



Thinking and Working Politically (TWP)



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What is TWP?

Development actors have long known that politics affects the outcomes of programmes but have been less knowledgeable as to what to do about it. For some, development programmes are a “technical endeavour” of fixing existing systems along a given ideal or along a “blueprint” approach. However, with such a mindset, the local powers and interests that are always influencing interventions are, in the worst case scenario, not included in an analysis on the context or may be perceived as a

nuisance; and in the best case scenario, they are well understood and included in the design of programmes. Many tools are available for unpacking the political context (see, for example, 2-pager on *Political Economy Analysis*) yet moving from the understanding and analysis to the implications and actions has been challenging. The thinking and working politically (TWP) approach fills this gap, and lays out how to go about operating in ways that are both “politically smart and politically informed”. A TWP approach also is important in making development programmes more effective and sustainable.

Key elements of TWP

The TWP approach thus has three main features:

1. The politics underpinning development processes – the (formal and, more importantly, informal) institutions, interests, values, behaviours, incentives, motivations, interactions and power dynamics. To understand these “politics”, **Political Economy Analyses** are often used among other analytical methods.
2. The key idea is that by understanding these underlying factors, one can make “best guess” designs of development programmes which are supported by coalitions of interest. In the ideal case, the politics of the programme is in tune with the developmental logic of the programme – in effect

“going with the grain”. When working through best guesses, the element of **Adaptive Management**, where deliberative and ongoing learning about what works and what doesn’t in a partnership or programme comes to the forefront.

3. Going with the grain does not mean refraining from challenging existing power structures in favour of the poor; rather, it means recognising and aggregating those actors and interests who are in favour of the intended changes and empowering them. In this process, donors take an explicitly pro-poor, pro-inclusiveness position. As such, TWP stresses the relevance of **policy dialogue**: not only evidence-based policy dialogue of the SDC itself with the government, but also with supporting partners.

Taking a TWP approach

TWP is not a challenge to traditional programme models; instead, it attempts to enhance them with specific analysis and action points that will enable the programme to be more realistic and develop better results. Nor does TWP offer a new set of methods or tools; but it points to tools and methods that already exist, and spells out how they need to be adapted and used in combination to achieve the results desired.

Figure 1 illustrates the key components of what thinking and working politically includes and means.

See: 2-pagers on *Governance Analysis*, *Political Economy Analysis*, *Adaptive Management*, and *Policy Dialogue*.

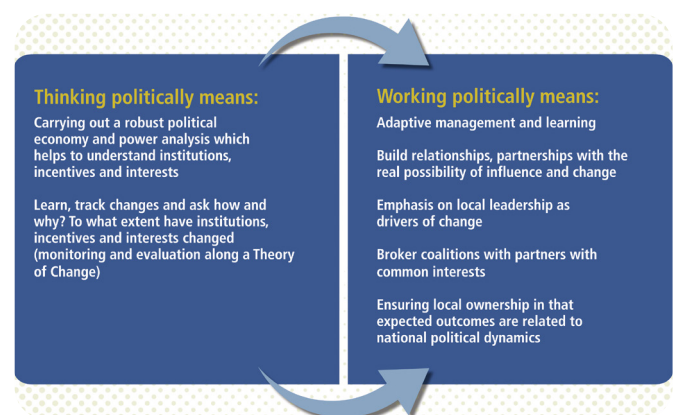


Figure 1: Components of thinking and working politically

Links with other approaches

Conceptually, TWP shares a resemblance with two other approaches – Doing Development Differently (DDD) and Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). These three approaches emerged at around the same time, though somewhat independently, but are often used interchangeably. All of them stress issues that are also discussed in the Aid Effectiveness discourse: the importance of context; governance programming not based on blueprints and good practices, but rather on “best fits” for a specific context; staying engaged for the long term with staff continuity; and the establishment of places and spaces to jointly learn (in real time) and adapt.

They have, however, slightly different emphases:

- **Doing Development Differently** focuses on using locally legitimate institutions, to work in partnership

From implementers to facilitators

Programme evaluations and evidence on programmes suggest that the TWP approach also asks development actors to rethink their roles – from implementers to facilitators and beyond. What enabled TWP in programmes was:

- **On the part of the implementers:** Politically smart leaders who use their political knowledge effectively

and not in a hierarchical “principal agent model”, and to focus on real results (not project results).

- **Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation** always starts with a specific problem, and then makes many small “bets” in terms of change. Also, it emphasises learning and adaptation as you go.
- **Thinking and Working Politically** focuses on an explicit recognition of competing interests, engagement with reformers and pro-poor coalitions, and is based on a Political Economy Analysis perspective either of the country, the sector, the programme or a specific problem.

See also: 2-pager on [Governance Analysis](#).

and programme managers who allow local actors to take the lead.

- **On the part of the cooperation offices:** A programme that brokers relationships with major interest groups in policy dialogue.
 - **On the part of the donors:** Flexible funding, strong commitment and a supportive internal organisation.
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