

Facilitating a Shared Political Context Analysis

Guidance note for programme officers, facilitators of a programmatic cooperation,
and other workshop convenors

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Colophon

This guide is developed for the democratisation programme of ICCO & Kerk in Actie, in collaboration with the Royal Tropical Institute and Fair & Sustainable advisory services. The guide was developed by Thea Hilhorst, Saskia van Drunen and Joanna Thijs. Previous versions have been tested in Liberia and Kirghizstan. We are most grateful to the participants in these two workshops for their valuable feedback. We like to thank in particular the workshop convenors in Liberia and Kirghizstan Shannoh Kandoh and Gulzat Temirova, respectively as well as the facilitators Julius Sele, Zaura Sydykova and Aida Kurbanova. They played a crucial role in reshaping the guide and workshop methodology.

Other organisations are welcome to use this guide and share their experiences with ICCO.

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1 Introduction

This background note is prepared for programme officers and facilitators of a programmatic cooperation or alliance who are organising a shared political context analysis. Such an analysis is an inquiry into the actors and institutions (political, legal, societal etc.) that shape inequalities, cause rights violations and produce patterns of exclusion experienced by marginalised groups. The aim is to identify the root causes of these issues and identify priorities for change, thus providing a solid basis for strategy development. This shared political context analysis will generally be part of a larger trajectory of programme development, in which the findings are validated and followed by strategy development (or strategy revision) and planning workshops.

This guidance note proposes preparatory steps and choices that need to be made before organising the political context analysis workshop. It offers suggestions for setting the objectives of the workshop, invitations, preparation, venue, facilitation requirements, reporting and follow-up.

One workshop cannot produce a complete context analysis, but can play an important role in identifying causes and trends, and identify knowledge gaps, which may need additional studies and consultation of resource persons. Arriving at a coherent work programme requires also clarity on the theory of change, pathways of impact and possible risks. Priority setting also needs to be in line with available capacity. When covering too much ground, the result is a scattering of energy and only 'scratching the surface'.

This background note is coupled with a guide developed for the facilitator of the context analysis workshop. The facilitator's guide discusses the ICCO & Kerk in Actie vision on democratisation and the reasons for a 'programmatic approach', which are the point of departure. The facilitator's guide presents the structure of the workshop, the content of the various sessions and suggestions for methodology. Support materials like handouts and power points, as well as reports of previous context analysis workshops, are available.

2 When to organise a shared political context analysis

Concretely, a context analysis process is useful for the following phases in a programmatic cooperation:

- Refinement of previous analysis as input for a new strategic plan. The leading question is whether interventions are still addressing relevant priorities
- Reality check (monitoring if the programmatic cooperation is on the right track)
- Starting a new programmatic cooperation.

2.1 Refinement

When a new strategic plan is to be developed, participants in a programmatic cooperation can use a political context analysis to assess their achievements and review challenges with respect to rights, justice and empowerment for poor, marginalised groups. Participants further need to check whether the analysis, vision and strategic choices that are guiding their activities are still valid. This moment of reflection before starting a new planning exercise is also an opportunity to share and integrate new insights.

2.2 Reality check

Continuously, political realities change and new developments emerge. This is even more important in a post-conflict setting, where the context can change fast within a relatively short period of time. Moreover, it is likely that the participants' visions have changed when their experience is evolving and that over time they have gained a deeper understanding of the issues at stake and the context within which they work. These insights may result in new interpretations of structural causes of exclusion and rights abuse, which could affect the strategy of the programmatic cooperation.

2.3 Starting a programmatic cooperation

When a group of organisations decide to join forces, they need to make informed choices on where to focus efforts and on what to spend resources. A shared context analysis is then the first step. In addition, these discussions will contribute to mutual understanding of how the actions of each participant (and of other stakeholders) contribute to the bigger picture.

3 Aim of a shared context analysis workshop

Achieving a transformative change in society that produces real improvements for marginalised, poor women and men requires a strategic focus directed at structural causes, not just symptoms. Making such choices requires, firstly, a good understanding of the issues that matter most for these target groups, how rights violation, injustice and disempowerment is inflicted, and the institutions causing this. Secondly, the (negative) powers need to be understood and this needs to be combined with a strategic analysis of the opportunities for leverage. The analysis produces an inventory of actors, institutions and forces that are causing and maintaining such situations, but which may also be transformed into entry points for achieving change.

Special attention is paid to identifying those entry points where in particular a programmatic approach has added value. Participants have to know what others are already doing and how other partners can add to their efforts. The discussions may generate new ideas for synergy and collaboration. In addition, the analysis helps to identify additional stakeholders which can make the programmatic cooperation more effective.

