

# Implementing the New Development Agenda

## *Framing Note*

### The 'new' agenda

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that development approaches need to change. Critiques of official development assistance have argued that it should more closely reflect the political, economic, institutional and social realities of developing countries. Similarly, some governments in developing countries, such as in Indonesia, have been advocating for international partners to support locally-led change rather than pushing external models. In parallel, many practitioners and organisations on the ground are grappling with using more experimental, flexible approaches to improve development outcomes and support key reforms.

These movements are gaining unprecedented traction, driven in part by the formation of a few global communities that have coalesced around some common ideas. We refer to this collection of networks, ideas, reformers, practitioners and researchers as the new development agenda.

Although it has many influences, a case can be made that the new development agenda has two main origins. The first was a paper the Washington-based Centre for Global Development published in 2012, *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)*.<sup>1</sup> PDIA is an approach that seeks to engage with reform-minded government actors to marshal the coordination, cooperation and authorisation that is necessary to design and implement meaningful and lasting change. Having hit a nerve, *PDIA* gave rise to a network of researchers, policymakers and practitioners who got together in August 2014 under the banner of 'Doing Development Differently' (DDD). The opening lines of the *DDD Manifesto* summarise the problem they sought to address:

*Too many development initiatives have limited impact. Schools are built but children do not learn. Clinics are built but sickness persists. Governments adopt reforms but too little changes for their citizens. This is because genuine development progress is complex: solutions are not simple or obvious, those who would benefit most lack power, those who can make a difference are disengaged and political barriers are too often overlooked. Many development initiatives fail to address this complexity, promoting irrelevant interventions that will have little impact.*

Often, development problems are not only complex and difficult to define; they require fundamental shifts in the status quo. They are what we might call 'wicked problems'. Wicked problems—poverty, inequality or climate change for instance—are caused by multiple factors, are highly changeable, have no clear solution and attempts to address them can easily lead to unforeseen consequences.<sup>2</sup> Solving them sustainably requires collective action and changes in behaviour among many actors. This year's *World Development Report* recognises that in development, wicked problems tend to be governance challenges: challenges produced by 'the ways in which governments, citizens, and communities engage to design and apply policies'.<sup>3</sup> Overcoming governance challenges therefore lies at the heart of successful reform efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Global Development, *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation*, Working Paper 299, 2012, <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/escaping-capability-traps-through-problem-driven-iterative-adaptation-pdia-working-paper>.

<sup>2</sup> *Tackling wicked problems: A public policy perspective*, Australian Public Service Commission, May 2012, <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/archive/publications-archive/tackling-wicked-problems>.

Second, in 2013 a group of donors, governance advisers and practitioners were focusing on the political obstacles to development. In their view, politics and institutions should be at the forefront of development thinking and practice. To promote changes in donor practices, they formed the international [thinking and working politically \(TWP\) community of practice](#).<sup>4</sup> TWP puts politics and power front and centre of development initiatives: ‘political factors are usually more important in determining developmental impact than the scale of aid funding or the technical quality of programming.’<sup>5</sup> Building on a wealth of evidence of the primacy of domestic politics as a determinant of change,<sup>6</sup> the TWP community see ‘governance failures’ as, to a large extent, explained by the incentives facing political actors, and the underlying pattern of institutions that generate and sustain these incentives.

Together, TWP, PDIA and DDD contrast with more traditional development practices – what we might term an ‘old development’ agenda.

**Figure 1: The old and the new agendas compared, broadly speaking<sup>7</sup>**

	<b>Economics, management</b>	<b>The new agenda</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	Project frameworks	Political and social sciences, institutional economics, entrepreneurial studies
<b>Motif</b>	Idealist	Systems theory, complexity
<b>Philosophy</b>	Fixed	Realist
<b>Timing</b>	Technical, bureaucratic problems; ‘concrete’ problems. Top-down approach to identification	Open
<b>Problem identification</b>	Lack of resources or capacity constraints	Local problems that are debated, defined and refined by local people in an ongoing process
<b>Problem definition</b>	Blue print; end-state; linear	Limited scope for collective action; reform resistant institutions
<b>Planning paradigm</b>	Prescriptive	Clear objectives but path undefined; disjointed incrementalism based on trial and error
<b>Theory of Change</b>	Rational sequencing in fully formulated Annual Work Plan	Adaptive
<b>Implementation approach</b>	Programmed	Iterative cycles of planning, action, reflection, revision (drawing on local knowledge); managing risk by making ‘small bets’
<b>Inputs</b>	Principal-Agent	Indicative
<b>Way of working</b>	Ex-post evaluation	Partnership, facilitating, brokering relationships, community participation. Local ownership built throughout process
<b>Way of learning</b>	Transactional, best practice, top-down diffusion of innovation	Rapid cycles of learning and reflection
<b>Changes sought</b>	Officials, technical assistance.	Transformational, replication of good practices/ positive deviance, social trust, empowerment.
<b>Change agents</b>	Central government institutions, regulator	Coalitions, networks, leaders, local conveners
<b>Key partners</b>	MDGs, SDGs, outputs	Central and local governments, local actors pressuring core government institutions for change
<b>Success measures</b>		Processes, institutions, outcomes

