

DOIT, a TEMPUS Project Aiming to Meet Challenges and Implement Transformations in Teacher Training for Multicultural Education

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Abstract

Laying the foundation which reinforces human rights is one of the greatest challenges facing culturally diverse countries today. Teachers are responsible for transmitting values, attitudes and codes of behavior for the next generation of citizens and leaders. In order to prepare their own pupils to participate in civic life and be committed to democratic participation, teachers need pedagogical competencies for lifelong learning tools and skills that promote Multicultural Education and positive interaction between different groups.

This panel discussion presents the first results of a European Commission's TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) Call for Projects, titled "Development of an International Model for Curricular Reform in Multicultural Education and Cultural Diversity Training" (DOIT). DOIT unites over 90 faculty and students in 26 different Higher Educational Institutions (HEI), student unions and non-government organizations (NGO) in 7 different countries. Israeli and Georgian institutions are the central focus and beneficiaries of DOIT's program of curricular reform but the consortium also includes HEI and NGO from the European Union countries of England, Germany, Austria, Netherlands and Estonia.

The article is organized into three main sections: section one presents DOIT's objectives, consortium and program; second section, presents the panel discussion; section three presents recommendations to professionals who are planning international collaborative projects.

Introduction

This panel discussion presents the first results of a European Commission's TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) Call for Projects, titled *Development of an International Model for Curricular Reform in Multicultural Education and Cultural Diversity Training* (DOIT). DOIT unites over 90 faculty and students in 26 different Higher Educational Institutions (HEI), student unions and non-government organizations (NGO) in 7 different countries. Israeli and Georgian institutions are the central focus and beneficiaries of DOIT's program of curricular reform, but the consortium also includes HEI and NGO from the European Union countries of England, Germany, Austria, Netherlands and Estonia.

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Background: Tempus Programs

In August 2012 the European Commission's selection of TEMPUS IV grant applications was published and DOIT, an Israeli TEMPUS initiative of Gordon Academic College of Education (GCE) was one of the programs selected. The aim of TEMPUS programs is to support joint projects that contribute to the development of higher education between HEI of European member countries and their partner countries in Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

DOIT's Aims and Outline of Its Programs

DOIT's main objectives are to foster the sharing of knowledge relating to the dynamic processes of multicultural education among professionals involved in education and for DOIT's international team is to construct a program that promotes curricular reform for multicultural education for HEI who are specializing on teacher-training and education. Promoting education for human and children's rights in HEI is another important objective of DOIT.

DOIT's program is multidimensional and includes:

- the development of academic courses;
- faculty workshops for enrichment and for training;
- 'out of the classroom' activities for the students;
- the development of an interactive portal;
- development and publication of teaching material;
- financial and administrative management;
- quality assurance of academic, managerial and organizational aspects of DOIT;
- evaluation and assessment of its various programs;
- implementation of curriculum reform in the participating institutions; and

- Promotion of curriculum reform on the National levels in Israel and in Georgia.

Academic Course Development, Faculty Workshops and Out of the Classroom Activities

DOIT's program includes the development of academic courses that promote different aspects of multicultural education. Within the first eight months of the program, working teams were created and they developed syllabi for five courses:

- Children's Rights in and Through Education
- Identity Formation in a Multicultural Environment
- Pedagogical Approaches that Promote Inter-Cultural and Ethnic Understanding in the Classroom
- Understanding Israeli Minority and Ethnic Groups
- Multiethnic and Multicultural Georgia

Pilots for the course will begin in the new academic year of 2013-14. There is one mandatory pilot course, Children's Rights in and Through Education that will be piloted in DOIT's three Israeli teaching colleges, five universities in Georgia and in at least two EU partner's HEI. In addition, the eight HEI in Israel and Georgia that specialize in teacher-training, need to pilot three other DOIT courses, piloting in total at least 32 DOIT courses. DOIT's five other HEI from Israel, The Netherlands, Austria and Germany will pilot at least two courses each. In DOIT's consortium, over 40 pilots will be implemented over the next academic year for students on the BA and MA level. Over 1,000 students will benefit from DOIT's pilot courses.

In addition, faculty workshops for enrichment and for training are an important part of DOIT's program. The faculty enrichment workshop will be on the topic of Children and Human Rights through Education and the training workshops will train faculty to teach DOIT's courses. Over 100 members of DOIT's HEI faculty will participate in these workshops.

