***AidData Proposed Additions to Counterpart International Workplan***

Building off of our conversations with CPI, we have revised the impact evaluation accordingly, focusing on the effects of greater transparency and accountability of public dialogues on elite and citizen engagement and the effects of follow on information dissemination on citizen collective action.

1. **Are dialogues strengthened when the citizen priorities enumerated in them are recorded and publicized? [Toward this end, CONGAFEN, RAIL and AEC will incorporate a standardized documentation scheme that records the priorities highlighted by citizens in a randomly selected subset of dialogues and meetings]**

One of the core objectives of the PRG-PA is to improve collective (government and citizen) responsiveness to priority public needs by increasing the capacity of Nigeriens to undertake and sustain collective action that holds their representatives accountable. Few institutions are as critical for responsive government as political accountability, in which citizens possess the capabilities and capacity to hold the government answerable for its policies.[[1]](#footnote-1) Extensive research demonstrates the positive effects of broad-based political accountability on provision of public services;[[2]](#footnote-2) even limited accountability in authoritarian regimes is found to improve human development.[[3]](#footnote-3) While much existing research on political accountability has tended to analyze the problem at a high-level of aggregation (e.g., in which scholars examine institutional patterns cross-nationally and their effect on public goods provision), there has been an important shift in research to the micro-foundations of responsive governance that is highly relevant to the PRG-PA in Niger.[[4]](#footnote-4) These studies have sought to leverage community-based monitoring, technological innovations and informational interventions to better understand the determinants of bottom-up accountability.

Two broad takeaways can be drawn from this emerging micro-level literature. First, in institutionally weak states, in which citizens find it difficult to learn about how resources are allocated, the relative quality of governance or the priorities of others in their communities, coordinated attempts to organize and improve access to information about the quality of public services, the performance of elected representatives or articulation of public preferences can potentially have an empowering effect on citizens and, in turn, lead to more responsive government.[[5]](#footnote-5) Following from this theoretical and empirical literature, we propose testing the effect meeting transparency has on elite and citizen engagement.

While all community meetings will discuss, record and publicize the citizen priorities to emerge from the dialogues, we suggest **treating half of the dialogues with a *transparency or accountability treatment*.** (Note: if there is a clear geographic partition within communes in stakeholder participation—i.e., some stakeholders coming from distinct towns or neighborhoods—and there are going to be multiple dialogues within a given commune, then one possibility is to apply this treatment at the sub-commune level).

The transparency treatment endeavors to ensure the discussions at the community meetings are standardized to make the series of dialogue meetings more observable and accessible to the public as well as a commitment device for the elite stakeholders. To facilitate this standardization we envisage the adoption of a ***citizen priorities reporting system***. The reporting system will include four key components:

* *Schedule of program*: List of when meetings will occur, who is invited to attend and what are the expected outcomes;
* *Roll call*: who attends each meeting;
* *Minutes of each meeting*: about what was discussed, who said what, and any pledges, resolutions or commitments made at the end of the meeting;
* *Commitments and Way Forward*: overall resolutions and commitments made at end of program.

We expect the citizen priorities reporting system to increase awareness, interest and buy-in among citizens, especially as its contents will be broadcast via radio. But it should affect the behavior of the elite stakeholders as well. Knowing that the meetings themselves are being recorded and reported rather than just the outcome of the meetings, we would expect this to increase their level of engagement and commitment, leading to more productive and efficacious dialogue that has a greater likelihood of moving stakeholders, most importantly citizens, toward collective action.

One question is whether such transparency is culturally appropriate. As these meetings are intended to agree upon a set of citizen priorities for the community, it seems that such an intervention can be justified as a channel to strengthen citizen learning and feedback. Moreover, as many of the stakeholders participating in the meetings are public officials and other community leaders, they should have an expectation their activities are of the public’s interest.

A second concern is that greater transparency may ‘scare away’ certain stakeholders and depress elite participation. If this is the case, this would be important to learn and shed light on dynamics that block reform and undermine local solutions to enhance the public good—one of the core aims of the PRG-PA.

***Process***

* AidData could assist in initial designs of the ***citizen priorities reporting system*** and work collaboratively with PRG-PA and advising on its development and use.
* To learn about the system’s impacts, half of the dialogues/meetings in each commune would be randomly assigned to have the system used, while the remaining half would use whatever existing methods of recording were planned, if any. It will be important that the project *not* use the system in those dialogues/meetings not randomly selected.
* PRG-PA would provide the upcoming schedule of dialogues on a 3-6 month calendar (or optimally, longer), and AidData would conduct the random assignment on this basis and provide the selected dialogue list quickly.
* AidData would observe the dialogues by sending 1-2 trained observers to detail the discussions, providing data that would be used for the evaluation (rather than as part of the reporting system).

