



***influence and accountability***

**One World Action is working for a world free from poverty and oppression in which strong democracies safeguard the rights of all people.**

**To this end, we provide money, expertise and practical help to organisations committed to strengthening the democratic process and improving people's lives in poor and developing countries. In all cases they initiate and work on the projects that we support, ensuring that local needs are genuinely understood and met.**

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**These 'partners for change' include other voluntary organisations, community and co-operative movements, women's organisations and trade unions. Though diverse in kind, they have a common commitment to strengthening local institutions and giving people a say in the decisions that shape their lives.**

**Central to our work is the belief that defeating poverty goes hand in hand with promoting human rights and good democratic government. Only if we pursue these goals in a coherent way can we build a just and equal world.**

**Report of a seminar**

## **Influence and Accountability**

Citizen Voices, Responsiveness and Accountability in Service Delivery

Written by Carole Rakodi

# **influence and accountability**

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Cover photo / A member of Good Hope Women's Development Forum, Namibia. Good Hope represents the interests of women's associations and now acts to influence policy-making at national level to improve the position of rural women in southern Namibia. In 1997, for example, Good Hope successfully lobbied the government for better arrangements for rural women to collect pension payments from the private company responsible for their distribution.  
Picture credit / Kate Ashton, One World Action.

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## Foreword

***From Consultation to Influence* was a two day seminar organised by One World Action in London in May, 2002 as part of our Policy Change Programme. The seminar was organised in consultation with the Governance Department of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Participation and Governance Units of the Institute for Development Studies, and built on One World Action's series of seminars on influence and access. It was funded by the Governance Department of DFID.**

***The aim of the seminar was to discuss two core issues: how citizens can exercise their right to participate in meaningful ways in order to influence the delivery of basic services, such as water, sanitation, health care, education, and how the public sector's willingness and ability to respond and deliver these services in accountable and sustainable ways could be increased.***

***The seminar drew on a study by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, of efforts to improve the responsiveness of public service providers to the needs of service users, particularly the poorest women and men, and on the experience of twelve public sector and NGO practitioners from India, Uganda, South Africa, the Philippines and Zambia. They were joined by representatives from the UK Department for International Development, the European Commission, the World Bank and research institutions.***

***Presenters showed how, through people's and non-governmental organisations, citizens are participating in decision-making and claiming their rights to services and how government is (or is not) responding. The presentations and discussions explored the factors explaining successful participation and claims, especially by poor women and men; discussed the constraints on governments' willingness and ability to respond, especially at the local level; and stressed the importance of accountability in securing appropriate and sustainable responses to the exercise of political voice. The central roles of both the representative political system and other types of political practice in increasing the accountability of service providers to citizens were explored.***

***We hope this synthesis of the seminar presentations and discussions will make a useful contribution to thinking, policy and practice on making local service delivery more democratic.***

## 1 introduction

***The basic services needed for well-being include water, sanitation, health care and education. So important are they that entitlement to a basic level of provision is considered to be a human right. Because of their importance and because collective provision is necessary, especially in urban areas, ensuring that they are available to all citizens is a core function of government. This does not necessarily imply that they should all be directly provided by government, although often they have been and continue to be, despite the tendency to involve a wider range of operators than has been traditional in the past.***

***To improve the delivery of basic services, a number of economic, social, technical and political issues need to be addressed. This seminar was concerned not with economic or technical issues, although these are clearly important. Instead, it focused on the core political issues relevant to service delivery.***

### Two core issues

The **first** core issue addressed in the seminar was **citizens' right to participate in a meaningful way in ensuring the delivery of appropriate services available to all**. In particular, it considered what 'meaningful participation' might imply and how the excluded and disempowered might exercise their right to influence decision-making and service delivery. In democratic political systems, citizens have a minimum right to participate by voting for leaders and representatives in periodic elections. In theory, these representatives will then make decisions in broad accordance with public opinion, as announced in the policy platforms which they articulated when standing for election. In practice, the occasional casting of their votes gives citizens relatively little influence over decision-makers. Also inequalities of power and resources are reflected in the political system. Those with economic resources and social contacts exercise disproportionate influence, while many groups are excluded and public policies, as a result, fail to meet their needs and reflect their priorities. For example, women almost invariably have less access to political office and influence than men, poor people than the rich, and minority groups than numerically or economically dominant groups, especially in majoritarian political systems.

Meaningful participation results in increased demand for services and increased expectations of and pressures on the political and administrative system. Unless the system responds, increased participation will give rise to dissatisfaction, leading to either



apathy or withdrawal or serious challenges which in turn might result in political instability.

The **second** core issue dealt with in the seminar was **the public sector's willingness and ability to respond and to deliver services in an accountable and sustainable way**. It considered the factors affecting the responsiveness of political and bureaucratic organisations and their members to citizen needs and demands, including their motivation and capacity, their resources, structures and procedures, and the channels and mechanisms by which they can be held to account. In particular, since service delivery takes place at the local level, it focused on the role of local government.

### ▶ Three key challenges

To address these core issues, responses to three inter-related challenges are needed. The seminar presentations and discussions focused on learning from the experience of a variety of non-governmental, people's and government organisations which have tried to respond to one or more of these challenges, comparing that experience and identifying lessons, principles and models which might be more widely applicable.

**Increasing influence** – The key challenge facing excluded and disempowered groups of citizens is to increase their capacity to exercise political influence, through both the formal democratic system and other channels. Seminar participants described a variety of attempts to increase citizens' awareness of their political rights and to strengthen the capacity of both individuals and people's organisations to articulate their views and exercise those rights.

**Increasing responsiveness and accountability** – The first hoped for outcome of increased political participation is more appropriate and accessible public services. This implies that public sector agencies are responsive to citizens' expressed needs and demands, implying willingness to respond, sensitivity to gender and other social difference, and capacity to improve service delivery. Responsiveness is related to, but not the same as accountability. The latter implies being called to account to some external authority, which has the right to demand answers and to impose sanctions. Both greater responsiveness and increased accountability are likely to require transformation in the culture and approaches of the public sector. Examples were also given of action to increase the role of citizens in holding public sector organisations to account.

**Democratic politics** – Political representatives and public sector organisations may attempt to improve their responsiveness by consulting more widely and frequently, whether during election campaigns, as part of project design, or to obtain feedback on levels of satisfaction with their performance. While improved information may indeed result in more appropriate and accessible services, generally neither politicians nor agencies are obliged to take the information generated through such consultative approaches into account. Consultation is, therefore, a necessary but not sufficient form of political participation. For effective civic engagement in democratic politics, citizens need not only to be aware of their political rights, but also to be able to exercise those rights through a variety of organisational forms and political practices. A number of attempts by citizens and people's organisations to influence elected representatives and public sector agencies, increase the representation of excluded groups in the formal democratic system, monitor the performance of those responsible for service delivery and hold politicians and officials to account for their performance were described by seminar participants.

### In summary

For poor and socially marginalized individuals and groups to increase their influence over governments, fundamental rethinking of the ways in which citizens' voices are articulated and represented in the political process and re-conceptualisation of the meanings of participation and citizenship in relation to governance, especially at the local level, are needed. This is captured in the Filipino strategy for achieving irreversible reforms in government, which is symbolised by **bebingka**, a local cake needing heat from both above and below to cook properly. This strategy requires mobilisation of civil society organisations to pressure government from below simultaneously with civil society organisations entering government and/or liaising with progressive and sympathetic politicians and officials to introduce changed practices and policies from above. The aim is to build a strong alliance which is pro-poor, gender balanced and in opposition to corrupt forces.

Change cannot be achieved **on behalf of** poor communities, by NGOs advocating on their behalf, sympathetic officials initiating new working procedures or donor conditionality, but nor can it be achieved by poor communities alone. The active engagement of poor women and men is essential, but changes to administrative structures and procedures,

laws and political processes are also required to produce more responsive and accountable governments.

The obstacles are serious:

- levels of awareness of their rights and of government organisation and procedures amongst socially marginalized groups, including women and poor communities, continue to be low
- opportunities for exercising influence in formal democracies where electoral politics is based on patronage and identity are limited
- the administrative arm of government is resistant to change, preferring traditional bureaucratic ways of operating and resisting attempts to increase its responsiveness by means of decentralisation and widened participation, and
- increasing the scope for meaningful citizen participation is resisted by the political arm of government, which believes election gives representatives primary decision-making power and prefers individualistic bargaining over open government as a means of retaining patronage resources.

Nevertheless, innovative ways of increasing citizen influence, improving the responsiveness of service delivery agencies and ensuring greater government accountability can be identified, at the national but more commonly at the local level. These imply not merely consultation of citizens, but their collaboration in decision-making, requiring their presence, influence and power. The examples discussed in the seminar and examined in the report by the Institute for Development Studies suggest that, for participation to be meaningful, five conditions, incorporating two key rights, are necessary:

- legal standing or formal recognition for non-governmental representatives (including both women and men) to be present in policy-making arenas and the institutions of public sector oversight which scrutinise quality and probity in service delivery
- a continuous presence for those representatives throughout the process of these agencies' work
- structured access by both these representatives and the public to a flow of official documentary information on intentions, progress and performance, disaggregated by sector, local area and gender as appropriate
- the right of representatives to issue dissenting reports directly to an authority of equal power (e.g. the legislature or judiciary) in order to challenge poor performance or corrupt practices

- the right of citizens to demand a formal investigation and/or seek legal redress for poor or non-delivery of services or corrupt practices.

Improved accountability, therefore, implies a need for poor people to:

- increase their representation in the formal democratic system, with particular attention to gender balance
- influence elected representatives and public sector agencies to make policy, resource allocation and working practices more pro-poor and sensitive to gender and other social differences
- monitor the performance of those responsible for service delivery
- hold politicians, officials and non-governmental service providers to account for their performance.

