

Civil Society and Poverty Reduction



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Department for Democracy and Social Development, Division for Democratic Governance

Author: James Manor, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex

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Introduction

1 In recent years, poverty reduction has been an increasingly important concern in most international development agencies. So has civil society.¹ There is no shortage of serious studies of civil society's contribution to democracy in less developed countries. But surprisingly, little is available on how it might assist and empower poor people – from development agencies, civil society organisations, or academic analysts.

2 What has appeared tends to be theoretical — next to nothing has been written that which summarises (often unpublished) empirical studies of actual events. Even less has been said about how development practitioners in Sida and similar agencies might help civil society organisations within less developed countries tackle poverty.²

3 This Guide seeks to fill that gap. Much of what appears here is therefore new, but some of it will be obvious to experienced practitioners. That is inevitable in a document that seeks to be comprehensive and useful to newer practitioners. It should not be taken to imply that this writer underestimates practitioners' sophistication.

4 The Guide is mainly intended for practitioners working *in the field* within less developed countries – for Sida and other international agencies, be they bi-lateral, multi-lateral or non-governmental. But it may also interest people in the international headquarters of such agencies. It may also be of some use to civil society activists within less developed countries, and to others (including scholars) who are interested in civil society and poverty – although they are not the principal audiences for this document.

¹ Sida has focused on these two things for far longer than most donor agencies – indeed, it has done so for over 40 years.

² The literature on the role of international civil society organisations is much more developed than that on such organisations within less developed countries – which is why this Guide focuses on the latter. It is a matter of urgency that organisations within these countries be understood, because they can play a far more direct and potent role than can international organisations in assisting poor people. This Guide seeks to provide the first wide-ranging assessment of the promise, limitations and dilemmas of civic organisations within these countries as a force for poverty reduction. In so doing, it is intended to provide useful insights to practitioners in international civil society organisations. For a useful entry into the comparatively extensive literature on international civil society organisations, see M. Ottaway and T. Carothers, *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2000); M. Edwards and J. Gaventa, *Global Citizen Action* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2001); and J. Howell and J. Pearce, *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Appraisal* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2001).

5 Much of what follows consists of rather *general* discussions. But since less developed countries vary enormously, it also focuses on distinctions between types of countries, and on ways to identify and adjust to those distinctions. A balance has been sought between these two things.

6 Empirical research clearly shows that civil society's impact in the 'real world' is ambiguous. Its constructive achievements have sometimes been overestimated, but its promise is still significant. This Guide seeks realistic and (again) balanced judgements of its potential.

7 This is a companion study to a longer (as yet unpublished) academic analysis of civil society and poverty reduction. It extracts *practical* implications from that other analysis.

8 Much of this Guide deals with things that practitioners *need to find out*. At first glance, this may appear to make excessive analytical demands on practitioners who already have plenty on their plates. But many of the things that they need to know are in fact *already known* to them. Within Sida, for example, practitioners already know a huge amount from their work experience, Sida's country analyses, and other Sida 'guidelines' that they have followed.³ So this Guide should not make their lives impossible.

9 Far less is said here about civil society's (often rather *indirect*) contribution to pro-poor economic *growth* than on its efforts (directly) to improve the material well being, security, capacity, influence and dignity of poor people. This requires two explanatory comments. First, civil society organisations (especially those that are pro-poor) usually find it impossible to influence macro-economic policies that might encourage growth and increase revenues that might be used to address poverty. Second, civil society sometimes contributes to pro-poor growth, but the scale and nature of that contribution are open to dispute. It is impossible to resolve these disputes with any confidence. This is true partly because those who claim that civil society contributes to growth argue in such *general* terms that their claims are hard to assess in specific countries. And it is often difficult or impossible, through lack of reliable evidence, to establish causal connections between the actions of civil society organisations and pro-poor growth.⁴

10 Two forms of shorthand are used here. First, apart from "Sida", this text contains just one acronym – "CSOs". It refers to "civil society organisations". They can be large or small, formally or very loosely organised, at the national or local levels, or in between. It is a very broad term – so it will frequently be disaggregated. Second, when the phrase "pro-poor CSOs" appears, it refers both to organisations consisting entirely of poor people, and to organisations consisting partly or entirely of the non-poor which have pro-poor aims. (When a distinction between these two types of organisations is important, they are treated separately.)

³ Sida, GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATION OF SIDA'S POVERTY PROGRAMME (Sida, Stockholm, n.d.). See also, Perspectives on Poverty (Sida, Stockholm, 2002).

⁴ These problems are illustrated, for example, in D. Booth, T. Conway and A. Silfverstolpe, Working with poverty reduction in Sida (SPM Consultants, Stockholm, 2001), especially paragraphs 120 and 125, but also paragraphs 106-112.

11 Before beginning the main discussion, it is necessary to ask what may seem an insulting question. Is Sida a fit institution to work with civil society? The answer is clearly ‘yes’. (Indeed, the tradition of support for civil society, ‘people’s movements’ and poverty reduction at Sida and other Nordic development agencies suggests that the discussions here of approaches to empowering the poor might be of greater use to practitioners in non-Nordic organisations.) But some analysts believe that when some other international development agencies are considered, the answer to the question above should be ‘no’. They argue that some agencies which do not “have a record of promoting progressive values and goals” do damage by imposing their own narrow perspectives on CSOs in less developed countries. They call attention to the dangers when donors ignore these (local) contexts and assume that complex historical processes can be replicated by external donor interventions. The dangers range from depoliticizing voices for change; creating local organizations in the Western image that lack local roots and legitimacy; and ignoring local organizational forms that do not fit Western schemas and models; to underestimating the importance of local ownership and autonomy. Donor civil society strengthening programs, with their blueprints, technical solutions, and indicators of achievement, run the risk of inhibiting and ultimately destroying the most important purposes [sic] of civil society, namely, the freedom to imagine that the world could be different.⁵

This is not Sida’s problem, and much of this Guide is intended to ensure that the problem does not arise. But it is a danger that practitioners from any development agency need to keep in mind.

