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CHANGE

# Empowering Transformational Decentralisation in Africa Through Delivery

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## Introduction

Increasing the effectiveness of governments in Africa requires efforts focused not only at the national level but subnational too. In line with strategies to decentralise governance while maintaining a strong and compelling national vision, subnational governments are the key to strengthening public-service delivery and socioeconomic transformation.

As decentralisation continues in many countries – often in the context of highly constrained financial and human resources – governments and leaders are exploring ways to enhance the implementation capacity of their devolved administrative divisions through delivery mechanisms. Delivery is an approach that translates the promises of political leaders into action through solution-driven processes and the four Ps framework – prioritisation, policy, planning and performance management. Cascading this mechanism of delivery down to different layers of government administration can enable leaders to successfully bridge the gap between their political promises and the services provided to citizens.

The concept and practice of delivery was initially pioneered at national level (president, prime minister and vice president offices as well as line ministries). In recent years, however, governments have increasingly sought to integrate the principles and practice of delivery at subnational level as a strategy to drive the performance of these institutions in delivering for their citizens while building implementation and capacity of decentralised functions.

This trend can be observed in both high- and low-income countries. For example, in the US, the Governor’s Delivery Unit in Maryland played a critical role in reducing infant mortality in the state from 8 per 1,000 live births to 6.5 in 2014, after the subject became a priority focus for the administration. In Buenos Aires, meanwhile, the mayor’s delivery mechanism contributed to the lowest infant-mortality rate in history (from 8 per 1,000 births between 2004 and 2007 down to 6.5 between 2016 and 2018), and a 42 per cent reduction in violent crime (from 5.7 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015 down to 3.3 in 2019). These falls followed Mayor Horacio Larreta’s public commitment to meet specific and quantifiable goals on these two matters within specific deadlines.

In Africa, there are several delivery mechanisms in subnational contexts. In this paper, we explore case studies from a trio of countries, where the mechanisms have been supported by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI), and from which we can draw insights. This is part two<sup>1</sup> of a series of publications generated by the Institute following the 2020 Africa Delivery Exchange (ADX)<sup>2</sup> event, during which the mayors of Kanifing in The Gambia and Freetown in Sierra Leone shared their experiences of establishing delivery mechanisms at subnational levels, leading to additional demand for learning on this subject.

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## Transforming Freetown Through Resilience, Human Development and a Healthy City

Before her election in March 2018, Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyer of Freetown already had experience of implementing delivery principles during her tenure as the delivery team lead for the President's Recovery Priorities, when her role in supporting the national response to Ebola in Sierra Leone and helping to drive socioeconomic recovery following the outbreak exposed her to the challenges faced by subnational government actors.

Mayor Aki-Sawyer was determined to serve the country's capital city as a transformational leader. Having launched her "Transform Freetown" agenda in 2018, which outlined an approach to addressing the issues faced by local residents, with a special focus on how to achieve and monitor progress towards set targets, the Mayor's Delivery Unit was established as a mechanism by which to fully drive this ambitious programme.

The structure of the Mayor's Delivery Unit was informed by the agenda, with technical experts selected to shape and support four priority areas, namely Resilience, Human Development, Healthy Cities and Urban Mobility. Each of these sectors comprises a cluster of three to four individual interventions (for example, Healthy Cities incorporates health, water and sanitation interventions).

The Mayor's Delivery Unit has assumed several core functions including performance management of corresponding initiatives and resource mobilisation to meet any funding shortfalls. Team members are funded by several development partners, including the African Development Bank, European Union, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and Open Society Initiative for West Africa. Additionally, several institutions send volunteer staff members for postings of between three and six months to boost delivery of specific activities in order to achieve sector-specific interventions identified by the agenda.

TBI supports the unit by providing delivery advice and support directly to the mayor as well as to the delivery unit lead on matters of leadership, programme management and direct delivery in areas such as sanitation and disaster management.