In other words, improved accountability requires that citizens have rights to demand an answer, call for and get sanctions, and litigate against their government. Even where these are not yet available, progress can be made in achieving effective civic engagement by increasing political awareness and understanding among poor citizens and elected representatives alike, developing strategies of collective action, and strategic engagement with the political system to influence decisions and encourage transparency.

## 2 increasing influence

**About what?** Service delivery is often based on the perceived needs of service users, deduced from more or less adequate and appropriate information. Services tend to be planned and delivery designed and monitored by the professional staff of the responsible agencies, with varying inputs from elected representatives depending on the political system, the location of institutional responsibility and the apparently technical nature of decisions. Citizens may wish to exercise influence, then:

- to provide better information on their felt needs
- to pressurise politicians and agencies to address their priorities when planning investment in and the design of infrastructure and services
- to bring the attention of those responsible to delivery shortcomings and failures, and
- to reveal favouritism and corrupt practices.

**On whom?** Responsibility for service delivery is shared, not only between politicians and public sector agencies, but also between levels of government, between government departments and other public sector agencies, and between public agencies and other operators. The allocation of responsibilities between these actors and their roles in planning and delivering services may change and is often unclear, not only to the consumers of services but also often to actors within the system, perhaps because of conflicting legislation or rivalry between government departments. Moreover, politicians or officials may deliberately blur the picture in order to conceal poor performance or evade being called to account. It is, therefore, often difficult for citizens to identify where it would be most effective to make their voices heard and where grievances should be taken to obtain redress.

In the following sections, a variety of channels for exercising influence and some preconditions for effective influence will be identified. Finally, strategies for supporting individuals and organisations to increase their influence and the effectiveness of their political practices will be described.

### Channels for exercising political influence and ensuring accountability

A variety of channels and tactics for exercising political influence were identified. Examples revealed some of their advantages and disadvantages, as well as what circumstances and characteristics are associated with success.

**Voting** – Most basic, of course, to a democratic political system is voting to elect political leaders and representatives. With (re-)democratisation in the 1990s, including democratic decentralisation, the role of the formal political system in ensuring representation has become more effective in some countries. In theory, voting is open to all and every adult's vote is of equal weight. In practice, lack of access to information, intimidation or patronage may deter voters or influence their choices. Also, elections are periodic and only the prospect of being ousted some years later serves to encourage responsiveness and accountability following election to office. Furthermore, gerrymandering is alive and well in many democratic systems, seen for example in the relatively large number of voters per representative in areas of opposition support (often, in developing countries, the large cities) compared to areas where the incumbent government has its power base.

**Lobbying and persuasion** – Particular interests supplement or substitute for their voting power by attempts to directly persuade political representatives or public officials of the merits of their cause by direct lobbying or advocacy on behalf of others. Lobbying may be the only way for groups to articulate their needs and priorities where political parties do not have an organisational structure capable of developing a policy platform and formal political systems seem unresponsive. However, many poor and excluded groups lack the knowledge, capacity and access for effective lobbying and social restrictions may prevent women engaging in such activities. In addition, the dividing lines between lobbying, clientelist negotiation for patronage or mutual favours, and co-option are not clear. Lobbying may either slide into corruption or serve only to increase the access of one group to services at the expense of systematic provision for all.

**Advocacy** – In theory, non-governmental organisations should enable people to advocate on their own behalf – to organise themselves, voice their demands and claim their rights. The work of the National Centre for Advocacy Studies in Pune, India, which supports the Community Learning Movement in

Kerala is an example (Box 1). However, NGOs often adopt an advocacy role **on behalf of** poor and excluded people. Such NGOs typically lobby for policy change, based on their knowledge of mismatches between services delivered and people's needs. While the resources, organisational capacity and contacts of the NGO may seem to be of benefit to those without influence, such a role is always patronising and usually patriarchal. While advocacy **with** people is an improvement, it is still potentially patronising.

#### BOX 1

### The Community Learning Movement, Kerala, India

**This movement:**

- facilitates groups of young people with different political affiliations to work together on political education
- encourages villages to designate an information wall to provide an interactive space for giving and receiving information, including both basic local and budget information
- plays a watchdog role at the local level to ensure that facilities function and to call responsible authorities to account if they do not, for example by writing to local political representatives.

**Resistance, protest and confrontation** – Another set of political tactics focuses on demonstration and protest, as well as use of the media. Such tactics need to be based on persistence and sustained monitoring. They may help to attract public attention for an issue or grievance, or play a role in praising or 'naming and shaming' individuals or organisations which are performing badly or engaging in corrupt practices. For example, demonstrations in the foyer of a District Office of Delhi's electricity provider increased users' knowledge of their rights and drew attention to the role the NGO, Parivartan, could play in assisting illiterate consumers to apply for connections or supporting refusal to pay bribes (see Box 2). Similarly, a demonstration at the Municipal Corporation in Delhi helped to ensure implementation of the Right to Information legislation enacted six months previously. However, confrontational methods can be counter-productive. They seem to work best when used judiciously in conjunction with other tactics including persuasion and engagement with policy-makers.

## BOX 2

## Parivartan, New Delhi, India

Parivartan, established in 2000, is a movement against corruption. It is a non-party political, non-profit making voluntary organisation made up of concerned individuals, and pursues a two-pronged strategy:

- to develop a clear understanding of systemic corruption, leading to proposals and lobbying for changes to practices to eliminate it
- to support citizens in accessing services without paying bribes, through making information on entitlements and procedures available to all, and through pressing for change.

It has tackled the Income Tax Department and the electricity utility (Delhi Vidyut Board), using a combination of educating users on their rights, support for those appealing against poor service or demands for bribes, demonstration and dialogue to tackle pervasive low-level corruption and user unfriendly procedures. It has also initiated local monitoring teams of housewives in two residential areas to keep registers of sanitation workers' attendance. Previously the supervisors of these workers extracted payments from them to certify their attendance whether or not they were working. The monitoring procedure, backed by public support, has led to improved operation of solid waste management services and a cleaner environment. Parivartan is now concentrating on educating citizens in the use of the recent Right to Information legislation and using the provisions itself to monitor municipal infrastructure works at the local level.

**Dialogue** – To increase the willingness and capacity of government to respond and to improve accountability, new ways of doing things are needed. Faced with protests or increasing demands, public sector organisations tend to become defensive, retreating into bureaucratic procedures, legal niceties, pretended expertise, jargon, pleas of inadequate resources or co-optive strategies to avoid change. New approaches may be initiated internally by officials, follow decisions taken by elected leaders or legislatures, or be responses to public pressure. To

be lasting and effective, they must be based on improved communication and understanding between citizens, elected representatives and officials. Such dialogue can most easily occur where government, poor people and intermediary organisations share common goals, and are seeking means of becoming more effective, as seen in the work of IDASA in South Africa (see Box 3), the attempts to develop participatory local development planning in Uganda (see Box 6) or the experience of municipal government in San Leonardo, the Philippines (Box 9). It implies a critical engagement by citizens and civil society groups with formal political structures and the bureaucratic arm of government.

## BOX 3

## The Institute for Democracy in South Africa - Budget Information Service

Following the 1994 democratic transition in South Africa, civil society strategies of confrontation gave way to collaboration. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) is an NGO with a number of programmes, including support to local government and a Budget Information Service (BIS). It supports the national constitution and the overall policy framework of the current government and sees its role as 'oiling the wheels of democracy' – a critical ally helping to realise the government's aims. The government is committed to broad participation in government and pro-poor policies. IDASA's BIS aims to translate these commitments into reality by:

- promoting the flow of budget-related information and analysis between citizens and government
- providing decision-makers with information, analysis and recommendations about the impacts of budgets and expenditure on poor people, focusing on social services, especially health, welfare and education
- researching the budget system and advocating changes to make it more pro-poor and participatory
- building capacity for effective participation, by training NGOs, members of legislatures and civil servants in pro-poor and gender-aware budgeting
- advocating, in conjunction with relevant

membership organisations, women's and children's budget initiatives.

It has:

- concentrated on encouraging people to question whether government is doing what it says it is going to do
- represented the concerns of civil society in policy language accompanied by practical proposals congruent with government fiscal constraints
- analysed the impact of national (and more recently some provincial and local) budgets on women and children
- produced training materials on the women's budget for use at local government level
- increased the capacity of advocacy organisations concerned with poverty reduction and women's and children's rights, as well as members of legislatures and government departments.

Conditions which make these positive achievements possible include:

- political commitment to open government, poverty reduction, and women's and children's rights
- the increasing public availability of information, together with changes in its format which improve its value for budget analysis and monitoring
- the movement of many civil society activists into government, meaning that there are sympathetic officials in many government departments.

The particular aspects of BIS's strategy which help to explain its success are:

- it is locally initiated rather than donor driven
- it has developed a reputation for technical expertise and rigour
- its links with parliament and the bureaucracy, to understand how the system works and obtain good access to information. It has, therefore, adopted an advocacy rather than confrontational 'no permanent enemies, no permanent friends'. It summarises its relationship with the executive as 'close the gap' (typified by its complementary capacity building activities) and its relationship

with the bureaucracy as 'mind the gap' (to achieve a balance between the good contacts needed to do its work and relationships which are so close they compromise its independence)

- its links, on the other hand, with civil society organisations (trade unions and NGOs), especially advocacy organisations
- its change of emphasis from producing academic/technical publications to much greater use of the popular media, its website and the rapid production of policy briefings.

