

Where in the world is RTI



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BIMONTHLY JUNE/JULY 2009

Starting Up

Teacher, Speak My Language

Research from high-income countries shows that teaching kids to read first in their mother tongue helps them become literate sooner and pick up a second language faster than teaching them to read in a language other than the one they speak at home.

To measure the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction versus official language instruction in low-income countries, RTI will conduct a nationally representative study in up to four African countries—Kenya, Mali, Senegal, and Uganda—with a grant from the Quality Education in Developing Countries (QEDC) initiative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.



Under the Learning Outcomes project, the Early Grade Reading Assessment will measure students' skills in naming letters, recognizing words, and reading and listening with comprehension in their mother tongue.

[Photo: Carmen Strigel]

“In principle, these countries are all experimenting with some form of ‘mother-tongue first’ language instruction in their schools,” said Amber Gove, RTI senior education research analyst.

RTI will use classroom observation to document the actual language of instruction and materials in roughly 50 schools per country. RTI will then conduct Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs) to evaluate basic reading skills in the language of instruction among third-grade students.

“Our surveys will inform the design of remedial interventions supported by the Hewlett Foundation to improve literacy instruction and will also serve as the baseline assessments for those interventions,” said Gove.

The EGRA—a 15-minute oral assessment conducted one-on-one with the pupil to measure proficiency in reading fluency, comprehension, phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and

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Help for African Militaries:

Epidemiologic Research and HIV-Related Services

In most sub-Saharan nations, soldiers are disproportionately affected by HIV. The mobile lifestyle of the military elevates risk for infection of the troops and their spouses and partners. It also complicates measurement of HIV prevalence and consistent access to HIV-related services.

In collaboration with the U.S. Naval Health Research Center, RTI is assisting troops in Africa through epidemiologic research and the implementation of HIV-related services funded by the U.S. Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP), which supports multiple efforts to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS among uniformed personnel.

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Peace Through Development in Southern Sudan

For most of its post-independence existence, Sudan has been in bitter internal conflict. Deep religious, cultural, and political differences between North and South, Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim have contributed to millions of deaths and left Sudan with the world's largest population of internally displaced persons.

However, in 2005, the government and its rival Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which declared a cease-fire and established a new Government of National Unity, as well as an



The BRIDGE project will help create and strengthen community development committees that are democratic and effective in promoting community well-being. [Photo: Winrock International]

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Strengthening the Fabric of Governance in Guinea Through Multisectoral Interventions

Governance structures in Guinea have long benefited few at the expense of many, obstructing stability and development. Guineans' lives over the half century following independence from France have been marred by dictatorship, coups, and deadly violence. Many observers consider the country's few elections flawed. Unless they are government officials, citizens have likely had limited input into how their country is run.

RTI International is working to improve the lives of citizens through strategic multisectoral interventions that produce tangible benefits while strengthening the fabric of governance required to extend such benefits to all. Under the U.S. Agency for International Development-funded *Faisons Ensemble* (Working Together, 2007–2010) project, RTI implements interventions in health, education, agriculture, and natural resource management. RTI leads a consortium of two Guinean and five U.S. nongovernmental organizations.

The project collaborates with an additional 16 Guinean organizations to increase civic participation in governance, including watchdog and advocacy functions; improve basic services; promote transparency and reduce corruption; and expand access to independent information. *Faisons Ensemble's* four regions—Conakry, N'Zerekore, Dabola, and Kankan—are home to more than half the country's population.

In December 2008, a military coup following the death of Guinea's president led to suspension of *Faisons Ensemble* governance work at the national level. Work continues, however, at the local level and in the health care and education sectors, considered as humanitarian by the U.S. Government and therefore not subject to its assistance suspension.

Civic Participation

Guinea's history of instability and corruption contributes to political apathy, so the project promotes citizen participation in government and, more generally, good citizenship.

