

Governance and Sector Outcomes: Making the Connections

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RTI Press
Policy Brief
ISSN 2378-7937
September 2018



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Key Policy Implications

- There is ample evidence that improved governance has positively contributed to sector-specific outcomes. But macro-level analyses, broad conceptualizations, and disconnected interventions offer few guideposts for practical and effective governance integration.
- Project designs range along a continuum, from ring-fenced sector-specific programming to fully integrated governance and sector activities. A large middle ground includes projects that incorporate governance activities during implementation, adjusting approaches to the demands of the operating environments, and scale-up of interventions.
- Barriers to integration include urgent sector priorities that overshadow governance concerns, requirements to demonstrate progress toward ambitious sector targets, and complex measurement.
- Sustainability and self-reliance are major drivers for integration and are facilitated by the flexibility and adaptation that governance integration enables.

Introduction

International development officials, practitioners, and researchers increasingly recognize governance as an essential contributor to outcomes in health, education, water, and other sectors. Projects focused solely on sector-specific interventions often fall short of objectives or sustained gains due to a lack of attention to government systems, citizen engagement, or accountability mechanisms.¹ However, the pathways connecting governance to sectoral outcomes are contingent on a range of contextual factors and are inconsistently documented. Debates continue over the definition of governance; the availability and quality of evidence documenting effects and impacts; and effective design, implementation, and measurement of governance interventions.

This brief explores evidence from the literature—as well as from projects implemented by RTI—indicating that governance interventions do contribute to achieving sector-specific results. We discuss how that evidence has influenced international development practice, presenting a stylized continuum of how governance elements relate to sector interventions and expected outcomes. We then discuss factors that impede or impel governance

RTI Press Publication No. PB-0018-1800, Research Triangle Park, NC, RTI Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3310> pgs 0019-1800

October 23, 2018

Governance from a sector perspective

For many sector specialists, governance remains ill-defined and vague—

- “big picture”
- “context”
- “politics”
- “system-level”
- “corruption, right?”



Challenges for governance specialists

- Define governance in terms relevant to sector specialists
- Demonstrate how paying attention to governance can contribute to sector outcomes
- Offer compelling evidence of the contribution of governance
- Provide input to sector project designs to incorporate governance interventions
- Overcome barriers to integration... in collaboration with sector specialists

Governance definitions

Governance defined as...	Analysis & interventions focus on...
Structures & processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Constitution, laws, & regulations-Separation of powers-Accountability, checks & balances-Decentralization-Institutional design
Policy & management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Civil service systems-Policy-making & implementation-Regulation, certification, & oversight-Revenue-raising, budgeting, & spending-Service delivery
State-society relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Regime type-Political competition & elections-Social pacts-Social contract-Media-Civil society-Social accountability

Evidence for governance-sector outcomes linkages?

