

# Making Good Governance Better

A Comprehensive Approach  
to Democratic Governance Programming

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2022

This brochure briefly outlines a new and **comprehensive approach to democratic governance programming**, developed by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) and our 18 member organisations.

The approach serves as a basis for discussion with donors, particularly with the EU and EU member states, with a view to **jointly design programmes and projects that address the specific governance-related needs and opportunities in a given partner country** – for the current implementation period of the EU budget from 2021 to 2027.

The approach can be employed by our members in partnership **with one or more technical partners** to avoid the pitfalls of conventional and often too narrow (good) governance support. It proposes a more systematic integration of the democracy support sector with the predominantly technical domains of governance support.

## What are the shortcomings of governance support?

Despite frequent criticism, governance support can contribute to change – if it is delivered in the ‘right’ way and under the ‘right’ circumstances. However, it has been difficult to answer why some governance programmes fail where others succeed.

**Political context** and **power relations** in a country are key factors in determining the success of any development intervention, particularly those addressing governance processes. Donors have often been criticised for insufficiently differentiating between vastly different contexts, paying too little attention to politics and avoiding incorporating power considerations into their governance programming.

Who is and is not included in governance processes significantly determines the scope and substance of agreed policy solutions, as well as their chances of success. However, current support still typically revolves around executive government actors exclusively, for example in large institution-building and public sector reform programmes, without strategically involving or supporting other actors.

## How to make good governance better?

**Our approach is based on the belief that democracy support actions possess innate qualities to address the shortcomings of good governance support.** Going beyond *good* governance support and transforming it to *democratic* governance support by incorporating elements of democracy support is a central step towards avoiding the recurring failures of governance support programmes.

**Democratic governance** can be understood as the realm where good governance and democracy support intersect. Democratic governance encompasses the principled functioning of the state, but also emphasises the importance of democratic norms, processes and institutions to policy making and centres citizens in the process.

By definition, democracy support aims to include all stakeholders that should be involved in democratic processes. Similarly, democracy support actions fundamentally rely on understanding the dynamics of a country's inner power structures and political realities within which an intervention is implemented.

Approaching governance support from an angle of democratic governance can therefore make success more attainable, as well as more sustainable.

## Our approach

Our approach focuses on the classic four dimensions of democratic governance: **responsiveness, participation, transparency, and accountability.**

**We view responsiveness as being supported by the other three pillars of democratic governance.** We therefore support good governance programmes dedicated to responsiveness by adding on a strong focus on participation, transparency and accountability and on the dynamics in which these three dimensions enable responsiveness. We are convinced by the fact that interventions aimed at improving responsiveness have limited effectiveness unless they also improve participation, transparency, and accountability.

Our approach targets a wider range of actors than is common in governance support programmes – both on the state and the non-state side. Non-state actors are often insufficiently integrated into conventional good governance programming. Our

comprehensive approach makes a concerted effort to fill this gap and the ability to do so is a unique asset of our network.

Moreover, instead of addressing each actor as a standalone entity, our members also incorporate the **links between actors** in their work. Thorough analysis allows us to identify and support coalitions of social actors that, working in partnership, can drive forward sustainable changes in governance systems.

Our approach also emphasises the importance of **sustained behavioural change**. Identifying how changes in incentives can lead to changes in behaviour means that programmes following our approach are designed for success.

Our members' mandates and priorities align with the three enabling dimensions of democratic governance, i.e. **participation, transparency, and accountability**. Our members have a large track record of related programming around the world. Further, our members address three cross-cutting thematic issues – '**gender equality & inclusion**', '**climate & environment**', and '**digitalisation & innovation**'.

## How do we implement our approach?

Our comprehensive approach to democratic governance is designed for **several EPD members to work in partnership** – based on how their specialisations and experience match the identified priorities in a given context. Such multi-member cooperation guarantees that a wide range of themes and relevant actors can be addressed.

Our approach functions best with the **involvement of a technical partner<sup>1</sup> with a strong track record in governance support**. Our focus on participation, transparency and accountability complements the core work of the technical partner with expertise in focus areas such as public finance management, public sector reform, justice sector reform, decentralisation, or sector governance.

Different programme components should be jointly designed and implemented by the technical partner and involved EPD members in a complementary manner. This arrangement allows for the coordinated cooperation between the technical governance sector, on the one hand, and the democracy support sector, on the other hand. Closer partnership allows all dimensions of democratic governance to be considered and addressed more systematically – increasing the prospects of success.

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<sup>1</sup> Suitable organisations include the development agencies of EU member states as well as international organisations, like the World Bank or OECD.

## Added value

### **Our approach is aligned with the Rights-Based Approach (RBA).**

Our approach is firmly rooted in the standards established by international human rights treaties. This means that any support given to governance processes must correspond to the needs of rights-holders, who are therefore integrated into our programming design stages and assessments. Similarly, the ability of duty-bearers to ensure the protection and promotion of such rights is a primary concern of our democratic governance programming.

### **Our approach enables analysis, learning and adapting.**

The expansion of political economy analysis (PEA) is crucial for governance programming in that it brings the complexity of politics to the centre of attention. PEA can help illuminate the way in which history, geopolitics, social and economic structures shape the governance system. It helps understand how formal and informal institutions all shape the political system and the incentives and behaviour of different groups and individuals within it. Accordingly, EPD members have increasingly developed and integrated PEA exercises in their ongoing programming. Exchange between EPD members on such issues has helped to make it a key component of our approach and thereby operationalising the shift towards thinking and working politically.

### **Our approach is ready for Team Europe.**

Our members are European and often work with the support of EU member states. Our programming is therefore able to represent the aspirations of the EU and EU member states and to achieve their political and policy objectives in the global context. Due to our cooperation with EU member states and their development agencies, we are also well placed to implement Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) in the field of democratic governance.

## About the European Partnership for Democracy

EPD was established in 2008 with the goal of contributing to and reinforcing European endeavours in the field of democracy support. Based in Brussels, Belgium, the network brings together European not-for-profit organisations – all specialised in different areas of democratic governance.

EPD's membership engages with a wide range of stakeholders relevant for democratic governance, including executive governments, local authorities, parliaments, political parties, justice actors, media actors, and civil society actors. We are active across the world and implement hundreds of programmes and projects – primarily supported by the European Union and European Union member states. EPD members therefore represent a community of practice with an incomparable network of democracy practitioners and a vast implementation capacity – in terms of content and geographic scope.

