

Communication and stakeholder management in a fragile situation

Saying no to donors if SAI priorities are not supported (SAI Sierra Leone)

By Mrs Lara Taylor-Pearce, Auditor General, Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL)

One common challenge facing SAIs in challenging situations hinges around the conflict over receiving funds for identified needs and donors providing funds based on their assessment of what they perceive the SAI really needs.

We were recently approached by donors to submit a concept paper for short term support in critical areas of operations. What we needed at the time was technical support in specialized audit, report writing and graphic summarization of the Auditor-General's (AG) report.

Series of meetings were held where it was made clear what the needs were prior to submitting a concept paper, followed by a proposal. The edited proposal that came back from the donors looked nothing like what we had submitted. We were then informed that the donors were willing to provide the funding if the proposal was tailored around the donors' perception of the SAI needs. Based on their research, the donors believed that we needed support in disseminating reports to the media and non-state actors.

We expressed appreciation for their support but advised the donors to identify another SAI for this support since the SAI was already fully funded from the Consolidated Fund on the aspects the donors were interested in funding. We did not even consider those areas to be challenges any longer as they were being successfully implemented.

The donors subsequently relented to support our identified needs but only provided half of the original funds earmarked. **From this experience, we learnt that it is better to say no to some support than to accept and duplicate efforts. The SAI should be open to discussion with donors but in the final analysis, we must keep our focus on the strategic direction of the SAI as defined in the SAI's Strategic Plan.**

