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Performance Management Can Improve Local Services in Developing Countries: The Service Improvement Action Plan

Katharine Mark

The Service Improvement Action Plan (SIAP) is a performance management tool developed to help local governments–especially those in developing or transition economies–improve their services. It has been used effectively by local governments with limited resources in a number of countries, including Albania, Honduras, Kosovo and Pakistan, among others. This note describes SIAP implementation to date, outlines some of the tool's advantages and limitations, and considers the SIAP's potential for replication.

Local governments are well positioned to reap the benefits of performance management: their decisions about services (informed by performance data) can have rapid results that are easy to see. In fact, local governments have been at the forefront in adopting performance measurement. Local governments in the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, have been measuring outcomes since the 1970s, and local governments worldwide have increasingly been adopting performance indicators and monitoring outcomes (Hatry 2008). Some local governments have gone further and have actively used the performance data to improve local services. Perhaps the best known example is the "stat" system in the United States, first pioneered in New York City as CompStat, in which detailed crime statistics were used by the police department to reduce the crime rate. In Baltimore, the CitiStat system was rolled out across the whole of city government, with all departments reporting biweekly to review meetings focused on selected performance indicators (Perez and Rushing 2007). Sanger (2008) describes a number of other cities in the United States that have used performance data in service delivery, including Des Moines, Iowa, where performance data reported by citizens on handheld computers were transmitted to city computer systems and the workload data were used to reorder service priorities.

Despite these promising trends, only a small fraction of the local governments who measure performance actually use the data for resource allocation or services management. Leadership in cities that have been successful in introducing performance measurement continue to speak of "the difficulties of persuading managers to use performance data in their management strategies" (Sanger 2008). Obstacles include rigid budgeting practices, where those who know best how to reallocate resources do not have the authority to do so, and centrally controlled civil service systems that restrict local governments from reallocating human resources. Also, if performance measurement is introduced top-down, it might be more difficult for local government

staff to clearly see its potential, or see how straightforward it can be to analyze and apply performance data to the practical requirements of service delivery.

Given the prevalence of this disparity between measurement and the use of resulting data, it is worth considering the Service Improvement Action Plan (SIAP), which has been effective in helping a substantial number of local governments with limited resources implement performance management to achieve measurable improvements in service outcomes. The following sections describe the SIAP methodology, outline its strengths and weaknesses, and conclude with discussion of its potential for replication in other countries.

The Service Improvement Action Plan

The SIAP can be described as a bottom-up approach that allows local government operational staff to be the prime actors in using performance management techniques to do their jobs. The SIAP provides a semi-structured set of basic management steps that explicitly focus on outcomes, such as local roads in good condition, clean cities, or access to drinking water. Local government working groups, typically led by frontline managers, but often including community representatives, carry the SIAP forward, using performance data to allocate resources and inform decision making to improve services. The key performance indicators measure outcomes that reflect not the process of delivering the service, but the result. SIAP commonly involves the following steps:

1. Select one service as the focus.
2. Establish a working group.
3. Analyze the service, priority needs, and options.
4. Identify the specific outcomes that are to be improved.
5. Identify indicators to measure progress, including both output and outcome indicators.
6. Identify data sources and collect baseline data.
7. Set targets for the selected indicators.
8. Develop an action plan to reach the targets.
9. Carry out actions and monitor the indicators.

