

Championing Leadership and Innovation in Nigeria

Nigerians are not new to the concept of local governance. Even before Nigeria's Constitution of 1999 established civilian rule and defined the 774 local government authorities/areas (LGAs), local governments were well-entrenched recipients of favor under several of Nigeria's military rulers. However, the country's decentralized governing structure has not adequately provided a voice to the average citizen or ensured that basic services are consistently available. According to a survey, nearly two thirds of Nigerians feel that LGAs manage service delivery fairly badly or badly.

Nigeria's challenge is not a lack of governance structure, but a lack of governing capacity. Local Nigerian authorities are given the responsibility of leadership, but, in many cases, they lack the skills to address the challenges before them. Moreover, Nigerian citizens lack the knowledge and abilities necessary to demand accountability from government representatives and articulate their needs. Inappropriate use of limited resources only has added to the rising levels of dissatisfaction and distrust that many Nigerians feel toward their local leadership.

Leading through Innovation

The Nigeria Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy and Development (LEAD) Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and led by RTI International aims to sustainably alter the landscape of local governance by fostering a spirit of innovation, where both government and civil society leaders are inspired to develop and disseminate locally created best practices and solve their own problems.

LEAD works with governments, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen the skills needed to create a more transparent and responsive governing environment. The project also aims to improve service delivery, especially in health and education. It is being implemented in the northern states of Bauchi and Sokoto.



Women participate in a LEAD-sponsored community mobilization activity in Bauchi LGA, organized by Rahama Women Development Program. [Photo: LEAD Local Government Coordinator]

Through a highly competitive self-nomination process, RTI selected 10 "champion" local governments in the first round to receive training and spearhead innovative initiatives. These 10 champion LGAs currently serve as mentors to other communities in each state that are interested in applying specific best practices. The LEAD Project recently selected another round of 10 champion LGAs and is expanding mentoring and peer exchange programs to more geographic areas within Bauchi and Sokoto.

Strengthening Local Governments and Service Delivery

RTI's assistance to a champion local government begins with an assessment of skill level, effectiveness, and knowledge gaps among local council members and government employees entrusted with service delivery by using RTI's Local Government Development Framework. LEAD Project staff follow up the analysis with practical, hands-on training on topics such as planning; budgeting; policy analysis; leadership; management; and public relations, over a period of three years. The project emphasizes transparency procedures for functions, like budgeting, procurement, and hiring.

The champion LGA selection process generated such enthusiasm that the chairman of Toro Local Government in Bauchi State solicited LEAD's immediate technical assistance, with an offer to finance it directly by the Toro Local Government.

LEAD also targets specific service improvements through a participatory, inclusive planning process with civil society organizations, development committees, and other community groups that identify two to three service priorities for each champion community. For instance, as a direct result of LEAD's intervention, residents of the Katagum LGA participated in a community priority-setting process that resulted in the inclusion of all six priority areas in the 2011 annual budget. LEAD supports local councils to create Service Improvement Plans and take specific actions that will result in visible improvements in the targeted service areas. By providing citizens with the services they expect and need, the project hopes to increase citizens' trust in their local governments. In addition, LEAD initiated a participatory strategic planning process in the champion LGAs in Bauchi and Sokoto states and finalized a Community-based Strategic Planning Guide to assist champion LGAs to improve service delivery in their communities.

Bolstering Civil Society and Increasing Transparency

To create an accountable, responsive government, the LEAD Project collaborates with civil society and public sector counterparts. In addition to cultivating capable leaders and service providers, civil society must be actively and effectively engaged in the process of oversight and advocacy. The project provides capacity building to a broad range of organizations at the community and state levels on topics—including strategic planning, budgeting, management, and advocacy—to equip them with tools to hold local government accountable.

Using its “With Many” approach, RTI is helping to broaden local development dialogue to include new voices by bringing together diverse community stakeholders to discuss concrete community issues and new strategies to solve them. For example, using this approach, LEAD simultaneously works



Local government officials and community representatives validate the LEAD Local Government Development Framework document in the Dass LGA of Bauchi State, July 2010. [Photo: Boniface Kassam]

at the state level to promote legislative changes that provide more citizen access to information and local decision making, especially related to budgeting. As a result of LEAD's advocacy and assistance, Sokoto State domesticated the Fiscal Related Laws; these laws increase the transparency of budget allocations from the state to local governments.

Getting the Word Out

An important aspect of the LEAD Project lies in the vigorous dissemination of ideas that produce the greatest impact for local citizens. The best practices and creative solutions generated by the champion communities' experience are being shared with counterparts in other local governments. This sharing not only occurs through mentorship and peer-to-peer learning, but it also occurs through dissemination across multiple platforms, including an aggressive national media campaign, workshops, LGA Innovations Fairs, and *LEADing Innovations*, the project's newsletter. Broadcasting lessons learned helps raise awareness among the broader population about the importance of effective local governance and increases demand for a higher standard of leadership

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