Global Future

THIS EDITION

Pro-poor governance: the role of civil society

FEATURING

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Letter from a reader

Jon Hartley

HOW ABOUT A BLOG?

Hi from New Zealand.

I wonder if you could collaborate your 10,000 readers through a blog?

This could become a very powerful tool of opinion.

Just a thought. Kind regards,

Jon Hartley
New Zealand

[Editor's reply: Thanks Jon for this suggestion, which we'll keep in mind as we consider ways to make Global Future more interactive. Meanwhile, we invite reader comments and feedback via the 'Contact us' link on www.globalfutureonline.org - and we'll publish one letter in each edition!]

what next?
in number 1, 2007

The children's health crisis

Globally, health is in crisis. AIDS, TB and malaria continue to devastate entire societies and their economies. Child mortality remains unfinished business, with 10.5 million children aged under five dying of malaria, pneumonia or diarrhea each year. Maternal and neo-natal mortality continue to be huge global concerns.

Yet it is clear that most countries are not on track to reach the health targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Health care systems have been severely under-funded for decades; few governments of low-income countries commit enough of their budgets to deliver a basic package of health services to reach marginalised poor communities and their children. In recent years, the international community has increased funding, but this has not made serious inroads into the crisis.

Which health initiatives and approaches hold promise? What local, national and international investments are needed to ensure that all children can benefit from quality health care, prevention and treatment?

front cover image: *A young woman studies the candidates at a polling station in the first direct elections for provincial leaders in Indonesia's tsunami-ravaged province of Aceh*
photo: *Maida Irawani/World Vision*

facing page background image: *People of Ipaumirim, Ceará, Brazil, marching in front of their municipal health secretariat for their right to a health post in their local community*
photo: *Carmilson Brito/World Vision*

World Vision

by FLETCHER TEMBO

THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

In the pursuit of poverty eradication, quality of governance is now widely accepted as a critical factor. The post-2005 global agenda for action against poverty has re-energised the governance debate, especially in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

What measures can the international community take to address the "governance gap"? How can civil society actors secure the space to exercise their right – and duty – to monitor and engage with the state for better governance? And does improved transparency and accountability make life better for the poor? This *Global Future* edition picks up these and other key questions.

Much has been said about the need for reforms to promote transparency and accountability on the "supply" side – in the institutions of government. There is also, critically, growing recognition of the need to involve other actors in designing and implementing governance interventions. Civil society cannot be dismissed as a conceptual hat-stand; it is a significant player in delivering this "beyond government" agenda, alongside other non-state actors.

Addressing the institutional side, our contributing writers argue for approaches ranging from linking aid with "good governance" indicators, to legislating transparency in finance and investment mechanisms. Teskey and Tobias write on behalf of two influential Northern governments (regrettably, Southern governments we approached were unable to write for us), while Parham calls for transparency of resource revenues for citizens of resource-rich-but-poor countries.

On the "demand" (civil society) side, participation and advocacy have been key mechanisms for empowering local communities and engaging governments. The thinking around participation is shifting from "consultative" towards "transformative" forms; yet ultimately, participation needs to be mandated by powerless citizens. Advocacy by NGOs, faith groups and other organised movements is linking the local to the global arenas of power and action; to have credibility, this advocacy must entail legitimate representation of the poor, alliance formation, use of evidence, and political influence.

Our writers unpack positional, conceptual and methodological dimensions of these issues. Ndegwa, for example, argues for a civil society beyond notions of confronting government, allied around the public good; Jenkins likewise stretches the debate beyond transparency and accountability concerns to the need for cross-class alliances for "quality of democracy"; Thindwa discusses the ARVIN framework for analysing governance contexts. Germann reminds us that children, too, are citizens, while other World Vision writers share thinking and practice in community-based performance monitoring and civic and legal education.

Some observers are suspicious that the emphasis on governance is driven by Northern donors, anxious to assure constituents that increased aid will be protected from corruption. This latter concern is important, but the development challenge is so much broader than this, and the quest for "good governance" must not be an excuse for donors' failure to deliver on their promises. At the same time, clearly there is much impetus and expectation in the South that "business as usual" is not the way forward.

We hope that this edition of *Global Future* will contribute to a re-think of the pro-poor governance agenda and the role of civil society, and to reflection/action on what works, and what does not. For just as it would be naïve to assume that "democracy" has always meant "rule by the ordinary people", so we must not presume that governance will mean the same thing – nor that civic engagement will be an easy, risk-free option – in all societies and sectors of society. ■

Dr Fletcher Tembo has been Senior Economic Justice Policy Adviser with World Vision UK for five years, prior to which he managed development programmes with World Vision Malawi. He has recently joined the Overseas Development Institute as a Research Fellow.

by **BILL WALKER**

GOVERNMENTS SERVING ORDINARY CITIZENS: TURNING THE EXCEPTION INTO THE RULE

Citizen empowerment, through approaches such as community-based performance monitoring, is key to government accountability and ultimately to poverty reduction, argues Bill Walker.

Provincial Governor Carvalho Muária addressing the Provincial Child Parliament in Zambézia, Mozambique in July 2006, where 81 young "MPs" representing 17 districts of the province gathered to debate important issues for children and young people. NGOs, including World Vision, and the Provincial AIDS Council supported the event.
Photo: *Jaime Chivite/World Vision*

"In Bangalore, India, a citizens' group is using report cards to rate the quality of public services and hold public officials to account. By putting these ratings on public display, government performance has improved and customer satisfaction with electricity service and public hospitals has soared."
– World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz's address to the 2006 IMF/World Bank Annual Meetings

Government existing for the sake of ordinary citizens? In far too many countries, government exists largely for the benefit of the powerful. There remain stark imbalances in power between impoverished citizens and those in government who have duties towards them. And too often, governments fail to provide adequate basic services, especially to those who are poorest.[1]

Meanwhile, levels of global aid are projected to double between 2006 and 2010. This will not necessarily address large power imbalances; indeed, there is the risk that it may increase associated abuses of power and levels of corruption. This could raise doubts about the wisdom of such large, rapid increases in aid – unless these issues are better addressed.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Over the past decade, governance has emerged as central to the development debate, with an emphasis on accountability and increased government capacity. Donors have spent enormous sums in support of "good governance".

Despite the scale and complexity of these efforts, scores of countries have made little real headway in realising the accountability that states owe to their citizens. In too many countries, progress has stalled; in some, accountability is in retreat. Failures in governance remain probably the major impediment to reducing global poverty.

Yet government accountability cannot be achieved through institutional reform alone or through legal mechanisms for generating social change, important as these are. Similarly, although financial accountability is essential, it has limitations as a means for holding those in power to account for ensuring that the poor actually benefit from development assistance.

From the viewpoint of many poor citizens, increasing accountability is part of a broader struggle for a social and economic good.

Recent research suggests that people who are marginalised consider substantive citizenship to be based on justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity.[2] These areas of concern reflect how some states are unresponsive to their citizens, especially those who are poor.

Accountability involves answerability and enforceability; it is both a process and an outcome

Accountability mechanisms are generally considered to have two complementary dimensions: answerability (the right to make claims and demand a response) and enforceability (the means to sanction a lack of responsiveness). As such, accountability is both a process and an outcome.

PUTTING CITIZENS AT THE CENTRE

Recently, there has been increased attention to the "demand side" of good governance: to strengthening the voice and capacity of citizens (especially those who are poor) to directly demand greater accountability by, and responsiveness from their governments.[3]

This role of citizens engaging to improve government accountability – known as "social accountability" – is essential to addressing power imbalances and to complementing accountability achieved via electoral processes. Evidence suggests that social accountability mechanisms can improve governance, increase development effectiveness through better service delivery, empower communities, and contribute to poverty reduction.

Social accountability relies on civic engagement, where ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability from governments and their agents (such as local essential service providers).

Diagram 1: Civic engagement in the budget cycle[4]

Budget formulation
e.g. participatory budgeting

Budget review and analysis
e.g. budget demystification and analysis

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Performance monitoring
e.g. CBPM; citizen report cards

Expenditure tracking
e.g. public expenditure tracking surveys
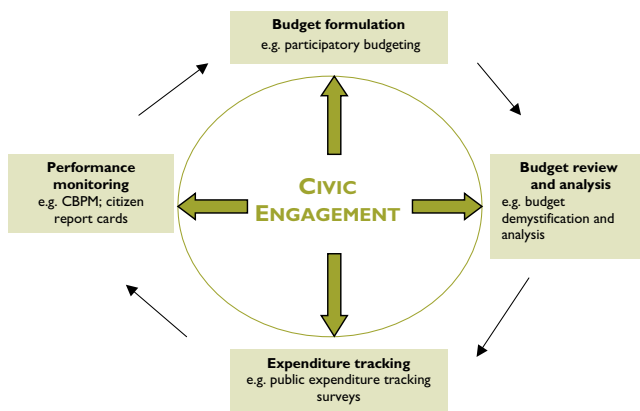
There is a broad range of ways that citizens, communities, independent media and civil society organisations can do this,[5] including:

- participatory budgeting;
- public expenditure tracking;
- monitoring the performance of public services, such as schools or health centres;
- investigative journalism; and
- public commissions and citizen advisory boards.

Key common elements of these mechanisms include obtaining, analysing and disseminating information, and mobilising community support to advocate for change. More recently, e-governance[6] has employed information and communication technology to extend the range of accountability mechanisms.

Appropriate intervention can vary considerably in different contexts

Such citizen-driven, vertical accountability measures complement and reinforce conventional, often more horizontal, mechanisms of accountability such as political checks and balances, accounting and auditing systems, administrative rules and legal procedures. Effectiveness and sustainability is improved when these mechanisms are "institutionalised", and when the state's own "internal" mechanisms of accountability are rendered more transparent, responsive and open to civic engagement.

Of course, what is an appropriate intervention can vary considerably

in different contexts. For designing a social accountability intervention, John Ackerman, a consultant to the World Bank on social account-ability, usefully suggests considering six parameters:[7]

1. incentive structure: punishment- or reward-based approach
2. accountability for what? rule-following or performance orientation
3. level of institutionalisation: ranging from independent external initiative to govern-ment-sponsored participation
4. depth of involvement: the degree to which the

engagement with government is consultative in nature
5. inclusiveness of participation: ranging from including only "well-behaved" groups to consulting extensively with a variety of actors, including marginalised groups
6. branches of government: whether the target of effort is the executive, legislative and/or judiciary branch

Government budgets represent a critical opportunity for citizens to engage and exact accountability. Thinking strategically about where to engage in the budget cycle is a useful way to decide which types of citizen engagement might be most effective. Diagram 1 shows the various stages with examples of suitable approaches.

CBPM: A WORLD VISION APPROACH

Working alongside millions of the world's poorest citizens in communities world-wide,[8] World Vision is uniquely positioned to empower people to monitor the performance of their government service providers in delivering health care, primary education and clean water. World Vision Australia is piloting one such social account-ability approach: community-based performance monitoring (CBPM).

Women in Peru participating in a CPBM exercise – using "face" drawings to rate their individual and group satisfaction with local health services.
Photo: *Carolina Naranjo/World Vision*

CBPM has been introduced to World Vision's programmes in several countries to help empower citizens to exact accountability for local service provision, and the results are promising.

