RTI International employs a dynamic MERLA framework (graphic at right) to guide and improve performance management through collaborative stakeholder engagement.

MERLA is the intentional application of results-focused monitoring, evaluation, and research to inform continuous learning and adaptation for improving program effectiveness and policy decision making. MERLA improves program operations when:

- Data collected through M&E systems are timely and high quality and are analyzed and used to evaluate program performance.
- M&E data are complemented and strengthened by filling gaps in evidence through operations research (OR).
- Key results and evidence from M&E and research are synthesized into learning.
- Learning is continuously incorporated into program design for improving implementation, communicating results, documenting lessons and best practices, and informing policy decisions.
RTI is a leader in expanding the use and utility of digital tools to ensure implementation of high-quality MERLA using globally accepted Principles for Digital Development (digitalprinciples.org). We provide technical assistance to donors, governments, and civil society organizations to establish national information systems, governed by relevant policies, and enabled by locally led technology solutions.

**RTI collaborates with governments and other stakeholders to:**

- Use cloud-based systems to help smallholder farmers and local farmer associations access data they can turn into action.
- Develop sustainable, scalable information system technological solutions within existing national frameworks, while using open standards and open-source technology.
- Strengthen human capacity to implement, support, and use information systems for collecting, analyzing, disseminating, and using data and information.
- Value the use of information for transparency and accountability.
- Quantify the positive impact of efficient, timely, complete, and high-quality data on health point-of-care services, disease surveillance, and reporting.
- Invest in continuous capacity building by establishing and institutionalizing training programs in health informatics and related fields.

The USAID Governance for Local Development (GoLD) project focuses on strengthening local government capacity, improving resource management, and increasing community participation and oversight in service delivery management across four regions in Senegal. RTI’s MERLA team conducted a quasi-experimental research study to examine the added value of an integrated governance approach compared to health interventions alone. This analysis found that integrated governance is associated with improvements in health service delivery, specifically more open health facilities, improved infrastructure, and increased staff compliance to correct procedures. This evidence highlights the importance of improving governance structures with an emphasis on social accountability. Findings were used to inform GoLD implementation and future program design.