### Introduction to Smart Implementation

> "The term 'implementation' understates the complexity of the task of carrying out projects that are affected by a high degree of initial ignorance and uncertainty. Here 'project implementation' may often mean in fact a long voyage of discovery in the most varied domains, from technology to politics." (A.O. Hirschman, Development Projects Observed, 1967, 35)

## Inhaltsverzeichnis

The following should serve as an introduction into implementation, its nature and forms as a central part of the work of GIZ. At the same time, it is the first part draft of an introductory chapter of a publication of GIZ Div. 42 on the subject of smart implementation.

Three themes are introduced that hopefully make the subject of the future publication better understood. These topics should also give an orientation to all those who have already or want to express their interests in contributing to the publication.

The starting chapter includes definitions and the main focus areas that led us to propose this publication.

The following chapter addresses the inputs of the publication as we see them now – not so much in terms of structure – Renate Kirsch has developed some guidelines on that – but rather the type and nature of contents we would like to elicit from you in order to provide a complete picture of the particular features of implementation by GIZ.

Thirdly, an attempt is made to outline the resulting messages on how to manage implementation processes and how to prepare for making the best use of opportunities as they arise. This is of course a difficult endeavour without having your actual inputs. We have given it a try because we realise that what we are asking is quite different from the usual reporting exercises. By drawing the attention to exemplary messages others have come up with we don't want to restrict you – but rather give you more self-confidence to venture out and try to summarize your findings so they may be of value to others in the same position as implementers or as advisors to implementers.

This is the first draft of an introductory chapter to the final publication. And it should give the reader some more background of the final study and the motivation. The final version will be complemented by a sub-chapter on the state of the discussion on implementation as well as pointers to the discussion about the limits of adaptation or experimentation and how smart implementation fits into the development cooperation landscape.

## 1. Starting points of our journey: Transformation, Politics and Implementation

(Here we have planned to exhibit three stories of (past) programmes that have a particular affinity to the subject – but are not represented in the publication.)

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> 'The project is a device that development agencies use to organise complex reality into a manageable, bounded unit. In 1966, Hirschman referred to them as 'privileged particles of the development process'. Rosalind Eyben, International Aid and the Making of a Better World, Routledge 2014

*Transformation Uncertainty, Complexity*

Governance reform mostly happens in transformational situations. The better we understand transformation the better we can accept its companions, uncertainty and complexity. The n**ature of transformation** processes make it difficult to conceive of direct and intentional interventions. Yet transformation needs governance. And our support and advice need to take both into account. While we would never claim we can target transformation processes from the outside we understand that our partners and their institutions are embedded in this process.

Transformation processes cannot be anticipated with certainty. There are too many variables and their nature and the many interdependences between these variables prevent any prediction as to the future direction of the process let alone its effect. Transformation consists of many sub processes – but they do not follow one unified objective. As a rule, transformation respond to past conflicts; they are subject to pressure from delayed reforms, but they are also driven by visions of the future and of changes in society and a new balance of power and resources resulting from these drivers. These processes can best be understood with reference to the nature and the behaviour of complex systems with

- results/impacts that are not known as they cannot be deduced from existing evidence but "emerge" as the process moves on;

- unexpected effects in case critical junctures or tipping points are reached – which cannot be influenced as they are not known – and they determine the future of the processes and its steps.

As with all complex systems direct steering is impossible. One of the major contributing factors are feedback loops that can create new synergies but add to the unpredictability of the process, its details and above all its rhythm and pace. Since those involved in a transformation process will not abstain from trying to interfere and manage the process, the best would be to remain conscious of the fact that there are no secure and stable expectations neither in terms of contents nor in resources and time.

Under these circumstances that we encounter in most parts of the world governance support for us is about supporting to move/influence framework conditions in order to support emerging institutions to solve future – not yet known – **complex problems** (the "unknowns unknowns"). We provide support for agency and for institutions to work on solutions.[1] We work with institutions and people that want to make a difference. Sometimes they do it for themselves, sometimes they do It for the common weal. Knowing that we act in conditions of transformation will not directly determine our mode of work but it helps us to understand the nature of reforms as well as their limitations.

