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Strategies for Improved Delivery of Basic Services: A Concise Framework and Selected Cases

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ag/NRM   agriculture and natural resource management

APS   Annual Program Statement

CBO   community-based organization

CSO   civil society organization

DG   Democratic Governance

IDG   International Development Group, RTI

LEAD   Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, Development project, Nigeria

LGA   local government authority

LGI   Local Government Initiative, Bulgaria

LGSP   Local Governance Support Program, Indonesia

MATD   *Ministère de l'Administration du Territoire et de la Décentralisation* / Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, Guinea

NGO   nongovernmental organization

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPP   public-private partnership

QAPC   Quality Assurance Partnership Committee, Philippines

RTI   RTI International (trade name of Research Triangle Institute)

USAID   United States Agency for International Development

ABSTRACT

This paper presents lessons from RTI International's experience in improving the delivery of basic services in developing countries. It is structured to highlight the key components needed for effective service delivery: a policy framework that clarifies service responsibility, authority, and financing; service provision institutions with adequate capacity and tools to be responsive to users' needs; and user associations and civil society organizations with the capacity to advocate for their priorities and monitor providers' performance. The paper concludes that "improving the accountability of service decision-makers to citizens and service users" is the critical dimension to upgrading and expanding service delivery. The paper is illustrated by four cases that document RTI's experience in Nigeria, Indonesia, Bulgaria and Guinea.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:
ON GOVERNANCE AND IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

RTI International has implemented programs to improve local service delivery around the globe since the1980s. These have focused on a wide range of issues, starting with urban development and services, including water and housing; and ranging all the way to rural health service delivery and education. To implement such programs, RTI has relied upon a broad range of technical expertise, tools, and methodologies. Some of the tools were unique to specific contexts and other have been adapted in many countries. One common thread that unites several such experiences is the integration of governance as a critical dimension to improve quality and access to services.

The integration of governance into service delivery improvement initiatives has taken many different forms over the years. We can identify three very broad types of interventions:

- Obtaining the *opinions of stakeholders and users* through formal or informal consultations or user surveys. While simple in appearance, in actuality this type of intervention can be challenging in many countries. It often means convincing experts that they can learn from ordinary citizens and overcoming resistance from government officials who view any kind of participation as a challenge to their authority.
- Introducing a number of mechanisms aimed at improving *timely service-provider responsiveness* to citizen needs. The development of feedback systems such as citizen report cards or complaint-management systems falls into this category. Such mechanisms indicate governments' willingness to listen to and act upon the feedback they receive.
- Promoting the emergence of *complex accountability systems* structured around service delivery. These include introducing policies and practices to improve access to information and government communication, supporting the advocacy and oversight roles of civil society, promoting external and internal auditing of service delivery, and developing performance monitoring systems that establish and monitor clear service benchmarks.

This working paper draws on a selection of project experiences that integrate all or some of the above approaches, depending on contexts and project objectives. Among the cases presented, the Nigeria Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, Development (LEAD, Case A in the annex of this paper) and Guinea *Faisons Ensemble* (Case D) projects probably took the most deliberate approach toward building sustainable accountability mechanisms around service delivery. Both projects have helped local governments achieve significant improvements in own-resource mobilization. As citizens are involved in adopting priorities and see improvements in service access and quality, they value the services more and are willing to pay for them. They become more confident that their contributions will be put to good use.

Drawing on a wealth of professional experience and personal reflection, this paper points to some of the basic building blocks necessary to design and implement effective service-delivery programs. It mirrors the deep knowledge and expertise of Henry (Hal) Minis, who more than any other RTI staff member has come to embody our approach to improving service delivery, during his long and productive tenure with the Institute. He developed or significantly contributed to the design of many of our tools and approaches that incorporate governance concepts in service-delivery improvements. We are thankful for his many contributions to RTI and to the many countries and communities where he worked over his career.

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IMPROVING LOCAL SERVICES: LESSONS LEARNED FROM RTI EXPERIENCE

1. Introduction

Providing efficient and effective basic public services is a requisite for economic and social development and a core governance function. In stable environments, local services are, in part, the springboard for local economic and social development and provide numerous avenues for citizens and service users to participate in decision making—a building block for improved governance. In fragile and post-conflict settings, basic services are critical to restoring stability and, in the process, enhancing the legitimacy of the emerging governance structure. In rapidly urbanizing areas, pressing problems created by growth and the dominance of urban centers bring heightened attention to any significant gaps in local services. As a result, improving service delivery is an increasing focus of assistance programs.

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness specifically recognized the need for basic services in committing partner countries to "make progress towards building institutions and establishing governance structures that deliver effective governance, public safety, and equitable access to basic services for their citizens" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], n.d., p. 6). The extent to which governments respond to the service needs of all segments of society—from marginalized populations to the business sector—reflects its ability to govern and to mobilize diverse resources for community development. Indeed, effective and responsive services enhance the accountability of local governments, and higher citizen satisfaction provides important positive feedback to decision-makers and can translate into electoral gains. However, all too often, local services are poorly managed, are underfunded, and are not embedded in a strategic vision of development. Poor services create a gap in confidence between citizens and the government that is supposed to serve them.

While national, regional, and local levels of government may all have a role in service provision, the focus of this paper is primarily the local level, where services can more effectively be tailored to local needs, where citizens and service users can more easily participate in service design and monitor delivery, and where the ultimate impacts of service delivery are felt. The goal of this paper is to highlight ways to improve local services as a critical part of the development process. We provide selected examples of RTI International's approaches and tools for improving local services and identify strategies that have contributed to improved service delivery in our programs.

In addition, we have attached in the annex several examples of RTI projects, to describe more in depth the context and overall approaches we have used to improve services, strengthen governance, and enhance local development. Each case highlights different dimensions of the framework for improved services delivery:

- The Indonesia Local Governance Support Program (LGSP, April 2005–September 2009) supported local governments to become more democratic, more competent at the core tasks of governance, and more capable of supporting improved service delivery and managing resources. It also aimed to strengthen the capacity of local legislatures and civil society to perform their

legitimate roles of legislative representation and oversight, and citizen participation in the decision-making process.

