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Moderator: Caby Verzosa, the World Bank

Caby Verzosa: Why should managers of governance reform programs be concerned with securing political will?

Matt Uzzell: I think in a very real sense, unless you have political buy-in from the start, the program is not going to be, possibly won't even get off the ground, or certainly won't be sustainable or instrumental in the real sense of the word. If you have political will and buy-in from the outset, then it's much more likely that the program will be supported.

Caby: But a lot of development practitioners shy away from being engaged with politics. Can you talk about this a little bit?

Matt: Yes, I think there is a general anxiety within development about recognizing the political nature of what development aims to achieve. A lot of donors obviously have anxieties that they are seen as interfering in a country or context, so they very much shy away from it, from being seen to be political. Now, the irony is that any form of development is effectively a political endeavor. I'm not talking politics with a big "P", but it has ramifications, it affects often a large number of different stakeholders. And unless you recognize that you need the buy-in and support from those stakeholders, you're not going to have a sustainable program.

Caby: You have done a lot of work in developing countries, what kind of examples come to mind?

Matt: If we look for example in Rwanda where I worked with the World Bank on a country framework report, which is a five year development plan. From the outset we wanted to ensure we had the buy-in and the ownership from the host government of Rwanda, so we thought, how are we going to do this? We can undertake stakeholder analysis, go and see key stakeholder groups to figure out what the priorities are going forward and then we can process that and write it out. What we decided to do was do that and then sit down with all of the key line ministries and basically present the information and say this is where we are, what do you think?

Caby: Well there must be some stories as well of things not going quite the way you had planned it. What might the lessons be from this?

Matt: I think, in my experience, generally things begin to fall apart when the first step of stakeholder analysis isn't undertaken properly. When I say stakeholder analysis, I'm saying at the start of any communication project, you need to sit down and figure out what the goals are and ensure that everyone is on sight and on message and all agree that this is where you want to go. Once you've done that, then you sit down and map out which interest groups are effected by what you are intending to achieve. When I say interest groups, I am saying what are the hopes and fears, anxieties, what do people want to achieve, what are they worried about, what are the channels you need to reach them, what are the message that may resonate with them. Until you have done that deep sort of stakeholder analysis, that doesn't need to be a quantitative research poll, it needs to be more of a qualitative appreciation of what are hopes and fears of the people you're working with. Once you've got that in place, then you'll find that you can't really go wrong, you've built a foundation there. Any program that doesn't have that upfront analysis and research tends to get wrong.