Democracy Assistance and Results Management

From upward accountability and control to ownership and learning

Workshop report, 1–2 December 2015

Overview

On 1–2 December 2015, International IDEA's Democracy and Development team hosted a workshop, 'Democracy Assistance and Results Management: From upward accountability and control to ownership and learning'. In this report, 'results management' is used as an umbrella term to incorporate all the various types of methods and approaches used to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate democracy assistance, while 'democracy assistance' refers to forms of development cooperation such as support to parliamentary development, electoral processes, political parties and party systems, civil society, media development and so on.

The purpose of the workshop was to explore how the democracy-support community and its partners could carve out more space for the learning dimensions of results management (as opposed to the current move towards the control dimensions) by using combinations of methods which can fulfil donors' need for results, as well as partners' needs for reflection, analysis and continued improvement. This was a follow-up event to the June 2014 round-table event, 'Democracy Assistance and Results: Debates and Constructive Reflection'. Both events form part of the International IDEA project Democracy in the Development Agenda. Partner countries' capacity to drive and own democratization and development is crucial, in particular in light of the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The workshop was attended by guests from the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA), BBC Media Action, the Christian Democratic International Center (KIC), the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), the British Department for International Development (DFID), the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP), the European External Action Service (EEAS), Global Partners Governance, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Program for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA), SPM Consultants, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Over the course of two days, 24 policymakers, evaluators, consultants and donors shared experiences of innovative and alternative ways to plan, manage, monitor and evaluate democracy-assistance projects and programmes. Moreover, participants discussed the ways in which they can contribute to further movement towards more context- and reality-sensitive and learning-oriented results-management approaches. Participants concluded that establishing trust, strengthening reporting and budgetary transparency, and shifting management styles and evaluation methods, are among the most important tasks for the years ahead.

Workshop summary

In order to maximize creativity and participation, International IDEA made use of a meeting format called Open Space during the workshop. The Open Space methodology centres on the circle and on dialogue, and is inspired by the idea of a never-ending coffee break. As an unconventional introduction, two classical musicians from the Royal Opera and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, respectively, were invited to perform a few tunes. This feature contributed to a relaxed and open atmosphere, and was very much appreciated by the participants.

After the music performance, opening remarks were delivered by Cathy Shutt, an independent researcher and consultant in the wider development-aid sector, who was one of the leading figures of the Big Push Forward (BPF). Initiated in 2010 by Rosalind Eyben and Irene Guijt, the BPF sought to create space for development practitioners to reflect on politics and power in relation to the results agenda in international development. This workshop had a similar objective, albeit with a specific focus on democracy support.

In the first phase of the Open Space, participants were asked to suggest all the issues that they wished to discuss during the workshop, and thus jointly create the agenda. Some participants decided to merge their issues into one discussion session. The participants then engaged in exploratory discussions on these issues in smaller groups, to identify and consider all possibilities. For an exhaustive list of issues suggested for discussion, see Annex 1.

In the second phase of the Open Space, the participants narrowed down the list of issues through a prioritizing exercise using sticky dots. The participants agreed that the following issues were in need of further attention:

• How do we enable practitioners to contribute to behavioural change, and then, how do we analyse, understand and measure it?

• How can our community become better at documenting innovative experiences of results-based management (RBM) in democracy assistance? How do we tap into and share experiential learning alongside evidence?

• How can we improve the rigour of creative and participatory methodologies, enhance downward accountability and improve upward accountability?

• What do process-oriented, adaptive and flexible indicators look like? How can we balance between too much and too little flexibility?

• What could a results framework which is not a log frame look like? How would it change accountability and ownership?

The third and final phase of an Open Space focuses on action: How do we get there, and how can I/my organization contribute? Ideas were worked out for each of the prioritized issues, and participants' commitments were written down in the discussion notes (for a summary of all proposed actions and ideas for the future see Annex 2). The following conclusions and ideas came out of the more action-oriented discussions:

• It is important to keep the conversation going amongst ourselves, as well as to have a peer-to-peer learning alliance that stretches across different communities and sub-sectors of democracy assistance.

• More attention needs to be paid to the enabling and evaluation of behavioural change, as well as involving of beneficiaries in continuously analysing results.

• Innovative approaches to results management and evaluation that are being used in the field of democracy assistance need to become more widely known, and their value fully appreciated. Thus, documentation and further face-to-face learning is important.

• The next meeting should be more inclusive, but still a safe space for sharing of both success stories and failures. The showcasing of instructive examples should be centre-stage at this meeting.

• New results frameworks and indicators that are more flexible and adaptive to context need to be developed and tested, possibly alongside existing log frames. If any new frameworks are tested before another meeting is convened, partners would ideally join that meeting to share reflections on the result of the test period.

• There is a need for common principles of RBM and evaluation in the democracy and governance support sector. These principles would be used as guidelines, as well as for the purposes of advocacy and socialization of a learning-oriented approach.

During the concluding workshop session, participants were given the opportunity to say a few words about the experience. Participants stated that the Open Space methodology was helpful in both learning from peers and clarifying their own thoughts and ideas. It was also noted by participants that the meeting format created a safe space for sharing challenges, struggles and failures.

