Improving Government Implementation Capacity in Madagascar through “Rapid Response”

Context
Two cyclones ravaged the island of Madagascar, which created a food crisis. To bolster its depleted stocks of rice, a staple food responsible for providing Malagasy with most of their nutritional needs, the government applied a “Rapid Results” project management methodology with great success. The method focuses on rallying government, civil society, and private sector officials to achieve common goals under tight deadlines, usually in less than five months.

Development Challenge
Madagascar has faced development changes from natural disasters combined with macro-economic challenges. In 2004, the island of Madagascar suffered two major cyclones, Cyclone Elita and Cyclone Gafila, which together damaged nearly a third of Madagascar’s rice-producing fields and wiped out an estimated 10 percent of national production. At the same time, Madagascar could not import enough rice to make up for the deficit of this critical staple stock responsible for half of the calories in a typical Malagasy diet: the global price of rice was rising quickly while the exchange rate for Madagascar’s currency was falling. By the end of 2004, the price of rice in the capital city of Antananarivo had doubled from the previous year.

The Intervention
Needing to increase its stocks of rice, the President of Madagascar tasked key administration officials with finding a solution. They looked to the World Bank’s Governance and Institutional Development Project team, which suggested a “Rapid Results” approach that had proved capable of solving frequently encountered public sector management reform obstacles. In late 2004, the government set the parameters for a rice production pilot project to take place in four of Madagascar’s 22 regions with the hope that it could be implemented widely across the country. After a successful pilot, Rapid Response was applied to rice production with great success: regions that implemented the method increased average rice yields steadily from 3.75 tons per hectare in 2006 to 5.8 tons in 2009, compared with national average yields of 2.5 to 3 tons per hectare from 2005 to 2009. This success led the government to widen the scope of Rapid Results for rice production countrywide, and then to a range of other initiatives.

Delivery Challenges
This delivery note analyzes the following key challenges the project faced during implementation and examines how they were overcome:
1. **Bureaucratic Barriers to Reforms:** The GoM suffered from siloed agency priorities and agendas. The Ministry of Agriculture’s initial efforts to confront the rice crisis failed because other ministries did not cooperate. Projects in Madagascar had often fallen apart during implementation as ministries often developed and implemented policies without adequate consideration of the needs of other ministries and interested parties. The administrative culture also discouraged personal initiative, because risk-averse officials who were used to working at a relaxed pace found safety in collective responsibility. Poor inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral coordination along with low capacity and professional inexperience also inhibited progress and important programs stalled when obstacles caused confusion.

2. **Organizational Capacity:** Ministers and other high-ranking administrative deputies struggled to translate development policies into tangible gains. Civil servants, comfortable with wide-ranging policy discussions, were less familiar with setting concrete goals and taking specific steps to achieve them. Regional and local authorities lacked know-how and understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

3. **Financing Mechanism:** A 2004 law empowered regions to levy production taxes, and communes to collect land and house taxes to support their new responsibilities. However, knowing that new taxes would prove unpopular with their constituents, local officials refrained from exercising those powers for more than two years while budgets dwindled.

### Addressing Delivery Challenges

The following steps were undertaken to overcome **bureaucratic barriers to reforms**:

- The Rapid Results method changes embedded norms, empowers leaders with project management skills, and facilitates coordination across levels and sectors of government. The GoM decided to use the rice pilot project Rapid Response method to improve government implementation. The Presidential Chief of Staff convened a cross-agency meeting of officials from the agriculture, customs, transport and security sectors, (including representatives from the offices of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister) to set pilot project parameters to increase rice production. To oversee the Rapid Results project on the central and local levels, officials involved in the pilot program set up an inter-ministerial steering committee to identify key priorities based on economic and social impacts, and to decide how to overcome major bottlenecks and manage communications. In May 2005, at the end of pilot phase, the president’s office and the World Bank organized a Cabinet retreat to present Rapid Results to other government leaders, one of several initiatives under the World Bank’s governance project to build capacity for leadership.

The following steps were taken to address **Organizational Capacity**, i.e., inability of officials to execute interventions due to its overall institutional arrangements:

- Rapid Results emphasizes concrete goals and tightly defined results within a short time frame, replacing collective responsibility with assigned specific tasks to individuals. While the steering committee members provided guidance, they recruited 400 coach/consultants to work with ministerial civil servants and elected officials to move Rapid Results projects forward on the central and local levels. The coaches trained in the Rapid Results methodology were assigned to specific ministries and regions to build capacity to coordinate between levels of government and to train local leaders in basic project management skills.

The following steps were taken to mitigate **Financing Mechanism** related challenges:

- To focus on local tax collection, a politically sensitive but highly important area, the Boeny regional head encouraged mayors to begin to collect land and house taxes with coaches providing training to help them do so. The regional head persuaded some mayors that the potential to collect taxes and providing better services for constituents outweighed the political risk of collecting new taxes. Meanwhile, the GoM also implemented a public communications campaign, with support from the World Bank’s governance project, to publicize the successes of Rapid Results projects and to build demand among local electorates. The campaign included encouraging radio and newspaper outlets to interview strategic leaders and others responsible for successful outcomes.
Bibliography