• The Nigeria Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, Development (LEAD) Project (2009–2014) focuses on four objectives: (1) Strengthening the capacity of local governments; (2) increasing the transparency of local government operations, focusing on improving the budget process and increasing local revenue flows; (3) increasing the capacity of local organizations to interact with local government and advocate for their interests; and (4) improving service delivery, resulting from improved local government capacity and increased citizen involvement.

• The Bulgaria Local Government Initiative (LGI) had two distinct phases. Phase 1 (1997–2001) provided technical assistance and grants to 10 local governments and to local government associations. Assistance focused on building the capacity of mayors and their technical and administrative staff, and creating avenues for citizen participation. Practices such as the establishment of citizen service centers and improved solid waste management showed citizens a new face of local government. Phase 2 (2001–2007) focused more directly on improving the enabling environment and removing existing constraints on local government performance. RTI facilitated a policy dialogue process that led to significant reforms, which in turn clearly delineated state-mandated and discretionary local service responsibilities, service funding standards, and mechanisms for funding. Other reforms included the introduction of obligatory public hearings for the budget process and a constitutional amendment that granted taxing power to local governments.

• The Guinea *Faisons Ensemble* Project (2007–2013) worked to improve the lives of citizens through strategic multisectoral interventions in governance, health, education, and agriculture and natural resource management (Ag/NRM). These sectoral activities integrated democracy and governance goals either by strengthening civil society knowledge, behavior, and participation; or by improving government accountability, transparency, and efficiency at the local, regional, and national levels. The project worked with government, civil society, media, and the private sector to forge alliances and support positive change.

The paper proceeds as follows. After a brief framing of the opportunities to improve local service delivery (Section 2), Section 3 highlights various entry points in the areas of policy reform and local service management through which relevant actions can enhance local service delivery. Text boxes in each subsection of Section 3 describe experiences from RTI projects that illustrate these points. Section 4 summarizes the overall findings and lessons learned as described in this paper.

2.   Framework

Local service provision typically involves a complex matrix of responsibilities and financing mechanisms at the national and subnational levels. For example, the national legal framework, including the Constitution and local government enabling legislation, may spell out the basic service responsibilities of the national and subnational levels. In addition, programs and policies for specific sectors often provide a framework to improve a public service such as health, education, environment, or agriculture. Most typically in such programs, policy, overall service design, and monitoring are the responsibility of the national government while service delivery is the responsibility of the local level. Funding mechanisms

may range from flow-down funding from the central level, to shared funding responsibilities, to unfunded service mandates.

How well service responsibilities and funding mechanisms are thought out, designed, and implemented has a significant impact on how services play out at the local level (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). At the same time, the policy framework can never be so detailed as to dictate the operational character of service delivery in every locality. That is the responsibility of local elected officials and technical managers and their interaction with citizens and service users. An effective policy framework is based on what is feasible at the local level and provides clear definition of responsibility and space for local innovations, while local actors with strong capacity implement policy and find locally appropriate solutions to service challenges.

At the local or regional level, two sets of actors are critical to delivering effective and efficient services. First, the local government, a service utility, or a specialized agency typically has the institutional mandate to manage services (see diagram below). This mandate encompasses both technical management and financing and budgeting for service delivery. Both aspects offer numerous options for service improvement, but the extent to which they can be capitalized upon depends crucially on state capacity (Holland, Ruedin, Scott-Villiers, & Sheppard, 2012). At the same time, recent development experience has demonstrated the importance and value of mobilizing citizens and specific user groups in service planning, delivery, and monitoring so that they can voice their needs and hold service-delivery officials accountable (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Indeed, increased accountability can be an important driver for improved services. Ideally, the greater the opportunities for citizens to hold officials accountable for their actions, the more responsive government officials will be to citizens' needs, although both enhancing opportunities and increasing responsiveness can be complex (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012; O'Meally, 2013).

Policy framework
- Service responsibilities
- Service financing arrangements

Local service institutions
- Technical management capacity and tools
- Budget process

Citizens/service users
- Capacity building
- Advocacy

Service improvements
- More responsive
- Improved performance
- Increased funding
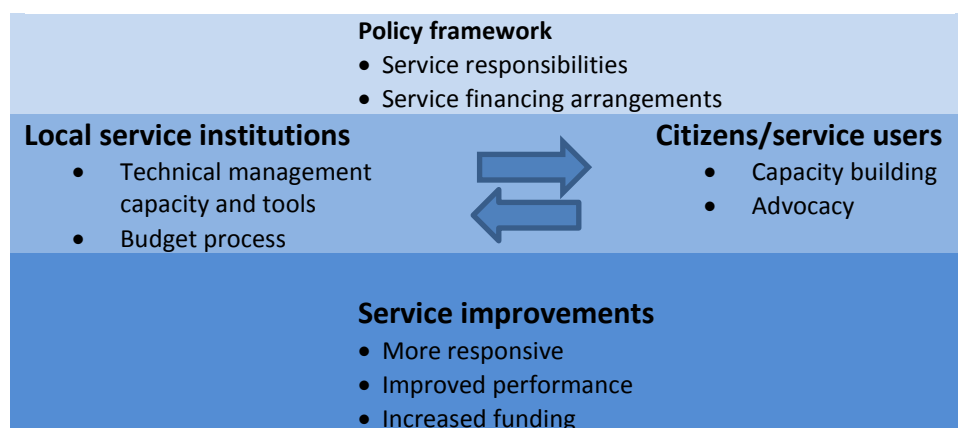
Within this overall framework, RTI project experiences have often shown that strengthening this cycle at the local level is the key to both local service improvement and service policy reform. While service delivery has conventionally been seen as a technical function, we have found that improving citizen access to and participation in service decision-making yields significant results (see, for example, Case A). This does not have to be a confrontational process. Rather it should be seen as a bridge-building or partnership process in which the demand and the supply sides are strengthened and a sustained process

of dialogue and exchange is established (see, for example, Cases B and D). Where local action has yielded positive results, but the policy environment is unfavorable to sustained improvement, RTI experience shows that local successes can serve as the main driver for reform at higher levels (see, for example, Case C). Local leaders can become powerful advocates as their legitimacy and credibility are enhanced and concrete results serve as the basis for informed policy reform.