A special feature of DOIT's program is the involvement of the students. Members of six student unions have worked together with members of NGO whose expertise are in promoting intercultural relations and have developed programs of activities that aim to promote cultural diversity on the college campus.

Other Special Features of DOIT's Programs: Portal, Publications and Quality Assurance

An important part of DOIT's program that contributes towards the collaborative process is DOIT's portal: <http://tempus-doit.sapir.ac.il> . This portal was designed to facilitate collaborative work, communicate, share news and to disseminate within and beyond DOIT's consortium. The portal has two main areas. There are secured sites on the portal where the academic working teams can collaborate in an open and transparent manner, yet feel secure that their working drafts are available for comment only among their team members. In this protected secured area of the

platform is also the site for financial management where financial documents and reports can be securely uploaded for DOIT's financial manager to access and process.

The portal also contributes to DOIT's dissemination processes. There is an open public domain to the portal that the public can access and learn about DOIT's aims, the members of the consortium and read the latest news and announcements. As the project develops and the pilots assessed, the public domain will be enlarged and include DOIT's products and materials for viewing and downloading.

In addition to the portal, DOIT participating in conferences and publishing articles on DOIT's results are two additional processes that contribute to DOIT's dissemination process.

An important part of DOIT's program is its structure of quality control and assurance of both the academic development processes as well as the administrative functioning of the consortium. There were three working teams that functioned during the first year in this realm; one quality assurance team that was responsible for overseeing the functioning of DOIT as an organization in regards to administration, communication, logistics, and financial management; and, two academic quality assurance teams; one was responsible for developing the template for the syllabi of DOIT's courses and the other team was responsible for the academic content of the course materials. Since the development stage of courses have been completed, the academic development quality team has been merged with the quality assurance team for the purpose of developing evaluation tools and questionnaires that assess the impact of DOIT's various programs.

DOIT's Consortium

DOIT's official partnership at the time of application included seventeen HEI, four NGO and six student unions. The members of DOIT's quality and contribution to the consortium is noted by their:

- involvement in their society as they train future educators of the next generation of societies' citizens;
- expertise in multicultural education
- TEMPUS experience of some of its members

The Israeli members include GCE as project applicant that has practical experience in multicultural education in teacher-training. GCE was the first HEI in Israel to establish a Multicultural Educational Resource Center in 1997. Sachnin Academic College (SAC), is the only HEI for Israeli's Arabs of the Galilee, brings to DOIT experience and innovative teaching practices for Arab Schools, including programs that promote multicultural education and conflict resolution. KAYE Academic Teaching College, serves Israel's peripheral multicultural populations of the south has been awarded the UNESCO prize for promoting multicultural education and co-existence. The Interdisciplinary Center of Hertzlyya (IDC) is a private, centrally-located HEI with a substantial Israeli and European network with HEI, business and

governments as well as experience with successful TEMPUS programs. Sapir Academic College (SAP) brings to DOIT expertise in new technology and experience in developing website platforms for TEMPUS programs. Ben-Gurion U. (BGU), a major Israeli university, brings to DOIT TEMPUS experience and expertise in research and evaluation.

The Georgian partners include several HEI with TEMPUS experience: Ilia State U (ISU), Tbilisi State U (TSU), Telavi State U (TESAU), and Sokhumi State U (SSU). ISU has a Center for Professional Development of Teachers, is involved in developing and implementing new teacher training methods. TSU with its two Institutes of Pedagogy and of Cultural Studies and the UNESCO Chair in Intercultural Dialogue, brings a wealth of practical experience based on research, development and implementation of a wide range of multicultural educational programs. SSU's BA and MA teacher-training programs include innovative educational programs that provide their students with knowledge and skills to work in their culturally diverse region. TESAU, located in the Kakheti Region is a multi-ethnic institution which promotes multicultural education in its teacher-training programs. Samtske Javakheti State Teaching Univeristy (SJSTU) has two campuses located in the multiethnic region of S. Georgia where the majority of the population is Armenian.

