Country Dialogues for Using and Strengthening Local Systems:

Proposal from Pillar III

This joint USAID-CABRI project proposal contributes to Pillar III of the Effective Institutions Platform on the Use of Country Systems. It is the result of countries requesting that external stakeholders assist in strengthening country systems in a more holistic manner.

A number of development partners, including USAID, are developing new approaches to move local systems to the centre stage (rather than relying on development partner systems). This includes addressing and identifying local systems; designing projects that focus on identified weaknesses; deepening and consolidating risk considerations; and developing monitoring and evaluation tools to chart progress in sustainable results.

Meanwhile, countries in Africa and Asia are sharing their experiences on how the use of country systems has evolved and are sharing innovative practices at country level. In order to link global policy developments with country practice, the Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative, a network of senior budget officials from Ministries of Finance in Africa, has recently researched "hybrid" forms of country systems in Africa; incentives for external stakeholders to use such systems; and the use of project implementation units. The research will support the CABRI network and partner countries to learn more about how the use of country systems work in practice.

For purposes of this paper the term 'local systems' as opposed to 'country systems' will be used in that it provides a more inclusive description of systems that are used by the authorities in a country and the systems that are used by local non-governmental entities.

Given these two developments, it is an opportune time for USAID and CABRI to collaborate on supporting country dialogues on the use of local systems to reflect country priorities and contexts and move forward on the global commitments made by the Global Partnership in Busan.

1. Global commitments and context

1.1. Context: the use of local systems

As part of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, countries receiving aid agreed to strengthen their national systems and donors agreed to using them to the maximum extent possible. These commitments were reiterated during the Accra Agenda for Action forum in 2008. Country systems are defined as national arrangements and procedures for public financial management, procurement, audit, monitoring and evaluation and social and environmental procedures (AAA, 2008). The benefits of donors using country systems in providing development assistance include:

- ❖ Improved alignment with partner country policies;
- ❖ Increased country ownership and domestic accountability;
- ❖ Strengthened systems, including a more stable macroeconomic framework and higher efficiency of public expenditure;
- ❖ Higher potential for overall impact, improved coordination, greater predictability and sustainability of donor programmes; and
- ❖ Lower transaction costs (Mokoro, CIPFA, 2008).

Despite these commitments, progress has been poor in implementing them. While the use of country systems has been stated as the "default approach", paragraph 19b, which highlights that "providers of development cooperation will decide on the extent to which they can use country systems" may result in donors continuing to avoid using local systems..

The CABRI-USAID partnership in this regard therefore provides a necessary basis that can inform the manner that partner countries and development partners can promote the use of local systems as a critical input to the integration of aid in the budget cycle and strengthened country budget practices.

1.2 Existing Guidelines and Research on the use of local systems

There is a growing body of research on the use of country systems. Key publications include:

A study by CIPFA and Mokoro and commissioned by DFID on behalf of the OECD-DAC Joint Venture on Public Financial Management, 2008. The study analyses:
- - different donor approaches to managing risks when using country systems;
- - different types of risks which donors face when using country systems;
- - various opportunities for donors to coordinate and harmonise their strategies, terminology and risk assessments.

CABRI, Putting Aid on Budget: Synthesis report & Good Practice Note: Using Country Budget Systems, 2009. These reports provide an overview of:
- - international efforts to monitor the proportion of aid that is on budget;
- - main factors behind the quality of aid captured in the budget (such as lack of realism in information provided by donors and weak demand for information by governments);
- - good practices for using country budget systems and priorities for action by donors and governments, as well as priorities for joint action.

What are the benefits of using country systems, Policy briefs 1, 2 & 3, OECD. These policy briefs outline the benefits of using country systems for the aid effectiveness community, oversight institutions and sector audiences. Amongst other issues, the briefs highlight the fact that the use of country systems potentially lowers donors' transaction costs and can lead to ultimate savings and thus greater development impact. The briefs emphasize that benefits of using country systems are usually long term and sometimes difficult to quantify.

Managing Development Resources, the use of country systems in public financial management, Better Aid & Joint Venture on PFM, OECD, 2009. This report reviewed the progress on the Paris Declaration commitments and outlines recommendations intended to facilitate a greater use of country systems.