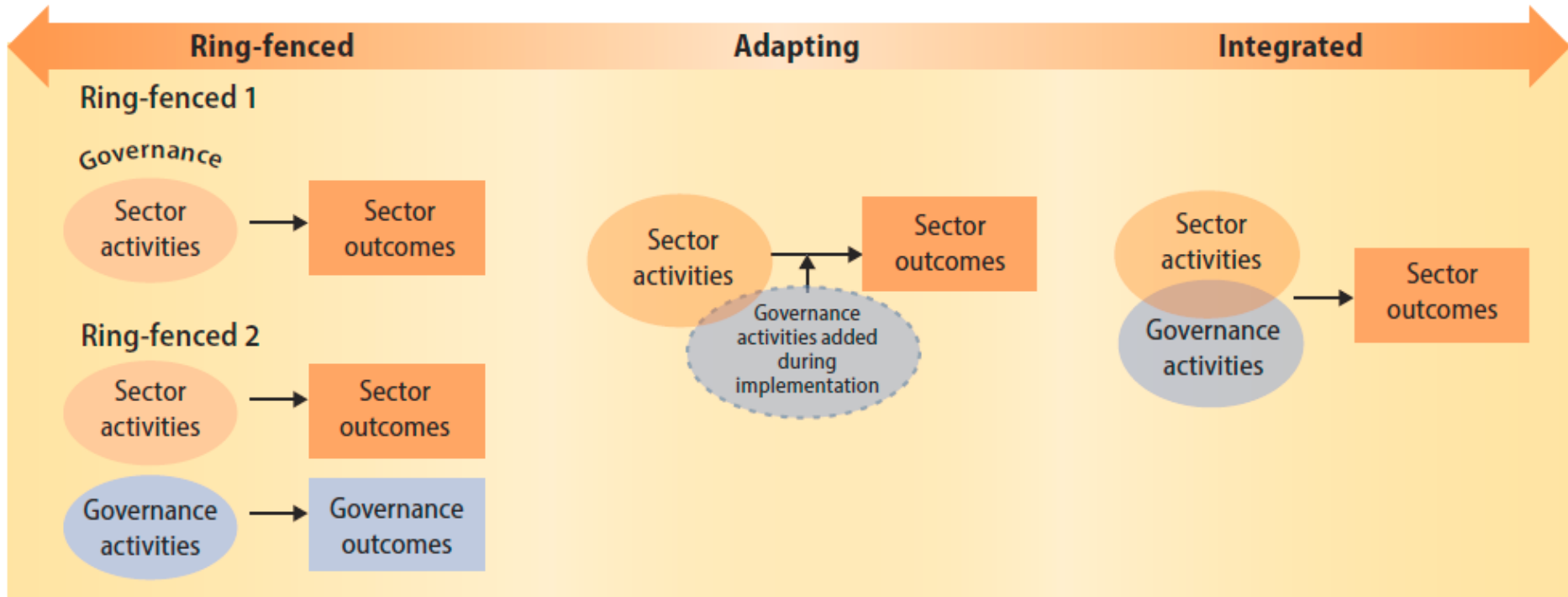
Level of analysis	Governance	Sector outcome
Macro	Democracy (vs. autocracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved access to education
	Higher corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower life expectancy• Higher infant & child mortality• Higher HIV/AIDS prevalence
	Increased government expenditures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced mortality rates
Micro	Community-monitored service agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved health service uptake• Reduced <5 mortality rates
	Reduced corruption & absenteeism + increased accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved student learning

Evidence issues

- Macro-level findings are “black box,” no guidance on what to do
- Micro-level findings treat interventions as “widgets” decoupled from context

