

– Information Flow-back for Accessible
and Comprehensible Results
on Programme Support

Information Flow-back



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Foreword

While the era of budget support and sector-wide approaches (SWAps) presents new challenges in the field of communication, it also presents exciting opportunities. Communication can not only be used as a tool to enhance aid effectiveness and managing for results, called for in the Paris Declaration, it can highlight development results for taxpayers in donor and partner countries.

In 2004 Richard Manning, chairman of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), asked the DAC Heads of Information Group to investigate new methods for handling information from budget support and SWAps.

This report, initiated and financed by Sida, is a contribution to the development of a new communication strategy. This study, the first of its kind, proposes a system for producing and channeling information from programme and sector support.

One condition for constructing a new flow of information is that the new system builds on existing reporting structures. Moreover, to make the new system function efficiently, alignment with partner country practices and coordination with harmonised donor practices are crucial. This study shows how this is possible, and, in accordance with the DAC recommendations, can be country-owned and built on local capacities.

To solve the problem of limited resources for reporting in partner and donor countries, the study suggests that a "flow back" function for information is written into the Programme Support Agreement. The costs will then be shared equally among the donors, and the information made available to all.

Target groups for information on results can be found in donor and partner countries. The development of a system for access to information is of mutual interest.

Johan Åkerblom
Head of Information
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June 2005

Executive Summary

Objective of the study

The assignment is to create a model to secure enhanced information flow-back, both in quality and quantity, from harmonised donor initiatives. The information produced shall be comprehensible and accessible to the public, both in donor and partner countries. The overall objective of the information flow-back is to increase public awareness and support for development co-operation.

Problem Analysis

Sector and budget support (programme support) constitute a growing share of development support. At the same time, there is very little useful information on results of programme support available. If information on result exists, it is usually complex and hard to access.

There is a growing pressure on politicians, opinion leaders and officials at involved ministries and development agencies to answer questions on results and aid effectiveness. Considering that there is no evident stakeholder to take responsibility for producing information to respond to these needs, a joint communication effort is necessary.

Prime target groups and information needs

Politicians, opinion leaders, staff at ministries/agencies and staff/students at high schools and universities have been identified as prime target groups for the model. These target groups seem to have similar basic information needs in both donor and partner countries. This opens up possibilities to embrace an aligned and harmonised approach on development communication, well in line with the present development of ODA.

To be able to communicate with the public, the prime target groups need accessible and comprehensible information flow-back on results, presented as:

- Comprehensible and accessible statistics on progress in sectors, programmes or other processes, such as “how many more children in Uganda attend school today compared to 1995”.
- Short human-interest stories that describe or exemplify progress in a programme, sector and a country and/or describe how the life of individuals and groups has changed for the better due to programme support.
- Arguments on advantages with harmonisation and alignment in ODA.

Harmonised donor practices

When considering a model for information flow-back, the general context and development of present ODA must be taken into consideration. Presently, there are four main tendencies that will probably be in the centre of ODA for a long time to come. These issues were consequently highlighted at the High Level Meeting in Paris in March 2005:

- Ownership: developing countries set their own poverty reduction strategies, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.
- Alignment: donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
- Harmonisation: donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.
- Results: developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.

Flow-back of accessible and comprehensible information should be considered as a reporting tool. The issue is thus related to the work in the DAC-OECD “Task Team for Aid Effectiveness” particularly the Task Team’s sub-group, “Joint-Venture on Managing for Development Results”. The study recommends that future studies and implementations of information flow-back models are closely coordinated with this sub-group.

Conditions for an efficient information flow-back model

To make a model function efficiently, some issues need to be given specific attention:

- Alignment with partner countries practises and coordination with other harmonised donor practises.
- Harmonisation with MDG- and PRS-processes.
- A coordinated canalisation of information needs from donor countries. Such a function can be developed within the JPPT.
- Flexibility. The model should provide a framework that is adaptable to each given situation in both donor and partner countries.
- Effective monitoring mechanisms on both processes and results focusing on comprehensibility and accessibility of reporting.
- Sustainable structures. The model needs to be based on sustainable structures, built for reporting on a long-term basis.

Proposed information flow-back model

The model suggested implies that information flow-back of results is carried out in all programme support. This can be achieved by including a standard passage in the Programme Support Agreement.

In each partner country, the government takes on the responsibility of producing the information of results required. The Donor Support Group and international and/or national communication consultants support the process.

Standard passage

The following standard passage is proposed for the Programme Support Agreement:

X-country publishes accessible and comprehensible information on results of the programme.

Output of the information flow-back model

- Comprehensible and accessible statistics on progress in sectors, programmes or other processes, such as “how many more children in Uganda goes to school today in Uganda compared to 1995”.
- Short human-interest stories that describe or exemplify progress in a programme, sector and a country and/or describe how the life of individuals and groups has changed for the better due to programme support.
- Arguments on advantages with harmonisation and alignment in ODA.

Benefits of the information flow-back model

- The quality of the programme support is enhanced if a good dialogue and planned, strategic communication processes are being carried out.
- The democratic process and transparency is improved in the programme.
- The information flow-back can easily be connected to existing participatory processes as well as other communication for developments processes.
- The competence of communication professionals in partner countries has greatly increased during recent years. The proposed model will further strengthen this development.
- Both donor countries and partner countries have limited resources for reporting. By putting the information flow-back function of accessible and comprehensible reporting at the donor country and including it in the Programme Support Agreement, the costs are equally shared among all donor agencies and the results are available for everyone. This implies higher cost efficiency for all donor countries’ development communication efforts.

