C4DC
CONTRACTS FOR DATA COLLABORATION

DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY AND THE GOVERNMENT OF MOLDOVA COLLABORATE ON A DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

A Case Study by SDSN TReNDS for C4DC

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THIS CASE STUDY DOCUMENTS A DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN (DMP) ESTABLISHED BY DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY AND THE GOVERNMENT OF MOLDOVA TO COLLECT DATA ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AND AID PROGRAMS. IT IS A USEFUL EXAMPLE OF AN UNSIGNED DATA SHARING AGREEMENT, WHICH CAN BE A VALUABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR CERTAIN DATA COLLABORATIONS. THE PLAN WAS PRODUCED THROUGH JOINT-COLLABORATIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF MOLDOVA, DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY, AND OTHER DATA CONTRIBUTORS. INFORMED BY AN INTERVIEW WITH DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY AND THE AGREEMENT TEXT, THIS CASE STUDY DESCRIBES HOW THE DMP WAS FORMED AND HIGHLIGHTS KEY ELEMENTS OF THE AGREEMENT. THE COMPLETE DMP IS AVAILABLE IN THE CONTRACTS FOR DATA COLLABORATION REPOSITORY.

ABSTRACT

In 2013, the Government of Moldova and Development Gateway worked together to create an aid management platform to collect data from different development actors across the country. To accompany the platform, a data management plan (DMP) was established to provide guidelines for data submissions. The plan was first drafted by the government and Development Gateway, and it later incorporated feedback from various development actors and data providers. Most important, the plan was written as a flexible living document and supported by an accompanying law that increased the incentives for submitting data electronically. The DMP has proven effective for project implementation in Moldova, with development actors continuing to regularly submit data.

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BACKGROUND TO COLLABORATION

Moldova has the lowest GDP of any country in Europe, with a per capita GDP of US$2,724 as of 2018. According to the World Bank, although Moldova has achieved significant growth and reductions in poverty over the past few years, it continues to face social and economic challenges, including corruption, polarization, and low business growth. As such, Moldova is still highly dependent upon international development assistance; as of 2018, Moldova received US$241 million net in development assistance and aid (World Bank, 2019).

Moldova's State Chancellery is responsible for coordinating external assistance and managing official development finance (Global Partnership for Effective Cooperation, 2016). As part of an effort to better coordinate the donor community and development activities, the Chancellery began collaborating with a technical partner, Development Gateway (DG), to create a process for tracking development projects in Moldova.

DG is an international NGO that supports countries with digital and data solutions to development challenges. Following the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the OECD, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) identified DG as a potential provider of a tool for managing aid related data, which led to the creation of the Aid Management Platform (AMP). According to DG's Chief Operating Officer, Vanessa Goas, "The idea was to try to build a tool that would put governments in the driver's seat to manage their aid portfolios." The AMP was piloted in Ethiopia in 2005, and as of 2019, it has been deployed in 25 countries, ranging from middle-income contexts to post-conflict states.

Beginning around 2008, DG realized that it was important for AMP projects to be supported by a data management plan (DMP), a document that clearly states the data procedures and the roles of different data actors. Goas explains, "The role of the data management plan emerged from a number of failures. To be frank, what we learned early on was [that] some of our biggest failures were because we failed to codify with the government the roles, responsibilities, and definitions. Things that we all thought were basic, shared knowledge ended up with everyone having a different idea of what should be happening."

In 2013, the UNDP contracted DG to assist with implementing an AMP in Moldova. The creation of Moldova's AMP came out of an express need, because the Chancellery had a mandate to coordinate and manage all development assistance in the country. Moreover, Moldova had launched an open data initiative in 2011 as part of a wider set of governance transformations, and this required central authorities to provide publicly available, regularly updated data (Creţu and Tişacova, 2014). Yet, there was no existing mechanism for the Chancellery to collect the necessary data. Prior to the establishment of an AMP, the Chancellery would send an excel sheet to all of the donors and line ministries requesting project data, but the ad hoc nature made the effort difficult to manage (Goas, 2019). DG recommended that the Chancellery establish clear guidelines so that it could count on implementing agencies and development partners to provide data to the system, as well as ensure that those data providers could understand the benefits of participation.

