How to Drive a Peer-to-Peer Learning Event—
from the Backseat

Understanding what to do about policy reform is the (relatively) easy part, our clients tell us. The hard part is figuring out how to do it. The path to reform is fraught with the details of practical implementation, the challenges of working with stakeholders, and the mammoth task of ensuring that a reform is both effective and politically sustainable. That’s why the best sources of wisdom on how to do it are the reformers themselves—who have been there and done that. So, during last September’s Doing Business launch in Kigali, Rwanda, we were delighted that government colleagues from Mauritius—who have successfully implemented reforms—offered to host a peer-to-peer learning event for African governments on business regulation reform.

Background

In the early years of the Doing Business report, we recorded relatively little business regulatory reform in Sub-Saharan Africa—a region that, on average, had the lowest scores in streamlining and making accessible regulatory processes, and in improving property rights. Notable exceptions were Rwanda, which had been implementing a broad-based investment climate reform program from as early as 2001, and Ethiopia and Botswana, which had done so since at least 2002.

More recently, however, the situation has improved. We have observed an expansion and deepening of reform efforts in the region:

- Two West African countries (Burkina Faso and Senegal) were featured on our top-10 reformer list in Doing Business 2009.
- Rwanda was the top reformer in that report—joined on the top-10 list by Liberia.
- Mauritius continued systematically to reform, breaking into the top-20 list in the Doing Business 2010 report.
- As of December 2009, 24 Sub-Saharan African countries had advisory engagements with IFC on investment climate reform.

With so much going on, the potential gains from knowledge sharing among the countries were enormous—for the workshop participants as well as for the World Bank Group (WBG). We needed to move quickly to take advantage of this momentum.
Colleagues from IFC Advisory Services in the region, the World Bank’s regional financial and private sector team, the Doing Business Reform Unit, and teams from the Mauritian Ministry of Finance and Board of Investment put together an agenda combining experience sharing, practical clinics, and site visits—all coordinated by Constantine Chikosi and his team in the World Bank’s Mauritius office. We set a date in January, and sent out the invitations. The response was overwhelming: 112 delegates from 15 African countries signed up. Eight of the country delegations were to be led by the Minister responsible for investment climate reforms. As we put the finishing touches on the program, we approached it as partners—rather than as managers—in the learning process. Below are some of the lessons that resulted.

Lessons Learned

1) Keep your eyes on the prize: Structure the invitation list with an eye toward intended outcomes.

The main objective of the workshop was to facilitate peer-to-peer learning among all of the participants. To achieve the greatest breadth of sharing, we invited representatives of countries at very different stages in their reform processes—some that have been working at reform for the past 10 years or more, some with 3-5 years of experience, and some reform “newcomers.” For example, long-time reformers, such as Mauritius, Rwanda, and Singapore, provided broad and rich perspectives both on the content and on the political reform; participants from Liberia, Rwanda, and Senegal brought insights on the challenges of transitioning from short- to long-term reform programs; and Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe came equipped to talk about their action plans for reform.

Involving participants from different reform stages both posed a challenge—to make sure every country delegation left the workshop with an idea of how to take its reform process to the next level—and presented a tremendous opportunity for experience sharing. This sharing of experiences among reformers at different stages—giving each stage a chance to present for the others kep everyone engaged and was key to achieving our objective: successful peer-to-peer learning.

2) Mix it up: Invite speakers from other regions—to bring fresh perspectives.

Looking across regions can broaden everyone’s perspective—the clients’ and our own—regarding approaches to reform. That’s why we invited a delegation from Singapore—the top performer in Doing Business 2010—to present at this event for African reformers.

Although Singapore focused on information technology (IT) and e-government in its reform process, the presenter stressed that IT in itself was not the solution, but rather a new way of thinking about regulation. As one delegate responded, “Paper should move, not people.” The idea is to streamline processes and change the civil servant’s mentality from “regulator of a potential lawbreaker” to “provider of service to a client.” As another participant aptly put it, “It is important to question the added value of each procedure.” The Singapore presentation received some of the highest ratings in the evaluation and certainly helped participants see their reform programs in a new light.

3) Do market research—and then focus the agenda.

To determine which areas of reform were priorities in the region, we analyzed the Doing Business data across all topics and talked with our colleagues working in the field. We found that most of the participating countries were either in the process of reforming (or needed to improve) along four common themes: business start-up, construction permits, access to credit, and trade logistics. Other topics, such as insolvency procedures and investor protection, were also important, but we needed to focus the agenda to ensure a coherent discussion. We wanted to be sure the participants would take away meaningful and specific advice on a few topics, rather than just skim the surface of several.

4) Build an agenda that helps learning unfold.