Implementation

1. The Partner Government engaged in the Programme Support makes a communication plan that specifies what and when information (statistics, human interest stories etc.) needs to be produced.
2. The partner government sets up a website where the information is published as a sub-site of the government site.
3. Digital newsletters are sent to relevant staff at ministries and development agencies in donor countries and to relevant stakeholders in the partner country. Other politicians, opinion leaders, staff at NGOs or individuals, both in donor and partner countries, can subscribe to the newsletter free of charge.

Contextual definitions of concepts and acronyms

Alignment: Initiatives where donors harmonise practices with the partner countries. Harmonisation and alignment are thus closely interconnected.

Harmonised Donor Practises: Initiatives where donors cooperate in development support. Most common forms today are sector programme support and budget support, but the proposed models should function in any kind of harmonised initiatives. Another example is the donor cooperation in Central America, formed after hurricane Mitch.

ODA: Official Development Assistance

Development Communication: Communication about development issues to raise awareness and maintain support for development cooperation. In this context, the concept mainly refers to communication processes in donor countries.

Programme support: There are two types of programme support, based on the purpose of the support:

- Budget support, or support for economic reforms/debt relief
- Sector programme support

Information Flow-back: In this context the concept describes flow of information from development cooperation characterised by harmonisation to Information Departments at HQs. Furthermore, the information that flows back is adapted to be efficient for the public in the donor countries.

Donor Support Group: The group of donors that cooperate in a sector programme support, budget support or similar process.

Lead Agency: The bilateral or multilateral donor that is heading the donor support group.

Dialogue programme support: Verbal and written exchanges of facts and ideas. In the context of harmonisation and alignment processes, the dialogue perspective is often very closely linked to the organisation perspective.

A dialogue can be characterised as good when it consists of an exchange of information that leads to an increased level of result achievement with respect to the overall goals of the programme support.

Communication in Development Programmes: The use of communication processes to create participation, to achieve objectives and to contribute to dialogue and good quality in development programmes.

Introduction

There is a growing pressure on politicians, opinion leaders and officials at involved ministries and development agencies to answer questions on results and aid effectiveness. Considering that there is no evident stakeholder to take responsibility for producing information to respond to these needs, a joint communication effort is necessary.

Scope of the study

During the High Level Meeting at DAC 2004, Mr Marc Verwilghen, Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation, the chair country of the EU at the time, Mr Mark Malloch Brown, Head of UNDP and Ms Louka Katseli, Director of the OECD Development Centre, proposed that the network of DAC Heads of Information should make a particular effort to consider how donors can enlarge and sustain public support in donor countries as aid investments shift from project to programme funding. Public support is considered to be absolutely necessary for international development cooperation in the long term.

At a meeting with The Network of DAC Heads of Information, the Chair of DAC, Mr Richard Manning, raised the issue of how DAC could assist in informing about the advantages and outcomes of programmatic approaches to aid

SWAps, budget support and other initiatives characterised by alignment and donor harmonisation embrace a growing share of the total ODA, but there is little information adapted to the public in donor countries about the results of these initiatives. There might be a risk of declining support for ODA if an increase of programmatic approaches is not coordinated with a similar increase of adapted, high-quality information to the decision makers and the public in the donor countries.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has taken the initiative to carry out a study on how to develop a model for an information flow-back system on donor-harmonised initiatives.

Structures for harmonised and aligned ODA exist or are currently being constructed in many partner countries. This provides a possible basis to develop models for information flow-back, resulting in lowered costs and enhanced information for the public in the donor countries as well as the public in partner countries.

The issue can be categorized as part of the agenda of OECD-DACs “Task Team for Aid Effectiveness”, with close links to one of the Task Teams sub-groups, “Joint-Venture on Managing for Development Results”.

The assignment is, against this background, to create a model to secure enhanced information flow-back, both in quality and quantity, from harmonised donor initiatives. The information produced shall be adapted to decision makers and public in the donor and partner countries. The overall objective of such an information flow-back model is to increase public awareness and support for development cooperation.

Team and time schedule

The study was carried out by two Swedish based communication consultant agencies: Global Reporting and Amazonas Relationship Management. The project team comprised four communication specialists: Klas Palm and Olle Wiklund from Amazonas Relationship Management, Lars Tallert and David Isaksson from Global Reporting.

The study was initiated in November 2004. A “Basis for Discussion” was distributed to the members of the Informal Network of Heads of Information from the DAC-countries in February 2005 and discussed at their Annual Meeting in Paris, March 4, 2005.

The study was initiated and financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this report. Responsibility for its content rests entirely with the authors.

Data collecting methodology

The data collecting has been carried out in co-operation with relevant representatives from:

- Information and Policy Departments at Development Agencies Head Quarters and involved Ministries in donor countries and multi-lateral organisations
- World Bank office in Paris
- DAC Head Office involved in harmonising donor practices and public opinion.
- Donor countries Field Offices
- Governments in partner countries, involved in sector and budget support programmes
- International NGO “Plan”

To achieve the established goals and taking into consideration the complexity of harmonised information flow-back, the work has entailed:

- In depth interviews with representatives mentioned above
- Visit to Nicaragua
- Reviewing DAC’s policy documents
- Reviewing documentation and literature on donor harmonisation processes, information flow-back and public opinion about development cooperation.

The mission has worked in a participatory manner. The mission started out with an open-minded approach, absorbing the views of the respondents. At a second stage, some preliminary models and reports were distributed. The views of the respondents to these preliminary drafts were taken into consideration when formulating this report

The mission started to interview representatives at the Information and Policy Departments at Development Agencies Head Quarters and involved Ministries in donor countries. The respondents suggested repre-

sentatives at Field Offices. The Field Offices proposed representatives in the partner Governments. All respondents have been given a possibility to provide feedback at the second stage.

