

# Starting the conversation

## flexibility with partners or in a consortium

In several places in the flexibility guide, it is recommended to create open dialogue within and between partner organisations throughout the programme cycle around risks and opportunities. It is also recommended for each actor to agree on limits / boundaries regarding flexibility, discuss roles and responsibilities, and keep each other informed via informal moments of reflection. These factors are particularly important for building trusting relationships and cultivating flexible working cultures. All of them require strong communication, in terms of asking the right questions and finding a common understanding. But how to do this? This handout suggests talking points before and during a programme, and things to make clear and agree on as you go along. Some points may be more or less relevant, depending on the historical relationship and what is already known about each other's incentives and ways of working.

### 1. Talking points

■ Do you have a shared understanding of the risks and opportunities of flexibility? What is your common vision of how it can strengthen your collaborative efforts for this programme?

■ Common approach to flexibility

- What are the limits of flexibility? What kind of changes need discussion (with who?) and what changes do not? What should be the general objective of a change?
- How can you request change when this is necessary? How long do partners have to come to a decision?
- How will you monitor for flexibility needs, and what will you document to report when you make a change? Will you use flexibility 'thresholds' and what are these?
- How can you request (emergency) funding for flexibility?
- How often will you individually or jointly reflect on needs for change?
- Under what circumstances can budgets assigned to one implementing partner be allocated flexibly to other implementing partners? Is a facility or reservation for this necessary?

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### ■ Roles and responsibilities

- Will all partners handle logistics and monitoring/reporting on flexibility separately? Will you appoint a flexibility lead/coordinator?
- How will you make sure that decisions can be made effectively? Who holds decision-making power over budgets and will they be at the table at regular consortium coordination meetings?
- Who will coordinate with and communicate to the donor about flexible changes when this is necessary?

- How will you create the right working culture for flexibility? Do field staff and subcontractors feel free to suggest adjustments? Are there enough moments for informal reflection? How will you use feedback from communities?

## 2. Things to agree on / clarify in writing by the end of the meeting

- Why flexibility is necessary for this programme.
- What kind of changes need discussion, which do not and who should be involved in this discussion.
- The general flow of how to request and decide on changes in what timeframe.
- What will be documented if a change is implemented.
- Roles and responsibilities for monitoring, reporting and decision making on changes.
- Action points to implement these agreements.