

## **Online Appendix:**

### **A. Case Studies**

#### **Election Case Study: Benefits and Obstacles**

Due to long-standing research networks and extensive connections in a West African country by a team member, an in-country partner was able to approach researchers with ideas for a collaborative program prior to an upcoming election. Because the idea was generated directly from the relevant experience of in-country partners within a state bureaucracy, the research team was able to conduct a field experiment with communities who are often difficult to access. In this way, academic researchers gained unique insights and were able to use their skills and training to help ensure the neutrality and quality of the field experiment, while in-country partners were able to build capacity, develop skill sets, and address issues that were most important to them at that time. Further, after the experiment was completed, the in-country partner was able to leverage the support of the internationally-based research team members to expand elements of the project that were deemed particularly successful and helpful.

However, the trade-offs within the project are also noteworthy. From the outset the project suffered from a lack of sufficient and timely funds, and could only continue after the research partner based at a Global North university was able to provide access to limited university-specific funding sources. Even after multiple conversations, international donors were skeptical of a project that did not necessarily fall in line with their specific interests, goals, and networks. Without this initial external support, the field experiment itself was difficult to scale up to an acceptable sample size, leading to downstream challenges in other stages of the research process. Nevertheless, this case is illustrative of how researchers with access to funding sources that are otherwise inaccessible to researchers in the Global South, grant writing experience, and useful methodological training can lend their skill sets to support mutually-beneficial, collaborative research projects.

#### **Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Research**

One author on this piece gained first hand experience on the benefits of creating partnerships and communicating frequently with stakeholders, with an eye toward producing actionable knowledge, having served as part of a large team of researchers evaluating different aspects of policy reform in an eastern African country. The study involved working with national and local level government bureaucrats, recipients of

public services, representatives of bilateral and multilateral donors, and members of an international project implementing organization.

Core to the stakeholder engagement strategy was the creation of a Steering Committee, which met at least once a year for the duration of the research period. At first, the benefit of having a Steering Committee was not readily apparent to the entire research team. However, over time, the research team was appreciative that the funder prioritized serious stakeholder engagement from the outset. It sharpened the research questions asked, forced close attention to be paid to the political and institutional context, and enabled anticipation of potential challenges in research implementation. Most importantly, it increased the relevance of the overall research.

The Steering Committee consisted of representatives from all key stakeholders groups—including individuals from different government departments, academics from the main national university (some of whom were part of the research team), members of grassroots civil society groups, and employees from a leading national think tank. These stakeholders were selected on the basis of the objective of the study—to understand the challenges in a specific sector with the goal of informing government reform efforts. At meetings, policy and research questions relevant to stakeholders' daily work were solicited, and ideas and findings from the ongoing research were shared by the research team.

An interesting byproduct of this arrangement was the fact that senior government officials, bureaucrats, and the beneficiaries of public services would routinely discuss the research design and findings from different perspectives. These discussions enriched both the research team's study design, including its experimental component and the quantitative and qualitative work done using administrative data. Finally, the research team's rapport with government officials and other stakeholders ensured research continuity, even as various government officials were transferred in the middle of the study period.

### **Leaving the WhatsApp Group: A Failure to Communicate**

After two months of fieldwork in a West African country, one author got on a plane back to the Global North and replaced her SIM card with her usual Global North service provider. This meant that she no longer received notifications from the WhatsApp group that project staff had been using to communicate on the ground. She assumed they would be able to contact her by email. It later turned out that project staff had assumed she would stay engaged in the WhatsApp group and had been sending questions and updates to the group. Because of this miscommunication, issues that arose after the main fieldwork had been implemented went unaddressed for days (e.g., payments to

implementing partners that had not been properly processed, and questions from research participants).

## **Learning from Failure**

Examples of reporting on the failure of an RCT include entries on the World Bank's Development Impact blog (<https://blogs.worldbank.org/impactevaluations/failure>), which maintains a page of "Learning From Failures." Researchers submit short reports about RCTs that went wrong and lessons learned.

### **B. Checklist**

In this checklist, the authors gather the issues and suggestions discussed in this piece into a series of questions that researchers can interrogate while designing, planning, implementing, and communicating about RCTs in the Global South. This checklist can be seen as supplemental to the more detailed discussions in the paper.

1. Have I sought input on my research questions from a variety of stakeholders—potential participants, activists, researchers, academics, policymakers—whose positionalities with respect to insider/outsider status or local/foreign identity are different from mine? Have I created spaces where critical feedback can be received from these stakeholders throughout the research process?
2. Have I assessed the demand for evidence related to the proposed study, the value of the study as designed, and weighed it against the impacts of the proposed study, particularly to communities directly affected by the study?
3. Have I considered alternatives to randomization and evaluated its potential costs? How might the study's allocations of resources be considered unfair or reduce the autonomy of participants? Have I established red-lines around benefits that should not be randomized and ensured that my study design does not cross these lines?
4. Have I ensured that training of research staff is expansive and responsive, with an eye toward developing sustainable skills for local partners and communities?
5. Have I planned for adequate support of research staff throughout the project cycle, including adequate compensation, manageable work schedules, and access to mental health care?

6. Have I planned ways to disseminate insights and findings from the project throughout the entire research cycle, rather than only at the end?
7. Does my project have systems in place to support continuous receipt of feedback that can help me evaluate whether it is safe and prudent to continue research and data collection?
8. Have I set up reliable systems and clearly communicated how project staff can easily contact me after I leave the field?
9. Have I used my power and connections to generate safety and continuity for research staff? For example, have I written reference letters or provided clear documentation of their participation in the projects and outputs?
10. In case a project “fails,” have I shared findings generated—such as protocols and survey instruments, or a short report on the failure itself that provides recommendations for addressing research limitations and challenges?
11. Have I prepared my results to be disseminated in a variety of non-academic channels, including by creating narratives, pamphlets, or short videos, and publicizing via local organizations and media?