A total of 40 people have been interviewed.

Target groups

Sector and budget support (programme support) constitute a growing share of development support. For instance, in Tanzania, programme support constitutes already around 80% of the total official development aid. At the same time, there is very little useful information on results of programme support available. If information on result exists, it is usually complex and hard to access.

One basic assumption of this study is that it is possible to provide information that is useful to donor countries, partner countries and multilateral agencies, despite the cultural differences. If CNN, Sony, MTV, the international NGO Plan can find universal models, it should be possible for the donor community to do likewise.

Most respondents in this study agree on this assumption, underlining that there must be certain flexibility, including possibilities for each Information department to edit or translate the material produced.

In discussions with respondents it is interesting to note that two target groups in donor countries seem to stand out as prioritised. The information needs of these target groups seem to be similar in the partner countries as well, according to the respondents in this study:

- *Decision makers/opinion leaders.* There is a trend that ODA is seen in a broader context, where coherence with other policy areas is desired, particularly on trade and FDIs. Consequently, decision-making on development issues is spread out on several ministries, implying that many more politicians need adapted information. Another trend is that the private sector is more involved in development processes. Thirdly, artists have to a larger extent engaged themselves in fundraising activities.
- *Public interested in international issues.* These groups can be found in NGOs, in schools, at universities etc. The size of this target group varies substantially in different donor countries.

A prerequisite for efficient information flow-back is that the information requested from the prime target groups is more or less the same. According to this study there seems to be a need of primarily three different types of information and once again these needs seem to be similar in all target groups, both in donor and partner countries.

- Comprehensible and accessible statistics on progress in sectors, programmes or other processes, such as “how many more children in Uganda attend school today compared to 1995”.

- Short human-interest stories that describe or exemplify progress in a programme, sector and a country and/or describe how the life of individuals and groups has changed for the better due to programme support.
- Arguments on advantages with harmonisation and alignment in ODA.

There exist obviously other specific information needs in each donor country. The information produced in the model below should be seen as complementary to national campaigns and other specific information efforts.

When designing a model for information flow-back the needs of information flow-back within the partner countries cannot be ignored, neither on a government level, nor among the public. On the contrary, there should be a common interest – at the public in both donor and partner countries – of better access to information describing results achieved by ODA.

The information needs seem to be universal among the identified prime target groups. When provided with accurate information, these prime target groups can be efficient in their communication with the general public. A developed system of information flow-back towards different stakeholders in partner countries can also contribute to a higher level of goal fulfilment of the programme support.

Examples of present information flow-back systems

The mission has not found any example of aligned harmonised information flow-back adapted to the public in donor and partner countries. Below are a few of many interesting examples of information flow-back models that can serve as inspiration.

Tanzania

Tanzania Online is an Internet based database that allows donors, government, civil society, academics and others, access to a wide-ranging set of analytic documents and reports on development in Tanzania, priorities, progress in poverty reduction and sector reforms. UNDP, the Government of Tanzania and the Economic and Social Research Foundation established the initiative. www.tzonline.org to improve access to, and promote the exchange of information on analysis of development issues in Tanzania.

This is a good example of a harmonised and aligned information flow-back initiative. However, the information produced in this model is not adapted to the public. It is fit primarily for readers with a high knowledge of development issues.

Uganda

A World Bank survey discovered that only a fraction (13%) of funds disbursed by central government for schools' non-wage expenditure was actually received. Funds were diverted to other purposes by local government officials, or used for private gain. The monitoring instruments were revised and government policy is now to publish details of all funds released to district authorities. Transfers are detailed in newspapers, radio broadcasts and on public notice boards, to enable local communities to check funds are actually received and spent as intended. As a result of this initiative, 90% of allocated funds reached schools.

This is a good example of a harmonised information flow-back, owned by the partner government, directed to the public in the partner country. The public in donor countries were not a target group in this information flow-back model.

Nicaragua

During the politically turbulent years in Nicaragua in around year 2000 several donors focused on the need of transparency and the fight against corruption. One part of this process was the funding of the Nicaraguan government website in which all development programmes are listed.

The website (partly financed by Norway, Japan and UNDP), accessible at <http://cancilleria.gob.ni/>, lists all ongoing development programmes in a very detailed manner. The statistics show both what has been agreed upon and actual disbursements.

This is a good example of a harmonised and aligned information flow-back initiative. However, the information produced in this system is not adapted to the public.

Plan – a communication flow-back example

Plan is one of the world's largest NGOs, active in 15 donor countries and 45 partner countries. Plan is mainly financed through child sponsorship. When a new sponsor is signed up a digital file is created and sent to the database where information about possible sponsor children is stored. A matching takes place, and at the same time a to-do-list is created. The following process is then set in motion:

- A welcome letter from the field director is written and sent to the sponsor. The letter often includes a presentation of the programmes in the areas, local conditions etc.
- A photo of the child and a presentation of his/her family, their condition, the community where they live etc. is sent to the sponsor.
- A contact is taken with the sponsored child and information is given about the sponsor (which country etc). The child is encouraged to write to the sponsor (often with the help of a volunteer, as many sponsored children and/or their families can not write).
- The child writes the first letter, it is translated into English by the Plan field office and sent to the country office in the donor country. The letter is registered and matched with the sponsor's profile. If the sponsor does not speak English, the letter is translated to the local language by one of Plan's volunteers.
- An annual progress report is written (either by the field office or by the country office).

