The District Operational Plan: A tangible tool for improved coordination of aid among implementing partners and recipient district local governments in Uganda

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What is a “DOP”?*

• DOP is “District Operational Plan,” a Memorandum of Understanding signed by local government leaders and USAID to ensure that its programs are aligned with district development plans.

• DOP utilizes the platform of district meetings to mandate the formation of the District Management Committee (DMC).

• DOP comprises of district leaders, USAID-funded implementing partners, and USAID-Uganda representatives and meets quarterly to jointly plan and coordinate development activities within the district.

• DOP gives local government leaders more power in donor coordination and helps USAID ensure that its programs are aligned with district development plans.

Project Purpose

• Resolve lack of coordination between recipient governments and donors, as well as between implementing partners working with the same donor

• Offer tangible methods of coordination between parties; (the need for coordination or cooperation is often identified by aid summits, but specific plans rarely result)

• Manage the USAID-developed coordination mechanism, DOP, in 35 districts across Uganda through the Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability (SDS) Programme — an example that aims to respond to The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

What is a “DOP”?**

DOP utilizes the platform of district meetings to implement interventions through district cash grants, technical assistance, capacity building, financing of public and social sector service programs, such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education and human resources for health. Through these interventions, SDS serves as USAID’s vehicle for empowering local governments in Uganda to drive the decentralization process. The program supports 64 districts across eastern, western and central Uganda.

Cardno’s Emerging Markets Division provides specialized professional services associated with the planning, design, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of development programs across a range of physical, economic, and social infrastructure sectors. Our business has a global presence and strong commitment to use and build local capacity. Cardno engages over 8,500 professionals in more than 100 countries.

Collaborative Partners

• DOP is a collaboration between district local government, USAID-Uganda, and USAID-funded IPs.

• SDS acts as a secretariat to USAID-Uganda and thus plays a key role in working with local governments to ensure the DOP is enacted.

• Non-USAID IPs also participate in this collaborative effort via DMC meetings if invited by the district leadership.

Summary of Successes/Challenges

• February 2012-present, over 90 DMC meetings have been held across 35 districts.

• Jan.-Oct. 2013, an average of 60% of USAID IPs present at each meeting; 13 districts have incorporated or invited non-USAID development partners into the coordination meetings.

Emerging Best Practices

[Source: Uganda SDS Program: DOP Analytical Progress Report, October 2013]

Good practice
Dialogue between the district and IPs

Example
Kamwenge district leadership task STRIDES to explain why they are distributing shoes—an intervention the district found to be unsustainable—8 months before the project’s close.

• A district asked SPEAR, STRIDES, RECO PIN to meet, discuss and streamline their activities to avoid duplication.

Presence of many IPs at DMC meetings leads to discussion of opportunities for collaboration between IPs

AIDSTAR-ONE learns that SDS had planned and Executive Leadership Training. AIDSTAR-ONE needed a venue to introduce their work to additional districts they were supporting, so SDS allotted AIDSTAR-ONE time in the training agenda to introduce their work.

Thorough analysis of submitted work plans and reports leads to identify gaps and duplication in intervention areas

In Kasese district, two IPs working in a prison were identified to have similar activities, but neither was addressing an emerging issue (an outbreak of diarrhoea).

Communication of next DMC meeting date during the DMC meeting to ease planning for all IPs and USAID

60% of the districts pledged to set DMC meeting dates ahead of time and communicate this date during the DMC meeting discussion.

Invitation of other non-USAID development partners to DMC meetings

47% of SDS supported non-mission Districts have extended invitations to other development partners (Mitapiza had 14 non-USAID partners at their first meeting).

Areas for improvement

Late submission of quarterly reports and work plans from the IPs to the district for consolidation and analysis—districts need at least two weeks

Meeting times often general, rather than concise and precise documentation of action points, responsible person, and timeline for implementation

Reading through the previous minutes at the DMC meeting rather than focusing on action points and areas requiring further discussion

IP submission of reports and work plans to district not in provided standard format

Poor time-keeping and unnecessarily lengthy meetings

Collaboration of IPs and districts only during DMC meetings

Some sector heads consolidate work plans for IP interventions only, leaving out district work plans

Moving forward

Learning event conducted in December 2013 to host discussions with IPs and district leaders to improve DOP

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness

Developing countries and donors, together, must focus on:

Ownership
Alignment
Harmonization
Results
Mutual accountability

SDS Programme

Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability

[SDS is a six-year, $500M (US$93M and $262M) innovative program that supports local governments in Uganda to improve public service delivery, with an emphasis on health and social sector services. Cardno brings to the program a combined approach of coordination, technical assistance, capacity building, financing of strategic interventions through district cash grants, and facilitation of public and social sector service programs, such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education and human resources for health. Through these interventions, SDS serves as USAID’s vehicle for empowering local governments in Uganda to drive the decentralization process. The program supports 64 districts across eastern, western and central Uganda.]

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