The SIAP was first implemented in Albania in 2000. At that time, Albania's local governments were in difficult circumstances. Their country was impoverished after a long dictatorship and closed economy. The local governments were gaining new responsibilities through decentralization, but they had limited authority, little experience, and scant resources. Moreover, they had inherited a legacy of deferred maintenance in infrastructure and a lack of trust from citizens. There was a strong desire to improve services cheaply and quickly and to build public confidence: the SIAP became a means to that end. The SIAP helped local governments focus on priority services and make improvements that could be seen and measured by citizens, businesses, and city staff. The local governments in Albania—and indeed in most other countries where the SIAP was introduced—did not have any earlier experience with performance management, therefore its practice emerged through the implementation of the SIAP. But in a number of Albanian municipalities, the approach led to some surprisingly rapid and visible results. For instance, when the city of Pogradec implemented a SIAP to address problems with garbage collection and street cleanliness, the percentage of households receiving regular garbage collection rose from 70 to 75 percent within one calendar year, while the percentage of citizens satisfied with cleanliness in the city increased from 75 to 91 percent. At the same time, cost recovery for the cleaning service increased from 54 to 76 percent (Cooley et al. 2007). Other Albanian cities, including Erseka and Kucova, focused their SIAPs on the condition of streets and sidewalks, public lighting, water supply, libraries, and cost recovery:

- The city of Erseka chose to tackle the maintenance of streets and sidewalks. Both were in bad shape due to deferred maintenance, lack of investment, and poor practices such as parking on the sidewalks. Following implementation of the SIAP, the percentage of people surveyed who rated maintenance of streets and sidewalks in their neighborhood as "good" or "very good" grew from 42 to 78 percent within one year.
- The city of Kucova identified poor street lighting—broken or nonexistent lamp posts, missing bulbs, and poor maintenance—as a major problem because of its impact on safety. The percentage of citizens who said the city was "well lit" or "fairly well lit" rose from 34 percent in 2004 to 65 percent in 2005 and 78 percent in 2006 (Cooley et al. 2007; Vokopola 2013).

In the last decade, some of the same approaches have been used in a number of other transition and developing countries. In addition to Albania, the SIAP has been carried out in scores of local governments (most mid-sized, but some quite small) around the world. Box 1 describes the SIAP implementation in Honduras.

Key Elements in SIAP Methodology

To date, the SIAP has been successfully implemented in seven countries and introduced in at least four others (box 2). In all countries, the SIAP followed the same steps outlined above, although in many cases local governments added their own approaches. This section describes the nine major steps as they are usually carried out, along with other specific applications.

Box 1. SIAP Case Study: Yamaranguila, Honduras

Yamaranguila is a small municipality of 16,000 in the southwest region of Honduras. Its population is scattered across an urban center (*cabecera*) and about 100 rural settlements. Yamaranguila implemented a SIAP in 2005. The working group was made up of 12 representatives of community associations, *patronatos*, from both the rural areas and the urban center, along with six municipal employees. In prioritizing the service issues for the SIAP, the group convened an assembly of community groups. Reflecting the largely rural composition of the population, the working group decided to focus on an issue that mainly affects the rural population of the municipality: the maintenance and repair of the access roads to the smaller settlements.

While deliberating on the problem, the working group observed that the high mountain area of the municipality was virtually inaccessible by road, which meant that mountain residents had to walk two to six hours to get to the town center. Residents with vehicles had to use alternative routes to get to the town, traveling 12 instead of 5 kilometers (km). Farmers had difficulty bringing their products to market, and families were unable to access services in the town, especially health services. Even in the urban center, the streets were in such bad conditions that access to some of the neighborhoods was very difficult, especially during the rainy season. The municipal employees who participated in the SIAP recognized that "there was no budget allocation for maintaining urban streets or rural roads." One of the community leaders put it more directly: "Before, street repairs were an act of God—when the central government decided to send equipment."

The working group used the Trained Observer Ratings methodology to measure the condition of the different roads and streets of the municipality, dividing it into six main areas. They measured the number of kilometers of road in each area that were in good, middling, bad, and very bad conditions. At the same time, they established as an overall goal to increase the 7 km of streets in "good" condition in 2005 to 14 km by 2007.

These ratings were used to determine which sections of road were in worst condition and therefore prioritized for repair work. The action plan presented to the municipal council by the SIAP group was based on the mobilization of community associations to provide repair and maintenance. The plan included estimates of costs per kilometer using community labor, which were substantially lower (less than half) than what the municipality had been paying to private contractors using heavy machinery. The plan was approved by the municipal council, which assigned a budget of 75,000 lempiras (approximately US$4,000) for the 2006 budget cycle.