The process of undertaking a shared analysis and select together priorities is as important as the findings and insights gained. Participants in a programmatic cooperation work at different levels and approach key issues from diverse angles and backgrounds. A successful programmatic cooperation requires a shared vision and a comprehension of each other's position and values. They also need to trust each other.

The workshop methodology has been developed in such a way that it helps bringing together different stakeholders and facilitates dialogue. The workshop thus contributes to cementing relations and mutual trust, the identification of common ground for interventions, while leaving space also for diversity of opinions.

4 Scope of the workshop

The aim of the workshop is to come to a shared context analysis, as part of a programmatic cooperation. One workshop will not produce, however, a full-fledged context analysis. This can not

be achieved with a diverse group in only two and a half days workshop.

The depth of the analysis will depend on whether a focus has been defined beforehand, the knowledge and experience of the participants, the presence of membership organisations and possibly resource persons. The more focused and the more selective the invitations, the more extended the analysis will be.

This point of departure should be clear when preparing the workshop and planning follow-up. It is important to be realistic about the results that can be expected and what steps need to be taken in the follow-up of the workshop. Various sessions include questions on knowledge gaps. The concluding session needs to bring together the results with respect to findings, gaps and agreement on what more needs to be done to complete the analysis.

One aim of the shared context analysis is to encourage participants to think 'out-of-the-box' and to recognise opportunities for synergy, but also gaps in their analysis. If well prepared and facilitated, the methodology used will help participants to leave their comfort zone with respect to target groups focus and issues. The methodology also seeks to encourage a shift of focus from (short-term) activities planning towards the developing a vision on (long-term) strategic goals. Furthermore, the workshop touches upon strategic issues, analysing the leverage of an organisation and of a programmatic cooperation. The tools used throughout the workshop may lead to more insights among the participants on, for example, how the characteristics of a policy space differ per organisation depending on their position in the political field. This is important for analysing the potential of a programmatic approach.

5 Venue and duration of the workshop

Attendance and concentration will improve when the workshop venue is not too close to the work setting of most of the participating organisations, as this will avoid people being tempted to go back to their offices during the workshop.

The minimum duration of this workshop is one evening, followed by two full days. Participants should be requested to stay over for two nights in order to use available time as efficiently as possible.

Experience has shown that it is feasible for senior management to attend a workshop of this length. Starting the day before ensures that the first day begins on time.

The evening session takes place before dinner and lasts between one and two hours. This session is used to explain the reasons for the workshop and to clarify any outstanding issues and even misunderstandings. The latter can occur with respect to the purpose of the workshop and how it fits into a larger trajectory of programme development, planning and strategy formulation. In the case that participants do not know each other well beforehand or know little about each others work, this evening session is also important for getting introduced to each others work. Finally, in countries where important political changes have taken place recently (for example an outburst of violence, elections etc.), the evening session can be used as a moment to exchange experiences and first impressions about these changes.

In case there is more time available, this extra time can be assigned to the sessions that focus on analysis (3 to 6) in order to complete the work. The extra time can also be used to analyse strategic issues such as accountability mechanisms or rights. Finally, one might also decide to organise additional sessions that focus specifically on gender analysis, duty-bearer analysis or other rights-based approaches.

6 Workshop preparations

6.1 Focus

Ideally the workshop is preceded by a clear and transparent decision-making process on the thematic focus of the workshop and key target groups, which set the point of departure. The quality and depth of the analysis is influenced by the clarity of focus and the range of workshop participants.

These may be sensitive decisions and should be made in a participatory and careful way. They also influence (scarce) resource allocation. The decision on focus of the workshop and key target groups is based on partner consultation. It also requires consultation of strategic allies and other actors in the country or region where the programmatic cooperation will operate, as well as cross-checking of the insights gained in these conversations with researchers and other documentation on the area.

These decisions facilitate the analysis and will direct invitations for the context analysis workshop, either as (future) partners or as a resource person.

The thematic focus of a workshop may be defined broadly (for example: fair relation between citizens and government) or more specifically (governance of forest or mining concessions which affect rights and sustainable development of rural communities).

When the group making the analysis has not yet defined a focus area, the workshop will produce a first identification of priorities, and introduces participants in the methodology of making a political analysis. This analysis will need to be deepened in a follow-up trajectory.