For example, working with the National Institute for Teaching and Learning, *Faisons Ensemble* developed a new middle school civic education curriculum now adopted by the Ministry of Secondary Education. In addition, *Faisons*



Faisons Ensemble supports rural and community radio through grants, and also trains journalists to fight corruption. [Photos: *Faisons Ensemble* staff]



Ensemble is supporting institutionalization of school management committees—composed of teachers, parents, and students—in selected areas.

The project has also employed nontraditional approaches to bolster good citizenship. In December 2007, tensions ran high in Conakry as

the one-year anniversary of violent protests that left more than 2,000 people injured and 250 dead drew near. Many feared unrest would ensue.

In response, *Faisons Ensemble* developed the targeted *Project d'Education Civique* (Civic Education Project, PEC), which promoted nonviolent practices, conflict resolution, and social responsibility. The project prepared more than 250 religious, labor, business, and local government leaders from Conakry's five communes to participate.

Since gangs—composed primarily of young, unemployed, and impoverished men—were responsible for much of the violence during the previous uprising, PEC participants reached out to gang leaders to defuse trouble. PEC gained the trust of several gang leaders and encouraged them to use their influence over Conakry gangs to promote reconciliation.

An influential gang leader, Ibrahima Camera, known as “Big Manager,” was among the first to join PEC. “I will do all that is in my power not only to avoid conflict but also to work with the many youth who respect me to spread the message of unity to prevent acts of violence,” Camera said.

He encouraged hundreds of gang members to refrain from instigating conflict and to actively deter others from inciting it. The project used multiple other activities, such as cultural events and public service announcements, to further promote peace among the city's youth.

No major violence occurred in Conakry in early 2008. In fact, youth gang members were regularly observed actively preventing those attempting to block roads or incite violence. Leaders across sectors cited PEC as a significant factor in the prevention of conflict at a fragile moment in Guinea's history.

Faisons Ensemble's participation efforts also support informed voting for an upcoming presidential election.

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Governance in Guinea (continued)



A woman speaks out at a town meeting in Bissikrima. [Photo: Faisons Ensemble staff]

Literacy as a Path to Good Citizenship

In Guinea, fewer than 20% of adult women can read and write. Illiteracy, coupled with traditional gender roles, prevents women from influencing public policy. *Faisons Ensemble* has established more than 180 adult literacy centers, which build competencies that may help facilitate civic participation.

At 50 years old, Fatoumata Barry had never offered input on public decisions that affect her life. Barry was illiterate and supported her family by selling household goods, but she was unable to keep accurate records, hindering business growth. Barry also led a collective of women who sell similar goods.

When *Faisons Ensemble* established an adult literacy center nearby, Barry and many members of her collective took literacy and numeracy classes in their native Pulaar language. Their enhanced ability to read, write, and keep accounting records has allowed their businesses to grow.

The women also learned they had the right and ability to participate in public decisions. They began attending local council sessions and petitioned successfully for a new multipurpose center to house classrooms and a health clinic.

Community Participation in Health Governance

The mismanagement of resources plagues the health care system in Guinea. To combat this problem, *Comités de Gestion de Santé* (Community Health Management Groups, COGES)—comprising a variety of community members—were formed as vehicles for community involvement in the management of local health facilities, such as clinics.

Faisons Ensemble has taught aspects of financial management and internal governance to more than 160 COGES representatives to assist them in bringing greater accountability and structure to the health care system. *Faisons Ensemble* has also trained COGES members in communication techniques so they can advocate for preventing the spread of HIV, improving family planning, and increasing the rate of

vaccination of children. In addition to supporting the COGES, the project works closely with associations of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Upcoming work in health increases the emphasis on local governance. For example, the project team and health advocates have concrete opportunities to improve the governance of community health centers. They include ensuring centers' service fees and financial reports are posted and published, supporting advocacy to increase health resources from the communes and rural development communities, supporting community audits of deconcentrated health services, and training elected leaders on health indicators.

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Southern Sudan (continued)

Interim Government of Southern Sudan. The new constitution declares Sudan a democratic and decentralized state.

