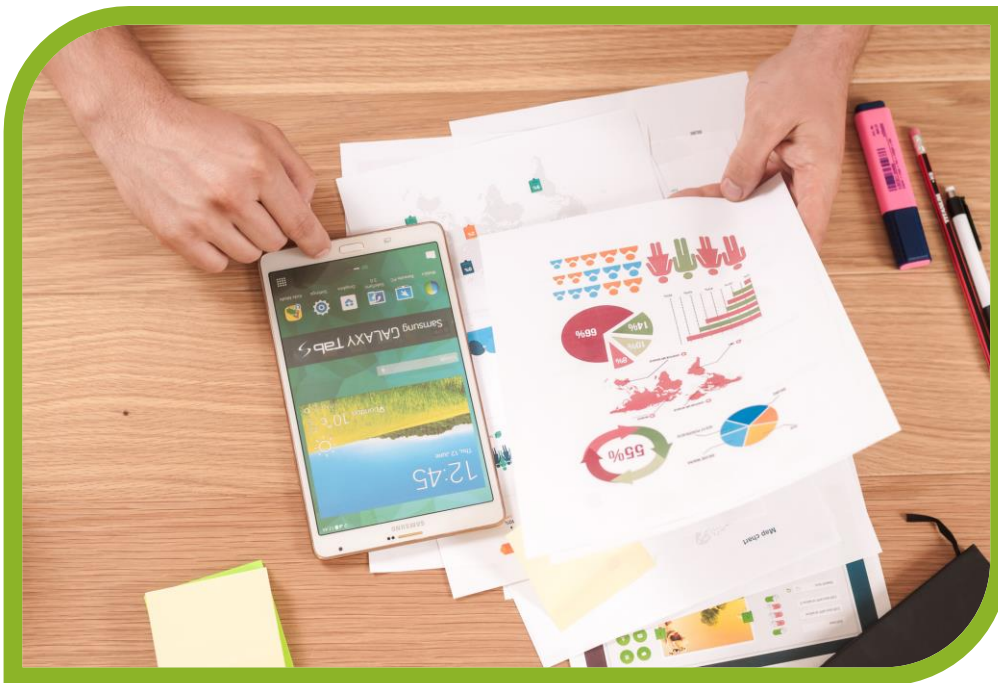


ReCAP Brand Audit

Inception Report



Mercury Group Ltd

KMN2141A

June 2018

mercurygroup

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Contents

Abstract	4
Key words	4
Executive summary	5
1 Background	6
2 Project Overview	6
2.1 Desk research.....	6
2.2 Familiarisation	7
2.3 Stakeholder mapping and consultation	7
2.4 Touchpoints and personas.....	7
2.5 Online presence assessment	7
2.6 Assessment of brand framework.....	7
2.7 Vision and mission of the ReCAP, AsCAP and AfCAP programmes.....	7
3 Clients and target audiences	8
4 Institutional context	8
5 Progress, achievement and measurement	9
6 Challenges	9
7 Aspired brand values	9
8 Assessment of web-analytics for the ReCAP website, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) measures that have been undertaken and social media presence	10
8.1 URL/ permalinks/ structure	10
8.2 Meta-data	10
8.3 Content	10
8.4 Name (negative searches)	11
8.5 Code Quality	11
8.6 Mobile responsiveness	11
8.7 Bounce rate.....	11
8.8 Exit pages.....	11
8.9 Referral sites and Search terms	11
8.10 Branding and Visibility	12
9 Managing the project	12
10 Programme team	12
11 Audit methodology	12
12 Initial strengths and weaknesses assessments for the three brands	13
13 Comments on terms of reference	13
14 Project risk assessment	13

Abstract

The project is breaking down into two main areas:

- Brand audit for the three brands (ReCAP, AfCAP and AsCAP)
- Assessment of web-analytics for the ReCAP website, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) measures that have been undertaken and social media presence

The brand audit through a seven-stage process as follows:

- i. Desk research
- ii. Familiarisation
- iii. Stakeholder mapping and consultation
- iv. Touchpoints and personas
- v. Online presence assessment
- vi. Assessment of brand framework
- vii. Vision and mission of the ReCAP, AsCAP and AfCAP programmes.

