Society for International Development
Washington Chapter

Practicing Thinking and Working Politically (TWP): Voices from the Field

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom
Wednesday, July 22, 2020 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Moderator
Ann Hudock | President and CEO, Counterpart International

Speakers
Sarah Frazer | Senior Research Scientist, RTI International
Alina Rocha Menocal | Principal Research Fellow, Politics and Governance Programme, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

Event Description

Current thinking on effective international development interventions highlights the importance of “thinking and working politically” (TWP). Among the emerging lessons of experience is that thinking politically and using tools such as political economy analysis is more easily undertaken than working politically. How can the two pillars of TWP be effectively integrated? What challenges exist and how have practitioners confronted them?

This session focused on listening to voices from the field to explore answers to these questions. The organizers solicited proposals from implementers, reaching out to SID-W members and the Washington, D.C.-based TWP community of practice. They selected the following four projects that illustrate different approaches to practicing TWP.

• Mercy Corps: Integrated Maji Infrastructure and Governance Initiative for Eastern Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo
• Asia Foundation: Tourism Strategy Project, Timor-Leste
• Counterpart International: Rights and Dignity Project, El Salvador
• RTI International: Knowledge Sector Initiative, Indonesia

Their voices were bookended by Sarah Frazer (RTI International), who summarized a recent study, Thinking and Working Politically: Lessons from Diverse and Inclusive Applied Political Economy Analysis, and Alina Rocha Menocal (Overseas Development Institute), who provided commentary on the four projects and the study findings. Ann Hudock (Counterpart International) moderated.
Key Takeaways

1 Video Interviews: TWP in Practice

The event began with brief speaker introductions and was followed by video presentations of four distinct projects in international development that practice thinking and working politically (TWP):

1. **Mercy Corps: Integrated Maji Infrastructure and Governance Initiative for Eastern Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo** - Mercy Corps’ IMAGINE Program project seeks to both improve public water systems and create equitable access to water in the DRC. Within this project, TWP is exercised by being deliberate about changes brought to an existing system, understanding why these changes are made, and being accountable for all actions and outcomes.

2. **Asia Foundation: Tourism Strategy Project, Timor-Leste** - The Asia Foundation project focuses on governance, economic diversification, and evidence-based policymaking to further develop the tourism industry in Timor-Leste. TWP played an integral role, serving as a tool to measure that all work conducted was politically feasible.

3. **Counterpart International: Rights and Dignity Project, El Salvador** - The Counterpart International Rights and Dignity Project works to strengthen human rights protection systems in El Salvador. To achieve this objective, implementers have reached out to women, youth, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA community. Counterpart International emphasizes thinking and working both politically and inclusively to enhance human rights in this country.

4. **RTI International: Knowledge Sector Initiative, Indonesia** - KSI seeks to support a range of policy institutes along with ministries in the Indonesian government. They undertake a catalytic role and use their understanding of TWP to seek momentum and amplify their work.

2 PEAs in International Development

**Sarah Frazer** (RTI International) provided a brief presentation on the research she and her fellow colleagues, Lisa McGregor and Derick Brinkerhoff, conducted. Their study sought to investigate what works for effective Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) in development work. According to Ms. Frazer, the study analyzed nine different PEAs in seven different countries: Haiti, Nigeria, the Philippines, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Ms. Frazer indicated that the nine PEAs were in four different sectors:

1. Governance
2. Water & Sanitation
3. Wildlife Conservation
4. Higher Education
Key Takeaways

Cont: PEAs in International Development

The findings concluded that engaging PEAs in development work increases the likelihood of TWP, makes positive contributions to technical interventions, facilitates adaptive management, and helps uncover and address hidden power dynamics. For Frazer, “applying insights from PEA is a matter of thinking and working politically, which contributes to better outcomes” within development.

Outlining the Politics of Development

Alina Rocha Menochal (Overseas Development Institute) further added to the discussion by providing an overview of what has changed in the politics of development within the last decade. Ms. Menochal encouraged development actors to understand the context of the countries in which they operate, as it enables more culturally sensitive and politically aware international development work. More specifically, Ms. Menochal alluded to the use of various tools (i.e. adaptive management) anchored around PEA to uncover underlying factors that may influence the efficiency of development work. Ms. Menochal stressed embracing TWP principals by “refraining from viewing PEA as a product and [instead] thinking of it as an approach or mindset.” According to Ms. Menochal, this approach informs how programs are designed, implemented, and assessed over time.