CREATING THE DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

The collaborators specifically chose to create a DMP, instead of a signed legal agreement, because it afforded greater flexibility and minimized legal barriers. With over 20 implementing agencies and nearly 30 development partners contributing data, a memorandum of understanding would have required an overwhelming 50 signatories (Goas, 2019). The DMP allowed the government to modify data collection procedures without securing line-by-line approval from every individual partner. Furthermore, given that many of the development partners were from the international community, creating a plan that did not necessarily require consensus among all partners enabled Moldova to own and manage the process. Additionally, by having an unsigned agreement, the process relied on establishing strong relationships and positive reinforcement because the government could not legally enforce the DMP.

The DMP was created as a living document, and although first drafted in 2013, it has since been modified several times. DG worked directly with Moldova's Director of the Foreign Assistance Department and her team at the Chancellery. Throughout the process of establishing the AMP and the supporting DMP, the DG team worked primarily with the Chancellery remotely over the course of one year, with quarterly in-person meetings. According to Goas, "When it came to building this plan, we did work in person for the first iteration, which I thought was very useful, because we could map things out on a white board, talk about different procedures, lay over the budget process versus the aid process, and see how things matched up." After just a half-day working session, most of the necessary information for the DMP was agreed upon, and the teams then worked by email to clarify details and finalize a draft.

The Chancellery and DG then met in person with development partners to share the draft and collect feedback. According to Goas, the partners were collegial and eager to participate, and the discussion focused on how to produce the best dataset for the government. Agreeing on the final iteration of the plan only required a few additional hours, and the process was expedited in part by DG's experience in previous countries.

The process also benefitted from the Government of Moldova's leadership. For example, one of the donors did not feel it was necessary to use the DMP, because relevant data was already published on the donor's website. The government pushed back, explaining that the Chancellery had already attempted to use donor websites to collect information, and a formal system was necessary to alleviate donor concerns about the accuracy of annual reports. Additionally, the government had a defined vision for how to engage partners and how the data would be used, as well as placed importance on maintaining good practices and international standards. This clarity helped to simplify the process.

Additionally, the DMP was bolstered by legislative support. Partners implementing a developmental project in Moldova can apply for a value added tax (VAT) exemption through the Chancellery. A law was created by Parliament to mandate that the Chancellery could no longer accept paper applications for VAT exemption, which required applicants to submit information through the AMP system (Lex.justice.md, 2018).

KEY ASPECTS OF THE AGREEMENT

• Documenting a collaborative, flexible approach

The DMP is not a signed agreement, but it clearly describes the purpose, as well as the collaborative nature of the relationship between the government and development partners. Goas explained, "It talks a lot about the collaborative process that was undertaken…It can change, and there should be regular discussions and input from the stakeholders using the tool that the State Chancellery should take into consideration. For me, that collaborative approach is really critical."

> **"THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS TO OUTLINE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF MOLDOVA AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS ACTIVE IN MOLDOVA, SUCH THAT, AS A MATTER OF ROUTINE, THE AID MANAGEMENT PLATFORM IS KEPT UP TO DATE, MAXIMIZING ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING AID MANAGEMENT. THIS DOCUMENT IS THE RESULT OF IN-DEPTH MEETINGS WITH CHANCELLERY STAFF. THIS DOCUMENT IS MEANT TO BE A LIVING DOCUMENT, AND WILL BE UPDATED REGULARLY BASED ON THE INPUT AND DISCUSSIONS FROM GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND DONORS AND IN CONJUNCTION WITH DG MISSIONS TO MOLDOVA."**
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> Source: DMP.

• Formalizing the iterative approach to data collection

During initial discussions, DG strongly advised the Chancellery to adopt a gradual, phased approach to data collection. Most of the data that the Chancellery required was for drafting high-level reports to ministers and Parliament, and detailed information about development projects were not initially necessary. Goas said, "We really asked the Chancellery to think about what is the essential data you need to do ninety-percent of your work. And then once you feel that this data management plan has been well established – people understand how to use the system, they understand their roles, you're not sending reminders to people, you're not giving trainings anymore – then start adding more data fields." Requesting substantial amounts of data at the beginning of the process from partners could have created additional complications and resentment, so the phased approach was written into the DMP.

> **"ENSURE THAT THE DEPLOYMENT PROCESS FOLLOW A PHASED APPROACH, AIMING FOR A BROAD BASE OF POTENTIAL USERS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND DONORS, AS WELL AS PUBLIC ACCESS…TO BEGIN ADDING FUNCTIONALITY AND EXPANDING ACCESS TO OTHER USERS WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME."**
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> Source: DMP.