Results indicator	2005 (baseline)	2006 (target)	2007 (target)
% of citizens who consider streets "accessible"	69	75	80
Kilometers of roads in "good" condition	7	10	14
Kilometers of roads in "very bad" conditions	3	1	1

According to the community leaders in the SIAP group, approval by the council was partially due to the fact that the labor-intensive technology would help poor families generate income. Some of the council members questioned whether the repairs and maintenance would be of sufficient quality, but the plan also included a mechanism for program oversight to monitor work quality. Plan measures also ensured transparency in geographic prioritization and selection of beneficiaries, which helped forestall concerns about political favoritism or clientelism in choosing in which communities to work.

The SIAP made it possible for the community and local government to agree, for the first time, upon priority infrastructure improvements, funds to be appropriated for street repairs, and the roads to be improved. A sustainable capacity for monitoring performance made it likely that oversight would continue. This was the first instance of collaboration between government and civil society around service improvement, and was seen by both sides as useful and positive.

Source: Cartier 2005, and author's personal knowledge.

Step 1. Selecting a service

As noted, many cities have focused on a traditional service area or department—for example, roads or public lighting. Others have found, however, that the SIAP process can also address more complex problems or issues that do not necessarily reside within one city department. Service areas that cities in the Russian Federation, Albania, and Kyrgyzstan have chosen include: juvenile delinquency, the avian flu, tourism, economic development, tax and fee collection, and celebration of traditional local holidays (community pride). Selection of service areas has been based on feedback from surveys identifying citizen priorities, city council input, as well as deliberations among city technical staff and leadership. [1]

Step 2. The working group

A cross-cutting working group is responsible for developing and carrying out the SIAP. The composition of the working group is critical because of the diverse functions it needs to carry out, including identification of the SIAP focus area and desired outcomes; oversight of data collection; development and implementation of the action plan for service improvement; and handling the budget implications of these activities. Typically the working group is led by a department

Box 2. Countries Implementing SIAP

Afghanistan
Albania
Georgia
Honduras
Kosovo
Kyrgyzstan
Pakistan
Rwanda
Russian Federation
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan

Source: Author's compilation.
Note: For countries in italics, the SIAP was introduced, but results are not known, or it is too early to tell. For example, in Afghanistan, SIAPs were initiated in four municipalities in the first half of 2013, so results will not be known until 2014.

head, such as the director of public works, but it should also include a representative of government leadership or higher management to ensure access and empowerment. Other actors to include would be those involved in planning and delivering the service, such as contractors (for example, a waste management company), if they are major players in implementation. It can also be useful to bring in a member of outside interest groups, such as citizen groups. Usually there is a smaller "core" group responsible for the majority of SIAP implementation, but other members can play an important role in planning and in brainstorming ideas, as well as in reaching out to other departments or groups.

In the municipality of Kucova, Albania, the working group for improving the business environment included the Director of Revenues, the Director of Public Services and the Urban Planning Specialist, as well as the Deputy Mayor. Additional members included the head of the Economic Commission, the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, the directors of two banks, and a representative from the taxes directorate. For a SIAP in Russia that targeted juvenile delinquency, the working group included representatives from the schools, police, the health department, and the community center. This broad-based support enabled the group to propose a solution that might not have been conceived by any department independently to help achieve outcomes of interest to all, such as the safety and well-being of youth.

Step 3. Situation analysis and focus on outcomes

It is important to ensure that outcomes—and not outputs—are the SIAP's focus. What citizens care about is not "to pave more of the local roads," but "to have roads in good enough condition so that children can get to school in the rainy season," and therefore producing those results should be the government's objective. The SIAP approach is to move backward from the outcome ("clean streets"), rather than to start with an output ("we will build a landfill"). There may be more appropriate, cost-effective ways to reach the outcome. In addition, focusing on an outcome that is important to all stakeholders usually makes it easier to ensure full ownership and to get all resources working together.