3.   Approaches and Tools

3.1   Policy Reform

Service provision in many countries is characterized by (1) unclear, shared, or overlapping responsibilities among various tiers of government; and (2) funding levels that do not correspond to service requirements. In the first instance, lower tiers of government find themselves sharing service responsibilities with national or regional agencies, and the resulting lack of clarity leads to inaction and lack of local initiative. In the second instance,

> **Bulgaria: Decentralization Reform**
>
> Faced with a local government financial crisis in 2001, which was driven by complex and unclear intergovernmental relations, Bulgaria established a Fiscal Decentralization Working Group to develop a reform package. The reforms included distinguishing between mandated services funded by shared tax revenues distributed from the central level, and non-mandated services provided at local discretion.
> **(See Case C and Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2006)**

funding transfers to pay for services may not have kept up with policy changes; or lower tiers may not have the legal authority or the capacity to generate service-sustaining revenues.

In the best of outcomes, new decentralization policies can shift roles in service provision to the level of government that is most competent to manage the role, and they can create a corresponding decision-making body to oversee services, thereby enhancing local accountability to service users. To reach this status of decentralization policy reform, three main issues must be addressed:

> **Egypt: Education Decentralization 2009–2011**
>
> Acknowledging a calcified education system that was failing to produce desired outcomes and frustrating parents and students, the Egyptian Ministry of Education sought to make structural changes. RTI assisted the Ministry in developing a vision for a decentralized education system and from it, reviewed education functions to determine those that should be assigned to central, regional *(Muderiya),* district *(Idara),* school, and local board of trustees levels within the education system. Factors such as economies of scale, national markets, responsiveness to customers, and characteristics of effective schools were considered in assigning functions. In addition to assigning service functions, RTI assisted the Ministry in developing new funding formulas for both non-personnel recurrent funds and capital funds.
> **(See Healey, Crouch, & Hanna, 2014)**

1. **Service responsibility:** clarifying the role and responsibility of each actor to avoid shared roles or duplication; applying the "subsidiarity" principle to identify the lowest level of government that can most effectively fulfill a responsibility.

2. **Service authority:** assigning decision-making authority that corresponds to service responsibility; creating elected decision-making bodies that allow service users to hold the decision-makers accountable.

3. **Financing:** assuring that each level of service provision has sustainable funding that matches its responsibilities; allowing local management of resources and ensuring that intergovernmental flows are equitable, transparent, and predictable.

Decentralization reform, like any policy reform, is a complex process with winners and losers. In the cases described in this paper, RTI's project teams recognized that the process must consider political, organizational, and institutional factors. In their approach to policy reform, they built the public legitimacy of the issues, brought local and national stakeholders together to hash out policy objectives and implementation requirements, and monitored results to evaluate policy impacts. Some of the most successful national-level reform efforts were built on prior or concurrent work at the local level that demonstrated implementation approaches, informed the policy dialogue, and allowed local leaders to advocate through their experience.

3.2   Local Service Management

Whether services are shared with other tiers of government or are a purely local function, they have critical elements that are subject to management decisions at the local level. The focus of local service management improvement is to determine the design of the service (quantity and quality) which best meets the needs and resources of the community. This implies working with both the supply side (service department or agency) and the demand side (service users, citizens). RTI has found four principal levers for local service improvement:

- the budget process,
- service management and organization,
- community participation, and
- service monitoring.

> **Ukraine: Service-Based Budgeting**
>
> RTI assisted in a national reform of the local government budgeting process that introduced service-based budgeting. The process directed local governments to consult with citizens on service priorities, assess service management, and produce service budgets that were aired publicly before adoption.
> **(USAID Municipal Budget Reform Project, 2005–2008. See RTI International, 2005)**

Although these are described separately below, in practice they are approached most effectively in an integrated way that recognizes the relationships among supply and demand, service delivery and resource allocation, and service planning and results.

The Budget Process

The budget process offers particular opportunities for improving services by channeling resources to publicly determined service priorities. Service improvements can be tackled through comprehensive budget reform, linking of budgeting to strategic planning, and more participatory budget processes. More comprehensive reforms, such as introducing *service-based budgeting,* typically include evaluating service management, setting priorities for

> **Indonesia: Participatory Budgeting**
>
> With the objective of improving local governance, RTI assisted in organizing a participatory budgeting process that drew in local elected officials. The new budget process promoted public input in priority setting, and established council–civil society partnerships for planning and budget oversight. It established indicators for budget execution as well.
> **(See Case B and Antlöv & Wetterberg, 2013)**

public infrastructure and services, budgeting costed service improvements, and monitoring service results. *Participatory budgeting* typically includes setting service and infrastructure priorities in a participatory manner, initiated by elected officials; holding open budget deliberations; and reporting to citizens on budget execution. While these two processes have somewhat different objectives (one targets more effective services, the other better governance), these processes share public involvement in setting

priorities, budgeting openly, and reporting back to citizens, all of which build process transparency and local accountability for service results. Through processes, local elected officials and technical staff alike come under greater pressure to deliver results that are visible to citizens.

Service Management and Organizational Improvements

Local service departments face numerous challenges in improving service delivery, including management inertia, political interference, and lack of knowledge of improved service-delivery models. Hence, improving internal management is often an element of service improvement. It requires assessing the way the department is producing the service, from departmental organization and service costing to partnerships with the private sector. According to RTI's Service Improvement Planning methodology, the steps for service improvement include assessing:

> **Nigeria: Local government services**
>
> Despite significant government and donor well drilling programs, much of the rural population in Bauchi state lacked access to potable water. Following training on RTI's Service Improvement Planning (SIP) process, a project team assisted pilot local governments in examining their water point maintenance program. The departments developed strategies for conducting routine maintenance and replacing minor pump parts that had failed and trained community water committees in maintenance procedures. **(See Case A)**

- existing service deficits (i.e., mapping existing service delivery against need),
- organizational structure,
- production process (e.g., technologies and community or private partnerships),
- maintenance,
- financing,
- human resources, and
- customer relations.