The unit's work has been particularly crucial during the global pandemic to ensure that targets and milestones of the "Transform Freetown" agenda are met, including the successful completion of the city's first faecal-sludge-management plant, which is expected to increase the proportion of matter treated after disposal at Freetown's dumpsites from zero to 80 per cent. Additionally, the Mayor's Delivery Unit has contributed to the successful rollout of revenue-mobilisation strategies, including approximately \$700,000 raised from property tax and \$130,000 from business licences, representing

15 per cent and 9 per cent of potential annual revenue from these two taxes respectively. Data has proven instrumental to the success of these interventions. For example, now that classification and allocation of tax bands for properties and businesses is driven by GIS (data-mapping) technology, held on an online database, it has been possible for the city council to move towards an automated system that makes the process more accountable and transparent while significantly improving collection rates. The mayor is optimistic about harnessing similar technology to maximise potential in other areas including street parking and other council assets. Such interventions are invaluable in meeting financial shortfalls.

## County Governments in Kenya Bolster Key Development Projects

In Kenya, 27<sup>3</sup> county governments have established what are commonly known as service delivery units. While they differ in name, structure and function, they do have the following cross-cutting similarities:

- Improving the delivery of services to county residents in line with county-integrated development plans (CIDPs).
- Performance-management functions including monitoring progress towards the completion of key development projects in line with the plans.
- Identifying and addressing challenges that might hinder or derail implementation of CIDPs.
- Communication functions to share information with the public on progress towards completion of key projects.

The establishment of such units in 27 Kenyan counties can be interpreted as an indicator of the political will at the devolved level to integrate delivery principles and practice into related administrations. The units have played a significant role in strengthening the capacity of county administrations to manage performance as well as supporting efforts to develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound (SMART) monthly-, quarterly- and semi-annual targets in line with CIDPs. SMART targets have served to break down CIDPs, sometimes referred to as “super” plans because they articulate a county’s overall framework for development, into manageable roadmaps with short- to medium-term trajectories defining clear milestones in the journey to achieving the wider goals.

As Kenya approaches a general election in 2022, county service delivery units, with support from the Council of Governors and TBI Kenya, are reflecting on their impact in delivering citizen-centric services while understanding ways to ramp up effective delivery of services that matter most to citizens. Efforts are also underway in the election run-up to increase the visibility of the transformative role of delivery practices in order to advocate for their survival post-2022.

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## Self-Sufficiency at Municipal Level in The Gambia

Delivery mechanisms have been established at national and subnational levels in The Gambia. At the national, TBI has supported the establishment of the Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery (DSPD), which is anchored at the Office of the President. At the local government level, a delivery mechanism is in place at the country's largest municipality, Kanifing Municipal Council, under the leadership of Mayor Talib Bensouda.

The delivery support given to the mayor presents an alternative model in the form of external advisors whose purpose it is to provide delivery skills and competencies that may not exist within existing subnational administrations. In the case of the specific support provided to Mayor Bensouda by TBI, our governance advisor largely serves as a resource to strengthen coordination efforts within Kanifing Municipal Council, and to establish systems and processes facilitating follow-up actions related to development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of priority interventions. This has proven a crucial role in the establishing of functional relationships between the council and external actors, including development partners and donors who have helped to address critical funding gaps for key services and interventions.

The delivery mechanism at Kanifing Municipal Council has contributed to the establishment of self-sufficient structures driving key projects, such as the GIS (data-mapping) unit heading up property-tax reforms and an independent board of directors leading on the running of a bus operator as a limited liability company of which the council is the majority shareholder. Additionally, the delivery mechanism has worked in collaboration with civil servants from the council to jointly achieve results in terms of international relations and communications for the mayor. Finally, it has also served as a bridge between council and development partners for the raising of resources for a sanitary landfill as well as supporting the project management of initiatives with external implementation bodies, including UN agencies and NGOs.

## Lessons and Recommendations for Delivery Mechanisms in Africa

We offer the following insights to inform strategies relating to the establishment of delivery mechanisms within subnational governance structures:

- There is a need to clearly link subnational agendas to national ones as part of a strategy to overcome political bureaucracy and tensions. This approach should be favoured over identifying subnational strategies and agendas that are, by default, primarily associated with the agenda of a single elected individual.
- It is important to leverage the high-calibre staff that make up delivery mechanisms to build the longevity of local government administrators when it comes to delivery implementation. Role models and standard-setting are crucial to the sustainability of all efforts driving subnational agendas in service of local citizens and communities.
- As shown in Freetown, the utilisation of technology to collect and analyse data to underpin decision-making, specifically regarding resource-mobilisation efforts, has proven to be a best practice. This is because “data wins arguments” in a way that cannot be compared to any other strategy for mobilising and allocating financial and human resources.
- Good project development and attracting investment from potential development partners are key techniques for expanding the reach of delivery mechanisms. As demonstrated in the Gambia case study, co-opting external project managers helped to achieve subnational development aspirations.
- Significant effort is required to bridge the political divide between local and national governments to find common ground and achieve aligned technical objectives.
- There is great potential for public-private partnerships to accelerate development at the local level, but caution is required to find appropriate partners with sufficient resources and capacity to fully realise this potential.