It is in that spirit that the working group should review the service in question, noting problems, the priorities of citizens (sometimes using feedback from a survey) and different options for addressing problems, and then use that review to identify first the principal outcomes sought and then decide upon the actions needed to move forward (box 3). Depending on the complexity of the issue, the knowledge of working group members, and the existence of prior analysis, it may not be necessary to undertake a major—and expensive—study.

The situation analysis is continually updated as the SIAP process goes forward, and revisited at least once a year.

Steps 4 and 5. Choosing outcomes and defining indicators

Choosing the specific outcomes that will be the focus of the SIAP is an important step. The target outcomes

Box 3. Situation Analysis Questions and Facts

Sample discussion topics for the situation analysis

- What do we know now about this priority area?
- What have citizens said they need?
- Would it help to bring an expert, local farmer, teacher, or business person into the group as a member?

Selected characteristics to cover in the analysis

- Geographic demographic information (population density, income, and education) relevant to this service.
- Characteristics of the service and how it is delivered (whether by the local government, enterprise, or NGO).
- What are the costs? Are there trend data? Does the right labor force exist locally to get the job done?
- What services are currently offered to citizens (for example, number of collections per week, opening hours)?
- What social or cultural traditions might affect or contribute to service delivery?
- Are there any legal issues to be considered?

Source: Cooley et al. 2007.

are usually identified during the situation analysis, and it may be necessary to narrow the focus to just one or two, especially if resources are limited. For example, both adult literacy and elementary school dropouts may be important to the community, but addressing them simultaneously risks diluting the effort and reducing effectiveness. At the same time, even in one specific area, there are many layers of outcomes, from "intermediate" outcomes such as clean streets to "end" outcomes such as more tourists spending money at local shops. SIAPs usually track the various layers. Some working groups consult with end users (for example, through focus group discussions or through nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] in the group) to ensure they have identified the right final outcomes.

Some working groups have developed "logic models" to help unearth the right outcomes and shed light on the relationship between the activities and outputs of the local government, such as organizing a community project to repair the roads, and outcomes such as improved road conditions and fewer accidents. Figure 1 provides a simple logic model with indicators for the road repair project carried out in Yamaranguila, Honduras. The boxes show the inputs, outputs and outcomes, with their respective indicators below.

Some of the outcomes that have been targeted by SIAPs in different cities include:

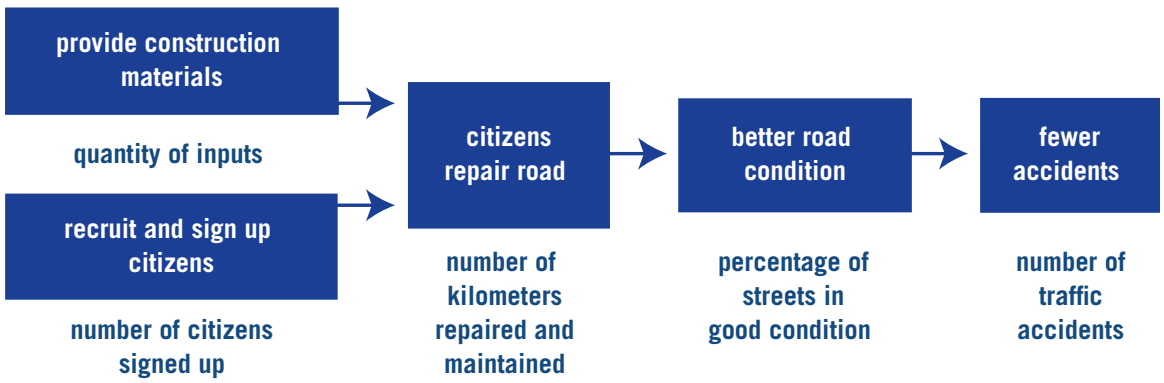
- citizens are safer walking alone at night in the city (public lighting);
- streets are cleaner and tourism rises (garbage service);
- fewer traffic accidents (road repair);
- greater cost recovery (billings and collection); and
- bullying of school children is reduced (schools, health, and safety).

