“Effective States and Engaged Societies: Capacity Development for Growth, Service Delivery, Empowerment and Security in Africa”

Rapid-Results for Capacity Development

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Over the past few years, dozens of teams from African and other countries have been able to achieve dramatic results in one hundred days or less – results that were unthinkable at the outset of these efforts, and that have surprised government officials who commissioned these teams as well as observers from donor organizations.

Unusual Results – in 100 Days!

Here are a few examples of the results that were achieved by these teams:

- In Freetown, Sierra Leone, the number of users of VCT services was averaging at 150 per month for the first 18 months of the MAP implementation. Two months into their rapid-results initiative, Dr. Jared of the National AIDS Secretariat reported a dramatic step up in utilization: 4700 users per month!

- In Kenya, the newly formed Managing Director of the Nakuro Water Company sponsored his first Rapid-Results Initiative even before his staffing plan was fully in place, targeting a 30% reduction in percentage of unaccounted for water. Within a hundred days, they had reduced percentage of unaccounted for water by 40%, from 85% to 50%.

- In another Kenya Rapid-Results Initiative sponsored by the Permanent Secretary Krhoda of the water Ministry, 100% of pastoral Masais in the Bunyala water scheme started irrigating crops in 120 days. This was an irrigation scheme started from scratch, along with sensitization work undertaken by other Ministries to ensure that the Masai pastorals in the area begin planting before the dry season. When asked why they felt this was something to brag about, the engineers involved in the project revealed that no water project in the Ministry had ever been completed in less than one year!

- In Sri Lanka, Dr. Kulasiri Buddhakorala led a Rapid-Results team that committed to put in place an ARV treatment program within 100 days. The team fell short of its goal of having 20 patients under treatment by the December 1, 2005, but the team celebrated AIDS day with a treatment program up and running and 5 patients under treatment.

- In Eritrea, the Central Zoba medical director, Dr. Musfin Worede and his team aimed at an initial goal of increasing use of VCT services by 25% in 100 days. By the end of the 100 days, they had achieved an 80% increase. And they kept upping their goals for the remainder

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1 This report is based on experiences of the author and his colleagues working closely with World Bank team leaders to introduce the Rapid-Results Approach into various operations (outlined in the Annex). Some of the ideas were described in the September 2003 issue of the Harvard Business Review “Why Good Projects Fail Anyway” by Nadim Matta and Ron Ashkenas. Excerpts from this report will appear in a chapter written by Nadim Matta in Rapid-Results: How 100 Day Projects Develop the Capacity for Large Scale Change (edited by Robert Schaffer and Ron Ashkenas), to be published by Jossey Bass in September 2005.
of the year, reaching 19,800 users by the end of the year (against a 12,000 user goal in their strategic plan).

- In Nicaragua, one of the teams sponsored by Noel Pallais Checka, the head of the Nicaraguan Institute of Agricultural Research tripled the sale of milk among 60 small scale producers in the Leon municipality.

**Unleashing Hidden Capacity**

These were not “one-shot” results. In many cases, the results continued to accumulate way beyond the initial 100 days, and long after all traces of the external catalysts disappeared. In Eritrea for example, many cycles of 100-day school-based HIV/AIDS initiatives have been launched, first in the Central Region, and then in other Regions. All schools in the country are now covered, with dramatic effects on safe sex behavior in schools.

And these were not donor-driven efforts that bypassed the government bureaucracy and procedures. In fact, in most cases the teams complained bitterly about the their lack of confidence that they resource transfer will occur in time for them to implement their ambitious plans. And yet they prevailed.

In going about this work, these teams defied the prevailing logic about performance and achievement in development efforts:

- There was little preparation and planning preceding the launch of the teams. In most cases, membership in the teams was decided only a few days before these teams got to work.
- There was virtually no subject matter training – before the launch – and minimal external inputs throughout the 100-day implementation period
- No changes in the enabling environment: no incentives systems – or major structural or policy changes – were introduced.

And yet, with remarkable consistency, these teams exceeded all expectations in terms of the goals they took on and the results they achieved. Moreover, their successes spurred others to emulate their experiences, in some cases starting what can best be best described as an “epidemic of results” in the targeted sector.

These experiences suggest that there is a huge untapped potential of “achievement capacity” that can be mobilized for development purposes – in countries ranging from Eritrea to Kenya to Nicaragua and Sri Lanka! The challenge is to unleash this “hidden capacity” and channel it towards the achievement of critical results.

**The Secret Ingredient**

When asked what spurred them to do this – and why this performance level was not attained in the past, here are some of the responses we got:

> “The goal was clear, and we knew that in a hundred days we will need to demonstrate where we were able to achieve the goal or not…”
“This was one of the few times when we could actually see the immediate impact of our actions – in 100 days. Our wages are quite low, hardly anything to get excited about. If we are going to work for these wages, we might as well be working on something worthwhile and exciting.

“For the first time we were not told what to do, but we were asked to figure out the answers on our own”

In the case of all of these rapid-results examples, the secret was to create an environment where teams were motivated to pursue ambitious results, with enthusiasm and discipline, despite all the adverse conditions that may have existed.

How was this favorable environment created?