The report identifies proposed target audiences and the institutional context within which the project is delivered and outlines the challenges, aspired values, methodology, management and measurement processes which will form the project.

Key words

Keywords for this report are: Brand, Audit, Marketing, Perception, Web, Search Engine Optimisation, online presence

Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP)

Safe and sustainable transport for rural communities

ReCAP is a research programme, funded by UK Aid, with the aim of promoting safe and sustainable transport for rural communities in Africa and Asia. ReCAP comprises the Africa Community Access Partnership (AfCAP) and the Asia Community Access Partnership (AsCAP). These partnerships support knowledge sharing between participating countries in order to enhance the uptake of low cost, proven solutions for rural access that maximise the use of local resources. The ReCAP programme is managed by Cardno Emerging Markets (UK) Ltd.

www.research4cap.org

Executive summary

ReCAP (Research for Community Access Partnership) brings together current and former DFID-funded research programmes in rural roads and transport services. Four years into the project, ReCAP would like to have a better understanding of the current status of brand awareness, identity and online presence for the three brands. For this purpose ReCAP tendered a brand audit. The brand audit will be delivered through a seven-stage process as follows:

- i. Desk research
- ii. Familiarisation
- iii. Stakeholder mapping and consultation
- iv. Touchpoints and personas
- v. Online presence assessment
- vi. Assessment of brand framework
- vii. Vision and mission of the ReCAP, AsCAP and AfCAP programmes.

The stakeholder consultation element of the project is likely to involve interviews with:

- DfID (ultimate client)
- The regional steering committees – Africa (12) and Asia (5)
- The technical panel who advise on research
- Academics and researchers
- Implementation companies
- Local community representatives
- Transport authorities
- Government agencies
- Banks and funding institutions
- ReCAP PMU

In undertaking the brand audit, a number of challenges have been recognized, including:

- Legacy brand
- Brand development
- International context
- Logistics

Since ReCAP is the only global research project in this area, ReCAP would like appropriate recognition for this, positioning the brand as the quality mark for research in this field. Initial thoughts on the brand values are that they should reflect:

- Gold standard quality mark for rural transport research
- Impartiality
- Authority
- Sustainability
- Accessibility
- Collaboration and partnership

1 Background

ReCAP (Research for Community Access Partnership) brings together current and former DFID-funded research programmes in rural roads and transport services. The aim of the partnership is to improve accessibility of the rural poor in Africa and Asia to economic, health and social opportunities and facilities through improvements to infrastructure and transport. The partnership is managed by Cardno Emerging Markets (UK) and runs from 2014 until 2020.

The immediate focus is on strengthening the evidence base on more cost effective and reliable low volume road and transport services approaches, thereby influencing policy and practice. ReCAP focuses its activities on Africa and Asia, through the Africa (AfCAP) and Asia (AsCAP) Community Access Partnerships respectively, and builds on previous UKAid-funded research programmes.

Four years into the project, ReCAP would like to have a better understanding of the current status of brand awareness, identity and online presence for the three brands. Since this is the only global research project in this area, ReCAP would like appropriate recognition for this, positioning the brand as the quality mark for research in this field.

ReCAP is the follow-on umbrella brand for AfCAP and AsCAP and is looking to build community, not just deliver a programme of activity, across twelve Sub-Saharan African countries and five southern Asian countries. AfCAP and AsCAP brands are used in specific countries, unless the project straddles regions in which case ReCAP is used. Mercury has been contracted to help in understanding whether the sub-brands have a positive or negative effect on the ReCAP brand.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the ReCAP brand is starting to gain traction, however there are only two years left on the current funding programme and decisions need to be made whether to rationalise or reinforce the existing brand portfolio.