Today, a vulnerable peace exists in Southern Sudan under the CPA, and infrastructure and institutions remain weak. Yet citizens there show great hope that sustained peace will catalyze significant development. To support the CPA and potential development, RTI will work as a subcontractor to Winrock International to build the capacity of local governments to deliver social services and promote economic growth.

Under the three-year Sudan Building Responsibility for the Delivery of Government Services (BRIDGE) Program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, RTI will operate across three southern states—Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, and Warrap—and several counties within each state. RTI will develop more effective linkages between state and local governments, increase transparency and accountability of selected government systems, and promote women's participation in government.

RTI will guide government officials through a participatory, rapid self-assessment process of local government planning and management capacity in key service delivery areas, including health, education, and water and sanitation. Using the rapid assessment findings, RTI will then facilitate discussions with officials and communities to develop Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs).

"These PIPs will address the skills and systems needed to enhance government effectiveness and responsiveness, and lead to improvements via targets and performance measures," said Philip Schwehm, RTI's technical manager. The project will help implement specific aspects of the PIPs, selected by government counterparts, through on-the-job training and mentoring, systems advice and upgrading, and regular follow-up.

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Help for African Militaries (continued)

DHAPP epidemiologic studies determine HIV prevalence and countries' HIV-related research abilities. RTI has been conducting studies in Botswana, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Uganda. Applying lessons learned through its initial DHAPP sero-behavioral research in Mozambique and Uganda, RTI now supports these militaries' implementation of surveillance programs. The surveillance study design supports needs such as questionnaires, HIV rapid test procedures, and the logistics of blood collection and storage.

"Our key objective is to enable and encourage militaries to conduct HIV surveillance regularly among their troops," said Lauren Courtney, RTI project director. "We are pleased that Mozambique requested a second round of surveillance with RTI assistance for 2009, after the initial implementation in 2006," she said.

In Uganda, RTI is implementing HIV-related services that also respond to the country's high rate of tuberculosis (TB), a co-infection responsible for many HIV-related deaths. Over three years, the project Expanding Access to Quality HIV Prevention, Care and Support Services in the Ugandan Military aims to increase access to HIV/AIDS-related services by military personnel and their families. RTI is partnering with the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF)-HIV/AIDS Control Programme to support implementation.

This project will help soldiers and their dependents via HIV counseling and testing; prevention of mother-to-child transmission; better care and treatment of the infected; improved diagnosis and management of TB; and programs that mitigate the effects of HIV on orphans, other vulnerable children, and their families.

In February, RTI assessed health facilities managed by the Ugandan military for level and quality of services, facility



Members of the Mozambican military participate in a pilot test of self-administered group interviews to identify behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs associated with HIV prevalence.
[Photo: Lauren Courtney]

conditions, supply needs, and staff capabilities. "The results of the assessment have been used to guide training of health workers, help build sufficient stocks of supplies, and improve infrastructure for HIV-related service delivery in the focus facilities," said Dr. Robert Ssengonzi, RTI project director.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Naval Health Research Center.

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Teacher, Speak My Language (continued)

other foundation skills—was developed by RTI and has been applied in several African countries in both English and French, the two official languages in the study sample.

However, for this study, RTI will work with local language specialists to adapt the instrument into mother tongues: Kiswahili in Kenya; Bambara, Bomu, Fulfulde, and Songhoi in Mali; Wolof and Pulaar in Senegal; and Ganda in Uganda.

In each country, RTI will also partner with a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) to carry out EGRA adaptation, data collection, and data analysis, so at project end the NGO will be able to conduct subsequent assessments with minimal technical support.

RTI will present its findings to the respective Ministries of Education and civil society at analytical workshops that will inform the countries' decisions around mother-tongue-first instruction as it impacts early reading outcomes.

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Where in the World Is RTI is a bimonthly publication 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.

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Selected Publications

Rocca, Corinne H., Sujit Rathod, Tina Falle, Rohini P. Pande, and Suneeta Krishnan. (April 2009). "Challenging Assumptions About Women's Empowerment: Social and Economic Resources and Domestic Violence Among Young Married Women in Urban South India." *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 38(2): 577–585.
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