A focus on outcomes does not mean that outputs and/or intermediate outcomes will be neglected. The end outcomes are most useful for planning and prioritization, but during implementation, outputs are also tracked. For example, the outcome sought might be a reduction in the number of dropouts, but the number of teachers and teacher absenteeism is also being tracked. The selection of indicators is one area in which working group members may need training. The working group will need to identify outcome indicators that are truly measurable, practical and actionable, as well as reliable over time.[2]

Step 6. Data sources

Cities considering the adoption of performance management are often concerned about the cost of data collection. The most frequent data source for SIAPs has been local government administrative records. Working groups are often surprised at how much information already exists, but have also had to struggle with data quality and improving data reporting processes to ensure data consistency and currency. The most valuable data for measuring outcomes are usually drawn from surveys, and many of the local governments that have implemented SIAPs have tried to incorporate such data, from multiservice citizen surveys or more narrowly focused user surveys. To minimize costs, cities have partnered with NGOs to carry out user surveys and have included surveys with bills and distributed them through schools. A helpful data source that can be used to rate cleanliness, road conditions, and a host of other services draws from the practice called Trained Observer Ratings.[3] The ratings can be used to identify and prioritize areas that need attention (for example, city areas that are least clean, segments of road that are in poorest condition) as well as to monitor improvements over time. This approach is well suited to citizen involvement because it allows lay people to assign scores using a predefined rating scale based on only brief training. In Georgia, for example, youth groups in more than 10 cities began rating street cleanliness, which proved to be a valuable source of information for city clean-

Figure 1. Logic Model with Indicators for Participatory Road Repair Project in Honduras



Source: Author's illustration.

ing crews while broadening young people's civic awareness (Mark 2008).

Steps 7 and 8. Targets and the action plan

Targets play a critical role because of the importance of motivation to SIAP effectiveness. Targets are identified for every indicator, including both outputs and outcomes. Local governments should always set the targets internally, with no involvement of central government or outside experts. The targets are set in the context of a known baseline and a specific action plan, which makes them more likely to be realistic. However, if the targets are not ambitious enough, they are not likely to get city council support, which is especially important when additional resources are needed. In some cases, the targets appear only in the SIAP document itself and are known only by service managers and city leadership. In other cases, the targets are made public, which leadership may perceive as risky, but public dissemination can be useful in justifying a planned expense or in balancing revelations of poor past performance. Figure 2 presents an excerpt from the budget presentation of Pogradec, Albania, which included the accomplishments of the past year (2005) in comparison to set targets as well as the new targets set for 2006, the upcoming budget year. In this case, their targets included not just increased satisfaction, but also the percentage of cost recovered for the cleaning service.

The action plan is developed by the working group, often reflecting inputs from many different sources. The action plan includes the work needed for performance measurement (such as data collection), but the heart of it defines the actions that are going to improve the service. For some local governments, simply writing down and formalizing those plans is a new process. In Afghanistan, after a presentation of the action plan, a mayor said to the working group: "You should be the mayor. You have a real plan for making this service better" (Reed 2013). In the action plan for street cleanliness prepared in Lezhe, Albania (table 1), explicitly planning a process to determine the best placement for garbage bins was the first step.

Step 9. Implement action plan and monitor indicators

Once the SIAP has been approved, there are typically many simultaneous actions that need to be taken, often by several different groups, for example, by the directorates for Services, Finance/Budget, and Economic Development in the case of Lezhe. The diverse composition of the working group proves useful at this stage, as the individual members will each need to keep the process moving by tackling different measures. The working group continues to meet periodically to keep informed on how each step is progressing.