2 Project Overview

We see the project as breaking down into two main areas:

- Brand audit for the three brands (ReCAP, AfCAP and AsCAP)
- Assessment of web-analytics for the ReCAP website, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) measures that have been undertaken and social media presence

We would deliver the brand audit through a seven-stage process as follows:

- i. Desk Research
- ii. Familiarisation
- iii. Stakeholder mapping and consultation
- iv. Touchpoints and personas
- v. Assessment of online presence
- vi. Assessments of brand framework
- vii. Vision and mission of the ReCAP, AsCAP and AfCAP programmes

2.1 Desk research

Since appointment the team has been undertaking a research exercise reading annual reports, the website, research, blogs and newsletters to familiarise ourselves with all aspects of the project and to start to build a picture of what will be critical for the brand audit and its execution.

2.2 Familiarisation

It will be important for members of the team to spend time getting a 'feel' for the organisation. We will want to understand 'what is the ReCAP / AsCAP / AfCAP experience to be?' in various situations and appreciate the different dimensions that make up the brand. This work will involve informal discussions with the team to help scope and frame the work ahead.

2.3 Stakeholder mapping and consultation

We recognise that key stakeholders vary in their importance, influence and perspectives. Not only this but the stakeholders themselves may change over time as can the relative importance and views of these stakeholders.

We will map all relevant consultees to:

- Identify the hierarchy of stakeholders
- Create personal and group stakeholder profiles
- Match who needs to engage with whom and when through meetings, phone calls, video-conferencing or email

2.4 Touchpoints and personas

In considering where, how and for whom the brand will operate we need to consider two questions: where and how is the brand perceived? And who is doing the perceiving? The answer is the brand is being perceived at various 'touch points' and by various 'personas'. In assessing the brand we will consider the interaction between these two.

2.5 Online presence assessment

In order to improve findability online, we will undertake a digital 'deep-dive' audit which will assess ReCAP's online presence on a variety of factors which affect search engine ranking and quality of online touch points.

An optimised online presence will not only provide a better chance to be found online but can strengthen brand value and increase reach of key messages which promote brand values.

2.6 Assessment of brand framework

Having undertaken the work above, our team will then be in a position to commence the assessment of the brand. Using the various inputs from stakeholder conversations, desk research, familiarisation, interactions with the programme team and any benchmarking research, we will then seek to assess the single, compelling, central idea for the brands. At this stage it is possible that more than one option will emerge, therefore we will put together a presentation of these prospective ideas for the programme team and specify our preferred approach. We will talk about the potential expressions applications and implications of each plus their relative advantages and disadvantages.

2.7 Vision and mission of the ReCAP, AsCAP and AfCAP programmes

A further deliverable will be the assessment of a discrete set of values that embody the brand ideas behind each of the projects in more detail than the brand idea. These values will then be developed and mapped against the vision and mission for ReCAP, AsCAP and AfCAP to benchmark whether the brands are supporting these, and recommendations made as to whether the brand values or vision/mission need amending.

Our focus in this is to ensure that the unique selling points and key messages of the projects are communicated effectively to the relevant target audiences.

3 Clients and target audiences

There are a number of stakeholders we will need to include as part of our research. Initial thoughts are Desk Research

- DfID (ultimate client)
- The regional steering committees – Africa (12) and Asia (5)
- The technical panel who advise on research
- Academics and researchers
- Implementation companies
- Local community representatives
- Transport authorities
- Government agencies
- Banks and funding institutions
- ReCAP PMU

Contact details will be confirmed with the ReCAP project team.

4 Institutional context

Previous UK Department for International Development (DFID) support for the transport sector in developing countries included two programmes focused on applied research in the area of low-volume rural roads and transport services - the South East Asia Community Access Project (SEACAP) that carried out applied research in low volume rural roads in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos between 2004-2009, and the Africa Community Access Project (AfCAP) between 2008 and 2014, supporting seven countries.