Plan provides an excellent example of a complex information flow-back model that not only works in different countries; it actually sets the entire framework of the organisation. See www.plan-international.org

Norway and Nepal

In 2002, NORAD initiated a two-year pilot project in Nepal and Uganda. The objective was to improve the understanding and to strengthen the follow-up of results in SWAps. By collecting learning experiences from the project, NORAD wanted to improve external communication of results. The project did not aim at changing the existing reporting mechanisms of the partner countries.

Norwegian teams with communication consultants were sent out to Nepal and Uganda. In Nepal, where the project focused on the education sector, staff were interviewed from the Ministry of Education, as well as teachers and students in schools and representatives from the Nepalese Central Bureau of Statistics. Staff at the Norwegian Embassy was also interviewed on how results was reported back to the HQ.

In Nepal, the project found that extensive compilation and different kinds of reporting of results was carried out at all levels, but with little coordination. Few reporting mechanisms paid attention to the very simple indicator that the Nepalese Ministry of Education had set up: "How many children go to school?"

At the embassies, there was little attention on reporting of results. Instead, much of the reporting focused on how many activities were carried out and how much money that was spent.

The team from NORAD also wrote human-interest stories combined with hard-facts to be published in Norwegian newspapers. This did not succeed, but the material has been used by NORAD in internal channels such as speeches, intranet etc.

NORAD ambitions were to improve the information flow-back on the basis of the pilot project, but as the operational work was transferred from NORAD to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the project could not continue.

The project particularly identified the need of good routines for reporting results from the field to the HQ. The project covered is an interesting example of a donor based, non-aligned model, even though it was not in cooperation with other donors.

Sweden

Gapminder is a non-profit venture for development and provision of free software that visualises human development. This is done in collaboration with universities, UN organisations, public agencies and non-governmental organisations. Funding is by grants from sources such as Sida, WHO, Save the Children Fund and UNDP. As a producer of global public goods, Gapminder benefits from free and creative inputs from pilot-testers and other end-users in many institutions and organisations.

Gapminder is an interesting example of how complex statistics can be presented as easily understandable graphics. See more at www.gapminder.org

Harmonised Donor Practices

When considering a model for information flow-back, the general context and development of present ODA must be taken into consideration. Presently, there are mainly three tendencies that will probably be in the centre of ODA for a long time to come. These issues were consequently highlighted at the High Level Meeting in Paris in March 2005:

- Ownership: developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.
- Alignment: donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
- Harmonisation: donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.
- Results: developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.

The Rome Declaration

The Rome Declaration on Harmonisation, endorsed by 28 partner countries and more than 40 multilateral and bilateral development institutions, declares:

We attach high importance to partner countries' assuming a stronger leadership role in the coordination of development assistance, and to assisting in building their capacity to do so. Partner countries on their part will undertake necessary reforms to enable progressive reliance by donors on their systems as they adopt international principles or standards and apply good practices. The key element that will guide this work is a country-based approach that emphasizes country ownership and Government leadership...

Rome, February 2003

In March 2005, the involved parties further strengthened their commitment to these viewpoints at a High Level Meeting in Paris.

DAC Harmonising Donor Practices

The Good Practice Paper “DAC Harmonising Donor Practices for Effective Aid Delivery”, based its work of the DAC Task Force on Donor Practices, chaired by Mr Richard Manning.

The DAC-Paper suggests four key areas for improvements. They reflect the need to strengthen national ownership and address the problem of the high transaction costs arising from multiple and uncoordinated donor practices:

- Donors should simplify their procedures
- Donors should harmonise their procedures
- Donors should align procedures
- Donors should be more transparent

The DAC Paper also outlines guiding principles for reporting and monitoring. This is of particular interest considering harmonised information flow-back models:

- Reporting and monitoring systems should be country-owned and led.
- A small amount of reliable data is more useful than a large volume of questionable data.
- Focus continuity in monitoring and reporting on a small set of core indicators.
- Tailor-made monitoring arrangements suit local needs, while "off-the-shelf models" rarely fit.
- Donors should work with partner countries to rely on country owned reporting and monitoring systems – such systems have too often been established and geared towards satisfying donor interests and concerns; often they have been carried out by donor personnel or consultants without appropriately involving partner countries. Donors should work with their partners in a participatory approach to strengthen country capacities and demand for result-based management.
- Reporting and monitoring systems should support partners' own information needs – partner governments – and in-country stakeholders (civil society, legislators, etc.) – should hold a rolling dialogue about their accountability needs. Donors should work with partner governments to support this dialogue while agreeing on arrangements that provide an adequate basis for external accountability to donors. Both partner governments and donors need to be accountable to the ultimate beneficiaries of development cooperation.
- Simplification and harmonisation of systems is a key challenge – as donors increasingly rely on partner country systems, it is important that their information requirements do not overburden those systems, or divert existing capacity. One way of achieving this is by ensuring that the reporting and monitoring systems used by donors are simplified, harmonised, and appropriately timed in relation to national policy and budget processes.

Among good practices in making the information more transparent, the need to share and disseminate information is underlined. The norm for donors and partners is that all monitoring results for publicly funded projects are openly available to the public.

The DAC Paper also outlines some future challenges that are important to bear in mind:

- Reporting and monitoring systems should be built on local capacities, demands and leadership.
- The opportunity costs of participatory approaches for the participants themselves should be taken into account.
- Project monitoring towards programme and policy monitoring should, wherever possible, be done within the PRS framework.

