

# Where in the world is RTI



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BIMONTHLY DECEMBER 2007/JANUARY 2008

## Starting Up

### Partnerships Support Community-Based Rehabilitation in Aceh, Indonesia

Three years have passed since the tsunami struck Indonesia's Aceh province, on the west coast of Sumatra Island. The natural disaster was preceded by 30 years of separatist conflict, isolation, and distrust between citizens and their local governments. Today, donors are preparing fragile local governments to manage the overwhelming burden of reconstruction and development.

Following a 2006 self-assessment of its Support for Poor and Disadvantaged Areas (SPADA) project in Indonesia, the World Bank proposed a partnership between its program and the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's)

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### Study Evaluates Innovative Woman-Focused Interventions for HIV Prevention in South Africa



*Staff in Observatory, Cape Town, prepare to screen and recruit participants for the woman-focused HIV pilot study. [Photo: Wendee Wechsberg]*

RTI is conducting a five-year study, Woman-Focused HIV Prevention in Western Cape, South Africa, to test the effectiveness of combining voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) for HIV with behavioral interventions that help women reduce substance abuse, sexual risk, and victimization. Woman-focused interventions offer strategies for developing personal

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### New China Partnership to Reduce Methane Emissions

The Methane to Markets Partnership is an international initiative by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and partner countries to reduce global methane emissions. Oil and gas systems are the second largest source of human-related methane emissions worldwide and present an excellent opportunity to achieve emissions reduction goals. As a part of this partnership, RTI is strengthening the capacity of the China University of Petroleum (CUP) to research, identify, and promote key methane-reduction technologies for oil and gas development in China. This collaboration marks the first partnership between the USEPA and an oil and gas institution in China.



*China is one of the largest emitters of methane among the 20 Methane to Market partner countries. [Photo: Getty Images]*

CUP is the lead university in China for petroleum engineering and has an extensive network of alumni and peers at the three major Chinese oil and gas companies. Casey Delhotal, who leads the project for RTI, says, "Building capacity within CUP will allow for broad training and information distribution among current and future petroleum and natural gas experts in the country. In addition, the timing is ideal, as the Chinese government has recently begun promoting methane reductions from China's oil and gas infrastructure, landfills, and agriculture."

The project began with CUP faculty and students translating technical documents on 80 methane reduction

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# Early Grade Reading Assessment Diagnoses the Literacy Deficit

When her child is sick, a mother reaches for the thermometer to check for a fever. Reliable and easy to use, a thermometer is the instrument of choice for quickly assessing a child's physical well-being.

When evaluating better ways to teach children how to read and write, educators worldwide need an equally reliable tool that provides quick, easy-to-interpret feedback on students' literacy.

RTI International designed such a tool under the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) EdData II project to help educators in low-income countries break the pattern of illiteracy among their poor.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is a 15-minute test administered orally to students in the early grades of primary school. EGRA evaluates students' foundation literacy skills, including pre-reading skills like phonemic awareness and listening comprehension, which have been shown to predict later reading abilities. Education ministries and their donor partners can then identify and address learning barriers before students grow older and struggle even more to break through to literacy.

In many developing countries, children enrolled in primary school for three and as many as six years cannot read and understand even a simple text. A student who does not learn to read in the first few grades is more likely to repeat grades and eventually drop out of school. This pattern is repeated generationally as illiterate parents are excluded from the economic opportunities they need to ensure quality education for their children.

This thermometer-like diagnostic complements conventional paper-and-pencil tests. Existing national and international tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test, thoroughly assess students' reading proficiency, yet inherently assume basic literacy.

"In low-income countries, the trouble is that most students score below the 'floor' of those tests," said RTI senior education researcher Amber Gove. So, the tests reveal only what the students do not know, and not what skills teachers can build on.

EGRA can be adapted to fit most alphabetic languages and cultural contexts and is gaining momentum as an instrument for quickly diagnosing children's literacy. USAID and the World Bank have backed pilot studies of EGRA across the globe to



*Caption: A team of Nicaraguan test administrators is using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to assess student literacy one-on-one with first-, second-, and third-graders in 50 schools in Nicaragua, including 10 bilingual Miskitu-Spanish schools. [Photo: Amber Gove]*

refine the instrument and the teaching recommendations that flow from the assessment results.

"With EGRA, we are taking proven methodologies that have been applied in the U.S. and Europe for about 10 years and adapting that to the needs of developing countries," Gove explained. RTI recently began a USAID-funded bilingual pilot in Nicaragua.

## A Tool for Social Integration

Despite investment in education by the government of Nicaragua, student performance is poor. Moreover, national literacy tests are administered sporadically and only two assessments

were conducted between 2002 and 2006, both in grades three and six. Consequently, Nicaraguan schools lack systematic information on the progress of their younger students on learning to read and write.

