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Development Insights: DAC peer learning brief on working across government

This Development Insights brief on working across government draws together learning from recent peer reviews and builds on discussions during the Peer Learning event held in Paris on 11 December 2019 [DCD/DAC(2020)19]. Development Insights are short briefs prepared by the Development Co-operation Directorate to support learning and knowledge sharing within the Development Assistance Committee.

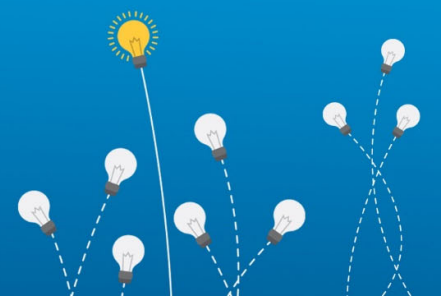
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Playing to strengths: How can working across government help deliver sustainable development?

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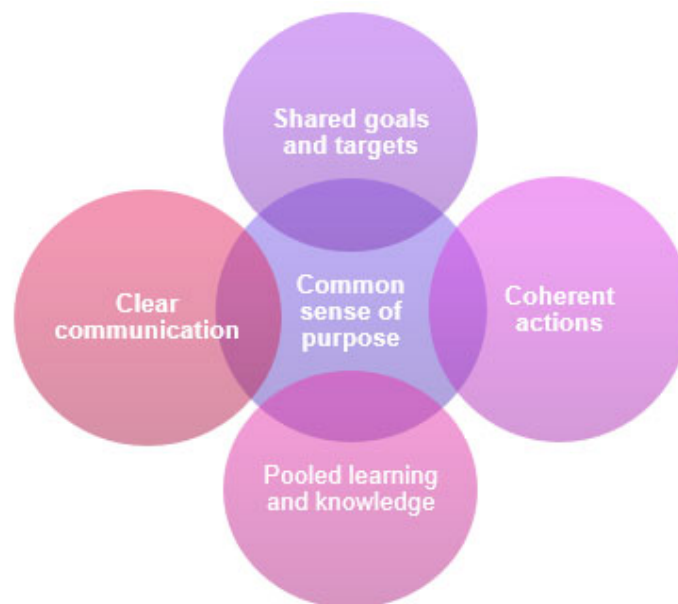
As development challenges become more complex, development co-operation providers are turning to the resources, skills and expertise across their governments to deliver on development policy priorities. Working across government can enable providers to play to their strengths, leverage existing partnerships and join up their national, regional and global efforts. To do so effectively, all actors need to pull in the same direction. This *Development Insight* looks at what can be achieved by working across government to deliver development co-operation, with an eye to what is working well and why.

Key messages

- Working across government to deliver development co-operation means mobilising expertise and knowledge from a wider range of government ministries and agencies and channelling these towards shared goals to achieve more relevant and sustainable development results.
- Co-ordinating different government actors and institutions can be challenging, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach, as all development co-operation systems and government administrations are different.
- Several factors can contribute to more effective cross-government delivery of development co-operation: clearly setting out development objectives at a whole-of-government level, ensuring implementation is co-ordinated and coherent, and putting in place learning and knowledge management systems to support continuous learning across the system.

Figure 1. Working across government: Building blocks for success

Based on learning from OECD DAC peer reviews, the following five factors contribute to more effective cross-government delivery of development co-operation.



Source: Author's elaboration based on learning from OECD DAC peer reviews, www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/.

Working across government: Building blocks for success

Based on learning from OECD DAC peer reviews, the following five factors contribute to more effective cross-government delivery of development co-operation (summarised in Figure 1). They take as their point of departure the importance of development effectiveness, partner country needs and the 2030 Agenda.



1. The policy vision directs efforts towards a common purpose

Most DAC members articulate their development co-operation objectives through a policy or strategy. Basing this vision on a whole-of-government analysis of what a provider can offer, and where and how it can best use its comparative advantage, and including decisions about focus and prioritisation, can help guide different government efforts towards a common sense of purpose.

Furthermore, the institution or actor mandated to co-ordinate implementation of development policy has an easier task when the overall vision or strategy is broadly owned. Agreeing upon the development policy at the highest level, and clearly branding and publishing it as a government document, is one way to help build ownership. An example is Ireland's policy for international development, A Better World, which is branded as a whole-of-government document.



2. Policies are operationalised through shared goals and targets

Setting common targets, goals and results frameworks against which government actors report helps ensure that each ministry and agency is pulling in the same direction. Actors often are pursuing other government objectives in parallel, so clearly articulating what results are expected can help maintain the focus on the contribution of each actor. For example, Sweden's strategy for capacity development and partnerships focuses on broadening the Swedish resource base by drawing on the development co-operation expertise of government agencies, local authorities and universities, clearly articulating what each actor contributes to delivering the overall strategy.

Oversight of these contributions should also be comprehensive, covering areas of the programme with higher risk or where the most resources (human and/or budgetary) are invested, rather than be focused on contributions of one particular agency or actor.



3. Arrangements support coherent implementation

Linking multilateral, regional and bilateral efforts can be more challenging where multiple government actors are involved. Yet this has important implications for partner country stakeholders and can help providers make the most of potential synergies across their system.

Comprehensive strategies help ensure activities at different levels are coherent. Through partner country strategies, different actors should be able to get a comprehensive picture of the providers' contribution in any country to facilitate co-ordination and minimise risks arising from incoherent actions. One example is the United States' Integrated Country Strategy, a three-year, high-level plan setting out whole-of-government priorities in a given country. Multilateral strategies can also ensure coherent and joined-up efforts across different multilateral institutions and at both country and governing board level.