Because departmental change is difficult, establishing support from higher-level managers and elected council members for the improvement process is critical for sustainable change. RTI applied this process to varying degrees across the cases documented in the annex, but in all cases, key intervention points emerged. In some places, production improvement led to greater partnerships with community groups to deliver an aspect of the service. In other projects, service departments changed their internal operation and maintenance procedures. In still other instances, partnerships with private sector firms (public-private partnerships, or PPPs) emerged as the best option for improvement. Part of the process might have included the department establishing a dialogue with the user group. This proved to be particularly effective in the case of services that were directly linked to fees, such as markets, motor parks, slaughterhouses. The end results were greater user satisfaction with the service and improved revenue mobilization.

The physical organization of services has a strong link to public access and responsiveness. In countries in which public access to service offices historically was difficult and the service process was opaque—as in the formerly communist countries in the sample cases—setting up one-stop shops or citizen service centers proved highly successful. In this arrangement, frequently used services—from tax payments to civil records—were brought together in a common, easily accessible space in town hall. The physical rearrangement typically was accompanied by process streamlining and greater transaction transparency (e.g., publicizing fees, standardizing timelines). In Bulgaria, RTI started with pilots in five

municipalities; 10 years later, more than 150 municipalities, without external support, had established citizen service centers.

Citizen Participation and Civil Society Strengthening

Traditionally, citizens or users have been seen as passive consumers of local services. However, more current governance-driven perspectives tend to view citizens as potential partners in service delivery and as rights-bearing users. They can assist the supply side on issues such as expanding access, improving quality, and identifying needed infrastructure improvements. This role builds service responsiveness and accountability. Indeed, citizen participation has been shown to improve service outcomes.

In the RTI case studies, citizen participation was facilitated by a wide range of mechanisms in all phases of service delivery, from planning and implementation to monitoring. In the planning phase, surveys of citizen preferences and community or user consultations proved successful. In operations, participatory mechanisms ranged from formalized or informal user participation in managing the service, to community in-kind contributions toward building neighborhood infrastructure. Citizen satisfaction surveys or report cards were the most frequently used mechanism to monitor local service delivery (see the next subsection).

> **Philippines: Health Service Delivery**
>
> The Philippines Local Government Code assigned public health as a local government function and designated health boards as the primary mechanisms for citizen participation in the service. RTI assisted in setting up Quality Assurance Partnership Committees (QAPCs) in two provinces as the practical implementation of a participatory approach to quality assurance and governance. The QAPC included health facility staff and community members. They identified issues for service improvement and implemented a variety of internal and public information activities. Results from greater citizen involvement in the QAPCs included increased service usage and mobilization of target populations for specific services.
> **(Health Systems 20/20 Project, task implemented by RTI International, 2006–2011. See Brinkerhoff, 2011)**

While citizen participation has often been seen as monitoring and oversight, in RTI's experience, this role in fact was often difficult to exercise because of power and information imbalances between citizens and service providers. In such circumstances, this approach could result in unproductive confrontation. On the other hand, a more collaborative approach that emphasized joint deliberation and consultation improved service governance and contributed to improved outcomes.

Service Monitoring and Oversight

RTI's experience in monitoring local government service delivery, as summarized for this paper, ranged from establishing citizen complaint processes and strengthening council oversight capacity to establishing performance management systems and conducting citizen satisfaction surveys. Complaint systems provided an avenue for citizens to identify specific service problems or failures and included an internal tracking system so that the response could be followed. Technologies used ranged from complaint boxes in Indonesia to cell-phone-based texting systems in Uganda.

The RTI-assisted performance management systems described in this paper were based on specific performance indicators that measured service effectiveness and efficiency, and typically were used in an annual budget process to assess service productivity, workload, and cost. This type of performance measurement system in an individual local government provided information to officials and citizens about service performance on a year-to-year basis. When performance measurement systems were instituted across a number of local governments or across a local government system, local governments and citizens could see how their government was performing in relation to other local governments. Poor or subpar performance could motivate change and improvement, while good performances could become benchmarks or best practices for other local governments to follow. Regardless of the scope of the performance measurement, the systems required significant data collection on service needs and production, as well as a cost accounting system to allocate costs to individual services.

> **Kosovo: Local Service Performance Measurement**
>
> RTI assisted the Ministry of Local Government and local governments in Kosovo in measuring the performance of local services. This monitoring was a way of assessing the degree to which local governments were fulfilling their mandate under the country's decentralization program, as well as building the awareness of local managers of the importance of services to citizens. Working with a team of local officials, RTI developed a list of indicators for 15 local services on which local governments would report annually. At the same time, the project conducted annual citizen satisfaction surveys to gauge citizen perceptions of local services. While initially a contentious process, by the second year local officials understood the importance of improvement and demonstrated results to citizens. RTI's project used the results as a criterion for awarding incentive grants, and the Ministry of Local Government—following that example—also developed service improvement criteria for awarding central government grants to local governments.
> **(USAID Effective Municipalities Initiative, 2007–2010. See RTI International, 2010)**

Citizen satisfaction surveys or report cards became an important measure of the public's perception of the quality of local services. They were useful in local strategic planning and goal-setting exercises to identify citizen priorities and areas for service improvement over a multiyear planning period or for an annual budget. RTI used these types of surveys to gauge the performance of an individual service (water) or a range of services (basic public works); and to monitor the more general governance performance of a local government (services, budget process, and access to information and decision-making). Citizen surveys provided a way for citizens to participate in service decision-making and a way to build the local officials' accountability to the community they were serving.