However:

- although its Board includes members from government, the private sector and civil society, opposition parties have been reluctant to engage in its work and are not represented
- it continues to experience problems obtaining disaggregated and reliable figures – the budgeting process is still quite secretive
- it sees itself as an intermediary NGO between government and advocacy NGOs, building the capacity of both, but it lacks the capacity and resources for direct links with grass-roots organisations, which are mainly seen as potential beneficiaries of the broader debates and are not directly involved in the budget analysis initiatives
- Parliament is institutionally weak and parliamentarians are inexperienced
- the budget process does not allow for inputs into preparation, and so it can only review budgets in arrears
- extending budget analysis to the local level introduces complications, especially if comparisons between local authority areas are required, since different areas use different categories. Also the data available at the local level is poorer quality.

**Direct representation** – Ultimately, however, in a democratic political system, the elected government at national or sub-national level makes the decisions on resource allocation and service delivery. Voting, persuasion, protest and dialogue are all potentially important ways of expressing voice, but it is argued by many that to guarantee influence for poor people and disempowered, direct representation of their interests in the political system is vital. This may be



achieved through:

- endorsing candidates with a pro-poor agenda
- supporting members of disempowered groups (especially women) to stand for election
- increasing people's awareness of what they can expect from their elected representatives
- educating representatives themselves on their roles and responsibilities, and perhaps even
- converting social movements of poor and disempowered people into political parties.

FOWODE in Uganda, for example, is developing the capacity of representatives of disadvantaged groups elected on a quota basis to local government bodies (Box 4), while the BATMAN NGO consortium in the Philippines undertakes a number of these activities (Box 5).

#### **BOX 4** **Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), Uganda**

FOWODE's mission is to promote gender equality in decision-making, following the introduction of quotas for disadvantaged groups (women, young people and disabled people) in Ugandan local government. Although women, young and disabled councillors elected under the quota system are regarded by their constituents as more responsive than other councillors, their lack of political experience prevented them from translating their understanding of the concerns of the groups they represent into policies sensitive to social differences and empowering of disadvantaged groups. FOWODE, therefore, trains elected representatives at the neglected sub-county level (in 25 of 45 districts to date) on the role of representatives, gender awareness, communications skills and budget analysis. Some trainees have formed caucuses and successfully lobbied for a larger share of development allocations to be directed to addressing the concerns of their constituents. However, because their training has made them more articulate than their fellow councillors, they are sometimes resented. Future training will include mainstream (male) councillors, to avoid such difficulties as well as increasing the effectiveness of the latter and their sensitivity to the needs of women and disadvantaged groups.

Through its gender budget project, FOWODE advocates gender-balanced, pro-poor budgets and more transparent and participatory budget-making processes. This targets councillors at district level by, for example, producing a simple handbook entitled "*Budgeting for women and men*", although integrating gender into development plans is difficult, since it tends to be defined as a separate matter of women's needs.

FOWODE's experience shows that not only does capacity building need to be an ongoing process, as newly elected representatives enter local government, but also that the awareness of the wider electorate needs to be increased so that they can actively engage with governance processes and hold their representatives to account.

#### **BOX 5** **BATMAN (Barangay Administration and Training Manual), the Philippines**

BATMAN is an NGO consortium with about 40 members, mostly engaged in governance-related work.

At *national* level, it plays advocacy and training roles, supporting a stronger role in governance for NGOs and the institutionalisation of participatory methods, opposing cuts in central-local fiscal transfers and training local government officials on behalf of central government.

At *local* level, it:

- undertakes pre-election education, including training CBOs in how to develop People's Agendas and run candidates' forums
- encourages the development of criteria to identify candidates who are willing to sign up to a pro-poor political platform in return for civil society endorsement
- provides training for endorsed candidates on how to raise funds, campaign and develop a political agenda, increasingly using successful candidates from previous elections
- monitors elections and the post-election performance of successful candidates

- provides training for local representatives and local government staff on good governance, including the preparation of municipal and barangay development plans using participatory methods.

As BATMAN has become more established, its membership has expanded to include people's organisations, elected representatives who received civil society endorsement during their campaigns (including 15 mayors) and some of the staff appointed by those elected officials, who are also graduates of training courses provided by BATMAN and its associated organisations.

#### **Towards more effective political influence**

All citizens need awareness of their political rights in order to exercise them effectively. Furthermore, they need the capacity to mobilise – since organised groups are likely to have more influence than individuals – and to analyse the reasons for good or bad performance in service delivery and learn from experience.

Without these, their influence is likely to be restricted – either exercised only by elites or limited to consultation. However, during periods of struggle for political change and after democracy is established, re-established or revitalised, a variety of ways in which citizens and people's organisations can be supported to learn and act can be identified. These may be undertaken by NGOs, organisations of poor people or politically excluded, or governments themselves. The development of awareness and capacity takes a long time, but can be encouraged and supported by awareness raising, organisational capacity building, the development of alliances and political education.

**Awareness raising** – Awareness is raised by action and learning from experience, education and the provision of information. Seminar participants' experience was that awareness is most effectively increased by engagement in political actions related to the everyday needs and conditions of life of citizens. In addition, there is an important role for education on political rights and the political and governance systems, for both children and adults, and for information dissemination by governments. NGOs can play an important role in interpreting the

political and administrative system to people. To do so, as seen, for example, in IDASA's work on budgeting, they need to achieve a delicate balance between:

- technical expertise and the ability to present complex information in ways people can understand and relate to, and
- a close relationship with the relevant public organisations to understand how they work and sufficient distance from such organisations to retain people's confidence.

The aims of such programmes should include:

- increasing both women's and men's awareness of responsibilities and rights
- changing perceptions of the political system from a means of obtaining favours to the channel for claiming entitlements
- increasing understanding of public sector operation, to obtain improved services and redress for grievances
- developing skills for more effective political practice.

However, increased awareness is also less likely to produce results if influence is exercised through intermediaries such as NGOs, since the legitimacy of the latter to speak on behalf of marginalised groups can be challenged.

**Organisational capacity building** – If newly empowered people are to define their own priorities, exercise influence on their own account, take up grievances or make claims, awareness needs to be complemented by organisation. NGOs can also play an important role in this respect. For example, the National Centre for Advocacy Studies in Pune runs an 18 month capacity building programme for community leaders at the local level, and the Uganda Debt Network assists communities to monitor whether the additional resources made available as a result of debt relief are indeed spent on 'poverty eradication', to hold government agencies to account for their actions and to secure improved policy and service delivery.

**Forming networks and alliances** – People's organisations formed at the village or neighbourhood level are individually small, have limited resources and lack the critical mass to produce changes in political and administrative practices. However, cumulatively they can exercise considerable political influence, either through social movements such as those that were instrumental in producing political



change in South Africa and the Philippines, or through networks, coalitions or alliances formed for more specific purposes. These may be of like organisations (such as networks of people's organisations, community-based organisations, women's groups or associations of micro-entrepreneurs) or unlike organisations and individuals with shared interests (e.g. people's organisations, NGOs, other civil society organisations such as trade unions, politicians and sympathetic officials). Networks of people's organisations may be supported by NGOs and are sometimes officially recognised by governments. They may form across or within national or sub-national administrative boundaries. Vertically linked movements include organisations operating at community, district, city, national and international levels, while horizontal links bridge sectoral and administrative divides. Other alliances link organisations with different strengths, for example the 'shouters' (those using tactics of protest) and the 'counters' (those assembling information on government performance).

For example, the district Poverty Action Fund Monitoring Committees established at the end of the Uganda Debt Network's initial study in mid-2000 have, with support, themselves carried out one or two further rounds of community-based monitoring, culminating in district dialogue meetings to bring together public officials and civil society organisations to discuss participation, budgeting, implementation and expenditure. As a result, the UDN is developing, in conjunction with communities and the Ministry of Finance, more appropriate indicators to monitor the implementation and poverty and gender impacts of the Poverty Action Fund.

Another example is the Rationing Kruti Samiti federation of around 40 NGOs and CBOs in Mumbai, India which in the mid-1990s worked to improve the quality of goods and services offered by the Public Distribution System for basic food and other commodities, as well as to reduce corruption in procurement and distribution. The RKS both attempted to lobby at the macro-level and formed committees from women's micro-credit and savings groups to monitor the operation of individual ration shops. While a sympathetic Controller of Rationing was in post, considerable headway was made. However subsequently, weaknesses in the organisation of RKS, its lack of formal status, its failure to institutionalise collaborative processes, resistance from vested interests and ultimately the need to change emphasis from improving the operation of the

RKS to fighting for its survival reduced the effectiveness of the coalition.

**Becoming more effective representatives** – The key role of elected representatives in both the formal political system and other consultative bodies was stressed above. To fulfil such a role effectively, high levels of political awareness, an appreciation of the key principles of democracy (including representation and accountability) and the skills to understand, use and communicate information are vital. Poor and disadvantaged people, especially women, are especially likely to lack such knowledge and skills (although arguably many elected representatives from other backgrounds do so as well) and can benefit from support programmes such as those offered by FOWODE in Uganda and BATMAN in the Philippines (Boxes 4 and 5).

### 3 increasing responsiveness and accountability

*The other side of the coin from increased influencing is increasing the responsiveness and accountability of government. Before bringing together voice and responsiveness to examine the construction of new relations between citizens and their governments in the final section, initiatives which may be taken by governments themselves will be discussed.*

#### **Politics, bureaucracy and governance: recent trends and changing conditions**

The context in which government operates has changed considerably in the last two decades, influencing both the scope for government political and administrative initiatives, and the demands placed upon government by citizens and international agencies. The trends and issues with most relevance to service delivery include democratisation, decentralisation, commercialisation and the proliferation of service providers.