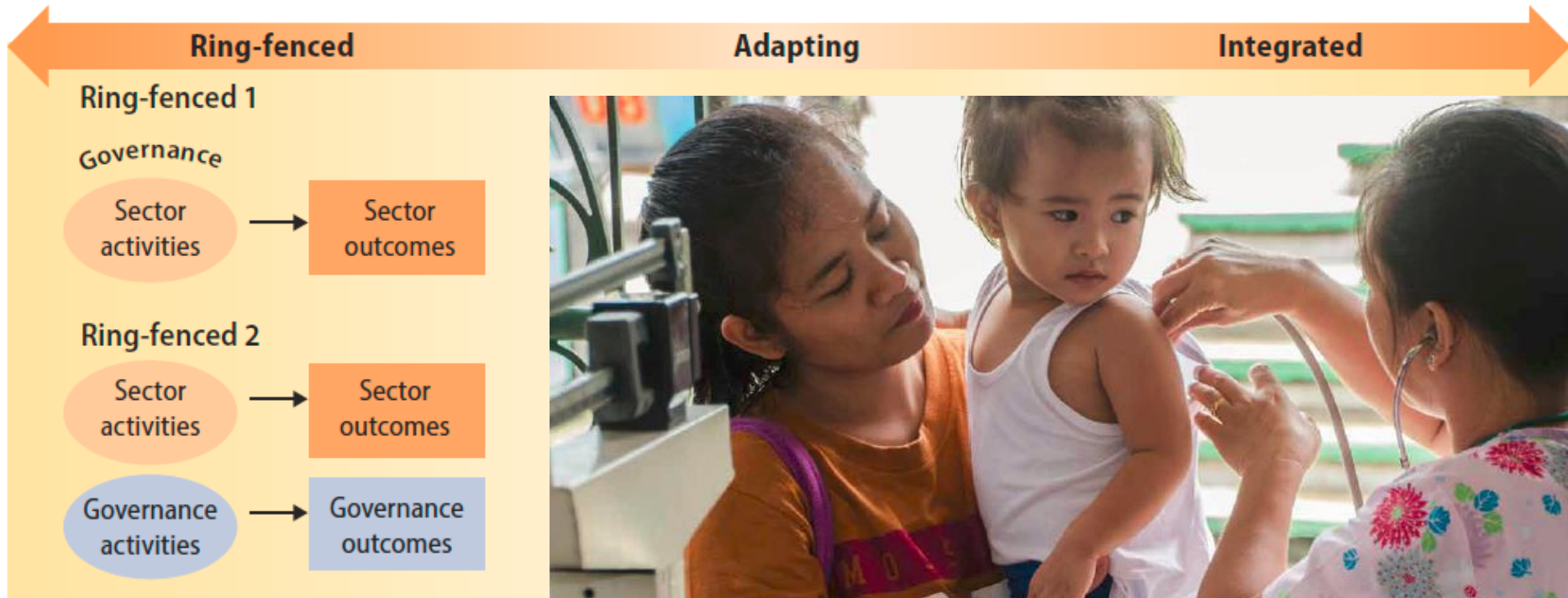
Where is governance in sector projects?

Continuum of governance and sector project integration



Where is governance in sector projects?

Continuum of governance and sector project integration



- **Ring-fenced 1:** no governance activities-- governance seen as secondary to sector outcomes, a diversion from achieving sector impacts
- **Ring-fenced 2:** some governance activities, but treated separately from technical sector interventions— parallel design & implementation

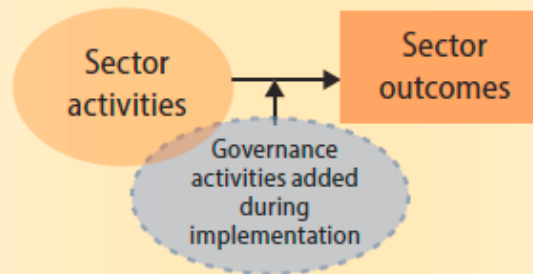
Where is governance in sector projects?

Continuum of governance and sector project integration

Ring-fenced



Adapting



Integrated



- Broad middle-ground category
- Sector project designs & implementation strategies that recognize governance as important, but assumed to be functioning, apolitical, and/or technical.
- Adaptation motivated by recognition of problems in reaching sector outcomes

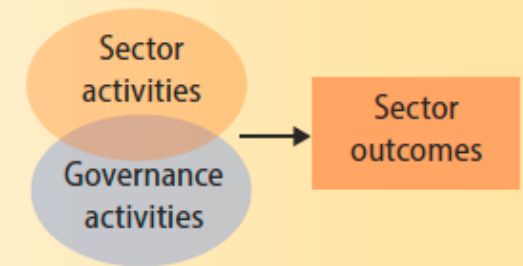
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Ring-fenced

