One of the core objectives of the Participatory Responsive Governance program in Niger 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. Extensive research demonstrates the positive effects of broad-based political accountability on provision of public services;[[1]](#footnote-1) even limited accountability in authoritarian regimes is found to improve human development.[[2]](#footnote-2) While most 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, political participation and transparency that is highly relevant to the PRG-PA in Niger.[[3]](#footnote-3) These studies have sought to leverage community-based monitoring, technological innovations and improved transparency to test the determinants of bottom-up accountability.

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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

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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