



The 10 Principles for Supporting Long-term Institutional Development in Ethiopia

**GUIDANCE FOR GOVERNMENT
PARTNERS (DRAFT)**

INTRODUCTION

Public institutions have a central role to play in implementing the ambitious economic reform programme in Ethiopia. However, there is a widespread recognition that too often technical support to public institutions had been short-term gap-filling, at the expense of building stronger institutions for the long-term.

In response to this, in March 2020 the Ad-hoc Working Group on Institutional Development developed 10 'guiding principles' for supporting long-term institutional development in Ethiopia. These were endorsed by the government and development partners.

This document provides further guidance and inspiration for government staff on how to operationalise these guiding principles, and suggestions for further reading for those that wish to learn more. It is accompanied by a similar guidance document for development partners.

We hope you find it useful when planning and implementing your reform projects.

The Institutional Development Working Group



CONCEPTION STAGE

When planning institutional development projects - donor-financed or otherwise- as a government representative **you are in the driving seat** in determining the objectives and selecting the most appropriate approach. You also have an important role in helping other stakeholders understand what is likely to succeed or fail in your organisation.

The following two principles should inform discussions at the conception phase:

1

Understand both formal and informal incentives for reforms

Many public sector reform projects fail because they underestimate the level of opposition or apathy towards a planned reform. Successful reforms usually benefit from one or two senior champions with the authority to support the reform and overcome obstacles. However, these persons do not need to be in place from day one- if they are not there you can build up awareness of the problem amongst key decision makers and slowly turn them into champions of the reform.



Raise awareness of the problem: In the early stages of a reform it can be more powerful to simply draw attention to a problem rather than advocating for a particular solution. Get good at quickly describing the damage that the current situation causes and why it must be addressed now.



Influence individual motivations to change: We are all complex individuals with multiple different and sometimes competing motivations. Reforms often require influencing those with low motivation to change, sometimes because they benefit from or are simply comfortable in the status quo. Influence must start with dialogue and understanding the individual's situation, and then move to helping them see the benefits for them of the reform, and the costs or risks to them of the current situation.

Suggested further resource :
[Why is political economy analysis important?](#)



CONCEPTION STAGE

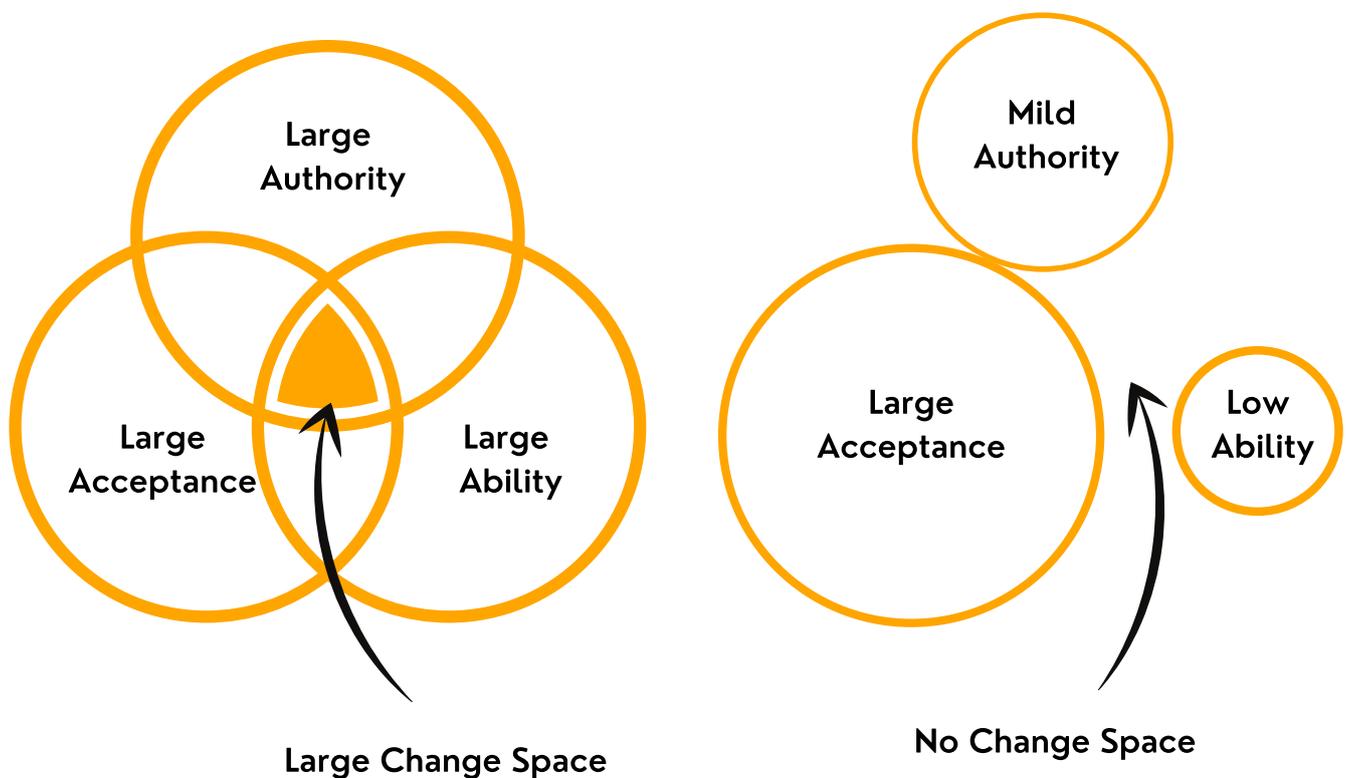


Assess the 'space for change':

