Concept Note
Draft Proposal

GDI Annual Meeting
November 2019, Tunis, Tunisia
Venue tbd.

Working title:
Challenge Accepted: Delivering Services in Fragile, Conflict-affected, & Transitional Environments
1. BACKGROUND: THE GLOBAL DELIVERY INITIATIVE

Too often development projects fall short of achieving their intended outcomes due to unexpected challenges that arise during implementation. Standard approaches to development practice do not always give sufficient forethought to understanding how change will happen in a particular context and to anticipating potential implementation challenges. The knowledge and expertise required to do this exists, but it can be difficult to access. It tends to be fragmented across different sectors and disciplines; it is often tacit knowledge, uncodified and residing principally in the heads of individual practitioners; and in some cases, taking advantage of it requires a process of learning by doing. Also, operational problems typically manifest themselves in unique ways that are intimately linked to the specificities of local context, history, the specific actors involved and the dynamics among them, the incentives they face, and the power structures in which they are embedded (and which they seek to shape). The lack of a shared language and conceptual framework to analyze those problems often hinders learning across sectors and countries. As a result, there is a tendency among development programs to repeat the same mistakes and reinvent the wheel.

The Global Delivery Initiative (GDI)\(^1\) was created to highlight and address these challenges by advancing the following outcomes:

- A **common language** and conceptual framework is created to facilitate knowledge exchange on delivery.
- Delivery know-how is more accessible through the development of a collective and cumulative **evidence-base** that curates and systematizes explicit knowledge on delivery and documents tacit knowledge.
- The transfer of delivery know-how is facilitated by **connecting practitioners** across organizations, sectors, and countries for experience sharing and knowledge exchange.
- Delivery know-how is **applied in practice** through support for processes that bring more explicit focus to the *how* of development and facilitate iterative problem-solving and adaptive implementation.

In December 2014, practitioners and thinkers from across the development community came together in Germany for the very first time under the umbrella of the Global Delivery Initiative (GDI). The official launch of GDI took place in April 2015, followed by a regional event hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Chile in January 2016, and a regional knowledge-sharing event hosted by the Ministry of Finance in China on November 2016. This was followed by a **2018 conference in Addis Ababa**, which focused on delivery challenges throughout the infrastructure project cycle with a special emphasis on African perspectives and experiences.

The planned 2019 conference in Tunis will bring together frontline practitioners and policy makers from government, the World Bank, and GDI partners from around the

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\(^1\) GDI is currently a partnership of more than 40 organizations.
world for a robust knowledge exchange on implementation challenges and delivery know-how related to service delivery in conflict-affected and transitional environments.

2. SERVICE DELIVERY IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT AFFECTED ContextS

Poor access to basic services is a defining characteristic of fragile, conflict affected, and transitional states. During conflict, the prevalence of violence and instability means that service provision often takes a back seat. And in the complex environments that precede and follow conflict – “fragile” and “transitional” environments characterized by the risk of conflict (re)initiation, service delivery often suffers from a host of challenges ranging from political polarization to weak governance capacity to physical impassability. Basic services here are defined broadly to include: (a) social services such as health, education, clean water and sanitation; and (b) social protection – ranging from social safety nets to livelihood-enhancing programs. Failure to deliver basic services in violence-affected countries and in transitional environments is often attributed to technical deficits, but a growing body of evidence demonstrates that technical capacity is only part of the story. The World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law (World Bank 2017) recognizes that governance and politics are central to implementation efforts – both as enabling factors and critical barriers that can hinder development objectives. The report shows how policy is made and implemented in complex political and social settings in which individuals and groups of unequal power pursue conflicting interests according to shifting rules. These dynamic factors often play an even more critical role in conflict-affected contexts. At the same time, there is limited understanding of how different strategies and modalities for service delivery might make a difference in different types of violence-affected and transitional contexts.

In these circumstances, certain kinds of delivery challenges – non-technical obstacles that emerge during implementation and hinder effective delivery of projects and programs – recur across the complex landscape of conflict and fragility. For example, there is often a dearth of firsthand, primary data from violence-affected and transitional contexts to make informed policy decisions. Practitioners complain of operating in contexts where the interests and identities of key stakeholders are often opaque, and the possibility of gauging “impact” a difficult proposition. The unstable and fragile nature of political settlements after conflict can make it difficult to identify partners with whom to work. As these complex political situations are characterized by fragmentation and by a varied, shifting, and unpredictable stakeholder landscape, this can make coordination for service delivery a politicized and challenging exercise. Also, recent studies have shown that it becomes increasingly challenging for donor agencies to reconcile between their fiduciary requirements, such as accounting and procurement, and the need for flexibility in FCV situations. Procurement for service


3 OECD, 2015, Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups: Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery
delivery may be complicated by a limited number of available contractors, political influence etc.

