

Getting it together

by SIDA'S DEPARTMENT FOR METHODOLOGIES AND AID EFFECTIVENESS

In April 2010, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) released a Guidance Note entitled “Getting it together: Strengthening transparency, accountability, participation and non-discrimination with communication methods”. The document’s purpose is to provide recommendations on when and how communication can be used as a means to promote enhanced accountability, transparency and citizen participation without discrimination, understood as requirements for aid and development effectiveness. Methods for enabling inhabitants in a country to influence the work of government and public bodies are in focus.

Background

“Getting it together” was developed by Sida’s Department for Methodologies and Aid Effectiveness in the context of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (from 2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action on Aid Effectiveness (from 2008). Signed by most bilateral and multilateral donors and a number of recipient developing countries’ governments, at present the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action encapsulate the principles on which aid and development assistance should operate. Moreover, both point for the need for better and increased use of communication to meet desired outcomes. “Getting it together” highlights how and why public bodies can communicate with the inhabitants for realizing sustainable and democratic development.

Because the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action call for the implementation of program-based approaches (PBA), a framework governing the relationship between a bilateral or multilateral donor and a recipient developing country government, the recommendations provided in “Getting it together” are geared towards instances in which PBA are used. PBA are at present Sida’s preferred approach to accomplish the

aim of supporting the efforts of people living in poverty to improve their lives.

Highlights of “Getting it together” are presented below.

Getting it together –why, what and for whom

The Guidance Note defines communication as both a concept and a method. It recognizes different types of working methods such as those with communication elements that are process-driven and participatory, as well as those that are about distributing information. It identifies possible entry points and opportunities for using communication within program-based approaches with a main focus on public bodies. It further provides a menu of key issues for planning, review, assessment and follow-up at different levels and in different areas, intrinsically highlighting the roles of civil society and the media. Different policy and practice perspectives are combined to encourage and assist Sida teams to take advantage of communication as a means for increasing accountability, transparency, participation and non-discrimination in development cooperation.

Communication: what does it mean?

The process of effective communication has both technical and political aspects to it. On one level it is about ensuring availability and access to information. On another level it is about ensuring the citizens’ right to participate and to have a voice in the development of society. A public body in a democracy has the responsibility to secure both levels, and both are needed for reaching sustainable results.

Communication is central to the process through which citizens hold governments accountable and responsive to public demands. Likewise, the media and Civil Society Organizations play a key role in the promotion of an informed citizenry by

providing platforms for dialogue and debate. Informal and everyday means for communicating also play a vital role.

How: basic principles for integrating communication

National dialogue and broadened ownership should be promoted by engaging with partners systematically (using formal and informal dialogue occasions as well as sensitizing activities to promote and encourage citizens' influence and understanding of the development agenda), using existing processes and mechanisms for dialogue and consensus building, integrating assessments of communication methods, analyzing the communication flows when mapping stakeholders, focusing communication activities on results (are the relevant individuals or groups are being engaged with the desired effect?), addressing reasons for lack of motivation for increased sustainability, and planning for sensitizing activities in order to showcase positive evidence of how and why to make a change.

When: strategic entry points

If the conditions for citizens to be able to discuss, interact and monitor are provided for in overarching national plans, public reforms and legislation, this will facilitate the democratic development of all sectors. Actions can be taken at all levels from the international level to the sector and program levels.

At the international level

- when influencing international analytical tools and methods (Communication approaches and processes need be integrated into international tools for assessments, analyzing development results and planning development support).

At the national level

- when formulating Sweden's Development Cooperation Strategy and Joint Country Assistance Strategies
- when supporting formulation, review and follow-up of a Poverty Reduction Strategy/National Development Plan

(Communication is both an end in its own right and a means to catalyze participation and transparency. Some of the shortcomings of Poverty Reduction Strategies are due to the fact that they do not integrate communication and media aspects in the analysis and findings).

- *when supporting formulation and implementation of key legislation* (Supporting access to information legislation and enforcement of the legislation in practice can drive substantial change in all sectors).
- *when supporting formulation and implementation of national reforms* (Real change requires integrating communication systems and capacity into national reforms).
- *when supporting media and CSOs to drive public debate, information sharing and investigations* (CSOs and independent media need support to be able to play their important role in promoting voice, checks and balances, participation, accountability and empowerment).

At the sector and program levels

- Issues can be raised during the partners' planning period, implementation phase and follow up phase. *Getting it Together* offers a set of relevant questions to use for different working areas of program based support

What: key issues for planning, assessment and follow-up

The influence of citizens depends on the information they can obtain as well as on what they are able and motivated to use that information for. In order to enable stakeholders' influence and access to information, three main working areas of program support are highlighted.

The basic institutional framework

- The quality of the laws already in place
- Institutional capacities and systems for public access to information
- Staff capacity

- The quality of activities enabling access to information
- Watchdogs' access to and use of public information

The capacity of the public administration, including public financial management

- The quality of the governance information made available: comprehensiveness, perspectives and relevant channels
- Facilitating citizen-government collaboration
- Enabling monitoring and investigation
- Comprehensiveness and timeliness of the key budget documents such as highlighted by the Open Budget Questionnaire and other tools

The sector implementation plan

- The quality of information provided on sector services
- Capacities and systems for public communication
- Enabling systems and activities for stakeholder collaboration and monitoring on sector issues

Overall recommendations

When you want to support a cooperation partner to stimulate broad ownership and dialogue on the development in a country, promote communication methods to realize transparency, accountability, participation and non-discrimination; encourage a result-oriented view of communication; emphasize the analysis of communication capacities and needs; support transparent information and communication systems; integrate communication with the core work processes; and couple support to a public body with support to the citizenry and the media

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about “Getting it together: Strengthening transparency, accountability, participation and non-discrimination with communication methods”

see http://www.sida.se/English/About-us/Publication_database/ or contact Kristin Olson or Pia

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