CBPM enables local communities to negotiate reforms in the delivery of services, such as primary education or health care (Diagram 2 summarises key steps in this). Citizens (grouped as different types of users) and service providers (such as teachers and nurses) deliberate and vote on the quality of service provision via structured focus groups, and propose reforms to influence the quality and efficiency of services.

Feedback from user groups to service providers is almost immediate. Changes come through mutual dialogue, facilitated during an "interface meeting" including user groups, service providers and the wider community. The community also produces an "input tracking matrix" by comparing actual facility assets and supplies against their entitlements.

The primary aim of the approach is community empowerment. Yet CBPM also can be used as an advocacy tool by aggregating community-generated data drawn from multiple CBPM "community gatherings" and analysing this, with a view to influencing government policies and practices towards being pro-poor.

It is time to put meeting the needs of ordinary citizens — especially those who are the poorest — at the heart of "good government", instead of at the margins, or off the map. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals will require genuine accountability for providing essential services, and empowered citizenship. This calls not only for effective initiatives at community level, but major donors and developing country governments having the political will to encourage processes by which this can happen. ■

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[1] This failure to provide for the poorest has been extensively analysed in the 2004 *World Development Report.*

[2] N Kabeer, "The search for inclusive citizenship: Meanings and expressions in the interconnected world", Introduction in *Inclusive citizenship*, London, Zed Books, 2005, pp. 1–27

[3] The CBPM process is described in more detail in a paper by J Thindwa, J Edgerton & R Forster, a summary of which is at: http://www.worldvision.com.au/webwriter/ CS_Documents/CBPM%20Practice%20Paper %20for%20ICEC%202005%20v2.ppt

[4] Diagram based on slide 15 of World Bank PowerPoint http://siteresources.worldbank. org/EXTPARLIAMENTARIANS/Resources/ Kende_Robb.pdf

[5] Use of these have been documented e.g. at http://siteresources.worldbank. org/WBI/Resources/Sirker_StocktakingAsia-Pacific_FINAL.pdf

[6] See: http://www.unesco.org/webworld/e-governance/

[7] J M Ackerman, *Social accountability in the public sector: A conceptual discussion*, World Bank, March 2005. pp 12–24

[8] In 2006, World Vision served over 100 million people and worked in 97 countries.

Diagram 2: Overview of CBPM stages, steps and tasks
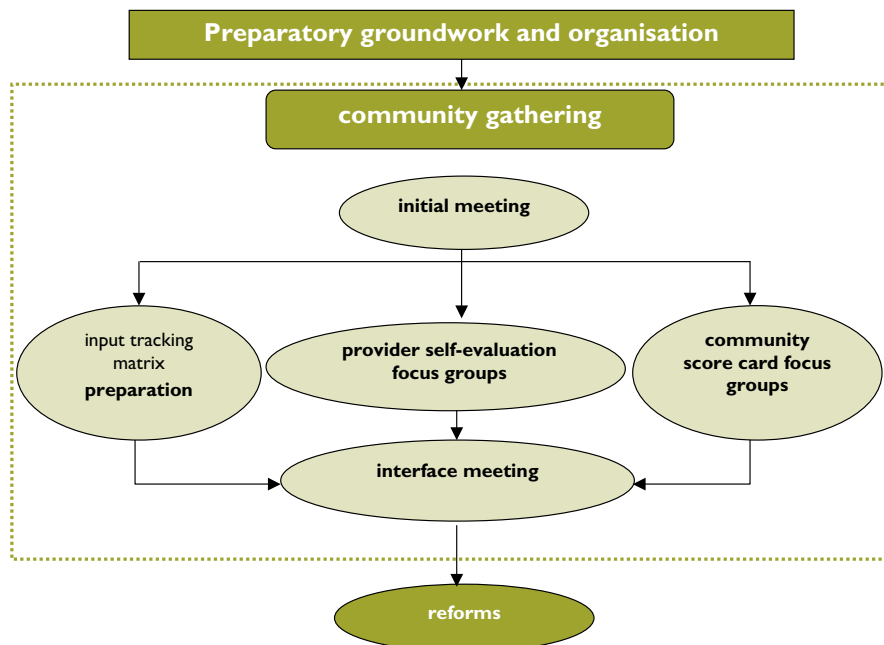
THE MIDDLE CLASSES: UNLIKELY ALLIES FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE?

Robert Jenkins argues that alliances among classes are critical to achieving accountability and to ensuring that the poor benefit from governance reform.

It is widely understood that a country's institutions of governance profoundly affect both the nature of poverty and its degree of intractability. Malfunctioning public institutions can hinder growth, hamper service delivery and impede the administration of justice. A common response to this unhappy state of affairs has been to call for more transparent and accountable governance – everything from opening up budget-formulation processes to public scrutiny, to establishing specialised anti-corruption commissions.

That such reforms rarely yield the desired results has been a source of widespread concern. Much less attention has been paid to what is potentially a far more disturbing problem: even when civic engagement does improve transparency and accountability, this often does not translate into better governance for the poor.

DIVERGING AGENDAS

Civic actors come in all shapes and sizes. Radical campaigners are one variety: activists can be found championing the rights of landless and dispossessed people in countries as different as Kenya, Brazil and Nepal. But many, if not most, civil society actors are either professionalised non-governmental organisations (NGOs) pursuing mainstream development agendas or citizens' associations working on issues of concern to urban middle classes.

The preoccupations of such groups often diverge considerably. For instance, if a neighbourhood association prompts a successful initiative to improve municipal services in a relatively well-off part of São Paulo, Brazil, there may be no appreciable impact in a distant *favela*, even if the same public sector body is involved. Or if a local water authority institutes a system to prevent its engineers demanding bribes for services that should be free, it won't necessarily operate uniformly across the city. In decentralised service bureaucracies, officials may implement reforms only where not doing so would prove costly – that is, where constituents have influence with their bosses.

Furthermore, shifting political alignments and the natural turnover of officials tend to erode the original impetus for reforms, making ongoing participation a burden that ordinary citizens (and most associations) find impossible to sustain.

CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES

If governance institutions are to operate more efficiently and equitably, different sectors of civil society must develop effective ways of working together. This means not only forming coalitions for lobbying purposes, but also re-orienting agendas to expand the range of stakeholders likely to benefit from any reform measure. In particular, alliances need to be forged between the middle classes and various groups among the poor.

Persuading pro-poor activists to address middle-class concerns is not easy, given a widespread perception that middle-class groups have largely ignored the impacts of market-oriented reforms on the economically marginal. Suspicion is heightened by the tendency of even lower middle-class families in many countries to pull their children out of state-run schools and shun government health facilities. Having detached themselves from the public sector where market alternatives exist, middle-class groups are seen as having little stake in making its institutions function more efficiently.

Many activists view the middle classes as impediments rather than allies in promoting reform

Such impressions make cross-class alliances, and the more inclusive agendas that would sustain them, less likely. Yet a New Delhi-based movement for accountability, Parivartan, demonstrates how the divergent interests of poor and middle-class groups can be bridged. Formed by professionals and retired bureaucrats in 2000, Parivartan originally focused on mainly middle-class concerns – such as corruption in the income-tax bureaucracy. (In India only the comparatively well-off are subject to income tax.) Over time, however, Parivartan began addressing problems facing poorer groups, such as the lack of services in slum settlements, police harassment of street vendors and the non-availability of subsidised food. This dramatically expanded Parivartan's support base, yielding valuable new allies in its battles for better government.

Sociologists have long emphasised the role of middle-class groups in transitions to democracy. But they are just as important to improving the **quality** of democracy. In poor countries, however, the middle class cannot bring about change on its own. Unless activists and citizens' associations working on behalf of poor and middle-class groups find creative means of working together, sustainable pro-poor improvements in governance will remain a depressingly distant prospect. ■

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by HENRY PARHAM

TRANSPARENCY TO AVOID THE "RESOURCE CURSE"

Henry Parham discusses how the blessing of natural resources can become a burden with poor governance.

This 14-year-old girl had her hands cut off by rebel fighters in Sierra Leone's vicious civil war – a war fuelled by the illicit sale of diamonds.
photo: *Brian Hatchell/World Vision*

Many of the poorest countries in the world are rich in natural resources. Natural endowments of oil and minerals provide governments of over 50 developing countries with significant amounts of revenue which should be used to reduce poverty and to promote sustainable development. However, this wealth in natural resources has all too often worsened the political, economic and social fabric of many developing countries. Mis-management of resource revenues has led to greater levels of corruption, conflict and inequality. This trend has come to be known as the "resource curse".

Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa's largest oil producer, gives a classic illustration of the resource curse. Nigeria is among the most oil-rich nations and has earned hundreds of billions of dollars over the past 40 years from oil. Yet more than 90% of Nigerians still live on less than US$2 a day, and infant mortality is among the highest in the world. In Venezuela, poverty has increased over the past 25 years despite $600 billion in oil revenues during that period. And despite its massive oil, gas and mineral wealth, nearly half of Indonesia's citizens live below the poverty line.[1]

CORRUPTION FACTORS

What such examples show is that high government dependency on natural resource revenues, combined with a lack of state infrastructure and fundamental poor governance, may allow revenues to be embezzled for private gain by ruling elites – to the detriment of human and economic development efforts. The corrupt are protected by deficient budgetary transparency, by lack of information available to civil society that would enable monitoring of income and expenditure, and in many cases, by the absence of democratic space.

Resource-rich countries are also prone to higher levels of conflict, corruption and poverty. In Africa, devastating civil wars linked to access to natural resources have been fought in countries including the DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Natural resources have been a significant factor in provoking civil unrest in several Latin American countries where disadvantaged and affected local communities around mines and oil pipelines have vented frustrations and anger against governments and corporations.

In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index – an annual ranking of countries according to levels of corruption – a great many resource-rich developing countries feature at the very bottom (perceived as "highly corrupt"). And 25 of the world's 33 oil-rich countries have low or medium rankings on the UNDP Human Development Index.

Companies operating in such highly unstable and volatile countries are at times faced with ransom demands and extortion from rebel groups in host communities. Often company staff are directly targeted, but more often it is actual oil fields or mines that are the most vulnerable. In these circumstances, companies may have no choice but to succumb to such demands, albeit illegally, in order to ensure the security of their operations and personnel.

Natural resources are often constitutionally enshrined as belonging to a country's citizens

On the other hand, foreign companies paying bribes to governments to secure contracts is often considered a normal part of doing business in developing countries. It may be illegal but without sufficient scrutiny it can be all too easy to get away with it. The payments made to these groups are categorised as "off the book" transactions, thereby evading scrutiny. This situation simply perpetuates a vicious cycle of violence and mistrust within host communities, damaging company reputation and further alienating these people from their governments.

AVOIDING "THE CURSE"

The mere presence of natural resources in a developing country does not equate automatically to being a curse. But it is clear that the mis-management of those resources can aggravate existing political, social and other grievances, and heighten the risk of conflict and the opportunities for corrupt behaviour to flourish. It is the governance structures underpinning the management of these industries that determine the development impact.

Australia, Botswana, Canada, Chile and Norway are often regarded as examples of countries that have harnessed their natural resource wealth for the benefit of their populations. Common factors in their success are greater levels of accountability and sound institutions that have been able to effectively manage these volatile industries and ensure prudent spending of revenue. Transparency in the payment and receipt of revenue generated from resource industries is an essential condition for ensuring that money is spent wisely by governments and in the interests of development.

