

# Improving information literacy for urban service planning and delivery at local government level in Nigeria

## Understanding decisions helps ensure effective capacity development

Without adequate planning and management of public services, urbanization is often cited as a cause of increased poverty, growth of slums and poor sanitation. In the developed and the developing world, it is the responsibility of local governments to provide public services to address these, and other issues – from education to electricity – to maintain quality of life and safeguard basic human rights.

Consistent and cost-effective delivery of public services relies on data collection and analysis; without robust evidence and ongoing monitoring, it is impossible to know what works, when, under what conditions, and at what cost. But, in developing countries in particular, local governments often lack the necessary budget and resources to collect, collate and use data in the delivery of public services.

The Improving Information Literacy for Urban Service Planning and Delivery Project (INFO-LIT) aimed to strengthen the understanding and use of evidence by local government in urban areas of Nigeria for more consistent and cost-effective public services.

Devised by Lagos-based public policy think tank the Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (CPPA), INFO-LIT looked specifically to



*Participants at the VakaYiko Grant Stakeholders Meeting, CPPA, Lagos, July 2015*

develop the capacity of staff in the state's Health Service Commission, Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) and the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) to collect and use data.

### Understanding data and how to use it

Through observation and consultations with local government council representatives and state agencies, the INFO-LIT project team identified a lack of understanding of data use as the greatest barrier to improving service delivery.

Needs assessments and stakeholder engagement sessions with staff from the three target agencies also revealed that, where evidence was used, it was typically for technical purposes and not for service delivery. For example, only LAWMA

gave consideration to customer satisfaction, tracking was basic and there were no indicators for quality of service.

Poor information sharing and lack of coordination across service delivery agencies in the state were also problems, as was the variety of data knowledge and use among different administrative levels across the participating agencies.

### Making knowledge useful through a learner-centred approach

INFO-LIT's approach was participatory from the outset: the project team met with senior executives (or their representatives), providing detailed project briefings and invited them to review and contribute to the





*Dr. Folarin Gbadebo-Smith addressed the stakeholders*

training curriculum. These senior policymakers were also asked to nominate participants to promote a sense of ownership of the final product and a level of commitment to training outcomes.

INFO-LIT then held three training sessions over two days, the structure of which was informed by the needs assessments and engagement sessions. Content was tailored to the different day-to-day responsibilities of participating staff, broadly grouped into three categories: data collection in the field, analysis and decision making. For the last session of

the second day, participants were then brought together to foster inter-agency collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Training objectives were developed from suggestions made during consultations. And, to make sure learning was useful and transferrable – and therefore sustainable, the training was set within local contexts through the use of relevant examples and case studies.

For example, participants in the first category – broadly responsible for data collection in the field – were provided with datasets and asked to identify the types of data (quantitative – continuous/discrete; qualitative; primary or secondary) and the levels of measurement

(nominal, ordinal, interval or ratio). These exercises, using familiar examples – such as census data and information on service use or access – aimed to improve their technical understanding of data, and how to collect and order it.

Managers and heads of units, in the third category of participants, were asked to consider the role of evidence in decision making using various scenarios. For instance, the demand for evidence in response to reports from an international funding agency of increased malaria among pregnant women in Lander state; or petitions from the general public about noise pollution due to the opening of faith centres in residential areas.

## Getting buy-in at the top

INFO-LIT also took a participatory approach in the inception phase. Before submitting formal requests for involvement in the project, CPPA made informal contact with stakeholders, which helped to build trust and understanding that expedited typically unhurried responses to formal requests.

But despite this, senior policymakers were initially reluctant to engage with the INFO-LIT project and its aims. To reach

**Working with a local and trusted organization can also contribute to project legacy and continuity as, in this case for instance, learning and training was incorporated into the existing curriculum.**



*Facilitators chatting with participants*







*Participants at the VakaYiko Grant INFODATA-LIT Pilot, September 2015, Lagos, Nigeria*

these critical stakeholders, INFO-LIT enlisted the support of the Public Service Staff Development Centre (PSSDC), a state training and capacity-building agency. The project was able to benefit from the convening power of the PSSDC to get buy-in from senior officials in the target agencies.

