To adapt or to be irrelevant: shifting security and justice programming into higher gear

The Secretariat of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law is organizing an event series on adaptive programming.

**Dates:** Three luncheons and one Interactive Brainstorm, in October and November 2016.

**Venue:** The Hague Institute for Global Justice, Sophialaan 10, The Hague

**Participants:** Experts in security and justice policy and practice, and research. The event series aims to include government representatives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as representatives of relevant multilateral organizations and NGOs. Finally, researchers with an expertise in security and justice programming will participate in the event series.

**Purpose & objectives**

The aim of this event series is to develop a practical work program for the organizational changes that bilateral and multilateral donors as well as international non-governmental organizations have to make, to turn the concept of ‘adaptive programming’ into an effective and operational reality for interventions that seek to improve the state of security and justice in conflict-prone environments.

The series is developed by the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law, and builds on its event of 10 May 2016, that unambiguously established the need for greater innovation in international support for security and justice programming and in particular the need to endow programs with greater adaptive capabilities. The reading list, discussions and outputs of the event can be considered as the ‘evidence’ base supporting these assertions. These can be found [here](#).

The event series will concentrate on organizations with a sizeable portfolio of security and justice related programs that benefit from Dutch funding, to ensure it is as operational in character as possible. Experience shows that getting to operational insights is facilitated by
discussing institutional-legal configurations, working cultures, administrative practices and relations of dependency. These should be sufficiently similar to each other across institutions, in order to allow for meaningful joint analysis, discussion and remedial action between representatives of such organizations.

The event series is situated within broader discussions about the innovation of development programming that take place under labels such as ‘problem-driven programming’ and ‘doing development differently’. It links to debates such as ‘thinking and working politically’: after all, the ability to work politically depends in large part on the extent to which supporting programmatic interventions are flexible. In a way, adaptive programming is both an enabling and a precondition for working politically. A focus on security and justice issues is helpful because they tend to be more salient than other areas of development due to the ability of organizations in this area to coerce, which has immediate effects on lives, freedom and property. This makes effective programming both difficult and imperative.

What is ‘adaptive programming’ in the security and justice area?
Briefly put, ‘adaptive programming’ leads to a program with the ability to flexibly develop and adjust its objectives, activities and resources to achieve its strategic aim(s) in reflection of political developments and programmatic experiences. This is done on the basis of thorough analysis of political opportunities and constraints, the organizational realities of those it seeks to support and a growing range of inputs from stakeholders that it engages during its lifecycle.

It typically features the following seven components, which can be grouped into three different clusters: I) objectives, II) enabling parameters and III) monitoring and learning:

**Objectives**
- A strategic aim that is described in rich narrative text but not necessarily quantified
- A mix of tangible, intangible and relational objectives that are quantified

**Enabling parameters**
- A clear approach to gradually handing as much program control (programming design, funding and implementation choices) as possible over to local stakeholders on the basis of program implementation experiences and growing local capacities

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1 Such initiatives include Doing Development Differently, Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation, Thinking and Working Politically (these three are essentially different frames used amongst different communities such as ODI and Harvard that call for a more problem-focused, entrepreneurial and experiential approach to programming). This overview on ‘From Poverty to Power’ of different ‘adaptive’ initiatives is also useful.
A relatively long time-horizon (6-10 years; or, a shorter but iterative lifecycle) that allows for analysis, relations and joint experiences to drive program performance improvement and program relevance

A permanent stream of applied analytical work that supports program objectives, learning and program activities

Monitoring and learning

A clearly articulated cycle and practice of monitoring and learning that both enables and is authorized to result in changes of objectives and associated resource allocations (e.g. by using a process like ‘strategy testing’, or constructing how social change happens by tracking change processes through outcome harvesting or storytelling).

Activities are designed to simultaneously address a concrete problem and promote learning about what sort of change is appropriate as well as sustainable.

What will be different?

Much ink has already been shed on the parlous state of security and justice programming. The intention is not to have this event series replicate such analysis or to produce voluminous outputs akin to those already in existence. Yet, much of the existing analysis is a level up from the organizational insights and initiatives that are needed to translate findings into operational changes.

This event series will focus on identifying such operational changes in as detailed a manner as possible. To this effect, the series is implemented together with organizations that have a sizeable portfolio of security and justice related programs: PAX, the NIMD (from the perspective of the politics of security and justice programs) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Key questions for discussion

A simple set of questions will guide the conversations and discussions throughout this event series so as to provide a framework for aggregating and sharing findings:

What issues, rules or practices prevent the seven dimensions of adaptive programming outlined above from being enacted in your organization?

Where has innovation happened on these dimensions in your organization and what made this possible?

Where is further change needed and what type of pressure can bring this about?

Event series: luncheons and an interactive brainstorm

The event series will consist of three luncheons in October and November, of c. 1.5-2 hours each for about 10 participants. They will be hosted at respectively the MFA, NIMD and PAX (tbc). Each luncheon will deal with one of the three clusters outlined above. It is appreciated that these clusters and their components do not operate in isolation; nevertheless, there is benefit in a focused discussion.

The different strands will be brought together during a full-day Interactive Brainstorm (IB) for about 25 participants. The IB will see half a day of case work that focuses on existing programs featuring adaptive elements (drawing from examples discussed during the luncheons; programs such as the Dutch sponsored justice program in northern Mali and the Burundian-Dutch Security Sector Development program can serve as illustrative examples for the purpose of this note). The IB will also feature another half day of conversation about a number of the remaining components of adaptive programming and/or explore particular points raised during the luncheons in greater detail.

Outputs

As input for the Interactive Brainstorm:

- An informal, one-page summary of each luncheon (written by the Knowledge Platform)
- A blog (written by the respective hosts) of each luncheon.

At the end of the series:

- A policy brief-type product of 6-8 pages that lays out as concrete an agenda for improvement of security and justice programs as possible, that is situated in the context of the broader international conceptual and practice debates that are currently taking place.

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