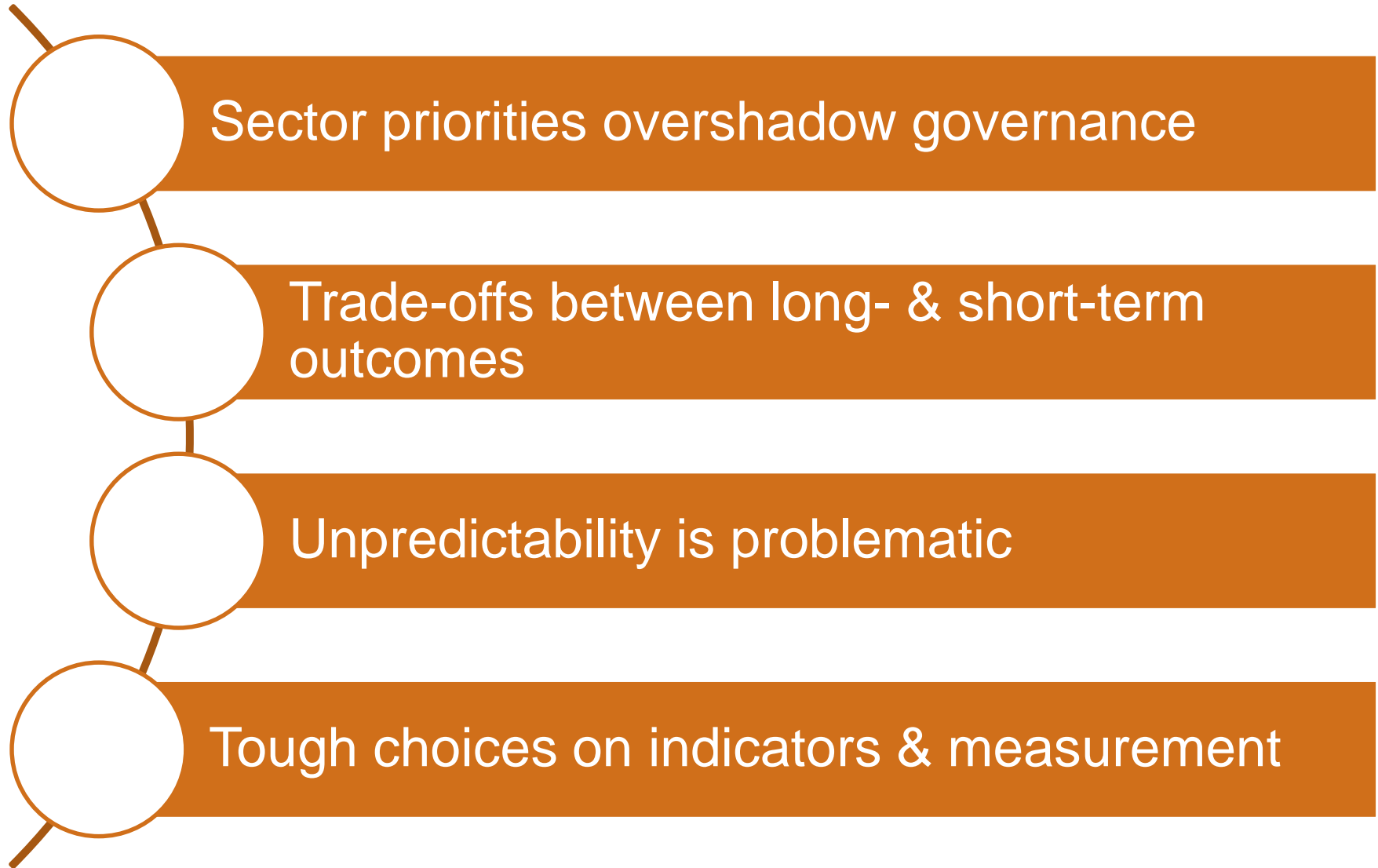
Adapting

Integrated



- Sector project designs and implementation treat governance as central to achieving sector outcomes by addressing barriers, recognizing politics, continuously adapting
- Integrated designs often emerge from experience with failed ring-fenced projects

Barriers to integration



Boosts for integration



Sustainability concerns as driver

Integration facilitates flexibility & adaptation

Adoption of systems thinking & tools

Conclusion



- Danger of oversimplification
- Lure of best practices
- Donor agency disincentives



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- Increased focus on sustainability
- Growing interest in integrated governance
- Demonstrated sector results of integrated designs and implementation
- Increased use of governance analysis and practical tools

More information

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Download paper at

<https://www.rti.org/rti-press-publication/governance-and-sector-outcomes>