#### **Democratisation**

The introduction, re-introduction or attempted revitalisation of multi-party democratic systems in many countries has, in theory, widened the political space available for citizens and interest groups to articulate their priorities and use the competitive electoral system to advance their interests. Generally accompanied by greater freedom of association, assembly and expression, democratisation has provided space for non-governmental and people's organisations to form independently of state or party sponsorship. However, the newly democratised systems have often been fragile: leaders have been unwilling to accept the peaceful transfer of power, intimidation or vote-buying commonly interfere with the electoral process, and parties have formed not on the basis of ideology or policy packages but along identity lines (often religion or ethnicity) or merely as vehicles for the ambitions of individuals to gain positions of power. Majoritarian voting systems have sidelined minority interests, and many democracies have failed to consolidate themselves or provide real

influence to poor or other disempowered groups, including women.

In societies where civil society organisations played an important role in the struggle to oust authoritarian rule, such as South Africa or the Philippines, as well as those countries with a history of tolerance towards civil society organisations, such as India, they are both better organised and more likely to have good access to decision-makers, although many experience difficulties in redefining their roles from protest and resistance to development and dialogue. Where community based organisations were, as in many one-party states, aligned with the grass-roots structures of the ruling party, their legitimacy was reduced or eliminated with the introduction of party competition. Although sometimes the social capital they built up remains and can be built on (for example, in Tanzania or Mozambique), elsewhere the formation of representative community organisation needs to start almost from scratch. The struggle to restore democracy is accompanied by a lively and widespread interest in legal and political rights. Where democratic rights are well established, as in the UK, they may be taken for granted, leading citizens to define their priorities in terms, not of political rights or access, but of rights and entitlement to **good quality** services.

### Decentralisation

Democratisation has often been accompanied by renewed attempts to decentralise government functions, this time accompanied by (re-) democratisation at sub-national levels. Democratic decentralisation also may increase the political space for citizens to articulate their priorities and pursue their interests, at neighbourhood, city or district, and state or provincial levels. In theory democratic decentralisation provides scope for local government to respond more promptly and flexibly to local needs and priorities, and to raise revenue locally to pay for improved services, resulting in more efficient government. Local government is indeed more accessible to residents and provides opportunities to influence the delivery of services important to people's well-being. However, conflicts between interests, marginalisation of groups such as women or young people, and undue influence on political agendas by powerful business interests are as, if not more, intense at the local as the national level in many places. In addition, central government is often resistant to giving agencies or local authorities autonomy; the financial resources available to local government (from central-local transfers and revenue

raising powers) are often insufficient to match its responsibilities; its capacity for efficient and effective implementation, operation and maintenance is limited; councillors lack political experience and residents may be little involved; it may be administratively conservative rather than developmental; and any newly decentralised system needs time to become effective.

### Commercialisation

Concern with public budget deficits and service delivery failure has, in recent years, resulted in pressures from within government and external agencies to reduce the role of government in the direct provision of services (see below) and provide them on a cost recovery basis. Only reduced dependence on government funding, the substitution of targeted for general subsidies, and freedom to charge users at rates sufficient to cover marginal costs will, it is argued, enable service providers to satisfy demand, ensure universal coverage and expand provision to cater for economic and demographic growth. Although resistance to devolving responsibility for service provision from government to other providers and to increasing costs and eliminating subsidies has been widespread, even where public agencies have retained responsibility for service delivery the pressures for increased commercialisation and cost recovery have been intense, especially for governments dependent on international agency funding.

The results and the reactions of citizens and consumers have been mixed. For example, better quality, more reliable water supply provided by a private contractor at a higher cost than before may be considered preferable to inadequate public supply or even more costly vended water from informal operators or polluted wells, but excessive price increases give rise to angry reactions. User charges for health services can result in improved quality but also may deter use and make necessary services inaccessible to poor people, or those with least call on household resources (often women). Free maternal and child health services and care for diseases of poverty (such as TB) and an effective exemptions system can mitigate the adverse effects of charging.

Some services need to be financed from general revenue, because they are natural monopolies, private sector capacity is limited, private providers are unwilling to serve low income users, or their individual or social benefits outweigh the costs. Environmental health services, treatment for infectious

diseases, maternal and child health care, education, libraries, fire services and many others fall into this category. While revenue financing does not preclude user charges, to ensure access by the poorest people such services will continue to require full or partial subsidies.

### Proliferation of service providers

Undoubtedly government service delivery has often been inefficient and inadequate. One set of responses has focused on improving the operation of public providers, to improve their efficiency, cost effectiveness and accountability. Often this has been attempted by administratively separating the service providing agency from central or local government and giving its managers a degree of autonomy to organise delivery, raise investment funds, set prices and run day-to-day operations. In theory, the board of such an agency is still ultimately accountable to the elected government.

Another common response, especially by the international agencies, has been private sector participation (PSP), in order to encourage a market-like response to consumer needs, achieve the presumed efficiency benefits of competition and access capital markets for investment funds, as well as to distance government from increases in charges. The entry of both domestic and international operators into service delivery in many cities in developing countries, under a variety of contractual relationships, has been controversial and the effects on service delivery in the long term mixed and unclear. Resistance to PSP has come both from municipal trade unions and service users and from local government. Monitoring of service delivery and value for money and holding private operators to account appear to be as difficult for private as for public providers. In future, the increased access for international providers promised by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) may make it even more difficult for local operators to compete with multinational firms and for citizens to hold providers to account. Often, although not invariably, access by poor people to services provided by large scale private operators has worsened, and is a major source of political contention in many cities. In partial recognition of this problem, both not-for-profit and small scale, often informal, operators have also been recognised as having a potentially significant role to play in service provision.

Even if local government shares its responsibility for the direct provision of services with other operators, it

retains responsibility for providing a policy framework, contracting arrangements, setting and monitoring targets and standards, and co-ordination. As the number of operators proliferates, the latter task becomes increasingly complex.

### Governance

Recognition of the limits on government capacity to 'rule' and to achieve state-led development, the diversification of associational forms associated with democratisation and civil society development and the proliferation of service providers have resulted in a very different environment for government at both central and local levels. Public agencies can never have perfect information on what citizens want or how cities or districts function and cannot maintain strict control over all economic, land and property development and other activities. Their role is redefined, therefore, as to enable and guide multiple development actors, regulate their activities in the public interest, take strategic decisions on infrastructure and service priorities, and co-ordinate inter-organisational networks of service providers and development actors. These functions imply a re-conceptualisation of their role from government (although many authoritative government functions are retained) to governance (co-ordinating multiple organisations and developing more interactive relationships with citizens).

### Arenas for government initiative

A number of arenas in which governments can take initiatives to increase their responsiveness to social needs and priorities and their accountability were identified by seminar participants. It was noted that the feasibility of actions in these different spheres will depend on the political circumstances of the country or city concerned, as well as the allocation of roles and responsibilities between levels and units of government and between government and other actors. All of them are likely to need changes in culture, procedures and working practices, which can be achieved by, amongst other measures, incentives and rewards such as merit-based recruitment and promotion. They may also need legislative change. Governments themselves may have the resources to make the necessary changes and build capacity for new ways of working, or they may need external assistance.

### Increasing opportunities for citizen influence

Governments can increase opportunities for citizens to influence the design of the electoral system and in

their decision-making processes. With respect to the former, representative arrangements can be designed to ensure responsiveness and accountability to constituents, fair representation of minority interests and means of ensuring the representation of disempowered groups. For example, Uganda's constitution and Local Government Act reserve a quarter of seats in local government for women, young people and the disabled, and South Africa's local electoral system is a mixture of 'first-past-the-post' and proportional representation arrangements to ensure representativeness.

With respect to decision-making, governments at both central and especially local level can provide opportunities for citizens to influence policy-making, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. These may simply provide channels to improve the flow of information to government – in itself potentially beneficial in terms of improving service design and delivery – or may attempt to improve information flows in both directions. In many African countries, including Uganda, Zambia and South Africa, **participatory poverty assessments** (PPAs) have provided opportunities for the views of poor people on the nature of poverty, their needs and priorities, and government programmes to be sought and collated. In Uganda, for example, water provision and security issues were given higher priority in the national Poverty Eradication Action Plan following the PPA (see Box 6). Although rural areas and gender issues are well covered in PPAs, the voices of the urban poor are often less well represented and existing inequalities influence the voices that are heard. Also countries are still struggling to integrate successive PPAs with more quantitative household survey results and to use them constructively in policy-making and action planning, even where a genuine commitment to poverty reduction has been made. In addition, if interpretation and use of the results of such consultations are at the discretion of governments they may do little to make service delivery more pro-poor, gender aware and responsive to differentiated local needs.

A somewhat different example is a Government of India initiative to **use information technology for improving information flows**. This stems from the recent enactment of Right to Information legislation in several Indian states and a perception that, for government to be more responsive and participation more meaningful, information flows need to be improved in both directions. In five pilot locations in five States, the information needs of residents in both

urban and rural areas were established through studies carried out by NGOs. They include both basic information about localities, public services and land ownership, and the desire to undertake transactions with various government department and pursue grievances remotely. Pilot projects are in the process of being established. They aim to improve information availability and enable some transactions (e.g. the issue of land records and various licences and certificates, the lodging and pursuit of grievances) to take place on-line at privately operated kiosks. Their successful operation will require extensive updating and computerisation of relevant information and records, as well as considerable capacity building in government departments. Their operation should be monitored to ascertain both whether the relevant services are delivered efficiently and also which population groups improve their access to information and basic administrative services.