DOIT's EU partners are all experienced in developing innovative teacher-training programs in multicultural education. University of Koblenz (UKL) in Germany has over 50 years of teacher-training experience. Padagogische Hochschule Oberosterreich (PHOÖ) located in Upper Austria, brings experience in developing new curriculum. Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen (HAN) in the Netherlands, has experience in multinational projects in education. The UK partners, Institute of Education (IOE) and Birkbeck (BBK) of the University of London, provide internationally recognized experts in multicultural education and education for human and children's rights. Jaan Tonissoi Institute of Estonia, the EU NGO, holds the Estonia UNESCO Chair on Multicultural Education and is involved in Education Law and Human Rights, Teacher training and Global Education.

NGOs and student unions are also an important part of DOIT's consortium. The Interfaith Encounters Association (IEA) in Israel and the Centre for Civil Integration and Interethnic Relations (CCIIR), and Civic Development Institute (CDI) in Georgia are NGOs that have experience in promoting intercultural relations and in working with university students. Together with three student unions in Georgia and three student unions in Israel, programs for 'out of the classroom' activities aimed at the whole university campus have been planned.

Panel Discussion: Introduction

The panel discussion revolved around several questions relating to motivations of joining the DOIT consortium to various challenges and benefits that are connected with international collaboration. The following discussion presents the different questions asked and the response from some of our participants.

Panel Question #1: What was the motivating factor of your institution joining our program?

The motivating factor for DOIT's two Israeli teaching colleges on the panel (GCE and SAC) was the expressed need to train their students in multicultural educational values and pedagogical tools. Manal Yazbak Abu-Ahmed (Manal) explained:

Sakhnin College for Teacher Education has Muslim, Christian, Bedouin, Circassian and Druze students. This diverse population will soon become the future teachers, and they will have to deal with diversity in the classrooms.... Hence, the college felt the need to prepare its student teachers to deal with all the issues which are related to multiculturalism by providing them with relevant pedagogical tools. I have already initiated a collaborative course with a Jewish College, but want to extend it to other local and international HEI.

Rhonda Sofer (Rhonda) from GCE and the coordinator of DOIT also expressed why she initiated this program for GCE.

There were several motivating factors for Gordon College to initiate a TEMPUS program that promotes multicultural education... we believe in the importance of training teachers to be competent, not only in pedagogical methods, but also as leaders who promote values to the next generation of our citizens. Initiating a program that promotes multicultural education and education for children's human rights complements our mission goals. Second, GCE is interested in expanding our global connections. TEMPUS programs promote international collaboration that we believe that we will benefit from and contribute to.

Hanan Maoz (Hanan), from SAP also mentioned the importance of entering into collaborative national and international partnerships. Moreover, he explained that as the college responsible for the technological development of the portal, participating in this program enabled SAP's technological team to leverage innovative practices. He stated:

As Head of International Relations of Sapir, the opportunity to work with Gordon College's DOIT initiative enabled us to leverage new technology platforms in international programs and create a state of the art application...this was an important objective and motivation for joining the consortium.

Hanan later explained the innovative platform that DOIT enabled his team to develop:

DOIT's portal is the first in Europe to combine two types of technology: the back office platform and in the front office. We need a back office workshop area for the partners to work, a Learning Management System which is secured. We also need a public site to show our work to the public, which is a Content Management System.

The Georgian DOIT team members viewed their joining the consortium as part of the process of Georgia's entrance into the Global world and providing their students with new approaches to multicultural education.

Nino Chiabrishvili (Nino C) of ISU explained:

Iliia State University as a leading high education institution aimed at supporting in-service and pre-service students to adapt to new challenges and to prepare them with new knowledge, skills and attitudes for life-long success in a global world, both inside and outside the country. The courses created in the framework of DOIT will be very helpful instruments in the way of these objectives.

Izabella Petriashvili (Izabella) from TSU reinforced what Nino C said:

Multicultural education, especially training teachers for ME is vitally important for such a multiethnic country as Georgia. Hence is our commitment to participate in this project, the aims of which address directly the issues of multiculturalism of today's globalized societies.