Joint-Venture for the Development of Result

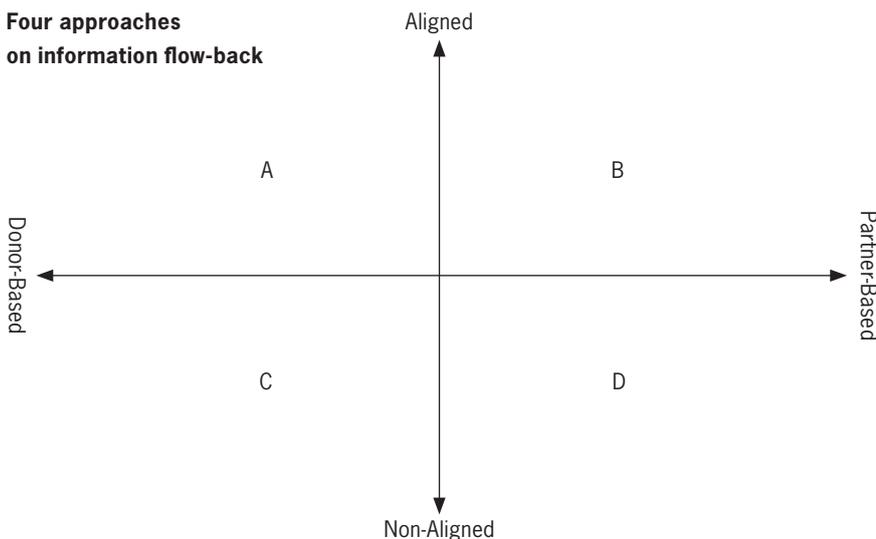
Flow-back of accessible and comprehensible information should be considered as a reporting tool. The issue is thus related to the work in OECD-DAC's "Task Team for Aid Effectiveness". The development of efficient flow-back is of particular concern of the Task Teams sub-groups, "Joint-Venture on Managing for Development Results" and the study recommends that future studies and implementations of information flow-back models are closely coordinated with this sub-group.

Discussion on Information Flow-Back Models

When analysing possibilities for effective, harmonised information flow-back, two aspects are essential: ownership and alignment. Is the public opinion on ODA in donor countries only a matter for the donor countries? Is it a shared task between donors and partner countries? Or should, according to harmonisation guidelines for donor practises and alignment policies, the partner country own the process with input and support from donor countries, or is this putting too much burden on the partner country? Which approach generates the best output for the public in donor countries, or is it just as important to provide the public in partner countries with adapted and understandable information?

The answers to these questions will also have consequences on to what extent communication is seen as an integrated part of ODA. Should it strive to create an information system that is integrated in harmonising and alignment processes or should development communication be seen as a separate structure?

On a theoretical level, a distinction of four different categories of approaches can be made.



A: This field represents approaches that are owned by donors and aligned to partner country government's procedures. In reality, it is hard to image a model that is owned by the donor and aligned, as this is contrary to other harmonising and alignment processes.

- B: This field represents models that are owned by the partner country's government and aligned to its procedures. Information flows in both directions from Information Departments at HQ, Field Offices and the government in the partner country. Models in this field are adapted to harmonisation and alignment processes in ODA. A model within this field is outlined in Chapter 5 of this study.
- C: This field represents models that are owned by donors and not aligned, run by Information Departments at HQ and/or Field Offices. In this field, most current procedures in bi-lateral information flow-back processes are found.

The advantage of models in this field is that they do not put any burden on partner countries.

A possible example of a conceptual model in this field:

The Heads of Information from DAC countries assigns a coordinating group. Partner countries and field offices are consulted to provide input on programmes fit for information flow-back. The coordinating group decides on the basis of this information a limited number of programmes. Communication consultants are contracted by the Lead Agency of the donor support group to compile and produce information adapted to the public in the donor countries. A communication plan is elaborated. Different set-ups are chosen, depending on the characteristics of the programme. A global website, a Portal, is set up, preferably by one of the donors in the Coordinating Group. Every time a new story is produced, an e-mail is sent to the Info Departments at HQ. The administrator of the website also handles distribution of DVDs that can be ordered from the website.

In a somewhat more integrated model, a paragraph in the Agreement of each programme support can be included, requiring each programme to have a readiness to organise information flow-back if this is requested by the Coordinating Group.

- D: In this field, no models can exist in reality, as a model can hardly be owned by the partner country and not aligned.

Proposed Model for Information Flow-Back

The proposed model has been elaborated on the basis of the interviews made for this study, as well as the analysis of needs, context and earlier experiences of information flow-back.

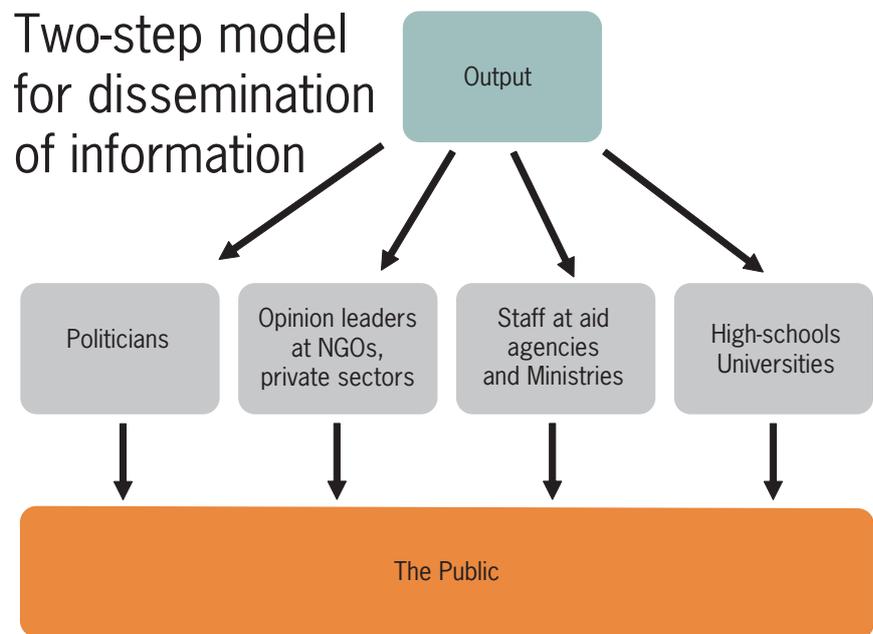
The model is based on already existing reporting structures between partner and donor countries. However, the reporting generally needs to be further developed to be more result-oriented, comprehensible and accessible.