The common theme connecting these examples is that each was organized using a few principles and a structured process – the Rapid-Results Approach. This process is designed to unleash capacity through injecting the following elements in the way groups operate:

- Sense of challenge and “stretch” – teams reaching for goals that go beyond normal performance thresholds.
- Belief that the goals – tough as they may be – will be achieved, despite the usual obstacles and prior failed attempts.
- Choice of the goals: teams are challenged to pursue “results-oriented” goals, versus activities, plans, recommendations and other preparatory steps. This is a critical motivator – as one of the quotes above illustrates.
- Personal accountability for specific and visible results. We are not talking here about accountability in a general, vague, or nominal sense, but a real sense of accountability that keeps one awake at night thinking about how they will deliver on the result.
- Flexibility in charting the path to the goals and results – trusting the local teams to develop their own solutions.
- Credible promise to give the teams “bragging rights” – in a public and visible manner – over their achievements.

Here’s how the process unfolded in each case:

**Results that Matter**

Results come in different varieties. The results we are talking about are of the kind that actually creates a real difference on beneficiaries. Not a promise of impact. Not studies. Not training programs. Real results, with real impact, delivered in months rather than years.

In the case of Nicaragua, for example, the result was not training dairy farmers on clean milking practices; it was tripling the weekly sale of grade A milk in one cooperative, within 120 days.

And in the case of Eritrea, it was not building a center of Voluntary Counseling and Testing; it was increasing the users of VCT services by 80% in 100 days.
1. The leadership group was engaged – so they own the process and agree on key priorities to focus results acceleration efforts.

2. Accountability for results was strengthened – both within the existing management structures as well as through cross-organizational task teams (when results required cross-boundary collaboration) – with clear roles for individuals involved in “sponsoring” strategic priorities/rapid-results teams, leading the teams, individuals participating as team members, or supporting the teams.

3. These sponsors clarified the challenge and motivated the teams to pursue stretch goals within 100 days.

4. The teams, with some coaching and support, “rose to the challenge” and actually set ambitious goals and developed rigorous 100 day implementation plans.

5. Sponsors and team leaders built good implementation disciplines in the work of their teams – while continually motivating these teams to remain focused on achieving their goal.

6. Sponsors drove the effort for sustaining and expanding on the initial, 100-day results.

7. The leadership group took steps to institutionalize the changes that led to the initial results – and in some cases to institutionalize the Rapid-Results Approach as part of the management process.

Building Capacity through Results: the DNA of Rapid-Results

What is at play here? Why were these teams able to break through the usual performance barriers?

Many management scholars extol the virtues of “small wins” in energizing large scale change. When groups are able to achieve real results, quickly, while the energy level is high, the stage is set for a deeper transformation. One success can lead to many. And a few committed individuals can foster the involvement of thousands. Initial modest results can turn into large-scale transformation.

Small successes early on build confidence that change is possible. Furthermore, a modest victory in the initial stages of the campaign serves to reinforce the commitment and determination of the people involved.

But the Rapid-Results Approach goes beyond “small wins.” Contrary to common perception, our observations and experiences suggest that the main value of these early, rapid results is not in political expediency or in picking the “low hanging fruit”. No doubt, there is a merit to getting “quick wins”. Early, rapid-results can be leveraged to strengthen coalitions for change at all levels. But Rapid-Results Initiatives can be additionally leveraged, by committed leaders, to advance three inter-related goals:

1. Unleashing and strengthening existing capacity for implementation
2. Building leadership capacity for accelerating change and results

3. Reducing risks of long-term plans

Unleashing implementation capacity: What we have seen over and over again is that individuals, groups, and organizations have more implementation capacity than we – or they – assume. The challenge for leaders is to unleash and channel this capacity in the right direction. In most of the situations we outlined, the cast of characters was the same – before and after the dramatic results. And so was the resource base. Yet when challenged to perform, in an empowering way, these same individuals tapped into their reservoir of capacity and used it to deliver better results. And with each phase of the effort, they reached deeper into that reservoir, never reaching the bottom…

In Eritrea, for example, one of the HIV/AIDS teams that was challenged with increasing VCT utilization in downtown Asmara set as its goal a 25% increase in the weekly utilization within 100 days. This was based purely on intuition. In fact, there was no baseline to use as a benchmark. At the end of the 100 days, the team reported an increase of 80% in weekly utilization! What did the team do in the interim to achieve this result?

First, they established their weekly baseline in the existing center. This required putting a rudimentary monitoring system in place – a daily tally sheet that counselors filled out, and that was aggregated and analyzed weekly and reported back to the senior sponsor of the effort, Dr. Musfin Worede.

Then they coordinated a number of activities, including re-commissioning a satellite center and opening 2 new stand-alone sites, equipping these with equipment and furniture (e.g. chairs and videos for waiting rooms); training 5 additional counselors, distributing Rapid Test kits, and setting up a user satisfaction monitoring process (exit surveys that get dropped in a suggestion box) – the results of which was tracked weekly against their 80% user satisfaction goal.

Who did all of this? It was Dr. Worede and the team he fielded – the same individuals who had been in charge of coordinating the medical response to HIV/AIDS in the Central Region. And they did this with very little technical support. M&E experts did not design the tracking system. One of the counselors did. The team in fact designed and carried out the 100 day effort with very little external input. When
Dr. Worede was asked by development partners how the team was able to accomplish all these tasks and achieve these results in a hundred days, his response was as follows:

“We had a challenge in front of us, and we decided what we needed to do to accomplish it. Then we decided who needed to do what – so our roles were clear. And we met each week to see what was done and what still needed to be done. It was as simple as that…”

Why do teams respond to rapid-results challenges by reaching into their untapped reservoirs of capacity? We believe that the answer lies at the intersection of accountability and empowerment. When teams feel truly accountable – meaning that they know that they will bask in the glory of success or suffer the shame and consequences of failure – they have a psychological choice to make. Either they commit themselves to success and tap into their creativity and energy, or they look for a way out and blame the system, their superiors, or others. This is where the empowerment dimension comes into play. Empowered teams opt for the former path. Passionate leaders can tip this balance in favor of commitment and empowerment.