Tamriko Jojua (Tamriko) from SSU explained the factors that influenced her university's joining the DOIT consortium:

Nowadays the effective multicultural teacher training is paramount for higher education system in the global society. SSU...has the mission to prepare future teachers who can effectively and skillfully work in multicultural and multiethnic regions of Abkhazia. Accordingly joining SSU the TEMPUS Program DOIT, which aims to promote multicultural education and the teaching of cultural diversity was very important and inspiring in realizing the aims and objectives of our institution

In summary, we see from the above discussion, that the motivation for joining DOIT's consortium ranged from viewing the importance of multicultural education, the importance of international collaboration and finally as an opportunity of developing innovative courses as well as technology.

Panel Question #2: What are the challenges for developing and implementing curriculum for multicultural education in an international context and what were the greatest challenges you feel DOIT has faced until now?

The collaborative process of over 90 DOIT members from 26 institutions that are located in seven countries creates many different kinds of challenges. The challenges that were perceived reflect cultural differences and perspectives of DOIT members. For example, Roxana Reichman (Roxana), from GCE and head of the curriculum development working team explained:

It is well known that developing and implementing curriculum for multicultural education is never easy, even in national context. This is of course true when we are working in an international context. First... there is no consensus about what multiculturalism is of about the way in which it should be taught. Second...each country faces specific challenges ... that have to be taken into consideration...the participants must be open to listen to other people and work together in a non judgmental way.

Roxana also explained that the monitoring process of ensuring consistency in the process of the development of courses and syllabi as also being one of her biggest challenges to date. She explains:

Speaking from my personal point of view as leader of the curriculum development and assessment team, the greatest challenge was to make sure that the other teams understand that our role is NOT to ... impose a certain way of working, but rather to offer them a template that would help them ... their goals and .. build academic courses which meet the requirements of the Bologna process ...

Rhonda also agreed with Roxana's statements and further commented that:

Communication and making sure that we are all have an understanding DOIT's mandate and objectives according to the accepted application as a big challenge. Although there are several approaches to multicultural education, DOIT's mandate is very clear ... making sure that all members understand DOIT's mandate for teacher training is one of the biggest challenges in our curriculum development.

Moreover, Rhonda also felt that one of the biggest challenges that DOIT has faced to date is:

The challenge of maintaining the academic integrity of course development by keeping personal political beliefs outside of course development... DOIT is a program aimed at integrating curricular reform in teacher training through strengthening multicultural education and education for children and human rights in the curriculum. It is not a program to further one's own political beliefs...keeping politics out of our course development has been one of the biggest challenges to our program.

The Georgian partners all referred to the challenges involved in adjusting the new curriculum to the needs of their institution and country as well as Georgian administrative processes that they have encountered.

Nino Sozashvili (Nino S) from TESAU expressed: "[The biggest challenge] here is the process of adjusting new curriculum to our country and even region...This requires very careful consideration of every step." Nino C agreed with this statement. Izabella further elaborated: "[a big challenges] is the working process within the teams, as we all come from different countries, with different backgrounds, and different approaches to the issues raised in the working process." Tamriko also expressed the challenges involved in "developing ... appropriate programs ... which truly engage and motivate students from different ethnic and cultural background."

All members of the Georgian team expressed the difficulties and frustrations that their institutions are having regarding the purchasing of their equipment.

Manal agrees with Izabella regarding the working processes but further emphasizes the significance and efficiency of the face-to-face consortium meetings, compared to group SKYPE meetings, to get the tasks done.

Hanan, whose perspective is from the side of technology reflected on the challenges that his team faced in regards working with such a large and culturally diverse consortium:

Technology skills are different within the consortium...and in order to use the portal, all members of the consortium should be competent with technology skills. For me, bringing the diversity of cultures and personalities together for work on one vision, one program through technology has been the biggest challenge.

Tamriko even mentioned how important the portal has been for overcoming challenges:

At the initial stage of our project the process of disseminating of all information among the team members from different countries and institutions seemed problematic, but after creating our portal that really is very technologically advanced this problem was solved successfully.

Panel Question #3: How can we neutralize the political dimension from our program?

When developing the questions for the panel discussion, Rhonda asked the members to suggest questions. One of the questions suggested by Manal was "How can we neutralize the political dimension from our program?" This was expressed above by Rhonda as being one of the biggest challenges of the DOIT team. In answer to this question, Rhonda continued:

In order to promote inter-cultural understanding, we all have to focus on what we agree on. We are all committed to promoting multicultural education and education for children and human rights in the curriculum reform in teacher education and training in HEI in Israel and in Georgia. We must focus on this mission and put our own personal political agendas on the side. While DOIT's mission goals unite us, politics and our personal political agendas can divide us. We must maintain the integrity of our program by keeping political agendas outside of it.