Using Country Public Financial Management Systems, A Practitioner's Guide, OECD-DAC, Taskforce on Public Financial Management, 2011. The guide outlines the ways in which donors can engage in using country systems, focusing on the fact that the engagement should not be an "all or nothing" approach. The report details the status of current approaches of donors to the use of country systems, including the approach to decision making in using country systems and donor preferences on aid modalities.

Furthermore, the Overseas Development Institute completed a programme of research, funded by USAID, which tests whether localizing aid, in other words transferring aid to and through state and non-state country actors, is a worthwhile policy initiative. This programme is expected to provide findings on whether the aid effectiveness objectives of using country systems (or localization of aid through the state), have been achieved.

More recently, CABRI finalised a report on the use of country systems, in order to provide further momentum to the evidence which has already been gathered on this topic, and importantly, to facilitate a transition to the implementation of the Busan commitments. The report provides an overview of the practices of the largest donors in Africa by examining: incentives that inform the extent to which development partners use country systems or not, and the distinctions that pertain for de-facto and de-jure policies and practices. Amongst other findings, the report finds that:

- It is more common for the use of country systems to increase, despite the lack of improvement or deterioration of systems, as opposed to a decrease in the use of country systems when systems deteriorate or remain stable - suggesting a threshold effect.

- Countries that are more reliant on aid experience lower UoCS. Most countries have experienced an increase both in the use of PFM and procurement systems. But generally, high volume African donors are less inclined to use procurement systems in high aid receiving African donors than in the rest of the world.

Further research is being undertaken in this area to further build the body of knowledge, including a BMZ/ GIZ research proposal around developing country management of external capacity development support. There is indeed an important research gap on how interventions to support capacity development can make use of country systems, such as in the planning and preparation of support, in the contracting or procurement of external expertise, or in the area of monitoring and evaluation.

2. Recent donor approaches to the use of local systems

2.2 Recent developments in development partners' practices and policies

It is in this context that development partners are currently responding to the Busan commitments by reassessing their approaches and methodologies to using local systems. The CABRI report finds that many donors have updated their policies and technical guidance over the last three years on budget support and/or non-budget support use of country systems. Of the traditional donors - USAID, Germany, DFID, France, AFDB, the World Bank and the EU - the only donor operating with a framework that is older than 2010, is France. However, in some donors the bar to access budget support has been increased over time due to additional criteria or procedures (DFID, EU and Germany). DFID and the EU

have both added criteria related to budget transparency / domestic accountability to their eligibility criteria.

Three donors have issued guidelines to enable more use of country systems. The USAID issued its first set of guidelines, whereas the AfDB has streamlined its existing guidelines for programme-based approaches. The World Bank has put in place a process through which countries can graduate to greater use of their local procurement procedures.

Nonetheless, donor frameworks remain better developed for budget support use of country systems, than for non-budget support use of country systems. Six of the seven donors considered, have clear frameworks and technical guidelines for the use of budget support (World Bank, EU, DFID, Germany and the African Development Bank). USAID is unique insofar as its framework does not provide for budget support as such, or for pooled funding modalities, but rather sets out clearly the circumstances under which aid can be channelled through local systems for its own projects and programmes.

Moreover, budget support for fragile contexts is now a separate instrument. The frameworks of the EU, DFID and the AfDB now includes specific provision for the use of budget support in fragile contexts, often applying legibility criteria less stringently. The emergence of results-based disbursement instruments is also encouraging for the use of country systems: The World Bank, USAID and DFID have approved disbursement on results financing instruments where the full budget cycle of the programme uses country systems, and disbursement only occurs when agreed results have been achieved.

2.2 Global Policy Development: A USAID Framework for Supporting Sustained Development

The world has changed dramatically since USAID first embraced sustainability as a core tenet. Profound economic, political, and social trends have reshaped the global development context and have reordered global development priorities. To respond successfully and sustainably to today's development challenges, we must mobilize and harness each country's unique assets. The principle of promoting conditions where local actors meet their own development needs must inform what we do and how we operate.

