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# Changing the way we work: fostering sustainable change in implementation partners



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All blogs

**Implementers need to help foster sustainable changes in implementation partners: co-facilitation helps fulfill this objective.**

Triggering sustainable change is the primary objective for market systems development (MSD) projects. Discussions on what sustainable systemic change means in practice and how to ignite and measure it are lively and plentiful. Curiously enough, debates on sustainability typically do not extend to a project's implementation partners. While most MSD projects rely heavily on local development organisations and consultancies throughout the implementation cycle, little effort is devoted to changing their approach in a fundamental way. Such oversight is unfortunate given that partners' presence extends well beyond the lifespan of a project; transforming how they undertake development is key to making development work more effectively going forward.

With these dynamics in mind, the youth employment project **MarketMakers** in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) designed a unique co-facilitation model with Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). RDAs represent the main economic regions of BiH and are funded by the public, private and non-governmental sectors, with the objective of fostering economic development. They serve as the implementers of various international donor agencies and provide consultancy services to both the private and public sectors.

## The set-up

Rather than outsourcing various bits and pieces of research and implementation to RDAs, MarketMakers incorporated them into the project as integral, permanent fixtures. Following an open call to submit market analyses of targeted sectors during the design phase, the project selected four RDAs to collaborate with. Each of the four RDAs thus works in one of MarketMakers' designated sectors.



Two to three employees are seconded to MarketMakers from each RDA, with the project paying their salaries directly to their respective RDA. Seconded RDA members are coupled with an intervention manager from the project's core staff. Together, they are responsible for project implementation within their respective sector. While RDA members are usually responsible for one or two interventions in a sector, the role of the intervention manager is to coordinate the various intervention activities, ensuring strategic cohesion and oversight.

This mode of integration comprises a stronger commitment than the traditional local partnership; fostering a strong understanding of MSD and equipping RDAs with the skills to apply a facilitative approach is part of MarketMakers' logframe – it is vital to the project's overall mission in Bosnia.

## Does it work?

The co-facilitation model holds several advantages. Firstly, the geographic reach of the project is significantly enhanced through the RDAs. While the project's office is in Sarajevo, the capital, RDA members who are seconded to MarketMakers are located across BiH. RDAs have worked in their respective economic regions for nearly two decades and have developed extensive networks and vast local knowledge that the project can tap into. They are thus ideally suited to foster and maintain relationships with project partners on the ground – they are the project's

extended arm. Indeed, this type of continuous engagement and dialogue with partners is hugely important in MSD projects: it drives facilitation.

Moreover, the fact that project staff and RDAs work jointly on interventions bolsters institutional learning: thinking is not outsourced to third parties but rather internalised within the project, enhancing the quality of the development work.

Co-facilitation, furthermore, forms a vital strategy in navigating donor-intensive contexts. It is a means to advocate for the wider application of MSD among development organisations, ensuring that donor money is put to use in a sustainable manner. SERDA, one of the RDAs, for instance, has successfully applied for two tenders using a MSD approach. Similarly, through its work with MarketMakers, NERDA, the RDA in the country's northeast, has been able to develop a niche-expertise in conjoining Disaster Risk Management and MSD – know-how that has stimulated additional donor funds for NERDA. RDAs have even requested MSD training for staff not seconded to MarketMakers, illustrating the buy-in that has been generated for the approach among the RDAs. Indeed, such a change in the mindset of local actors is required to improve the effectiveness of development work.

## What makes this work?

A number of key factors make the co-facilitation model work for MarketMakers:

**1) Commitment to capacity building:** as the RDAs are newcomers to MSD and deeply engrossed in the direct-delivery approach, the co-facilitation model requires extensive upfront investment in training and coaching. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation invited all seconded RDA staff to its MSD trainings – and provides continuous back-stopping support to the intervention teams.

**2) Smart use of technology:** While one RDA is based in Sarajevo and their seconded staff sit in the MarketMakers' office, most other RDAs are dispersed throughout the country and cannot meet with their intervention managers on a daily or even weekly basis. The project thus employs technology to facilitate information exchange; it relies on Yammer, an enterprise social networking service, for information updates and knowledge sharing. While this type of communication cannot substitute for physical meet ups, it nevertheless ensures a continuous information flow.

**3) Provide space for learning:** co-facilitation is premised upon mutual exchange and learning. The project needs to be able to listen to, and crucially, absorb the co-facilitators' input. This also means that the project needs to give co-facilitators space to explore ideas – even if they might be unsuccessful. It will be this experience that ultimately creates learning and buy-in in the long-term.

In MarketMakers' case the co-facilitators are RDAs, yet this role is by no means limited to development organisations; private or public sector associations, topic specific organisations or even state organisations are – depending on the context – equally suitable.

No matter what type of organisation a project chooses to work with, MSD implementers need to pay heed to fostering sustainable changes in implementation partners: co-facilitation helps fulfill this objective.

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