## *Politics*

Development traditionally was free from politics. The instrument used was the "project" insulating he reform space from outside interference. We dealt with politics as outside risks that entered the log-frame planning document via the assumption column. Only relatively recently a new consensus emerged that allowed us to transfer the items of **the 'assumptions column'** (with all the 'lack of political will' or with more or less well founded assumptions on the behaviour of institutions and the development of relations) to the results column. By cutting down the project fence and accepting assumptions and risks we make them part of our daily management routine. That means we have to deal with more and deeper problems that do not correspond to technical rational considerations.

> **Working politically in development co-operation** has been described to include "**supporting, brokering, facilitating and aiding** the emergence and practices of developmental or reform leaderships, organizations, networks and coalitions in concert with, initiatives and requests

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[1] The "we" refers to actors in our sphere, whether they are partners, local experts, and foreign experts from public institutions, from the civil society or from private commercial actors. They are individuals, collectives, institutions. GIZ advisers if they are not busy helping to improve the capacity of institutions or instruments hope to influence them in many different ways, i.a. by negotiating new spaces, by taking advantage of opportunities for moving into another direction, by increasing their capacity to think and act. Sometimes the modalities may be called "managing", sometimes "brokering", sometimes "facilitating", sometimes "nudging" or "influencing" etc. While GIZ advisors are not part of the local context – or a country system, both are our main reference points. But as GIZ advisors we are beholden to interests, but also to values and beliefs reflected inter alia in our constitution.

from local individuals and groups. It means ***investing in processes*** designed to support the formation and effectiveness of developmental coalitions, sometimes over long periods, committed to institutional reform and innovation by **enhancing** not just **technical skills** (the conventional domain of capacity building) but also the **political capacity** of organizations in areas such as **negotiation, advocacy, communication** and the generation of constructive policy options. It may involve supporting processes which lead to 'political settlements' whether these be at the macro-levels or in specific policy sectors."

The very idea of working politically might seem to suggest a flagrant violation of the principles of Accra and Paris. Yet, Accra simply reflected the predominant mode of development cooperation that simply ignored the non-technical background of reforms. And the gap between the type of reforms addressed and the deficiencies in the assistance provided had been there for all to se

This was confirmed after the supposed "end of history" when it was made clear that Good Governance, including human rights, democracy etc. was supposed to be a prior condition for development. This consensus among the G 7 states provided a principle that was universally applicable and that for their protagonists eliminated politics from development cooperation.

And it had hardly changed over time. 14 years and many studies later Merilee Grindle reminded the development community that the gap still persisted as "getting good governance implies changes in political organization, the representation of interests, and processes for public debate and policy decision making." (Merilee Grindle, 2004 525)

These changes take time. More than 25 years ago the BMZ issued its political criteria. First they applied only to policy decisions. Since 1996 these criteria had to be observed by all German development cooperation. GIZ at the time started a number of research projects to develop methods and instruments in accordance with the criteria. USAID started in the beginning of the 90es a world-wide programme on "Implementing Policy Change" Later the DAC GovNet had a Drivers of Change programme item to develop a common methodology for political economy assessments. Several countries took an active interest in the work. All of these attempts did not change the inherently authoritarian tendency of development cooperation combined with the technical/rational rationale that has been dominating during the first decade of the 3rd millennium.

## Implementation

To begin with a definition of Implementation by those who "invented" the reflection on this subject in administrative science: "Implementation means just what Webster [dictionary] and Roget [thesaurus] say it does: to carry out, accomplish, fulfil, produce, complete."(Jeffrey Pressmann*, Aaron* Wildavsky 1973, xiii-xv)

Yet since many years public administration has been wrestling with the question why the policy cycle with i.a. agendas, policies, programmes and implementation loses any effectiveness during implementation. The logic of the conditions prevailing and shaping the local context often take over so that programmes change and the effects differ from the original design. There are of course many explanations why this is so, not least among them the differences between the contexts where the programme is applied. Yet what has become evident is the importance of implementation processes for programme outcomes. But remains of policies if implementation is overwhelming? How do we have to look at implementation if we want to understand its management and the strategies that determine implementation processes?

