

## BCO Coordination: key lessons learned

Draft 02, IK, 08/12/2005

In the period 2001-2005 BCO management has gone through various stages – from the birth and creating of the programme (i.e. creation of logframes after the first year of the programme) to the evaluation, dissemination of results – and collective thinking about the next steps.

In the “BDO time” (2001-2004), leitmotifs of the coordination were *networking* and *catalysing collective efforts*. This was due to the historical set-up of the programme, as organisations were initially contracted separately, and brought under the BDO umbrella only at the later stage. Our effort has therefore been channelled towards building open environment where ideas could be shared and questioned candidly and constructively.

Lessons learned from BDO period:

- Encourage informality, and mix reporting/hard work with relaxing moments. Dinners and side events worked very well.
- Learn how to balance BCO and “external” groups: external groups bring diversity and counter “incestuous thinking” – but they also make discussions more formal and less candid
- Management needs to be “low key”, more oriented towards process than towards “tracking deliverables”.
- Coordination that comes from a group is more accepted than an external coordination entity
- The programme must be flexible and allow for quick changes in deliverables and milestones: rigid long-term planning will not allow to adapt to the changes on the ground

Between BDO and BCO we had a transition period during which the BCO programme has been defined and new partners joined the group

Lessons learned from the transition period:

- Donor communication require more facilitation than communication among implementing agencies  
Donors are very eager to collaborate, but tend to be restricted by policies and procedures of their organisations. Also, they are not extremely good in keeping each other informed, especially via mail. If donors do not give coherent image, than the programme suffers and implementing partners might play games of individual donors instead of BCO agenda. Facilitate donor communication, make sure they are informed about their plans and programmes – and introduce special ½ closed donor session prior to BCO meeting if necessary.
- Be neutral and facilitate. Do not lobby, advocate or push personal agenda. IICD coordination has been well-accepted among donors and implementing organisations because our key objective was to help group reach consensus and make collective decisions.

- Be proactive and creative. Everybody expects coordination to come with ideas and proposals. Don't be afraid to be proactive – just make sure all ideas are discussed and approved (or refused) collectively!

Lessons from the early BCO coordination:

- Capture the learning. This has been lacking in the BDO, and needs to be more visible in the new programme. Make sure also that learning involves a wide range of stakeholders right from the beginning. Remember to include communication specialists and networks early as well, in order to make the learning products well disseminated and known.
- Network with other programmes and initiatives, and seek constantly synergies and common ground. Share learning with them as much as possible
- If the number of face-to-face meeting will be reduced to only two per year, make sure that online communication is very dynamic and pro-active.
- Involve partners in BCO coordination when possible: make common initiatives and activities, and make sure partners take ownership of the programme. This is something we've been missing in the BDO – resulting in sometimes very passive behaviour (for example very occasional submission of information to iConnect that was originally created as BDO communication vehicle).
- Keep BCO focus in mind. Some partners – both implementing and donor -- tend to be more vocal and "pushy". For example, learning days need to be interesting for the majority of partners (i.e. topics like gender would not apply).
- Remember that behind successful online communication there is often lot of background networking effort done by phone and bilateral exchange. This will be vital if the group decides to stick with two meetings per year.