



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRAMME SUPPORT MECHANISMS

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Guiding principles for programme support mechanisms

Introduction

Programme support mechanism is a term used for a multitude of instruments, such as programme implementation -advisory, -support and management units, programme coordinators, advisers etc.

These Guiding principles for programme support mechanisms outline the **functions** such support mechanisms can undertake, the **modalities** and the **funding** sources that can, and cannot, be used to sustain the mechanisms.

The guiding principles will establish **4 modalities for programme support mechanisms** that can be used in development assistance:

- i) Advisers,
- ii) Programme Implementation Units, two main areas of responsibility can be undertaken:
 - a. Advisory and coordination
 - b. Management
- iii) Programme coordinators, and
- iv) Secondments/Professional Officers.

When using programme support mechanisms, MFA units are encouraged to use these categories in their planning in order to ensure uniform approaches across programmes, albeit, the various mechanisms will be tailored to the specific needs of the programmes concerned.

Coordination and management is likely, in some instances, to border on core ministerial responsibilities, therefore a specific assessment has to be made with respect to whether the particular engagement is to be funded from programme budgets or the ministerial recurrent cost budget.

Engagement of programme support modalities is not a departure from the development effectiveness agenda. Programme support mechanisms should be used with the aim to ensure results. Harmonisation, alignment and national ownership remain crucial factors in ensuring sustainable results.

For interventions in countries where security may be a concern it is important that considerations are made with regard to duty of care, security of personnel, and security related expenditure. Involvement of SEK and HR is important and, when necessary, senior management may need to be involved to assess whether the intervention is feasible in light of the security implications.

Restrictive application of programme support mechanisms

As outlined in the principles below, use of programme support mechanisms should be used restrictively. This entails:

- Clearly state the use of programme support mechanisms in appropriation documentation, also at concept stage
- Always use the least comprehensive mechanism
- Prioritise placement of support mechanisms with partners
- Clearly state the objectives and targets for the mechanisms deployed
- Clearly focus on support to partners
- Preference to multi donor set-ups over bilateral initiatives

Functions for support mechanisms

Overall there are three distinct but often overlapping functions carried out by the supporting mechanisms:

- **Advisory services** towards one or more partners, typically in the form of technical assistance
- **Coordination** between multiple engagements and partners, often involving technical dialogue with governments, implementing partners and other donors. This could also include support to monitoring of programmes across several partners
- **Management** of staff in programme units, management of disbursement of funding on behalf of a programme/embassy or other transactional duties and provision of advisory services etc. In some instances actual implementation of activities can be undertaken, especially in fragile situations.

Form of the support mechanism

Support mechanism can take the following forms:

Advisers

Advisers should, as a general rule, be posted with partners or, where multiple partners are supported by one adviser, with the most prominent partner.

- **Long term advisers**, contracts with duration of more than 12 months. Typically posted for 2-3 years on a specific part of a programme or one partner. Advisers can also take on coordinating roles between partners or themes in a programme.
- **Short term advisers**, contracts with duration of less than 12 months. Typically a very specific assignment or service to be provided in a programme.
- **Resident advisers**, contracts with specialist staff already residing in the country of engagement. Currently only utilised for countries where bilateral programmes are being phased out.

There are examples¹ of advisers posted at embassies; they are, however, not funded by programme support funds but from the recurrent cost allocation in the MFA.

¹ Peace and stability fund, Addis, Nairobi and Islamabad.

Programme implementation units

A programme implementation unit (PIU) is a setup where one or more advisory or management functions cannot be hosted by a partner and a separate office is required. A PIU can be hosted by a partner, but with wider mandate than supporting just that one partner. Reasons for a separate office can be the number of partners supported, no clear opportunity for adviser(s) to be posted with a partner or security concerns etc. PIUs are administered according to [Guidelines for Financial Management of Decentralised Units](#).

Generally the responsibility of a PIU can be divided into two main areas:

1. Advisory and coordination
2. Management

Advisory and coordination functions will typically undertake the following:

- Capacity development and technical assistance
- Coordination among several partners in a thematic/geographical programme²
- Consolidate reporting across several partners, including analysis and recommendations, to allow the ministry to undertake monitoring on an informed basis
- Ensure that reporting from partners is entered into the relevant reporting systems of the MFA
- Planning and programming related to the programme

Management responsibility is used in situations where one or more partners are crucial in the implementation of the programme, but where those partners have limited capacity or legitimacy to fulfil their implementation responsibility and management of funding³.

PIUs with management responsibilities can also be established in situations where a programme aims to support many smaller partners (typically civil society or private sector), and there is no institution with the mandate or capacity to manage implementation with all partners.

Finally, where a programme is implemented in an area where Denmark has no representation⁴, or where a Danish representation cannot get easy access (security or logistical concerns), a PIU can be established to implement parts of the programme which cannot in a satisfactory manner be managed at a distance or through other partners.

PIUs with management responsibilities⁵ can undertake the same tasks as advisory units, but also:

- Management of funding to partners on behalf of the MFA
- Supervision of programme implementation, financially and programmatic

² E.g. Technical advisory offices in DAI.

