



Co-funded by
the European Union



QUDRA2

Resilience for refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities
in response to the protracted Syrian and Iraqi crises

When European Partners Team Up

Managing Complex European Multi-Partner Cooperation Programmes

Qudra 2 is a European partnership strengthening the resilience of people and communities affected by the Syrian and Iraqi crises. Financed by three European donors and implemented by five European implementing agencies, Qudra 2 is an expression of European support for and solidarity with communities affected by the crises. The programme is implemented across three sectors in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye.

Developed as part of the Qudra 2 programme, this paper summarises success factors and lessons learnt on managing complex programmes implemented jointly by European development partners.

Success Factors

I. Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define each partner's contribution and why and how you will cooperate 2. Cooperation adds complexity and must be managed accordingly
II. Steering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Establish an effective cooperation management architecture 4. Balance "internal" and "external" cooperation and the value it creates 5. Allocate sufficient resources based on a case for cooperation
III. Processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Operationalise joint implementation quickly through joint planning and agility 7. Create robust shared processes and ensure accountability
IV. Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Create platforms for learning within the partnership 9. Actively manage your networks for disseminating information and knowledge
V. Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Foster a strong cooperation culture through communication 11. Conduct regular check-ins on cooperation to adjust and learn

Implemented by



Success Factors for Cooperation

The programme's lessons are discussed along the following success factors¹ for cooperation: Strategy, Steering, Processes, Learning, and Communication.

I. Strategy

Starting with the design phase, multi-partner programmes must develop a strong, shared strategic orientation towards creating added value through cooperation.

1. Define each partner's contribution and why and how you will cooperate

Cooperation is a means to an end and not an end in itself; it must add value. Value is created, for example, through more comprehensive services to partners and beneficiaries (e.g., linking training and small-business support) or more efficiency in management processes such as reporting, which benefits donors and implementing partners. Partner selection, whether by donors or through a process of self-organisation of implementing partners, should be based on comparative and complementary strengths.

As the partnership takes shape, partners should first explicitly define how cooperation will add value to the overall objectives of a programme. A common understanding of different forms of cooperation, ranging from information exchange to fully integrated interventions involving multiple partners is critical.

To define each partner's contribution, the partnership must develop a shared understanding of each organisation's expertise, experience, and networks. A common understanding of partners' relative strengths facilitates creating synergies and complementarities. Partners should document their approach in a cooperation matrix which outlines how they will cooperate, each partner's contributions, and the expected added value. The cooperation matrix can be integrated into the programme's logical framework, including indicators for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness. A collaborative design process documented in the programme's logical framework ensures early buy-in and ownership from all partners.

2. Cooperation adds complexity and must be managed accordingly

Cooperation among different partners adds a layer of complexity to an already complex programme that works in different countries and across multiple sectors. The challenges and opportunities inherent in these complexities must be balanced.

Working across multiple countries increases complexity as the specific contexts vary, and approaches require adaptation rather than replication. Diverse regional experiences are a valuable resource in complex programmes if knowledge and experience is transferred to support adaptation to different contexts.

Working across multiple sectors increases the temptation to work in sector-specific silos. Managing inter-sectorial cooperation effectively creates opportunities to leverage the capacity of all sectors to provide more comprehensive and coherent services for partners and beneficiaries, for example, by combining support for basic infrastructure with employment promotion.

Cooperation among multiple partners adds complexity to strategy as additional perspectives, approaches, organisational procedures, and cultures must be considered. However, this diversity is the basis for creating value through cooperation. Partners must ensure that their strategy takes a realistic account of this complexity when they define how, when, and where (not) to cooperate.

¹ Success factors are broadly aligned with "Capacity WORKS: Cooperation Management in Practice", (GIZ, Eschborn, 2014).

II. Steering

Partners must develop a cooperation management architecture that engages all partners and sets clear rules and procedures for effective decision-making.

3. Establish an effective cooperation management architecture

An agreed cooperation management architecture enables partners to steer cooperation. It includes decision-making bodies and cross-organisational teams engaged in collaboration at an operational level, such as working groups or task forces. This architecture must be based on clear roles, mandates, and processes that create shared ownership and mutual accountability. Internally, partners must set priorities throughout implementation and steer concrete joint activities, for example, by mandating and reviewing the outputs of working groups. Externally, the partnership must be able to jointly engage key stakeholders such as donors and political partners and speak “with one voice”. Joint decision-making must be designed with respect for each partner’s internal decision-making processes and cultures. Steering must reflect the programme’s complexity, for example, by decentralising decision-making to country teams or working groups to avoid over- or under-steering cooperation.