Considering that the partner country already produces statistics and economic reporting from programme support, it is logical that the partner country also takes responsibility to develop this reporting into more comprehensible, result-oriented information. In addition, the partner country is expected to produce human-interest stories that can exemplify the statistics and economic result-oriented information, to make the reporting even more comprehensible.

This is an approach that has not been tested earlier, but is well in line with the general trend towards partner ownership, alignment, donor harmonisation and focus on comprehensible and accessible results.

- The output of the model is:
 - Comprehensible and accessible statistics on progress in sectors, programmes or other processes, such as “how many more children in Uganda attend school today compared to 1995”.
 - Short human-interest stories that describe or exemplify progress in a programme, sector and a country and/or describe how the life of individuals and groups has changed for the better due to programme support.
 - Arguments on advantages with harmonisation and alignment in ODA.

The prime target groups for the output of the model are politicians and opinion leaders engaged in development issues, staff at development agencies and relevant ministries and staff and pupils at universities and high schools. The information needs of these prime targets are quite equal in both donor and partner countries. These prime target groups are important intermediaries to the public. This two-step model has been used in communicating the MDGs in Sweden with exceptionally good results. The two-step flow of information is described in the figure below.



- The output is published at a website connected to the partner country's government website. Digital newsletters are sent to relevant staff at ministries and development agencies in donor countries and to relevant stakeholders in the partner country. Other politicians, opinion leaders, staff at NGOs or other individuals, both in donor and partner countries, can also subscribe to the newsletter. All information is free of charge.
- A standard passage in each Programme Support Agreement between the partner country and the donor countries' and multilateral agencies regulates the obligation of the partner country to produce comprehensible and accessible reporting. The practical procedure is worked out in dialogue between the donors and the partner country.

To make this model function efficiently, some issues need to be given specific attention:

- Alignment with partner countries practises and coordination with other harmonised donor practises.
- Harmonisation with MDG and PRS-processes.
- A coordinated canalisation of information needs from donor countries. Such a function can be developed within the JPPT.
- Flexibility. The model should provide a framework that is adaptable to each given situation in both donor and partner countries.
- Effective monitoring mechanisms on both processes and results focusing on comprehensibility and accessibility of reporting.
- Sustainable structures. The model needs to be based on sustainable structures, built for reporting on a long-term basis.

There are several reasons why the production of accessible and comprehensible reporting should be put at the donor country:

Benefits of the information flow-back model

- The quality of the programme support is enhanced if a good dialogue and planned, strategic communication processes are being carried out.

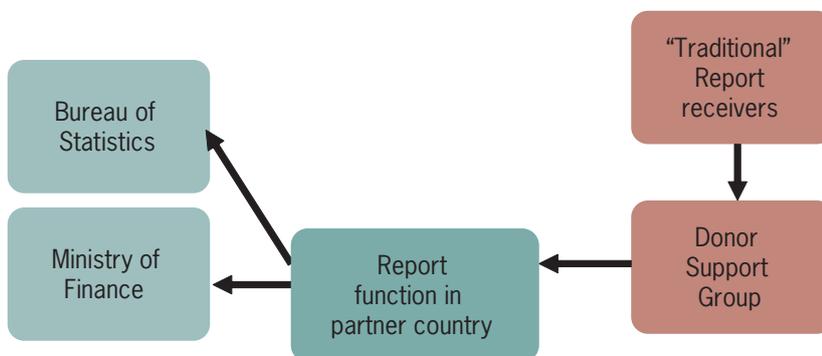
- The democratic process and transparency is improved in the programme.
- The information flow-back can easily be connected to existing participatory processes as well as other communication for developments processes.
- The competence of communication professionals in partner countries has greatly increased during recent years. The proposed model will further strengthen this development.
- Both donor countries and partner countries have limited resources for reporting. By putting the information flow-back function of accessible and comprehensible reporting at the donor country and including it in the Programme Support Agreement, the costs are equally shared among all donor agencies and the results are available for everyone. This implies higher cost efficiency for all donor countries' development communication efforts.

Developing the information flow-back model

In the proposed model, the partner countries need to develop a flow-back function, established by the same authorities that bear the responsibility for the already existing reporting towards donor countries.

The first step in the process of information flow-back is to channel the needs from the information departments in donor countries. The process of channelling needs should be done through existing structures for reporting.