Without accountability, transparency is meaningless

There is a very clear moral case for citizens of resource-rich-but-poor countries to have access to this information. Natural resources are often constitution-ally enshrined as the property of a country's citizens, so citizens have a right to know how much money is flowing in from the extraction and export of **their** resources. Revenue disclosure allows citizens to lobby for a democratic debate over how the money should be managed, and hence provides a basis for civil society to hold governments accountable.

To ensure that oil and minerals serve as a blessing, resource-rich country governments have to put in place policies and laws that will ensure transparent, accountable and responsible management of resource revenue and public finances. Just as importantly, citizens need access to information and a role to play in monitoring expenditure with the full co-operation of government, companies and the media. Without accountability, transparency is meaningless. Civil society provides a crucial watchdog role that ensures that governments and companies fulfil their obligations to society.

PWYP

The Publish What You Pay (PWYP) coalition has been working since 2002 to push for greater transparency in the extractive industries and to ensure that civil society is fully involved in efforts to achieve this goal. Having originally evolved out of UK-based

Global Witness' investigations into the squandering of oil wealth, PWYP is now backed by a world-wide coalition of over 300 civil society organisations from over 50 countries, with many more hundreds of groups involved in national civil-society coalitions across Africa, Central Asia, Europe and North America.

The NGO coalition calls for changes to company reporting and accounting standards such that it is a requirement to publicly disclose payments to governments for every country of operation. This is particularly important in G8 and OECD countries, as the majority of the world's resource companies are based or listed on stock exchanges in their territories.

PWYP also calls on export credit agencies, banks and international financial institutions to require revenue transparency of companies and governments that seek their financial assistance or investment support for extractive industry investments. Making transparency mandatory for companies and governments of resource-rich countries will be an essential step in the fight against corruption and poverty in the developing world.

A significant turning point in the campaign was the launching of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) by the UK Government in 2003. The Initiative brings together governments, companies, NGOs and international organisations to work towards a framework for the disclosure of payments and revenues in resource-rich countries, which will pave the way for greater accountability in the management of this income.

Around 25 countries have committed to implement the EITI in line with its principles and criteria. So far only Azerbaijan and Nigeria have published fully audited reports, and progress in the other countries is very limited. In Congo Brazzaville, the government has gone backwards on its commitment to EITI and civil society is faced with enormous challenges. The leading PWYP campaigners have been harassed because of their work to promote transparency. They were arrested and jailed in 2006 on what we see as trumped-up

charges designed to silence their voice and intimidate them.

As global oil prices reach record highs, the populations of many resource-rich countries still are not benefiting. But under the right conditions and with clear and enforceable standards of transparency and accountability in the management of revenues, the resource curse can be lifted and the lives of millions of poor people around the world can be improved. ■

Mr Henry Parham is International Co-ordinator of the Publish What You Pay coalition. See: http://www. publishwhatyoupay.org or e-mail: coordinator@publishwhatyoupay. org

[1] A November 2006 World Bank report states that "forty-two percent of Indonesia's population lives on between US$1 and US$2 a day" (*Making the new Indonesia work for the poor*, Overview, p xxiii). The Government's official figure is lower than this.

A landscape of oil derricks against the Caspian Sea, on the outskirts of Baku, Azerbaijan
photo: *John Schenk/World Vision*

by Jeff Thindwa

Tackling weak governance through enhanced stakeholder demand

The World Bank's ARVIN framework offers important insight into civic engagement for accountable governance, explains Jeff Thindwa.

There is growing consensus, and compelling evidence, that the quality of governance is key to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.

Transparency, accountability and responsiveness are central tenets of effective governance. But efforts toward good governance have conventionally focused on "supply-side" reforms to strengthen internal accountability processes, such as financial audits, accounting systems, administrative reporting, and political checks and balances.

Evidence suggests that these measures, important as they are, have been largely ineffectual in promoting good governance. It is now widely accepted that they have to be complemented by greater public scrutiny and enhanced stakeholder demand; citizens and their organisations are a critical part of this. Strategies to strengthen governance, therefore, have to invest significantly in stimulating, channelling and building capacity for demand.

This raises two questions: How can civil society effectively engage in processes of governance? What kind of conditions are needed for such engagement?

Approaches that promote civic engagement to hold government to account are referred to as "social accountability". A wide array of such tools is in use world-wide, helping to translate the otherwise abstract notion of "demand" into informed, systematic action by citizens. They range from information campaigns to oversight committees, independent budget analysis and citizen report cards on public services. Social accountability can also be initiated by government institutions themselves.

The World Bank management paper *Strengthening Bank Group engagement on governance and anti-corruption*[1] underlines the vital role of social accountability approaches, and the crucial role of civil society organisations and the media as powerful forces for holding government accountable and fighting corruption.

ARVIN

The World Bank's Social Development Department developed an analytical framework to help development stakeholders improve their understanding of the conditions that influence civic engagement and social accountability, and to design appropriate policy and capacity-building remedies. The basic premise of the ARVIN framework is that civic engagement is determined by the ability of citizens and their organisations to:

- **Associate** freely in pursuit of their interests;
- have access to appropriate **Resources** to support their mandates;
- **Voice** their issues and concerns freely, including through the media;
- access and disseminate relevant **Information** on government activities, as well as generate alternative sources; and
- be able to **Negotiate** their issues and interests with public officials.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) cannot engage meaningfully in governance processes when these enabling elements of civic engagement are compromised. In any given country context, a key set of external conditions can influence these enabling elements: the legal and regulatory framework, political and institutional features, socio-cultural characteristics, and the economic environment.

Research into the impact of these external influences on ARVIN factors is the cornerstone of ARVIN assessments. Recognising that particular institutional factors in civil society do constrain its agency in social accountability and demand for good governance, complementary research is conducted on the capacities, relationships (internal and external) and values in civil society.

In context...

As a multi-stakeholder, participatory process, the ARVIN methodology gathers relevant data through quantitative and qualitative methods to provide both depth and breadth. These include opinion polls, surveys of CSOs, focus group discussions, structured key informant interviews, and town hall forums. Case studies are conducted to provide empirical insights into civic engagement and social accountability in relevant areas such as service delivery,

environmental governance and participatory budgeting. Research of the country context helps to inform the study, which also uses detailed literature reviews and focused thematic studies (e.g. of media). The Bank has facilitated ARVIN assessments in Senegal, Albania, Mongolia, Ecuador, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Cambodia (ongoing). In Ghana and Sierra Leone, ARVIN assessments have sought synergies with the Civil Society Index,[2] using the Index's data to supplement ARVIN research.

Focusing ARVIN on social accountability has invariably led to prioritisation of Information, Voice and Negotiation, and how they are impacted by the external environment and internal dynamics of civil society. This is because social accountability requires:

- CSO monitoring of govern- ment actions, which both requires and generates publicly held **Information**;
- citizen feedback on, and advocacy for, specific govern- ment actions, both of which require **Voice** and free media;
- **Negotiation** of the issues; and government response.

Social accountability also requires redress mechanisms for dissatisfied stakeholders, and sanctions on public officials for failure to perform.

The impact of external influences on ARVIN factors is the cornerstone of assessments

To mention but a few examples, the Ghana assessment identified difficulties in citizen access to public financial information, which hinder current independent budget analysis and expenditure tracking initiatives. It recommended changes to the language and format of the national budget and more participatory local-level budgeting processes. The study recommended a national public education campaign to raise awareness of citizen rights and knowledge about relevant government laws, policies and services.

The Senegal assessment established that provisions on access to information in the

decentralisation laws were applied inconsistently, partly because local councillors and citizens were not sufficiently knowledgeable about the laws. It recommended that local officials and citizens be trained on citizen rights and the responsibilities of local councils, and that relevant laws and policies be translated into local languages.

In Mongolia, the study found that defamation laws restricted freedom of expression and media reporting, and recommended bringing those laws into line with international standards.

In Ecuador, the assessment found that the decentralisation law constrained citizens' demand for accountability of local governments. It recommended revising the law's provisions to include specific mechanisms on citizen participation in planning and budgeting, and on access to municipal information.

The Sierra Leone study found among other things that weak enforcement mechanisms limited social accountability, and recommended measures to strengthen and independently monitor justice services. It found serious difficulties in citizen access to information at the local level, and recommended strengthening the disclosure practices of local councils and support to community radio development. The study also identified the need to enhance the accountability and credibility of CSOs.

ASSESSMENT AND ACTION
The value of these assessments lies in how their findings are used to improve governance and enhance development processes. Country stakeholder groups – government, donors, CSOs, media, parliamentarians – review the ARVIN reports' findings and recommendations, identify priority action areas and propose action plans to address them. In addition to promoting in-country dialogues, the studies inform the Bank's Country Assistance Strategy and the country programmes of donors and CSOs.

As the Bank's own Quality Assurance Group's assessment found, the Mongolia study deepened stakeholder dialogue (on governance and accountability issues) and provided analytical

underpinnings to the Bank's Governance Reform Project. In addition, actions to mainstream transparency in projects, build stakeholder capacity for social accountability and improve the policy environment for media have been placed firmly on the Bank's agenda for supporting reforms.

In Ghana, a multi-stakeholder co-ordination framework was created to develop a roadmap for implementing the study's findings, while a multi-donor trust fund and multi-stakeholder forum have been proposed to support implementation of the Sierra Leone study's findings and recommendations.

Finally, experience suggests that ARVIN participatory assessments help to strengthen constituencies for accountable governance and demand-side approaches. A key lesson for the Bank from the ARVIN studies is the need to expand the scope for supporting civil-society capacity building – in addition to public sector reforms – as part of its support of governance reforms in client countries. ■

Mr Jeff Thindwa is Co-ordinator for the Participation and Civic Engagement Group of the World Bank.

[1] http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/comments/governancefeedback/gacpaper.pdf

[2] The CSI is an action-research project that aims to assess and compare the state of civil society in approximately 60 countries around the world using the indicators of values, structure, "space" or enabling environment, and impact. It is co-ordinated by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, a South Africa-based global CSO network. See http://www.civicus.org

Civic and legal education for the rural poor

CAMBODIA

"*Cambodia is a country bursting with activity. The World Bank estimated the 2006 gross domestic product (GDP) to be 8.9%; 2005's growth was listed as 13.4%. The nation is in a good position to benefit from the region's economic development. Yet, as in many countries, a closer look at the GDP reveals that this growth is disturbingly uneven. In Phnom Penh, the capital city, there was a 66% decrease in poverty and in other urban areas poverty decreased by 44%, but in rural areas poverty fell by only 22%.[1] Economic growth usually benefits only those with money and political influence. And as Cambodia's economy evolves, the ties between economics and politics grow closer, further marginalising the poor, the young and the powerless.*

In some ways, life has become harder for rural citizens, despite the increase in peace and prosperity. The tourism and garment sectors have seen the most progress and have drawn young people, particularly young women, away from their rural homes to the cities. But growth does not always yield as many jobs as expected. Without quality education in their villages, without economic opportunities, and with very little understanding of Cambodia's laws, young people often are exploited, and their rights are violated. As more and more young people enter the work force, pressure increases for the government to deliver better opportunities to them.

GOVERNMENT FOR WHOM?