RTI is administering EGRA to first-, second-, and third-graders across Nicaragua with the hope that it will become a tool for Nicaragua's education system to gather consistent data on early-grade literacy.

"If you find out earlier what is going on, you can make adjustments, rather than waiting until children are ready to drop out due to academic failure," said Vanessa Castro, the pilot coordinator and senior researcher at the Center for Research, Education, and Social Activism (CIASES), RTI's partner in the USAID-funded application.

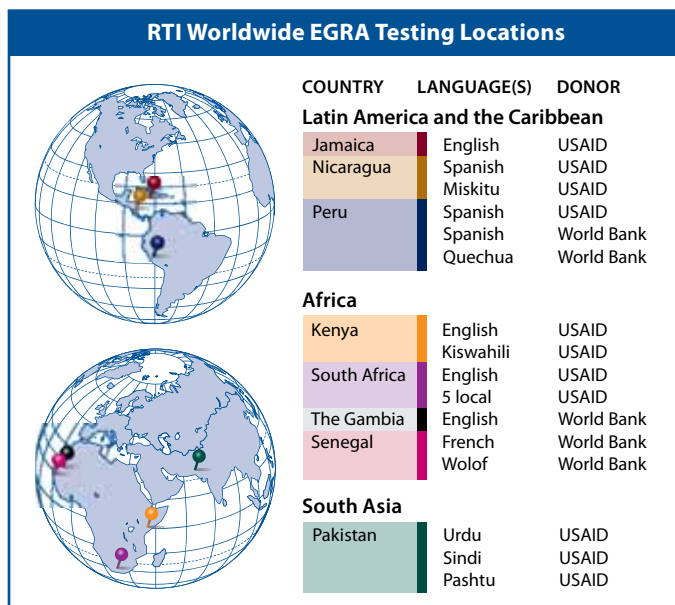
EGRA is being conducted in 40 Spanish-speaking schools and 10 bilingual schools where native Miskitu is the primary language of instruction. Illiteracy is particularly high among the Miskitu and other indigenous populations living in remote areas off the country's Caribbean coast.

Bilingual education is the best method to help the Miskitu students succeed in school, Castro said. So, despite the difficulty of tailoring EGRA to Miskitu, RTI developed a new adaptation of the instrument and trained bilingual enumerators to administer it.

Each Nicaraguan team of test administrators—whether Spanish or Miskitu—is conducting EGRA in one school per day, assessing approximately 50 students per school. When it completes the pilot, RTI will analyze the reliability of the test, looking for further refinements.

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### Early Grade Reading Assessment (continued)



### A Tool with Global Potential

Elsewhere, other education groups have adopted EGRA for their own literacy testing. Save the Children piloted the instrument in Haiti in both French and Creole. Plan International adopted the French version of EGRA from RTI's Senegal pilot and developed instructional approaches specific to the context in Mali and Niger. In Bangladesh, BRAC developed and tested a version of the instrument in the local Bangla script. In Afghanistan, CARE developed and tested a version in Dari.

On March 13–14, 2008, RTI will reconvene the international literacy experts who originally critiqued the instrument in November 2006 for a workshop at which RTI and its partners who have conducted their own EGRA pilots around the world will present their findings. The experts will then recommend further refinements or will give EGRA an official seal of approval.

“EGRA is a diagnostic tool for educators to improve their instructional approaches, not a high-stakes accountability test,” Gove explained. “Decisions about rewarding or sanctioning individual schools, teachers, or children will not be based on the results of EGRA.”

Enthusiasm is growing for EGRA to become a key diagnostic in the toolbox of education systems, schools, and teachers in low-income countries who want to customize their literacy instruction to meet the needs of their students. RTI will continue to lead EGRA enhancements and advocate that success in early reading become a goal of international organizations and education initiatives, such as the Education For All Fast-Track Initiative.

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EdData II website: [www.eddataglobal.org](http://www.eddataglobal.org)

### Indonesia (continued)

countrywide Local Governance Support Program (LGSP), led by RTI. The resulting SPADA-Aceh partnership leverages both funders' inputs to expand LGSP's work in Aceh from 5 to 10 of the province's most hard-hit districts. Both programs will benefit by linking SPADA's bottom-up civil society approach to rehabilitation to LGSP's *musrenbang* or public consultation model, which works through local governments to institutionalize community participation in decision-making processes.



Project staff work with villagers in Aceh Barat District to map out a village development plan to restore infrastructure destroyed by the 2004 tsunami. [Photo: Mohammad Kholifan]

SPADA-Aceh has started with five districts on Aceh's west coast, which include four LGSP districts. Project manager Philip Schwehm explained, “these districts will act as the vanguards for work expected to commence in January 2008, in five east-coast districts.”