The city of Lezhe began to see positive results quite quickly. A youth group carried out Trained Observer Ratings; between 2005 and 2006, the percentage of streets rated as "clean or very clean" grew from 0 to 47 percent. At the same time, city collections increased: by 2006, 27 percent more citizens, 18 percent more businesses, and 46 percent more institutions were paying the cleaning fee than the previous year. The additional funds were then reinvested to improve the service.

The cost of implementing SIAPs varies widely. In cases where resources are limited, SIAPs may include only simple steps, reallocation of resources, or citizen-fuelled activities. For larger efforts, additional funds are required, either from municipal budgets or in some cases from external grants.[4]

Many action plans include a formal link with the local budget process during implementation, especially if they are requesting sig-

Figure 2. Budget Presentation from Pogradec, Albania

General Objectives — Targets

No.	Outcomes	Survey 2004 (%)	Target 2005 (%)	Survey 2005 (%)	Change (NB)[a] ±	Target 2006 (%)
1	% of citizens satisfied with cleanliness in the city	75	82	91	+16	93
2	% of citizens satisfied with cleanliness in the neighborhoods	48	60	72	+24	75
3	% of households receiving regular garbage collection service	70	78	75	+5	78
5	% of cleaning service cost recovery	54	75	76	+22	85

Source: Budget presentation, Pogradec, Albania, 2006.
a. Percentage point change in indicators between 2004 and 2005.

Table 1. Action Plan from Lezhe, Albania, for SIAP on Street Cleanliness

What	When	Who
Improve cleaning and garbage service fee collection by providing every family with a passbook	Continuously	Local Revenues Directorate Services Directorate
Conduct cost analysis, issue request for proposal to procure metal and plastic bins, and determine the best placement across the city	July–August 2005	Budget Directorate Services Directorate
Include the output and outcome indicators from the SIAP in the contract of the cleaning service	December 2005	Services Directorate Working group
Present the SIAP indicators to the council as part of the draft budget for 2006	December 2005	Services Directorate Finance/Budget Directorate
Purchase 150 metal bins and 50 plastic bins and place according to the scheme prepared by the Services Directorate	February–March 2006	Services Directorate Contractor
Establish Trained Observers Rating group and ensure ratings are conducted annually	May 2006 and annually thereafter	Services Directorate Working group
Prepare and disseminate public awareness materials about keeping the city clean and pay the cleaning and garbage collection service fee	Starting February–March 2005	Services Directorate Economic Development Directorate
Review performance indicators to monitor the cleaning and garbage collection service contract	July–September every year	Services Directorate

Source: Cooley et al. 2007.

nificant funds or budget reallocation to reach a target. In the example from Pogradec (figure 2), targets and recent performance were provided in budget presentations. Some cities in Albania began including indicators and targets in their formal city budgets, linked with specific activities and their cost.

Replication

In most of the examples described in this note, SIAPs were introduced with support from international donors. To date, there are only a few documented cases of local governments carrying out SIAPs without external technical assistance. To what extent local governments would be able to initiate SIAPs independently is therefore still an open question.

Factors to consider when deciding on whether to introduce a SIAP include:

- *Leadership.* It is clear that strong commitment by city leadership is essential. The SIAP is not necessarily a daunting task, but it is a new way of doing things and necessitates that senior staff have the time and resources to follow through implementation. This requires a time commitment from working group members, access to performance information, and the power to affect the way that services are delivered. However, the actual SIAP process is not dependent on the personal involvement of city leaders. Unlike CitiStat, for example, which is a monitoring tool for leadership, the SIAP is a tool for line managers to make decisions and manage operations. Once established, the SIAP can move forward effectively without requiring direct actions by senior leadership.
- *Expertise.* Required technical know-how is fairly narrow, but still essential. The local governments need someone with knowledge of performance management—especially to help with understanding outcomes and developing indicators—and facilitators to help the working group with its first steps. Knowledge of sampling is necessary to conduct surveys, but although surveys are useful, they are not essential for SIAPs. Similarly, expertise in preparing survey instruments is useful, but model questionnaires are also widely available. Techniques such as Trained Observer Ratings require initial training, but are otherwise easily replicable.
- *Resources.* The most significant cost for the SIAP is the time of the working group. Data collection costs could be substantial if they include a wide survey, but much of the data collection can be carried out inexpensively. The service improvements can range from very inexpensive to major investments.