4.   Conclusions

Local services are a critical element of local development and reflect the nature of local governance. RTI's experiences demonstrated that service improvements could be achieved through numerous avenues, including reforming policies, strengthening the capacity and practices of the service agent (supply side), and building the capacity of citizens and user groups (the demand side). While these three were highly interrelated, the cross-cutting element was ***improving the accountability of service decision-makers to citizens and service users.*** This meant that the greater the opportunities for citizens to hold officials accountable for their actions, the more responsive they were to the quality and quantity of services that the community needed. The opportunities for accountability were created by a policy environment that assigned local responsibility and adequate financing for services. The legal framework could provide public access to information about plans for services, and allow citizens to participate in service decision-making. Opportunities also were created by specific mechanisms at the local level that

allowed citizens to participate, advocate for their interests, and provide active feedback on local government performance. To summarize on our key point: While technical management solutions may provide a measure of improvement, greater accountability will drive more responsive decision-making and build demand for improved technical performance.

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ANNEX: CASES OF RTI PROJECTS

Case A: The Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, Development (LEAD) Project – Nigeria

Background

Local governments have long been a pillar in Nigeria's governmental structure, with the current system of federal, state, and local governments established in the 1999 Federal Constitution. The Constitution established the 774 local government authorities (LGAs) as a system of "local democratically elected local councils" and required the states "to ensure under law the structure and function of local government." However, in spite of the theoretical importance of these structures, local governments have long been subject to patronage and political control, to the point that they are seen as weak, ineffective, and corrupt. Indeed, the recent tendency has been for the federal and state governments to reassume many of the service responsibilities that had been bestowed on local governments. Local governments also depend to a large degree on flow-down funding from the federal government, which is controlled and distributed by the states.

Role confusion, lack of resources, improper use of resources, and low capacity in LGAs have had a devastating effect on the quality of public services at the local level. Service indicators such as access to water and sanitation, school enrollment rates, pupils-per-classroom ratios, and infant survival rates are particularly bad in northern Nigeria. Overall, this situation has created an enormous gap in confidence and trust between citizens and local governments. The organization Afrobarometer's 2008 public-attitude survey results indicated that nearly two-thirds of Nigerian citizens felt that LGA services were performed fairly badly or badly (see Practical Sampling International & Michigan State University, n.d.). Further, local governments were essentially black boxes to their citizens—there were few if any openings for citizen participation in determining service priorities and little communication between the local government and citizens in general as service users and fee payers.

Recognizing the cross-cutting nature of governance in service delivery, in 2009 USAID/Nigeria designed the Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, Development project as the flagship local governance program to complement its major programs in health and education. All three programs focus on two states in Northern Nigeria: Bauchi and Sokoto. LEAD has four objectives:

1. Strengthened capacity of local governments, targeting the management capacity of elected and technical officials;
2. Increased transparency of local government operations, focusing on improving the budget process and increasing local revenue flows;
3. Increased capacity of local organizations, building the capacity of local civil society organizations to interact with local government and advocate for their interests;
4. Improved service delivery, resulting from improved local government capacity and increased citizen involvement in service delivery.

Building Local Capacity for Service Improvement

RTI recognized that to successfully implement the LEAD project, it must design an approach that included building the technical and management capacity of both local government (the supply side) and civil society organizations (the demand side) and establishing procedures to bring the two together to

negotiate expected outcomes. This capacity-building and partnership approach would be applied to the general procedures of local government and to the practices in specific services. The following three LEAD activities demonstrate.

Community priority setting: Historically, the list of development projects identified in the annual budget was derived from some combination of LGA councilors' ideas, technical staff proposals, or state agency priorities. The community at large, neighborhoods, and special-interest groups had little input into selecting development priorities. RTI introduced a community priority-setting exercise that began at the neighborhood (ward) level. Diverse community groups (women's and youth groups, associations, and sectoral groups) were invited to identify their needs at a meeting attended by a combination of elected officials and LGA staff. After open discussion, citizens voted on the priorities to establish a short list that would be transmitted upward. Finally, at the LGA level, the proposals were brought forward to identify the priorities, determined by representatives of all the neighborhoods. The highest-priority projects were then integrated into the LGA annual budget. In some LGAs, the priority list constituted almost the entire development project budget of the LGA. The process was repeated annually. Particularly in Sokoto State, LGAs also developed communications to citizens about the list that was approved by the state. Some LGAs fully embraced the process, initiating annual priority-setting exercises independently of LEAD.

Local revenue mobilization: Because only one to five percent of LGA revenues were derived from local sources, LEAD developed a local revenue-mobilization campaign. The activity included building the awareness of administrative staff about the nature of allowed revenue sources and effective mobilization practices. The campaign also emphasized communications with fee payers for services in which there was a fee associated with service delivery, such as markets and roadside venders selling in LGA kiosks. The dialogue between the two parties allowed the fee payers to articulate service improvements they wanted (more kiosks, better sanitation in the market) in exchange for higher payment compliance. The exercise resulted in significant revenue increases for the town, and improved services for the vendors.

Water service improvements: At the beginning of a LEAD-sponsored service-improvement activity, local officials identified water point maintenance as a high priority. The government and donors had spent considerable resources on drilling boreholes in rural areas, many of which no longer functioned because of lack of maintenance. The service-improvement program included inventorying the location of all wells, but especially those that were nonfunctioning; identifying the nature of any problems (typically, failure of small parts in the pump); and training community water user groups in pump maintenance, allowing them to be proactive if a well stopped functioning. The service-improvement teams in each LGA also lobbied their council for funding specifically for major pump repairs. In the two years following the start of the water point maintenance program in Bauchi State, community groups and local governments had repaired 399 water points, providing access to safe drinking water for nearly 140,000 people. In addition, local governments started to budget for major repairs and community groups mobilized their own resources for minor repairs. The LEAD pilot local governments have gone a step further by applying the same service-improvement methodology to other services, such as slaughterhouses and lorry parks.

Conclusions

The LEAD examples demonstrate that positive results can be achieved by mobilizing and building the capacity of the community—the service demand side—while also building the capacity of the supply side to use new management practices and bringing them together in a service-improvement partnership. The keys to the approach have been its participatory nature and the underscoring of the relationship between participation and benefits to all parties (services to users, revenues to the local government).