**BOX 6****Local government in Uganda**

**Building on earlier decentralisation tendencies, a legal framework was provided for a 5-tier system of local government in the 1995 constitution and the 1997 Local Government Act. Each level in the system has a representative structure, planning functions and executive responsibilities. The system provides for:**

**Representation – at village level, all adults belong to the Village Council, which elects an executive. Development proposals are transmitted up the system to the parish, sub-county/town, county and district levels. Quotas give representation to disadvantaged groups (women, young people and disabled people).**

**Influence – at the national and local levels, successive Participatory Poverty Assessments have increased understanding of poverty and led to the definition of poverty indicators for use in planning and performance monitoring. Earlier government suspicion of civil society organisations is now giving way to a greater willingness to act in partnership.**

**Participation – participatory planning at each level is guided by national guidelines and performance assessment, and some progress**

**has been made with gender mainstreaming. Technical planning committees at national level now include civil society representatives.**

**Capacity – funds are made available to local government at all levels on a matching grant basis for investment in areas such as water and sanitation, access roads, primary education, primary health and agricultural extension. To qualify, local governments must use a participatory planning process; produce a 3-year rolling Development Plan, annual budget and statement of accounts; and raise 10% of the capital cost in cash or kind.**

**Accountability – in addition to vertical accountability through the government system, the central government uses the media to inform the public about the funds allocated to local government and facilities such as schools.**

Political commitment and considerable donor support underlie Uganda's progress to date. However, tensions between national and local priorities remain, quotas give disadvantaged groups presence in the electoral system but not necessarily real influence, genuine participation in planning is limited, capacity at the lower levels of local government is particularly weak, the demands placed on government administrative capacity by the planning and performance monitoring arrangements are huge, capacity in the private sector and of local government to work with it are limited, and the poorest people are still marginalized.

**Increasing receptivity to citizen's influence**

Increased opportunities for citizens to exercise influence should be followed by a role in decision-making for citizens and/or their representatives and organisations. Sometimes this is done by establishing a forum at national, city/district or neighbourhood level, of which organised interests can be members and which has a deliberative and advisory role. The NGO Forums and task forces which play a role in PRSP preparation in many African countries, including Uganda (see Box 6), or the forums at different levels in South Africa, are examples. The limitations are, again, that such forums have an advisory rather than decision-making role, and also that ordinary citizens

and unorganised interests (often the poorest and most marginalised people) may not be represented.

To strengthen the role of civil society organisations in decision-making, governments may either make agreement of the relevant forum a necessary condition for government approval or require genuinely participatory planning processes at the local level (see Boxes 7 and 8). It should be recognised that increasing receptivity to citizens' demands is far from straightforward – inevitably interests will conflict; some voices are louder than others; participation is time-consuming, especially for poor people working long hours to make a living; it may not always be possible to resolve differences and reach consensus; and both bureaucrats and elected representatives may resent the apparent dilution of their roles and expertise.

**BOX 7****Mandating civil society participation in municipal development planning**

The Philippines Local Governance Code (1991) requires the establishment of a Municipal Development Council comprised of elected representatives (councillors, *barangay* chairpersons, representatives of the congressman) and representatives of government agencies (not more than 75%), NGOs, people's organisations and other interests (e.g. women, the elderly). NGO and PO (People's Organisations) representatives are elected from all accredited civil society organisations. The MDC is responsible for preparing the municipal development plan, which should include a gender programme. The Municipal Council (the elected councillors) must approve the plan if it has been agreed by the MDC and allocate 20% of the total local expenditure for its implementation and a further 5% for implementation of the gender programme.

**BOX 8****Bottom-up participatory planning in Kerala**

In Kerala, India, the communist-dominated left wing government's semi-autonomous State Planning Board instituted a process of participatory planning for local governments (*Panchayats*) to draw up five year plans. The proposals in these plans are then integrated



into the State development plan and 35-40% of funds allocated for their implementation. First, development needs are identified by village assemblies. 'Development seminars' are then held, with elected representatives, officials and experts, to discuss a panchayat development report which includes relevant information and survey results and details development issues and challenges. Task forces 'projectise' the proposed development approaches, culminating in the preparation of a panchayat plan. These plans are then integrated at block and district level.

The process is supported by a State-government initiated People's Planning Campaign aimed at developing support and capacity for decentralised planning. This includes both government-provided training for those involved and the participation of mass organisations, especially Kerala Sastra Sahitya, which contributes volunteers and expertise and develops innovative planning and governance mechanisms. As part of the process, financial and labour contributions have been mobilised for development tasks at village level, many of which can start without waiting for approval of the State development plan or external resources. It is estimated that the campaign has had a significant effect on institutionalising decentralisation and participatory planning in about 10% of *Panchayats*, that it has had no impact in 20% and that variable progress has been made in the remainder.

Enabling conditions which help to account for the initiative and its success to date include political commitment at State level, high levels of social well-being including literacy, the strength of mass organisations and the availability of retired people with expertise. However, further strengthening of Panchayat and neighbourhood organisations, institutionalisation of the process and satisfactory progress with delivery are threatened by opposition parties at State level, resentment of the State Planning Board's pre-eminent role and over-centralisation of the Board's operations.

### **Increasing accountability**

Governments can attempt to increase both internal and external accountability, by improving scrutiny and providing for sanctions if performance is poor or rules are broken. In doing so, a number of questions need to be posed:

- what are the reasons for accountability failures - capture (corruption or the use of resources to benefit particular individuals or groups) or bias (either deliberate or unintentional, which excludes individuals or groups from access to resources or opportunities to influence)?
- who should be responsible for scrutiny and calling government to account?
- which organisations should be held to account?
- where should organisations be held to account - at local, national or international level?
- how can scrutiny, response and enforcement be improved?
- what should be taken into account? Does accountability need to widen from a focus on procedures and financial auditing to wider concerns with gender equity, social justice and environmental impact?

Governments, under pressure from international agencies, newly elected legislatures and citizens, have adopted, with more or less commitment, a variety of approaches to improving the internal accountability of their bureaucracies, increasing the accountability of administrative arms to legislatures, and reducing corruption. The difficulties and dilemmas faced even by well-intentioned local representatives are illustrated by the experience of the Municipality of San Leonardo in the Philippines (Box 9). The results of attempts to improve accountability have often been limited, because of entrenched interests, the ingrained and pervasive nature of small-scale corruption, the failure of bureaucratic initiatives to obtain support from the political system, and a reluctance to fully involve civil society. The effectiveness of government initiated measures to provide opportunities for citizen influence, increase its responsiveness and improve its accountability is likely to be limited unless new relationships are developed within society: it is with these interactive approaches to improving responsiveness and accountability that the last section of this report is concerned.

### **BOX 9**

#### **Accountable to whom? Municipal government in San Leonardo, Neuva Ecija, Luzon, the Philippines**

The newly elected Mayor and his Municipal Administrator found, in July 2001, that the provisions for election of civil society representatives to a Municipal Development Council had not been implemented in the small municipality of San Leonardo (population 56,000). Moreover, the municipality had a fiscal deficit because the previous Mayor had made an excessive number of municipal staff appointments for patronage purposes, spent municipal resources on campaigning and made water free in a bid to win votes.

The new Mayor's attempts to fulfil his campaign promises to poor residents have focused on dealing with anti-social and criminal activities (including drug dealing, gambling, drinking and prostitution), preparing a Municipal Development Plan and raising additional funds to implement it. Early actions to deal with vested interests met with death threats and were only partly successful: the death threats received by the Mayor and his Administrator were published in the local media, affording them protection, and the crackdown on drug dealing is continuing because this has wide public backing, but residents support gambling (the numbers game), while protests from prostitutes and legal impediments have hindered the closure of beer halls. Although people's organisations, NGOs, women and elderly people have been engaged in preparation of a Plan, little progress has been made with implementation to date because of the limited financial resources available to the municipality. However, recent bids for external funds have been successful.

The need to generate support and raise funds for campaigning also gives rise to dilemmas: the Mayor depends on the support of elected councillors, but they expected 'commission' in return for their support, while poor party volunteers expect financial rewards or other favours. The attempted compromises include offering councillors the opportunity to bid for municipal contracts and promising party volunteers and supporters pro-poor programmes rather than cash or jobs.

## 4 democratic politics – towards accountability, trust and legitimacy

Throughout the developing world, confidence in the state is at a low ebb – people feel disconnected from their governments and trust is lacking. A key challenge for the 21st century is the construction of new relationships between ordinary people and the institutions – especially those of government – which affect their lives. Previously, strengthening civil society (demand) was seen as an alternative to a series of apparently unsuccessful attempts to make government more responsive (supply). However, it is increasingly evident that rebuilding relationships between citizens and their governments means going beyond ‘civil society’ or ‘state-centred’ approaches to focus on their intersection, through new forms of participation, responsiveness and accountability.

### Rebuilding the relationships between people and government institutions

The relationships between people and their governments are influenced by history, culture, the contemporary political situation and current governance arrangements. Relationships between rulers and the ruled vary from conflict through a relatively stable social contract to apathy; political regimes vary along a continuum from authoritarian rule through unstable formal democracy to consolidated substantive democracy; and the political practices of citizens vary from confrontation or exit through electoral participation to active engagement. A further dimension in many countries is the role of external agencies, with respect to their policies, the choice of activities they are prepared to fund, the terms of their assistance and their accountability (see Boxes 10 and 11).

