

14 projects promoted individual development

Projects with an aim to strengthen the ability of citizens to influence decision making or increase the opportunities to demand human rights, achieve results. That is the conclusion in two evaluation reports, which, inspired by the Outcome Mapping method, studied 14 projects in Latin America and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In all projects, changes in the target groups' attitudes, behaviour, relations and activities were established.

The projects in focus in the two evaluations are characteristic of the form of development co-operation that is directed towards civil society. The projects were implemented by local NGO's, funded by Swedish voluntary organisations, which in turn received project funding from Sida. The 14 projects included three leadership schools. These schools train civil society leaders in strengthening their ability to participate in and influence decision-making processes at the local and national level. Other projects sought to support democracy and human rights through organisations that work with marginalised groups and by training public officials and decision makers.

Greater self-esteem

The evaluations showed that the target groups developed a greater understanding of how the political system works and how they, as citizens, could exert influence. These new insights led to greater self-esteem and a perception of themselves as bearer of rights. In some of the areas studied, people started demanding not only political and civil rights, but also social economic and cultural rights.

The two evaluations found that women were particularly inclined to change both attitude and behaviour. Conclusions concerning the effects on different social groups, however, differed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, greater change was noted among young, highly educated and relatively influential people. In Latin America, by contrast, greater change was observed among those with the lowest social status and those with little previous experience of social organisation. In the latter case, the ability to organise themselves was particularly strengthened. Both evaluations concluded that the projects had encountered difficulties in actually transforming the outlook of those in power and among public officials that did not share the same views as project owners on democracy and human rights.

An effect of the projects in Latin America was enhanced collaboration between different organisation and groups within civil society. The group leaders, who participated in the projects, also developed a sustained mutual network. The evaluation noted, however, that the trained leaders also had a tendency of becoming a local elite, which occasionally lost touch with the grass roots. The evaluators therefore argued that donor strategies in promoting individuals rather than organisations can lead to negative side effects for civil society.



Outcome Mapping Evaluation of Six Civil Society Projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Steve Powell, Ivona Čelebičić, Esad Bratović, Ajla Šišić.

(Sida Evaluation 2008:17).



Swedish Democracy Promotion through NGOs in Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru.

Staffan Löfving, Charlotta Widmark et al. (Sida Evaluation 2008:02).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the evaluators found no evidence that the projects resulted in new forms of collaboration between individuals or groups. This was partly due to the fact that projects were directed towards individuals rather than groups. Furthermore, the group leaders that were trained seldom represented broad-based associations. On the contrary, the NGO's in question had very little resemblance to popular movements. The evaluation therefore raised the issue whether popular movements, as those found in Scandinavia, can serve as a model for the civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their conclusion was that instead of trying to achieve a similar civil society, an even greater emphasis might be placed on promoting charismatic and driven leaders. These leaders often worked with NGO's that implement donor projects and, according to the evaluation, deserved long-term strategic support through, for example, mentorship.

Political power structures remain

In common for both evaluations was that they had the opportunity to monitor behavioural changes among participants in the projects over a period of one to one-and-a-half years. The focus has thereby been on results at the so-called outcome level. In Latin America an attempt was also made to determine whether the observed behavioural changes led to any major social changes at the local or national level. In this respect, the evaluators could only conclude that the political culture was by and far unaffected. The reasons for this disappointing result are hardly surprising: political power structures are by nature hierarchical and do not change easily. For people who develop skills and abilities in the civil society context to succeed in contributing to changes, political power structures must also change. This is a task that individuals and organisations in civil society cannot be expected to accomplish alone – at least not in the short term.

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Further reading and persons to contact

[Sida Evaluation 2008:17 Outcome Mapping Evaluation of Six Civil Society Projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina >>](#)

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[Sida Evaluation 2008:02 Swedish Democracy Promotion through NGOs in Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru >>](#)

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[Resumen General de la Evaluación de Diakonia para el Desarrollo Democrático Local en Latinoamérica >>](#)

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Joint Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability

Alina Rocha Menocal and Bhavna Sharma.

(DFID 2008)

Citizens Voice and Accountability

From the 1990s and onwards donors' efforts to increase citizens' capacity to express and exercise their views in poor countries have been increasing. The development theory underpinning these efforts is that increasing citizens' voice will make public institutions more responsive to citizens' needs and demands and thereby more accountable for their actions. This combination of voice and accountability is an important aspect of improved governance and a stronger democratic culture, which in turn are factors which are generally assumed to contribute to poverty reduction and development. Interventions cover a wide spectrum of issues and areas: They range from contributing to policy and reform processes at the national level, to working with community based organisations on for example civic education and rights awareness programmes.

