

# Transforming Participatory Governance in Uganda

Since gaining independence from the United Kingdom, Uganda has experienced nearly four decades of political instability. Coups, dictatorships, and ensuing power struggles slid the country into economic and social decline, and human rights abuses abounded. In the past 20 years, the continued conflict in Northern Uganda has displaced an estimated 1.7 million people from their homes.

In 1995, a new constitution established Uganda as a republic. However, the country's institutions of democratic governance remain weak and neither participatory, transparent, nor accountable to an informed public. This situation has resulted in poor service delivery, severe social sector issues, and a decaying faith in democratic systems.

Despite these challenges, Uganda held its first multiparty general elections in 2006 and has built a framework for decentralization that will encourage both political participation and institutional accountability.

RTI International, as a subcontractor to the State University of New York Center for International Development, works to connect good-governance champions at every level of Ugandan society to promote public participation in the political process, strengthen institutional transparency and accountability, and improve public service delivery.

Under the U.S. Agency for International Development-funded activity, Strengthening Democratic Linkages in Uganda (LINKAGES, 2007–2010), RTI works at the local level to bolster the public's ability to voice their needs and priorities, as well as to support local governments in responding with reforms. RTI also assists civil society organizations (CSOs) at local and national levels to effectively engage with local governments and Parliament, advocate for reform, and exercise their oversight function.

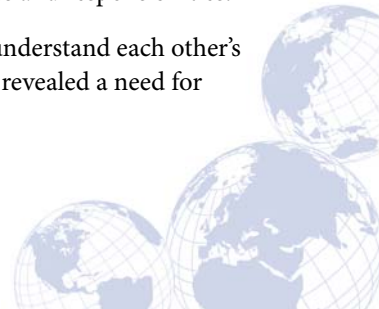
LINKAGES operates across 10 districts throughout Uganda—Arua, Amolatar, Hoima, Katakwi, Kisoro, Kitgum, Mubende, Mukono, Pader, and Sironko—and five subcounties per district.



## Bolstering Local Governance

RTI is working to build the capacity of local governments to provide transparent, accountable, and responsive policies and service delivery that more closely reflect public interest. As an entry point, the LINKAGES team facilitated 60 public-private dialogue workshops across all target districts. The workshops engaged more than 2,500 local stakeholders—including councilors, technical staff, and CSO representatives—to discuss priority local development and policy issues. The workshops also covered topics such as local government functions and the relationship between local government and civil society. Facilitators used RTI's adapted Participatory Mapping Assessment Tool and other participatory tools to map the stakeholders of and drivers in key processes, as well as their roles and responsibilities.

The dialogues helped stakeholders understand each other's viewpoints and concerns. They also revealed a need for



further training on operating in a multiparty system, citizen participation in budgeting and planning, and capacity building on the part of CSOs. The LINKAGES team used the workshop findings to develop tailored technical assistance and training interventions in these areas and others, such as local revenue mobilization.

RTI trained more than 1,000 councilors, clerks to council, and sergeants-at-arms at the district and subcounty levels on the model Standard Rules of Procedure for local council operations under the multiparty system. This training has enhanced council operations and prompted the debate, adoption, and implementation of new council rules of procedure in target local governments.

LINKAGES also developed a Harmonized Participatory Development Planning (HPDP) process that strengthens the Ministry of Local Government's current planning process. RTI is helping to build the capacity of key actors to carry out—in a more effective and participatory manner—their responsibilities in local government planning and budgeting.

HPDP lays out a systematic, 10-step approach to planning and budgeting and helps ensure participation from local governments, civil society, and the private sector. HPDP also emphasizes the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, as well as groups that focus on issues such as HIV/AIDS and land tenure. LINKAGES is piloting HPDP in four districts in Northern Uganda, including five subcounties per district, and will use lessons learned to further enhance the process before rolling it out to additional districts.

### Engaging Civil Society in Good Governance

While helping local governments become more responsive to public demands, LINKAGES simultaneously strengthens the ability of CSOs to voice their needs and preferences for local government action.

RTI has trained nearly 600 civil society members from more than 400 CSOs from a broad range of sectors on the structure, functions, and operations of local governments and Parliament. These trainings help CSOs to more effectively engage with local governments and Parliament.



*LINKAGES organized dialogues to bring together various stakeholders in each district. Participants in Mubende discussed the importance of each actor in a decentralized system of governance. [Photo: Dan Gerber]*

LINKAGES also seeks to engage CSOs in the policy reform process at the national level. For example, LINKAGES recently supported regional CSO consultative workshops in coordination with the Uganda Land Alliance to facilitate dialogue and input on the draft national land policy. LINKAGES supported the CSOs to consolidate and present their workshop findings in a National Land Conference, with the goal of incorporating their collective priorities into the final national land policy.



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