The 'triple A' change space analysis looks at 3 As:

- **Authority to engage:** Who has the authority to approve or block the reforms? Look at the different types of authority: Legal authority, Informal authority, procedural authority.
- **Acceptance:** Which stakeholders have an interest in this work, and where do they stand on the acceptance (low-high) / influence (low-high) scale?
- **Ability:** Which staff can work on this reform and what other resources do you need?

Analysing the three together can help you see where you need to put more efforts for the reform to be successful.



Suggested further resource:

[The 'triple A' change space analysis](#) (template)



CONCEPTION STAGE

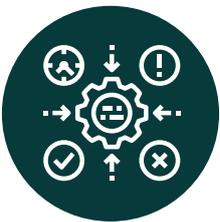
2

Ensure reforms are locally-led and any assistance is context-specific

A common criticism of donor-funded reform projects is that they impose external 'best practice' or 'blueprints' on national institutions that do not fit the unique context of the institution. In these cases, the leadership and staff do not fully buy into the solution and reforms exist largely on paper only- with informal pre-reform practices continuing unchanged.



Align with leadership priorities: Efforts should be made to continuously ensure that the reforms are in line with the top priorities of the senior leadership of the organisation. This is **especially important after there are changes in the leadership.**



Set high demands for external advisors to understand the context before making recommendations or beginning implementation: As a government representative you are the 'client' to all external advisors. You therefore have the right to demand that advisors develop a good understanding of your context before making recommendations or beginning implementing solutions.



Suggested further resource:
'Form does not equal function'



PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

3

Ensure a prioritised and sequenced approach

Another common cause of reform failure is trying to do too much at once. This leads to something called “premature load bearing” – where organisations try to do too much, fail and enter into a vicious cycle of failure- in turn leading to cynicism that anything will ever improve. Institutions are built through successfully overcoming important challenges, and it is far better to set more modest, realistic objectives at the beginning that will build up the impression that the reform is working and gather the momentum needed to tackle harder problems.



Push back on too ambitious reform schedules: Especially if they are set by outsiders who do not understand the context. Although donor-funded projects must demonstrate results within specific funding timeframes, it is always better to set and exceed expectations rather than underperform and create an impression of failure.



The more complexity- the more time needed. This is especially true of reforms that require new types of cooperation between multiple institutions. A typical rule of thumb is that for each new institution that is involved in a reform you should add at least 6 months to the implementation schedule.

PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

4

Consider different entry points and multi-actor processes: which other actors can support the change we are seeking?

Reforms often need support from both inside and outside an organisation. Often there are other organisations that support the objective of the reform, and these can be great sources of support, resources or expertise in the process.



Identify external allies: Look outside your organisation for parties that could also be supportive of the reform. 'End users' that are unsatisfied with the current situation are often natural allies. End users may be organised into business associations or civil society organisations but even if not their views can be gathered and communicated to decision makers through focus groups and surveys. Influential think tanks or research institutes can also help to draw attention to an issue or identify a way forward. International actors can also be useful allies with resources, expertise and influence.



Align with cross-cutting objectives: Ensuring that your reform also promotes cross-cutting objectives such as gender equality, social inclusion or environmental protection will expand the number of supporters of the reform and increase its impact.

Suggested further resource:

["Doing development differently: what does it look like?"](#)



PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

5

Think 'behavioural change' rather than only the technical solutions

Most public sector problems must be addressed with a **combination of behaviour change and technical solutions**. Yet often the focus is only on the technical solution- the new IT system or the precise wording of a new law or policy proposal. People inside an organisation need to be persuaded to adopt a new solution and supported to implement it. Therefore equal attention needs to be paid to the organisational change aspects of any reform- what behaviours need to change to achieve the objectives of the reform?

- → **Use a change management framework to guide you:** There are several excellent change management frameworks that can give you guidance and inspiration. Examples include the *ADKAR change management model*, *Lewin's Unfreezing-Changing-Refreezing model* and *Kotter's 8 step process for leading change*.
- → **Consult extensively with front-line staff:** The front-line staff who regularly interact with the public, businesses or other stakeholders are usually best placed to explain why things are done the way they are, and can give ideas and input into the reform. You may even find 'outliers' – people who are already performing the task in a superior way and can serve as role models for a new way of working.
- → **Combine reforms with an internal communication plan:** to raise awareness of the reasons for the reform. Make creative use of different channels of communication that you know your target audience will see - e.g. meetings, newsletters, office posters/stickers. You cannot over-communicate. And remember that if you fail to communicate, the space will only be taken up by rumours and resistance.
- → **Find credible messengers:** People's willingness to change is often influenced by their perception of the credibility of the person communicating the change- including our perceptions of their competence and integrity.

PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

6

Consider whether whole-scale reform or ‘pockets of effectiveness’ are more appropriate objectives, and how Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) can be used

Transformational reforms of whole institutions or even whole sectors can be achieved if a specific set of conditions are present. Chief amongst these are the presence of political leaders committed to driving transformative change over a sustained period, and a sense of urgency to transform- often the result of a recent crisis. However, since many of these conditions are often not present, other, more-focused approaches have emerged as more ‘pragmatic’ alternatives.

One such approach is to focus on developing so-called ‘pockets of effectiveness’ – building smaller, high performing teams in a smaller number of key departments of the organisation who then create ripple effects on the performance of the whole organisation.

Another approach is to work in a Problem-driven way - to focus efforts and energy on addressing a very specific problem – e.g. construction permits not being issued correctly- and building the institution by successively solving more and more complex problems. The great advantage of this is that it gives urgency and focus to institution building work, and, unlike more abstract institution building efforts, it is easier to measure and build on each success.

Suggested further resource:
[“Scaling through the Diffusion of Practice”](#)



PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

7

Avoid stand-alone trainings

In many reform programmes there is a tendency to see “more training” as the answer to all problems. Training certainly has an important place in any reform programme, but it should be relevant to the current problems the target group is facing and should be followed up with coaching and skill reinforcement. Too often, however, projects organise one-off training sessions and are happy that ministry participants attend- even if the content is not immediately relevant to their work and the participants will not make use of the content when they go back to their jobs. These should be avoided as they take time away from more important work tasks.

Tangible steps that can be taken to facilitate skills development include:

- → **A focus on ‘learning-by-doing’:** with capacity building centred on the transfer of technical skills tangibly linked to the current tasks of a given individual or group.
- → **Move from one-off short trainings to supporting training plans/longer term staff development.** Try to institutionalise these by working with in-house HR/training departments or conducting activities jointly with national capacity building institutions (Institutes, Universities, civil service training bodies) and handing over ownership of the materials when complete.
- → **Focusing on teams or groups** -rather than individuals, may be more beneficial for inducing sustainable organisational change, and minimise the potential impact of individual staff leaving

PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

8

Go beyond technical advisers, and ensure that you decide which type of support is provided

When faced with implementing a large reform programme there is often a temptation to bring in a large number of highly qualified, and project-funded, 'technical advisors' into the public sector organisation to do the work. There is nothing wrong per se with getting external support to achieve specific tasks – most public organisations make use of external consultants– but the problem comes when these external advisors take over the jobs of civil servants, This means that the staff do not get the chance to learn-by-doing and the advisors leave large competence gaps behind when they finish the assignment.

Additionally, the presence of better-paid technical advisors working inside the organisation can have damaging effects on overall morale and civil servant retention.



Explore alternatives to technical advisers doing the work themselves:

Civil servants or government taskforces can be supported to do the work with the help of external consultants, new talent can be recruited into the organisation and mechanisms can be developed to retain top performers.



If technical advisers are the only option, take steps to manage the risks: team them up with civil servants and make capacity enhancement an explicit objective of their work task. Put an exit strategy in place to transfer knowledge when the assignment is nearing an end.



Work long-term to improve recruitment and retention of qualified civil servants and slowly reduce reliance on technical advisers. Some countries, for example, have placed limits on the number of technical advisers and introduced common salary scales for technical advisers to reduce pay differences with civil servants.



Suggested further resource:
["In Country Facilitation: working with coalitions of reformers"](#)



PREPARATION AND DELIVERY STAGE

9

Build flexibility and adaptability into your plans

Reforms are rarely implemented exactly as planned- and although planning is crucial to think through all the issues- it is a mistake to make a plan too rigid. There are a number of ways to build in flexibility into reform programmes - these include:



Include flexible programme components and/or budget lines for emerging issues or scale-up of successful activities. This will allow you to shift funding to new issues that emerge as obstacles or opportunities and to scale-up activities that gather momentum.



Conduct frequent review and learn sessions together with your authorisers/funders: Involving your authorisers or funders in regular review and learning sessions gives them a chance to understand and approve changes to your plans.



Suggested further resource:
['Development entrepreneurship'](#)



MONITORING AND LEARNING

10

Invest in ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning based on an explicit theory of change and theory of action

The objectives of monitoring and evaluation are to learn what works and what doesn't work, and most importantly: why. This is as important for government leaders to understand as it for donors, and yet monitoring and follow-up of government reforms is often not prioritised.

This means that plans or strategies are often launched with no mechanisms to follow-up on whether the activities are actually implemented or successful.

Key elements to be adopted are:



Include M&E plans with any new reform or strategy with a clear mechanism for follow-up.

The M&E plan should be owned by the lead institution and each activity should have a responsible team or department—allowing you to follow-up on implementation at regular intervals and change approaches as needed.



Test your assumptions and adjust your approaches.

The reform programme will be built on a number of assumptions that may or may not prove correct. This is why it is important to make your assumptions as explicit as possible and adjust approaches when they prove incorrect.