#### BOX 10

### The UK Department for International Development, governance and service delivery

DFID is concerned with the capability of the state to play an appropriate role in the delivery of the Millennium Development Goals. It is, therefore, concerned with seven governance-related areas. Although supporting activities related to each of these, it is also aware of the limits to donor legitimacy and impact:

- DFID is trying to improve its understanding of contemporary political

systems in developing countries and to provide opportunities for poor women and men to influence policy, but is concerned at the ambivalent role of external agencies in multi-party political systems

- DFID has supported attempts to ensure that government is accountable and honest, including both government attempts to improve internal accountability and civil society organisations which are trying to secure better external accountability of governments, but is aware of the limited effectiveness of the former and wishes to develop a more strategic and nuanced approach to supporting civil society initiatives
- In ensuring macro-economic stability, DFID has traditionally worked predominantly with the state, but is considering whether it should pay more attention to enabling the private (and not-for-profit) sectors to play a larger role in service delivery
- DFID has supported public sector reform and capacity building for pro-poor policy formulation and implementation, but is concerned about the apparently limited impact of state-centred programmes and is willing to work with local actors to identify more appropriate approaches, as well as ways of involving the public in the design and monitoring of reforms and their outcomes
- DFID has supported sectoral reform programmes for many services and is keen to identify ways of involving poor people in service planning and delivery to ensure equitable access
- Security and access to justice is recognised as a high priority for poor women, men and children, but the effectiveness of current approaches supported by DFID to developing the capacity and accountability of the police and judicial systems is not certain
- Conflict is recognised as a significant factor contributing to impoverishment but, although DFID is keen to assist in the resolution of conflicts, it is aware of the limitations on its legitimacy and involvement in conflict situations.

Overall, DFID recognises that improved governance is part of a long-term process of social and political change and can only be driven internally, through changed relationships between the state, the private sector and civil society. Donors can have a positive role in the process of improving governance and changing state-society relations but this must be modest, given the limited legitimacy and impact of external agencies.

#### BOX 11

### The World Bank, participation and accountability

The World Bank has traditionally concentrated on participation at project level to improve design, implementation and sustainability, and has been less concerned with the impact of the social capital developed through project activities on the wider political and administrative system. However, the Participation and Civic Engagement Group in the Social Development Department is researching, documenting and promoting methods and approaches that encourage stakeholders, especially poor people, to influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocation and access to public goods and services, through involvement in wider public management systems, including Public Expenditure Management (PEM) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

The World Bank attributes bad governance to the unresponsiveness and weak accountability of government and its abuse of discretion, exacerbated by a collective response which is weakened by the lack of exit options, information barriers, lack of trust in formal mechanisms and threat of reprisals. Change can be accomplished, the Bank suggests, by a shift on the part of citizens from coping to the exercise of influence and from episodic reaction to informed and organised action. Participatory PEM incorporates accountability mechanisms into budget formulation, budget review and analysis, expenditure tracking and performance monitoring, with the anticipated outcomes of accountable,

**transparent and efficient resource allocation, expenditure and service delivery. The institutionalisation of participation in PEM requires the development of appropriate knowledge and skills in civil society organisations; appropriate information for analysing the implications of budget allocations for poor people, expenditure tracking, user satisfaction with outcomes and assessment of impacts; and mechanisms to ensure citizen views are reflected in decision-making.**

**To achieve these ideals, changes will be needed in World Bank procedures and instruments. For example, the current timetable for PRSP processes does not permit adequate civil society inputs. At present the Bank acknowledges that its rhetoric outstrips reality. The current shift to adaptable programme lending and the incorporation of social and public accountability components in projects, public sector reform and programme lending may provide opportunities for the necessary changes in approach. However, the Bank does not have a good understanding of institutions, civil society or processes of change, not all its staff support its involvement in participatory processes and its support to improved information generation (e.g. Poverty Assessments) has not been followed through by changes in practice or programme content.**

In this seminar, the countries represented included one with a long democratic history (India) and others with democracy recently achieved following a period of struggle (South Africa, the Philippines), one-party (Zambia) or autocratic rule (Uganda). The form of democracy adopted varies from Uganda's single party participatory democratic model to multi-party systems in the other countries. The history and structure of local government and features of the local democratic system also vary. In none were the relationships between citizens and governments characterised by the widespread apathy reported in the UK, although neither had stable social contracts been arrived at. Although disillusion with the probity of politicians and the capacity of government agencies was widespread, all the countries were characterised by active attempts by civil society and governments alike to re-negotiate citizen-state relationships. This section focuses on some of these attempts to build active engagement.

In such political exchanges and negotiations, it is important to distinguish between spaces for influence which are provided by the state, those in which citizens are invited to participate, those which have been jointly constructed and those which citizens have demanded and claimed for themselves. These spaces may occur at different levels: global, national, local and community. Indian experience has demonstrated that unless people articulate demands and make claims for themselves, genuine changes in state-society relationships are less likely. Recent Right to Information legislation is a case in point – it is producing a more significant increase in accountability in those States where people mobilised to demand the legislation than in those where the pressure came from NGOs or State governments themselves took the initiative.

The new relationship between people and their governments will, in principle, be characterised by collaboration and not merely consultation. This is not, as noted above, to downplay the potential contribution of spaces for influence provided by governments, or of increased consultation to improving service delivery, but to stress that these are insufficient. Nor does it imply that collaboration is easy or always achievable – limited resources, tricky development problems, patriarchal social structures and conflicting interests mean that negotiations will not always be amicable and agreement will not always be possible. Spaces for influence are dynamic and contested. It is necessary, therefore, for civil society organisations to think about the way spaces are changing, who influences each space and how, the opportunities and entry points provided as a result, and the strategies they might adopt at different levels to take advantage of potential new political spaces. It is in the political arena that channels, mechanisms and procedures are available to handle the ongoing negotiations.

The new relationship also implies that people are not merely clients or beneficiaries of a more or less paternalist and benevolent government, but are active citizens, themselves engaged in shaping that government, its policies and its resource allocation decisions. It is this right to participate that citizenship implies.

For participation to change the relationship between people and their governments and between these governments and external development agencies to ensure greater responsiveness and accountability, however, initiatives need to:

- be extended from needs appraisal to programme design, implementation and evaluation
- scale up from the project level to policy level
- be long term, to produce changed attitudes and new ways of working, and
- make the transition from micro-level political practices to changing the macro-level operations of the political system.

#### ▶ **Key areas for action**

Seven key areas for action can be identified to strengthen democratic politics:

- governmental arrangements
- political arrangements
- government functions
- the legal framework for governance
- auditing and accountability
- building awareness and capacity
- strategies for increasing impact.

In each of these the experience of seminar participants revealed critical issues to be considered, alternative models and priorities for action. In each, the positive achievements depended on the involvement of two or more actors, and so the priorities for citizens and their groups, NGOs, governments and external agencies are identified. Action is required in each of these seven areas as they are mutually dependent and reinforcing.

#### ▶ **Governmental arrangements**

The key principles in determining appropriate governmental arrangements are subsidiarity, autonomy and accountability – these apply at both the national level (the relations between governments and external development agencies) and sub-national levels (the relations between central and sub-national government). They are, of course, neither easy to conceptualise nor straightforward to design and implement.

There is no optimal set of governmental arrangements which can ensure responsive, efficient and equitable service delivery. Neither the traditional models of service delivery by government departments or public agencies nor the contemporary efforts to improve efficiency by private sector participation should be dismissed. Participants stressed the need for responsibility for service delivery to be decentralised to a level appropriate for the particular service, often local government, but acknowledged a legitimate role for higher levels of government in developing policy frameworks, setting minimum standards, ensuring equity between areas with different revenue

potential, exercising scrutiny and providing certain services. Central government may legitimately link revenue transfers to local government performance, but devising mechanisms for doing so which do not delay disbursements, stifle local initiative or allow national political imperatives to bias allocations is not easy. The difficult trade-offs involved in central-local relations were acknowledged. For example, in Uganda, means of resolving conflicts between national poverty reduction policies and local priorities are still being developed.

Where responsibility is allocated to local government, however, it is important that decision-making autonomy is also given, since responsibility with neither resources nor autonomy to manage them will not result in more appropriate and efficient services. Local government seems to function best where it has a sufficiently wide range of powers and responsibilities to achieve development objectives, adequate and predictable financial resources, and accountability to locally elected representatives and gender balanced policies, representative arrangements and staffing. None of these guarantees responsive, efficient or pro-poor local government. However, effective local government is much less likely if central government ministries resist decentralisation, key functions are retained by higher levels of government or semi-autonomous agencies, financial resources are insufficient to fulfil responsibilities or flows are unpredictable, and local elected representatives can be over-ruled by centrally appointed executives. It is, moreover, likely to neglect women's needs and priorities if they are under-represented in policy formulation and decision-making.

Given the current shortcomings of public provision and limits on citizen influence and accountability, users should have a degree of choice. Participants acknowledged that there is a role for NGO and private sector provision of services. However, concerns were raised about the adverse outcomes of some cases of private sector participation (PSP), in terms of efficiency, equity and access by disadvantaged groups; the extent and effectiveness of government regulation of non-government providers; the transparency and fairness of competitive bidding processes; and the apparent lack of responsiveness and accountability of private and NGO providers to citizens via their elected representatives. PSP should, therefore, be accompanied by:

- clear accountability by private operators to elected bodies



- processes for involving service users, including poor women, men and children, in decisions about standards and modes of provision and monitoring standards
- provisions to ensure that services are provided in areas occupied and at costs affordable by disadvantaged groups, by means of public sector provision or financing
- effective regulatory arrangements
- transparent and fair bidding processes for the award of contracts
- clear alternatives for citizens if PSP does not deliver.

External funding and technical assistance are valued, but concerns were raised about the divergence between the priorities of external agencies and those of local actors, lack of accountability by external agencies to their government partners or the citizens of recipient countries, the apparent inverse relationship between conditionality and intended financial disbursements, and the burdens imposed by donor/lender proliferation and lack of co-ordination. The agendas of external agencies should be set in consultation with government and civil society actors in the countries where they are working, to increase their responsiveness to local priorities. They should build on current moves to involve civil society organisations in the design, delivery, monitoring and assessment of public sector reforms and service delivery. They should also open up their activities and programmes to local scrutiny, by increasing the transparency of their policy-making, allocations and operating procedures, and should be accountable to local 'partners' as well as their boards of directors or taxpayers in their countries of origin. This could be achieved, for example, by introducing report cards or public hearings. They should accept responsibility for their failures, improve co-ordination and impose conditionality consistently, not reducing requirements in countries where their spending targets are high.