Roxana emphasized:

It is important to stick to the goals of the program the way they were explicitly expressed in the application. People involved in such a program should focus on the issues on which we can agree and on the issues on which we can reach a consensus instead of trying to pursue a private political agenda, which might alienate some of the members instead of bringing them closer.

Hanan also expressed this but explained that:

We need to discuss this in the very early stages---very open and transparent---but very determined to take individual political dimension out of the scope of the program... our emotions will take us away of the real vision of the group.

Manal agrees with Hanan but adds:

I suggest emphasizing and appreciating the similarities between the different groups in order to build common ground between them.

The Georgian team viewed this issue differently. Both Nino and Tamriko did not even feel that DOIT's program in curriculum reform and multicultural education is related to politics. Nino expressed:

The multicultural education itself is directed to neutralize the political dimension. The only thing project members have to do is to create quality "product", which can stand the test of time.

Tamriko also said something similar:

Our program aims at creating the curriculum that will be used in the process of training teachers in multicultural education and the problem of political dimension is neutralized itself as the principles of multiculturalism and diversity give no ground for this.

Izabella felt this issue was a challenge but not one that is overpowering in DOIT. She explained:

It's not an easy task, though we have to be respectful and tolerant to diversities within our consortium. So far we have demonstrated positive attitudes and understanding among project participants, and developed truly friendly and collegial atmosphere within the consortium.

In summary, although the Israeli panel members all acknowledged the challenges that we face in developing courses that do not promote individual's personal political agendas; the Georgian panel members did not see this as a major issue. This difference reflects the different social realities of the Israeli and Georgian societies.

Panel Question #4: How do you envision your institution benefiting from DOIT 5 years from now? What aspects of the program do you think will be sustained?

All members of DOIT's HEI that are involved in teacher-training expect to benefit from the program. How they envision the long-term benefits is similar in regards to teacher training, while some members even envision an impact of the community and society.

Rhonda and Manal believe that the innovative courses and programs will be integrated into GCE and SAC's curriculum and become an integral part of their teacher training curriculum on the BA and MA level. Rhonda is hoping that the impact will be on other academic teaching colleges in Israel. Hanan also sees the new curriculum being integrated in BA and MA programs.

The Georgian members also agreed with the fact the curriculum reform will become a part of their curriculum in their institution. Nino S stated:

In DOIT's framework, we'll have a MA teaching program "Culture Study" in Telavi State University. Program creation sets as a goal to install national and universal human values, namely, supporting positive perception of cultural diversity, installation of dialogue principles between the cultures, and it implies introduction of other cultures, understanding of differences between the cultures, respect of different

ones; prevention of stereotypes, xenophobia and racism; working out of skills needed for orientation in diverse cultural environment, successful communication.

Tamriko also believes that the DOIT programs will be sustained in SSU:

In 5 years from now SSU will have its first graduates on BA and MA levels trained on the basis and principles of teaching courses and programs designed within DOIT. They will be ready to meet all challenges that they may face while teaching in the diverse classroom.

Izabella also concurred with her Georgian colleagues that DOIT programs will be integrated into the curriculum but adds the importance of updating and maintaining the relevancy of the courses over time:

I am sure the courses designed within the DOIT project will be implemented and running successfully, though may need to be updated from time to time according to the needs and requirements of the particular time and institution.

An interesting dimension of DOIT's Georgian team is the fact that several mentioned the impact of the program on the society. Thus for example, Nino C envisioned:

Five years is enough to prepare several dozen teachers who teach future citizens to live in a multicultural environment. In turn those future citizens can transfer their knowledge and attitudes to others. This will be a constant and continuous process, which will be enriched by each generation with new approaches.

Nino S also saw the impact of DOIT in its influence on the Georgian society:

Program creation sets a goal to install national and universal human values, namely, supporting positive perception of cultural diversity, installation of dialogue principles between the cultures, and it implies introduction of other cultures, understanding of differences between the cultures, respect of different ones; prevention of stereotypes, xenophobia and racism; working out of skills needed for orientation in diverse cultural environment, successful communication.