Building leadership capacity:
Groups do not necessarily take on challenging goals. Nor do they necessarily come to these goals with a confidence and a belief that they will actually achieve them. On the contrary, many groups that are asked to take on challenging goals are likely to retreat and cite the litany of obstacles standing in the way of success.

Enabling groups to respond in a positive, empowered way, to these challenges is an act of leadership. The results we outlined above—and the continued momentum—would not have been possible without committed leadership.

But where does committed leadership come from? This topic is a recurring theme in the international development literature. What if the leadership was not there—could the results have been achieved? And what if the leadership commitment wanes—can the results be sustained?

It is not About “Heroic Leadership”…
Whether the leadership drive provided the impetus for getting the 100-day results cycles underway or emerged as part of the process, there is no question that without leadership energy, the dramatic results would not have followed.

The leaders that must be given credit for making the above results possible are a diverse group, with very different styles. But there is a quality that they exhibit during the process: an uncommonly stubborn belief in the possibility, or even the inevitability, of succeeding in tackling the challenges they decided to take on. These are individuals who step forward and take a risk in spite of the odds. In doing so, they inspire others to take a leap of faith as well – to contribute rather than staying on the sidelines or moving on to other causes and commitments.

This is not about “heroic leadership” that is at once glorified and demonized in management literature. It is not about a belief in one’s own ability or influence, but rather a conviction about what one’s team and organization can achieve, once properly focused and mobilized. If there is a word to describe the various leadership figures that we believe played a critical role in these cases, it is the word “engaging”.
Interestingly, several of these waves of rapid-results initiatives did not start with committed leadership. Rather, committed leadership emerged as part of the process.

The Nicaragua example is a case in point... The locus of leadership energy that made this particular experience successful and sustainable was unpredictable at the outset of the effort. By all accounts, the head of the Nicaraguan National Institute of Technology, Noel Pallais-Checka, provided the leadership spark that ignited the initial rapid-results teams, and he played a key role in injecting a continued sense of urgency in the effort for many months after the start-up. But there was no indication at the start of the effort that Pallais-Checka would play that role. In fact, he started out as a skeptic when this idea of pursuing 100 day “rapid-results” was first introduced: “I felt, ‘What is the bank up to now? What do they want from us again? What new idea are they thinking about that they would like to experiment with Nicaragua? We came to this workshop and we sat down and listened to these people, and we were not in a very good mood...we had a task to do in a country and we did not want to waste our time.”

But something changed. At a certain point in the Rapid-Results process, Pallais-Checka decided to move from the sidelines and take his rightful leadership role. Here’s how he described the shift that occurred: “I think the turning point is that the human beings that were in charge were adamant in convincing the people to do it. The people that were there to organize from the Bank were really convinced and they managed to convince us and then we managed to convince ourselves, that yes, we could actually do it.

So, the context that was created around Rapid-Results in Nicaragua gave Pallais-Checka the opportunity to commit the ultimate act of leadership: to believe that results which are seemingly beyond reach will actually be achieved, and to inspire others to commit themselves to achieving these results.

This emergence of leadership capacity happened at several levels. A sponsor was designated to shape the challenge for each team, and to cheer the team along to their success. This role was filled by people like the heads of local milk cooperatives and the regional representatives of the key agricultural institutes. For several of these, this was a new experience. And yet, most of them rose to the challenge and demonstrated team leadership skills that one might expect from sophisticated managers who had been to the latest executive education programs: they ensured that all stakeholders were aligned.

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<th>What if Leadership Does Not Emerge?</th>
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<td>The Rapid-Results Approach creates the space and the incentive for individuals with leadership capacity to step forward, take a risk, and practice their leadership skills. If these leaders do not emerge after the first or second round of rapid-results initiatives, then the chances of sustainability and expansion are limited. External catalytic support, whether it is related Rapid-Results, technical advice, or policy guidance will very likely be underleveraged. It would be best in these circumstances to scale down the support or phase it out.</td>
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2 This and other quotes from Noel Pallais are excerpted from an interview conducted by Ronnie Hammad of the World Bank in December 2002, as part a program by the World Bank’s Africa Region to debrief clients who are playing a key role in pioneering development work.
they set and managed team expectations, they held people accountable to their commitments, and they played an active role with the teams when their support was needed to help close the gap from current performance to the desired goal.

For example, with 20 days left in their 100-day initiative, and 50% achievement toward the goal of signing up 100 farmers to commit to cooperative agreements with agricultural technical service providers, Maria Flores, the team sponsor, sprang into action. She challenged her team to take radical steps to close the gap. The team rented a car and went around the villages of the region with loudspeakers announcing the benefits of the program. Over the next 20 days, the gap was closed and the team exceeded their goal at the 100-day mark!

Each 100-day cycle of Rapid-Results gives emerging leaders a taste of what it’s like to reach the holy grail of the high performance culture – in the microcosm of one team and the span of 100 days. It is leadership for high performance – on training wheels!

**Reducing risks of long-term plans:** Even though we do not often admit it, plans are merely hypotheses that if certain activities take place over a period of time, desired results will follow. Let’s put aside for now the obvious risk of compliance and competence – that those who are supposed to undertake these activities actually perform, on schedule and within budget. There are still two critical risk factors associated with any plan.