Case B: The Local Governance Support Program – Indonesia[1]

Background

The Local Governance Support Program, or LGSP (April 2005–September 2009) was an integrated set of assistance activities designed to support both sides of the good-governance equation—supply of and demand for good governance. Its objectives were twofold. First, it supported local governments to become more democratic, more competent at the core tasks of governance, and more capable of supporting improved service delivery and management of resources. Second, it aimed to strengthen the capacity of local legislatures and civil society to perform their legitimate roles of legislative representation and oversight, and citizen participation in the decision-making process. The US$61.8 million project, one of the largest USAID governance projects at the time, provided intensive technical assistance and training to 62 district governments in nine provinces of Indonesia. In addition, LGSP assisted several provincial governments and in 2006 was expanded to provide policy support to key national ministries to strengthen the enabling environment for effective decentralization.

With decentralization reforms starting in the late 1990s, by 2005 the policy framework to enhance service delivery had moved forward, but attitudes and practices at local levels remained unchanged. Thus, while challenges existed at the national policy level (corruption, lack of monitoring, some reversal on important local governance issues), the primary focus in LGSP was on working with local governments and civil society to improve service delivery and state–society interactions.

Local Service Management

LGSP incorporated all the elements of the RTI framework into its approach to improving service governance: participatory planning, finance and budgeting, public service management systems, and strengthening demand for democratic governance at the local level. The project also added an emphasis on legislative strengthening at both national and local levels that cut across these areas.

Participatory planning: At the start of LGSP, local actors had a poor understanding of the national planning framework. LGSP strengthened processes for preparing planning documents, by working with planning and sector officials, legislators, and facilitators who encouraged citizen engagement. As part of its legislative strengthening efforts, LGSP worked with local councilors to develop their understanding of participatory budgeting and public service oversight.

By the end of the project, a majority of local councils used mechanisms to solicit citizen and stakeholder input into local plans and budgets. End-of-project surveys of local government and CSO perceptions of local councils indicated improvements in the responsiveness and timeliness of council processes and citizen access to them. Council members perceived that the executive had become more responsive in accommodating council inputs, with more than 63% seeing an improved commitment by the government to listen to them. With LGSP's support, participation by council budget committees in the executive-led development planning process doubled in one year. LGSP also supported the drafting of 20 local regulations to promote citizen participation and transparency.

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[1] This case draws heavily on the *LGSP Final Report* (RTI International, 2009).

Finance and budgeting: In 2005, local officials lacked clarity on and skills to implement the budgeting processes introduced with decentralization. LGSP therefore designed a highly applied training program to develop core skills in budgeting, accounting, and asset management, with particular focus on performance-based budgeting. Programs to improve the understanding of budgeting processes and analysis were provided to local councils, civil society, and media to encourage these actors to exercise oversight. After these interventions, 34 local governments produced a performance-based budget by 2009, and timely approval of annual budgets (by December of prior year) doubled between 2007 and 2009. Local councils held more than 110 budget hearings during the period 2007–2009 and, by the end of the project, 85% analyzed draft budgets.

Public service management systems: On a demand-driven basis, LGSP conducted small-scale experiments to improve public service management systems. The project used an action planning methodology to help interested local governments address a specific service-delivery issue. The resulting plans were used to strengthen relevant data management, service organization, and customer relations. A number of these plans (such as a center for integrated public economic services, a unit for electronic management of government procurement, and an electronic citizen information service) proved successful and were replicated by other regions. To sustain improvements and encourage further reforms, LGSP worked with civil society organizations (CSOs), universities, independent consultants, and small consulting firms to advocate reform, provide technical advice, and facilitate implementation of the reform agenda.

Civil society strengthening: LGSP worked with CSOs to strengthen their oversight of budgets and service delivery. LGSP focused on equipping CSOs with a basic understanding of how the planning and budget process worked (see above) and on helping them develop advocacy and analytical skills to negotiate effectively in these areas. LGSP supported more than 270 civil society organizations in monitoring basic public services such as health care and education, through direct oversight of public services and participation in multi-stakeholder groups working to improve basic public services. Mechanisms included citizen report cards (19 jurisdictions), citizen charters (41 public service provision points), electronic citizen information services (9 districts), and local government budget analysis software (12 jurisdictions).

As a result of LGSP assistance, CSO participation in development planning meetings increased by a factor of 2½ times, and two-thirds of the CSOs became able to access and analyze the budget. By the close of the project, 60% of councils were involving CSOs in preparing draft regulations, and 70% routinely held public consultations on these. An estimated 82% of civil society activists were involved in public consultation mechanisms in 2009, up from 35% in 2005.

National legislative strengthening: LGSP was designed to improve local services, including strengthening local regulatory frameworks, but was expanded to encompass national policy reforms. National regulations often drew on local-level experimentation that captured the attention of Ministry of Home Affairs officials (with LGSP's help), enhancing sustainability as the practices had been tried and tested before adoption and dissemination.

Conclusions

To improve demand for service improvements, LGSP worked with CSOs and local councils. The project also addressed the supply side, enhancing officials' budgeting and planning capacities, and contextual elements such as legislation and participatory planning processes. This multipronged approach encouraged accountability by directly enhancing oversight processes and opportunities. It also gave council members and CSOs greater confidence in dealing with the executive branch, and encouraged collaboration between citizens and reform-minded legislators and officials. Such shifts in local power relations are likely to introduce more sustainable change than improving services through technical training provided solely to government staff.

Case C: The Local Government Initiative – Bulgaria

Background

Like in most former Soviet bloc countries, the late 1980s and early 1990s in Bulgaria saw the fall of the communist system and the move toward democratic governance and an open market economy. Bulgaria's Constitution of 1991 and, subsequently, the Local Self-Government and Administration Act, created a framework for autonomous local government. Municipal elections were held successfully thereafter at four-year intervals. With the legal framework and the election system in place, the basic processes for local accountability were established. However, translating these processes into effective local governments that responded to citizen needs against the historical backdrop of centralized, party-based decision making proved more difficult. Moreover, the lack of locally managed resources limited local initiative. Despite these constraints, a small group of reform-minded mayors from both progressive and socialist (former communist) parties emerged and embraced more Western-style management and democratic process.