There is little civic engagement between marginalised youth and their governments. Many citizens do not know who represents them in the government, nor do they expect civil servants to serve the public as such. The Cambodian term for those who work in the government — muntrey reachkha — means "government employee"; there is no word comparable to the English "civil servant", which implies serving civilians. And most Cambodians are not aware that the laws and the constitution were designed to serve the people, or that they have the right to claim their place as citizens. Those who are aware may still be held back by fear. Thus, when services that are supposed to be carried out by civil servants are delayed, mis-managed, or not implemented, people do not know enough nor feel that they have enough power to ask for delivery of the basic services they need.[2]

How can government officials and civil-society groups in Cambodia meet the challenge of empowering citizens, particularly those in the rural areas, so that they feel able to participate in the development process and governance of their country? Addressing this oft-overlooked dimension to development, World Vision seeks to help communities overcome the systems and structures that create powerlessness, to learn about their roles as individual citizens, and to be a part of development.

World Vision Cambodia (WVC) has partnered with various government ministries and rural communities for over 25 years to build economic resilience for rural and urban families. Our 2006–2010 National Strategy seeks to reduce the vulnerability of children by empowering communities to meet their own needs in the areas of food, health, HIV and AIDS, and education; to work to eliminate the causes of injustice, and to promote peace within families and in the wider community.
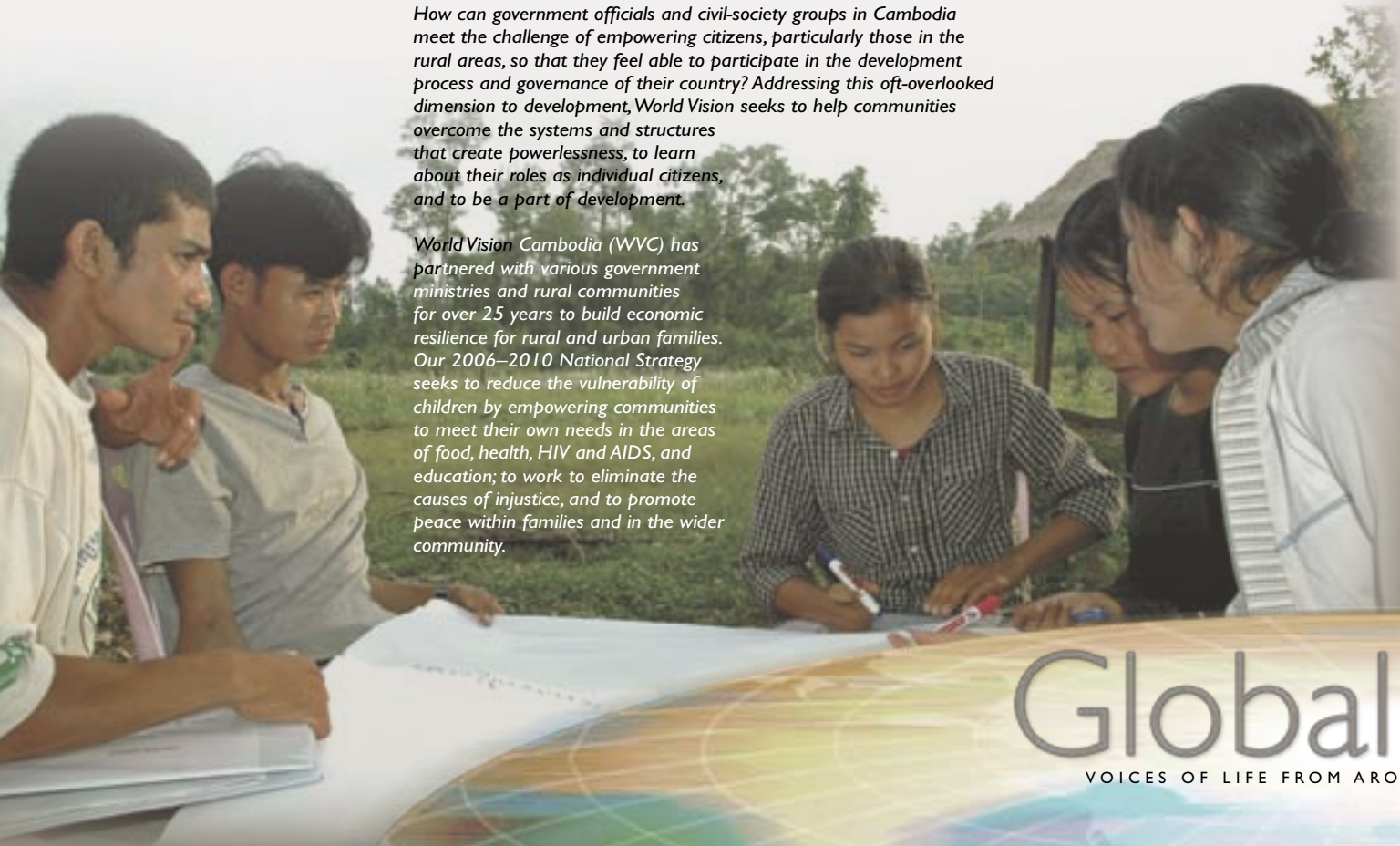
Global

VOICES OF LIFE FROM ARO

In our 2006 Civic and Legal Education Project, WVC aimed to reduce the gap between citizens and the government. We worked closely with the local authorities of the remote Samlot District of Battambang Province to provide basic training to 140 selected community members aged 16–50 years old. The training materials teach citizens that it is their duty to care about public policy, and encourage them to question government performance in service delivery, and to work with government ministries to ensure the passing of important laws that govern the lives of the Cambodian people.

Under the new Cambodian National Poverty Reduction Strategy for 2006–2010, the government has plans to further decentralise its activities through the "rectangular strategy for growth, employment, equity and efficiency". But there is still much to be done towards community empowerment, particularly in remote villages.

"Now we know very well"

Problems that contribute to increasing poverty in remote areas include: land-grabbing for the purpose of speculation by those with money and power; conflict over water, in which those with "connections" often have more rights; and the low level of education that often makes people vulnerable to trickery and deception.

To help reduce such vulnerability for people in Samlot District, WVC, with the district governor's permission, provided training on the constitution and distributed documents to community members such as students, teachers, village leaders, and village development workers. We trained villagers on the roles of citizens under the Cambodian Constitution, human rights, children's rights, and the newly-passed domestic violence law. When asked about who represents them in the parliament, one participant said: "We don't know our representatives in the government; does it matter?" Another commented: "It is difficult to advocate with authorities because we often have a lower level of education than they do."

After the three-day training, a participant said: "Now we know very well about our roles as citizens and we also know more about the government officials' roles as civil servants." The project then distributed folders explaining how villagers can work with their local authorities to file complaints through the proper legal channels.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

The pilot project ended in July 2006. More are needed; the gaps facing justice in Cambodia today are many. Some of the obstacles that we need to keep in mind when talking about empowering communities are internal ones: such as lack of understanding for advocacy; fear of being "political" when advocating for a balance of power or addressing rights issues; fear of treading on the toes of those with money and power; and lack of understanding of the legislative process, the law and the judicial system. Other challenges are external: such as lack of transparency in the legislative process; lack of incentive for low-paid government employees to work towards change; an often defensive attitude of leaders in powerful positions towards public criticism; and the weak judicial system. In a country context where power politics are prevalent, it is difficult to work for meaningful development without discussing the power dynamics between those who work inside the government and the civilians – the people who do not have strong connections to powerful families.

The trainees in Samlot expressed that the training had really "woken them up" and given them more hope and motivation to bring about change for their communities. They indicated their commitment to work together with local authorities and NGOs to address issues that affect their daily lives. Ongoing efforts to truly empower such people to take part in governance and to hold government to account, will require overcoming the political, economic and educational gaps that exist in Cambodia." ■

Reported by Ms Haidy Ear-Dupuy, Advocacy and Communications Manager for World Vision Cambodia

[1] World Bank, *Cambodia: Halving poverty by 2015?*, 2006

[2] One of the weakest links is between the citizens of Cambodia and their parliamentarians. Cambodians vote for a political party, not an individual. The winning party appoints a parliamentarian to represent a geographic region for the party, not the people, and the party can remove a parliamentarian from office. Parliamentarians do not report to the people, but to the party.

life
UND THE GLOBE

To vote with understanding
NICARAGUA

"In November 2006, Nicaraguans elected the president and vice-president of the Republic and members of the National Congress and of the Central American Parliament. In a country with a population of five million, about three million were eligible to vote in more than 11,000 polling stations across the country.

Five political parties and alliances stood for election: the Liberal Alliance (ALN), the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), the Liberal and Constitutionalist Party (PLC), the Movement for Sandinista Reformation (MRS) and the Alliance for a Change (APC).

The electoral process was monitored by international bodies including the Organization of American States, the Carter Center and the European Union, and national observers including civil society groups Etica y Transparencia, the Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE), Hagamos Democracia and World Vision.

PROMOTING PEACEFUL PARTICIPATION

Two years earlier, World Vision Nicaragua had engaged in "outsider" observation of the Municipal election process, and had organised children's participation in forums for raising the major candidates' awareness of children's rights. World Vision has worked in Nicaragua since 1989, and our framework of empowering people to be active citizens is supporting our wider work in promoting sustainable development for children, families and communities.

Our objective during the 2006 presidential electoral process was to contribute to building communities' capacity for peaceful participation. Other goals were:

- *to contribute to the discussion and analysis of the population's political behaviour in order to develop strategies for educating people for electoral participation;*
- *to open up opportunities for the population to know and debate the political candidates' proposed policies, so as to be able to participate intelligently; and*
- *to educate the population on how voting works.*

To this end, with funding from Australia and Canada, we hosted or engaged in five major activities throughout 2006 which significantly involved local leaders from communities World Vision is accompanying:

Photos

Top — *Electoral Law Forum, Managua*

Centre — *Political Candidates' Forum, Carazo*

Bottom — *Volunteers inputting survey data*

Opposite — *Community members addressing political candidates*

Photos: Jaime Tercero/World Vision

Global

VOICES OF LIFE FROM ARO

expressing questions, doubts and concerns

JUNE:
NATIONAL ELECTORAL LAW FORUM

The first step was a Forum, held in Managua City, where specialists in the electoral process presented an evaluation of Nicaragua's electoral law, pointing out its weaknesses and strengths. Some 80 people participated, among them electoral observers, political parties, universities, and community leaders from regions where World Vision is working. After each presentation, members of the public were able to enrich the analysis and make it more participatory, by asking questions and offering their own reflections on the different themes. The Forum was reported on television and radio news programmes.

JULY–AUGUST:
LOCAL TRAINING IN ELECTORAL LAW

To prepare local populations for meaningful voting and increase their understanding of the importance of civil participation for building democracy, 700 people in 15 municipalities were trained in electoral law. A number of these people later volunteered to be election observers.

AUGUST:
FIRST SURVEY OF PRE-ELECTORAL CLIMATE

The survey aimed to ascertain the psychological mood of the population regarding their knowledge, fears, perspectives and feelings about the electoral process. Subsequently, a journalist commented that this was "the only serious and scientific poll" carried out during the whole process – since the poll was not intended to benefit or harm any political party. The poll was effective in exploring the impact of the media and propaganda on the consciousness of voters in terms of influencing their choice of candidate.

SEPTEMBER:
POLITICAL FORUM WITH NATIONAL CANDIDATES

World Vision Nicaragua together with community representatives organised this Forum, held in Carazo Department, which provided an encounter between candidates and local populations, so that local people could get to know candidates' legislative proposals and candidates could hear the people's own legislative priorities. Participants numbered 300, mostly from more than a dozen World Vision-accompanied communities.