Despite the best of intentions and meticulous planning, most large and complex projects are designed with a “blueprint” model, as if all the activities required to achieve the desired results are known at the outset of the effort. So streams of work are scoped out and accountabilities defined, and task and project teams are deployed against these. The
ultimate goal, of course, is to piece all the streams of work together to achieve the end result. But as managers identify all the activities and work streams that will be needed to produce the desired pay-off, it’s almost inevitable that something will be left off the plan—key activities that were unknown or unknowable during the planning stage. What’s more, even if managers could somehow identify all the right activities, it may be difficult or even impossible to knit them together once they are complete.

So while managers diligently supervise the execution risk associated with each stream of activity using project plans, timelines, and budgets, they too often neglect these two other critical risks — the “white space risk” (that some required activities are not predictable in advance and thus represent gaps between planned and required project activities) and the “integration risk”. As a result, project teams can execute their tasks flawlessly, on time and under budget, and yet the overall project may still fail to deliver the intended results.

Naturally, the longer the time horizon for the desired results, the bigger the white space and integration risks.

In cases where long-term plans and strategies are the overall framework for action, Rapid-Results Initiatives become a vehicle for minimizing these risks. The challenge to each Rapid-Results team is to deliver a sharply focused piece of the overall result, within 100 days.

So in the case of increasing use of Voluntary Counseling and Testing in Eritrea, the challenge to the initial Rapid-Results was to bring about a significant improvement in the utilization rate, in the Asmara Region, within 100 days. The team had to draw on the existing planned activities such counselor training, upgrading of facilities, and social marketing. But the creativity unleashed through the rapid-results process also helped them uncover other – more local issues – and develop solutions to these. For example, the waiting time at VCT centers became a deterrent to one of the vulnerable groups targeted in this effort:

Another Reason for Decentralization…

Planning structures that involve laboring hard upfront to break down long term objectives into outcomes, outputs, and inputs are too often thwarted by the white space risks. Managing these risks is critical. And the first step in managing risk is to determine who’s in best position to carry it.

Rapid-Results Initiatives, because of their focus on long term global results, but in a local short-term context, push some the white space risk down to the local level. This is exactly where the white space risk belongs and where it can best be managed.

Unfortunately, in most situations, white space risk is carried by senior leaders at the central level.

3 For a fuller treatment of these risks and how Rapid-Results Initiatives can help reduce them, see Nadim Matta and Ron Asheknas, “Why Good Projects Fail Anyway,” Harvard Business Review, September 2003
commercial sex workers. The team decided to issue special letters to members of this group so they are get precedence over others in the VCT line!

The team also took upon itself the task of coordinating and integrating all the planned activities so these add up to their 100 day result.

In pursuing their 100 day result, the VCT team proved the case of the long term goals and refined the plan to achieve these goals. And within 100 days of this effort, the inherent risks in this undertaking had been reduced. One can also take the alternative view: if no commitment for action and results emerges in the context of the initial wave of Rapid-Results Initiatives, then one has to wonder whether the longer term plan is anything more than a pipe dream… So in the course of the Rapid-Results Initiative, the long term risk of results delivery is reduced, or it becomes more painfully apparent. Either way, the decision to proceed with the investment or to cut one’s losses gets more grounded in reality rather than speculation or wishful thinking.

What Happens After the Initial 100 Days?
Achieving initial unusual results in 100 days is important. Its psychological impact and catalytic effect on implementation and leadership capacity can provide a powerful boost for long term change efforts. But it is not sufficient. The ultimate challenge is to make the achievement of unusual results in development work the norm rather than the celebrated exception. This requires a fundamental transformation in the way public sector institutions in developing countries operate, and in the way development efforts are organized.

What have we learned about this from the extensive Rapid-Results experiences in the private sector and the more nascent experiences in developing country contexts?

100-day results achievement as “positively deviant” behavior: In their article in the May 2005 issue of the Harvard Business Review, Richard Tanner Pascale and Jerry Sternin describe the phenomenon of “positive deviance” – how change agents can leverage individuals who labor under the same constraints as others and are endowed by the same assets and yet manage to produce superior results. They outline a process for helping communities “discover” these individuals and adopt the practices and behaviors that are at the root of their success. They cite numerous examples where this process was catalyzed – with remarkable results.

Pascale and Sternin describe how this “social envy” or “social proof” can be leveraged to spread good practices across communities. We’ve observed this same phenomenon fueling the spread of the Rapid-Results Approach as a practice for tackling challenges and for discovering solutions to perennial problems. This should not come as a surprise. Achieving results, quickly, is addictive. It is self reinforcing in that people feel the gratification of achievement. Coupled with the recognition and the “bragging rights” that the senior sponsors award Rapid-Results teams as part and parcel of the Approach, achievement of 100-day results can also become infectious.

We’ve seen this happen in private sector organizations where we’ve introduced this approach. We’re also beginning to see this where the Rapid-Results Approach was introduced and actively supported for a year or so in the development arena. Perhaps the most striking example of this is
in the case of HIV/AIDS in Eritrea, where we worked for over the year with the Minister of Health and his team to inculcate Rapid-Results as a way of doing business.

