



# DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

## In practice

# SCALING UP GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT KNOWLEDGE CO-OPERATION

### Key messages

The Knowledge Bank was established by the Norwegian government in 2018 with a mandate to strengthen and co-ordinate Norwegian technical co-operation with partner countries. Responding to demand from partner countries for specific thematic areas of expertise, the Knowledge Bank facilitates knowledge and experience sharing by drawing on the collective knowledge of more than 30 Norwegian public institutions, along with multilateral institutions and civil society organisations, to strengthen the capacity of partner country public institutions.

### Keywords

[Governance](#) | [Innovation](#) | [Learning and knowledge management](#) | [Partnerships](#)

### Key partner

[Norway](#)

### Challenge

Many developing countries [cite the need for stronger organisational capability](#) in the public sector to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. This reflects the near universal knowledge that competent, transparent and accountable institutions perform better when it comes to sustainable development. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, open, responsive and competent public institutions contribute to resilience in governments' ability to respond to crisis.

Ministries and public agencies in Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries have tremendous technical expertise and experience with government processes that often go beyond that of development co-operation experts, who combine sectoral and co-operation expertise. However, leveraging technical expertise and experience for developing countries is often challenging. Contexts are vastly different, including in their complexity, and co-operation between different institutions can often suffer from organisational silos. Thematic programmes run from headquarters also risk not being grounded in the realities and priorities of partner countries.

## Approach

Prior to the establishment of the Knowledge Bank, Norway had sector-specific technical co-operation programmes that brought together expertise from different ministries, agencies and universities. For example, Oil for Development draws on Norway's experience and knowledge on petroleum management anchored in different ministries and directorates. Other programmes leverage Norway's particular experience such as on gender equality, tax, fish, and oceans. To enhance the effectiveness of these programmes, in 2018 Norway launched the Knowledge Bank. Its key features are:

- a **common platform** for key technical co-operation programmes, with Norway's development co-operation agency Norad serving as the secretariat
- **joint backstopping and support**, pooling expertise for quality assurance, support and training for all programmes on what works in technical co-operation
- **standardisation and simplification** of administrative tools and processes to reduce the burden on individual programmes
- **enhanced co-ordination between programmes** through shared approaches, as well as information sharing at country level, with the next step being to identify synergies
- **exchanging experiences** and learning across programmes, with a focus on co-creation by partners
- **support for the association of partners** such as civil society organisations, international organisations or other developing countries
- maintaining focus on **ensuring partner country ownership** – assistance from any of the programmes is demand-based and designed and implemented jointly with partners; Norwegian embassies are focal points
- a **strategy** for the Knowledge Bank (2020-2025) that defines **shared long-term goals**, setting out how Norway will work to achieve them and outlining strategic areas of work (e.g. results in partner countries, areas for learning and cooperation, and standardisation and simplification).

## Results

Norway has extensively documented concrete results in partner countries from its capacity development efforts. Since the introduction of the Knowledge Bank, it has observed the following:

- Changes in the approach to capacity development among Norwegian stakeholders, with **an increased focus on context** and the partner institution leading the process, empowerment and learning as projects proceed.
- **Increased awareness** that sharing experiences and knowledge depend on long-term relationships, familiarity with the context and mutual trust.
- The development of **common guidance, tools and resources**.
- Greater **awareness of the valuable capital that public sector officials possess** in terms of sector specific competencies, and the experience of working in a government administration.
- More **common, joint direction** for the Norwegian actors involved in capacity development through institutional co-operation, and less work in silos.
- Insights from Knowledge Bank technical co-operation programmes are **informing Norwegian efforts**, notably international normative work.

- Including multilateral organisations in the knowledge programmes has led to **more flexibility of programming** and an ability to respond to countries where access to Norwegian officials is limited due to security or resource challenges.
- At the partner country level, in Uganda where the Oil for Development programme co-operates with the authorities on resource management, environmental protection, security and the economy, an important milestone in 2019 was the approval of the National Environmental Act and special regulations on the management of waste from petroleum production. In Ethiopia, the Gender for Development programme supported work on gender-disaggregated statistics and knowledge in key areas such as work-life, to inform government communications. Together with the Swedish statistical agency SCB, Statistics Norway has developed a free, user-friendly programme for setting up national accounts, currently in use by statistics agencies of eight African countries. For more information on the results achieved by individual programmes, see the resources below.

### Lessons learnt

Preliminary lessons from the introduction of the Knowledge Bank include:

- An **open and participatory approach** in Knowledge Bank programmes has contributed to innovation in programme management approaches, making them more fit for purpose for capacity development.
- A **focus on learning through exchange of experiences** helped to develop capacity across government agencies and in Norad, and has contributed to a stronger acceptance and understanding of the Knowledge Bank's objectives.
- Political commitment and dedicated leadership in Norad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been helpful for **developing a strong mandate** and providing the Knowledge Bank with a space to grow.
- Ustanding of the **need for embedding capacity development in institutions to avoid over-reliance on individuals** and the need for long-term support, as capacity development happens gradually, has increased across government entities.
- Working bilaterally in effective government-to-government partnerships contributes to **strengthening bilateral ties** with partner countries.
- There is a **need to adapt and maintain the Knowledge Bank in the face of changes** to the development context. At the programme level, COVID-19 caused delays in 2020 in most of the Knowledge Bank's projects. As a result of the pandemic there has also been considerable effort to find new ways of working with partner countries across programmes. E-learning courses and digital workshops have been developed to prepare for post-pandemic co-operation.

### Further information

Norad, The Knowledge Bank, <https://www.norad.no/en/front/the-knowledge-bank>.

Norad, Strategy 2020-2025: The Knowledge Bank in Brief, <https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2020/the-knowledge-bank-in-brief>.

Individual thematic programme pages, including on Oil for Development, Gender Equality for Development, Statistics for Development and Tax for Development: <https://www.norad.no/en/front/the-knowledge-bank/programmes-in-the-knowledge-bank>.

Norad, Results report 2017: Knowledge to fight poverty - Capacity development of the public sector in developing countries, <https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2018/results-report-knowledge-to-fight-poverty>.

Government of Norway (2017), "Common Responsibility for Common Future: The Sustainable Development Goals and Norway's Development Policy – Report to the Storting (white paper)", Meld. St. 24, English summary, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-24-20162017/id2547573/sec1>.

Government of Norway (2018), "Partnerland i utviklingspolitikken – Report to the Storting (white paper)" (Partner countries in development policy), Meld. St. 17, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-17-20172018/id2604526>.

### **OECD resources**

OECD (2019), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Norway 2019*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/75084277-en>.

### **To learn more about Norway's development co-operation see:**

OECD (2021), "Norway", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/aaf0304f-en>.

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