The five candidates each presented the main points of their policy platforms, especially those relevant to Carazo. Then attendees had the opportunity to express their questions, doubts and concerns, and make recommendations to the candidates. There was also opportunity to raise issues that the candidates had not touched upon, such as the problem of land ownership and commercialisation of communities' produce. This Forum was one of the few instances where an organisation could bring together the five political parties contesting the election.

NOVEMBER:
"EXTERNAL" OBSERVATION PROCESS

On election day, 250 volunteers watched 250 polling stations during the voting, and surveyed 800 voters near the polling stations. Most of the volunteers were among those who were trained in electoral law during July and August. The people surveyed were from communities attended by World Vision. They were asked questions such as:

> *"How is the community atmosphere during this election? (tense/calm/indifferent/other)"*
> *"Do you trust that the election results will be transparent?"*
> *"Will you be able to accept the results, no matter who wins?"*
> *"Did you decide who you would vote for some time ago, or at the last minute?"*
> *"In your family, do you agree on who to vote for, or decide this individually?"*

Nicaragua's main television news channel gave us an interview to announce the survey results on the night of the election. The most significant finding of this poll was that the family has a major role in the voter's decision: 60% of those polled acknowledged having voted for a candidate through a family decision, while 40% decided it individually."

Reported by Mr Jaime Tercero, World Vision Nicaragua

life
UND THE GLOBE

Transparency and accountability at the community level
Zambia

"We will advocate for our rights"

"Zambia remains one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 166th out of 177 countries in the 2005 UNDP Human Development Index.[1] The World Bank reported that poverty and vulnerability in Zambia are linked largely to poverty of resources, access and relationships,[2] and that solutions lie in expanding economic opportunities for the poor — by improving the investment climate for private sector-led growth; by ensuring that poor people participate more actively in market-led growth and be less exposed to risks; and by improving governance.

From the governance perspective, poverty is not only related to consumption (access to income through employment, entitlement or other means) but also to participation in the institutions and processes that govern one's life; exclusion results in voicelessness and powerlessness.

Engaging civil society

The Zambian Government, in its 2000 Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Paper, outlined three broad areas for its governance and poverty reduction programme:

- regular and wider consultations between government and citizens;
- efficient, equitable and transparent management of scarce public resources; and
- guaranteed justice.

The government has engaged civil society and the private business sector in its governance agenda, inviting civil society to participate in the process of formulating its PRS. The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) network, founded in 2000, has led to strong civil society participation in this.

World Vision's research into the depth of poverty and deprivation in communities, and potential areas for participation, triggered our growing involvement.[3] As a member of CSPR, World Vision Zambia participated in drawing up the civil society position paper on the adoption of the PRS and attended government-hosted meetings to review the process.

The Zambia National PRS primarily, though not exclusively, targets agricultural development as the engine of income expansion for the poor. The majority of Zambians depend on agricultural activities for livelihood, and the PRS sees this sector as one of the best opportunities for the economic growth required to reduce poverty. But the "growth" approach needs to be complemented by measures to lessen the adverse impacts of economic reforms and other factors upon people living in poverty. In particular, the PRS has earmarked substantial resources for basic education and health.

Communicating policy

Yet the general public (particularly in rural communities) lacks information and clarity about government decisions and policies. Citizens have been unable to exact the full measure of government commitments or hold government to account; communities have been unsure of the implications of some policies — such as liberalisation of the agricultural sector — on their lives and livelihoods. Absence of citizens' feedback has prevented necessary reviews of policies that may not be working. The danger is that lack of transparency can lead to uncertainty, suspicion and corruption.
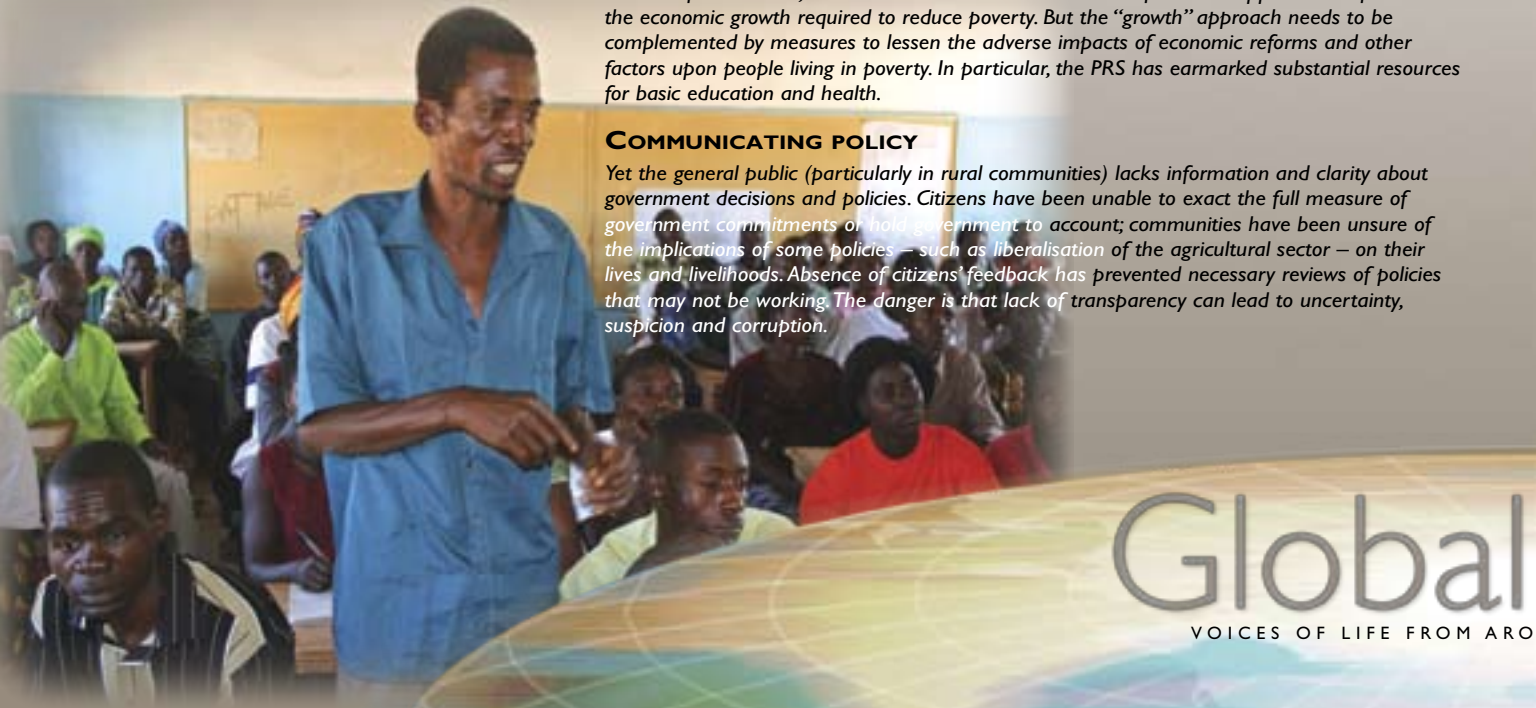
Global
VOICES OF LIFE FROM ARO

Poor policy implementation and information adversely affect people. For instance:

- staff in some rural health centres continue to demand payment, despite the policy of free access to general health care;
- some school authorities prevent the integration back into school of female students who have given birth, despite the re-entry policy providing for this;
- farmers in some not-so-remote areas are stuck with unsold maize grain because they don't know details of the marketing policy, or they lose their livestock due to lack of awareness of the animal diseases control policy.

Believing that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) need the participation of communities in development, and noting this general lack of information at community level, World Vision Zambia collaborated with government departments responsible for implementing policy to change things. In the process we saw the need to increase citizen interaction with government agencies, officials and among themselves.

World Vision made available to community members information relevant to poverty reduction in agriculture, health and education. We held workshops on policy dialogue between government and communities in the Nyamphande Area Development Programme (ADP), in Petauke, Eastern Province which over 300 people attended. Workshops in Mpika, Northern Province ADP drew more than 400 participants. And things changed.

Mr Kaziours Lungu, Petauke District Education Board Secretary, said: "In our efforts to attain the MDGs, the education sector is implementing the recently-established policies on free primary education and on girl child education which enables girls to continue with education even when they become pregnant."

Mr Robertson Mwansa, Mpika District Senior Environmental Health Technologist, said that the health sector is focusing on prevention of mother-to-child transmission (pMTCT) of HIV and on malaria eradication, which are major challenges to Zambia attaining the MDGs: "We are distributing free insecticide-treated mosquito nets. A pMTCT centre has been opened here to fight TB, provide free anti-retroviral therapy and fight HIV and AIDS." Mwansa said that the workshop had educated him. "As a result of this workshop, I know how to address community problems using relevant people in power. Our participation will help to develop our communities."

Mrs Aliness Mwanza, another participant, said: "I have learnt to fight for my rights as a woman. Many of our traditional customs, such as marriage succession, infringe on our rights, and women are not even allowed to participate in decision making. We will advocate for our rights."

The District Planning Officer shared information on the local government decentralisation policy. Participants challenged him to explain how the district council hoped to manage the added responsibility of the education sector when it failed to pay regular staff. The Mpika District Education Standards Officer then explained the allocation of free education funding to schools and the expenditure structure within schools. **Mr Ichampa Lesa**, one of the participants, thanked him for the information, saying parents were under the impression that teachers stole part of the funding.

ONGOING CHANGE

Participating communities learned about the free health and educational policies, and are now able to analyse policies for impact on the poorest and most vulnerable community members. They are more aware of agriculture-related policies (such as marketing and co-operatives), and farmers are taking responsibility for managing their livestock. They are demanding more "face time" and action from their MPs and public officials, and are more able to request improvements to poor policy implementation. Meanwhile, the Global Movement for Children has brought increased engagement between children and policy makers, with Zambian children influencing numerous policy changes.

Remaining challenges include limited resources for community capacity building; managing potential confrontations with government or parliamentarians; and broadening communities' understanding of poverty to include infringement on rights and social exclusion, which directly impacts traditions and practices.

After the advocacy workshop in Mpika, Area Development committee members of Lubaleshi ward followed through their need for a bridge with the district council. Their first step was a presentation at the December 2006 District Development Coordinating Committee meeting. At the time of writing they were waiting for the outcome, but this step itself indicates a new energy to advocate on issues of shared concern." ◼

Reported by Dr Gertrude Chanda, Head of Advocacy and Communications, World Vision Zambia

[1] http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_HDI.pdf

[2] World Bank, *Zambia poverty and vulnerability assessment*, discussion draft, 29 June 2005

[3] World Vision UK funded three pieces of research: *Poverty reduction: Are the strategies working?* (https://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/WVUK_PRS_report_July.pdf), *Dreams for 2015: The voices of Zambian children and their families* (https://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Dreams_for_2015.pdf), and *More than words? Action for orphans and vulnerable children in Africa* (https://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/More_Than_Words.pdf)

life

UND THE GLOBE

POLITICAL GOVERNANCE THAT WORKS FOR THE POOR

Graham Teskey discusses the UK Government's White Paper on International Development, its focus on poverty reduction and the crucial role of civil society.

The UK Government's July 2006 White Paper on international development was entitled *Making governance work for the poor*. The title and the contents of the Paper are no accident, nor were they chosen lightly. Poverty elimination is the over-arching priority for the Department for International Development (DFID); indeed, everything it does must be seen to have an impact on poverty reduction.

