

Understanding PERL's Approach

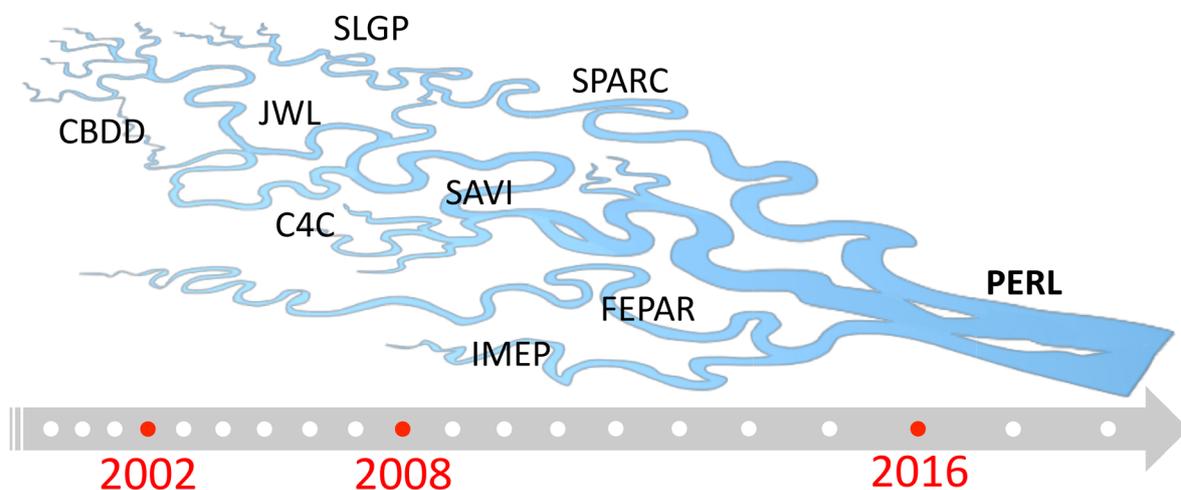


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Introduction

The Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) is a public-sector accountability and governance programme working to achieve improvements in governance and service delivery, primarily focussing on health, education, water and agriculture services. PERL builds on two decades of learning and experience from supporting governance reform in Nigeria through various ways of working in partnership with governments, citizens, parliaments, media and the private sector.

PERL recognises that demonstrating the link between governance reforms and improved service delivery for citizens is critical, which is why civic engagement is an integrated part of every aspect of its approach. Facilitating this engagement has been an extensive learning journey. This executive note explains the contextual rationale behind PERL's broad strategic approach deriving from the earlier experiences and lessons learnt by PERL's predecessor programmes and over the course of PERL's implementation.



PERL's Origins

DFID has been investing in public sector reform in selected Nigerian states for more than 20 years. Its current investment, through the PERL programme (2016 - 2021), builds on the achievements and learning of three generations of successive DFID projects and programmes dating back to 1998. During the transition to civilian rule after years of military dictatorship, DFID's engagement in governance reform in Nigeria was limited to civil society Capacity Building for Decentralised Development (CBDD, 1998-2002) and advocacy for a credible, peaceful return to democracy, in the run up to the 1999 elections.

Post-1999, DFID's engagement with the new civilian administration on governance was forged through the provision of technical assistance to central government agencies. This focused on policy and strategy development, strengthening public financial management and public sector management in a few 'focal' states: Jigawa, Benue and Ekiti, as well as at the Federal level. This was provided through the State & Local Government Programme (SLGP, 2001-2007) alongside technical

assistance to selected sectors (mainly health, education and justice) in the same places and an early issue-based project Joint Wetlands Livelihoods. Sector programmes at this time were not deliberately connected to governance programmes. Assistance was however aligned to emerging national and state economic empowerment and development agendas, which in turn were being shaped at that time by international agreements based on the Millennium Development Goals.