After the initial demonstration effect in the Central Zoba, Minister Meky challenged other regional medical directors to get a similar process underway in their Regions—starting with the Northern Red Sea. Local Rapid-Results coaches from all Regions were trained, and they participated in the launch of the process in Massawa, the main port city of Eritrea. Priority areas were identified, and 100-day rapid-results teams were launched. The teams faced several difficulties, including slow disbursement. Nevertheless, they were able to achieve impressive results. For example, the use of VCT increased from an average of 50 per month in October 2003 to an average of 120 per month in January 2004 (exceeding their goal of 75% increase). The use of VCT continued to rise beyond the 100-day initiatives, and it had reached 170 per month in March.

In February 2004, the Debub Region followed suit. This time, though, the process was orchestrated entirely by local coaches, with guidance from Dr. Anderhen Tesfazion, the National HIV/AIDS Director, and support from the Medical Directors and others who had spearheaded the Rapid-Results work in Massawa and Asmara. In May 2004, the third Region, Ansaba, got initiated into the process. And in June 2004, the Gashbarka Region began.

Meanwhile, Dr. Worede of the Central Region continues to drive results in Asmara: “This is now a way of working for us: when we have a challenge to overcome, we attack it with a Rapid-Results team”

It is too early to tell if the process will continue to transform the way work on HIV/AIDS gets accomplished. No doubt, there is much more work that needs to be done to help Minister Meky and his team tackle the challenge of institutionalization. But the early indications are promising. And what is even more exciting is that despite the state of continued military mobilization in the country, the prevalence of HIV was stabilized at 2.4% in 2004.4

Here are three levers that are critical for sustainability and scale up:

- Strengthening continued demands for results: continued leadership vigilance and focus:
- Reinforcing positive changes in behavior structural and institutional reforms:
- Strengthening the results delivery engine: investment in local capacity to support the rapid-results process:

**Strengthening Continued Demands for Results**

If “engaging leadership” is key for start-up, then continued leadership vigilance and focus is one of the pre-requisites for sustainability and scale-up. This is critical for a number of reasons:

- Sustained demand for results acceleration is a key driver of the transformation process. Organizations and individuals need to feel the urgency for delivering unusual results, not only in response to one-off crisis or to leadership whims, but in a sustained manner. In

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4 According to UNAIDS/WHO AIDS epidemic update in 2004. Please note that prevalence varied by Region, so for example, it was 7.2% in the Southern Red Sea Region – which coincidentally was the only Region where the Rapid-Results Approach was not introduced by the end of 2004.
private sector organizations, this continued sense of urgency around results can be driven by competitive pressures and by customer expectations. Even with these pressures, private sector organizations too often lose their “results compass” and need to be re-oriented towards this by the leadership group. The larger the organization and the more complex its operations, the more likely this will be. In the public sector, one eventually might expect this demand for results acceleration to come from informed citizens and pressure groups. But even in countries where the tradition of citizen activism is well rooted, public sector institutions still need to be jolted out of complacency by demanding leaders. In developing countries, individuals at the helm of public sector institutions have no choice but to inject this sense of urgency for results – and to do it repeatedly and vigorously over a period of at least one year.

- Demanding results without rewarding and recognizing performance can lead to cynicism and on-the-job resignation. Engaged leaders need to continually provide visibility and afford bragging rights to teams and groups that deliver unusual results. This ensures that more and more people step forward and try to emulate this “positively deviant behavior.”

The Rapid-Results Approach does not guarantee that the kind of leadership necessary for sustainability and scale-up. However, it does create the enabling conditions for a positively reinforcing cycle of results achievement and leadership development. As initial challenges are framed and individuals are given the opportunity to step up and take leadership roles in the context of 100-day projects, their confidence and their credibility is reinforced with each 100-day cycle of results achievement. They in turn are in a position to create demand for more ambitious results. Ultimately, the experience of better results can raise the overall level of expectations among recipients of Government services, which in turn can reinforce the demand for better and faster results.

This boot-strapping strategy presumes that there are at least a few individuals in leadership positions in the targeted public sector institutions who are not completely captive to the adverse behavioral patterns – ranging from patronage to outright corruption. The Rapid-Results Approach can in fact strengthen the hand of these individuals so they can pursue the deep reforms needed to reverse the endemic perverse incentives and behavioral patterns.

Reinforcing Positive Changes in Behavior
Even though the glory of achievement, coupled with “bragging rights” can be a powerful motivator, this needs to be complemented with more permanent changes in management practices. If people get complemented publicly by the leadership group for the results they had achieved, and yet get passed over in favor of non-performing managers when it comes to promotion time, the glow of achievement will inevitably fade out. There are other actions the leadership group needs to take to signal that they value in deeds – not just words – individuals who commit to unusual results and actually deliver on these.

Deep reform is almost always required – reform that often flies in the face of established interest groups. This is the primary focus for many public sector support programs
No doubt this needs to be a critical part of the solution, if the aim is to create a culture of high performance, accountability and results. The question is how best to go about this.

The challenge of building a culture of high performance is one that many leaders in private sector organizations have struggled with. And over the past twenty years the industry of management consulting in the US and Europe retooled to help these leaders tackle this challenge. In fact, tens of billions of dollars have been invested in consulting support over the past two decades, in culture change programs ranging from total quality management, to reengineering, to balanced score cards, to visioning and strategic planning. Sadly, there is little real evidence connecting many of these efforts to bottom line impact.

