case of DG NEAR.

***Project implementing bodies (programme beneficiaries)***

This is the most precisely defined target group, consisting of the organisations and their staff who are specifically engaged in the implementation of projects supported by the IPA CBC programmes. They have specific concerns over a wide range of issues and, similarly, can contribute extensively and substantively on many different aspects affecting the performance of IPA CBC projects and programmes.

***Potential beneficiaries***

This encompasses the above target group (beneficiaries) but is much broader, covering public bodies, civil society organisations, and possibly private sector organisations which are (or might be) eligible for seeking support for CBC projects under the IPA CBC programmes.

A ‘pool’ of potential beneficiaries is already defined for each programme, based on the databases of the JTSs, and reflect the potential beneficiaries who are known to have expressed an interest, for instance, by participating at info days or submitting unsuccessful project applications. However, these ‘pools’ could be enlarged further, particularly, by proactively channelling relevant information through umbrella organisations and by raising awareness among the general population in the programme areas (see below).

***Programme area (local) population***

This is a large group comprising all the local population in a programme area; effectively all the people who should ultimately benefit (albeit indirectly) from the interventions supported by the relevant IPA CBC programme(s).

Raising the awareness of the local population and getting feedback regarding issues that could/should be addressed by CBC programmes and on the likely effectiveness of projects and programmes are of paramount importance.

# 7. Reviewing and adapting the strategy

Although the strategy will follow a flexible approach it will be appropriate to establish a structured process for reviewing and adapting it as the project unfolds, including:

* an initial action plan which could, *inter alia*, signpost to new or pilot activities and flag up existing tools (e.g. publications, CBC Regional Forum), as well as provide a basis for future reviews and updates; and
* regular short reports by the TWG/project team on key lessons drawn from various sources and from feedback from the target groups.

Since the CBIB+2 project will be reporting progress on a six-monthly basis, it will be appropriate to follow this pattern in planning and reviewing relevant activities (e.g. surveys and publications) and this is illustrated in the following indicative time plan.

**Figure 4: Indicative time plan**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Months 1-6** | **Months 7-12** | **Months 13-18** | **Months 19-24** | **Months 25-30** | **Months 31-36** |
| Develop strategy  Initial action plan  Launch study visit feedback system | Pilot potential beneficiaries survey  Launch promotion of links with umbrella orgs  Plan for the exchanges\*  Start expanding best practice database | Roll out potential beneficiaries surveys  Launch exchanges\*  Launch promotion of ‘CBC quality circle’ | Roll out beneficiaries surveys  Roll out potential beneficiaries surveys  Roll out opinion polls of local population  Set-up TWG | Roll out beneficiaries surveys  Roll out potential beneficiaries surveys  Roll out opinion polls of local population | Completion |
|  | Short report on key lessons (and strategy adaptation, if appropriate) | Short report on key lessons (and strategy adaptation, if appropriate) | Short report on key lessons (and strategy adaptation, if appropriate) | Short report on key lessons (and strategy adaptation, if appropriate) |  |
| Progress report, as part of 6-monthly report | Progress report, as part of 6-monthly report | Progress report, as part of 6-monthly report | Progress report, as part of 6-monthly report | Progress report, as part of 6-monthly report | Results achieved, as part of final report |

\*exchanges are connected with the activity for provision of support for the transition from direct to indirect management mode.

It will be further discussed and analysed if the roll out of opinions and surveys will be on a yearly or on 6 monthly basis.

1. <http://www.interact-eu.net/focus_on_etc_2014/survey_let_s_capitalise/512/20077>

   <http://admin.interact-eu.net/downloads/9650/INTERACT_Capitalisation_Survey_s_background_paper_30_11_2015.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ref. ‘Local partnerships for employment’, EU CARDS project in Croatia 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibidem. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/lessons.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/achievements/capitalisation_strategy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.programmemed.eu/en/the-programme/programme-capitalisation.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. e.g. <http://www.cbc-cro-bih.net/images/stories/Dokumenti/Brosura2015.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. e.g. <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/opendays/od2015/doc/OD2015_web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/final\_approved\_evaluation\_report\_\_0.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. There was also an earlier evaluation covering WB “Phare Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 1999-2003” by MHW, delivered in 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/news_and_events/news/didseeprogrammefulfilitsmission> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Report on questionnaire on ex post monitoring of the projects implemented under 2007-2013 IPA I Cross-Border Programme Serbia – Montenegro, November 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Report on two events related to the implementation of the three cycles of IPA I Cross-Border Programme the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Albania, May 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For example, in the form of a group in a social network [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Including ‘CBC champions’ (i.e. advocates of CBC, promoters/managers of successful CBC projects, advocates of CBC, research institutes engaged in CBC-related work). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. September 2014 and April 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)