

Summary report of the INTOSAI CBC Workstream Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Cooperation Webinar

22 June 2022: Exit Strategies

Introduction

The fifth and final session of the P2P webinar series on exchanging lessons learned on the project management cycle in medium to long-term peer-to-peer cooperation was led by SAI Sweden, SAI Bosnia and Herzegovina, and SAI the Netherlands. The webinar's focus was on **"exit strategies"**, with representatives from a variety of SAIs virtually discussing the requirements, challenges, and best practices associated with this phase of the project management cycle.

What makes a good exit strategy?

The NCA opened the webinar with a brief presentation concerning a conducted desk research on exit strategies from different organisations, such as the OECD, USAID, Oxfam and other NGOs, INTOSAI, and IDI. Then, with input from participants, a list with crucial elements of a good exit strategy was drawn up. A selection of these elements were clear communication, mutual respect, and having clear criteria for an exit at the project initiation. The NCA continued to demonstrate some of their selection criteria for entering a partnership. These selection criteria can be transformed into exit criteria.

Sharing a different perspective

Many of the attending SAIs are on the provider side of partnerships/cooperation projects. The second presentation offered perspectives behind the institutional cooperation project between SAI Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Swedish National Audit Office, seen from the receiving side of a cooperation project. SAI Bosnia and Herzegovina shared the long-term nature and comprehensiveness of support during their cooperation project. This was described as "... learned us how to walk, followed every move we made, until we learned to run, then they left us running ahead on our own." Different other aspects of the cooperation project were explained, for instance the concept of ownership, the external assessments, the importance of a written knowledge base, the leadership engagement, and the exit challenges experienced.

The presentation was followed by a moderated Q&A, led by SAI Sweden. One question concerned the importance of a political momentum and a positive climate when starting a project. A shared response of SAI Bosnia and Herzegovina and SAI Sweden pointed out the importance of a SAI's management that needs to take responsibility for their institution and their office. A second participant asked whether different kinds of experts were needed in the different phases (learning to walk, learning to run, running ahead) from the provider side. It was explained that many different experts were involved over the course of the partnership as there was a shift from a management-approach to a more hands-on approach.

Discussing case studies

Following the presentations, the participants were divided in three break out groups. All groups were asked to focus on one of three case studies, as provided earlier by SAI Sweden. The case studies were based on real-life situations:

1. Downturn in political environment
2. Crisis hits the partner country
3. Longstanding partnership without problems

Following the guiding questions, the participants shared their thoughts on exit strategies in all three cases. The outcomes of these discussions were collected on a Miro board.

Many important thoughts on exit strategies were formed, such as:

- In case of a downturn in the political environment where democratic processes are being challenged, it is important to revisit the set goals and expectations;
- The desire of donor partners and their considerations need to be taken into account;
- When the partner country is faced with a crisis, it is important to maintain (informal) contact;
- Acting non-politically does not mean ignoring the political issue(s) the partner faces;
- When exiting a longstanding partnership, the gained knowledge of the partner SAI can benefit their peers in their region (train-the-trainer programme);
- At the end of a longstanding partnership, it might be wise to build in more peer support from more regional support bodies.

Concluding remarks: what comes next?

This webinar marks the conclusion of the meeting series and looking back, all recognised that the work done was both important and needed. A continuation of the discussion and the exploration of potential other important topics or themes was deemed necessary.

The NCA will organise a separate meeting to discuss the future of sharing knowledge, best practices, and discussing topics related to peer-to-peer cooperation.

The five webinars organised in this meeting series will be captured in an end product.

Participants indicated their preferences and three products came out on top: a clickable PDF, a booklet, and an infographic.

The topic of exit strategies showed the importance and the potential to explore this topic further after the completion of the workstream. A clear cooperation project starts with a clear vision of how to exit the partnership in order to achieve a sustainable change.