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# Doing Development Differently: The critical role of in-country facilitation



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**Why is in-country facilitation so important when 'doing development differently'? Clare Manuel shares her experience implementing the DFID-funded LASER programme.**

The Legal Assistance for Economic Reform (LASER) programme aims to improve investment climates by helping to identify and solve commercial law and justice problems, as well as documenting and sharing lessons learned about how this is done. Problem-driven and iterative in nature, LASER supports partner governments to develop initiatives that are country owned and led.

To understand how LASER's core facilitation role works, it is essential to grasp its very different programme design. LASER's programming eschews the traditional hallmarks of many unsuccessful investment climate reform programmes in the past, such as unrealistic levels of predictability; locked-in objectives and activity plans; strict budgets with pressure to spend; and closely monitored, pre-determined results. Instead, LASER had an extended, experience-based design phase allowing for 'designing by doing' to identify technically sound and politically feasible reforms. LASER's logframe commits to activities under broad outputs, but the specifics are determined at country level with counterparts on a rolling basis. Payment is largely focused on results, and flexible programming allows assumptions to be revised and theories of change to be tested.

Why are these design elements so important? Because they enable LASER to take a problem-driven, iterative and adaptive approach to investment climate reforms, one in which the development practitioners implementing the programme are politically astute, and form trusting and respectful relationships with local counterparts. And

crucially, this built-in flexibility ensures that LASER's development practitioners are the facilitators and enablers rather than the drivers of reform.

## What is in-country facilitation?

In-country facilitation is about supporting local actors to identify problems and develop appropriate solutions to those problems, in recognition that external agents are most effective as brokers, rather than drivers of reform. Genuine facilitation is possible under a programme like LASER, which has latitude to explore a range of potential partners, issues and solutions, without the constraints imposed by rigid logframes, or large sums of donor money to spend.

LASER's approach is to broker and foster relationships with coalitions of reformers, seek to understand incentives and build common interests in order to solve problems. The aim is to engage with a broad set of agents from the public, private and civil society sectors, and use technical and political skills to support those agents to explore the detailed nature of local problems and craft potential solutions. But facilitation does not end there. We also seek to support local actors to build alliances and connections so that together they can authorise change, motivate others, mobilise resources, generate ideas, and implement reforms. This requires strong and supportive relationships of trust with local actors, being realistic about the scope of an outsider to lead transformational change. It also requires a sense of modesty, a willingness to remain low-profile and not assume the limelight.

## How LASER does facilitation

By now you might be wondering what facilitation actually looks like on the ground. Here are some examples of how LASER has facilitated local partners to identify and solve local problems:

- The **Kenya** judiciary called for a response to its growing backlog of court cases as part of a momentum for reform that had developed in the political economy at the time. LASER was privileged to be approached, and our flexibility meant we were able to respond without coming along with a set blueprint. This meant working *with* senior judges and lawyers, helping them to identify the problems they were facing, and helping them to come up with appropriate solutions.
- In **Rwanda**, LASER worked with local counterparts in the Ministry of Justice to develop practical tools and guidance to enable the Government of Rwanda to achieve its objective of more effective and efficient negotiation and management of commercial contracts. Our adviser in the Ministry of Justice used existing coordination mechanisms to understand the challenges facing line ministries and subsequently designed context-specific guidance that responded to the jointly identified problems. She worked closely and collaboratively with colleagues to develop content for a series of training sessions for legal officers, budget

managers and procurements officers. 75 per cent of legal officers – at both line ministry and district level – reported improved monitoring and management due to the support provided.

- > In **Sierra Leone**, LASER advisers supported the Ministry of Justice to develop a commercial justice component to the country's national justice strategy, linked to national priorities, policymaking, and resource allocation processes. During the development of the strategy, the Ebola crisis struck. Recognising the drastic change in the environment, we worked with local actors to help them identify the justice sector's response to the crisis and to post-Ebola recovery.

These are just some of the ways in which LASER has used its flexible, problem-driven and locally-led mandate to facilitate crucial discussion and action, in a way that maximises partnership, ownership and ultimately, sustainability of investment climate reforms.

The BEAM Exchange community can find more information on how LASER does development differently at [LASERdev.org](https://beamexchange.org), including in our recent synthesis paper *Investment climate reform: doing it differently*.