The following sets forth a development approach that reaffirms USAID's commitment to sustainability. Consistent with the international development effectiveness agenda, this approach moves local systems to center stage of development efforts from USAID's plans to projects, to collaboration with all partners and counterparts across the U.S. Government, and other donors. As the name suggests, the focus on local systems is a focus on local actors—be they governments, civil society organizations, universities, or the

> **Box 1. Sustainability - An Important Objective, but Not the Only One (USAID)**
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> Sustainability is central to USAID's mission. Promoting sustainability and supporting indigenous development processes are inextricably linked. However, there are times when the need to respond rapidly to a natural disaster, a public health emergency, or political crisis is of prime importance. Accomplishing that mission may entail establishing systems parallel to the local one. But even then, USAID should respond to crises in ways that lay the foundation for an eventual shift toward local systems and sustainable development results. This is also in keeping with USAID's *Policy and Program Guidance on Building Resilience to Recurrent Crisis*.

private sector –and how they can work together more effectively to produce the development that local people want. USAID has made considerable strides to embrace this approach, especially by elevating attention to risk and sustainability in strategic plans and project designs. However, there are four areas where we need to make further progress:

(1) identifying and assessing local systems;
(2) designing multi-faceted projects that address identified weaknesses in those systems;
(3) deepening and consolidating risk considerations in decision-making process;
(4) developing monitoring and evaluation tools that can accurately chart progress in strengthening local systems and the sustainability of their results.

2.1 Why Focus on Local Systems?

All parts of society – not only the government, but civil society, the private sector, universities and individual citizens -- have important resources, ideas, and energy to contribute to development. Indeed, it is the increasingly productive interactions among these local actors that translate into the market expansion, service delivery improvement, policy reform, and entrepreneurship that yield improvements in development outcomes.

USAID's development hypothesis is that comprehending, engaging, and developing local systems will deliver a more sustainable return on investment for all parties involved. While USAID has engaged in systems strengthening for many years, the current effort is designed to deepen those efforts in order to support development more holistically. This requires to become even more keenly attuned to the actors, the incentives, and the drivers of change within a system, and also adopt a more expansive understanding of risk, focus on a broader set of results and outcomes to gauge progress, and utilize a diverse range of financing options and implementation mechanisms.

This development approach is consistent with the Paris (2005), Accra (2008), and Busan (2011) Declarations, which collectively articulate the global commitment to partner with host country actors based on the principle of mutual accountability. The most recent articulation of "development effectiveness" principles at Busan emphasizes that successful development is inclusive development.[1]

This means engaging the full range of local actors in setting and fulfilling national development priorities, strengthening local change agents and ensuring mutual accountability. The Busan Declaration is equally clear that international actors should support inclusive, country-led development in ways that promote sustainability, especially by focusing assistance on strengthening—and then using—the country systems that produce development results. Creating strategies and programs through the lens of local systems enables us to determine whether and how we should partner with governments, civil society, private sector, academia and other development actors, whether to do it directly, and if not, what alternative modalities will facilitate the delivery of results while avoiding long-term dependency. The

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[1] "Development effectiveness" embraces principles of aid effectiveness, but recognizes they apply to all who support development processes and not just to the providers of official development aid.

U.S. Government has affirmed these central pillars of development effectiveness across the past two administrations with bipartisan support.

While the Agency has emphasized a commitment to sustainability for decades, it is now explicitly focusing on identifying and developing a broad definition of local systems. The approach embraces the global consensus that development should be locally-owned and locally-relevant while recognizing that official assistance is an ever smaller share of development finance. This fundamental shift is not only increasing the number of assistance providers, but changing the relationships between providers and partner countries.

Understanding local systems identifies how the efforts and interactions of these many actors produce development results within specific country contexts. Moreover, by mapping a local system and making it visible, we create a means for sharing and coordinating among the many development actors as they seek to improve results. Heretofore, the discussion of using local systems has focused primarily on the fiduciary risks associated with transferring taxpayer funds to developing country institutions. In this framework, we expand this focus to include the programmatic, contextual, and reputational risks associated with any U.S. Government (USG) development undertaking. Taken together with the requirements embedded in the country strategy and project design processes, USAID is now broadening and deepening our assessments of the actors we should engage to achieve the identified results and to ensure that those valuable resources are spent effectively and accountably.

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Box 2. Experience and Evidence that Inform the Framework

Experience - USAID staff and partners shared experiences supporting local systems and sustainable development through consultations, document review, and five background papers. This review culminated in a two-day *Experience Summit* on "Strengthening Country Systems," held in November, 2012, in Washington, DC. The Summit provided an opportunity for USAID staff and partners to review the accumulated experience and identify what was most relevant moving forward. A summary of the event and background materials are available at: http://kdid.org/events/experience-summit.