### Political arrangements

Participation has increasingly come to have two divergent meanings: participation in the electoral system, by voting, lobbying and party membership, and participation in setting priorities and project design at the local level (although this may be consultation or mobilisation rather than participation in decision-making). As the limits of the latter have been recognised, attempts have been made to extend mechanisms for participation to city or district level (for example, in the preparation of City Development Strategies) and to national level (for example, in the

PRSP process). Seminar participants agreed, however, that mechanisms for deliberative or participatory democracy supplement rather than substitute for electoral democracy.

The arrangements for electoral democracy are, therefore, key determinants of citizen-state relationships. These have various dimensions. First is the nature of representation. What do citizens expect of their elected representatives, and how do those representatives see their roles and responsibilities once elected? How do citizens expect politicians to resolve the tension between advancing particular interests (those of their constituents or financial backers) and governing an entire administrative area (which, given limited resources, necessarily involves trade-offs between different priorities and may or may not include a concern with increasing equity)?

In many developing countries parties are not formed around an ideology or policy agenda. Instead, they are vehicles to mobilise the support needed to secure political office, by means which include rhetoric, appeals to sectoral identity and promises of investment and services. Once elected, and despite disillusionment with politicians' rhetorical promises, supporters expect privileged access to state resources. Such patron-clientelist political systems, in which votes are traded for state resources, are not only widespread but also so entrenched that they come to be regarded as the normal and natural way of organising political life. In favourable circumstances and with good tactics, poor and disempowered political groups can make some gains in such systems. However, such gains are unpredictable and fleeting, and often fragment groups (such as residents of different informal settlements) who would otherwise have common priorities.

In the short term, the Philippines experience illustrates the potential for organisations of poor people or disempowered to endorse a candidate in return for that person signing a written agreement summarising the promises that have been made.

Ultimately, however, a functioning political system with appropriate electoral arrangements is needed for meaningful participation by disempowered people, as well as appropriate policies and a fair share of resources to meet their needs. Such a system requires suitable electoral arrangements and executive arrangements which are effective and accountable.

- There is evidence that **councillors elected on a ward basis** are more responsive and accountable to their constituents than representatives elected on a party list system. Where poor people are concentrated in certain wards, therefore, they can have greater influence on political decision-making through a ward-based system. Representatives elected through a party list system, it is suggested, owe their primary allegiance to their party. However, proportional representation arrangements are also likely to give better representation to minority interests than a majoritarian system. A combination may be the most appropriate, as in South Africa.
- **Quotas** guarantee the representation of otherwise under-represented groups, especially women. They are the surest way of increasing the presence of people with particular characteristics (women, the disabled, economically weaker groups), although it cannot be assumed that presence equals influence. Women elected through a quota system do not necessarily share the priorities of poor women if they come from elite backgrounds. Patterns of social behaviour and cultural assumptions may restrict the ability of such representatives to exercise influence or lead other representatives to devalue their contributions. For quota systems to result in meaningful participation, supporting activities are needed to improve the skills of representatives and change social attitudes.
- In theory, **political parties** organise electoral campaigning and articulate alternative political agendas. The issue of campaign financing is a particularly tricky one, since those who contribute funds tend to expect paybacks later. These expectations may reduce the freedom to manoeuvre of newly elected politicians, however committed they are to particular political goals, such as pro-poor policies, increasing government efficiency or reducing corruption. The failure of parties to develop coherent policy platforms is in part the result of a lack of research and policy-making capacity and the absence of internal democratic and organisational structures. Whether the solution is for poor people to form a political party capable of addressing their concerns, as in the Philippines, or for citizens and civil society organisations to influence the development and agenda of the mainstream parties will depend on local circumstances.
- **Executive arrangements** vary. For example, at the city level, directly elected mayors have executive powers but share their legislative powers to a greater or lesser extent with elected legislatures, depending on the political system. Mayors may be able to strengthen their executive capacity by directly appointing key staff, as it the practice in the Philippines or Latin American countries. Alternatively, legislative and executive powers may rest with the elected council or corporation as a whole. A directly elected chief executive can provide strong leadership, a political agenda and a clear focus for accountability. However, such a system also involves greater risks should leadership be poor or favour powerful interests over those of poor people. Where executive powers are shared, decisive leadership may be lacking, but a better balance between different interest and greater attention to equity are likely. Where executive and legislative power both rest with a council or cabinet, accountability may be threatened, but the involvement of all councillors in debates, including those from opposition parties, increases the scope for scrutiny.

Governments have key roles in reforming the legal framework for government and electoral arrangements, and regulating the functioning of political parties. The limited policy formulation capacity and organisational practices of political parties weakens democracy. External agencies can assist governments by disseminating international experience in these respects, but it is unclear whether and how donors should play a role in strengthening political party institutions because of the implications for their relations with governments. There is, however, potential for donors to support national dialogues on the role and functioning of parties and on reducing corruption.

NGOs can play an important role in lobbying for changes to electoral and executive arrangements or greater accountability in the political system. However, participants agreed that NGOs should generally create constructive rather than antagonistic relationships with government, without sacrificing their independence and ability to challenge the state. In addition, NGOs can play a positive role in pre-election education, encouraging voter registration, election monitoring, and training for candidates and elected representatives.

## Government functions

The government functions referred to here are the generic ones relevant to the delivery of all services, at different levels of government, as well as to the co-ordinated achievement of development objectives – they include planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The role of auditing and scrutiny in increased accountability will be discussed in a later section. Traditionally regarded as the functions of the bureaucracy at either central or local levels, under the direction of elected representatives, unresponsive government and service delivery failures demonstrate the need for citizens and their organisations to play a more direct participatory role at each stage.

There are many examples of participation by citizens in government (or NGO) initiated projects (which, although still limited, is a valuable step beyond consultation) and some of more genuinely collaborative decision-making as well as projects initiated and designed by people's organisations. There are a variety of pointers to what works - for example distinguishing between solutions to problems which can be achieved quickly and with a community's own resources, to build commitment to the participatory process, and more ambitious longer term actions needing external resources. Experience shows that women are often the most effective local change agents. More rare is participation at city, district or programme level, for example in the preparation of poverty reduction strategies, in part because scale may preclude extensive use of direct democracy. Although South Africa's Integrated Development Planning process requires community involvement, lack of local government capacity and an over-elaborate process increase the danger that participation will be formal rather than real.

Participation in implementation has a long history. Although it has more often meant contributions of labour and finance than participation in decision-making, decentralised management has provided additional opportunities for local involvement in day-to-day operations (for example, through parent-teacher associations in schools). However, care needs to be taken that such participatory roles are not merely window dressing (a danger unless there are procedures and incentives to ensure implementation matches the plan) or substitutes for adequate government finances. Increasingly, the value of involving users and residents in monitoring and evaluation is recognised, both at project level and above. The role of the District Poverty Action Fund

Monitoring Committees facilitated by the Uganda Debt Network in developing monitoring indicators at community level is a case in point.

Attempts to increase participation in public expenditure management focus on budget preparation and analysis, expenditure tracking and performance monitoring. The experience of many Brazilian municipalities with participatory budgeting, FOWODE (Box 4) and IDASA (Box 3) provide a number of pointers to good practice:

- participatory budgeting requires provision for inputs during the pre- or draft budget stage. This is not always available, especially at national level (for example in South Africa). However, Economic Justice and Peace in Zambia makes a pre-budget submission
- participatory budgeting at the local level requires that a reasonable volume of resources and discretion over their use is required
- for budgets to be pro-poor and gender aware, changes in budget rules and processes may be required, for example, requiring allocations linked to objectives and participation in formulation
- for participation in preparation to be possible, budgets should be presented in user-friendly ways, information made available to civil society organisations and the media, sufficient time should be allowed for consultation and feedback, and citizens and their organisations should have the capacity to understand the budget
- budget analysis can substitute for or complement participation in preparation.

Effective participation in planning, budgeting, implementing, monitoring and evaluation requires citizens and their organisations to make an effort to understand and use the information available and press for more, for example, through the media. NGOs can play an important intermediary role, assisting in the aggregation and presentation of information generated by women, men and children to government agencies and national legislatures and interpreting information generated by government to the wider community. They can use the media to raise policy and resource allocation issues and participate in consultative processes and decision-making fora at national and sub-national levels. However, not all NGOs are representative of or accountable to poor people, so generally direct participation by organised poor groups is preferable.

Governments should develop an understanding of the information needs of civil society organisations

wishing to participate in budget preparation and analysis. They should produce, simplify and disseminate suitable information, including figures disaggregated by programme and geographical area for both budget allocations and expenditure. Central government action is needed to change budgetary rules, although there is more scope for direct citizen participation in budgeting at local level. Participatory planning and budgeting require significant changes in the attitudes and working practices of public sector employees, changes which should be rewarded through performance appraisal and promotion systems. They also take considerable time and resources – for public agencies, citizens and civil society groups to participate on an ongoing basis, they must feel that the benefits of more responsive government outweigh the costs.

Donors can support wider participation in policy-making and resource allocation by revising the timetables they impose for PRSPs or similar processes to ensure participatory planning and budgeting. In addition, research is needed to evaluate the practical outcomes of participatory processes of planning and budget preparation. Such research should ascertain whether there is value added in terms of more pro-poor and gender-aware proposals, resource allocation, expenditure and outcomes, as well as greater local ownership of programmes and more successful implementation. External agencies are well-placed to commission comparative studies of international experience.