### About CPPA

**The Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (CPPA)** is an independent, non-partisan public policy think tank based in Lagos, Nigeria. CPPA aims to help sub-Saharan African governments, institutions, and businesses create innovative data-driven policy solutions to development challenges. For more information, see [www.cpparesearch.org](http://www.cpparesearch.org).

Early recognition of this convening power was a significant factor in INFO-LIT's success. PSSDC's involvement in the design and delivery of training also helped to make sure that the content was received positively by participants. After the workshop, PSSDC management also decided to incorporate the INFO-LIT training modules into its own curriculum for local governments and other service agencies – a huge success for the project and a positive sign for information literacy going forward.

### Being adaptive: refocusing for different audiences

The intervention had been targeted at local government officials but, during implementation, this became difficult as they appeared

much later in the service delivery chain. This was in part due to changes in certain sectors of local government responsibility, whereby the management of service delivery had shifted from local government councils to specialized state agencies.

Instead, it was these state-level agencies that entrusted local government officials, and so needed to be using information and data from the field. Refocusing the intervention for state-level agencies ensured INFO-LIT reached the actors in data collection, processing and analysis for effective service delivery in the chosen sectors.

Overall, 59 participants were trained. Through two days of learning and practical intensive sessions, participants demonstrated improved attitudes to data use and welcome continued opportunity to deepen the knowledge base skills.

**PSSDC management also decided to incorporate the INFO-LIT training modules into its own curriculum for local governments and other service agencies – a huge success for the project and a positive sign for information literacy going forward.**





## Acknowledgement

The success of this project was made possible, to a large extent, by the contribution of stakeholders, and the INASP team. We would like to recognize the tireless efforts of the CPPA team: Mojisola Akpojiyovbi, Josiah Aramide, Oyindamola Popoola and Michael Falade (Team Lead).

*Moji having a summary session with participants*

They reported that the training had addressed gaps in information literacy identified during initial stakeholder engagement and, according to the training feedback, 95% of participants indicated (36% agreed, 59% strongly agreed) that the training had increased their capability to perform in current or future jobs.

## Reflections and future work

The successful involvement of the PSSDC demonstrates how important it is to have an understanding of how decisions are made in order to ensure an effective entry point for capacity development.

This also suggests that working with known and trusted capacity building institutions can be an effective means to getting buy-in from key stakeholders (though it is still too early to say it had a definite lasting impact).

Working with a local and trusted organization can also contribute to project legacy and continuity as, in this case for instance, learning and training was incorporated into the existing curriculum.

The participatory approach also meant there was buy-in and a sense of ownership from participants and from key senior policymakers.

Challenges with data collection and its use by local government councils remain. This could be

addressed through an intervention to strengthen technological capabilities for data collection use. This training primarily addressed the need for a greater understanding of evidence and how it can be used in planning and managing public services.

Future work should make sure that the responsibility for data collection and management is delegated to qualified personnel within local government agencies. As the government structure closest to the citizen, local government agencies could also benefit from closer collaboration with urban service agencies. CPPA can, with additional support, ensure these recommendations are pursued.

## About VakaYiko

The VakaYiko consortium is a three-year project managed by INASP and funded by DFID under the Building Capacity for Use of Research Evidence (BCURE) programme. As part of the project, grants have been awarded to seven organizations in low and middle income countries to build capacity for research use through projects that enhance our understanding of how policymakers can be supported, through practical measures, to make more effective use of evidence.

These organizations are the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, the Center for Public Policy Alternatives (CPPA), the Gender Centre for Research and Training (GCRT) in Sudan, Jimma University in Ethiopia, Politics & Ideas in Argentina, and the Universidad del Pacifico in Peru. For more information, see [www.inasp.info/en/work/vakayiko](http://www.inasp.info/en/work/vakayiko).