In the first five districts citizens now have a meaningful voice in decision making that affects them. RTI has helped elected local governments, which had difficulty operating at all in 2006, bring back open consultations that had been banned under martial law, and transform them into mechanisms for citizen input rather than pro forma events. Local budgeting and allocation decisions are open to scrutiny for the first time in the province's history, allowing the media and citizens to hold their representatives accountable for results.

These districts, employing *musrenbang*, are now planning and budgeting for 2008. In Aceh Jaya District, 55 village chiefs, religious leaders, and youth and women's group representatives from 11 communities recently received training on Participatory Planning for Village Development. Training sessions relayed the importance of compliance with a new state regulation mandating public consultation in village governance. Susila Utama, Planning Specialist in Banda Aceh, explained, “This regulation is the main guideline shaping village's governance apparatuses.”

On the east coast, SPADA-Aceh experts are helping national government representatives engage local government leaders, district council members, and community groups to assess planning and financial management skills and responsiveness among local governments.

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### China (continued)

technologies used in the United States to better understand the applications and to stimulate discussions on their relevance to China. The technologies generally focus on two problem areas: reducing leakage of natural gas (methane) during production or transmission/distribution, and preventing venting of natural gas into the atmosphere during operation and maintenance of the systems. Both are achieved through better technologies and maintenance practices. Currently, RTI and CUP are working on a technical paper prioritizing the technologies most relevant to sites in China. CUP will describe the top five applications in detail, in hopes of gaining further financing to conduct feasibility studies at specific sites. The paper will undergo a peer review at a three-day workshop in the spring at the university's Qingdao campus.

In addition, RTI assisted CUP in networking with other organizations at the recent Methane to Markets Expo in Beijing from October 30 to November 1, 2007. At this major event, RTI helped coordinate attendance of key Chinese oil and gas experts and assist participants in networking with carbon traders, vendors, and international experts. For years, China has captured and used methane from coal mines, landfills, and animal waste as an energy source and as a climate change strategy; however, reducing methane leakage from oil and gas systems is a new idea. Ms. Delhotal notes, "Education and training are key in promoting these projects."

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*Where in the World Is RTI* is a bimonthly publication of RTI's International Development Group (IDG). This publication is intended to inform clients and partner organizations about RTI's global activities and research areas. RTI is dedicated to improving the human condition in developing and emerging countries. RTI has worked for over 40 years in 140 countries around the world. We offer a broad range of policy support, applied research and analysis, and other technical expertise in strategic planning, institutional development, and training. Our expertise is multisectoral and spans the fields of education, health, environment and natural resources, governance, finance, and information and communication technology.

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### South Africa (continued)

power, strengthening negotiating skills, and preventing sexual violence. The research is supported by the U.S. National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of premature death in South Africa, and the Western Cape Province has the highest increase in HIV incidence, at 15.7 percent in 2005. Throughout the country, noninjecting drug use among Black African and Coloured women is associated with high-risk sexual behavior, HIV seropositivity, and sexually transmitted infections. Violence against women is also associated with HIV risk.

In an earlier U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) pilot study in Western Cape, RTI tested the effectiveness of individual and group interventions among 112 poor, substance-using women. All participants reduced their sexual risk behavior and victimization, as well as substance use as verified through biological testing.

"The group intervention had another effect in that women who participated in these sessions continued to support one another after the study," said Dr. Wendee Wechsberg, RTI Principal Investigator and Senior Director. "The groups complemented the strong sense of community cohesion intrinsic to Western Cape townships," she noted.

The current study—a randomized controlled trial with 900 participants—will compare results among women who receive VCT and a woman-focused intervention with two control groups, one that receives only VCT, and one that follows a nutrition curriculum. Evaluations will include biological testing for substance abuse and HIV.

"The HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa has received substantial attention, but interventions that address the increasing problems of women's drug abuse and victimization, and how they contribute to the spread of HIV, are urgently needed," said Wechsberg. "These intersecting phenomena jeopardize not only the present generation, but also future generations."

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### Selected Publications

Brinkerhoff, Derick W. (Winter/Spring 2007). "Where There's a Will, There's a Way? Untangling Ownership and Political Will in Post-Conflict Stability and Reconstruction Operations." *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 8(1): 111–121. [http://diplomacy.shu.edu/academics/journal/resources/journal\\_dip\\_pdfs/journal\\_of\\_diplomacy\\_vol8\\_no1/09-Brinkerhoff.pdf](http://diplomacy.shu.edu/academics/journal/resources/journal_dip_pdfs/journal_of_diplomacy_vol8_no1/09-Brinkerhoff.pdf)

Ssengonzi, Robert. (2007). "The Plight of Older Persons as Caregivers to People Infected/Affected by HIV/AIDS: Evidence from Uganda." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 22(4): 339–353.