Partners may mandate one organisation to facilitate cooperation by providing a secretariat or share these responsibilities. At the decision-making level, however, steering cooperation within the programme remains a joint obligation of all partners.

4. Balance “internal” and “external” cooperation and the value it creates

A programme consciously designed to draw added value from cooperation among European partners will naturally focus on cooperation among its members. However, each member organisation remains rooted in its internal structures, which require cooperation and coordination.

Furthermore, other actors in the partnership’s environment may offer specific expertise or access to networks, or require coordination to ensure coherence, for example, vis-à-vis a joint government partner. Investing resources into cooperation with stakeholders inside each member organisation and outside the partnership must be weighed carefully against the resources available; Again, the expected pay-off in terms of added-value should guide priorities. In general, partnership members should proactively communicate the peculiarities of the cooperation programme to create an understanding of the programme’s priorities.

5. Allocate sufficient resources based on a case for cooperation

Effective and efficient cooperation requires investments from all partners in joint planning, implementation, and learning (e.g., team building across implementing partners, meetings, and working groups for designing joint activities). Programme staff, particularly among managers and technical and administrative staff, must have the time and resources to identify and exploit opportunities for cooperation. If there is no “slack capacity”, cooperation will be perceived as a burden, and teams will prioritise their assigned tasks, especially in fragile settings, where frequent changes in implementation context bind resources and attention. Dedicated costs for expert facilitators, travel, or online platforms must be budgeted as the returns justify this relatively minor expenditure. If partners decide to mandate one organisation to facilitate cooperation, it must have the necessary resources.

These resources should not be seen as “managerial overheads” but as investments that will pay off through better results for beneficiaries and donors. To support sufficient budget allocations in the design phase, partners should develop a straightforward narrative linking these costs to the programme’s expected increased impact and efficiency.

III. Processes

Partners must engage in collaborative processes to implement and manage joint programmes. Cooperation requires joint planning and agility from the start, and managerial processes should ensure speed and quality while avoiding duplication and unnecessary deviations from the standard procedures of each partner.

6. Operationalise joint implementation quickly through joint planning and agility

Cooperation becomes concrete through joint implementation. Implementation teams must operationalise their cooperation as early as possible in the inception phase, building on the cooperation matrix developed in the design phase. The selection of geographical areas where multi-sectorial interventions will be concentrated, the sequencing of interventions if partners' outputs build on each other, or co-producing of new activities should all be documented. Partners should reflect on the possible risks of each approach in the specific context (e.g., delays in a chain of sequential interventions).

Intensive joint context analysis and planning are required. Decisions must be made with local (political) partners who need to be fully engaged throughout the cooperation strategy. The steering structures, specific task teams, and working groups that comprise the cooperation architecture must take up their work quickly. Different modalities of cooperation should be tested and evaluated throughout the inception phase. This agility has to continue throughout implementation to mitigate potential risks resulting from cooperation and seize unforeseen opportunities. Qudra 2 experience shows that partners should reserve a budget to flexibly replicate successful approaches of other partners or co-produce responses to unexpected challenges.

As in the design phase, teams on the ground must invest the time to create a mutual understanding of each other's philosophies, approaches, and tools and develop a shared understanding of the context. This process should involve all relevant team members, not only the management team. Technical and administrative staff members must understand and embrace the programme's approach to cooperation to contribute proactively. Successful and rapid operationalising of the cooperation strategy can be challenging in complex programmes, as each partner must first become operational (e.g., recruit staff). A more extended inception period (and even a longer implementation period) will help fully capitalise on the added value of cooperation.

7. Create robust shared processes and ensure accountability

In addition to joint implementation, joint programmes need shared management processes, such as financial management, reporting, and support services like M&E and communication. These interdependencies require mutual accountability. Well-functioning processes maximise added value through efficiencies in bundling processes. However, the more partners, the more fragile such processes can become, for example, due to late submissions or mutually incompatible administrative rules and procedures. Qudra 2's experiences highlight the following elements of successful processes: Early planning and communication of inputs and deadlines; clear guidance documents on required inputs, including opportunities for "Q&A", and commitment to timelines and quality standards by all partners. It is essential to minimise deviations from the internal processes of member organisations where possible to reduce the risk of errors or redundant work. Like strategy, process management should be aligned with the complexity of the partner structure to avoid over- or under-steering.

IV. Learning

Cooperation programmes should always be seen as opportunities for learning and disseminating information and knowledge in networks beyond the partnership.