Transport is fundamental to economic growth and the delivery of basic services. Low volume roads are the principal form of transport in the rural parts of most low-income countries. People require access to reach basic services and all kinds of economic, health and social opportunities. However, an estimated one billion people live further than two kilometres from an all-season road and isolated communities are often left behind in development.

Building on the success of these two projects, DFID initiated support to a second phase of AfCAP in 2014 and new support for a similar, applied research focused project focused on South Asia, the Asia Community Access Partnership (AsCAP). These two initiatives operate in parallel under the umbrella of the collective Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP)

The aim of ReCAP, is to build on the programme of high quality research established under SEACAP and AfCAP1 and take this forward to a sustainable future in which the results of the research influence policy and are incorporated into practice.

The work is demand-driven and aims to embed results and engage partners and influencers to encourage uptake and action. Cross-region learning and building research capacity in partner institutions is also important.

AfCAP currently partners with 12 countries in Africa: South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, DRC, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, whilst AsCAP, currently partners with five countries in Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge the institutional context. The multi-partner approach and history of the project and its predecessors, combined with the international dimension presents a number of challenges for the brand audit which are outlined in more detail in section 6 of this report.

5 Progress, achievement and measurement

In terms of success factors, the ReCAP project will be judged on:

- The number of peer-reviewed papers published
- General outputs such as research reports and conference papers
- The number of findings that become practice or get embedded into policy and regulations (this can be difficult to measure due to the timescales involved research, testing, legislation and implementation)
- Socio-economic impacts in the partner countries – e.g. access to markets, education and health services, transport fares and travel time
- Contributions from ReCAP partner institutions – either in-kind or direct

The overall outcome of the programme is defined as “Evidence-based, cost effective and reliable low volume rural roads and transport services that are strengthened, promoted and influencing policy and practice in Africa and Asia”.

6 Challenges

In undertaking the brand audit, we recognise that there are a number of challenges we need to consider:

- Legacy brand - there will be some challenges in terms of dealing with legacy brands such as SEACAP and AFCAP1 – many staff have carried over from the earlier projects and the AfCAP brand has strong equity in this region
- Brand development – linked to the above, the brand was originally developed through the regional steering committees. The research needs to be sensitive to the work already undertaken in this area.
- International context - international brands often discover that many of their experiences and assumptions no longer hold true in an unfamiliar market – what works in a home market does not always work in an overseas market. Apart from potential language and cultural hurdles, brands need to tailor strategies and rethink marketing programmes. “Glocalization” is an emerging concept which refers to the practice of managing brands according to both local and global considerations
- There is also a “sister” project to ReCAP which we need to be aware of. The High Volume Transport project is another DfID project which is delivered by IMC Worldwide. This looks at transport issues at the other end of the volume scale and there is potential for cross-over and complementary work
- Logistics – on a practical level, we need to consider the availability of key stakeholders given work commitments and time differences. This will heavily influence how we conduct the surveys with the different stakeholders.

7 Aspired brand values

Since this is the only global research project in this area, RECAP would like appropriate recognition for this, positioning the brand as the quality mark for research in this field.

The initial brand values when the ReCAP brand was established in 2015 were to be a quality mark for high quality rural transport research and to reflect a community of practice.

Our initial thoughts on the brand values are that they should reflect:

- Gold standard quality mark for rural transport research
- Impartiality
- Authority
- Sustainability
- Accessibility
- Collaboration and partnership

We will test and develop these values through the stakeholder consultation process.

8 Assessment of web-analytics for the ReCAP website, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) measures that have been undertaken and social media presence

In order to improve findability online we will undertake a digital 'deep-dive' audit which will assess your online presence in a variety of factors which affect search engine ranking and quality of online touch points. An optimised online presence will not only provide a better chance to be found online but can strengthen brand value and increase reach of key messages which promote brand values.

Factors which could cause a barrier to success for the promotion of online presence are vast and require a holistic and strategic approach to address. The project's online presence audit will look into all key factors affecting visibility and provide a clear, concise strategy to correct and issues and strengthen any existing efforts.