A different definition of implementation is based on the complex and uncertain environment reforms for development have. Here implementation deals with how to overcome uncertainty and master complexity in order to solve common problems. Uncertainty and complexity are root causes for the difficulties a design has to be executed on its terms.

There are a myriad of reasons why implementation does not simply mirror the original design of a programme. One is uncertainty, risk or problems that appeared only once the programme had progressed. The other is complexity: the process is always playing havoc with the design. And thirdly we deal with problems we don't know and which in the course of implementation we might become better, understand the project better and finally be able to address problems for which we had no handle.

The following contributions are trying to show that *smart implementation* does neither simply carry out a predetermined design nor does it forge predesigned links to reality: Implementation is a process on its own and not a dependent variable of the policies and programmes. This is so – not because the servants/agents don't want to follow the principal any longer, or worse, they want to cheat in order to add to their personal benefit, but because they have a mandate to do it. Enlightened politicians when founding GIZ were of the opinion that without excellent knowledge of the local sphere DC cannot reach its aim. They made GIZ is responsible for embedding German DC into the local context.

Implementation in development has an added dimension – which will be dealt with in more detail under the heading of transformation. In development cooperation implementing means often to pursue aims that are next to impossible. For a long time development cooperation was supposed to follow tried and tested "best practices." Many in the trade believed that best practices could be transferred between contexts. At times these practices were considered by its protagonists to be of universal validity. Comparable to the idea of legal transplants, these practices needed only to be planted into the new context – and they would blossom and provide fruit. Unfortunately, the type of problems we are confronted with are far from having been solved once and for all. And only in rare circumstances could one application programme that has been developed in one context be transferred to the next without substantial change.

Implementation therefore requires more than carrying programmes or applying foreign "best practices" to local problems. Solutions have to be developed and in order to find them one needs to convince people, one has to mobilise allies and likeminded people to engage with in the quest finding solutions or to influence conditions that will in the future make solutions more likely. These tasks may sound like policy making. In fact, they belong to the regular chores of implementers in systems that are rapidly changing economically or socially. And most of our clients belong to this category.

Implementation is time consuming and requires patience. Without patience, without waiting for effects of the local contexts to an intervention, one is tempted to apply standard options with universal applicability according to their promoters. They buy time until a better solution can be found. Without patience and time and convictions, chances are that these standard options – Matt Andrews calls them 'codified ideas' – will be chosen without it being understood that these options (often used to produce "quick wins") can only serve as the first step in an unfolding implementation process. This being so, sometimes implementation resembles more an advocacy programme where problems are well known, where the will to start reforms exists, where standard recipes abound, but where all options have been found wanting. In this context implementation is about profoundly reflecting the problem on the basis of recent experience, opening up new avenues of thinking including new aims and patterns of activities, new developments, learning but also acceptance of failures and proposing hard choices. And all this while new standard options are proposed that – so it is claimed – just need to be implemented.  Fortunately, many of the complex programmes have several arenas of implementation. So there is always at least some activity that is moving ahead while others are – temporarily – trailing or on their way out.


## Roles and perspectives in implementation

GIZ personnel in the field are advisors to the reform managers in a transformation process. The latter are part of the so called "country systems." Advisory personnel at headquarters are advisors to our colleagues "in the field". Their main job is to develop concepts for implementation, not least by analysing experience of programmes in different countries and situations. Their second job is to relate these experiences to the BMZ.


**Advisors and their perspectives**

Country systems and its "reflective managers" of governance reforms in transformation processes

GIZ (international and national) advisors implementing programmes trying to adapt the design to the requirements of the local context

> GIZ Sector advisors bridging the gap between general designs and the specific programme design based on the local context

GIZ advisors in the field are working in the tradition of development management: Development, especially in public governance related fields, can only evolve from within a society and its institutions. Outside advisors have a facilitating, accompanying and assisting role, e.g. as conveners of hitherto opposite groups or institutions, as brokers of ideas or standpoints that have not been covered up to now, but also of providers of technical and political know how, of experience of peers in comparable countries and situations.

Transformation/reform/change needs to be managed or administered in different degrees and forms. And management needs investment especially in the early phases of activities.  And we have to cast our nets wide to be able to recognize potential for collaboration. These steps are in parallel to those that managers of country systems are undertaking. So working on the street level or transformation is all about defining the street level of activities, where services are actually rendered or where new orders evolve. It would be of little use to stick to a programme that has been agreed upon – but that has no bearing on the realities, with assumptions that have been proven deficient, with a structure that does not justice to the potential of those that have shown their capacity to collaborate and move forward – even if they have not been included in the original schedule of participants even if they are affiliated with hitherto unknown institutions.

The programme in this way may remove some of the uncertainties and reduce some of the complexity that come with reforms. More important is the learning process that prepares the programme and its collaborators to move confidently in an atmosphere marked by complexity and uncertainty.   These are important lessons. Without them our advisors in the field would shun experiments, shrink back from steps that have not been planned in detail and do not recognize capacities where they are developing.

## 2. The nature of possible contributions:

> "Reform is a partly political, partly organisational, partly economic, partly technological process with quite uncertain outcomes." (Christopher Pollitt, Geert Bouckaert 2011, 221)

The contribution of GIZ advisors to implementation action in transformational circumstances takes many shapes and is presented in many different ways. Few of them have focussed on the background of uncertainty and complexity. In the following, we have outlined three very general options to do just that. They should be taken as directions a contribution can take which would be the backbone of the publication. The three are followed by more options which have been suggested by others.  They are also introduced in this chapter so we can provide future contributors with a sort of landscape in which to situate their contribution.

Compared to the endeavour of the World Bank to develop or promote a "Science of Delivery" we propose to be less ambitious but to remain closer to our current practice. In the past we have suggested to build less of a science and more of a craft of implementation. In order to explain what a craft could be looking like we would take the definition used by Pollitt and Bouckaert on comparative public management reforms. The authors in distinguishing their approach from science suggest that they deal with

1. models and techniques working in most places,

2. conditional generalisations – probabilistic hypotheses;

3. assorted insights, rules of thumb; bits and pieces that do not add up to a general theory, adding to *craft knowledge* respectively to *practitioner's wisdom*.

They will not be able to come up with workable generalisations. This description of the nature of the findings and messages appears to be fitting for the contributions we are asking for. Not only because it is most closely related to actual stories on the ground but it is considerable more modest.

The description, the following analyses and some of the messages we hope can provide others in a similar situation with ideas, sometimes instruments and encouragement. And the three options can also act as a framework within which to enrich and promote the "craft knowledge" of implementation.

Option 1: **Case studies** on managing a smart implementation process – against the odds (complexity and uncertainty)

These case studies form the backbone of the book. There are two reasons for it: They can offer a story line that includes developments of the local contexts as well as the reactions of the programme. Second, they provide real details anchored in time and space. These events and reactions are not analysed and summarized because there is very little chance that the findings are of direct help to others. It is the way they react, the story of experimenting, innovating and learning and the way one could make use of opportunities based on relationships and previous work.

We know from experience the typical scenarios that require managing actively implementation processes:

Problems that appear to be intractable and where solutions are not known – so implementation will consist of experimenting with and testing solutions while learning and improving the methodology to perfect existing and prepare even more examples how solutions could look like.

Several complementary interdependent work streams that need to support each other – but are unrelated in terms of actors and reform speed and where implementation process management needs to guarantee the cohesion between these streams

A very diversified portfolio of support measures that respond to very specific partner demands – but that in their combination reach a new level of effective cooperation based on demands but also on the kind of trust that is needed to navigate in sometimes very uncertain and uncharted waters.

Managing the inclusion of new opportunities for cooperation while gradually fading out old activity fields without however losing the lessons learnt during their implementation – keeping the attention on some topics that need longer term support while preparing other areas and thereby increasing the effectiveness and the sustainability of earlier solutions.