During this period, DFID began to establish a number of core principles aimed at strengthening its portfolio of programmes in Nigeria. These programmes were structured based on learning from this early technical assistance and from DFID more globally: on working in 'partnership' with host governments; the use of 'political economy' and 'drivers of change' analysis; and on the merits of taking an 'issue-based' approach versus capacity and systems focussed 'sector reform'. This triggered a review of DFID's footprint and inter-relations of its initial portfolio of programmes in Nigeria. State focus shifted to places with larger populations:

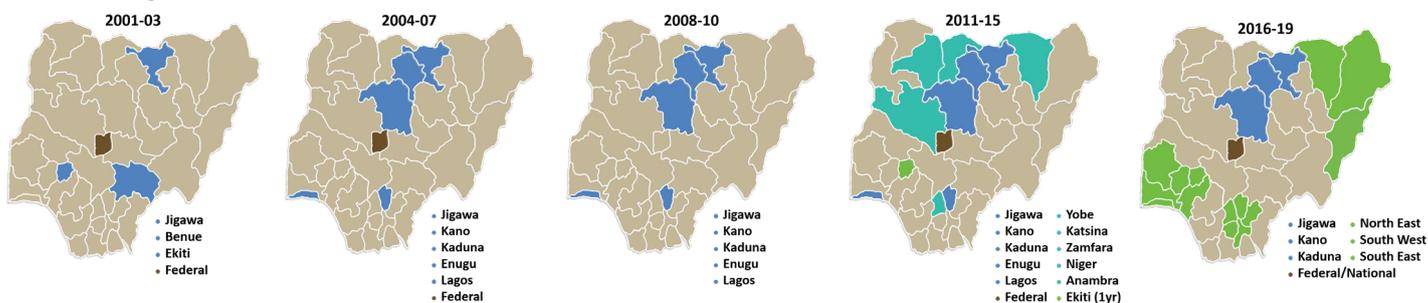
Kano, Kaduna and Lagos, whilst maintaining a geo-political regional spread. Joining up the portfolio in each state and building greater state ownership proved more challenging. This gave rise to a new suite of State Level Programmes (SLPs) designed to start together, work towards a common set of state specific goals, and be jointly overseen by both DFID and the host state governments. At the core of this new suite, taking forward the centre-of-government work of SLGP, was the State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC, 2008-2016), together with an offshoot, the State Accountability & Voice Initiative (SAVI, 2008-2016), to strengthen citizen engagement, which had been an integral but underdeveloped component of SLGP.

SPARC and SAVI were separately contracted, as were all of the sector programmes in the SLP suite: Partnership for Transforming Health Systems 2 (PATHS2), Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) and Growth, Employment & Markets (GEMS - Comprised of several components). They all inherited the new 'focal state' footprint (minus a Federal component, initially) engaging in a mixture of capacity and systems strengthening, 'sector reform' and 'issue-based' work. Co-ordination proved to be a major challenge, but linkages between governance reforms and improved service delivery were forged although better in some places, and between some

programmes than others, and over time, but not at the scale that DFID expected. Sector programmes were deliberately designed to work with governance programmes but ultimately fell back into separate governance, human development and economic growth silos. The sector programmes were also designed in such a way that they did not need to collaborate with the governance programmes.

SPARC and SAVI were expanded into five other states (2011-15 in the 'footprint maps' below) in which DFID had established other programmes. These were mainly in the North and predominantly focused on health (Maternal, New Born and Child Health). With the benefit of hindsight and learning, the partnerships established between the programmes and with host governments, citizens and other key stakeholders were generally more effective and efficient in these new states. The service delivery issues and governance processes engaged as entry points for reform were also generally less constrained by past legacies, pre-determined priorities and internal capacity/knowledge gaps. Staff and partners in the old focal states began learning from those in the new states. The success of some of these new partnerships, and their potential to influence improved ways of working in the old focal states, fuelled demand for the extension of SAVI and SPARC and contributed to the design of PERL.

Founding Principles



It has taken over a decade of trial and error, of learning by going through three generations of programmes, to discover what it takes to apply the core programming principles that began to emerge in DFID Nigeria in 2003/04. Applying understanding of what works and what doesn't – and in what context and why – to demonstrate effective linkages between governance reforms and improved service delivery. PERL's design embodies these principles, locally adapted and developed, but now framed in the language of PDIA and adaptive programming. It continues to provide DFID with valuable learning about connecting programmes in its portfolio:



principles of **partnership** – shared determination and ownership of the reform agenda and approach with host governments and their citizens, and between supporting programmes and donors ... to the extent of reinforcing **locally led, locally**

sustainable, locally scalable agendas and approaches.



use of 'political economy' (PE) and 'drivers of change' analysis – to ensure agendas and approaches are both **politically smart**: contextually derived and defined; easily changeable as the context changes; and therefore, **iterative and adaptive** based on regular reflection, shared learning and **de-projectisation**.