Key considerations for SEO include:

8.1 URL/ permalinks/ structure

Permalinks are the permanent links to pages and articles on your website. They are used to identify websites and pages so they can be found by web users. Google and other search engines determine the quality of links based on many factors, one of which, is how easy the permalink structure of a website is for users. For example "mywesbite.com/about" will rank higher in searches than "mywebsite.com/pages/about/index.html".

We will complete an audit of all pages and articles on the ReCAP website to determine permalink structure throughout and identify and issues which may reduce search engine ranking.

In order to correct any issues found we would need access to the CMS (Content Management System) dashboard for the website as well as FTP (File Transfer Protocol) access. This will be verified with the ReCAP Web master.

8.2 Meta-data

Meta-data is descriptive text within a website's code, usually populated by page content, that determines key search terms for search engines. If not formatted correctly, this can reduce searchability and search ranking.

If any meta-data issues are detected during the audit we will be able to recommend relevant meta tags.

8.3 Content

On-page content is the largest deciding factor when it comes to search engine ranking. Content needs to include search keywords and terms without being repetitive. Other considerations such as readability and positioning on a website are also taken into consideration when analysing content.

8.4 Name (negative searches)

Due to the ReCAP brand name being related to so many similar words and phrases, Google searches are very likely to bring up negative results. In order to make it easier to find the ReCAP brand, we would increase related keywords in on-page content to help Google determine relevant searches and increase likelihood of the ReCAP website appearing in search results.

We would also recommend negative keywords which would avoid the website showing for unrelated searches such as “Recap of TV shows” etc.

8.5 Code Quality

Rankings can be affected by the code quality of the website. A website with poor code quality is deemed to be less user friendly by search engines and, as a result, ranked lower in search results.

8.6 Mobile responsiveness

Almost 80 percent of website traffic is said to be via a mobile device. The percentage of people *solely* using mobile devices to access the internet is higher in Africa and Asia than in Europe or the United States - and being connected to the internet can be a life-changing advantage in terms of access to education and healthcare.

As a result of this, a website which is poorly optimised for mobile can dramatically reduce search rankings.

In order to address any issues caused by improperly optimised websites, we would need to create a set of styling rules which would apply themselves only when the website is viewed on a mobile device. The styling rules would ensure all content is readable and user friendly to navigate on a mobile device.

Analysis on website analytics will allow us to identify patterns and issues that may affect search ranking. The metrics we will take into consideration when assessing website analytics are:

8.7 Bounce rate

Bounce rate indicates people who leave the website after landing on a page without completing any actions. This is usually a good indicator of a bad landing page experience or the website appearing in search engines for irrelevant search terms.

In order to address any bounce rate issues found, we would first look for patterns in entry points. We would then cross reference this with search terms and referral websites to determine what is causing a high bounce rate.

8.8 Exit pages

A page with a high exit rate could indicate a bad landing page experience, poor usability or poor on page content.

8.9 Referral sites and Search terms

Checking the sites on which people find the ReCAP website will give insights in to backlinks and how people are searching for the ReCAP services. This will allow us to identify strong channels and work on any weak referral points.

We would also monitor search terms from these sites to identify what terms people are using when looking for the ReCAP brand and advise on page content accordingly to maximise findability online.

Online visibility should take into consideration more than SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) factors. The online visibility is also determined by presence on social media and community platforms

8.10 Branding and Visibility

The impact that social media has on a business has to be considered as important. Essentially, these platforms provide an almost instant connection between the end user and ReCAP, and therefore, it is essential that the branding and tone of voice is established and consistent throughout.

The representation of the organisation on social media provides the user with additional sight of the organisation's credentials. We will ensure that the branding, key messages, responsiveness and visibility to users is maintained on all social media platforms in line with the organisation's objectives and KPIs.

All research work will be managed internally using the agile project management methodology, this is visualised using a Japanese inspired Kanban system to allow us to monitor quality, performance and timelines in real time throughout a project lifecycle. In order to ensure the quality of all insights given all reports are quality and fact checked by our management team at each sprint in the agile management method.