Evidence - USAID also commissioned a series of research papers prepared by the Overseas Development Institute that reviewed the case for providing direct funding to governments, civil society organizations, universities or the private sector in developing countries and examined the

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For USAID, focusing on local systems to achieve development results simultaneously provides operational direction for supporting sustainability, delivers on development effectiveness commitments, and clarifies and takes USAID Forward objectives to another level, especially the commitment to localized aid.[2] Over the past several years, USAID has undertaken extensive efforts to identify both experience and evidence where USAID staff members, implementing partners and other donors are already well-advanced in embracing local systems. These efforts included a Local Capacity Development

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[2] ODI defines "localized aid" as channelling aid to recipient-country entities; these entities might be public (ministries, parliament, accountability bodies and local government) or private (civil society organizations, media, non-governmental organizations and the for-profit sector).

Summit in June 2012 and an Experience Summit on Country System Strengthening in November 2012 (Box 2).

2.2 What's Next?

This framework lays out a vision and rationale for organizing our work around local systems and specifies broad principles and considerations that will lead us in that direction. Becoming even more responsive to 21st-century development opportunities and challenges calls USAID to make best use of existing strengths while developing new ones as well. Above all, by being more purposeful in our attention to local systems, USAID will improve the delivery of short and medium-term results and ensure long-term, sustainable outcomes.

Another critical effect will come as we infuse this shift in focus into our ongoing practices and increase our effectiveness and efficiency in strengthening local systems to deliver sustainable outcomes. The good programming practice embedded in USAID's program cycle is broadly applicable. USAID is also broadening the range of funding arrangements and implementation mechanisms that are employed in support of system strengthening.

Based on the feedback received on this framework, we will develop additional details and guidance that will embed a systems lens within USAID policies and processes. This may include augmenting existing policies and good practice guidance to incorporate a systems lens, adjusting our program cycle to more clearly reflect the principles outlined above, and developing operational guidance, tools and training to advance the implementation process.

3. Country Dialogues

3.1 Objectives

Based on this growing body of research and ongoing changes in development partners' practices in this domain, the proposal aims to bring together development partners and partner countries around country dialogues on local systems.

The work will involve country level action, led by partner countries, towards the greater use of local systems and better integration of aid in the budget cycle. The proposal is to pilot the approach in a volunteer partner country in 2014, followed by adjustment and extension of the initiative to other interested countries subsequently. The initiative is based on an understanding that making progress against global commitments to use country systems will require country-level agreement and action, and that effective integration of aid in the budget cycle requires partner country and donor action.

The framework for analysis that will be used for the dialogue will be the CABRI typology which was formulated in the 2008 research programme on 'aid on budget'. This typology has been adopted by many stakeholders as a useful way to describe existing practice comprehensively, while at the same time offering a framework to target progress towards improved use of country systems, as proposed in the OECD Practitioners' Guide to the Use of Country Systems (OECD 2011 (b)). The 2009 OECD/DAC

report on using country systems similarly defined it as the use of systems in "the entire budget cycle from strategic planning to oversight." (OECD DAC 2009, p13).

The typology defines the use of systems in each phase as follows:
- *On plan*: aid is integrated into spending agencies' strategic planning and supporting documentation for policy intentions behind the budget submissions.
- *On budget:* aid integrated in budgeting processes and reflected in the documentation submitted with the budget to the legislature
- *On parliament*: Aid is included in the revenue and appropriations approved by parliament.
- *On treasury*: Aid is disbursed into the main revenue funds of government and managed through government's systems.
- *On procurement*: procurement using aid funds follows the government's standard procurement procedures
- *On account*: aid is recorded and accounted for in the government's accounting system, in line with the government's classification system
- *On audit*: aid is audited by the government's auditing system.
- *On report*: aid is included in ex post reports by government.

The project would start with the refinement of the methodology, including detailed concept notes, timelines, identification of partners (both development partners and partner countries), the number of country level dialogues, funding etc.

