

Lessons Identified at the Strategic Level

THE INTEGRATED APPROACH IS ESSENTIAL

The Lesson: The integrated approach is a more effective use of resources and improves the impact of activities.

What is Integration?

Integration is forming a single multi-disciplinary and multi-departmental team to take on a task. The task may be planning, it may be designing a programme or it may be delivering a project. When asked to work together government departments generally look to liaise or coordinate, to retain their own teams whilst negotiating with other departments. Experience from the field has shown that in the complex, fast moving and highly pressurised environment of conflict this does not work. The transactional costs are too high.

Integration is primarily driven by the process of people from different institutions and different disciplines working side by side at several levels to ensure that their perspectives and activities reinforce each other. Integration requires low-level cooperation and mid-level coordination, supplemented by high-level alignment of overall strategic objectives. Integration should improve the flow of information, contribute to a shared understanding of stabilisation challenges and responses, reduce policy and delivery 'silos', and ensure greater effect on the ground.

What can Integration Bring to Planning?

The core planning phases – assessment of the problem, creation and selection of objectives and the design of measures of effect can all benefit from integration. Integration can reduce institutional misunderstanding and prejudices early in the process. Integration is far more likely to create genuine detailed agreement on the nature of the problem to be addressed - something that different institutions trying to harmonise their own separate plans frequently fail to do - and drive genuine ownership of objectives. Finally, it prevents the attribution of measures of effect becoming 'a blame game'.

Preparing to Integrate

Integration does not work if we do nothing until we need an integrated team. Staff from different backgrounds need to train together, attend common courses and read each other's guidance to promote a basic level of common understanding. If not, they will not think of each other during a crisis and will talk at cross purposes when trying to establish common goals.

In addition, the highest levels of the contributing departments must share incentives and be willing to be accountable for their element of the effort. If not, a well integrated working level team might design an impressive programme only to find that none of the team members can bring their departments with them.

The Risks of Integration

Integration does not mean everyone must be involved in everything all the time. If activity is intelligently planned, diplomatic, development and military staff should not necessarily all be in the same place at the same time. It is also important to avoid the cookie cutter approach. Teams must be flexible and organised for the task at hand. It is unlikely that any two integrated teams will look the same.

Policymakers must also remember that the integrated approach in this context is not the answer for everything. Much core diplomacy, development and defence work still needs to be undertaken separately by FCO, DFID and the MoD. Finally, the more we integrate on one level (cross-government for instance) the more we risk ignoring anything outside our circle of integration. As an example International Organisations and NGOs cannot be integrated (were it to even to be practical it is politically undesirable, they have their own mandates to fulfil) but their views and capabilities have to be considered. Ensure that your integration does not just create another exclusive 'club'.

Case Study: Development of UK Government Strategy on Somalia, 2009

In summer 2009, at FCO request, the Stabilisation Unit Planning Team ran a series of planning workshops attended by a range of UK Government representatives in both London and Nairobi to design a strategy for UK engagement in Somalia. These workshops highlighted the agencies across the UK Government which had a stake in Somalia; 19 different entities were represented at one of the London workshops. The result of this integrated planning process was a single strategy across government. This strategy went on to form the basis for policy formulation and programme design on Somalia by FCO and DFID in particular. The strategy remained in place for approximately one year before being 'refreshed', again through a cross-government process, for adoption by new Ministers in summer 2010.