6.2 Participants

The total number of participants in the workshop should be around 20-25 people to ensure depth of exchanges in plenary sessions, while making group work still feasible. Firstly, the participants in the workshop are representatives of organisations working on the thematic focus determined beforehand, resource persons or key allies. These organisations can either be civil society organisations, or public or private sector organisations. They should preferably represent a mix of different type of stakeholders from diverse levels (community based organisations, professional lobby and advocacy NGOs, membership organisations, faith-based organisations etc.) and different background (civic, public, private). This enhances the added value of a programmatic cooperation.

Participants are representing their organisation. The organisers need to decide whether the invitation is by 'name' or if this choice is left to the discretion of the organisation. Depending on the number of partners both decision makers and field staff can be invited. The gender balance also has to be considered. Finding the right balance between having a good mix between decision-makers and field staff and not having too many participants can be a dilemma. This needs to be reflected upon –and solved- before sending out the invitations.

A decision before the workshop with respect to focus on certain key target groups (marginal groups) will influence the invitations. If the target groups are not represented directly in the programmatic cooperation, special action is required. There is then

a major risk that workshop participants will discuss over people and not with them, and that the agency of marginalised groups is overlooked. When membership organisations are not part of the programmatic approach, special efforts are required to ensure that their views and analysis are known and taken into account.

Ideally, representatives are invited. Great care should be taken in the facilitation to ensure that they are at ease and contribute actively. The facilitator has to ensure fluid communication between representatives of the target groups or more community based membership organisation and research and advocacy organisations. Connections have to be made between different levels of understanding and ways of communication. Patronising behaviour should be recognised and challenged.

Finally, if the target group is not or weakly represented in the programmatic cooperation, the internal accountability of the participating organisations acting on behalf of these groups becomes even more important. Weak accountability towards the target group may produce patronising behaviour.

6.3 Convenor

Decisions on who is convening and who is sending the invitations have to be taken with care, as this may influence the legitimacy of the workshop and the commitment of participants.

The convenor may be a person or an organisation and will take the lead in developing the workshop programme, contracting a facilitator and selecting the workshop venue. If the convenor is the main donor of most of the participants in the workshop, the role of the workshop in future programming should be clear to all.

The convenor sends the invitation, which presents the objectives, expected results, programme outline and list of participating organisations. The success of the workshop depends on attendance by all organisations and on whether their representatives are in a position to contribute to the analysis and ensure follow-up. Therefore, the convenor has to follow-up the invitation with phone calls.

To prepare for the workshop, participants may be asked to discuss certain questions in advance within their own organisations.

7 Workshop facilitation

The quality of the facilitation is important for the results of the workshop. A good facilitator can help to improve the quality of the analysis and to have a good process towards building a programmatic cooperation.

7.1 Selecting the workshop facilitator

An experienced workshop facilitator with a basic understanding of the issues being discussed is required. The facilitator needs to master the tools used in this guide to visualise relations, clusters and interactions (Meta plan; cause-effect mapping); and for priority setting (e.g. matrix, ranking or quadrant). The facilitator especially needs to understand the power cube as developed by Gaventa (2006, www.powercube.net).

The task of the workshop facilitator is to moderate plenary discussions; assist the group in clustering and synthesising information and arriving at priorities, assist the group in identifying common ground, or to 'agree to disagree'. The workshop facilitator also needs to keep participants focused and ensure that all can participate freely.

A solid preparation of the workshop is essential. The workshop facilitator needs to receive background information and clear instructions from the convenor of the workshop.

The facilitator's guide is leading and needs to be respected. This guide contains for each session guiding questions, but which may need to be adapted to the specific circumstances within which the workshop takes place. This adaptation is a task of the programme officer and (if relevant) programme facilitator, in collaboration with the workshop facilitator. The questions are now posed for programmes that are starting up. When the guide is used for updating ongoing programmes, the questions should be reformulated and posed in terms of change that have taken place since the start of the collaboration.

7.2 The working groups

In order to stimulate participants to leave 'their comfort zone' and get in touch with new thoughts,

they will not necessarily work (or start working) on the themes or target groups that they know best. Therefore, the workshop methodology is organised around group discussions in small groups of 4 to 5 participants in 'unusual' compositions. These working groups are also used to cover more issues and deepen the analysis.

In the first session priority target groups have been identified, and from there on the working groups focus on the same target group throughout the workshop, deepening the analysis step by step.

The composition of the working groups is important for the dynamics of the entire workshop. Therefore, the distribution of participants over the working groups will be 'at random' (for example by counting 1, 2, 3, and 4 and ask all those having the same number to go to the same group), especially in the beginning of the workshop. After each session half of the participants will move to another working group and half will stay- to ensure the 'group memory'. This rotation will be organised again at the start of the next session.