To sum up, the workshop showed that the planning, monitoring and evaluation of democracy assistance projects and programmes are considered important topics for continued work, and that future events need to focus more squarely on showcasing instructive examples of innovative methods. New approaches need to be developed, and existing approaches need to be implemented in ways that promote local ownership, as well as organizational learning and flexibility to adjust to ever-changing political and social contexts.

As for the road ahead, International IDEA is considering hosting another, somewhat bigger event in May or June 2016, to include more partners from the Global South in these discussions and to expand the movement.

Annex 1. Issues suggested for discussion

During the agenda-setting session, the participants were asked to suggest all the issues that they wished to explore during the workshop, and these issues then served as the topics of the exploratory discussion sessions. Some participants decided that their issues and perspectives were similar enough to merge them into one discussion session.

After the exploratory discussion sessions, the participants did a prioritizing exercise using sticky dots. This exercise entailed decisions as to which issues were to be discussed further in the action-oriented phase of the Open Space, in order to come up with ideas and commitments with regards to the road ahead.

The list below contains all issues that were suggested for discussion, grouped according to the mergers that were made. The issues that received the most votes in the prioritizing exercise, which were also discussed during the action-oriented phase of the Open Space, are marked in bold.

1. What does a meaningful donor-partner relationship look like?

    Reflect on our role as external actors to sensitive issues—how this has changed over time—and how it impacts on our understanding of ownership?

2. How should/can we think differently about 'control' and evaluation of big programmes and small grants/programmes?

3. Future of state building and democracy promotion in MENA and beyond? What is realistic/feasible? How does this relate to normative models of change and how to digest/communicate that?

4. How to communicate results to taxpayers? Do they really want to know all those details on a quarterly basis?

5. How to support results-oriented planning processes?

6. **An 'enabling' approach. How to promote, support and then measure behavioural change?**

    Outcome level results? How do we enable/empower practitioners to aim for impact rather than outputs?

    Is context and people/behaviour research questions and measures a better way forward?

7. Can learning be used for accountability?

   What has really enabled your organization, programme (or you) to learn and be challenged?

8. I want to learn more about experiences with qualitative impact evaluation methods (contribution or attribution through non-experimental methods).

9. **How can our community become better at documenting innovative experiences of RBM in democracy assistance?**

   How do we tap into and share experiential and implementation learning alongside results/evidence?

   Forums: where do we go to discuss and share existing evidence?

10. **Downward accountability to enhance upward accountability?**

    How to improve the rigor of creative and participatory methodology in order to strengthen downward accountability? (local democracy actors <---> donors, practitioners).

11. **What do process-oriented, flexible and adaptable indicators look like? Risks/ challenges between too little and too much flexibility?**

12. (How) can realist-flavoured evaluations enable 'locally' led contextual learning for local actors and contribute to donor learning and accountability?

13. SDG 16: From bad (good?) master to constructive servant/s?

14. Brainstorming/drawing. Draw a result framework which is not a log frame: how does it change accountability/ownership?

15. Upstream question for the EU: Can policies be better formulated to strengthen ownership and learning? How? What is needed?

Annex 2. Actions and ideas for the future

This Annex provides a summary of the proposed actions and ideas for the future which the participants came up with during the workshop. Most of the ideas are extracted from the discussion notes, while some were suggested during the closing open space and plenary sessions.

- Keep the conversation going; create internal channels for sharing.

- Organize peer-to-peer learning alliance across communities. Political party assistance providers need to meet media development and parliamentary development experts and vice versa. There is also need for conversation between evaluators, donors, implementers and partners across different sub-sectors of democracy assistance.

- Organize another meeting like this one but more inclusive, to create a safe space for sharing of both success stories and failures. The showcasing of instructive examples should be centre-stage at the next meeting.

- Organize a large-scale conference.

- Contribute to a growing network by not only speaking to the converted, and by recommending invitees for future events.

- Prepare case studies that demonstrate that flexibility works—that is, pilots of 'RBM done differently'.

- Produce 'practice briefings' (video or written brief of partners' and practitioners' learning, reflections and takeaways from the project or programme: "What did you learn along the way?").

- Try to get success stories published in media every so often, to counterbalance negative aid scandals.

- Follow-up by sharing innovative examples that we think people should know about.

- Ask partners for their best examples of results and impact, document them, and analyse.

- Discuss, draft and agree on a one-pager with common principles on RBM and democracy assistance.

- Produce and publish knowledge products.

- Start sharing examples around failures (what's not working).

- Capitalize on planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) experiences from other sectors of development (e.g. HIV/aids). Research what is already there.

- Purposefully design and implement rigorous evaluations as 'demonstration' projects.

- Document and 'package' good examples of alternative evaluation methodologies.

- Collect good practices of mixed methods evaluations for direct publication at policy makers.

- Create constructive partnerships with experimental researchers for mixed methods RCTs.

- Create a Community of Practice of democracy and governance (DG) support evaluators.

- Create evaluation 'principles' or guidelines for the DG sector.

- Design an advocacy campaign to spread message and evidence to donors, evaluation agencies and practitioners.

- Come up with alternative ways to present the results from alternative evaluation methodologies.

- Test alternative results frameworks alongside existing log frames.

- Focus on diagrammatic approaches to capturing baseline/context conditions and desired end states that depict desired changes in political economy/power relationships and the changes in attitudes, behaviours and norms that would need to happen to achieve such transformation.