8. Create platforms for learning within the partnership

Partners need to learn from each other's experiences and jointly identify innovative approaches to implementation. Learning takes place on two levels. Firstly, partners can learn from each other through implementation, for example, the most effective ways to promote community participation in local governance. Partners should map areas of shared concern early and regularly revisit these. Open formats in which partners can propose topics for discussion can help identify new topics which can be pursued more systematically, for example, through a working group. These formats should allow the inclusion of external participants in technical topics, widening mutual learning. Secondly, partners must learn to work together, for example, by finding the most effective ways to exchange information and knowledge or gain experience in collaborative management processes.

9. Actively manage your networks for disseminating information and knowledge

The scope for learning and innovation is enhanced if the partnership is seen as one node in a much more extensive network that consists of its members' broader organisations, local partners, and other stakeholders. Actively managing the dissemination of information and knowledge and brokering relationships within this network will add value. Partners could, for example, find additional support for local partners from donors of each partner or other programmes towards the end of a programme. Generally, the reach of the partnership's networks makes it repay the investment in information and knowledge management throughout the implementation, especially in the closing phase. One concrete way to exploit the opportunities of large networks is to document lessons learnt for dissemination, as in the paper you are currently reading.

V. Communication

Effective communication is essential to create a common culture around common goals and foster teamwork. Regular reflection helps to adapt the course and manage expectations.

10. Foster a strong cooperation culture through communication

Cooperation will require teams across organisations to develop a shared identity around their common goals and a culture of joint reflection and action. This culture will only emerge through frequent and effective communication. Establishing strong relationships and communication channels should be a priority in the early phase of the programme to create the trust and confidence that will support inclusive and proactive cooperation. Communication between individuals, within and between teams transcending organisational boundaries, needs investments and commitments from all involved. Proactively sharing information must be rewarded and acknowledged by placing partners' good practices in the spotlight. In the Qudra 2 experience, communication should be both "high touch" and "high tech": "Expensive" face-to-face events pay off in terms of relationships and the sharing of information and knowledge. In contrast, seamless digital communication channels are essential for day-to-day exchange.

11. Conduct regular check-ins on cooperation to adjust and learn

Regular check-in meetings across the cooperation management architecture are crucial, especially at the management level. Regular joint reflections on the strength of cooperation reaffirm priorities, facilitate necessary course correction, and help to manage expectations. Reflection meetings contribute to documenting learning for dissemination at the end of the programme. Besides structured and formal meetings, creating the space for more casual gatherings that foster strong relationships is essential. Partners may bring onboard external professional facilitation to guide these check-ins and provide a neutral perspective on cooperation.

Concluding Remarks

Due to its complexity, Qudra 2 has been an exciting and sometimes challenging endeavour. However, from a bird's eye perspective, it provides a vast wealth of learning for future cooperation programmes. Based on a more comprehensive report, this brief paper helps prepare for future similar complex partnerships. It provides guidance for realising added value, often hidden by not seeing the forest for the trees.

Each factor outlined here contributes to successful cooperation and added value for beneficiaries, partners, and donors. The Qudra 2 experience also shows that cooperation programmes can provide a rewarding professional experience for those directly involved.

Based on the learning shared above, we can offer five "rules of thumb" for the future:

- Believe in the value of partnerships.
- Bring a clear idea of what you will gain and what you are contributing to joint success to the table.
- Convince everybody, including donors, partners, your teams, and yourself, of the value of cooperation before investing time and money. If you cannot, stop.
- Cooperation will challenge "internal" and "external" boundaries and nudge you out of your organisation's comfort zone.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate! Talk to each other, especially if you feel things are going wrong.

The Qudra 2 programme wishes all future European efforts: Good Luck!, ¡Buena suerte!, Bonne Chance! Veel Geluk!, Viel Glück!, Sok Szerencsét!



Acknowledgements

Felix Richter, Omar Abdel Samad, Sandy Fahed, and Soraya Boulos of Management Consulting GmbH (www.kompetus.de) and Beyond Group Consulting (www.beyondgroupconsulting.com) provided valuable support for data collection and drafting of this report.

Editor: Catherine Churchill

Published by:

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH under the programme Qudra 2 – Resilience for refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities in response to the protracted Syria and Iraq crises

May 2023

Registered offices

Bonn and Eschborn

Germany

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36

53113 Bonn

Germany

T +49 228 44 60-0

F +49 228 44 60-17 66

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1 - 5

65760 Eschborn

Germany

T +49 61 96 79-0

F +49 61 96 79-11 15

E info@giz.de

I www.giz.de

Registered at

Local court (Amtsgericht) Bonn, Germany: HRB 18384

Local court (Amtsgericht) Frankfurt am Main,

Germany: HRB 12394

VAT no.

DE 113891176

Chairperson of the Supervisory Board

Jochen Flasbarth, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

Management Board

Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel (Chair)

Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven

