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**Participatory Responsive Governance – Principal Activity (PRG-PA)**

**Annual Work Plan**

**February 2016 - January 2017**

**Counterpart International**

**Overview**

In February 2016, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded the $18 million, five-year *Participatory Responsive Governance – Principal Activity* (PRG-PA) program (Cooperative Agreement No. AID-625-LA-16-00001 under Leader with Associates Award No. AID-DFD-A-00-09-00141-00) to Counterpart International.

The purpose of the PRG-PA program is to improve collective (government and citizen) responsiveness to priority public needs, by improving the capacity of stakeholders – including civil society organizations (CSOs), traditional and religious leaders, government representatives, political parties, the media, cultural artists and private sector actors – to identify and examine the local dynamics that either block or promote reform and to enact measures supporting local solutions to enhance the public good. The program will focus its efforts in four regions of the country – Niamey, Agadez, Diffa and Zinder.

The Government of Niger’s (GoN) inability to meet the basic needs of its citizens and to decentralize governance has diminished public confidence and caused citizens to question democracy as a credible system of governance. The Nigerien health and education sectors offer opportunities to promote positive civic engagement and support reform initiatives instituted by the GoN to improve the delivery of health care and education services. Exacerbating Niger’s governance crisis are challenges related to both internal and external security threats, taxing the state’s already limited financial resources to ensure the security of the population. PRG-PA will work to capitalize on the government’s commitment in these areas and support improved outreach to and engagement with citizens.

Having recently completed the first round of legislative and presidential elections in February and a second round presidential run-off election in March, Niger is preparing to hold local elections currently scheduled for January 2017.

The level of voter participation for the legislative and presidential election was the highest since independence recorded at over 67%. The participation level for the presidential run-off election is disputed. The opposition called for a boycott of the vote and claims there was very low voter turn-out while the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) reported a participation rate of nearly 60%.

The local elections present an opportunity to address the deficiencies and to fill gaps in citizens’ knowledge about their role in the process that were identified during the legislative and presidential elections. The postponed date affords time to work with citizens and election stakeholders to capitalize on lessons learned from the earlier rounds of voting and to foster dialogue that focuses political party platforms and election campaigns on citizen priorities laying the ground work for more accountability from elected officials to constituents.

**Program Approach**

Counterpart’s strategic approach to improving collective responsiveness to priority public needs is guided by the program’s theory of change that increased understanding of local dynamics hindering or promoting reform (research) and increased positive and constructive public discourse (dialogue), combined with the improved ability of civil society, government, and political parties to form alliances and partnerships to achieve reform (collective action), will ultimately bolster local solutions that promote the public good and shift incentives away from behaviors that undermine this good.

PRG-PA will work with stakeholders to examine the interaction of these local dynamics, systems, and incentives and create opportunities for dialogue leading to collective actions that encourage government stakeholders to work with civil society, the private sector and the media toward initiatives that benefit Nigerien society as a whole. PRG-PA will support this through capacity strengthening activities aimed to increase the ability of local actors to understand and carry out research-dialogue-action steps to reach shared public policy goals.

PRG-PA activities will work with all stakeholders to build on the results of the Initial Political Economy Analysis Action Research Activity (IPEAAR) to support citizen participation in dialogue with government, and to help multiple stakeholders take action around shared goals based on existing formal and informal ways of influencing the provision of public goods in Niger.

Through dissemination and sharing of existing political economy analysis (PEA) findings in the thematic areas of health and education, particularly about the issues of teacher deployment and the distribution of health care workers, in the first year, the program will lay the ground work for engaging keys actors to assess the best ways to advance action up and down the continuum of local, regional and national decision making structures and processes. It may be determined that research on some issues will need to be expanded and/or deepened to inform and support action initiatives.

PRG-PA will collaborate with the PRG Political Parties Activity (PRG-PP) to complement this work by supporting political parties to better respond to citizens’ priorities and needs. The program will share conclusions from existing PEA on political and economic factors that contribute to the clientelistic electoral system, as well as information from the forums organized by PRG-PP in the period prior to the legislative and presidential elections.