Operating with different levels of organisations or different institutions pursuing their specific interests and functions but trying to combine these activities in a way that they can contribute to and foster one unified strategy, even making the pursuit of the strategy possible

Starting with a portfolio of many different initiatives, actively supporting one at the time as opportunities arise and seeking procedural and material synergies between the different functions promoting ownership and sustainability.

The list of exemplary modes, all based on real examples, can never be exhaustive. In fact there are very few programmes – and certainly none in the governance domain – that do not resemble one or the other example as they are all in need of an active implementation process. And all these processes happen side by side with the pursuit of activities according to a pre-established boxes of a log frame type project plan.

Option 2: Supporting instruments and concepts for better implementation

The second category of our contributions are concepts (Instruments, methods, tools) based on demands from the project level and further developed in order to benefit project practice. They are assembled and further developed by our sector advisors in line with project demand but also to create more coherent programmes that appeal to funders and their demands. Often these concepts start out from results of an implementation process that left their carefully defined box and ventured out to other, related questions. These concepts will therefore support locally active advisors in order for them to improve the design of their programmes and by the same build a sound basis for further implementation.

Option 3: Describing and assessing actual Implementation paths of programmes that had an active adaptive management

We would think that programmes that found their way in difficult circumstances can highlight the crucial moments of the implementation path. In contrast to the first option the contribution would assume the viewpoint of an evaluation assessing the path based on the results of the completed project or programme. Thus with the benefit of hindsight they could point to the junctures and their respective qualities. Theirs's an input into an evolving global science of delivery for certain sectors. The results would improve the understanding of the dynamics and the directions of an implementation process and its needs in order to move ahead regardless of the many uncertainties and the ambiguities situations offer. See as an example Sarah Glavey, Oliver Haas, From Subsidy to

The following options are also based on real studies – except they are further away from the options that are directly related to the specifics of implementing processes of GIZ projects. They are part of the landscape that has developed to respond to the essential question how projects can be pursued in tune with the changes of framework conditions and the opportunities that help to drive processes increasing their relevance and significance.

Option 4: Case studies to verify the assumptions on how implementation by iterative adaptation works – also an evaluator's viewpoint

Another interesting perspective that resembles our perspectives is the documentation of adaptation and possibly adaptive management. Starting point are reforms that are not successful because they introduce new solutions that do not fit the context. Many aspects of the context have not been taken into account by project designers – they were either not able to see them, they underestimated them or they developed over time as one digs deeper into local historical, social, political and personal stories and conditions. It is the implementers' primary obligation to see to it that these ideas are translated into something that can grow roots being locally acceptable and legitimate or to look for substitutes that would fulfil the original role. This is a routine job. In law reform, the discussion between transplants vs. indigenous development is a case in point. If transplants happen, the legal advisor has to see to it that the "reception" works – turning a transplant into a natural part of the landscape.

Making a transplant an integral part of the local landscape is of course not a foregone conclusion. We are used to a number of reasons when it did not work, generally known as capacity constraints, political resistance, failure to analyse and understand the framework conditions for a reform to get a hold. If the programme continues regardless because we still see the tree but can't see that it has not developed any roots we build on the existence of the trees rules, behaviour, we even suggest to orient interests and values with the transplant in mind. And since we don't notice that the tree cannot survive we see the new landscape and base our future decisions on this "success." In the end, the original problem is unresolved, the transplant does not work and in addition has created wrong incentives and effects.

This phenomenon has been called the "capability trap." A foreign induced change not in line with the local context, e.g. existing capabilities results in repeated donor interventions. They do not only prolong the original problem but produce new forms and formats that do not serve their purpose and create additional damage.

This chain of event may not be typical for GIZ operation, first because we are on the ground and have hopefully better means to analyse and assess failure of our work. But the people who have analysed and developed this approach became aware that if you invest in implementation processes one can

not only avoid the mistakes but also can create effects in complex situations. The precondition is, however; that reformers and advisors develop and sustain implementation processes that allow a gradual adaptation and a learning process and a focus on assisting reforms to take hold in a possibly hostile environment. The process allows the emergence of solutions within the context, given contextual realities. Authority and legitimacy needed to adopt, implement and institutionalize these solutions are also part of the process. In sum, these criteria are part of an implementation process – not only the iteration, but also the stepwise procedure, the importance allotted to the local context and its actors.

