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Level 5, 33 Ainslie Place, Canberra City, ACT 2601 Australia
PO Box 310, Civic Square, ACT 2608 Australia
T +61 2 6191 6420 abtassociates.com.au

GOVERNANCE

BRIEFING NOTE SERIES

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Operationalising ‘Thinking and Working Politically’ in Facilities: KOMPAK case study

Lavinia Tyrrel with the KOMPAK Program Team/ Emma Piper

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This brief (and its annexes) summarise how Abt Associates’ is testing and applying a ‘thinking and working politically’ approach in its international aid programs – using the example of the Australian Government KOMPAK program in Indonesia. It is hoped that, by sharing these lessons with the development community, Abt can add to the body of knowledge on what it *actually* takes to implement a TWP approach in large, ‘Facility’ mechanisms.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Relatively little has been written about the experience of ‘thinking and working politically’ (TWP). Many development agencies are increasingly *thinking* politically, but there is scant evidence yet regarding the practice and implications of *working* politically. Where evidence does exist, it is largely focused on the experiences of small, single sector, low-profile grants; not the experience of what it takes to ‘TWP’ in large, multi-sector, Facility-style initiatives.

2.2 Abt Associates is currently managing three such Australian Government-funded Facilities in the Indo-Pacific¹. Generally speaking, our progress on TWP in these facilities has been mixed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we seem to be better on the ‘thinking’ part than the ‘doing’ part – and there are clear areas where the TWP agenda has been easier to implement than others (for full reflections see the Abt Associates [Governance Working Paper #2](#)). However, by virtue of it being the longest standing of the three Facilities, the KOMPAK team in Indonesia are making head-way in developing, trialling and refining a set of tools, systems and practices to drive TWP across the Facility.

2.3 The process of KOMPAK ‘learning to do TWP’ is still ongoing. To date it has focused on turning the team’s, existing tacit knowledge into explicit/ actionable knowledge, and getting teams comfortable with a more rapid cycle of thinking/ doing/ learning that would normally be the case in a more traditional pre-planned program (where design, implementation and evaluation are often managed sequentially). As such, the tools being developed by KOMPAK try to both incentivise and systematise TWP across the program, while also allowing for flexibility in how teams operate (especially where they are innately using TWP principles). Looking forward, the team will continue to focus on how TWP can be more closely integrated with its existing program cycle – including practical questions such as who has delegation for program adjustments? And what qualifies as ‘sufficient data’ to justify program change?

3. KEY MESSAGES/ FINDINGS

3.1 The KOMPAK program is in the process of using, adapting and integrating the wealth of existing theory and practice on TWP², to design an approach appropriate for the Indonesian context and structure of program itself.

¹ KOMPAK in Indonesia; the Papua New Guinea Governance Facility (PGF); and the Timor Leste Partnership for Human Development (ATLPHD)

² In particular, the [development entrepreneurship model](#), the World Bank’s [problem driven analysis](#) technique, the Development Leadership Program’s [‘everyday political analysis’](#) tool and the DFID’s [Drivers of Change](#) Analytical tool.

3.2 Given that KOMPAK is a large, multi-sector program comprising three distinct work areas³ and multiple projects, KOMPAK is adopting a ‘spectrum’ approach to applying TWP. This acknowledges that not all KOMPAK project can (or should) operate in highly flexible and politically-informed ways over-night, and as such may begin with a ‘minimalist approach’ to TWP. It also allows TWP to be grafted to the existing KOMPAK program cycle (in particular it’s established quarterly and six-month review and reflection process), and build on existing capacity within KOMPAK program teams (see **Note #2** for more detail on the KOMPAK context).