The objective of the project will be to:
- ❖ Map local systems in country and achieve a common understanding between local donors and countries on priority 'country systems' as well as definitions of and rules for 'using country systems' and integrating aid in the budget cycle, adapted to the specific country context;
- ❖ Identify current opportunities and constraints in the strengthening and use of country systems, and integration of aid on budget;
- ❖ Define joint Government-Donor next steps and recommendations for achieving progress on strengthening and using country systems, and integrating aid on budget;
- ❖ Ensure high-level momentum from donor headquarters for this initiative and establish concrete steps towards fulfilling those recommendations.
- ❖ Provide lessons learned to share with other countries and to communicate to members of the Effective Institutions Platform.

3.2. Scope

The term 'Local Systems dialogue' does not refer to the organisation of a series of meetings creating new initiatives at country level. Rather, it is a process, led by the Government of the host country with Development Partners, and taking advantage of existing initiatives (such as Government-Development Partners coordination groups). It will not increase the burden on either Development Partners or the Government by duplicating initiatives that are already underway. Additional and more detailed

objectives of the Country Systems Project will be determined through a dialogue with Government and Donors on the priorities.

One of the main rationales for undertaking a Country dialogues is to accelerate Government and Development Partner efforts to together enable or enhance the pilot country's capabilities to exercise greater ownership and demonstrate this enhanced performance to its citizens, the dialogue will also contribute to:

1) Report improved results from the Survey on Monitoring the Busan indicators
2) Increase the percentage of aid across the different components of the Government's budget and across aid modalities
3) Strengthen Country Ownership and Dialogue on Aid Effectiveness Principles
4) Support the implementation of the Government's Aid Management Policy

3.3 Methodology

The process at country level would have three main stages:
- Phase 1 takes the form of an inception report to map local systems and investigate which country systems/component phases of the budget cycle should be a priority focus;
- Phase 2 takes the form of in-country analysis to investigate, analyse and discuss the current constraints and opportunities to using local systems and integrating aid in budget cycle; and
- Phase 3 takes the form of in-country working sessions to identify concrete 'quick-wins that matter' which could be the focus of deeper analysis and a set of concrete recommendations for progress. These sessions will facilitate the drawing up of joint Development Partner and Government recommendations for progress.
- Phase 4 will monitor progress against the recommendations on a six monthly basis or after a year of implementation has been undertaken.

In all the steps highlighted above, existing Government-Development Partner fora will house the dialogue on country systems. For the working sessions to be successful, the Government and Development Partners need to demonstrate strong commitment and interest in providing input to the design of the programme.

The initiative would be a collaboration between the partner country, local donors in the partner country, the OECD-DAC and CABRI. The process would also draw on the experience of peer partner countries and/or allow for peer partner countries interested in learning to take part.

Phase One: Inception

Phase one will include preparatory work with the pilot country and take the form of an inception report to map local systems and investigate which country systems/component phases of the budget cycle can be considered as a priority focus.

The report will provide a background on the Public Financial Management system in the pilot country, including recent trends, weaknesses and strengths, as well the major trends in Overseas Development Assistance in the country, in terms of volumes and development partners, as well as the existing

organisational set up for aid management, such as the existence of an AIMS or/and aid coordination unit.

The inception report will detail the different phases of the project, outline the timing of the project, and identify the major stakeholders to be involved in the project. It will identify a cross-stakeholder steering committee for the process.

There will be cross-stakeholder consultation on the inception report.

<u>Phase Two: Facilitating a Dialogue for Government and for Development Partners on Country Systems</u>

The first Phase of the project includes the organisation of a dialogue for Government (stakeholders to be determined by Government, but should include sector ministries and may include parliamentarians, CSOs, and think tanks) around the current bottlenecks on Strengthening and Using Country Systems in the pilot country.

The dialogue will focus on:

> 1) which are the priority country systems for the pilot country (ie Public Financial Management, Procurement, Monitoring and Evaluation and/or others);

> 2) where are the current constraints and opportunities to strengthening and using country systems; and

> 3) the identification of concrete technical recommendations on how to meet the Busan commitment on Country Systems as they apply to the pilot country context.

The dialogue will also identify which Government-Development Partner sector working groups or co-ordination fora are the appropriate vehicles to hold such a discussion of both project and non-project assistance (particularly since project assistance remains the predominant form of donor assistance, the emergence of SWAPs are a useful organizing and coordination tool, and enable the addressing of specific constraints in a more manageable manner).