## The legal framework for governance

Informal political and administrative arrangements, however progressive, are vulnerable to electoral change or opposition challenge. Rights backed up by a strong legislation and a sound legal framework for governmental and political arrangements are essential. Legitimate, effective and gender-sensitive legal institutions:

- protect the basis for rights and claims
- limit the actions of corrupt state officials
- provide a basis for institutionalising new electoral arrangements and reformed working relationships and procedures.

Legislation which can play an important role in developing new citizen-state relationships includes:

- right to information legislation
- legislation that requires consultation and also that the results of consultation and participation are reflected in plans and proposals
- provision for public interest litigation

- legislation that gives non-governmental representatives legal standing in the policy arena and regulatory or oversight bodies.

In addition, a non-corrupt police force and judiciary are needed, requiring reform to improve the capacity, probity and accessibility of the main points of contact between citizens and the state – local courts, the police and regulatory officials.

Governments are responsible for introducing the necessary legislative change, as well as reforms to the judicial system. The latter should improve access to justice, so that citizens and their organisations can take action to improve accountability and reduce corruption. There is potential for external agencies to assist in the dissemination of international experience of legislative and judicial reform and implementation. However, effective reform is more likely to follow local demand than external conditionality, so citizens and their organisations need to campaign for legal change. NGOs can assist in such campaigns and disseminate their results, as well as identifying the basis for legal challenges to governments by citizens.

## Auditing and accountability

Better targeting and allocation of resources is insufficient without tracking of expenditure and monitoring of performance, outcomes and impact. Auditing implies checking that expenditure matches budget allocations, that contracts are allocated using transparent and legal processes, and that quality of work performed or services delivered satisfies relevant quality criteria. Such criteria may relate to social dimensions (such as gender balance) or environmental impact, as well as cost effectiveness and performance. Along with other checks on performance and probity, therefore, it is part of the scrutiny process. Traditionally governments have both internal scrutiny processes and are subject to scrutiny by the relevant legislature. As the range of operators involved in service delivery has increased, the number of regulatory bodies for particular sectors may also have proliferated. Increasingly, however, these mechanisms and processes are regarded as inadequate, as poor performance continues and corruption remains widespread, and the potential for more direct citizen scrutiny is being investigated.

Citizens and their organisations can perform a scrutiny function, monitoring official information and comparing it with spending or delivery. Tracking and monitoring outputs require ways of:

- obtaining and understanding official information

- on budget allocations
- obtaining information on actual expenditure or works to check against the intention.

Such information may be partly available through official channels, but needs to be supplemented by other mechanisms, such as collective public audits of local accounts, informal vigilance committees to monitor service delivery, public opinion surveys, or technical committees relying on qualified volunteers to assess the quality of publicly funded infrastructure or services.

Parivartan's experiments in using local monitoring teams to improve solid waste management in residential areas in Delhi is an example. Such mechanisms can also help to reveal malpractice, assist users to take up grievances and obtain redress, and put pressure on government agencies to improve their practices. In addition, they can monitor whether government money is spent as planned – Indian examples include People's Hearings run by a workers' and peasants' union in Rajasthan to assemble evidence of officials pocketing part of the wages of workers on public works programmes. Such 'naming and shaming' tactics can produce results, especially if combined with dialogue.

Tracking expenditure needs time and persistence, and attempts to call government to account may also threaten poor people's relations with powerful interests they rely on for access to jobs, land and services. To scrutinise government behaviour and performance and fight corruption, socially marginalized groups therefore need organisational strength to stand up to local elites and powerful interests, as well as access to official information, technical skills to analyse accounts and legal resources to prosecute violations. The strength of people's organisations depends on their capacity to analyse, articulate their concerns and build alliances, as well as their accountability to their own members.

Because monitoring expenditure is a painstaking process which needs to be undertaken on an ongoing basis and the information needed is technically complex, there is a potentially important intermediary role for NGOs in deciphering and interpreting budgets, expenditure and the quality of works and services. They can also share their skills with citizens' organisations and identify possible legal bases for challenging government. However, NGOs themselves need to operate transparently and to develop accountability mechanisms.

Monitoring expenditure and outcomes at national and sub-national levels requires disaggregated allocations and expenditure figures, preferably linked to output indicators. There are, therefore, implications for government rules on auditing and accountability, as well as a need for increased capacity to develop appropriate public expenditure management systems and provide information. While internal auditing and performance monitoring, scrutiny by legislatures and monitoring by regulatory bodies can increase accountability because of the availability of enforcement powers, citizen scrutiny can only result in greater accountability by the use of intermediate mechanisms or channels, for example the electoral system or the judicial system. The latter includes the use of public interest laws (for example, to obtain changes in practice by the Income Tax Department and implementation of Right to Information legislation in Delhi). In South Africa, both accepting and offering bribes are criminal offences. For the police and judiciary to take action to investigate abuses, political backing is necessary.

External agencies have invested in generating information (e.g. Poverty Assessments), improving public expenditure management and developing audit capacity. Such support is needed but because these are regarded as technical processes divorced from accountability exercised through political systems or civil society pressure, it has generally had relatively limited results. To realise the full potential of reforms to public sector operations and financial management, support to civil society organisations is needed to increase their organisational and technical capacity to audit government accounts and hold agencies and their elected representatives to account.

### ▶ **Building awareness and capacity**

Awareness and capacity building has two main dimensions: building the awareness of citizens and civil society organisations to enable them to exercise their rights and responsibilities, and building the capacity of governments to be more responsive and accountable.

For citizens this involves thinking systemically, to identify power relations, inequalities (e.g. gender imbalances) and their causes. It also means increasing awareness of their rights and responsibilities. As discussed in Section 2, this may be achieved through education and the provision of information, in which both NGOs and government agencies can play a role, supported by external agencies where additional resources are needed.

Improved knowledge of their rights and government policies and operations encourages citizens to participate in electoral politics, protest against poor government performance or malpractice, and join together to lobby for improved services. Programmes of voter education and registration can have a particularly important effect on women's awareness and participation.

However, the impact of education and information provision related to abstract rights and principles is limited compared with the awareness built by engagement in political processes related to everyday living conditions. Neither formal electoral participation nor NGO advocacy on behalf of poor women, men and children is sufficient – instead effective engagement implies the formation of citizens' organisations, constituted by and accountable to people themselves. These may coalesce around ostensibly non-political shared interests (such as sport) or practical day-to-day needs (such as savings and credit or childcare). The capacity of such organisations to increase the awareness and understanding of their members and devise effective tactics based on a combination of participation in the formal political system protest, lobbying and dialogue needs to be developed by building on local knowledge, developing skills and investment in leadership.

NGOs such as BATMAN in the Philippines can play catalytic and capacity building roles in this respect, but should be ready to respond rather than impose their own agendas and to remain engaged in the long term. Most importantly, citizens and people's organisations can learn from the experience of their peers, through local, national and international exchanges, facilitated by NGOs and external agencies.

Because of the importance of the formal electoral system in ensuring representation and influence, and in the allocation of resources and delivery of services at the local level, it is important not only that pro-poor candidates are identified, endorsed and held to account but also that poor people select candidates from amongst their own ranks. Both formal electoral arrangements (such as quota systems) and the provision of support to candidates can facilitate this. It is necessary to develop understanding amongst elected representatives of the situation and priorities of their poor constituents (especially women, children and other disadvantaged groups), through a combination of awareness raising, participatory

decision-making processes and citizen feedback on service delivery. Furthermore, it is necessary to build understanding amongst both citizens and elected representatives of the responsibilities of a representative, including requirements for probity, transparency and accountability.

Finally, new citizen-state relations cannot be developed without building the awareness of those responsible for service delivery and the capacity of government agencies to respond to the needs of poor residents. Possible ways of widening channels for the expression of, and increasing receptivity to, citizen influence were discussed in section 3. Local government associations may be more appropriate delivery agents for awareness and capacity building for local authority staff and councillors than central government institutions. Competing demands and conflicting priorities are generated by increased opportunities for exercising influence. To handle these, mechanisms for participatory planning and conflict resolution are needed, as well as a sophisticated understanding by citizens and their organisations of local politics as more than just winning concessions for their own group.

It is inappropriate for external agencies to be directly involved with people's organisations, although they can usefully provide assistance to supportive NGOs or public sector agencies. For such assistance to be appropriate, they need a much better understanding of the long term and unpredictable nature of processes of building the awareness and capacity of disadvantaged citizens, people's organisations, political parties and local government.

A continuous process of learning and building capacity (skills, knowledge, organisations, financial resources etc.) is needed for all actors. If one actor obtains new knowledge and skills, other actors may feel threatened – one way of avoiding this outcome is to learn together, through training, joint action and shared capacity building processes. In addition to learning from experience, peer exchanges seem to be effective learning mechanisms. As with other awareness and capacity building processes, these may also involve all the relevant civil society, political and administrative actors.

### ▶ **Strategies for increasing impact**

Many actions initiated by civil society organisations remain isolated and small in scale. They may have an impact on one department or local authority but do not have a wider or long lasting impact. Strategies to



spread, scale up and institutionalise models for civic engagement in democratic politics which have been successful in one locality or sector include:

- legal change (see above)
- building coalitions and alliances, both horizontally between organisations of similar types (such as BATMAN) and vertically between people's organisations, NGOs, administrative departments and the formal political system. For example, a bottom-up civil society movement backed by an intermediary support NGO achieved changes in the South African legal system to make HIV/AIDS drugs available; and changing the Zambian constitution involved the OASIS forum, a coalition including churches, the women's movement, lawyers and other membership organisations, which has continued to work together on other issues
- sharing of experience between peers at local, national and international levels, both through research, documentation and incorporation of examples and lessons in training programmes and by exchanges.

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