We structured the agenda to cover the priority areas of reform as well as the process of reform—guiding the participants toward formulating action plans to take reform forward. First, Mauritius, Rwanda, and Liberia gave us the big picture with presentations on the political economy of reform. Then, six countries drilled down,
presenting their most important lessons in reform on four priority topics.

The next day, the technical people in each delegation sat together to devise reform action plans on their chosen topics. Experts from the World Bank Group and from the participating countries were on hand for consultations and best practice examples. Ministers did not attend this very focused technical session, instead meeting separately with senior WBG managers for a broader strategic discussion. This separation allowed for frank, technical discussions both within and among the delegations. The Ministers were able to give the WBG a high-level perspective on the Africa private sector development strategy for our institution.

On the final day, the Mauritian agencies responsible for the priority topic areas—the credit bureau, the property registry, the business registry, and the port—gave the delegates tours to demonstrate their good practices. In retrospect, it would have been more useful to schedule the site visits before the working sessions so that the delegates could have included the best practices of Mauritius in their work plans.

5) Facilitate peer-to-peer discussions, rather than WBG-to-client lectures.

From the start, we wanted an event in which the WBG played facilitator, not lecturer. The technical working session in particular brought out the value of this approach. According to the format, when a delegation presented its action plan, a member of another delegation also participated as a discussant. For example, when Zimbabwe presented its reform action plan, a delegate from Tanzania sat at the presenters’ table to give commentary afterwards. In this way, country delegations could share lessons and learn from the experiences of their neighbors. Following are some outcomes from this approach:

- **On improving access to credit:** Some delegations focused on improving credit information on borrowers and amending laws on secured transactions. But the discussant from Tanzania pointed out that improving credit in Africa is largely dependent on improving property rights and creating well-functioning registries for immovable and movable assets.

- **On cross-border cooperation:** Uganda and Zambia pointed out the importance of such cooperation for reforms—particularly in trade logistics, immovable and movable registries, and credit bureaus. Burkina Faso noted that it would be necessary to lobby at the OHADA1 level to pass certain legal reforms in the areas of business start-up and secured transactions.

- **On the importance of communication:** To implement the changes that the Registry in Sierra Leone envisaged, it had to educate and retrain its staff, and inform the public so that they could benefit from the new system.

1 Several participating countries were members of OHADA (Organisation pour l’Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires), a commercial law regime common in Francophone Africa which can only be changed by the unanimous approval by all member countries.

6) Beyond the agenda: Provide an outlet for participants to express their concerns—and monitor follow-up progress.

During the working sessions, WBG staff made it clear that although the event was motivated by Doing Business, building a better investment climate requires a much broader focus. Participants saw the Doing Business report as a good way to catalyze and inform reforms, but the presentations made it clear that it was just one part of the picture. According to the participants, the most pressing reforms in areas not covered by the Doing Business report are improvements in macroeconomic and political stability; the quality of infrastructure, particularly energy and transport; and the skills development of the labor force.

Participant evaluations told us that the event was a great success, but we were just as interested in knowing what happened after the event. Were the participants continuing to use peer-to-peer learning as a vehicle to help client governments take their reform programs to the next level? As we began drafting this SmartLesson, we realized that we could go to the same World Bank and IFC teams that helped design the event and ask them to help us monitor the follow-up. Here is some of what we found out:

- The Liberian delegation has contacted the Mauritian government and requested peer-to-peer technical assistance.

- In Tanzania, the delegation returned energized and immediately created a task force that has been working to develop a road map of reform actions, which will be transformed into a program document.

- The Burundian delegation returned to Bujumbura eager to proceed with their reform program, and the attending Minister is already working to implement some important measures.

- The Mauritian government has been in contact with the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to host a joint workshop in Kinshasa on reforms.
• Burkina Faso, one of the recognized top reformers at the event, is planning to host its own peer-to-peer workshop aimed at West African reformers.

Although the WBG took a backseat at the event, when it came to follow-up we made sure to continue our role as partners in the reform process. For countries such as Tanzania and Zimbabwe that were just embarking on their reform programs, the Doing Business Reform team followed up with a reform memo to each country—and a mission to Darussalam. For the others, advisory staff are using the momentum created in Mauritius to help their countries reach the objective of the workshop: to take their reform programs to the next level.

Conclusion: With peer-to-peer learning, we’re big beneficiaries, too.

In a peer-to-peer learning event—where our role is to convene and facilitate rather than to teach—we officially join the ranks of the learners. It was our privilege to sit at the table with senior government colleagues as they shared their stories and their challenges. This is learning that we can take to other clients in our ongoing advisory work. As a bonus, this event brought together World Bank and IFC colleagues from both the region and headquarters who are active in investment climate reform work in Africa. Learning together alongside clients served to reinforce our own internal communication and collaboration.