Hanan added that an important aspect of DOIT's sustainability is as a model for organizing international collaboration and projects. He claimed:

[DOIT provides] a model of collaboration and working together...there are 121 partners registered in the portal and working together. [DOIT's] collaborative procedures and practices are a model for all international projects of "how to do it right."

In summary, we see that all panel members see the sustainability of the program within their institution, while some even claim that DOT's model and effect will be impacted in the wider society and in other international collaborative programs.

Panel Question #5: How do you think the impact of our program can be measured?

There are many possibilities for evaluating the impact and success of DOIT's program. First from Rhonda's point of view:

There are several levels to assess our impact: first whether we maintained our integrity to the application and to implementing the programs that we stated that we were going to implement. Our program also needs to be assessed by the learning outcomes that our students have achieved. Also the maintenance of our portal after the life of our project is another indicator of our sustainability. Finally our program's impact can be measured by the new partnerships and programs among DOIT's members that were a result from our collaborative work.

Roxana believed that DOIT's impact can be measured in several ways:

The first step is to make sure that we are accountable to the funder and make sure we achieve all the goals we proposed in our initial proposal.... In addition we have to measure the success of our programs in terms of dissemination (research, people participating in conferences, etc, articles published, etc). I believe it is crucial to measure the change in students' attitudes as a result of the courses and of the students' activities.

Manal also agreed with Roxana about the importance of measuring both student and lecturers attitudes in pre and post questionnaires in understanding the impact of DOIT's program.

All of the Georgian DOIT members of the panel discussion agreed and emphasized that they felt the quality of the students being trained will be the indicator of the impact of the program. Izabella explained that the impact of the program will be judged "by the quality of teachers prepared according to our programs".

Hanan took a very practical approach in looking at the impact our DOIT's program. He stated that by looking at indicators:

level of participation of students in our course---number of students who take our course.... how many conferences and events are DOIT partners participating in ...the number of new formal applications and programs were developed between DOIT partners...How many new collaborative projects are formed based on DOIT's vision...

Moreover, Hanan looked at the portal as another indicator of the impact of DOIT. He felt that by looking at "How much traffic do we capture to the public DOIT portal...which will be continued least 3 years after DOIT..."

Conclusion: Lessons that can be learned from DOIT's practices.

Panel Question #6: What advise would you give to other professions wanting to initiate international collaboration?

DOIT is relatively a young project and its main objectives set for the first eight months of collaborative work from academic development of syllabi for five courses to two financial reports, to arranging and having three consortium meetings have been completed successfully. DOIT's panel participants provided some important suggestions for other professionals planning to initiate international collaboration.

Roxana felt that:

Choose your partners wisely, explain your expectations and make sure that you act in an open and transparent way, making each and everyone feel equally important and taking into consideration other people's opinion.

Izabella continued:

I would advise to choose the topic of research carefully according to the national and international priorities defined in the application's guidelines. Also, it is very important to find correct partner institutions. Once the consortium is formed, the best way is to have an online workspace (Moodle, Facebook, etc.) where all the consortium members will be sharing the necessary information for the submission. It is important to establish good communication and friendly atmosphere among consortium members right from the start, as it is the prerequisite of further successful collaboration.

Manal adds:

I believe that all HEI around the world have to take advantage of updated technological tools to collaborate together since online sites have the potential to make academic visions a reality.

Tamiriko expressed the importance of "uniting under the common goals and objectives..."

Hanan emphasized the importance of "Leadership, Management and Governance."

Nino C stated the importance of:

Being honest, respecting each other, discussing issues openly, listening and helping each other... According to the ancient Georgian proverb, "Unity is strength". With common desire and will – everything is achievable.

Rhonda, DOIT's coordinator who worked intensively for two years on the TEMPUS application and has been leading the program for ten months explained:

The principles of equality and inclusion, transparency and communication, and processes of diversity management have all contributed to the culture of collaboration, cooperation and sharing of knowledge that characterize DOIT's professional relationships. I feel that these processes have contributed greatly to the feeling of "ownership" that most members of DOIT have towards our program. I would advise others who want to initiate international collaboration, to begin with the collaborative approach combined with responsible leadership based on inclusive transparent communication from the beginning of the design of the program and through all of the project's stages.