No doubt, there may be merit in all of these efforts. But like all structural and process changes, they are critical to reinforce behavioral change, but they are overrated as a tool for triggering and driving changes in behavior. In explaining why 70% of reengineering efforts in the heyday of the reengineering mania in corporate America failed, Michael Hammer (the inventor of the concept) cited “human behavior” as the key culprit: “the method works, but senior management was not paying enough attention to the behavior of individuals in the rank and file…”

In public sector institutions in developing countries, the risks of leading with traditional institutional reform efforts are even higher. Rapid-Results Initiatives help pave the way for these reforms by focusing directly on results achievement. By creating a mindset of results orientation… By strengthening the confidence and credibility of individuals who favor reform… By demonstrating the liberating and motivating effect of results achievement… Once this is in place, the reformers have at least a fighting chance for pushing the reform agenda and implementing the institutional reforms needed for sustainability and scale-up of the initial results.

**Strengthening the Engine for Results Delivery**

Leadership vigilance reinforces the shift in mind-set – where people develop a healthy impatience for results and begin to demand results and hold themselves and each other accountable for achieving these results. Achieving results though is not just about a state of mind. It is about execution disciplines: clarifying priorities, bringing key stakeholders on board, setting clear goals; developing work plans, following up on commitments; maintaining focus; persisting in the face of obstacles; and adapting plans to changing circumstances.

These disciplines get built over time, through repetition and reinforcement, until they become part of the “muscle memory” of an organization. The words of Dr. Worede “this is now a way of working for us: when we have a challenge to overcome, we attack it with a Rapid-Results team” suggest the possibility that “execution muscle memory” is developing in the institutions handling HIV/AIDS in Eritrea’s Central Zoba. There is a set choreography that kicks into motion when a new challenge emerges. All the actors know their role, and they play it competently.

Developing this muscle memory requires time – and an investment in people. The most leveraged investment in this regard is the development of “Rapid-Results coaches” – who

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5 Reference to be provided  
6 Reference to be provided
provide day-to-day support to sponsoring leaders and to individuals involved in “Rapid-Results Initiatives” – until the execution muscle memory develops. These are individuals who have the pre-disposition and the expertise to help others, on a just-in-time basis, apply the principles of the Rapid-Results Approach and the related execution disciplines. Without investing in these coaches, the results epidemic started by well intentioned leaders can lose its virulence, and “Rapid-Results” can become just a fad.

We have experimented with various models for doing this: building up the capacity for rapid-results coaching within the public sector (e.g. communicable disease coordinators in Eritrea); coaches recruited into the public sector specifically to play this role (e.g. in Sierra Leone); private sector rapid-results coaches providing consulting services to public sector managers (e.g. in Madagascar). There is no set formula for doing this, and continued experimentation is needed before we find out what works best – and under what conditions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BUSINESS OF DEVELOPMENT

The Rapid-Results Approach blurs a number of the traditional boundaries: between policy and implementation; capacity development and results achievement; local empowerment and central accountability. It also suggests organizing work in ways that cut across traditional organizational boundaries. Meaningful results do not often come in packages that are aligned with existing public sector organizational structures. So more often than not, cross-organizational teams are required to ensure proper accountability for results.

Experiences applying the Rapid-Results Approach confirm an insight that is quickly gaining ground: It is not enough to figure out the right solutions, the key is to make these happen! At its core, the Rapid-Results Approach provides a structured process for going from intentions to implementation, through successive waves of 100-day initiatives. Each of these initiatives produces a tangible result, develops existing capacities, and sheds light on the remainder of the implementation journey – including the required policy and institutional reforms.

If we accept this as a premise for organizing implementation, here are some of the corollaries that follow.

- The key is to get into action – to start the implementation process – as quickly as possible, versus agonizing over where to start and how to sequence the interventions.

- Implementation need not only be about putting pre-conceived policies into action. Rather, it can be organized to stimulate experimentation and discovery about the policies and solutions that actually work, and to build political and social commitment for these policies.

- There does not need to be a trade-off between achieving results in the short term and building capacity to achieve sustained results in the medium and long term.

Just Get Started...

The Rapid Results Approach was used in the Sierra Leone as a tool to unleash and strengthen implementation capacity at the local level, to encourage and reinforce development orientation of
newly created local councils, and to improve trust of citizens in nascent local government institutions. Local council chairmen were asked to choose areas of focus for their first wave of rapid-results initiatives before disbursement procedures were established, before bank accounts were set up at local levels, even before the chairpersons had officially taken office. All 19 councils launched RRI’s and achieved their results areas such as water access, sanitation, feeder roads, traffic, rice production, post-harvest loss, among others. Here are some examples of the goals – and results – that were achieved in the first 100 days:

• Reduced travel time between Sewafe and Peya of Nimiyama Chiefdom of Kono District from 1hr to 15 minutes, and cut transportation costs from Le 5,000 ($1.75) to Le 2,000 (70 cents).
• Increased the availability of high-yield quick-harvest Inner Valley Swamp Rice seeds in Pujehun District by 4,000 bushels.
• Ensured the availability of safe and portable drinking water in the mains and laterals and 25 public taps in the Moyamba township.
• Reduced total volume of garbage in two lorry parks (How for Do and Bus parks) and two markets (fisheries and Gbongbotoh) in Kenema Township by 90%.

The Councils implemented the RRI’s before they completed a participatory development planning process, but nevertheless, the initial wave of rapid-results – as opportunistic as these had been, served several purposes:

• Built the confidence of the council members in their own ability to deliver.
• Built the credibility of the councils with their constituencies.
• Forced accelerated implementation of enabling activities – such as opening a bank account and putting in place disbursement and accounting mechanisms.