Studies to verify the assumptions of this reform avenue have been very rare. They are complicated and costly as they are trying to create "robust evidence." We need to be aware, however, that the timelines of the processes involved are different: A transplant or structure that has been selected and transplanted because of their supposed usefulness needs to show value for money. But those responsible for the reform may not be inclined to wait until with the help of iterative steps context and new structure have found a common thread and – if at all – fulfil the expectations. So these cases will be rare and can only be undertaken after all the effects have been shown and verified.

Option 5: Problem driven political economy analyses that are further revised on the basis of recent experience. They are presented in a volume of case studies.

The **first step** is to identify a specific development challenge, often one where technical analysis and engagement on their own have failed to gain operational traction. The challenge could be narrowly focused: for example, what to do about continued teacher absenteeism or about stalled efforts to improve electricity provision. It could also be framed more broadly, such as how best to pursue further health sector reform, how to promote a more level playing field for businesses, or how to help a country deal with fundamental shocks.

The **second step** consists of analysing why the observed, dysfunctional patterns are present, that is, the political economy drivers. This step should cover three dimensions:

> (a) relevant structural factors that influence stakeholder positions;

> (b) existing institutions, including institutional dysfunctions that channel behaviour, as well as ongoing institutional change; and, finally,

> (c) stakeholder interests and constellations.

The **third and final step** are analytical recommendations intended to offer a road map for operational engagement for potential entry points and ways to engage including risks (unintended consequences of first-best policy reforms) and options and positive ways of engaging with political economy drivers. These options may include

- how to identify the areas with the greatest potential overlap between political incentives and policies that foster development progress,
- how and with whom to engage to expand opportunities for progress, or how to increase the prominence of certain policies on a government' s agenda.

Addressees are programme designers. The hope is that if designers understand the conditions of implementation they would come up with something more realistic. But feed-back to designers that are competing on a completely different level of assessing conditions and counting success is a difficult if not hopeless endeavour. In fact, in this context the idea of going "with the grain" that has been around for some time does not translate into a process – as the expression going with the grain would have one expect – but rather a design quality. In line with the expectation that the outcome of studies of this kind would be the "basis of models and techniques and possibly rule that will work in most places regardless of local circumstances and at any time."

So the two latter options influencing the design by better and broader based analysis are complementary to the first options we have outlined. And the first three options put the emphasis on the potential of implementation processes. They may demonstrate processes that are able to capture local context, local capabilities and local opportunities. Therefore they will be closer to GIZ practice and a source for implementation learning which is the reason why we suggest to prioritize these options for the forthcoming publication.

## 3. Possible Messages

> It is an inherent feature of political systems that they claim to be able to create a better world, with governments and scientists providing the required instruments. The problem is, however, that ambitions and pretensions often tend to run away with those instruments. WWR 2010, 132

What can we learn from giving implementation due weight? Who are the target group who might be able to take messages on board? How are we to frame these messages taking into consideration the peculiar level of what we offer, insights into the craft? Would it be appropriate only to report what went well?

The following are broad suggestions of messages. Some of them are more descriptive – as they represent findings of real projects – and we would not want to venture into making claims how they apply or what the conditions are that can support them. Some of them are normative. They come from recent literature that discusses implementation – either from the viewpoint of service delivery – or from discussing challenges to development projects posed by the complexity and uncertainty of the environment where they operate. In this category we find many lessons that sound familiar to those that are working in (post-)conflict areas that long have been considered complex or those that are involved in larger reform exercises of systems, such as decentralisation or public sector reform that have had an uncertain fate over time – or were considered to be unmanageable.

Three areas of messages:

1. The **pathways of projects are determined by bends and curves** – few of them have been planned, many have surfaced and had to be reacted upon rather quickly. While we plan projects with an impact chain and a results matrix the actual itinerary may be more tortuous and the outcomes more uncertain than expected during planning.