9 Managing the project

In the consultation stage, this project must be inclusive, embracing people from all areas of the partnership. However, for it to be effective it must have as few people as possible involved in managing and taking decisions.

Ultimately, the programme will need to be cascaded to different elements of the organisation, partners and stakeholders so it is important to have a structure that enables this to happen from the start. As outlined above, we will work with ReCAP project team to map the key stakeholders.

10 Programme team

We recommend keeping the programme team as small as possible. Caroline Visser, Knowledge and Communications manager, will be the primary ReCAP contact and Simon Taylor will be the primary Mercury contact. Other members of the project team will be Andrew Acum, Jamie Del Grosso and Kaye Neylon (all Mercury).

11 Audit methodology

The audit methodology will comprise the following:

Weeks 1 – 3

- Desk research
- Familiarisation

Weeks 3 – 8

- Stakeholder mapping and consultation

Weeks 8 – 9

- Touchpoints and personas

Weeks 9 - 10

- Assessment of online presence
- Assessment of brand framework
- Vision and mission review

Weeks 10 – 12

- Presentation of initial results to project team

Weeks 12 – 14

- Production of final report

12 Initial strengths and weaknesses assessments for the three brands

Whilst it would be inappropriate to comment on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the brands ahead of the primary research, our discussions with the project team has lead us to the following initial thoughts.

ReCAP		AfCAP		AsCAP	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
Umbrella brand for global activity	Does not have the brand heritage of AfCAP	Legacy brand equity	Very much related to African projects	Some track record in delivery	Very much related to Asian projects
No links to any one region	Only two years left to gain traction	Buy-in from partners / regional steering committees	Defines the region in which projects are delivered		
Anecdotal evidence that brand is growing		Long track record			
About community not just project delivery		Staff carried over from AfCAP1			
Cross-region learning is important		Defines the region in which projects are delivered			
Research database which will live on after conclusion of the research					

A more detailed SWOT analysis will be developed as part of the brand audit.

13 Comments on terms of reference

Following the first inception meeting with the project team, we can confirm that there are no changes to the terms of reference.

14 Project risk assessment

Risk	Effect	Mitigation
Not being prepared before the project begins	Being armed with information not only speeds up the development process, but helps to clarify your needs and expectations.	We have tried and tested brand audit blueprint which has been proven on numerous projects across a wide variety of different sectors. The inception meeting was the first part of this process and this report clarifies our approach and actions.
Inability to make a decision	Until the client gives us decisions at key milestones, the project cannot progress to the next stage.	We have a project team with sufficient authority to take decisions. We have a proven structured approach and key milestones have been identified.
Limited accessibility to main contact / project manager	Whenever the team has questions, answers are needed before they move forward.	Regular client contact with an appointed project team lead.
Main contact does not have enough authority	If every decision has to be escalated within the organisation, it will add time to the project.	Appointed project team lead with authority to progress the project.
Too many people involved in the decision process	Allowing too many people a 'final say' in major decisions makes it more difficult to schedule meetings and to bring the group to a consensus	Appointed project team lead with authority to progress the project. key stakeholders will be identified and agreed in advance

Fixating on low priority details	Delays caused by low priority distractions.	A clear, prioritised and timed methodology has been identified.
Huge change requests late in the project	Late changes in specification will have an effect on the project timeline and budget.	Project specification and terms of reference have been agreed at the inception meeting.
Underestimating the project timeline	Underestimating how long each phase can take can cause delays to the overall timetable	A clear, prioritised and timed methodology has been identified and we are working to a proven blueprint.
Failure to appreciate causality	The brand audit is essentially a linear process - each phase of development affects the next. If one phase is delayed, it makes it harder to deliver the next phase on time.	A clear, prioritised and timed methodology has been identified and we are working to a proven blueprint.
Failure to recognise the implications of the international dimension	Brand experiences that work in a home market does not always translate to an overseas market	We have experience of /qualifications in international marketing.