Since Hilary Benn became Secretary of State in 2003, he has become more convinced than ever that "politics matters". He has remarked on a number of occasions that it was politics that put poverty elimination at the top of the G8 summit agenda at Gleneagles in July 2005. Without politics, Britain's development budget would not be set to grow to 0.7% of GNI by 2013. In his many country visits, Hilary also became convinced that unless governance works in our partner countries, real sustainable development will not be possible.

AREAS OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

But what do we mean by "governance", and how can donors act in order to help make it work? Some have criticised the White Paper as being overly statist. I would suggest that this is a mis-reading of what the Paper is saying.

Political governance covers three broad areas: public sector institutions (principally the executive but also the judiciary); political institutions (i.e. systems and organisations of representation); and human rights and individual civil liberties. The White Paper emphasises that unless public sector institutions are capable, unless political institutions are accountable, and unless both public and political institutions are responsive to human rights and civil liberties, then governance will not work for the poor. The argument of the White Paper was that all three areas of political governance have a role to play in poverty reduction.

Over the past decade, donors in general, including DFID, have given most attention to developing the capabilities of the executive branch of the state, increasing its capacity to identify, design, deliver and monitor development

programmes. Support for the "accountability institutions" of parliaments or national assemblies have had a lower profile. Similarly, donors have focused on the "supply side" of governance (helping the state deliver it) rather than the "demand side" (helping the citizens of a state demand it). The White Paper addressed this head-on: it states clearly that accountability and responsiveness, as well as capability, are required if governments are to be effective. After all, we know that rights were secured in the UK because people went out and fought for them, from the Tolpuddle Martyrs in the 1830s to the Suffragette movement in the last century.

Accountability will not be achieved merely by creating formal institutions of representation (though they are vital). An accountable society is one where there is a vibrant civil society constantly engaged in debate with the state, hammering out the terms of the "social contract" – that broad agreement between the governors and the governed.

This agreement emerges only over the long term. And civil society – the loose collection of advocacy and lobby groups, vested interests and trades unions, faith communities and professional associations – has a central role to play in developing that contract and ensuring that the state keeps its side of the bargain.

Thus civil society plays two key roles. First, it helps to keep the state honest, and second, it contributes to securing and upholding the full range of human rights obligations to which most national governments have committed themselves. These two roles are key priorities for DFID and give the lie to the critique that the White Paper is overtly statist.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

The next question is how outsiders can help build the capacity of civil society to hold governments to account, and ensure that they are increasingly responsive to citizen rights and aspirations. Millions of words have been written about capacity building, many of which generate more heat than light.

Thirty or so years ago, capacity building was interpreted

The head teacher of a Ugandan primary school (right) puts his hands on education reforms demanded by the local community – indicating that he is owning them and taking responsibility for delivering them.
Photo: *Keren Winterford/World Vision*

narrowly as training and the provision of equipment. It was then realised that individuals work in organisations that either constrain or encourage individual performance. In the 1980s, donors consequently placed great emphasis on organisational change and restructuring. Much of this work was influenced by some of the ideas underpinning the New Public Management approach, which in turn was influenced by management ideas in the private sector (business process re-engineering, for example).

Poverty reduction requires capable, accountable, responsive public and political institutions

In the 1990s, a further wave of understanding influenced development thinking. New Institutional Economics entered the mainstream. Its impact was to focus attention on the wider set of incentives and the institutional environment in which specific organisations and individuals work. To what incentives do senior officials and ministers respond? We learned that however well-trained and skilled individuals may be, however well-structured are the organisations in which they work, unless the wider institutional environment is responsive and receptive, impact is likely to be limited. In short, "turning individual competence into organisational capacity requires institutional change."[1]

So in terms of implementing the British Government's White Paper, civil society has a huge role to play in developing and shaping the wider institutional environment in which public sector bodies operate. Arguably one of the most effective ways of improving the capability of the public sector is to open it up to external scrutiny and public accountability. Civil society – the great variety of associational life – has the ability to demand better performance of governments.

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY

In many ways this summarises the new governance agenda. As indicated above, much donor activity and spending on governance over the last decade has been on improving the performance of public sector

organisations, such as line ministries or ministries of finance. Of course this is, and will remain, important. But step-changes in the accountability of public organisations will be a focus for DFID work in the next few years.

How do we try to achieve this? To answer this we need to clarify a little more what we understand by accountability. Accountability refers to a set of institutionalised relationships; how is one body (or individual) responsible to another? There are four functions in any accountability relationship:

- standard-setting: what level of service is required?
- investigation: to what extent are these levels of service being delivered?
- answerability: to what extent are organisations/individuals made to answer for performance?
- sanction: what punitive or corrective action is to be taken to ensure standards are indeed met?

If governance has the capacity to deliver each of these four aspects of accountability, then it will begin to work for the poor. Civil society has a role to make sure this happens.

In order to give the accountability dimension of governance a real profile, the White Paper announced the establishment of a Governance and Transparency Fund. The fund, totalling £100 million over five years, will become operational in 2007. It is designed to encourage proposals from civil society (NGOs, faith groups, trade unions, co-operatives, media groups, women's organisations, professional bodies, and groups working on promoting democracy and/or parliamentary process) that promote transparency and accountability at local level.

Full details of the scheme will be available soon on DFID's website.[2] ■

Mr Graham Teskey is Head of Governance and Social Development for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID).

[1] DFID, *Capacity development: where do we stand now?* London, 2002

[2] http://www.dfid.gov.uk

Addressing the governance gap, engaging civil society

Ambassador Randall Tobias explains how the new US Government framework for foreign aid emphasises "transformational diplomacy" to support governments and citizens in addressing the governance gap.

When asked about the role that the structures of governance should play in poverty eradication, I cannot help but think of the many courageous local leaders I have met over the past three and a half years. Dr Peter Mugyenyi – a friend who leads the Joint Clinical Research Centre in his home country of Uganda, and is one of the most inspiring, creative and effective leaders in the fight against HIV and AIDS on the African continent – immediately comes to mind.

Some time ago, during my time as the first United States Global AIDS Coordinator, Dr Mugyenyi made a comment that really struck me. To paraphrase, he said that it is neither practical nor moral for the people of Africa to expect that the rest of the world will take care of Africa's problems forever.

He explained that it is not practical because it means their own destiny will be at the mercy of changing political priorities in nations far beyond their control. And it is not moral, he said, because the people of his continent have many of the tools they need to meet their own needs, and those they do not have they can and must develop.

Neither Uganda nor any other nation can develop the capabilities to address the challenges faced by its citizens without addressing the governance gap.

Setting priorities

The steps necessary to address the governance gap are at the heart of the approach of the United States Government (USG) as we implement the most significant restructuring of US foreign assistance in decades. The first step is to define "success" as providing both the needed tools and the right incentives for host governments to secure the conditions necessary for their citizens to achieve their full human potential.

That is precisely what we have built in to the new strategic framework for US foreign assistance. The framework focuses all our efforts on the achievement of a single over-arching goal, which Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has articulated as "transformational diplomacy": "to help build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce widespread poverty and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system."

A second important step is to appropriately align the use of resources to advance our goal. The framework provides the principles by which our USG personnel will work with host governments to make improvements in each of five priority areas: achieving peace and security; governing justly and democratically; investing in people; promoting economic growth and prosperity; and providing humanitarian assistance – all of which are vital to sustainable development.

The framework seeks balance among these objectives and rightly recognises that different country conditions call for different approaches. This leads to the third essential step: to appropriately align activities and programming to advance the transformational diplomacy goal. Doing so means ensuring that activity decisions – on what should we focus? and with whom? – will be made by USG personnel in the field working with our implementing partners and host-country governments, who are best placed to gauge which programmes will best advance our objectives.

Engaging civil society

Such field-driven decisions require engaging civil society. This means working with and through indigenous organisations to communicate with and seek input from host-country citizens. If we are to reduce poverty in a way that is sustainable, citizens in the countries we seek to assist must understand the degree to which their own governments are responsible. With the best intentions, donors too often have created parallel systems of service delivery that have allowed reluctant governments to shirk their responsibility, and shifted citizens' expectations from their own governments to the international donors.

Too often, citizens' expectations have shifted away from their own governments to international donors

The fact is that outsiders cannot sustainably secure citizens' health and safety, educate a critical mass, or create the conditions needed for economic growth – all of which are necessary for development, and all of which are largely the responsibilities of a nation's own government.

The foreign assistance policies and programmes of donor countries like the United States can and must play a vital and catalytic role in the establishment of a clear understanding about appropriate roles and responsibilities. This understanding is indeed crucial to addressing the governance gap and empowering all human beings to reach their potential. ■

Ambassador Randall L Tobias is Director of US Foreign Assistance and Administrator of the US Agency for International Development.

by **MERILEE GRINDLE**

"GOOD ENOUGH" GOVERNANCE

The good governance agenda is unrealistically long and growing longer over time, Merilee Grindle argues; "good enough governance" may be more realistic for many countries faced with the goal of reducing poverty.

It is all too clear that when governments perform poorly, the consequences are wasted resources, undelivered services, and denial of social, legal, and economic protection for citizens – especially the poor. For many reform-minded citizens in developing countries, as well as for academics and practitioners in the international development community, good governance has become as imperative to poverty reduction as it has become to development more generally.

However, good governance is deeply problematic as a guide to development. Getting good governance calls for improvements that touch virtually all aspects of the public sector – from institutions that set the rules of the game for economic and political interaction, to decision-making structures that determine priorities among public problems and allocate resources to respond to them, to organisations that manage administrative systems and deliver goods and services to citizens, to human resources that staff government bureaucracies, to the interface of officials and citizens in political and bureaucratic arenas. Getting good governance at times implies changes in political organisation, the representation of interests, and processes for public debate and policy decision making. Not surprisingly, advocating good governance raises a host of questions about what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and how it needs to be done.

When good governance is advocated as a necessary ingredient for reducing widespread poverty, these questions are compounded. This is particularly so for countries attacking poverty as a condition for debt relief. Among them are the poorest countries in the world. Almost by definition their institutions are weak, vulnerable and very imperfect; their decision-making spaces are constricted by the presence of international actors with multiple priorities; their public organisations are bereft of resources and are usually badly managed; those who work for government are generally poorly trained and motivated.

Frequently, the legitimacy of poor country governments is questionable; their leadership may be venal and their commitments to change undermined by political discord; their civil societies may be disenfranchised, deeply divided, and ill-equipped to participate effectively in politics. In such contexts, getting good governance as a route toward poverty reduction can overwhelm the commitment of even the most energetic reformers.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

However, expectations about what such countries should accomplish are high. The good governance agenda, largely defined by the international development community but often fervently embraced by domestic reformers, is unrealistically long and growing longer over time.

Among the governance reforms that "must be done" to encourage development and reduce poverty, there is little guidance about what's essential and what's not, what should come first and what should follow, what can be achieved in the short term and what can only be achieved over the longer term, what is feasible and what is not. If more attention is given to sorting out these kinds of issues, the end point of the good governance imperative might be re-cast as "good enough governance"– that is, a condition of minimally acceptable government performance and civil-society engagement that does not significantly hinder economic and political development and that permits poverty reduction initiatives to go forward.