It will be an interesting exercise to move from the demonstration of causality change and results matrix to the real pathways projects had to take in order to reach their final destiny. While it may be premature to directly link the strategy and process elements of Capacity Works to the inflection points, the tipping point or the critical junctures case studies may help to understand that decision making at an inflection points needs support, either from local "constituents" or from stakeholders that can represent the past and the future of the programme.

2. Most projects are severely **undermanaged** considering the many unanswered challenges of the local context. In the face of uncertainty – there are no known solutions, of complexity – reforms move in fits and bonds but hardly ever smoothly as planned, of persistent failure – ready made solutions are failing yet the next recipe or model (in the form of best practice) is just around the corner, our programmes often had no time and given the necessity to coordinate, too few incentives to focus on actively managing processes to face these challenges. Yet, many longer running programmes – once they had survived their initial shock with the local context – developed methods, instruments even structures to better manage their contributions in transformational situations.

3. Our concepts need to be the result of a **superior knowledge of the environment of the problems** to which we are invited to contribute. This environment is determined in large measure by the local context, the task of the implementation process. But the way how to grasp and assess the local context of a given problem or of the dynamics of actors and their preferences and the directions they are moving need to be based on a solid understanding of the problems and its aspects and how it is anchored in and influenced by the context. These factors may be politics and drivers of change, it may be the specific institutional set up, some upstream and downstream links or the historical and political situation in which these problem thrive. Among the factors may also be the importance of local and other sources of processional knowledge.

There are some messages and some cases that are learning material.

We practice a **learning cycle** including the double loop; otherwise we are of no help to the reflective practitioners who are our partners and who are confronted with change in many more variety than we are. So we can understand the **reflective practitioner.**

There are roughly two levels of concepts/models/practices, one dealing with how to act in order to support **actual activities** under way and the other with how to strategize, i.e. how to prepare for **future activities**.

1. Prepare for **adverse situations**

2. Develop **broad participation** in order to have a broad engagement – and a basis for legitimacy – but also for mobilising people to think on future ways. Engage local partners for broad coalitions.

**3. Design programs and funding to anticipate a backlash – counter-reforms and multiple battles.** Opposition learns, too: techniques that worked at one point may fail at another.

4. A more traditional criterion is to keep programmes and budgets **flexible** for programme and budgeting, expecting changes but also self-imposed breaking points (for periodic activities, for contracts and other agreements), test hypotheses throughout a program's life cycle, design contracts to enable closing projects and moving funds among projects so that acting on what works does not carry a stigma or lead to perverse incentives.

5. A staple is **preparing for windows of opportunity to** open – unexpectedly by aligning knowledge and people, by having funds available and by investing in networks

6. **Explore and monitor options in your policy space** including entry and exit points for new developments – not following the logic of the old framework

7. **Document activity streams** – particularly those that have not come to fruition but were once considered important – with a view to pursue them again if conditions have changed.

Messages can be based on instruments, such as e.g. participation mechanisms and their expected capability to understanding and expressing **the local, complex, diverse, dynamic, uncontrollable and unpredictable** realities experienced by many poor people.

What are the more recent recommendations of others in this area? Recommendations from other institutions usually are very general and in only very rare circumstances address foreign (bilateral) donors. In a very recent article on "Designing and Measuring Reform Efforts" (Rachel Kleinfeld August 2015) for the Carnegie Foundation we find the following recommendations:

**Engage local partners who can amass broad coalitions.** Avoid making groups overly beholden to donor agendas that can cost them local support. Measure programs based on whether they have created long-term, broad coalitions and/or elite influencers with real political power who are growing stronger.

**Prepare for windows of opportunity before they open.** Invest in coalitions, policy development, and social networks ahead of time.

**Determine whether programs have shaped the rules of the system to make change easier.** Programs that enable organizing, increase transparency and public voice in policy, reduce violence against reform advocates, and increase avenues to power are types of systemic changes that allow reform.

Look at all the **potential options in a policy space**, including possible counter-reforms, not just the currently ascendant policy.