The program will also coordinate with the Local Capacity Strengthening Initial Activity (LCSIA) in its support of select civil society organizations’ ability to engage effectively in issue-focused dialogues and collective action. Monthly collaboration meetings of the aforementioned PRG-PA partner organizations have begun already to share information on the political and security context and to coordinate program activities.

Counterpart will conduct a baseline evaluation of the program that will serve as part of the foundation of information, statistics and judgement for PRG-PA’s monitoring and evaluation system, including the annual works plans and performance monitoring plan. Additionally, it will assist the management team in refining the program design.

Counterpart also will be collaborating with AidData in the development and execution of an impact evaluation of the PRG-PA program.

**Program Activities**

***Program Start-up***

PRG-PA is in the process of hiring national staff members and recruitment is underway for priority positions on the finance, grants, monitoring/evaluation and program teams. The composition, structure and modalities of the PRG-PA consultation committee are under consideration in anticipation of the first meeting in July.

Meetings with donors and other international and local non-governmental organization implementers and key local actors are on-going to present the PRG-PA program and to discuss collaboration and complementarity with existing programs and structures to maximize efforts and budgets, particularly in the target regions. Discussions are underway with Overseas Development Institute (ODI) about the best ways to continue dissemination of the PEA research findings, including brochures. The program has also met with some of the researchers who worked with ODI to learn more about the research process, to discuss various dissemination methods and to be prepared for the possibility of additional research.

***Outcome 1: Elections are more responsive to priority public needs***

PRG-PA local election activities will foster a collaborative environment in which political parties and candidates become more aware of and responsive to citizen needs at the community level. The activities will achieve this by strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations, private sector actors, media and other actors that could be champions to facilitate opportunities for citizens to engage constructively with political party representatives to discuss community priorities.

The local election support activities form part of the foundation of Counterpart’s approach to collaborating, learning and adapting for the broader PRG-PA program, through which the articulation of citizen priorities and the creation of space and opportunities for dialogue will move stakeholders, most importantly citizens, toward collective action and holding their elected representatives accountable in the post-election period and beyond.

**Activities 1.1 and 1.2:** **Convene election donors and implementers to share citizen priorities and conduct workshop for civil society and government representatives on evidence-based, non-partisan advocacy**

PRG-PA will convene sessions with international and local election activity donors and implementers at the national level to review and share citizen priorities as identified in the political economy analysis and Afrobarometer, as well as, those emerging from PRG-PP activities during the legislative and presidential elections and other election-related projects. The sectoral - health, education, security - priorities emerging from these meetings will provide a broad overview that will be distilled to specific local priorities (lack of medicine, not enough teachers, extremist threats etc.) through PRG-PA program activities such as multi-stakeholder dialogues facilitated by local partners throughout the electoral cycle.

CSO and government representatives, along with other interested community actors will be invited to begin working together during a workshop where they will be introduced to advocacy strategies and tactics using evidence-based, non-partisan approaches to address citizens’ needs.

**Activity 1.3: Support media coverage of local elections**

Through a sub-grant to Equal Access (EA), PRG-PA will support media coverage of program activities carried out by local partner organizations using on-site radio, and television where possible, broadcasts and in-studio productions of discussions, debates, call-in sessions and listening groups in local languages focused on localized issues and featuring traditional, religious, civil society and political party actors from the communities in the target regions of Agadez, Diffa, Niamey and Zinder. PRG-PA will solicit input from PRG-PP on the selection of participants and suggestions for topics to include key political actors and to address timely election-related issues.

The media component will connect citizens with practical outlets, such as, radio magazines, blogs and newsletters for voicing opinions and actively engaging citizens in the electoral process. PRG-PA will also coordinate some media activities with Foundation Hirondelle, Search for Common Ground and other organizations working on election-related media to ensure that information is consistent, and citizens receive reliable information about the political process through a variety of media channels.

**Activity 1.4:** **Facilitate issue-based multi-stakeholder dialogues for local elections**

PRG-PA, in coordination with PRG-PP, will work with partners to reach out to citizens, including women, youth, and other vulnerable populations where they live to share information on existing priorities and to provide opportunities for them to expand and refine these and other priorities that may be unique to each group. The dialogues will use best practices and lessons learned and strong experienced facilitators from the PRG-PP events organized during the presidential and legislative election periods.