Moving toward good enough governance for poverty reduction means accepting a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of institutions and government capabilities; being explicit about trade-offs and priorities for poverty reduction in a world in which all good things cannot be pursued at once; learning about change from what's working rather than focusing solely on governance gaps; taking the role of government in poverty alleviation seriously; and grounding action in the contextual realities of each country.

There are no technical or easy fixes to what is inevitably a long, slow, reversible and frustrating path toward better-performing governments, but there may be

In 2003, after 10,000 indigenous people and peasants marched on Quito, Ecuador's capital city, the government agreed to lower petrol and butane gas prices and transport fares; introduce tax reforms; assist small producers; retrieve loans from corrupt bankers; resolve land tenure, water and resource problems; fund more development; decentralise the state; and support civil-society participation.
Photo: *Marco Cedillo Cobos/World Vision*

ways of reducing the burden on those attempting to undertake the journey.

Toward a "good enough" governance agenda

The good governance agenda is overwhelming. It has evolved in part through research, when scholars have found links between particular kinds of policies and institutional arrangements associated with growth or poverty reduction, or when analysis indicates that factors such as corruption and instability constrain development.

The good governance agenda has also expanded as a result of advocacy by committed partisans of democratic government, universal human rights, sustainable development, empowerment of the poor, free trade, participatory development and other desirable conditions. Indeed, much of the agenda has emerged from the research, experience and advocacy of international financial institutions, multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors, and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

However, this agenda has a very large constituency in developing and transitional countries among government reformers, NGOs and civil society organisations, intellectuals and concerned citizens. Individually and collectively, many have embraced the importance of good governance as a pre-condition for effective development and poverty alleviation, and have added to the list of factors that are essential for it.

The governance agenda is particularly demanding of states that are poor, disorganised, vulnerable to political disruption, and lacking in legitimacy. Among such states are many that are seeking debt relief through the HIPC (highly indebted poor countries) initiative of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. As a condition for receiving debt relief, governments are expected to produce poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) that outline a broad set of commitments to reform in a wide variety of policy and institutional arenas – governance among them.[1]

To assist them in preparing these papers, the World Bank produced a *PRSP Sourcebook* that provides an outline of the kinds of reforms that are expected to reduce poverty. In terms of governance, the list includes a daunting set of characteristics that HIPCs are to consider, from efficient tax administration to effective national elections (see table).

Unfortunately, the long and lengthening agenda often means that for any given country, a multitude of governance reforms are being undertaken at the same time, differentially supported by a plethora of donors, often with little thought to their sequencing, their interdependence, or their relative contributions to the overall goal of creating governments that are more efficient, effective and responsive – let alone those that are able to alleviate poverty.[2]

The agenda does not set priorities or define sequences of actions. It does not separate activities that are easier to undertake from those that are more difficult; those that can be achieved in the short term from those that will take years, if not decades, to accomplish. It does not provide insight into the dynamics that surround efforts to change current conditions. It does not take seriously the contentious nature of the changes it recommends. And it does not separate an ideal state of good governance from one that is "good enough".

More realistic

Given these problems with the governance agenda, is there anything that can be done to make it less overwhelming, less additive, more strategic, and more feasible for countries that may lack even basic capacities required to put authoritative changes in place? Possibly. Several actions might lead to a more realistic agenda for good enough governance: situating good governance historically and developmentally; addressing the link between governance and poverty reduction more carefully; asking different questions about change; assessing more carefully who needs to do what; and applying priorities on a country-by-country basis. While the governance agenda is likely to remain a challenging one, there are ways to provide better guidance about what needs to be done, how it needs to be done, and when it needs to be done. ■

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[1] See K Casson, "Governance and the PRSP process: A review of 23 I-PRSPs and PRSPs" in K Casson and M Grindle (eds) *Governance and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers*, pp 1–32. DFID, London, 2001; and A Whaites (ed.) *Masters of their own development? PRSPs and the prospects for the poor,* World Vision, Monrovia, CA, 2002

[2] See D Bräutigam, *Aid dependence and governance*. Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, 2000

GOVERNANCE REFORMS REQUIRED OF HIPCs

Empowering the poor	• rules for seeking and holding public office • oversight by political principals
Improving coverage, efficiency, and sustainability of basic services	• adequate, predictable resources for sectors, local authorities • demarcation of responsibilities for delivery • accountability downward • flexible delivery • development of local capacity
Increasing access to markets	• legal and regulatory framework • methods for reducing exclusion • demarcation of responsibilities and budgeting procedures to support development and maintenance of infrastructure (e.g. rural roads) to enable physical access to markets
Providing security • from economic shocks • from corruption, crime and violence	• rules for sound economic management • safeguards against economic vulnerability • enforcement mechanisms • efficient courts with competent judiciary and legal personnel

Source: World Bank, *PRSP Sourcebook*. Draft for comments. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001. Chap. 7:9.

by STEFAN GERMANN

CHILDREN: CITIZENS ONLY OF THE FUTURE?

Children deserve attention as citizens of the world today, not only as the citizens and workers of tomorrow, argues Stefan Germann.

There are more than 2,100 million children aged under 18 living in the world today.[1] More than any other group, they will be affected by decisions being made now that have long-term implications. As a global community, can we achieve significant improvements in accountability, good governance and meaningful participation in policy implementation, if we are not accountable to over 30% of our population: our children?

Children have their own specific rights, as set out in the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and deserve attention as citizens of the world **today**, not only as the citizens and workers of tomorrow. Yet too often children's interests are ignored, and their rights are not seen as inalienable human rights.

Typically, children cannot vote, have very limited access to the media and often have no access to the courts — processes basic to adults' exercise of democratic rights and good governance. As a result, children's voices and opinions usually go unheard in the public arena. It is unsurprising, then, that children are denied effective recognition as citizens.[2] But it is not acceptable.

Citizenship is not simply the status that is acquired as one grows up that is limited to the boundaries of a nation-state; it is more along the lines of a "portable citizenship right" that starts from when a child is conceived, regardless of place of abode.[3]

CULTIVATING CHILD CITIZENS

The lack of children's participation in fundamental citizenship processes provides significant challenges. But there are opportunities for programme innovation and developments that have potential to empower children in communities.

A child's learning process begins even before entering the world. Adults' behaviour, especially how we engage with children, powerfully shapes the way children see the world. Children's upbringing should focus on adults assisting them to realise their rights as citizens, progressively in line with their developing capacities, until they are able to fend for themselves.

Some of the child's citizenship rights are activated from the moment a child is born (such as the entitlements of every child to a name and to have his or her birth registered).[4] Others, such as democratic responsibility and accountability, are acquired through practice, and can be fostered from an early age. As they grow older and their capacity for involvement develops, and as they are given the opportunity, children often want to take an increasingly active role in their community.

Provided there is a degree of local autonomy in planning and management, the neighbourhood is the ideal domain for children to participate and learn skills in democratic processes, good governance and accountability. Initiatives to this end might include:

- involving children as representatives (using democratic processes) of their local organisations, in local government committees that focus on children's interests (including in the governance of child-focused organisations at local, national and international levels);
- providing platforms to elect, using child-appropriate voting processes or national child commissioners; and/or
- ensuring that children are engaged in local government budgeting processes.

"*If children live with fairness, they learn justice.*"[5] This much-quoted saying is foundational to the importance of child participation. Given that children learn what they live, the surest way for enhanced accountability and good governance for our global village in the future, is to ensure that children fully experience in their own lives accountability, good governance and meaningful participation — today. ■

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[1] UNICEF, *The state of the world's children 2006*, New York, 2006

[2] See G Lansdown, *Child rights in the European Union*, Euronet, Brussels, 2000

[3] See L Dominelli, "Empowering children: The end-point for community approaches to child welfare", in L Dominelli (ed.), *Community approaches to child welfare*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999

[4] Article 7, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

[5] Dorothy Law-Nolte, "Children learn what they live", 1972 http://www.empowermentresources.com/info2/childrenlearn-long_version.html

[6] Within World Vision Area Development Programmes in many countries, children participate, vote or hold office in decision-making committees and clubs. In some countries, such as Tanzania, Bolivia, Mozambique and the Philippines, World Vision-assisted children participate in youth parliaments which are governed at the national level.

by STEPHEN **N** NDEGWA

A NEW PATH TO FULL CITIZENSHIP

Stephen Ndegwa proposes new models for civil-society action in the pursuit of good governance, and highlights the role of international organisations.

For most of the developing world, the heart of the development challenge in the coming decade is to formulate and advance society toward a vision of full citizenship for the poor.

By "citizenship" I mean the relationship between individuals and the state, denoted centrally by a balance of rights and obligations, within which social, political and economic fulfilment can be found. Civil society represents an ideal conduit to advance action toward a robust citizenship, especially in ensuring government promises are actually delivered. But to achieve these goals, it must transcend the predominant model of engaging governments and the international development community.

Over the last two decades, the principal approach to governance by civil-society organisations, both locally and globally, has been to confront the state. Born out of the struggle for democratic rights and, before that, for economic rights, the model of civil society as a buffer and necessarily in opposition to the state is fast

fading, its relevance challenged by realities. In an era where most states have transitioned to some form of democracy, constitutionalism has emerged as pre-eminent, and economic activity is largely market-led – all imperfect, yet advancing more than declining – a civil society in perpetual opposition to the state is foolhardy.

In fact, several new governments – especially those propelled into power by new democratic elections or by citizen anger against settled classes – are led by hitherto civil-society leaders. Often, these "progressives in power" have behaved no differently from professional politicians, suggesting that neither repeated confrontation nor replacement is a sufficient fix for governance problems.

Moreover, organisations such as NGOs, church groups and local civic groups have emerged as critical non-state service providers, either as sub-contractors or as self-directed providers where the state writ is minimal. In such contexts, governance failure is not simply a matter of "problem government", nor of civil society acting as a buffer to a capricious state, nor of unfettered civic activity threatening the state's dominance. Instead, the public good in question – and indeed the **space** for its collective production, rather than who produces or procures it – is the important issue.

A model of civil society in perpetual opposition to the state is foolhardy

Therefore, mediating the relationships therein – markets, contracts and politics – to ensure mutual accountability, transparency and joint action among various stakeholders is central to development.

MODELS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In this context, two models of civil-society action are likely to be most effective in achieving good governance. One is moving civil society from a buffer/agitater stance to making specific claims on the state (a model closer to classic pluralism). This requires a bold re-imagination of the poor: as capable and desiring of breaking out of ascriptive (ethnic, caste) groups for agency, and of organising around economic preferences that may

compete against other interests besides the state. It also requires the development community to accept and promote actions that may initially seem to benefit only or especially the (aspirant) middle classes (e.g. higher education, telecommunications liberalisation).

It is necessary to expand the vision contained in current rallying calls such as "poverty reduction" or "pro-poor" to focus on a citizenship which, when fully articulate, encompasses **everyone**, and does not unwittingly suggest that the poor's destiny is shaped only by a focus on them. Examples of such imaginative action include self-organisation and claims on the state by tea farmers in Kenya. Through revived co-operatives, a parliamentary caucus and direct market action by small and medium growers, the market structure and government interventions have changed for **all** tea farmers; the initiative also has spawned a workers' rights movement in plantations that are now no longer protected by the state.

The second model of civil society, not unrelated to the first, is that of broad-based alliances around certain truly "public good" issues (e.g. anti-corruption, AIDS) to deploy measurement, policy advice and oversight on government action. Such alliances require the recognition that individuals within even the most ineffective or corrupt institutions may be keen to change their own environments, sometimes at extreme personal risk.