Providers use a range of other approaches to support coherent implementation. **Inter-ministerial committees** can help bring agendas together across government, serving either co-ordination or information-sharing functions. **Cross-government funds and programmes** are often used to address more specific challenges, helping to leverage capabilities to tackle complex challenges that cut across

departments. For example, the United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund integrates official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA resources to build peace and stability.

Working-level arrangements, including formal committees and working groups as well as informal, ad hoc consultations, can bring together staff to help break down silos and share ideas, knowledge and learning. Similar arrangements also exist at **country level** to co-ordinate actors. For example, Japan's ODA Task Forces and the United States' Country Team, which involves the head of all in-country agencies, help align different country-level efforts for a more joined-up approach in partner countries. Another strategy used by some providers is the co-location of actors, whereby all key actors including lead ministry actors are housed together.

Common guidance, databases and country diagnostic processes also support coherence by pooling expertise and potentially finding common solutions that make the most of the skills, knowledge and networks of different government actors.



4. Learning and knowledge are shared to inform continuous improvement

Putting in place systems to pool knowledge and experience is critical to inform better policy and decision making and to improve future policies and programmes. Effective **learning and knowledge management across actors** also ensures a more focused and coherent approach to implementing development co-operation policy objectives. For example, Norway's Knowledge Bank brings together experiences from across the government for enhanced information exchange and facilitates efforts to feed this knowledge back into policy setting within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



5. Communication channels are clear and tell a comprehensive story

Partner countries, local stakeholders and multilateral agencies often find it challenging to engage with providers where there are numerous points of contact and an incomplete picture of how and why a provider is engaging in a specific area. Establishing clear communication channels, with a single point of entry for partner country stakeholders, can help address this challenge. Whole-of-government country strategies that go beyond the activities of the main implementing actor, including ODA and beyond ODA, are another important means to provide complete information.

Timely and transparent information about development co-operation activities is also important for accountability, both to the public and to partners.¹ Telling a comprehensive story that describes how development co-operation objectives are achieved and delivered tends to be more effective, useful and impactful when the story draws on the provider's total contribution in a partner country on thematic areas.

Working across government: What can it deliver?

Peer reviews have brought to light examples of how DAC members are achieving greater impact through cross-government collaboration.

Whole-of-government strategies

Global health. Sweden's approach to addressing global health challenges engages different government agencies around a clear strategy with defined objectives. While the Ministries of Health and Foreign Affairs are the main actors responsible for delivering the strategy, seven additional government agencies have specific responsibilities. The Public Health Agency of Sweden, for example, is charged with providing support for implementing the global action plan on antimicrobial resistance, and the Swedish Research Council plays a key role in international research collaboration on this issue (OECD, 2019^[1]).

Innovative institutional arrangements

Knowledge Bank. Launched in 2018, Norway's Knowledge Bank aims to strengthen and co-ordinate ten of Norway's technical co-operation programmes by drawing on the expertise of Norwegian ministries, agencies and public institutions (Norad, 2018^[2]). Managed by staff in the development agency, Norad, the Bank pools the expertise of 35 Norwegian institutions working with 35 partner countries on broad topics, including Fish and Tax for Development. The Bank supports co-ordination and knowledge management by breaking down silos and bringing together experiences from across the government for enhanced learning and information exchange (OECD, 2019^[3]).

Effective institution building. The United Kingdom's Government Partnerships International (GPI), launched in 2018, is a cross-government unit that provides peer-to-peer support to partner governments. GPI comprises of a core team of civil servants from different government departments, as well as short- and long-term expert support from government, academia and the public sector. Funded through the Department for International Development Stabilisation Unit's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund budget, GPI also uses funds from other government partners. This work supports the United Kingdom government objectives in fragile and developing countries by helping to build effective institutions, thus increasing the impact of the United Kingdom's development interventions (HM Government, 2019^[4]).

Mobilising strategic priorities across actors

Stabilisation in the Pacific. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which ran from 2003 to 2017, is an example of Australian government agencies working at the strategic and operational levels to co-ordinate development co-operation. RAMSI enabled different government agencies to work across their areas of specialisation and provide an integrated government response with a coherence that is often missing in responses to fragile contexts (OECD, 2014^[5]). That the initiative was welcomed by the partner government and endorsed by key regional actors were also important success factors (OECD, 2018^[6]).

Using one voice to support reform

Integrating all co-operation offices in embassies has strengthened Switzerland's whole-of-government approach, bolstering its capacity to analyse contexts comprehensively and speak with one voice. In Ukraine, for instance, the Swiss Embassy operates under a "whole-of-Kyiv" approach that builds on its different strengths – development and humanitarian support, diplomacy, and advice on human security – to support long-term reforms in the country (OECD, 2019^[7]).

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Notes

¹ In Busan, DAC members undertook to implement “a common, open standard for electronic publication of timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on resources provided through development co-operation” (Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011^[8]).

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This *Development Insight* brief is part of a series of briefs that build on discussions within the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), learning from OECD DAC peer reviews and peer learning exercises and feed into standard setting at the DAC. Working across government was also a discussion topic at the December 2019 OECD DAC Peer Learning Event. See background papers at [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC\(2020\)19/en](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2020)19/en).

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