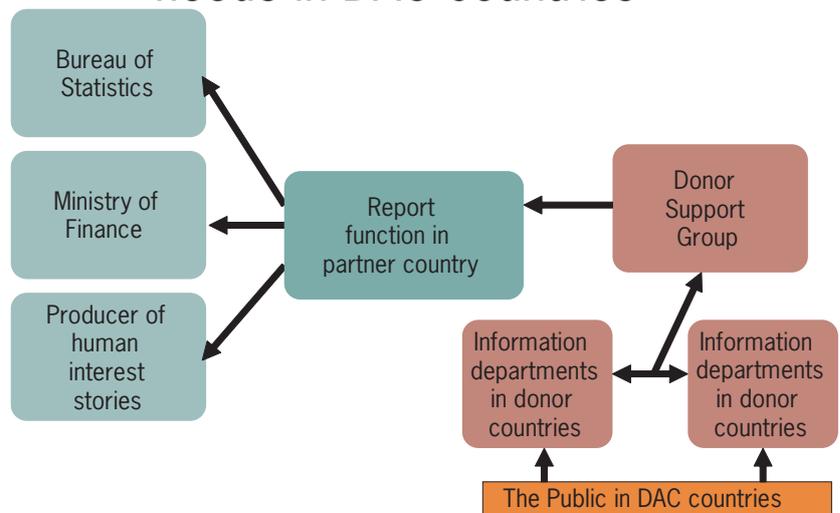
Already existing channelling of needs



The already existing channelling of needs has to be complemented by a channelling of public information needs in the DAC countries. Those needs have to be channelled through and coordinated among DAC information departments. A system for how this could be set up could be taken into consideration by the DAC “Task Team for Aid Effectiveness”, particularly the Task Teams sub-group “Joint-Venture on Managing for Development Results”.

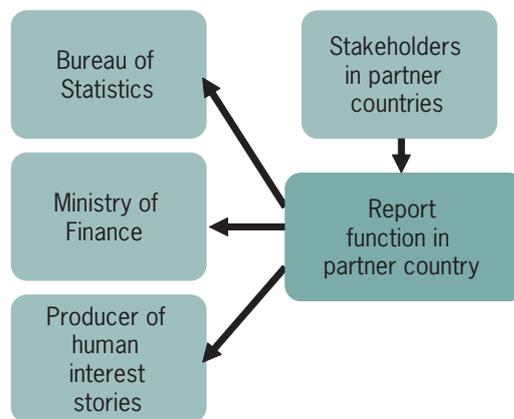
The report function in the partner country also needs to establish a relation to producers of human-interest stories in addition to the traditional report producers.

Channelling of public information needs in DAC countries



The report function in the partner country needs also to take national information needs into consideration.

Channelling of information needs in Partner countries

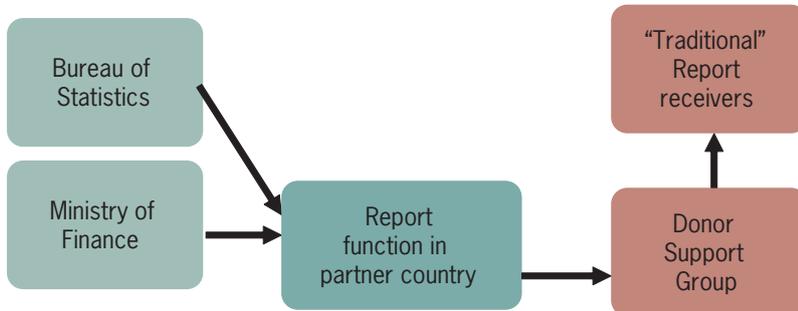


When the needs are channelled and harmonised at the report function in partner country, and further communicated to the producers of statistics and human-interest stories, the next step is to produce and distribute information that respond to the expressed needs. An information flow-back model should as much as possible build on existing reporting systems and other aligned and harmonised processes. Double structures should be avoided. The partner country – that already produces statistics and economical information – shall produce comprehensible result-oriented information and in addition produce human-interest stories that can exemplify the statistics and economic result-oriented information.

Harmonisation with MDG and PRS processes is particularly important. Coordination is not only beneficial for the information flow-back

but might also improve the MDGs and PRS-reports by including human-interest stories and more easily understandable statistics on results in these reporting procedures.

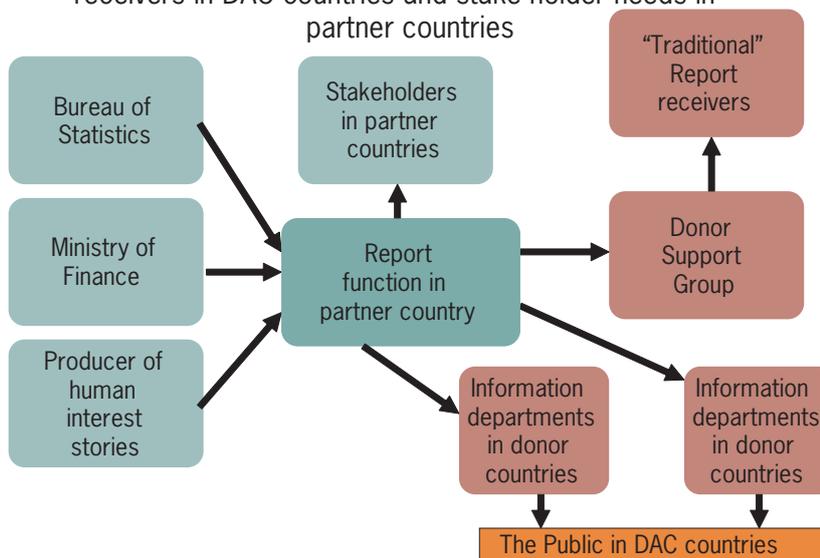
Already existing report flow



As a consequence, the partner country should be responsible for compilation, production and distribution of information. Competence in the field of communication has increased at a rapid pace in most partner countries and the trend seems to be strengthened, providing a solid base for good quality.