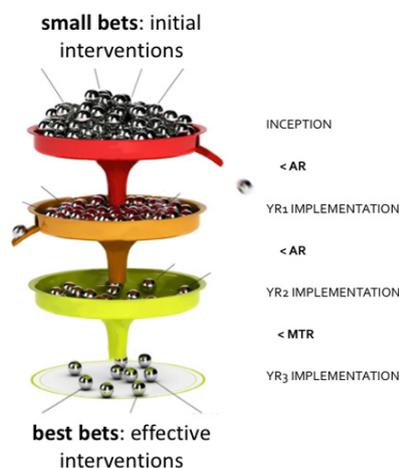
a combination of 'issue-based' and capacity and systems strengthening 'sector reform' approaches – primarily **problem driven**, pro-poor service delivery **impact oriented**, maximising **use of technology** wherever possible, and achieved as efficiently as possible, representing good **value for money**.

PERL's mandate from DFID is to apply these principles in Nigeria to reform how governments organise their core business of making, implementing, tracking and accounting for **policies, plans and budgets used in delivering public goods and services** to citizens, and how citizens themselves engage with these processes. It does this by building on existing successes in previous Nigerian governance reforms, reinforcing successful **islands of effectiveness**, replicating and broadening reforms to trigger significant improvements in the delivery of public goods and services, leading to more systemic reforms: **transformational change**. PERL was deigned to achieve this by working together with a new suite of DFID sector programmes, but these have not yet "come on stream" - in their absence, PERL has forged partnerships with sub-sector programmes.

From Small Bets to Best Bets: 'Stacking Up'

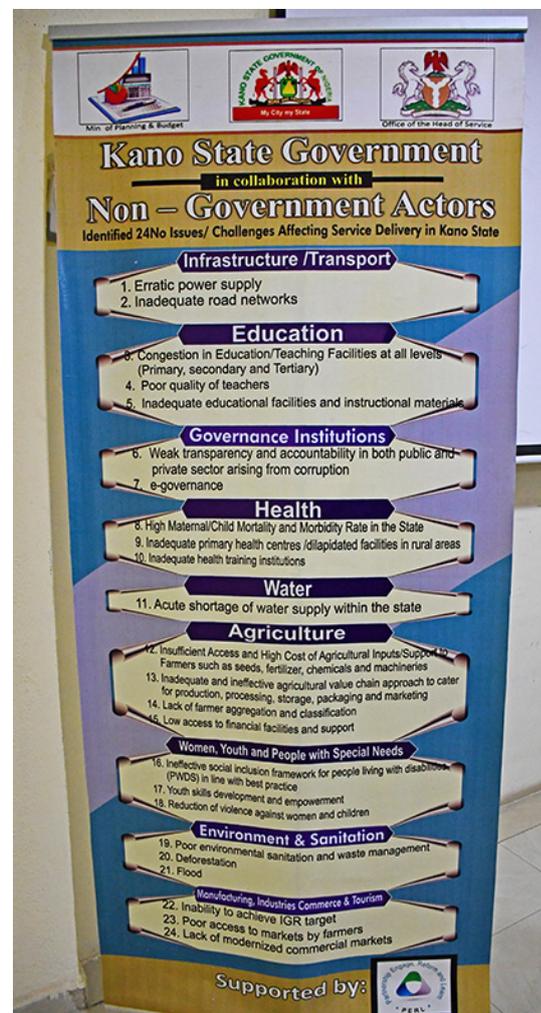
During inception, PERL relied heavily on PE and stakeholder analysis to identify governance processes and service delivery problems with the greatest potential for supporting local partners to pursue and realise transformational change in their respective places (state, region or nation as a whole). Federal and State development agendas at that time (mid-2016) were focussed on economic recovery (after a drop in global oil prices) and national security (with increasing insurgency in the North, pre and post 2015 elections). Revitalising the agricultural sector and tackling problems of power supply and youth unemployment were foremost on all agendas. Public goods like health and education (DFID's main sectoral priorities) featured much lower down on their priority lists. Issues selection became a challenge and extended analysis to justify the decision-making process led to some paralysis and delay in the take-off of several interventions. There was also insufficient evidence of a locally led approach.

Rather than reject either the PE analysis or DFID priorities, PERL opted to keep to its principles and mandate and support partner governments and citizens to jointly develop a wide-ranging agenda, covering several sectors, and pursue each one simultaneously during the first year of PERL's implementation. PERL agreed to support their take-off with detailed problem analysis, blockage identification, initial partnership



formation, tracking them to observe which had the greatest self-sustaining momentum in terms of partner commitment, public traction, investment of local resources, etc. In two years, PERL would then scale-up support to these and scale-back support to others in year two. This is commonly referred to in PERL as taking a "small bets approach", advocated by most PDIA practitioners and borne out of the success of SAVI and SPARC's engagement approaches in states such as Yobe, Anambra and Niger. In hindsight, the programme could and maybe should have taken this more locally-led approach to issue selection from the outset to save time. A painful lesson learnt for PERL and a strong message to other programmes facing this challenge.