Recognizing the contribution that strong local governments could make to Bulgaria's democratic transition, USAID began assisting this group of mayors and a few regional associations of municipalities to develop sound management practices and demonstrate the value of effective local government. In 1996, the assistance was formalized under the name of the Local Government Initiative (LGI).[2] For the first four years of the program, technical assistance and grants focused on training mayors and technical and administrative staff, and opening spaces for citizens to participate in their own government. Citizen service centers and improved solid waste management let citizens see a different side of public administration. Elected mayors recognized the value of responding to citizen needs for both philosophical and political reasons and, through LGI "partners" meetings, recognized the value of sharing experiences and working together toward a shared objective of stronger local government.

Policy Reform for Local Fiscal and Service Improvements

While the initial phase of the Local Government Initiative was successful at building a core of committed local government practitioners and support associations, by 2000, this audience and USAID realized that the principal constraint to strong local government was indeed the policy environment. A governmental fiscal crisis induced by an economic downturn exposed the confused and nontransparent nature of intergovernmental relations. With little revenue-raising authority of their own, local governments depended largely on a complex and opaque system of transfers from the central government that resulted in unpredictable transfers and significant disparities in revenue levels among local governments. Local governments found themselves unable to pay salaries and utility bills as central transfers decreased because of the fiscal crisis, while social service demands from citizens and service mandates from the central government increased. In addition, responsibilities for key services such as education and health were shared with the central government in a poorly defined way that left local government little management flexibility to adapt to local needs. LGI documented these structural problems with the assistance of a working group representing both local governments and national ministries.

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[2] RTI International joined a group of USAID contractors in 1997. From 2001 to 2007, RTI implemented LGI under contract to USAID.

At the same time, the group of vocal mayors had expanded and was buoyed by its accountability to citizens, giving greater legitimacy to the mayors' outcry. The National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria also became more effective at articulating a common local position for reform, sounding active opposition to government policies.

In 2001, with the crisis acknowledged by all parties, LGI organized a policy dialogue process that included the development of policy analyses that were represented at a stakeholder forum, At the forum, local governments, national ministries, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) agreed to a framework for fiscal decentralization as the means to resolve the crisis. Following the forum, the government created a stakeholder working group, with support from LGI, to develop the specific actions under the policy. The group began by adopting a set of objectives for the policy that addressed intergovernmental transfers, own-source revenues, and service responsibilities. Over the ensuing five years, the reform process produced several key pieces of legislation that restructured and clarified intergovernmental relations and empowered local government. The most significant reforms came in the Municipal Budgets Act of 2003, which included the following:

- Clear delineation of state-mandated and discretionary local service responsibilities, with the commitment for state funding for mandated services
- Service funding standards, based in transparent criteria, for mandated services, as well as formalized mechanisms for funding them
- An equalization grant to ensure revenues for resource-poor local governments
- A public hearing requirement on the draft local government budget
- A defined capital budget system with a debt service limit.

Other major legal reforms included the Municipal Fees Act, the Municipal Debt Act, and a constitutional amendment that granted local government taxing power. By the end of the project, budget deficits that had plagued local governments at the start had disappeared, borrowing for infrastructure investments had increased, and local governments were able to devote more resources to local services and infrastructure investments.

Because education dominated local budgets, LGI focused on education as one area for service improvement. Building on a World Bank-funded experiment of delegating increased budget authority to local governments and individual schools, LGI documented how increased authority to allocate local education resources translated into improved services. Based on LGI's analyses and training in delegated budgets, the Ministry of Education adapted the approach as policy for its largest school systems in 2007.

Conclusions

The scope of the reform process in Bulgaria would not have been possible without the base of support that had been built at the local level by LGI's early efforts. The early efforts equipped mayors with both knowledge that allowed them to be strong advocates and, more importantly, the legitimacy bestowed by the level of their local support. That local officials who showed themselves to be more accountable to citizens by providing better services enjoyed a high level of support was incontrovertible: By the end of LGI in 2007, approximately 25 percent of the National Assembly was drawn from the ranks of former local government officials.

Case D: Faisons Ensemble Project (Multi-Sectoral Interventions to Advance Democratic Governance) – Guinea[3]

Background

The *Faisons Ensemble* project, implemented by RTI from 2007 to 2013, worked to improve the lives of citizens through strategic multisectoral interventions in governance, health, education, and agriculture and natural resource management (Ag/NRM). These sectoral activities integrated democracy and governance goals by either strengthening civil society knowledge, behavior, and participation; or improving government accountability, transparency, and efficiency at the local, regional and national levels. The project worked with government, civil society, media, and the private sector to forge alliances and support positive change. From the onset in 2007, work focused on *communes* in the administrative regions of Greater Conakry, Faranah, Kankan, and N'Zérékoré. Later, in October 2011, an extension allowed work to expand to additional communes outside the original zone.

The objective of the Annual Program Statement (APS) issued by USAID in 2006 that resulted in the *Faisons Ensemble* project was to "Advance Democratic Governance through multi-sectoral interventions in health, education and agriculture/natural resource management." The APS specified four Democratic Governance (DG) objectives:

- **DG Goal Number 1 –** Improved effectiveness of government institutions and decentralization and local service delivery
- **DG Goal Number 2** – Greater visibility and effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts
- **DG Goal Number 3** – Increased capacity and effectiveness of civil society working through strong civil society and community-based organizations (CSOs and CBOs) that are well managed and participate, demand accountability and transparency in service delivery, and advocate for good governance
- **DG Goal Number 4 –** Increased citizen access to more diverse source of information.

