



Summary

This Policy Brief shares documented examples and lessons from approaches to results management and evaluation in democracy assistance work that have successfully enabled flexibility, learning and ownership. It concludes that policymakers and practitioners do have room to manoeuvre, and makes recommendations for how they can adapt and document their experiences in order to contribute to learning about more democratic approaches to results management and evaluation in the field of democracy assistance.

It is based on a more in-depth Discussion Paper (Bjuremalm and Sjöstedt 2016) which includes an overview of current debates on results management and evaluation designs, more elaborate discussions of the examples included in the Policy Brief, a full list of references, and a comprehensive section on further readings. These products build on a workshop series hosted by International IDEA between 2014 and 2016.

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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Flexibility, learning and ownership: innovative results management and evaluations in democracy assistance

A growing consensus among policymakers, practitioners and evaluators is that the most commonly used results management approaches for democracy assistance programmes today are too rigid and controlling. The desire to be accountable to taxpayers in donor countries has encouraged performance management approaches that focus on short-term quantitative results and frameworks underpinned by assumptions that development implementers can control progress towards predetermined outcomes.

Such results frameworks place too much importance on external actors and tend to ignore complex realities and the constant need for adaptation in the dynamic and multidimensional contexts in which democracy assistance takes place: Democracy assistance providers are expected to 'predict ... how a goal will be scored before the (football) match has started, without taking into account the opposing side, the conditions or fitness of your players' (Power 2014: 3), as put in a compelling comparison of football and politics.

This Policy Brief summarizes examples of instructive, learning-centred approaches to results management and evaluation designs that are underpinned by different logics. These approaches assume that the changes democracy assistance actors seek are political, complex, unpredictable and difficult to assess and measure. The Policy Brief also contains recommendations for policymakers and practitioners which, if adopted, would enable more relevant and effective contributions to democratization.

Flexibility

The use of outcome mapping by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in a civil society programme on democracy, human rights and peacebuilding support in Rwanda is an instructive example of how staff can create space for flexible, learning-based approaches to programming.

Outcome mapping is used to monitor qualitative changes in behaviour and relationships rather than more standard quantitative metrics that tend to focus on activities. Users of outcome mapping begin by outlining the changes they wish to see and what behaviour they are working towards; then they decide how to assess

this by creating progress markers which indicate whether they are getting closer to the overarching goal. Objectives, progress markers and activities can be changed at any time during a project, either due to changes in the contexts or understandings of change processes by implementers. It is a shift away from traditional end-of-project reporting and independent evaluation of results towards a participatory approach which can generate transformative change underpinned by evaluative thinking. Outcome mapping fits well with the ethos of democracy assistance: for example, communities can participate in reflective sessions that strengthen their learning, results focus and sense of ownership.

All involved in adopting a flexible approach to outcome mapping require confidence and patience. Sida succeeded because its staff and consultants recognized an opportunity to enable a flexible learning-based management approach that would also fit with its own results reporting and performance management requirements. However, they still had to be sensitive to local partners who needed time to learn and experiment with the new approach. Moreover, they also had to be able to report the results in a traditional logical framework that was required by a co-funder. The logical framework was used as a reporting tool to capture outcome-level change rather than as a top down management tool with rigid output level targets.

Like the 'KAPE[®]' approach (knowledge-application-practice-effect) developed by Global Partners Governance (GPG), Sida's experience in Rwanda shows how more flexible approaches can feed logical frameworks used for performance management by donors while remaining stand alone results management approaches in their own right. The KAPE approach is a politically, adaptive and flexible way of programming and doing results management. It is believed to have played a useful role in enabling Iraqi parliamentarians to remain a 'most important political forum ... in Iraq', during a period of extreme political turbulence (Power 2016: 6). Thus,

KAPE has won the support of donor staff who understand its benefits and trust GPG to be able to use it to achieve and demonstrate results.

KAPE provides a logic that underpins project design, delivery and monitoring and measurement of results, while encouraging learning. External actors are assumed to play a relatively minor role in the behaviour changes necessary to achieve institutional change and KAPE expects such change to be incremental and complex. According to KAPE's logic, small pockets of change engender ripple effects, which can spread positive behaviour in institutions; this behaviour, when repeated, turns into the new common practice.

Given these assumptions, KAPE's success relies on stakeholders being able to assess change in quantitative and qualitative indicators that reflect on progress towards its more strategic goals. Logical framework approaches are commonly used in ways that neither capture all the relevant factors in its knowledge-application-practice-effect chain nor are flexible enough to allow the analysis and adaptation required in dynamic contexts. KAPE therefore provides a more intuitive framework for enabling the kind of monitoring and adaptation required to achieve results that are appropriate in a given context at a particular time.

The importance of reflection and learning

Effective learning requires reflection throughout project implementation, preferably including people from all links of the chain of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and learning. Conducting ongoing learning evaluations allow implementers to learn from feedback by participants and adapt activities accordingly, during as well as after projects come to an end. The Program for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA) is an instructive example of a programme which utilizes a robust ongoing and learning evaluation process as a flexible method for learning throughout project implementation.

PYPA is a multiparty, transnational

“[During the Deliberative Sessions] we learned many things that we were not aware of -- what had been done in the past, what still needs to be done. The details from the exercises surprised us. They led to really important discussions for us. We realized we need to find our own solutions and push them through the Local Councils.”

