

ICPS newsletter

Technical assistance can be effective

The international donor community, through its technical assistance (TA) programs, has played an important role in the realisation of democratic and market reforms in Ukraine and Poland. Yet, their activities in the two countries are executed very differently. Comparing the two distinct systems of TA implementation, it becomes clear that the Polish framework, designed in order to attain EU member status by fulfilling the criteria outlined in the Accession Partnership Agreement (APA), has produced good and sustainable results. On the other hand, the ad hoc, non-systemic assistance in Ukraine has resulted in a considerably slower transformation in every way, including that of the local government sector. Further, the criteria outlined in Ukraine's Partnership Cooperation Agreement (PCA) are not realized in TA project design. ICPS's comparison of TA implementation was presented in the research paper "Information collection and assessment of international donor activities in Ukraine and Poland", prepared for the Open Society Institute's Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative

Criteria for effective technical assistance

International donors have spent considerable resources on defining the criteria that ensure effective technical assistance. And for good reason: developed nations spend globally about fifteen billion dollars a year on technical assistance, and it is in everyone's best interest that this sum of money is spent efficiently and effectively. Most recently, the World Bank has published (and successfully implemented) the *Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)*, which embodies four principles of effective TA:

1. A long-term, holistic vision that addresses a country's development priorities in an appropriate, consistent manner that is balanced and non-discrete;
2. Country ownership, with the country owning and directing the development agenda through building consensus between the government, civil society, and private

sectors, as all stakeholders have their say in setting the agenda;

3. Establishing a strong partnership among the government, civil society, private sector, donors, international agencies, and other actors that creates a single framework aligning actions to the national strategy and supporting the country's lead in managing aid coordination;

4. Achieving concrete development results that are linked to the overall aims of the country's stated vision, with a key aim being poverty reduction, and others guided by the *International Development Goals* generated by UN agreements during the 1990s.

Assessment of TA effectiveness in the two countries by these four criteria showed that the criteria are followed to good success in Poland, but are being neglected in Ukraine, to its peril.

Long-term, holistic vision

From our research, it is clear that in Ukraine, donors do not typically implement long-term

initiatives; nor do they directly address their strategies or projects to the realisation of Ukraine's obligations under the PCA. Concomitantly, because the Government of Ukraine does not generate an over-all country strategy to guide or regulate donor activity, there is no formal requirement that donors attend to Ukraine's need for implementing the PCA in the agreed-upon timeframe, set in collaboration with the EU (2004). In contrast, all TA in Poland is structured under the framework of the APA. In consonance with this is Poland's National Strategy for TA, which also reinforces the fulfilment of the APA.

Further, Ukraine's lack of legislation on TA, and the predominance of bilateral agreements, increase the confusion in the country's development environment. All of this makes it difficult to design projects that are interconnected and can develop the kind of cumulative mass, in terms of time and goal fulfillment, needed to produce real transformation.

These factors obscure the focus which should be directed at a long-term vision of TA that directly targets stated needs and meets Ukraine's international obligations. This conclusion was also corroborated by the results of ICPS's donor survey. While all of the Polish donors indicate a strategic vision for their activities, in Ukraine, less than half of the donors mention future plans in their documents. Moreover, in Poland the donors consistently provide information about their current main programs and projects, providing a basis and direction for future work. In Ukraine, only half of this information is available. This reduces the possibility of future project design that would take into account past and current work and use this information to construct projects that move reforms ahead in a strategic way.

Country ownership

This principle of the World Bank's CDF includes not only government consultations, but also dialogue with civil society and the private sector in project design and implementation. All the stakeholders are consulted and have their say in setting out development priorities.

Forms of donor project activities

Ukraine

- Policy advice;
- Seminars, conferences, roundtables; and
- Short-term study tours and training.

Poland

- Creation of policy documents, manuals and regulations;
- System of training for adoption of the new EU regulations;
- Launching a nation-wide system of training in order to adopt new standards; and
- Twinning.

In Ukraine, there is evidence of a general lack of coordination between the government and these relevant parties, starting at the level of establishing of a national strategy and extending downward through to individual projects. Although some projects target reforms for civil society and the private sector, public consultation is not the norm and therefore not typically included in any step of the process. There is also a lack of coordination between all interested parties in setting the TA agenda, designing projects, and seeing them through to implementation.