Alliances can form around a number of issues to promote good governance. One is around transparency of government operations, including measurement of performance. Another is in actual policy formulation around goals, which, while useful in galvanising government action, either get subverted by narrow interests and exclusion or are simply difficult to execute without sustained and broad-based action.

Civil society can track governance locally or deliver services and capacity that empower actors to enforce good governance. For example, in the Philippines, concerted action by transparency organisations, procurement professionals and bureaucrats and select politicians changed procurement

laws and practices despite deep and moneyed networks arrayed against clean government. Civic organisations now diligently review local government procurements to prevent corruption, thus ensuring public goods actually reach communities.

MEASUREMENT

Measuring government performance is critical to making governments responsive and live up to the delivery and institutional reforms that many promise, especially around elections. In this regard, the most useful change is a move to more concrete, objective and action-oriented indicators of government performance (which civil society is particularly suited to promote). Now routinely called "actionable" indicators, these are more useful than perception-based indicators[1] which, while coming of age over the last decade, provide only a snapshot of often distant opinion. Moreover, there is little encouragement in countries knowing they are fossilised at one end of the rankings for years.

Citizenship is for all, not only for the poor; broad alliances can tackle truly "public good" issues

Instead, civil society — locally based, globally connected — can promote measurements that are both real and meaningful to citizens and governments: ones citizens can concretely appreciate and governments can tangibly address via discrete action. These range from the mundane — kilometres of road, girls enrolled in school, days it takes to register a business or get an identity document — to sophisticated and quite technical measures such as tracking service accessibility levels using GIS,[2] optimal constituency size, measures of budget realism, pro-poor spending levels, audit lags. This would, of course, call for more professionalised, evidence-based policy, advocacy and action — nothing less than we ask of governments!

ROLE OF INTERNATIONALS

International development organisations such as the World Bank, and bi-lateral aid organisations such as DFID, USAID and others, can contribute to this civil society renewal in a variety of ways. Besides their ability to provide financial support, knowledge exchange and technical assistance for reforms in government, these organisations should focus their energies on two areas:

First, given their comparative advantage to convene and set agendas, these organisations can build up a more expansive global dialogue on governance, beyond anti-corruption. Working within their mandates — individually limited but collectively compelling — these organisations can establish platforms for collective, responsive and responsible action to enhance governance based on broad consensus and rights expansion for citizens. Thus they can fulfil a truly global public good responsibility: uplift governance norms and assist civil society to support this.

Second, such organisations can tie their work and support for governments to the expansion of citizenship rights in all spheres. This does not mean that each donor has to act in every sphere of citizenship rights — clearly beyond certain mandates — but rather that they exploit the synergies of their collective work. Conditionality and cross-conditionality may be unpopular, but helping communities to hold their government to account on agreed-upon social objectives, and leveraging support on that circumstance, are moral imperatives that should not be overshadowed by over-zealous criticism for quite unrelated historical mis-steps.

The current dialogue on doubling aid, especially to Africa, is therefore quite beside the point if the aid does not re-invigorate pursuit of good governance. Good governance cannot be narrowly defined as anti-corruption, but must be broadly defined as sustaining an environment that permits the expansion and unfettered utilisation of social, political and economic rights to secure prosperity for all. ■

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[1] Such as Transparency International indexes or the World Bank Institute aggregate indicators

[2] GIS = geographic information system

Do you know? ✓

▶ *While governments overall devote about a third of their budgets to health and education, they spend very little of it on services that* **poor** *people need to improve their health and education. Public spending on health and education is more typically enjoyed by the non-poor. (World Development Report, 2004)*

▶ *Recent research dispels the* **myth** *that only wealthy developed nations perform strongly in governance, and reveals that more than a dozen non-OECD countries score higher in the rule of law and control of corruption indicators than some industrialised countries. (Governance Matters 2006: Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2006)*

▶ *Good governance is known as "the 300% development dividend", according to the World Bank's Daniel Kaufmann. "A country that improves in governance gets three times more income per capita in the long term — from $1,000 per capita per year to $3,000 or from $3,000 to $9,000 a year", significantly reduces infant mortality, improves literacy and improves competitiveness.*

▶ *Obstacles to civic participation can be* **internal** *(e.g. fear of being "political" when advocating for justice, fear of treading on the toes of those with money and power, or lack of understanding how the political or judicial system works), or* **external** *(e.g. lack of information available to the public about government services and policies, lack of transparency in legislative, electoral or financial processes, lack of incentive for low-paid public servants, leaders defensive towards public criticism).*

▶ *There are more than 2,100 million* **children** *aged under 18 living in the world today. More than any other group, they will be affected by decisions being made now that have long-term implications. Yet children are often denied recognition as citizens.*

▶ **E-governance** *is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies to improve information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in decision-making, and making government more accountable, transparent and effective. http://www.unesco.org/webworld/e-governance/*

▶ *Many of the poorest countries in the world are rich in* **natural resources**, *such as oil or minerals, yet this wealth has all too often failed to benefit the poor (25 of the world's 33 oil-rich countries rank low or medium on UNDP's Human Development Index). In what is known as the "resource curse", mis-management of resource revenues has led to increased corruption, conflict and inequality in numerous countries.*

▶ *Several national governments today are led by former civil society leaders.*

the Back Pages

...spiritually speaking

FROM VIOLENCE TO LOVE

A reflection on some ways that people of faith in Brazil are asserting an alternative, new humanity in contexts of oppressive power relations

From contexts at the same time distant and near, we decided to write together, expressing the views of two people living about 800 kilometres apart, yet both part of the team of ministers in the Bultrins First Baptist Church, in the city of Olinda, Pernambuco, in the poor North-East region of Brazil.

In considering the possibilities for government/civil society interaction, the subject we chose to bring this into focus is violence – a frightening issue in Brazil (as indeed, in the world). Marcos lives and works as a teacher and minister in Feira de Santana, Bahia, known as a very violent city, with about 800,000 people, most of whom live in poverty and misery. Benedito, also a teacher and minister, lives in Recife, a city of more than three million inhabitants, more than one thousand *favelas*, and considered Brazil's most violent city, proportionally speaking.

Three recent and quite different events can illustrate our issue well.

People's Forum

In early November 2006, the church promoted the Fifth People's Theological Forum, on the subject of "Church, Community, and Violence". The church, which was born in a nearby *favela*, meets in a good-sized sanctuary, but one without doors and windows. (Initially, the reason for this was lack of money; now it is part of their theological vision and project. Not having doors or windows, the church became an architectonically visible extension of the community. It is used every night as a shelter to homeless, poor and drunk people. The service room is also occasionally used for residents' meetings, for discussing the city budget, and other such events.)

In the People's Theological Forum, local community leaders participated actively. Diverse expressions of popular art, music, dance, street theatre, puppet theatre… mixed with religious songs and theological, sociological or political lectures, formed a very rich and inclusive liturgy which has a strong impact on the participants. The struggle towards "a culture of peace" was far more than a rationalistic debate. It was a collective construction of an alternative image for the city: one of beauty, joy, and loving fraternity.

Powerful testimonies

At the end of November, we both participated in a meeting with the Belgian theologian José Comblin, who has lived in Brazil for many years. The meeting was in a small city called Mogeiro, Paraíba, also in the North-East, where about 40 popular leaders – Protestant and Catholic, ministers, priests and laypersons – have been gathering in small and large groups, reflecting on the Bible and on life, with Father Comblin's guidance. Here, in a very quiet and pleasant environment, we studied the subject of love. It was the final meeting of a series studying hope, faith, and love – purposefully in this order. The meeting was made up of the extraordinary words and the extraordinary life of Father Comblin, but also of the words and lives of each participant. We share the belief that violence is a brutal, irrational and irresistible force, and that only the active and courageous force of love can face it.

Now an 83-year-old man, Father Comblin has dedicated his entire life to the training of popular lay leaders to develop an intensive spirituality in the struggle for the empowerment of the poor and miserable in our country, and in Latin America, facing unjust structures and relations and developing more fraternal and egalitarian communities. Each participant in the meeting was able to say and show something about his/her own life and experience, but two testimonies had a particularly strong impact.

Luisinho and Neném live simple lives in very small and different towns, but shared similar experiences. With no assured income, no defined jobs, as a Christian choice they engage with great conviction in complex struggles of the people, constantly risking their lives, always in the defence of the impoverished, always on behalf of the oppressed, always in the struggle for a more just and loving society.

Luisinho, along with several fellows in Brazil's Landless People's Movement (MST), is studying nursing to better serve in the settlements.

Neném, a woman with a very humble aspect and a low, smooth voice, has accumulated strong experiences and an amazing wisdom in her 14 years of missionary life. Recently, she had what she considers to be one of the more remarkable spiritual experiences of her life.

An MST settlement was being evicted from a farmland. The legal owners (who quite often in Brazil are not legitimate) released 300 head of cattle onto the land which destroyed the poor growers' entire plantation. Policemen, defending the interests of the powerful and the oppressors, came with guns to expel the settlers. Spontaneously, an isolating circle was formed by children who joined hands, and said to the police: "You will not kill my father! My father is not an outlaw! You are doing wrong!"

Neném said that she is always moved when she remembers the children facing the guns. We ourselves were moved by the strength of the weak – a force that courageously faces the violence of the strong.

Sacred music for all

We did not attend the third event at the end of November (Benedito living far away, and Marcos at the time visiting missionaries in small inland towns). The choir of the Avenue Baptist Church at Feira de Santana presented in the public square an entire Bach cantata, a selection of Negro spirituals, and a selection of gospel songs. Many people gathered to watch and participate, as we ourselves would have liked to. We believe it is significant when a traditional, middle-class church puts the best of its music at the city's disposal. This, too, is a form of participating in the building of a better world.

These three events shed light on the relationship between government and civil society. In a democratic society, governing is a task for all people – though the political society, managing the state's apparatus, plays a more direct role in constructing the social fabric. Meanwhile, society organises itself as social, cultural, religious, and non-religious movement, establishing different kinds of power relations with political society – concurrent, co-operative, antagonistic or conflictive relations.

An alternative space

In the face of violence, which may be the most urgent question in our society, the State has acted as a repressive and preventive force, not always with the desired efficiency. The Theological People's Forum establishes a space for dialogue between political society and civil society in their multiple expressions. In this space, all participants are aware of a structural violence, a sub-product of an androcentric–patriarchal structure (whose spiritual ethos is domination), and of a hegemonic economic system (which presumes itself to be the only possible one). In this space, power relations tend to become relations of violence against women, black people, Indigenous people, children, the poor and other minorities.

In response to this, diverse civil-society actors and actresses, including churches, can take different positions. They may establish a project to train and equip popular leaders, showing theology as effective and holistic… or organise inclusive spaces for discussion… or help communities to organise themselves to be efficient social agents… or clearly and visibly confront violence against the weak and oppressed… or organise public cultural events in which the new humanity can be sung.

Or, on the other hand, they may almost completely remove themselves from any participation in the building of a new world. In the democratic space, however, omission is also a kind of participation – which legitimises the rights and the violence of the oppressor.

All of civil society, in its multiple expressions, is invited to participate in the great shared construction of which popular art forms always remind us. In the people's space, we all can dance – in multiple, festive and varied styles, with our own way of being, in a moment in which all and any form of violence becomes an odd being, and we seek only the rhythm dictated by joy and love.

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