Key Program Approaches and Interventions

The *Faisons Ensemble* team developed several innovative strategies and initiatives to achieve program objectives. For example, the **One-Team Approach** for implementation promoted cross-sectoral collaboration and integration of governance into all project interventions. Thus, the project's structure mirrored the strategic framework developed by USAID. This helped promote consistent messages and collaboration among team members. Also central to the project's implementation strategy was the **With Many Approach,** which brought together government, civil society, media, and the private sector to seek areas of common interest. This approach enabled the *Faisons Ensemble* team to work with government and civil society and to identify win-win situations where both entities saw advantages of working together. The networking also extended in some cases to the media and, to a lesser degree, to the private sector. The concept of selecting **Beacons,** or giving stature to high-performing communes, made these communes want to retain their status and encourage others to emulate them. The Beacons also established **Innovation Circles**—voluntary citizen groups to help address issues of concern to the commune. Many of the Innovation Circles increased dialogue between citizens and officials, helped mobilize resources,

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[3] For more details, see Arandel (2013).

and worked to address commune problems. Initiatives such as **Good Governance Innovation Exchange Fairs** and **Mystery Client** visits to test the quality control of voluntary counseling and testing services for HIV/AIDS supported the objectives of peer-to-peer learning and citizen oversight of public services.

The strategies described above and the targeted project interventions (see text box) enabled the implementation team to have a transformational impact on many communes. At the project onset, for example, few communes regularly held open public sessions, and officials only paid lip service to community participation. The project was successful at introducing new governance concepts and practices, such as:

- civil-society-led social audits of local government,
- citizen audits of the performance of health centers,
- partnerships between civil society and communal officials to collect taxes, and
- use of local radio stations to inform the population of communal deliberations.

> **Key *Faisons Ensemble* Interventions**
>
> ♦ Capacity assessment and development for communes, NGOs, and CSOs
> ♦ Support to community-based governance structures in health, education, and agriculture and natural resource management sectors
> ♦ Rights-based civic awareness and knowledge dissemination campaigns
> ♦ Support to citizen oversight initiatives, such as Mystery Clients and social auditing
> ♦ Technical and governance training for key stakeholders with focus on local management, mobilization of resources, and service-delivery improvement
> ♦ Peer-to-peer exchange programs (fairs, study tours, peer coaching and advising)
> ♦ Technical and financial support to voluntary counseling and testing centers for HIV/AIDS
> ♦ Support to public policy reform in decentralization, health, and agriculture and natural resource management

These new concepts led to new behaviors, such as when a youth group successfully demanded the removal of a mayor because he was unable to explain what the commune government had done with mining payment receipts.

The project was also able to achieve significant sectoral results. As measured by periodic surveys, citizen perceptions of health service delivery in *Faisons Ensemble* communes improved during the life of the project. Health center directors in areas reached by the project began working more openly with community-based management committees, and school directors became more responsive to the parent–teacher associations. Transparency and accountability also increased through citizens' greater participation in local government, as well as through posting of budgets and cost for services, media reporting on local government actions, officials respecting procurement rules, and social auditing. The project's civic society and civic engagement accomplishments also were notable, with the strengthening of 18 implementing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and some 900 CSOs receiving assistance to increase their internal governance and ability to advocate for and represent their constituencies.

The project's successes were less notable at the central level, largely because of a coup d'état in 2008 that resulted in the suspension of project support at this level. Nevertheless, there were successes in helping establish policies, guidelines, procedures, and changes in the health, education, and Ag/NRM sectors and within the *Ministère de l'Administration du Territoire et de la Décentralisation* (MATD, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization). These included working with the MATD to develop a tool to audit communal governments; changing the scopes of work for agents of the *Direction Nationale des Eaux et Forets* (National Directorate for Water and Forests) and the *Agence Nationale pour la Promotion Rural et le Conseil Agricole* (National Agency for Rural Development and Advisory

Services) so they would be more responsive to citizen needs; and promulgating policies that improved quality and access of services in health, education, and Ag/NRM.

Key Lessons Learned from *Faisons Ensemble*

Faisons Ensemble achieved remarkable results and demonstrated that good governance can lead to improved service delivery. While the conditions that led to the design and influenced the implementation of *Faisons Ensemble* are unlikely to be repeated, much can be learned from the *Faisons Ensemble* experience for practitioners who want to use governance approaches as a lever to improve service delivery.

The first lesson[4] is that, in the absence of an effective policy framework or of strong national and subnational government institutions, meaningful change can be initiated from the base. *Faisons Ensemble* demonstrated that when local stakeholders come together to address issues of common interest, they can achieve meaningful results. This is particularly true in rural areas and small towns, where visible impact can be achieved with limited resources.

Our second lesson is that disseminating knowledge and information can have a deep impact when combined with a rights-based approach. As stakeholders understand they have a right to receive services that they are paying for through their taxes, they become empowered to demand better services and hold providers accountable. This lesson also proved true for local officials, many of whom were unaware of the full range of functions devolved to the communes under the communal charter. Obtaining that knowledge enabled them to advocate for an effective transfer of their functions.

A third lesson derives from some of the limitations of *Faisons Ensemble* interventions in promoting collaboration among different levels of government, especially deconcentrated administrative structures such as the prefectures. Collaboration was difficult for two main reasons: (1) the prefectures were accountable only to the central level, not to local citizens; and (2) the communes (rightfully) were advocating to reclaim some of the prefectures' functions. The Guinean context[5] did not allow *Faisons Ensemble* to devote sufficient effort to promote collaboration between the communes and the prefectures or to develop mechanisms for downward accountability.

A fourth lesson is to keep a broad multisectoral focus as a means to promote stakeholder engagement and to generate mutually reinforcing impacts. For example, in rural areas, agricultural development is key to improving living conditions but is impacted by natural resources management practices, livestock breeding, and traditional hunting practices. Likewise, literacy promotes women's social and economic empowerment and should be a critical dimension to any gender strategy. As stakeholders work together to promote broad-based development, they become increasingly aware of the interconnectedness of the challenges they face.

Finally, **our fifth lesson** is that projects need to strive to achieve a delicate balance between supporting civil society advocacy and promoting collaboration between government and nongovernment

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[4] It is important to note that as a result of the 2008 coup, the project was prohibited from working with central government representatives for nearly two years, leaving the project no choice but to focus on grassroots efforts.
[5] The ban on working with government officials extended to any deconcentrated structures representing the central state, such as the prefectures.

actors. *Faisons Ensemble* combined a rights-based, advocacy-focused approach with incentives for stakeholders to work together toward achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. It showed that a collaborative model could yield better results than a potentially more confrontational approach.