**Are we following the same track?**

Before going into detailed messages one needs to ensure that there is a basic common understanding of what it means to drive transformational change and to accept that part of the change lies in the way we are ourselves managing our programmes so they are in sync with partner reforms. We may pose three questions in order to ensure that all collaborators share the same understanding:

*Intellectually:* Do we understand our task to deal with messy political processes instead of creating ideal institutions?

*Institutionally:* Are we able to convince people that working for reforms even in unstable and risky situations on a trial and error basis is worth the effort?

*Politically:* Can we bridge the gap between policy expectations developed or required by us and the political process in situ? (Is there a real political dialogue or are problems swept under the carpet or ignored because they cannot be addressed?

The messages taken from process management practice cover a wide area. The following list includes more general lessons such as e.g. learning from history as well as more specific messages such as develop a portfolio of options.

- **Recognize lessons from history**: take time to investigate the relevant history/background of the market/country/organization

- **Develop relationships**: in this way, you learn about the past, shape approaches that are more likely to work and also are owned by people, and get more information about what is working and what is not – learn about their preferences and leanings, find out how to mobilise for new reforms

- **Weave together a longer range perspective based on a vision for change** involving several perspectives and thinking through consequences systemically

- **Start small, grow from there**, piecemeal often is a good option for a start;

- Develop a **portfolio of approaches**, try and monitor a range of options that may serve you if the situation changes.

- **Custom tailor implementation as you go along; find out the point where optimization does not serve its purpose and you will have to enter into a discussion of goals**

![giz logo](top right)

- Expect to **learn and adapt as you do things**: you cannot avoid unintended consequences and unexpected changes. So don't wait but build into the process elements **for reflection, review and adaptation**

- **Keep looking for change** – around and ahead: take note of things that are interesting or different and **triangulate these 'qualitative perceptions' with what others are noticing**. **Keep scanning widel**y for new factors emerging in the wider world; **take a range of opinions**, particularly from those close to the issues; **think about the longer future** but also **a few steps ahead**. You will be more **attuned to change as it emerges** and better able to **anticipate** and **adapt** to **seize opportunities**.

**Adaptation, Innovation and Learning**

Analysis of the local context firstly will take you only so far and secondly will be hampered by high ambiguities and uncertainties so your first initiatives often will fail outright or run into the unexpected traps; we need to *be able to foster reflection* on what gaps can be seen in these moments, and *what kinds of practical changes these gaps call for* – but resist throwing new "solutions" at the problem that are bound to fail.

**Find and use evidence in order to move forward and close old patterns and methods**

Finding new, but by necessity untested solutions and discarding past solutions is the indicator for transformational change. But the cost and availability of practical, useful evidence can act as a stop to new solutions and effectively prevent old solutions from being discarded.  Given the adverse effects of closure, exit and decommissioning decisions – the costs of redundancies, risks to service users and consumers, the impact on providers and communities – this aspect of innovation has been neglected, and holds strong, negative connotations.

Finally, messages may address the structure and the processes required to understand, analyse and assess the progress and, in particular, progress of alternative options that projects and programmes have developed over time and which in their turn can help to manage the programme in times of change and uncertainty.

> **Monitor innovation processes**: Document success, failures, options not yet taken, concurrent competing ideas etc.

> **Make innovation explicit:**  but without being restrained by the way of how to make things explicit

> **Assess learning needs** – without having regard to learning methods and activities

> **Think of complementary measures** – but keep an eye on coherence

> **Exploitation of short term** knowledge **vs. developing a framework of knowledge production**

> **Knowledge** has many uses**:** for operations, for adaption of design, for optimization of instruments

> **Shorten feedback loops**

As far as the structure is concerned – and one a project has reached its cruising altitude

**Decentralize** decision-making

**Open spaces** for individual decision making including incentives and responsibility

Create **flexible working patterns** with a view to cross-fertilize – not with a view to rule

Again, when reading these recommendations one should keep in mind that they are directed at a situation that is not the typical GIZ project or programme situation as they are by nature too general and abstract. They are listed here because when thinking about and drafting a case study these recommendations can orient the messages that are borne out by experience of our programme implementation.