Institutionalising the discussion on Country Systems within existing fora (but widening it beyond those focusing solely on budget support) at the sector level would provide a platform for constant communication around specific challenges and opportunities relating to Country Systems.

The dialogue will also allow Government and other key representatives to voice their preferences regarding the issues that they feel should be a priority for discussion in the setting up of a Country dialogue. These could include, for example:

➢ Identifying priority areas and components of government systems for quick wins that matter (e.g.: Reducing transaction costs by standardising reporting formats; Finding ways of reducing the need for external audits by engaging local audit firms).
➢ Strengthening Government Leadership on Country Systems (including the need for better training on leadership and negotiation skills for Government officials).
➢ Identifying specific focus areas (Environment, local government) where transaction costs of not using country systems are high and should be reduced as a matter of priority.
➢ Providing a mechanism for reporting both to local stakeholders and to the Global Partnership.

Taking the issues addressed by Government Officials as a starting point, a second dialogue will be organised with Development Partners to focus on:

- areas of particular interest or concern to Development Partners in the Strengthening of Country Systems;
- how to take advantage of opportunities and innovate in the Use of Country Systems around different components of a country's system and different aid modalities, including project support; and
- a process to build jointly with government a set of recommendations on how to implement the Busan commitments as they relate to Country Systems (setting out priorities for Phase Three below).

Phase Three: Analysis and Setting Recommendations

Drawing on the conclusions from the Dialogue with Government and with Development Partners, a deeper analysis will be conducted to identify concrete opportunities for improvements in the Strengthening and Use of Country Systems. The analysis will be based on in-depth interviews with stakeholders across Government (including MDAs and local government), Development Partners, and CSOs.

The Global Partnership will support the preparation of working sessions to define an agreed-upon set of technical recommendations to implement a set of steps that will advance Country Systems by 2016. These recommendations would be developed through a set of technical seminars and interviews around each of the quick wins identified (e.g. Using National Audit Procedures; The implementation of the Government's Procurement Plan to identify areas for improvement, Tracking flows of funds from the central to the local level in a given sector)

The Global Partnership will support the drafting of a Synthesis paper outlining the results of the joint Government-Development Partner working sessions and recommendations. The Collaborative Africa and Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI), representing African Senior Budget Officials, will be available, if requested by the pilot country, to support the analysis alongside Government and local Development Partners.

In all the steps highlighted above, existing Government-Development Partner fora will house the dialogue on Country Systems (PFM or Health Sector Working Groups, HOCs meetings).

Phase Four: Enhancing the Dialogue and Monitoring Progress

The exact modalities of this last phase are to be determined by the joint Government-Development Partner dialogue but could include consultation to validate the recommendations and propose a timeline for implementation, monitoring and reviewing the results of the Country Systems Initiative by the pilot country and Development Partners.

3.4 Timeline and Resources

The timeline will be determined by the host Government of the dialogue, and where possible, will coincide with ongoing or planned meetings (such as donor coordination fora, other regional initiatives, etc). A preliminary timeline is set out below:

	Duration	Indicative Timeline (dependant on pilot country availability)
Consultation on proposal Fundraising	3 months	February – April 2014
Selection of pilot country Firming up of schedule Tailoring of concept note to pilot country context	1 month	May 2014
Tendering and contracting lead consultant	2 months	June-July 2014
Phase 1: Inception phase for pilot country	3 months	August-October 2014 (TBC)
Phase 2: Government and Development Partners workshops	1 month	January 2015 (TBC)
Phase 3: Technical working sessions	2 months	April 2015 (TBC)
Phase 4: Monitoring and tracking progress	N/A	April 2016 (TBC) or on a six monthly basis

An indicative budget for a pilot dialogue process is joint to this proposal.

4. Outreach

The project could be linked to other initiatives of the Effective Institutions Platform, particularly the work streams regarding: i) indicators and measuring the effectiveness of institutions, and ii) change management.

The project would link up with on-going country systems initiatives (Malawi, Mali, Ghana) and take on broad lessons learnt on approach, in particular with regard to managing multiple stakeholders.

There may be opportunities for the proposal to be shared and for consultation to take place at regional and international forums, including the ministerial meeting of the Global Partnership, in Mexico on 15th and 16th April 2014.