It is also important that the analysis benefits from insights of those participants who have more experience with the target group or the issues being discussed. Therefore, to make sure that important points are not missed all participants can leave comments on group work presentations (e.g. using post-it), that then have to be discussed and included when deemed relevant.

Furthermore, as the analysis deepens throughout the sessions and moves towards strategy, it becomes more important to build on expertise of the participating organisations, while keeping an open mind for alternative perspectives. It is the responsibility of the organisers of the workshop to look at a good balance between breaking with vested interests and making use of existing knowledge within the group.

7.3 Group instructions

The productivity of the working groups is influenced by the extent to which the groups understand the task they are asked to perform. The workshop facilitator should explain clearly in plenary what is expected and develop an example. Handouts are also made available. Participants are encouraged to be as detailed as possible in their analysis, and consider all the different dimensions and levels.

The workshop facilitator will check regularly on all groups and give advice where required. Where possible, other participants (convenor, programme officer, programme facilitator) can play a role in getting the working groups going.

8 Reporting

A good workshop report is important for capturing results and is the 'point of departure' for the next step. This report also enables other members of the organisation to inform themselves and give feedback. It is also the memory of the process and can be used by new staff.

When the theme of the workshop is not focused yet and participation is very broad a lighter approach to reporting can be taken. The reporting of the workshop findings is then based mainly on the cards and flipcharts. It is essential that workshop participants understand the role of cards, and make sure that all the results are written on cards in an understandable and readable way.

The workshop facilitator should make sure that all relevant information is captured on cards or flipcharts, both during plenary sessions and in the working groups. During the plenary sessions, somebody of the group may be requested to assist the workshop facilitator with writing down key findings on a flipchart. The writing on the cards and flipcharts should be clear and the message 'understandable'. These cards and flipcharts are the basis for the workshop report and thus help to capture the reasoning during the analysis and conclusions. Ideally, all results (cards and flipcharts) are typed out every evening. If this is not possible, photos should be taken and will be processed later on.

If the workshop organisers expect the shared context analysis to reach considerable depth, note-keeping participants are required too. The organisers of the workshop can act as note-keeping participants, and are, if needed, complemented by others. Besides the reporting on cards and flipcharts, each working group should then also have one person from the organising team to document the discussions. They will take detailed notes per session, and this will serve as an input to the final report. However they are not the ones writing the report for the group, neither do they give presentations on the outcomes of the group discussion in plenary. They must keep a

low profile, but can bring up issues for the group to consider.

The note-keeping should preferably be done electronically, in great detail, and conflicting views are also to be taken into account. Proper briefing of note-keepers before the workshop is essential.

9 After the workshop

Whether the workshop constitutes the starting point of a new programmatic cooperation, or will be used to refine an analysis or as a reality check of goals and strategies, it will always require follow-up.

It is important to pay attention to follow-up steps in the last session of the workshop, and, as organisers of the workshop, to have beforehand a clear idea of what you are prepared to facilitate as a follow-up. Here are some suggestions for a possible follow-up of the workshop:

- Deepening of the analysis/ addressing knowledge gaps
- A validation of the workshop results
- Further steps for strategic planning

As participants are representing their organisation, it is important that they report back to their organisations after the workshop. The workshop report can be used as starting point. Whether these feedback sessions took place should be monitored.

9.1 Addressing knowledge gaps

It is possible that the shared analysis did not provide all answers that participants were looking for, while new questions came up during the workshop. This is normal, as not all knowledge may be available amongst the participants. Moreover, the ability to formulate the knowledge and insights that are required for making strategic choices is an indicator of progress in the analysis.

It is therefore useful to request workshop participants to identify knowledge gaps, of which some may demand further in-depth research (such as by commissioning a study), while others can be solved through exchange between the participants.

9.2 Validating workshop results

It is useful to undertake a validation of the workshop conclusions with respect to priorities and a mapping of already ongoing work around the selected themes. A 'validation' can consist of exchange with

resource persons, sister organisations and off course with the target group(s). Participants also need to have time to discuss the findings within their own organisations and seek adherence. These discussions are also part of the validation phase.

9.3 Theory of change and strategic planning

When all participants in the programmatic cooperation have adhered to the results of the context analysis, programme development can start, or adjustment to the existing programme can be made. The new insights gained by the participants during the workshop will need to be translated into adjustments of the goals, strategies and partnerships.

In the case of a new programmatic cooperation, the next step after the context analysis might be the development of a vision of change for the group, and the identification of preconditions to achieve this vision of change, the first steps towards a strategy for the programmatic cooperation. From there the group will move towards identifying specific objectives, a division of roles between the participants, a strategy to link up with other relevant actors, the formulation of broad impact indicators etc.