- *Computerization.* When considering performance management, many local governments are concerned that insufficient IT capacity will be a significant impediment. But that is not necessarily true: in many instances, data collection and analysis can be conducted easily without IT resources. Obviously computerization is needed for larger data sets and for survey analysis, but many of the local governments that have successfully implemented SIAPs had limited or no IT capability.
- *Authority.* Local governments may not have the authority to determine priorities, or to reallocate finances from one sector to another. For example, in countries where local government employees are employed by a centralized civil service, cities may not be able to reallocate staff to different tasks. Accordingly, some local governments have been reluctant to go forward with a SIAP for this reason. As noted earlier, local governments must have some freedom to take actions that affect service delivery for the SIAP. However, even modest leeway can be enough to undertake some important measures. The costs can be very minimal, and some of the actions—moving the location of garbage bins, distributing information, organizing community inputs—do not require major changes in approach or additional investment. SIAPs have been successfully implemented in countries where the local governments had very limited autonomy, such as in Tajikistan in the early 2000s.

Overall, it appears that the most important ingredient is the political will to improve service delivery and ensure that the working group has a clear mandate and includes the right people. That makes the potential for SIAP replication very promising.

Conclusion

Hundreds of local governments with very limited resources and constrained circumstances have been able to improve services using the SIAP. How has the SIAP managed to be so effective in delivering measurable service improvements? Its chief characteristics are that it is practical, low-cost, and can be implemented by operational staff directly, giving them full control over the process. Its primary strength is probably its motivational force. The structure encourages a local government to focus on a few priority problems. Selecting indicators further helps focus on what needs to be done and how it will affect the outcome. Measuring progress motivates the working group, and through them, in turn, motivates other relevant staff to get on board. Having different stakeholders agree to seek specific outcomes brings many resources to the table.

The two main challenges are first knowing some of the basic principles of performance management and having confidence in the effectiveness of the approach, and second, having enough freedom to take action to improve services. Identifying the best indicators and finding good quality data will continue to pose difficulties. Importantly, the SIAP informs decision making, but does not make decisions automatic: there will still be hard choices to make between priorities, and complex thinking needed on options for improvement. In some cases, data analysis will be simple, in others it might require more sophistication, and therefore results will require careful interpretation.

The magnitude of positive outcomes in many different countries suggests that the SIAP is a valuable tool that can be tailored for different country contexts. Experience indicates that this performance management tool can potentially help local governments worldwide improve their services and therefore the quality of life of their citizens.

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About the Author

Katharine Mark is *Principal Research Scientist* at the *National Opinion Research Center (NORC)* at the *University of Chicago*, and previously was *Senior Research Associate* at the *Urban Institute*. She has worked on local government for more than 20 years, in Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America, and has helped national and local governments in more than 10 countries introduce performance management and performance-based budgeting. Email: mark-katie@norc.org.

Notes

1. Sharma (2011), in a note on the use of social accountability tools, describes citizen report card surveys, which have been used in many countries to identify the level of citizen satisfaction with different services and their priorities.
2. See also Castro (2011) for a useful discussion on performance indicators and targets.

3. Trained Observer Ratings are based on observations made by trained laypersons using a standardized rating scale. If properly done, the ratings can provide measurements that can be compared over time. More information about Trained Observer Ratings can be found at the following Web site: http://www.urban.org/toolkit/data-methods/ratings.cfm, as well as in Mark (2008).

4. It should be noted that the SIAP process can be helpful in obtaining grants because donor organizations or central funding may come with monitoring requirements.

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