

OPERATING MODEL

Executive Summary

The Operating Model presented in this handbook is the result of the ***Integrated Support Programme for Inclusive Reform and Democratic Dialogue (INSPIRED)***. Financed by the EU through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), INSPIRED had as its main goal to operationalise the EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support. The input for the development of the Operating Model came from locally led dialogue processes that took place in five very different contexts (Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco and Tunisia), tackling five different issues. This diversity was deemed necessary to ensure that the Operating Model would be applicable on a wide geographical and thematic scope.



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The Model addresses the ***operational divide between democracy support and the array of instruments aimed at promoting good governance***. For a number of reasons (historical, institutional, ideological, etc.) practitioners working on governance tend to favour technical solutions to problems that are, in reality, inherently political. Indeed, the power dynamics, latent conflicts and vested interests underlying democratic transformation cannot be neglected when supporting partner governments through technical assistance programmes. Aware of the harmful unintended effects that this overly technocratic approach to development can produce, donors have started to look for new ways of linking their aid to locally owned reform agendas.

Over the last decade – and in particular following the Paris Declaration – the EU and other major donors have turned the ***principle of ownership*** into the cornerstone of the international system of aid delivery. But what exactly is meant by national ownership? In other words, who should own the national agenda for reform in a given country? Giving “partner” government this exclusive prerogative has proved to be a recipe for consolidating authoritarian regimes all over the world. The only way to counterbalance the natural tendency of power holders to act exclusively according to their own self-interest is to open decision-making to other actors in society.

To this purpose, international aid organisations and practitioners can make use of ***policy dialogue*** – an instrument that has been gaining importance in donor portfolios in the last two decades – by enhancing its inclusiveness and putting in place participatory mechanisms that make it more representative and legitimate. Situated in the middle-ground between politics and public management, policy seems to offer an ideal vehicle for promoting the culture of dialogue, favouring the kind of constructive and evidence-based debates that can nurture trust and mutual understanding amongst confronted actors in polarised societies.

Enhancing the inclusiveness of policy-making is not only a matter of justice or legitimacy, but also of outright efficiency, as policies that have been elaborated

taking into account different interests and viewpoints are more likely to resist sudden changes in the balance of power than policies that benefit only a small ruling elite. The increased resilience of inclusive policies will naturally improve the sustainability of international aid programmes aimed at promoting good governance.

The Operating Model builds on the **democratic principles of inclusiveness and participation**, which function as its two core values; being both intrinsic and instrumental, they provide the red lines guiding multi-stakeholder dialogue processes. Thanks to its focus on evidence-based policy-making, the Model also promotes the principles of transparency and accountability, which are key prerequisites for a functioning democracy. In order to be of practical use in guiding policy dialogue, the two core values of inclusiveness and participation have been streamlined throughout the Operating Model, which is made up of **three phases: Collective assessment, Consensus-building and Monitoring and donor alignment**. Each phase presents a series of tools and techniques that dialogue hosts and facilitators can use to make policy debate more inclusive and participatory, while keeping it oriented to concrete results.



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Overall management of the dialogue is to be ensured by a “**hosting structure**” that functions as an impartial convener, facilitator, policy analyst and communicator of results. Acting on behalf of the donor while being at the service of the domestic stakeholders participating in the dialogue, the hosting structure embodies the idea of a true partnership; one that is based on mutual trust and accountability so as to be responsive to the challenges of consensus-building.

The Operating Model is **simultaneously policy-oriented, process-oriented and results-oriented**. By focusing the dialogue process around policy choices, it identifies different entry points into the policy cycle, implying different strategies for influencing decision-making and monitoring implementation. Second, given its focus on dialogue, the Model puts strong attention on the notion of process, recognising that in democracy support the means are as important as the end. Nevertheless, results are not to be neglected either: the Roadmaps for Reform and the Recommendations for Institutional and Policy Reform, to be produced by the participating stakeholders themselves, will provide a clear reference for the identification of institutional needs and capacity gaps that need to be addressed in order to make policy reform possible.

All these aspects are to be reflected in the **Integrated Support Framework (ISF)**, a reporting tool that can be used to present snapshots of the dialogue process at different moments, providing practitioners and the donor community with a very useful insight into the points of contention, as well as the interests and incentives of the participating stakeholders. By presenting this kind of “intelligence” in a focused and structured way – identifying potential gridlocks and conflicting visions as well as real windows of opportunity – the ISF can help donors and implementing agencies design and coordinate programmes and assistance measures in a way that ensures their alignment with locally-led processes of reform.