

Planning in HR is possible: Action Against Hunger Spain's adoption of a new workforce planning process

Background

Action Against Hunger/ACF International is an international humanitarian organisation committed to ending child hunger. We work in over 40 countries around the world, helping over nine million people every year.

[Action Against Hunger \(ACF\) Spain](#) employs 135 staff based in its Madrid headquarters with 1600 staff in 15 countries in Latin America, Eurasia and Africa. In 2013, ACF Spain's human resources (HR) department was facing challenges due to its lack of long-term planning for vacancies and HR needs. The department felt that they were reactively responding to recruitment needs, rather than proactively planning ahead. The main challenges they faced were:

- No prior anticipation of HR needs
- No clear vision on the profiles needed
- Only addressing urgent and immediate needs
- Not thinking of long-term placements.

This way of working made it next to impossible to cover vacancies on time and impacted negatively on the perception held by other departments of the HR team's capacity and efficiency. It also hindered the HR department's capacity to develop mid/long-term career plans for the expatriate staff and guarantee continuity within the organisation. Not being able to anticipate the organisation's needs also meant that the team did not have the necessary tools to develop a recruitment strategy. The HR team felt that they were constantly fighting fires and never undertaking efficient and effective workforce planning.

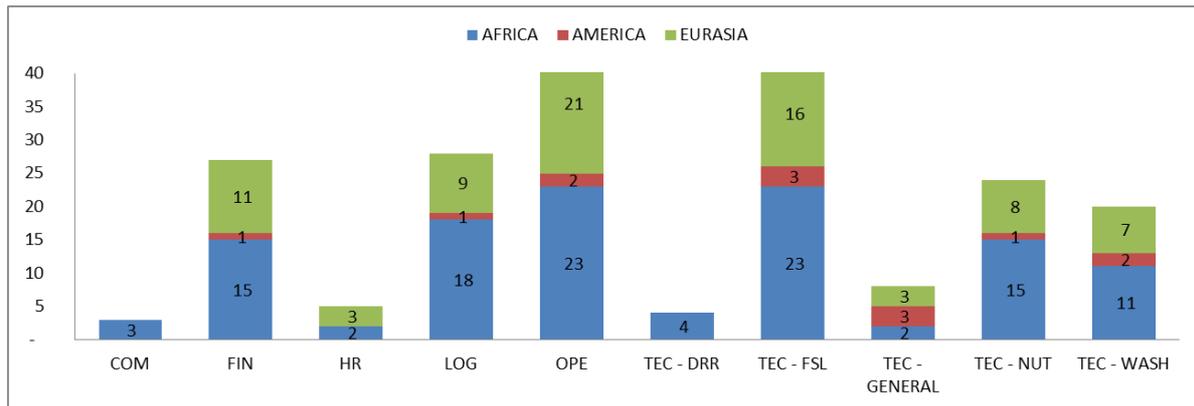
Analysis and action

ACF Spain undertook a range of data collection and analysis activities to address the situation. In consultation with country directors, operational staff and heads of departments, ACF Spain's HR team undertook a global forecasting analysis, looking at overall organisational data such as the organisation's growth rate, as well as HR data such as staff turnover rates, country and regional needs, categorising staff profiles, so they had a better picture of needs. They categorised positions in "families", according to their level of responsibility.

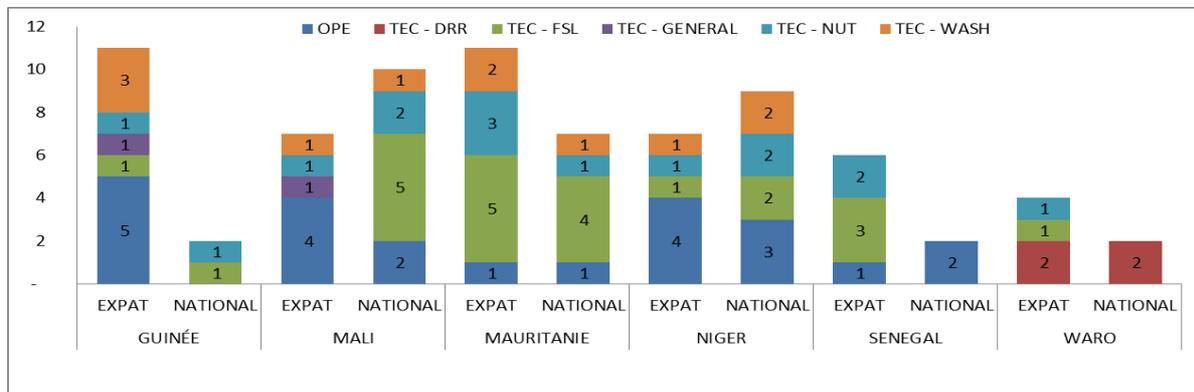
Results of the analysis:

- Operational volume growth 15% per year
- Expatriates growth 7% per year
- National staff growth 13% per year
- Headquarters (HQ) staff growth 12% per year

As seen in the chart below, the main needs were in the operations department followed by the food security and livelihoods department, and most of the positions were concentrated in Africa and the Middle East. This kind of planning allowed them to focus on the recruitment strategies at national and international level, career planning, and moving of roving experts.



In the chart below we can easily identify that the main needs of expatriates were in Guinea followed by Mauritania and in the case of national staff vacancies would mainly be in Mali and Niger.



This approach particularly relied on excellent perception from partners, missions and other departments such as operations, finances and technicians.

Armed with the findings from their analysis, the HR team embarked on some innovative strategies to address the needs of the organisation. For example, they found that there was a need (current and future) for French-speaking staff in a number of countries, so they launched a “commando” recruitment campaign in French-speaking countries. The campaign was announced on different recruitment webpages at national and international level. A HR team went to the countries where staff would be placed and spent one week doing HR and technical assessments.

Another new strategy launched was a project to **identify the potential within their own teams**. Linked with performance management, the HR team prepared a matrix to detect the potential with some indicators and they are currently in the process of mapping talent within the organisation.

Results and lessons learned

One of the challenges of this project was changing the accepted view that it is impossible to plan or foresee HR needs when working in the humanitarian sector. The nature of humanitarian organisations will not change, but this case study shows that using data to anticipate needs, working with other departments and using innovative strategies can yield positive results:

Anticipation: By gathering and analysing data, the HR team could forecast the staffing needs of the organisation – the number of roles to recruit, the type of roles needed, the locations – early on which meant quicker and better placements of candidates.

Leadership and collaboration: The HR team worked closely with other departments to define the needs and address these.

Innovative strategies: The innovative recruitment strategies used by the HR team were successful in finding suitable candidates both within and outside the organisation. This not only meant new staff were found, but also that existing staff had new opportunities within the organisation.

As a result of its activities, ACF Spain's HR is more strategic and prepared and less reactive. The gap in field positions has also been reduced from 5% to 2%.