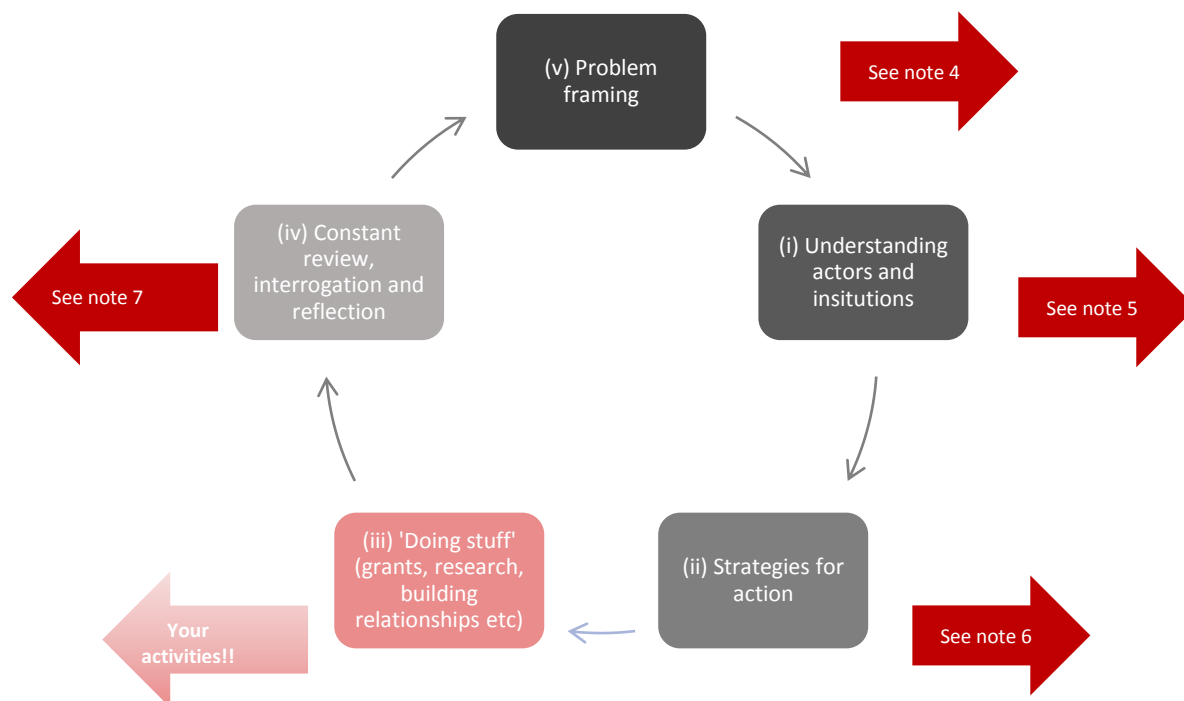
3.3 KOMPAK’s starting definition of TWP assumes that (1) change is inherently political and (2) change is complex and often unpredictable. This then translates into three principles for programming [as drawn from the [TWP CoP](#)] (1) TWP requires strong political analysis, insight and understanding (2) TWP requires a detailed appreciation of, and response to the local context and (3) flexibility and adaptability in program design and implementation are required (see **Note #1** for further detail).

3.4 While still being refined and rolled-out, the KOMPAK approach comprises of a straight forward set of tools that enable teams to think about, and respond to, power and politics in their programming. These tools include:

1. **First, framing the problem:** This means clearly defining the ‘problem’ that teams are grappling with, or that they want to better understand – particularly the political dimensions of the issue at hand. **See Note #4.**
2. **Second, unpacking the drivers and different interests that have a stake in change:** This means working through a set of simple questions and an actor map to understand what the real drivers or blockers of change are. **See Note #5.**
3. **Third, turning our analysis into a strategy for action:** this means thinking critically about who and where change is emerging (e.g. coalition building etc), and determining whether our project is making the best choices to support this change (e.g. in terms of THE Theory of Change, relationships, activities, budget, partners, outcomes etc). **See Note #6.**
4. **Fourth, a process of constant review, interrogation and reflection:** this means revisiting analysis, activities and assumptions in light of: new information the team has learnt; changes in the local political context; and lessons from implementing activities. **See Note #7.**

These tools are illustrated in the diagram below and described in more detail in Notes 4 through 7.

Figure 1: TWP Tools Available to KOMPAK Staff



4. ENCLOSED RESOURCES

4.1 Attached are a series of ‘how to notes’ explaining how KOMPAK is testing, developing and learning how to apply TWP in its projects. These include: **#1 what is TWP; #2 how and why does KOMPAK apply TWP; #3 TWP ‘tools; #4 defining the problem; #5 actor and institutional analysis; #6 strategies for action #7 review and reflection.**

³ Supporting the Government of Indonesia (GoI) to: re-align incentives and build systems for frontline services, embed village and community structures for community development and increase options for off-farm employment.