How to improve information flow-back to the public, both in donor and partner countries, should be done in dialogue with information departments, field offices and governments in partner countries. The dialogue could also result in an exchange of knowledge and a better understanding of each office's priorities on how reporting should be carried out.

Information flow towards public needs and traditional report receivers in DAC countries and stake holder needs in partner countries



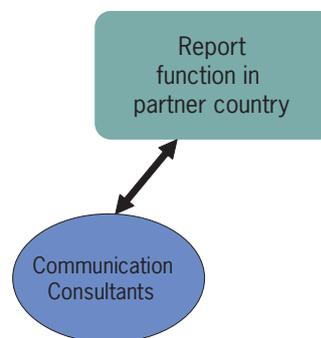
The partner, within each programme or coordinated at a national level, publishes the information on a website and sends newsletters to contact persons at relevant agencies, ministries etc. It is also possible for individuals to subscribe to the newsletter. All information is free of charge.

The Donor Support Group is – from the donor country’s point of view – the responsible part to discuss this issue with representatives from the partner country. The Donor Support Group can in the same discussions raise both the donor countries needs of information flow-back and the needs and opportunities with a developed national communication strategy for the same programme.

It is hence very important that the Donor Support Group at the field offices understands the needs of information flow-back system, and that they can argue for this kind of cooperation. A major challenge in this model would hence be to support the field representatives so they can take part in the discussion about “why” and “how” the information flow-back system should be arranged in their countries. One measure could be to follow the example of Dfid and mainstream the development communication responsibility into the job description of all relevant staff at the field offices. Information departments at HQs can cooperate to provide communication training for the staff at the field offices.

In order to manage this new kind of reporting, it is probably necessary in most programmes to strengthen the report and information flow-back systems with national and/or international communication consultants.

Communication consultant in order to support the report and flow back function in partner country



Developing the output of the model

As stated above, the content and output must be coordinated according to the needs expressed by the prime target groups. According to the respondents in this study, the needs seems to be similar:

- Comprehensible and accessible statistics on progress in sectors, programmes or other processes, such as “how many more children in Uganda attend school today compared to 1995”.
- Short human-interest stories that describe or exemplify progress in a programme, sector and a country and/or describe how the life of individuals and groups has changed for the better due to programme support.
- Arguments on advantages with harmonisation and alignment in ODA.

Human-interest stories on results of programme support are presently hard to find, indicating that such information cannot be derived from existing reporting.

Statistics on progress exist in present reporting, particularly within the MDG and PRS processes. These statistics can be extracted and used in information flow-back processes. However, they need to be elaborated and simplified to suit the needs of the public. This task is closely connected to the work of the “Joint-Venture on Managing Development Results”, a sub-group of the OECD-DAC “Task Team for Harmonisation and Alignment”.

Arguments on advantages with harmonisation and alignment are similar to all harmonised and aligned support and can thus be handled centrally.

Standard passage in the Support Agreement

The basis for the model is that all procedures for information flow-back are included in the Agreement of each Programme Support or other similar Agreements built on harmonisation and alignment. This implies that information flow-back is carried out in all countries where programme support occurs.

A passage in the Support Agreement would regulate how the information flow-back is organised. The practical procedure would be done in a dialogue with donor countries and partner country.

The standard passage can be formulated as follows:

X-country publishes accessible and comprehensible information on results of the programme.

If a more elaborated text is needed in an appendix, this text can serve as inspiration:

X-land shall continuously provide the Donor Support Group with information regarding achieved results by the project/programme. The information shall be adopted for the needs expressed by the donor organisations information departments. Those needs shall be discussed at The Annual Review Meeting.

This information shall be renewed and presented twice a year. The Annual Review Meeting may decide that this information shall be revised and updated more often. The content and procedure for this information production and distribution shall be stated in the Agreed Minutes from the Annual Review Meeting.

Costs

Costs for compilation, production and distribution of information would be covered within the Programme Agreement. This connotes that costs are shared between the countries supporting the programme according to the same principle as other costs.

One observation of particular interest is the possibility for donor countries with limited resources for development communication to use the information produced in the information flow-back process. At large, a functioning model could lower the development communication costs for each donor country substantially.

Possibility to edit information

As a consequence of the need for flexibility, information departments at donor agencies, at ministries in donor and partner countries and at multilateral organisations should have the possibility to edit and translate the information according to the specific needs of their publics. When human-interest stories are produced, different information needs in different countries should be taken into consideration.

The public thus has the possibility to either search for the needed information directly at the partner government's website or search for edited information from the information departments mentioned above.

Conclusions and possible steps ahead

- a) It seems to be possible to construct an information flow-back model that fulfils the information needs of the identified prime target groups in both donor and partner countries.
- b) It seems to be possible to place the information flow-back function of accessible and comprehensible information on results *in the partner country*.
- c) Placing the information flow-back function of accessible and comprehensible results in the partner country entails several benefits to the development cooperation process and consequently to both donor and partner countries.

However, as this study is the first of its kind, it is important to conduct follow-up studies from different approaches. The study team suggests two possible steps ahead:

1. The results of the report are discussed and developed in the DAC “Task Team for Aid Effectiveness”, particularly in the Task Team’s sub-group “Joint-Venture on Managing for Development Results”.
2. A pilot project is carried out in one or two partner countries to test the validity of this study and to further develop or alter the proposed information flow-back model.

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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