To tackle these myriad delivery challenges, development practitioners working in FCV environments often display remarkable tenacity, innovativeness, and entrepreneurial spirit. Yet we still need a better understanding of the landscape that the development community faces in these circumstances. And a critical overarching question is whether development actors can adapt their procedures and ways of working to the fluidity, uncertainties, and risk taking that fragile, conflict-affected and transitional contexts demand while preserving financial accountability, doing no harm, and ensuring aid effectiveness.

3. WHY TUNISIA

Following the 2011 revolution, Tunisia went through a peaceful political transition that led to the adoption of a new Constitution in early 2014, followed by orderly presidential and parliamentary elections in late 2014. These achievements were due in large part to the role of the country’s robust civil society and particularly to the work of the Tunisia National Dialogue Quartet, which was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in October 2015 “for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the country’s 2011 Revolution.” The Government of Tunisia (GOT) has also taken remarkable steps to improve the legislative framework covering issues of accountability, transparency, and public participation, which have a substantial impact on the implementation of service delivery. Also, Tunisia’s SmartGov 2020 strategy identifies education and social protection sectors as priority areas for the government and its citizens, and both sectors seek to improve the access to and quality of their services through digital technologies and public administration reforms. GDI believes there would be great value in building on and sharing the lessons and insights that have emerged from these reform efforts as a foundation for encouragement and action for civil servants, citizens, policy makers, and donors working in other transitional and in fragile and conflict affected countries. Tunisia’s successful transition can serve as a model for other neighboring countries in the region in demonstrating the strength to withstand challenges and the leadership capacity to steer the country on the path to progress. Tunisia is also centrally located and easily accessible for practitioners working in fragile and conflict-affected environments from across the region and beyond.

4. GOAL and OBJECTIVES

4 The GoT has taken steps to increase transparency and accountability, which if implemented would increase citizen engagement. The new Constitution obligates the government to effectively manage public resources (Article 10), serve citizens and the public interest according to rules of transparency, integrity, effectiveness, and accountability (Article 15), and guarantee the right of citizens and civil society organizations to participate in public policy-making at the local level and in implementation of laws (Article 139). The Freedom of Association Law was passed in 2011, making it easier to establish civil society (and other types of) organizations. The GoT also joined the Open Government Partnership, committing itself, at least in theory, to timely publishing of budget data, adoption of a freedom of information law, establishment of an income and asset disclosure regime covering elected and senior public officials, and openness to citizen engagement in policymaking and governance. The Law on Transitional Justice, adopted in December 2013, establishes a legal and institutional framework to address human rights abuses committed during the Ben Ali regime and providing reparations and restitution to victims as a means toward national reconciliation.
The overarching goal of this Dialogue and Knowledge Forum is for participants to share, exchange, and gain knowledge, insights, lessons, tools, and relationships that will enable them to identify, understand, and better navigate the operational challenges that impact service delivery in conflict-affected and transitional contexts.

The conference will encompass two days of dynamic, lively, and operationally relevant sessions filled with opportunities for interaction, co-creation, networking, and peer exchange. Rather than long presentations or manels, it will provide practical, hands-on activities driven by participants. The specific objectives of the forum are to:

- Develop a shared understanding of the prevalent delivery challenges obstacles that emerge during implementation and hinder service delivery in FCA and transitional contexts
- Share what’s working, what isn’t, and why based on efforts to overcome these common delivery challenges
- Surface practical, agile tools to track and improve implementation of service delivery in FCA and transitional contexts
- Share innovations that have potential for scale up to improve service delivery outcomes in FCA and transitional contexts in key sectors from health and education to social protection and water
- Learn from inspirational leaders from government, the private sector, and civil society.

To generate both content and visibility, in the lead-up to the conference GDI has sponsored a case study competition to crowdsource short case studies, highlighting how projects have addressed specific implementation challenges in conflict settings. The authors of the most interesting and inspiring cases will be invited to present the stories of how their programs have faced and overcome delivery challenges at the conference.

4. WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

The event aims to bring together members of the development community as well as a diverse group of stakeholders from different countries, especially from the Middle East and North Africa region, to connect around delivery know-how and innovative knowledge solutions focusing on service delivery in FCA and transitional contexts. In spite of the regional focus on MENA, we encourage partners and participants from other regions of the world to share their experiences and bring their delivery challenges to Tunis in order to learn from each other on a global level.

We expect around 100 participants to join us in Tunis during the two-day event. Bilateral and multilateral partners as well as participants from academia, foundations, civil society, and private sector organizations involved in knowledge agendas will play a central role in the event. We invite all participants to engage in the conference by preparing and presenting concrete delivery challenges that they confront in their
work. Participants who wish to present their delivery challenges at the conference will be assisted in their preparation as to assure their inputs truly reflect a delivery challenge angle instead of merely presenting a success story.