

Security, reconstruction, and peace

There is no way around it: We need strong teams for working on fragile and conflict contexts

Working on fragile or conflict contexts is different from work in other projects. The consulting team of a GIZ programme and the individual consultants¹ have to deal with security issues as well as with their own emotionality. National consultants' personal histories are interlinked with specific conflict issues and actors. This emotionality and how consultants deal with it plays an important role when the consultants interact with the client systems and within their own consulting team. The consultants need to be aware of their own backgrounds and of how to keep the necessary distance to the clients. To deal with tensions and conflicts in the team and rather create a constructive and supportive working atmosphere, the GIZ project or programme manager and the team can strengthen their skills of self-reflection, communication, feedback, peer consulting, and other necessary technical and methodological skills. Applying these skills will enable the team to work more effectively on the conflict context. The experience of a BMZ financed GIZ Peacebuilding Programme in Colombia (Cercapaz, 2007-2015) can inspire others how to achieve this.

What challenges did Cercapaz face?

More than 50 countries in which GIZ is working are fragile or ridden by conflict and violence. One of them is Colombia. GIZ work in Colombia faced a lack of security, an atmosphere of mistrust, and was and continues to be influenced by the emotionality of the long-lasting conflict context which is expressed, among others, in the emotionality of the stakeholders, both inside and outside the cooperation systems. The programme title "Peacebuilding by promoting cooperation between government and civil society", in short Cercapaz, already highlights the objective and main focus of work of the programme. The majority of the Cercapaz' consultants have been Colombian experts. Their personal background shaped their interests, loyalties, and contacts to the different actors of the conflict system. This diversity has been an asset in a programme that aimed at bringing different actors together. However, in the first phase of the programme, the mentioned aspects led to tensions within the team, affecting the delivery of consulting services to the programme's clients.

How did Cercapaz respond to these challenges?

From the perspective of Cercapaz' leadership at that time, there was need for action to create a more constructive working atmosphere in the GIZ team.

The process to achieve this was geared to the special needs of the team and its objectives were concretely that (1) GIZ consultants become aware of their own position in and to the conflict and the

team finds a constructive way to handle these different positions, ideally using them for the work with partners from the public sector and civil society; (2) the team establishes mechanisms to reflect jointly on consultancy processes and gives feedback to each other; (3) as soon as the internal process is initiated the consultants begin applying new technical and soft knowledge in their own consultancy processes with the partners. These objectives were based on the hypotheses that a qualified and reflected team working closely together is an important requirement for successful consultancy in a fragile context.

In 2011 Cercapaz started an internal Organizational Development (OD) process supported by GIZ external consultants, in which important topics such as teambuilding, internal and external communication, planning, monitoring and others were addressed. This process was based on an in-depth needs assessment. The reflections within this process identified which technical and soft skills were needed in the team. In close coordination with the responsible managers of the internal OD process a capacity development process was designed and implemented in a three-year-period (between the beginning of 2011 and the end of 2013), called SERDEPAZ (which means "to be part of the peace"). Important issues raised during the SERDEPAZ process were taken into consideration in the internal OD process and integrated into the management cycle and working routines, if necessary. A key success factor for SERDEPAZ was the clear mandate the programme manager gave to the external consultancy team (Como Consult and Berghof Foundation), another was his support during the whole process.



¹ Within this text the terms „consulting team“ and „consultants“ refer to the group of long-term national, regional, and international GIZ consultants who work for GIZ in a project or programme, e.g. Cercapaz.

The process consisted of the following elements that were carefully sequenced:

SERDEPAZ working group: In close coordination with the programme manager and representatives of the GIZ consultants, the contents were developed and adjusted by feedback loops along the whole process.

Tailor-made modular trainings: Six training modules of four days each were conducted outside the city of Bogota to create a protected space and a distance to the working context. Each of the modules was conducted by a trainer team consisting of a Latin American and a German trainer. The evaluation of every module was taken into consideration for the following training module and also for activities in the process consultation and OD process. After an intense evaluation of the first three training modules in 2011 another three modules were planned and implemented in 2013. The six modules covered the following aspects:

- Process consultation and consultant's attitude, also towards the conflict
- Organizational Development for cooperation systems
- Dialogue, conflict transformation and policy advice
- Awareness of own personality and how it influences the consultant's work
- Feedback culture in teams and non-violent communication
- How to cope with different personalities in the partner systems

Peer advice groups: From the start of the modules on, self-organized peer consulting groups were established, meeting approximately every six weeks to apply newly gained skills, to reflect on current challenges in their consultancy processes with the partners or on team issues, and to exchange experiences and know-how in general. If needed, these groups could ask for support of the external consultants.

Coaching: During the training process the Cercapaz consultants had access to individual coaching. About two thirds of the consultants received coaching on work issues in a personal and protected space.

The design was such to ensure that the internal OD process and SERDEPAZ were adequately connected. Around 18 consultants took part in the training modules, peer advice groups and coaching and agreed that their contribution was one weekend day for each module.

What did change?

Cercapaz consultants communicated much more openly and respectfully within the team. Exchange and mutual support among the colleagues became part of the working routine, and the consultants felt relief. While disagreements and tensions still occurred, consultants could manage these within the team. Most importantly, programme partners and clients reported a significant change of attitude and mode of consulting in the Cercapaz consultants. Their approach had shifted from a more supply-based to a demand-based approach, and the consultants displayed a better ability to listen. Additionally, the increased cooperation within the Cercapaz team led to synergy effects for different consultancy processes with the partners. At the end of the programme, many of the partners described the Cercapaz consultants as good examples for cooperation and communication.

What can other projects learn from this?

One could ask if such an intensive team process is a luxury or a necessity. For Cercapaz, it was a necessity to bring the team back to constructive and high quality work without "doing harm". Especially in the peacebuilding context, change processes need a long-time perspective. Investment in a programme's staff should also be seen as an important resource for the peace process. Colombia still needs to undergo.

This specific and tailor-made process can hardly serve as a blueprint for other GIZ programmes working on fragile or conflict contexts. Nevertheless, as the challenges for GIZ teams in such contexts are often similar, aspects like a process approach, the programme manager in the driver's seat, and tailor-made trainings and other measures in close connection with an OD process can be of use for other contexts. One of the leading mental images for a team process should be: "How can we build a seaworthy ship before sending it into stormy waters?" Preparing a team for working on conflict in volatile settings is a timely investment. Only a team with diverse experts who work complementarily and understand their role as consultants can fully reach its potential during the programme and for the peacebuilding field once the programme is finalized. National staff will stay after the end of each cooperation intervention and become part of the capacity installed within the partner countries.

The methods and tools that Cercapaz consultants found most useful for their consultancy practice are summarized in the document "Reflexionar – Concertar – Actuar. Bases conceptuales y herramientas para la asesoría en procesos de Construcción de Paz" by Johanna Willems, Uta Giebel, Barbara Unger, Download in Spanish at www.cercapaz.org.

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