*AidData Proposed Additions to Counterpart International Workplan*

The impact evaluation would aim to learn about three features of the PRG-PA activities. These features will be randomly assigned (as described below).

1. **What motivates individual Nigeriens to participate in collective action, both around electoral issues and around ongoing service delivery challenges? In particular, what types of messages are most effective at encouraging citizens to attend and participate in the dialogues planned under Activities 1.4 and 2.3? Toward this end, the PRG-PA project will randomize the encouragement and messaging of invitations among households in the targeted regions. AidData will assist in identifying alternative messages and encouragement.**

Two elements in the draft work plan stood out: 1) the program’s theory of change; and 2) the desire to link lessons from Niger’s recent national elections to the local elections scheduled for January 2017. We could address both of these points by randomizing the messages embedded in invitations to community dialogues, as briefly described below.

The workplan words the theory of change as follows:

*“[I]ncreased 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.”*

To complement and concretize this theory, we can draw on social science research showing that increased understanding of local dynamics is necessary but not sufficient to increase collective action.[[1]](#footnote-1) That is because the costs of participating in collective action (e.g. time and foregone income) fall on individuals, but the main benefits of collective action (e.g. government accountability) accrue to everyone regardless of participation. Therefore, people who are aware of poor governance and who want better accountability are likely to free-ride on the civic engagement of others, resulting in low engagement levels overall.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Other studies reveal that social sanctioning can overcome the free rider problem: If people think they will lose respect for shirking, they will be more likely to participate in collective action. Typically, effective social sanctioning comes from close neighbors or co-ethnics who can make credible threats to punish free-riders.[[3]](#footnote-3) We could test the effectiveness of social sanctioning in the Nigérien context by embedding messages within a subset of the invitations to community dialogues along the lines of, “Your participation in the dialogue is important to your neighbors, who may be in attendance and will notice if you are absent.” A control group would not receive that message.

We could also explore a second source of encouragement to participate in community dialogues and long-term collective action: the knowledge that citizens in other African countries are currently participating in historic social movements to promote government accountability. Two examples are Y’en a Marre in Senegal and Balai Citoyen in Burkina Faso. Both of these movements have massive followings of citizens who form local “clubs” that meet regularly and contribute to national dialogues with politicians and opinion leaders. We could randomize a version of the invitations along the lines of, “Nigériens did not hold many dialogues during the national elections, but there is still time to do so for the local elections. Are you aware that citizens of Senegal and Burkina Faso are mobilizing for change and holding their leaders accountable? Now you have the chance to do the same.” We might expect such a message to inspire citizens to participate. A social-sanctioning variant could end with, “Citizens of neighboring countries are watching to see if Nigeriens seize this opportunity.”

A fourth version of the invitations would be a high encouragement treatment arm, in which we promised to provide a small payment (per diem for travel time) for attendance. This will help ensure adequate participation in the event that the social sanctioning or inspiration primes do not work.

To summarize, versions of dialogue invitations would be:

1. Social sanctioning via neighborhood monitoring
2. Social sanctioning via transnational monitoring
3. Transnational inspiration
4. High encouragement
5. Control
6. **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.[[4]](#footnote-4) Extensive research demonstrates the positive effects of broad-based political accountability on provision of public services;[[5]](#footnote-5) even limited accountability in authoritarian regimes is found to improve human development.[[6]](#footnote-6) 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.[[7]](#footnote-7) 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.[[8]](#footnote-8) Following from this theoretical and empirical literature, we propose recording the results of the community discussions on citizen priorities and publicizing them along with an action plan for sustained community engagement in a randomly selected subset of dialogues and meetings

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.[[9]](#footnote-9) 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.[[10]](#footnote-10) 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.[[11]](#footnote-11) The limitations of informational programs suggest the importance of follow-on interventions, such as media broadcasts, that not only reinforce the original information,[[12]](#footnote-12) 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.*[[13]](#footnote-13)

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[[14]](#footnote-14)—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 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.*[[15]](#footnote-15) 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.)

In light of the cost efficiency of SMS dissemination campaigns and their potential effectiveness in engendering citizen engagement but cognizant of the digital divide in Niger, we propose—if there is sufficient statistical power—to compare the effectiveness of follow-up outreach via phone to canvassing or meetings in *fadas*.

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