One Council focused on increasing availability of rice seeds – from 20% to 80%. The goal was achieved, and in fact planting took place as part of the RRI. This initial success created the impetus to deal with the next challenge: storing the harvest in a manner that minimizes wastage. This is being considered as a theme for the next Rapid-Results Initiative in the council. We can visualize a series of Initiatives in this Council, each designed to focus collective energies of the Council – and the community – on tackling the challenges – and constraints that bubbles up as a consequence of the previous ones. So the Initiative following storage, for example, may be building the road infrastructure to transport the harvest. And so on.

No doubt, constraints could have been pre-identified in advance, before the first RRI on seed production was launched. We are not advocating doing away with this pre-planning. Simply that we do it quickly and let the roadmap evolve as implementation unfolds.

This is a micro-level example of deploying Rapid-Results Initiatives to sequentially tackle emerging constraints, one at a time. Notice that by insisting on value-producing results in 100 days, the choice of where to start becomes less critical. First, any results producing effort will smoke out the critical constraints, and thus make it imperative to deal with these either in the initiative itself or in subsequent initiatives. Second, even if the initial RRI is completely misguided, the most significant cost may be a 100-day delay from a more appropriate start-up. This pales in comparison to the time it typically takes to decide where to start in most development efforts.
In sum, *Rapid-Results Initiatives* can be used to converge towards the binding constraints through experimentation and successive approximation.

**Rapid-Results and the Policy Debate**

Policy reforms are critical for enabling the achievement of better results. Too often, though, implementation is viewed as a subsidiary or a derivative step – a way to put policies in place and to harvest these policies into better results. After all, what’s the point of strengthening and accelerating implementation if the wrong policies are in place? We may simply be accelerating progress in the wrong direction…

This sequential view – “policy first” then implementation – leads to missed opportunities for using Rapid-Results Initiatives as a way to advance the policy dialogue. In Madagascar for example, several growth experts present at a Governmental retreat lamented the decision to proceed with a *Rapid-Results Initiative* focused on vertically integrating the cotton sector. This was viewed – perhaps rightly – as yet another example of hurrying along in the wrong direction. The long term economic viability of this effort was highly questionable. Even though the Malagasi garment manufacturers were competitive in selected global markets, it was not clear whether vertical integration would increase this competitiveness. After all, cotton prices were falling worldwide, and cotton could be imported cheaply from Kenya and other countries. Furthermore, success in this effort would depend on convincing farmers that had abandoned cotton production to grow cotton again!

Against these odds, one might legitimately question the path that this *Rapid-Results Initiative* was heading in.

But the fear of venturing in the wrong direction may be misplaced. In fact, it misses the point that *Rapid-Results Initiatives* can be used as tools for “strategic discovery” precisely in situations where the policy path is unclear, or where there is political momentum behind a potentially unfruitful path.

How can this be done?

It is too early to describe Madagascar as a case in point. But there are early indications of corrective forces at play. As soon as a “strategic leader” was assigned to organize this *Rapid-Results Initiative*, he was asked to articulate the strategic context for this effort. As part of this, two steps were identified, and work was commissioned right away to complete these steps in 2-3 weeks:

- Assess the comparative cost of local production versus import of cotton
- Meet with the farmers in question and explore their readiness to return to cotton farming.

In effect, the 100-day *Rapid-Results Initiative* transformed the question of cotton growing from a highly charged political – or academic – debate to a concrete technical and implementation readiness exercise.
What happens next? Even if the initial two-week analysis is inconclusive, or if it comes out biased (perhaps inadvertently) towards proceeding with what might objectively be viewed as a wrong decision, there is still a strong safety net built into the process. The *Rapid-Results* team will need to agree and commit to deliver a real result in 100 days – a result that will shed light on the viability of vertical integration of the cotton industry.

To be clear, this result will have to go beyond the “hurry up” 100 day goal of completing a study or a report on this issue. It goes beyond preparing the plan for doing this – or even achieving a milestone like preparing land for cotton production. The challenge to the *Rapid-Results* team will be to achieve a result that will actually increase the level of confidence that the strategic path will yield the promised long-term benefits. Alternatively, if the initial hypothesis is misguided, pursuing this 100-day result will make it painfully clear that the strategic path will lead to a dead-end in terms of value creation for the country.

What might such a 100-day result, in this case, look like? Here are some examples:

- By end of October 2006, secure purchase agreements of Malgasi cotton garments (traditional and T-shirts) totaling at least $____, between Malgasi garment manufacturers and major US high-end mass retailers (e.g. TARGET) – at premium cost per item.
- Finalize preliminary purchase agreement between farmers in 5 targeted communes in the Southwest Region and DARGIS (major Malagasi manufacturer), to purchase cotton at preset prices that assure margins over production costs for farmers and competitive prices in export market for DARGIS.

In each of the above scenarios, the challenge is focused and localized enough, both in terms of scope and duration, to limit the investment risk. And yet the results are strategic in that achieving these – or failing to do so – will yield rich real life data on the strategic questions at hand: Is this a useful path? Can this vision be implemented? Is there readiness among key stakeholders to do this?

This process of “emergent policy” mirrors a shift that has been taking place in the corporate world – about the equally elusive challenge of strategy formulation and strategic planning.

The first guru to sound the alarm on this was Henry Mintzberg – in his January 1994 Harvard Business Review: “the Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning”. Mintzberg argued that the traditional processes for strategy formulation – as well as the whole process of strategic planning – are too often uncorrelated to the real-world manner in which strategies that actually lead to change and better results come about. He argued that effective strategies emerge organically through experimentation that is borne out of necessity, versus deliberate analysis carried out by strategic thinkers and strategic planners.