To date there have been only limited attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of this work on a broader scale. Therefore a number of DAC partners, including Sweden, commissioned a large joint evaluation on the topic, which was carried out between 2006 and 2008 by the British thinktank ODI (Overseas Development Institute).

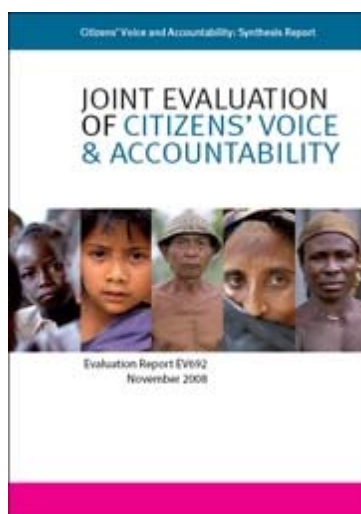
The evaluation, Joint Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability (DFID 2008), found that interventions lead to positive changes in behaviour and practice, especially in terms of raising citizen awareness, and encouraging state officials (at local levels in particular) to become more accountable. Interventions targeted at empowering marginalised and discriminated groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, were found to be particularly successful. The same could be said about the work donors have undertaken with non-traditional civil society actors like social movements and trade unions. Some instances of policy change were also identified.

Findings from the three evaluations presented in this newsletter are largely concurring. Just as in the case of the other two evaluations, Citizen Voice and Accountability concludes that outcomes in terms of changed behaviour at individual and group levels have been significant. However, the evaluation could not find any evidence of substantial changes of power relations at the macro level or broader developmental impact.

Unrealistic expectations and misguided assumptions

According to the evaluation there are two main reasons for the relatively limited results. The first reason is that the donors' expectations are based on misguided assumptions including: an automatic relationship between enhanced citizens' voice and accountability; that citizens' voice represents the interests, needs and demands of a homogeneous people; and that more effective institutions will naturally be more transparent, responsive and ultimately accountable.

The second reason is that power relations and the informal institutions, processes and relations (including social and cultural norms, clientelism and corruption) fundamentally shape the way that formal institutions operate and hence limit the outcome and impact of any interventions in this area. It was also noted that donors should be more realistic about what they can achieve in the shorter term, and that they might undermine results by pushing NGOs to go beyond their core competencies and capacities. For example, many service delivery NGOs are increasingly doing advocacy in order to secure donor funding, which takes them beyond their core mandate and away from their beneficiaries. This often has a negative impact on both the quality and effectiveness of these organisations.



Recommendations

The evaluation recommends that donors should:

1. improve their contextual analyses of power and change, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the interaction between formal and informal rules.
2. work with what is already in-country rather than to transplant formal institutional frameworks from the outside.
3. keep on working with capacity building of both civil society and state actors, particularly at local level, but pay considerably more attention to the political capacity of these actors.
4. increase their support to non traditional civil society actors such as trade unions, religious organisations and social movements.
5. bring together their work with voice and accountability more systematically.



Recommendations

The evaluation recommends that donors improve their contextual analyses of power and change, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the interaction between formal and informal rules. By putting such analysis into practice donors need to understand, live and engage with the informal practices, rather than ignore them. An upshot of such a strategy would be to “work ‘with the grain’ (i.e. what is already in-country) rather than to transplant formal institutional frameworks from the outside”. In order to work towards this the evaluation further recommends that donors keep on working with capacity building of both civil society and state actors, particularly at the local level, but pay considerably more attention to the political capacity of these actors. Donors should furthermore increase their support to non-traditional civil society actors such as trade unions, religious organisations and social movements and ensure that the voice and influence of marginalised groups in society are also strengthened.

In addition, it is recommended that donors bring together their work with voice and accountability more systematically. This would include efforts to: strengthen independent media; increase access to information by supporting legislation of the right to and citizens access to information; strengthen existing mechanisms at the national and local level which brings the state and citizens together, such as parliaments, ombudsmen and local development committees.

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[Joint Evaluation of Citizens' Voice & Accountability \(DFID 2008\) >>](#)

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Sida Evaluation Newsletter presents summaries of evaluations and methodological studies commissioned by Sida alone or in partnership with other donor agencies. The views and interpretations presented are those of the authors of the studies and should not be attributed to Sida.



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