³ In many instances there will be only one partner with the mandate to undertake the programme activity, which makes it impossible to identify another partner with stronger capacity to implement a programme engagement. An example could be a human rights commission, police training academy or a patent office. Also, a programme aimed at supporting civil society organisations should naturally work with the weakest, not the most capable, organisations, making it necessary to establish a support mechanism.

⁴ This includes situations where a programme is being phased out and the Danish representation is closed before the implementation of the programme has been completed.

⁵ E.g. Democratic governance facilities in Kampala and Kathmandu.

- Monitoring of partner implementation
- Overall programme reporting and monitoring
- Ensuring financial and programme reports are entered into relevant systems in the MFA
- Direct implementation of activities in the programme.

Secondments/Professional Officers

Secondments and professional officers in multilateral organisations can be funded from programme budgets, typically regional or country programmes⁶. The positions must be included in the programme document and be part of the approved grant appropriation. These positions are supposed to strengthen the general capacity of a multilateral partner. When funded from a programme budget it is important that the secondment is fully, or substantially, supportive for the achievement of the objectives in the programme. Therefore the positions should be:

- In connection with a partnership with a multilateral organisation receiving funding from the programme.
- To a multilateral organisation working on e.g. framework conditions for a thematic area, which is crucial for the successful implementation of a Danish programme, even if the relevant multilateral organisation is not a direct recipient of funding for the programme.⁷
- As the justification of this type of position is a substantial contribution to the achievement of the objectives of a Danish programme, the positions are likely to require a specialist with considerable expertise.

Programme coordinators

Programme coordinators are funded from the recurrent cost in the MFA, not from programme budgets, and are therefore able to work as posted ministry staff at the embassies. Programme coordinators will typically be tasked with specific areas of responsibility in the implementation of development assistance, but can undertake all tasks normally done by ministry staff. Programme coordinators can be utilised in connection with the other support mechanisms mentioned above.

Funding of programme support mechanisms

Generally a programme support mechanism, if abiding by the principles stated, can be funded from programme budgets, except programme coordinators or advisers posted at embassies⁸.

Expenditure for programme support mechanisms should be part of the programme description and budgets, and thereby clearly stated in the grant appropriation document. This will ensure that the mechanisms are transparent and subject to the quality assurance process of the programmes. It will be important to outline the use of such mechanisms already at the concept note stage, including an analysis outlining the rationale for such mechanisms. Introducing new mechanisms in an already approved programme will, as a minimum, require consultations with, or approval by, the Under-Secretary for Global Development and Cooperation.

⁶ In addition, HR has an instrument for secondments to multilateral organisations.

⁷ E.g. an organisation working on framework conditions for judicial reform, which Denmark would not be able to undertake alone as bilateral partner, and where the Danish programme has a focus on support to judicial reform.

⁸ With the exception of security concerns etc. mentioned above.

Programme support mechanisms can be established through individual contracts, bilateral set-up, multi donor basket funding, multilateral contributions, tendering of private companies, grants to umbrella organisations etc.

Principles for establishment programme support mechanism.

1. **The overriding principle for programme support mechanisms is that they should not directly or indirectly take over the duties vested in the authority of the MFA or be administrative support to units in the ministry.**
2. **Any support mechanism should have clear objectives on what it is expected to achieve.** Success of a mechanism should not solely be assessed against the performance of the partners it is supposed to assist.⁹
3. **Focus should be on enhancing the impact of the programme and assisting partners.**
4. **Support can be provided to partners in terms of capacity development** to ensure capacity to fulfil the stated objectives, **monitoring and reporting** (financial as well as programmatic) **and financial support.**
5. **Support functions can be considered where the capacity of partners is especially low or where coordination and management of interventions is particularly difficult.** These conditions are often prevailing in fragile situations or where Denmark has no permanent presence.
6. **It should always be an ambition to aim for the smallest possible set up,** i.e. units should not be established if the capacity constraint could be addressed with posting adviser(s) with the partners. Therefore a principle of least intensive intervention should always be observed.
7. **Multi-donor setups are, when feasible, always preferable to establishment of a Danish bilateral set-up.**
8. **Support structures can engage in technical, financial dialogue with partners, but not undertake political dialogue on behalf of Denmark** or make any commitment with regard to bilateral agreements outside the specific programme it is established to support.
9. **Staff posted at Danish embassies and representations should be funded by the recurrent cost budget.** In very special circumstances:
 - where the security of i) personnel, ii) information or iii) partners is of particular concern
 - cost of maintaining a separate office outside an embassy for a support mechanism is substantially out of proportionworking from a Danish representation can be justified. In such cases, approval must be obtained from the Under-Secretary for Global Development and Cooperation.
10. **Use of support functions in programmes should clearly be stated in the grant appropriation documentation,** also at the level of concept note. In some instances the modality can be included in the narrative in the Finance Act.

⁹ Areas for monitoring could be; capacity development of partners, advisory services, coordination and establishment of networks and peer to peer structures, timely management of grants and use of partner systems etc.