<sup>4</sup> Participation has included representation from DFID, DFAT, the World Bank, UNDP, NORAD, ECDPM, the University of Birmingham, the Overseas Development Institute, the University of Melbourne, the Asian Development Bank and USAID.

<sup>5</sup> Thinking and Working Politically, <https://twpcommunity.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012) ‘Why Nations Fail’. New York: Crown Books; Matt Andrews (2013) ‘The Limits of Institutional Reform in Development’, New York, Cambridge University Press; Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont (2013) ‘Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution’, Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment; Francis Fukuyama (2012) ‘The Origins of Political Order’, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Francis Fukuyama (2014) ‘Political Order and Political Decay’, New York. Farrar, Straus and Giroux...

<sup>7</sup> Table courtesy of Graham Teskey, Senior Governance Advisor, Abt Associates.

## Indeed... how?

As we work more closely in partnerships, governments, donors, implementing organisations and civil society have a shared interest in addressing these wicked reform challenges. That implies transforming ways of working, enabling governments and partners to tackle development problems more effectively. But how?

Honestly, we don't know. It's a problem. So we thought we'd workshop it with both the TWP and DDD communities. The workshop starts with the following questions:

- How can the principles of the new development agenda be practically applied to a range of different wicked development problems?
- How can the agenda be operationalised from the perspectives of the different actors involved?
- And what tools/techniques/frameworks are out there to help us do so?

We've broken those challenges down further into six components with some guiding questions to kick off a dialogue that we hope will interest as many different interlocutors as possible. These sub-problems are by no means exhaustive. But unpacking them and looking to how they might be addressed – we hope – will take us another step along the road to changing the way we do things, to the greater benefit of the countries in which we live and work.

### 1. **How to take approaches to scale through replication and diffusion?**

When (if at all) should the aim be to replicate the model and when to replicate the process? If the focus is on replicating the process, what does that look like and how is it done? How can examples of positive deviance be identified and built upon?

### 2. **How do we move from logframes to 'searchframes': iterative monitoring, evaluation and learning**

How can project frameworks be made more iterative? What examples do we have of programs adapting on the basis of learning in 'real time'? What do/would iterative, adaptive theories of change look like? What kinds of reflective practices are necessary? What examples are there of programs adapting on the basis of learning in 'real time'?

### 3. **How do we build effective networks, movements and coalitions?**

What examples are there of successful network-building programs? What challenges are there? Is there a role for external partners in network building and if so, what is it?

### 4. **How do we balance flexibility with accountability?**

How can development partners adopt more flexible approaches to accountability for public money while not contradicting the importance for governments of being more accountable for results? What should our respective authorising environments be encouraged (and shaped) to authorise? If donor efforts become more responsive – responsive to whom, why and in what way?

**5. How do we find the right people with the right skills to work on reform/ governance programs?**

What skills are needed? Where would we find them? Should they be contracted in or identified within institutions? If you're placing bets, how do you back a reformer?

**6. How do we balance going with the grain with going against the grain?**

What can gender-based programs learn from coalition-building programs? What does politically-smart gender programming look like?

**Welcome!**

So let's get stuck in! We expect to be joined by over 100 participants from civil society, the Indonesian government, international think tanks, the donor community, and implementing teams and organisations working in the field of governance reform. We look forward to spending two days with you mulling these problems over in a workshop that aims to be as dynamic, iterative and adaptive in its form as in its content.

Please come equipped with ideas, examples, stories, tools, frameworks and approaches – and questions!

***The DDD4 Organising Team***