1. **Is participation in collective action by individual Nigeriens strengthened when progress (or lack thereof) toward citizen priorities by local government is publicized? The PRG-PA project will publicize this progress via media (likely radio) and via SMS follow-ups to a randomly selected subset of dialogue attendees.**

It is important to note that while shedding light on government actions and performance is necessary for increased accountability, informational interventions are no panacea. A number of studies have found that while citizens demonstrate strong demand for greater access to information about government performance and the quality of services, this does not always translate into increased civic and political engagement, improved accountability, and better services.[[6]](#footnote-6) In Uganda, the distribution of detailed scorecards on the performance of members of parliament, regarding their participation in plenary sessions, committee work, and constituency service, had no effect on re-election rates and, strikingly, did not lead to an uptick in citizen knowledge of their MP’s activities.[[7]](#footnote-7) In Kenya, providing parents with test scores on literacy and numeracy exams at the schools in which their children were enrolled along with information on concrete steps they could take to hold their schools accountable for poor performance had no impact on parent behavior.[[8]](#footnote-8) The limitations of informational programs suggest the importance of follow-on interventions, such as media broadcasts, that not only reinforce the original information,[[9]](#footnote-9) but increase citizens’ capabilities (or belief in their capabilities) that it is within their power to can act on that information, that authorities will respond to their actions, and perhaps most importantly for overcoming collective action problems, *they know that others are also receiving this information and plan to act on it to improve government performance.*[[10]](#footnote-10)

To test this hypothesis on the benefits of follow-on interventions to public dialogues, we suggest undertaking an informational campaign that publicizes the progress (or lack thereof) toward citizen priorities by local government via media (likely radio) and via SMS follow-ups to a randomly selected subset of dialogue attendees. We propose that this messaging should not only be specialized—directed at individual citizens to increase their personal sense of responsibility[[11]](#footnote-11)—but also provides concrete examples as to how their fellow citizens are acting on the information they have received to improve government performance.

One concern of this informational component is cost. This may prove a barrier to making follow-up phone calls or holding grassroots meetings. But both radio and especially SMS represent low-cost solutions. In terms of mobile messaging, Frontline SMS is an open platform system that allows sending free SMS.

Another concern is whether the use of SMS dissemination campaigns to update citizens about the progress of achieving citizen priorities risks marginalizing the marginalized—for example, non-phone owners or those with low levels of literacy. Initial research suggests that SMS messaging may actually be a boon to participation of traditionally marginalized groups, such as women or political outsiders, *if they can be reached.*[[12]](#footnote-12) But that is a big caveat and the gender gap in mobile phone ownership is particularly high in Niger. (According to Round 6 of the Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2015 there is a 30 percentage point difference between male and female phone ownership (75% vs 45%, respectively), which is nearly twice that of the average across low- and middle-income countries.) Extra measures will need to be taken to ensure that the information is shared within families and across mobile communication networks. This represents an opportunity to see what types of messages increase information sharing within households, for example, simply emphasizing the importance of sharing the information with other family members.

***Process***

* AidData could assist in initial designs of the messaging as part of the informational campaign around the ***citizen priorities reporting system***.
* AidData would assist in the sampling and random assignment of individuals to be targeted by the SMS campaign, based in part on baseline data collection sampling.
* AidData would collect information on the radio coverage of stations airing messaging as part of the informational campaign.
* AidData would collect data on citizens’ perceptions and experience with the citizen priorities discussed in the dialogues/meetings via household surveys.

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2. Bueno de Mesquita, B., et al. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press. Adsera, A., et al. (2003). "Are you Being Served? Political Accountability and Quality of Government." *Journal of Law, Economics, and organization* 19(2): 445-490. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Miller, M. K. 2015. "Electoral Authoritarianism and Human Development." *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (12). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. To highlight just a few, see Björrkman, M. and J. Svensson. 2009. "Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment on Community-Based Monitoring in Uganda." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124 (2): 735-769. Olken, B. A. (2007). "Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia." *Journal of Political Economy* 115(2). Lieberman, Evan S., Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai. "Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya." *World Development* 60 (2014): 69-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ferraz, Claudio, and Frederico Finan. "Exposing Corrupt Politicians: The Effects of Brazil's Publicly Released Audits on Electoral Outcomes\*." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.2 (2008): 703-745.

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6. Olken, B. A. 2007. "Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia." *Journal of Political Economy* 115 (2). Banerjee, Abhijit V., et al. "Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in education in India." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* (2010): 1-30. Humphreys, Macartan, and Jeremy Weinstein. "Policing politicians: citizen empowerment and political accountability in Uganda preliminary analysis." *Columbia University. Unpublished manuscript* (2012). Lieberman, Evan S., Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai. "Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya." *World Development* 60 (2014): 69-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Humphreys, Macartan, and Jeremy Weinstein. "Policing politicians: citizen empowerment and political accountability in Uganda preliminary analysis." *Columbia University. Unpublished manuscript* (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lieberman, Evan S., Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai. "Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya." *World Development* 60 (2014): 69-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ferraz, Claudio, and Frederico Finan. "Exposing Corrupt Politicians: The Effects of Brazil's Publicly Released Audits on Electoral Outcomes\*." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.2 (2008): 703-745. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Lieberman, Evan S., Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai. "Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya." *World Development* 60 (2014): 69-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Grossman, G., et al. (2015). Can SMS-Mobilization Increase Citizen Reporting of Public Service Deficiencies to Politicians?, Working Paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Grossman, G., et al. (2015). Can SMS-Mobilization Increase Citizen Reporting of Public Service Deficiencies to Politicians?, Working Paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)