By the second year of PERL's implementation, staff and partners had homed in on a smaller selection of linked service delivery problems and governance processes. In Kano, for example, out of the 24 problem areas of priority on partners agenda (seen in this photo), roughly 10 (in 4 out of 9 sectors) had shown themselves to be "front runners" by the end of year one. So, PERL's support in year two gave highest priority to these, while continuing to observe and track the remainder to pick up any "slow starters". In all PERL places, progress and plans are reviewed quarterly, but mid- and end-of-year strategic reviews and re-work-planning processes at programme level serve as a bigger picture check and balance.



This filters out the more progressive interventions from the intractable and less effective. It also generates shared learning, success stories and cross-fertilisation of ideas and opportunities. Even with such an iterative and adaptive, locally-led approach, it has been necessary and possible to forge strategic partnerships with DFID's and other donors' service delivery and sub-sectoral reform programmes working on PERL partners' specific priority areas in each place. However, it may have prevented PERL from establishing long-term commitments from the outset with other projects and programmes in DFID Nigeria's current portfolio, but wherever the need for these has emerged they have materialised. This has often been without the use of formal cross-programme partnership agreements. This is especially the case where there are strong, locally-led donor co-ordination mechanisms in place, as for example in Kaduna. These already serve to strategically align the support provided by a range of external actors and their different interventions with a place-specific development agenda – very much in keeping with DFID's principles of partnership.

Significant reforms have already been triggered through such partnerships, addressing critical service delivery gaps and blockages, contributing to tangible impacts on selected services in key sectors in multiple locations of DFID partner states. These reforms are generating significant learning for all the partners involved, for PERL and for DFID, shaping our engagement strategies and influencing our future actions.

PERL is currently preparing for a midterm strategic review. During this, further filtering is taking place: scaling back support to less effective areas of intervention and scaling-up support to those that are already making a significant contribution to governance reform and service delivery improvements (as well as demonstrating and enhancing the linkages between them) and that have the potential to continue to do so in the remaining two years of the programme. Decisions are also based on wider learning as well as regularly updated, well-informed, forward looking political economy analyses, partners changing development agendas (post 2019 elections) and projected investment by DFID and other donors in existing and future programmes. For such reasons, the timing of PERL's annual strategic reviews was aligned to Nigeria's electoral cycle at inception.

These are no longer "small bets", but "big bets" or "best bets" based on current projections. PERL's latest place level workplans are still place-specific, and thus varied across the programme in their sectoral focus but they each now consist of a much tighter and more coherent portfolios of planned interventions. These also have a clearer line of sight to desired impacts on service delivery and a longer-term, transformational change, development agenda. Further modifications will be needed, as the political context in each place, and DFID, continues to change, but relative to where they all started, they are now beginning to "stack up".

Expected Transformational Change

All three DFID partner states, federal level and some conflict-affected North Eastern states now have increasingly robust inclusive planning and budgeting frameworks: still taking root at the federal level but developed in Jigawa, installed in Kano, embedded in Kaduna, and maturely performing in Yobe. And through the constructive engagement and actions of a wide and diverse range of citizens, media, parliamentarians and development partners, working with government in each place, these frameworks are beginning to support some significant improvements in service delivery: most notably in Primary Health Systems in Kaduna State, in Education Services in Kano State, Services for Persons With Disabilities in Jigawa State and for Internally Displaced People in Borno and Yobe States. These developments still have some way to go before we would consider them irreversible transformational changes. However, all are being sustained and scaled-up through the linkages forged with these increasingly robust inclusive planning and budgeting frameworks, in which citizens representing geo-political and demographic as well as sectoral constituencies are being increasingly engaged by government in processes of budget preparation, approval, implementation and oversight. In years past, without brokering such linkages, these developments have tended to erode over time or remain isolated islands of effectiveness with political or key personnel changes in government and/or the withdrawal of external support and 'completion' of supporting programmes. Early signs suggest that these trends are being broken. Through PERL's approach, partnership arrangements are being sustained and multi-stakeholder engagement to resolve service delivery challenges, becoming practice.

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