### Recommendations

We offer four key recommendations for delivery practitioners and stakeholders seeking to accelerate their practice at subnational governance level:

1. **Political will must be grounded in a firm understanding of delivery principles and practice.** The Mayor’s Delivery Unit in Freetown highlights the need for political leaders to root political will in a



strong awareness of delivery principles and practice as well as the potential that delivery holds in driving ambitious and transformative development agendas. Delivery practitioners should ensure that adequate resources and time are allocated to this process as a critical starting point when seeking to strengthen the capacity of subnational structures. Such a process can be undertaken through high-level meetings and discussions to ensure principles and practice are well understood. Additionally, cross-learning platforms for subnational leaders can facilitate the transfer of knowledge about and understanding of delivery's transformative role, drawing on experiences and lessons from countries that already have established subnational mechanisms. It is this combination of political will and understanding that leads to effective and transformational mechanisms.

2. **Subnational strategies that integrate the four Ps of delivery serve as crucial guidance for delivery mechanisms.** Clear articulation of what a subnational administration hopes to achieve (in the form of documented strategy as per the “Transform Freetown” agenda) is crucial to the structure and role of a delivery mechanism at subnational level as well as the potential it has to drive implementation, monitoring and performance management of development. Delivery practitioners and stakeholders should support the development of concise subnational strategies integrating the four Ps as part of their starting point for a targeted agenda or, at the very least, of establishing an integrative delivery mechanism at subnational level.
3. **Alignment of subnational development agendas to national and international ones serves as a powerful strategy to overcome bureaucracy.** It is crucial to ensure that subnational development priorities are aligned to national and international ones, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other regional and continental strategies in order to overcome potential political tensions and bureaucracy that can disrupt complete implementation of a subnational agenda. Delivery practitioners play a key role in ensuring this alignment.
4. **An evidence base of “role-model” approaches is critical to recruiting support from both subnational actors and development partners for the greater adoption of delivery mechanisms.** Development partners are often apprehensive of delivery mechanisms because of sustainability issues, especially with regards to the “injection of external talent, skills and competencies” that are lacking in existing government institutions. Delivery practitioners may need to dedicate attention and resources in order to expand the definition of “capacity building” while documenting and disseminating success stories where the “role-model” approach has worked as a practical and long-term strategy for getting things done.

***“Citizens may not be able to judge the President’s macroeconomic policy, but they can certainly tell whether their Mayor is filling the potholes, trimming the trees, and trucking off the garbage.” Robert Behn, 2014***

## Conclusion

As showcased in our three case studies, delivery mechanisms are instrumental at the subnational level in terms of strengthening the ability of governance systems and structures to deliver services for their citizens. Fortifying the connection between subnational development goals and national and international development strategies is key to overcoming any bureaucratic tensions as part of decentralisation. Instituting delivery principles and practices in subnational governance structures can serve as a capacity-building initiative to drive the implementation of services for citizens. Furthermore, the use of technology for data collection and analysis can inform decision-making and the planning of subnational services, projects and programmes. When proactive problem-solving skills and techniques are applied to this process, potential obstacles and bottlenecks that threaten to derail delivery of services are also identified and addressed in a timely fashion. Last, but certainly not least, delivery mechanisms offer a platform for development partners to contribute to subnational public-service delivery and enhance impact at the grassroots level.

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## Footnotes

1. ^ Part one found here: [“Deliver Better: How Government Can Facilitate Recovery and Transformation in Africa”](#).
2. ^ ADX is an annual forum for delivery learning and exchange among African delivery leaders and practitioners. ADX 2020 was hosted by the Government of Kenya – President’s Delivery Unit, in partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Tony Blair Institute (TBI).
3. ^ 27 of 47 county governments have established service delivery units.



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