Another management guru, Gary Hamel built on Mintzberg’s argument, and speculated on ways that leaders can accelerate this process of strategy “fermentation”\(^7\): mixing people up, bringing

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people from the fringes of the organization into the mainstream, and creating a marketplace for experimentation and innovation, all for the purpose of creating the conditions for strategy emergence that Mintzberg described. Both authors highlight the need for leaders to vigilantly recognize “strategic discoveries” as these begin to emerge or become apparent, and to nurture these along into full fledged strategic initiatives.

Just like grand visions and lofty strategies, pre-occupation with policy reforms can lull development professionals and government leaders into a false sense of security. It is tempting to think that enhanced performance can be signed into existence with the creation of a legal document or policy statement. Organizational, institutional, and policy reforms may be a stimulus for accomplishing better results, but without an explicit focus on performance improvement, and a specific mechanism for achievement and for capacity building, the link between reforms and results is a hit-or-miss proposition.

By contrast, when policy reforms emerge out of the experience of trying to achieve initial results, or scaling up initial results, they become a natural element an organic change process. The readiness and commitment for these reforms is then assured at the local level, because the reforms are grounded in peoples’ experiences rather than emanating from the theoretical constructs of academicians or the assertions of experts. It is not that theoretical constructs and external experiences are irrelevant, but more often than not policy reforms are force-fed to development clients rather than allowed to emerge as part of the process of discovering what it takes to achieve and sustain results.

The dramatic turnaround in the use of Voluntary Counseling Services in Freetown in July and August 2004 illustrates the power of the “policy through results” approach. One of the key strategies that led to the turnaround was a shift from hospital-based VCT Centers to local community centers. During the first 30 days of the 100 day initiative, the Rapid-Results team set up 20 community VCT centers. Coupled with an intense marketing campaign as well as hospitality training to those managing the centers, this created a buzz in the various communities which led to an avalanche of users. Visiting the centers became a social trend.

The interesting aspect of the story was that international experts had been advocating since the outset of the project – 18 months prior – the need to make this shift to community-based centers. And yet adopting this strategy – and acting on it – only took place when the local team took accountability for an urgent and dramatic result that required a huge step up in performance. Nothing changed, really, except for their readiness to act on the strategy. Once that happened, success became possible – or perhaps inevitable.

**Short-Term Results and Medium and Long Term Capacity Building: False Trade-Off**

Many capacity building efforts are driven by the following logic:

- Start with what you want to accomplish,
  - analyze the required actions,
  - map out capacities needed to accomplish these,
  - inventory existing capacities
- Assess the capacity gap
  - Implement interventions to bridge this gap
  - Organize for results delivery

As we’ve outlined earlier, the Rapid-Results Approach suggests a different logic: Start with the results you want to achieve, and develop capacity as you go – in the context of achieving 100-day results. This has significant implications for the huge investments that are being made in capacity building and training initiatives: less “just-in-case” training workshops, and more “Just-in-time” training and coaching; more learning by doing, and while achieving; learning in smaller bites; and so on. These may seem inefficient and costly ways to build capacity by comparison to the more traditional ways of delivering capacity building programs. But their return on investment is likely to be much higher.

The Rapid-Results Approach may also have implications on the way some development products are designed:

- The Sierra Leone capacity building support to local councils is an example of simultaneously tackling the dual agenda of short-term results delivery in a post-conflict situation and medium term capacity building to nascent governance institutions.

- In Ethiopia’s Public Sector Capacity Building Program (PSCAP), Rapid-Results Initiatives were introduced as a template for organizing service delivery performance improvement efforts within Ministries, and for requesting capacity building grants from a facility set up by the Bank and managed by the Ministry of Capacity Building.

- In Kenya, after the success of the initial wave of HIV/AIDS Rapid-Results Initiatives, there are discussions underway to simplify the grant proposal template of the community component of the MAP so it aligns with the Rapid-Results Approach: What result will you achieve in the next 100 days? What are your plans to achieve this result? And how much will this cost? A training program is being piloted to help local AIDS Control Committees assess these proposals – with the mindset of venture capitalist firms making funding decisions on the business plans of entrepreneurs.

From Bureaucrats to Entrepreneurs

Individuals playing an active role in Rapid-Results Initiatives experience a shift from Government’s “business as usual”. Well designed Rapid-Results teams have the feeling of a start-up company: people experimenting, learning together, discovering new solutions, challenging each other; holding each other accountable, cutting corners, making do with minimal resources, persisting against adversity, and having fun. Perhaps this “intrapreneurship” is what sets Rapid-Results Initiatives apart from other short term improvement projects.

There is little incentive for embarking on this intrapreneurship in the public sector. It needs to be encouraged. It needs to be supported. And it needs to be rewarded. Once the process gets underway and committed leaders begin to emerge, their role too shifts. Just like members of rapid-results teams act less like bureaucrats and more like entrepreneurs, these leaders begin to
act less like central planners and more like venture capitalists. They make bets on people and ideas, and carry some of the investment risks with the entrepreneurs.

Perhaps this is the fundamental cultural shift that needs to permeate public sector institutions in developing countries, and that needs to motivate public sector reform efforts. More and more people engaged in figuring out solutions to their own problems and inefficiencies, spurred by entrepreneurial energy that is fed by leaders who think and act more like venture capitalists than central planners.

This is not a pipe dream. We are seeing it happen in isolated sectors, in a few countries. Perhaps the challenge ahead, for all those involved in the development work, is to help make this the norm rather than the exception.