PRG-PA and its sub-grantees, Réseau d’Appui aux Initiatives Locales (RAIL), Alternative Espace Citoyen (AEC), Coordination des Organisations Non Gouvernementales et Association Féminines Nigériennes (CONGAFEN) will organize program activities such as forums, town hall meetings, debates and radio programs for citizens to communicate their priorities to political parties for their responses and inclusion in their party platforms.

Themes emerging from discussions, including regionally specific issues, for example related to measures for countering violent extremism in Diffa and Agadez, will guide the multi-stakeholder dialogue activities with community based groups, individuals, and local leaders to inform the development of a questionnaire for local election candidate debate activities in collaboration with PRG-PP. Equal Access’ IVR/SMS platforms will also be used to gather more questions citizens would like to pose to local candidates.

PRG-PA will organize pre-debate practice sessions for community members, while PRG-PP prepares candidates for political party debates to be organized jointly in each target commune. PRG-PA and PRG-PP have agreed to a coordinated approach to selecting target communes in each region and to implementing dialogues activities at the regional and national level to maximize impact. The dialogues and debates will be covered by Equal Access’ media component and supplemented by follow-up radio programming, including call-in shows, radio magazines.

**Activity 1.5: Conduct civic education campaign on code of conduct and conflict mitigation**

Using lessons learned from the previous election cycle to adapt activities to address past gaps and current needs, PRG-PA sub-grantees will conduct civic education, including workshops for a core group of civic educators which will include select key leaders at community level. Key leaders will be selected based on their peaceful, neutral activism and local knowledge and trained to carry out the messages of why and how citizens should participate in the electoral process. Local partners will also develop voter education materials and use community theater around the electoral law and code of conduct to improve citizens’ understanding of the process and to mitigate conflict. PRG-PA will work with other USAID-funded election partners to make sure that messages are timely and appropriate to the regional and national contexts.

PRG-PP and LCSIA will contribute to identifying participants for the training of trainer (ToT) sessions for civic educators. PRG-PP will also inform PRG-PA activities around the political parties’ code of conduct, which include citizen participation awareness raising activities about the code, identifying issues and challenges to implementing the code and monitoring adherence to the code. With the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and its local partners, PRG-PA will identify potential election violence risks and incorporate recommendations for conflict mitigation in civic education materials. Conflict mitigation materials will address violence against females and youth in elections, as well as the role females and youth can play in preventing electoral conflict.

***Outcome 2: Informed multi-stakeholder (government and non-government) contribution to specific elements of reform implementation for targeted citizen priorities***

Building on collaborative learning and momentum gained through dialogues during the elections, PRG-PA will support diverse stakeholders to form strategic partnerships around shared public policy goals. Through community mobilization, stakeholders, including businesses and trade unions, will identify approaches and resources for achieving those goals using advocacy to improve accountability.

**Activity 2.1: Conduct government systems mapping to inform collective action initiatives**

To support research and collective action efforts and assist partners in identifying champions who can influence specific priorities and designing effective advocacy campaigns, PRG-PA will create a series of tactical systems maps. The program will build on and leverage existing mapping research in the health and education sectors in developing the systems maps. PRG-PA will seek input from leading international organizations in the technical sectors, such as CARE, UNICEF and PLAN International as well as members of the financial and technical partners (PTF) health and education groups.

Tactical mapping will improve PRG-PA staff and partners’ understanding of the nature and strength of relationships that key individuals involved in the policymaking process have with specific government bodies. It will also delineate the formal process of policymaking along with the existing chain of policy decision points. The mapping exercise will identify the internal reformers along with those more resistant to change among public servants.

PRG-PP will support PRG-PA in interactions with members of the National Assembly and its committees to contribute to the mapping exercise. Maps will be produced based on topic, type of reform, key individuals and institutions, policy decision points, and changes in the system over time. PRG-PA will share these maps with PRG-PA partners and relevant stakeholders in order to ground-truth and validate the maps and gain buy-in on next steps. Tactical maps will also inform negotiations among unlikely allies, such as opposing political parties or representatives across government ministries to broker agreements to work together toward shared policy goals.

