This case study tested the hypothesis that “State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) participation in sharing knowledge with other programmes has been of benefit”. The study explored how coordination worked among UK Department for International Development (DFID) state-level programmes at a national level in Abuja and in two states, Lagos and Kaduna, between 2008 and 2014. The study method involved examining relevant documents, interviewing key informants and peer reviews.

How does coordination happen?

In 2008, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) launched a suite of programmes in ten states in Nigeria covering governance, education, health and growth. DFID tasked SPARC with coordinating these programmes to deliver greater impact.

Programmes understand the need and importance of coordination for learning, sharing experiences, collaborating, preventing duplication, avoiding competition and delivering value for money.

Coordination between programmes happens in several ways. Meetings of national programme managers coordinate issues such as security, cross-programme concerns on DFID review processes, cross-programme monitoring and evaluation data, value for money, liaison with DFID, and forthcoming elections and the transition to new administrations. State cross-programme monthly meetings in Lagos involve 13 programmes and, in Kaduna, 9 programmes. Same-sector programmes, such as health programmes in Kaduna, synchronise activities such as workshops. Informal collaboration between programme staff outside formal meetings is common.

Has coordination been productive?

All interviewees gave examples of the benefits of coordination. A tangible benefit mentioned by many was sharing information. Programmes often shared contacts which led to better and quicker results. Many interviewees cited instances of jointly organising workshops and training for key stakeholders. Programmes saved costs, time and
avoided confusing partners by working together to achieve goals in common areas, such as developing medium-term sector strategies (MTSSs). The fact that Kaduna has MTSSs and updates them annually testifies to active collaboration between programmes.

Collaboration with other programmes also brings benefits. The State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI), for example, played a critical role in pushing the anti-stigma law on HIV/AIDS through the Kaduna House of Assembly in 2009/2010. Programmes also respond to requests for advice, as when the Support to National Malaria Programme (SuNMaP), Kaduna, consulted the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) about distributing mosquito nets in schools. In both Kaduna and Lagos, programmes found sharing the analysis of the political economy particularly useful. SPARC’s mid-term review mentioned this analysis as an example of stimulating exchanges of knowledge and experience, and joint approaches.

Challenges

Notwithstanding the benefits, coordination can be challenging. As coordination meetings expanded to include more programmes and more areas, participants found they became less relevant to their particular needs. Several people even suggested that coordination should be voluntary. But even though some perceived coordination to lack relevance, they acknowledged that meetings were useful for highlighting common interests that programmes could follow up.

Although programmes had compatible high-level objectives, compatibility often fell apart at lower levels, hampering coordination. Programmes did not find understanding each other’s work plans easy because different service providers manage each programme, and partners, agendas and time frames differ. Many interviewees perceived these differences as a constraint to working together. State-level centralisation of programmes also sometimes slowed responses to partners or other programmes, meaning missed opportunities – a lack of collective approaches to gender, developing capacity in state and local governments, and engaging the private sector. Representation, when not at a senior level, inhibited sharing information fully and making decisions.

Almost universally, people interviewed said that DFID’s role in coordination is critical but that DFID’s interest in programme coordination has ebbed and flowed, partly because of the turnover in advisers. Interviewees perceived DFID’s recent leadership in coordinating the growing number of programmes in Lagos as a positive move that recognises the need for a coherent approach to Lagos State Government, a major partner.

Findings

Overall, the positive results from coordination outweigh the negative and support the hypothesis that knowledge sharing among programmes has been of benefit. Many programme staff at national and state level, not just those involved in knowledge management, contribute to coordination. Nevertheless, even though coordination works well in Kaduna and Lagos there is room for improvement.

In particular, there was a widespread desire for DFID to lead coordination, particularly regarding integrating new programmes and overseeing complementary programmes. The challenge in coordinating programmes is how to work around the different incentives, approaches and contracts of service providers, and incorporate coordination arrangements in the design of programmes.

Lessons for the future

- Overall, coordination between programmes has net benefits
- Coordination needs to be relevant
- Programmes would like DFID to lead on coordination
- Programme designs need to incorporate coordination arrangements.

Contact details

SPARC has eleven offices in Nigeria.
For more information on our work:
Email: info@sparc-nigeria.com
Or
at ask@sparc-nigeria.com
Telephone: +234 (0) 8178 116303
Visit our website: www.sparc-nigeria.com
Find us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/SparcGovernanceNews

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