• Adapting data collection to the local context

The section on "AMP Terms, Definitions, and Data Requirements" includes changes made to better reflect local conditions. The data definitions were initially a combination of the OECD Development Assistance Committee reporting standard and the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), but the terms had to be extended to better reflect the context in Moldova. For instance, the government required that some data fields be reported in both English and Romanian.

> **"THE FOLLOWING FIELDS WERE IDENTIFIED DURING THE ASSESSMENT AS BEING THE MOST CRITICAL FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO CAPTURE IN THE FIRST YEAR OF AN AMP IMPLEMENTATION. ALL FIELDS ARE CRITICAL; THE MOST CRITICAL ARE MARKED WITH AN ASTERISK. IN ADDITION TO IDENTIFYING THE RELEVANT FIELDS, THE CHANCELLERY HAS ALSO SUPPLIED THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS FOR EACH FIELD. WHERE POSSIBLE, THE DEFINITIONS CONFORM WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS (IATI, ETC)."**
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> Source: DMP.

• Responding to feedback from data providers

The agreement also reflects adjustments that the Chancellery made following consultation with the donor community. Donors suggested modifications to the definitions. For example, following donor recommendations, the Chancellery added a field for support to balance of payments under funding information. As a result, the agreement can now better serve the needs of the data contributors.

> **"..SUPPORT TO BALANCE OF PAYMENTS - BALANCE-OF-PAYMENTS (BOP) ASSISTANCE IS DESIGNED TO EASE A COUNTRY'S EXTERNAL FINANCING CONSTRAINTS. THIS CAN TAKE THE FORM OF MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE."**
>
> Source: DMP.

• Providing public access to data

All of the data that was submitted through the AMP was eventually made public using a World Bank data platform. The intention to make data public is clearly noted in the DMP.

> **"PUBLIC 'WORKSPACE': ALL USERS WITHOUT A USERNAME AND PASSWORD WILL BE ABLE TO ACCESS ALL NON-DRAFT AND VALIDATED ACTIVITIES VIA THE PUBLIC SITE. THE CHANCELLERY CAN PUBLISH REPORTS, DOCUMENTS, AND TABS IN THIS SPACE."**
>
> Source: DMP.

OUTCOMES

The AMP has been used in Moldova since 2013 to monitor development activities and to standardize data submissions (Global Partnership for Effective Cooperation, 2016). Reflecting on the DMP and the outcomes in Moldova, Goas said, "From my point of view, this [DMP] is extremely successful. For me, it's because it leaves very little wiggle room. What it asks for isn't out of the realm of what everyone knows the Ministry needs to do its job. It's realistic."

Notwithstanding its success, the implementation of the DMP has required added effort. A number of development partners at first struggled to provide data in both English and Romanian, and some asked for support from the Chancellery with translation. The sectoral ministries were also challenged by limited resources and initially had difficulty with data submissions.

Yet, the flexible nature of the DMP and phased approach has since been extremely beneficial in streamlining data collection. For example, since 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become the main guiding framework for development projects in Moldova, and to track the alignment of these projects with the SDGs, the government simply added this component to the DMP, and the revised document was circulated without the need for extensive negotiations (Global Partnership for Effective Cooperation, 2016).

DG's formal engagement with Moldova concluded in 2016, and the responsibility for the platform has since been transferred to the Ministry of Finance. DG still receives occasional requests for assistance, but the tool is maintained by the government, and the data is kept up to date. The platform can be found online at amp.gov.md.

Parliament Building, Chișinău, Moldova - Pudelek - Wikipedia

LESSONS

The project offers several lessons for other data collaborators. These include:

Creating a flexible plan, rather than a signed legal agreement, can help increase country ownership of data actions.

Approaching partners with an already established document can expedite the process.

Taking a collaborative approach and creating a living document can improve flexibility for the data users.

Especially when dealing with many contributors and large volumes of data, agreeing to a phased roll-out of data collection can improve implementation.

Incorporating international standards can strengthen methods and definitions, but it is also important for certifying that the agreement reflects local conditions.

Garnering feedback from data contributors can strengthen relations and ensure the agreement meets the needs of the entire data community.

Having a supporting law or legal mechanism can increase cooperation and success. The unsigned agreement focused more on relationship building and positive reinforcement, but it lacked legal enforceability. The accompanying law helped add credibility to the digital system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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