*Roma Elected Official from
1/10 CBPR projects*

African capacity-development programme aiming to increase the participation and influence of young people in politics run by four Swedish political party foundations: the Christian Democratic International Center, the Centre Party International Foundation, and the Olof Palme International Center of Sweden, in collaboration with the Green Forum. The programme includes a results matrix with programme and specific objectives. However, as in the Sida example, it uses open-ended indicators developed by the party-affiliated organizations involved based on their concepts and definitions. This increases flexibility and ownership of a learning process that is accompanied by external evaluators. These evaluators are involved throughout the process, providing continuous input, critical questions, advice and recommendations based on empirical findings related to results and relevant social and political theories.

Evaluation ownership

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) provides an example of another donor that has started working differently to facilitate learning and ownership in its evaluation practice. Through its emphasis on self-evaluation, NED employs a bottom-up approach to evaluation which highlights strategic learning to empower local partners. Instead of imposing its own pre-determined results, NED always begins by asking its local partners what they wish to achieve and how they plan to measure those achievements.

Recognizing that the transformative potential of evaluation and degree of local ownership depends on when and how local communities participate, NED and one of its partners, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), experimented with an 18-month participatory evaluation of a 10-year programme. The evaluation was designed to create a sense of shared ownership with its Roma partners in Slovakia.

Using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) model, NDI established a Roma steering

committee and trained local Roma research assistants to collaboratively develop evaluation questions, identify 10 Roma communities, co-design evaluation methods for community-based data collection and analysis, interpret findings and make recommendations.

By including Roma activists as full partners in the retrospective evaluation of NDI's 10-year programme, NDI shifted the lines of its accountability from donors to its local democratic partners. In order to make the evaluation process as democratic and transformative as possible, it was designed to enable the Roma communities to use their evaluation findings and analysis for their own advocacy purposes.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Those seeking to give local communities and implementers greater influence over the processes used to plan for, monitor, assess, learn from and report democracy assistance results face challenges. Approaches used have to satisfy the performance management, accountability and learning needs of different donors and capacities and contexts of different projects. There are no magic solutions but, as the examples above indicate, it is possible to find methods to enhance flexibility, learning and local ownership.

The room for manoeuvre each policymaker and practitioner has to select and use flexible and democratic approaches to results management and evaluation will be constrained by capacity and power; it may not be possible to aspire to more than small wins. Nevertheless, each successful example documented and shared will create new opportunities in support of enabling local people to achieve, learn from and report results in democracy assistance. Policymakers, practitioners and evaluators working on democracy assistance programmes seeking to increase flexibility, learning and ownership are therefore advised to:

Tackle power and develop trusting relationships. When developing results

International IDEA's work on promotion of flexibility, learning and ownership in results management and evaluation of democracy assistance builds on a workshop series arranged by International IDEA in 2014–2016, and ends with this policy brief.

Experiences showcased in this paper might or might not fit in a particular context but could, at minimum, serve as food for thought and a source of inspiration: doing results management and evaluations differently in democracy assistance is indeed possible. The values of learning and ownership can be combined with robust reporting and evaluations.

It would be prudent to end with a note of caution. Irrespective of how advanced a particular results management or evaluation approach is, the way in which findings are interpreted—and most importantly, the political uses to which they are put (or ignored)—make all the difference.

On this note, International IDEA hands over the baton in the relay race towards more learning- and ownership-centred approaches to results management and evaluation to those democracy assistance actors who would be interested in continuing these debates, and ultimately producing shifts in policies and practices.

management systems, consider who gets to define what the results are and how they should be assessed: the donor, the implementing partner or the target groups? Innovate in results and evaluation approaches and tools, and trust innovators, like GPG, while also taking care to avoid imposing well-intended innovations on partners and target groups. Whatever the case, look for means to provide sufficient support to partners, including their planning units, so that they can take advantage of virtuous cycles of planning-implementation-learning-adaptation and planning.

Encourage flexibility and adaptation to contextual realities and changing assumptions. Regardless of the tools used, any targeted outcome should be viewed as guidance rather than strict rules requiring full compliance. Those involved may want to fine tune projects because of political context analysis and as they learn more about each other's perspectives and capacities. Therefore, progress data should be collected for the primary purpose of learning and reflecting on the appropriateness of original targets and future adaptations—not merely for reasons of upward accountability and control.

Adopt hybrids. Consider integrating traditional results management tools, such as log frames, that can be used for communication and reporting of key results with other more flexible and learning focused approaches

such as outcome mapping, KAPE or participatory evaluation. These enable a more flexible, adaptive and learning-centred approach to management informed by monitoring and analysing a broader and more informative range of democratically selected results indicators.

Nurture learning cultures.

Institutionalize spaces for all involved to undertake iterative reflection and learning using results data and evaluations during and after interventions to explore what is and is not working and why. Document this learning, whether through blogs, video or in print. Maintain learning conversations across the different sub-communities of democracy assistance.

Push for democratic ownership. Seek to emulate NED's and NDI's approaches and ensure that local actors influence or shape problem analysis, results indicators and evaluation questions, and that findings from results monitoring and evaluation are analysed by or fed back to groups that can use them in their ongoing democracy work.

Innovate with communication.

All actors need to work together to find innovative, nuanced and contextualized means to communicate the relative significance of results achieved, including those relating to improvements from more flexible and democratic approaches to results management. ■

References and further reading

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