On the other hand, country ownership is a necessary requirement of Poland's strategy for EU membership. For instance, the APA sets out what is needed in local government reform and these needs are benchmarked with projected dates of fulfilment. Everyone knows the agenda and what needs to be done to complete it. As a result, local government projects cover 50% more spheres of activity than do Ukrainian projects and therefore involve 50% more stakeholders in civil society and the private sector.

Partnership

The kind of single framework that links individual stakeholders into a community of partners must be developed in Ukraine. The basis of this framework must be the realization of Ukraine's obligations under the PCA. Yet, none of the surveyed Ukrainian TA projects mentioned PCA criteria implementation, while in Poland, half of the projects directly mention co-ordination under the framework of the APA. This has created an environment of coherence for government reforms in Poland, as all initiatives seek to fulfil the same mandate—EU membership—working together in partnership with the EU. The consistency of government reforms at each level benefits all levels, with the machinery of Polish government moving together in consonance, as a result. Declared goals and expectations are concretely outlined, and the actual assistance to the country is directed at making it possible for these goals to be fulfilled; thus, Poland steadily moves towards accession with everyone working together as a team to bring about this result.

In Ukraine, we observed an overall lack of technical cooperation and alignment between the government and the international donor community, which impedes the creation of a partnership

environment. Further, because the design of reforms is not systematic, any changes that do manage to be pushed through in one place clash with the still-entrenched Soviet system, and the entire process breaks down. This produces, among other things, enormous discouragement and lack of trust in the reform process.

The situation is slowly beginning to change for the better. Since 1999 all donors have begun to discuss their TA strategies with the Government of Ukraine. There is a slow evolution towards a more partnership-focused paradigm, which is leading to better-developed strategies. Yet at the same time, procedural norms under the framework of extant bilateral agreements continue to exclude Ukraine's voice in determining specific projects, their content, and the selection of project contractors and Ukrainian grantees.

Finally, the Government must acknowledge the importance of producing a national strategy that outlines, from Ukraine's perspective, the transformation needs the country is facing, and includes consultations with all stakeholders. This document should set out requirements defined by the PCA and target benchmarks that will indicate criteria fulfilment.

Development results

The donors involved in the ICPS research all provided information relating to their overall mission and strategic objectives for their development work in Poland and Ukraine. These missions seek to enable the transition in both countries towards democracy and a market economy. The question is: what correlation exists between a project's stated goals and objectives and its outputs and outcomes?

Our research indicates that only 19% of Ukrainian projects specify both goals and objectives. Conversely, 7% do not state any goal or objective, and 73% provide only goals. Concerning outputs and outcomes; 40% of Ukrainian projects do not specify concrete outputs and 81% do not specify outcomes. This indicates a serious problem in project design and reveals the lack of correlation between goals and outputs. Without clearly stated targets and delineated, measurable achievements, it is impossible to align goals with concrete, observable results. Without designing internally consistent projects it is very difficult to achieve project success and produce measurable outputs.

On the other hand, the link between these criteria is more consistently shown in the data from Poland. 71% of projects specified objectives, while 38% identified outcomes consistent with these objectives. These figures reveal stronger project design ensuring the results that will achieve donor mission criteria for future EU membership.

It is important to note that building government capacity to conduct reforms represents a very small aspect of the overall sphere of work on Ukrainian projects. Conversely, in Poland, institution and infrastructure building are the key areas supported by the EU. The PHARE focuses on disseminating EU procedures in order to ensure Polish preparation for accession, and uses twinning as the mechanism to provide skills-based training in all levels of government. In Ukraine, the predominance of short-term activities, such as advice only or one-off seminars and conferences, undercuts the cumulative effect achieved by long-term projects. The end result is development results that underachieve in attaining the stated goal of democracy building and market reform.

Recommendations

On the basis of this research, we:

- advise the government to develop the PCA as a technical system and a strategic framework for democratic reform;
- insist all local government projects are designed in the framework of the PCA and the European Charter on Local Self-Government;
- recommend donors create programs and projects that implement the PCA;
- suggest project design includes the CDF's effectiveness criteria;
- insist activities emphasised in Poland's projects—development of manuals, skills-based training, and twinning—be included in Ukraine's projects. ■

The project was conducted by an ICPS research team in collaboration with Polish experts from the Institute of Public Affairs. It was financed by the Open Society Institute's Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative. The research will be published in one of forthcoming issues of "Policy Studies". Information about the project will be available soon on the ICPS web-site: www.icps.kiev.ua.

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