**Activity 2.2: Build a cadre of master dialogue facilitators**

PRG-PA will select up to six sub-grantees from civil society and the private sector to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues to drive local input to solving service delivery problems and gaps identified by citizens in the education, health and security sectors.

Master discussion facilitators will be selected from among groups and individuals who have a wide range of experience, such as PEA and other research methods, facilitation techniques, human resource management, community outreach, strategic planning, external communication and advocacy. The mapping exercise will also help identify additional dialogue facilitator candidates

Dialogue topics will be informed by issues emerging from local election debates and dialogues, and political party platforms to support diverse stakeholders’ convergence on issues of shared interest.

Sub-grantees will be required to attend project design workshops that will address collective action principles so that applicants better understand how dialogues will provide stakeholders with opportunities for building partnerships, as well as incorporate relevant principles into their proposals. PRG-PA will solicit input from LCSIA, PRG-PP, ODI and the High Commission for the Modernization of the State for input on the selections of applicants.

The program will develop teams of Master Dialogue Facilitators to whom specialized training and mentoring skills will be provided using field-tested modules on: asset-based community mobilization; cross-cultural communication; socially inclusive, participatory facilitation methods and dialogues for social, political, and policy change. At least one male and one female at each partner group will serve as Master Dialogue Facilitators, who over time, will provide training, mentoring, and technical assistance to develop other facilitators within their own organization/group and at other CSOs, enterprises and community groups.

**Activity 2.3: Broker commitments around targeted citizen priorities through local partner dialogue**

Multi-stakeholder dialogues will be forums for diverse actors to identify shared goals, leverage resources and build strong strategic partnerships with other stakeholders at community, regional and national levels. PRG-PA partners will work with Cadres de Concertation (CDCs), where they are functional, municipal leaders and regional councilors, community groups, private sector actors, including businesses based in the regions to contribute to implementing Regional Development Plans (PDRs) and Communal Development Plans (PCDs).

Partners will also leverage relationships with *fadas*, CDCs, women’s cooperatives, and other local groups to ensure broad participation in dialogues. As priorities and resources are identified, master facilitators will work with the range of committed actors to build partnerships and to formalize commitments.

CSO partners will work regularly with stakeholders at the community level to address issues. They will also organize quarterly regional sessions, during which representatives from commune level dialogues will be able to discuss successes and challenges in garnering support for policy reform, as well as engage with regional representatives with shared priorities. As appropriate for each region and priority area, partners may work with regional councils, government-led sub-working groups, international organizations and businesses as opportunities for strategic collaboration.

At all levels, media will cover dialogue sessions and help facilitate and convene dialogues. PRG-PA will continue working with EA’s network of listening groups to create discussion among youth regarding priority health, education and security initiatives in conjunction with other dialogue events and engage existing well respected cultural groups and individuals from the arts community to enhance dialogue messages and encourage government and other stakeholders to engage with citizens.

PRG-PA will also continue to support radio call-in shows or productions following in-person discussions that feature traditional, religious, civil society, government and political party leaders from their communities to address more localized issues and priorities and invite citizens to participate in dialogues via SMS, IVR, and other social media outlets.

**Activity 2.4: Support media production of reliable information that supports collective action**

Informed by the mapping and dialogue activities, PRG-PA partners will continue working with a range of media actors to increase public discourse to support and encourage advocacy and collective action around priority issues. Before the local elections, PRG-PA partners will organize workshops for journalists and media professionals at the national (radio, television, and print) and local (community and private radio stations) levels, to train media professionals to effectively interview and discuss priority issues with citizens, elected leaders, and political parties and to ensure accuracy of reporting.

PRG-PA partners will support the development of radio programming in multiple languages at the local level through production contracts with partner radio stations and at the national level through PRG-PA supported radio magazines. PRG-PA will continue to work with Foundation Hirondelle to support joint training for journalists, where appropriate, and to ensure consistency in news bulletins and PRG-PA supported radio programming.