12 The rest of this Guide is divided into three parts. Part 1 (paragraphs 13-58) deals with ‘basic issues’, fundamental points that need to be understood before we turn to practical matters — how CSOs within less developed countries might contribute to poverty reduction, and how development practitioners might assist them in doing so. Part 2 (paragraphs 59-112) deals with those practical matters at *higher* levels in political systems, and Part 3 (paragraphs 113-146) deals with them at the *local* level. Parts 2 and 3 are presented separately (with some inevitable overlaps) because there are important differences between the problems that arise at different levels.⁶ To summarise many of the main points in this document, the Guide concludes with a cautionary discussion (paragraphs 147-149) which warns practitioners against leaping to premature conclusions on the basis of potentially misleading evidence. Finally, to assist readers, the Guide is also accompanied by a short Annex on “Possible Points for Action by Practitioners” – which is an index to important issues in the Guide.

⁵ Howell and Pearce, *Civil Society and Development*...pp. 233 and 237.

⁶ I am grateful for critical comments on a draft of this Guide from development practitioners at Sida, the British Department for International Development, and the Dutch Foreign Ministry. Detailed comments by Ingmar Armyr of Sida were especially helpful.

Part 1: Basic issues

What is poverty?

13 This question do not need to detain us. The Swedish government has provided a satisfactory answer. ‘Poverty’ entails much more than “a lack of material resources”. It includes “a lack of access to and control over social, economic and political resources that people must have to satisfy their basic needs”, and severe limitations on the freedom of choice. It also entails vulnerability and insecurity – immense difficulties in “the safeguarding of certain rights and protection from violence and injustice”. And it includes social exclusion – not least on grounds of gender — and an incapacity “to fulfil social obligations, to be a respected and valued member of a family and a community”.⁷ This Guide therefore examines CSOs’ contributions to the material well being of the poor, *and* to their inclusion and empowerment — including greater access to services, justice, and the policy and political processes.

Who are ‘the poor’?

14 This Guide defines ‘the poor’ in any given country as those people who must bear the burdens of ‘poverty’ as they are defined in the previous section. Sida’s documents show that it has a sophisticated approach to the definition of poverty, and its country analyses have developed reliable evidence on the identities of the ‘poor’ in partner countries,⁸ but two points are worth stressing here.

15 First, recent research reveals a widespread tendency in less developed countries for elites — who usually dominate the institutions that are supposed to tackle poverty — to fail (partly or often *entirely*) to see that poverty is quite severe in *rural* areas, and among *women*.⁹ Practitioners need to watch for these and other misperceptions, partly in order (see paragraphs 70-71) to address them.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Rights of the Poor – our Common Responsibility: Combating Poverty in Sweden’s Development Cooperation, Government Report 1996/7: 169 (Stockholm, 1997) p.10. Sida also rightly stresses that the views of the poor should contribute to definitions of poverty. (The role of CSOs in transmitting those views into the policy process is discussed later in this Guide.)

⁸ Sida, GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATION..., p. 4; and Sida, Perspectives on Poverty...

⁹ This comment is based on a research project on ‘elite perceptions of poverty and poor people’ in six less developed countries – conducted by this writer and colleagues from Brazil, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Britain, the Netherlands and Norway. Its initial findings are set out in the IDS Bulletin (April, 1999).

16 Second, the proportions of the populations of different countries that are ‘poor’ vary greatly. The proportions are higher in countries with (i) low average per capita incomes and/or (ii) low ratings on the Human Development Index and/or (iii) high levels of inequality. Since the proportions vary from country to country, it is unwise to regard ‘the poor’ in any given country as those who fall into the lowest decile or quintile in terms of per capita incomes – because in many cases, far larger portions of the population are ‘poor’. This is important because, where that is true, the poor possess *immense numerical strength* which – as we shall see in paragraphs 108–112 below – *might be translated into political influence*, with the help of pro-poor CSOs.

17 Because of limitations on space, this Guide does not dwell on the distinction between ‘the poor’ and the ‘poorest’. This writer is well aware of the literature on this distinction, and of the huge difficulties that anti-poverty programmes and pro-poor CSOs encounter when they try to reach the ‘poorest’. But most of the pro-poor initiatives discussed here hold some promise both for ‘the poor’, and (to a lesser degree) for the ‘poorest’.

What is ‘civil society’?

18 ‘Civil society’ has been defined in many different ways, but if we want a realistic understanding of it, we need a broad and neutral definition. Let us therefore define ‘civil society’ to include *all* of the organisations that we find in the space between the state and the household, which are *voluntary* in nature, and which have *significant autonomy* from the state.¹⁰

19 The words in italics above need a little attention, to clarify matters. By including *all* of these organisations, we make sure that the definition is neutral. This is crucial, since it forces us to assess civil society *as it is, and not as we wish it to be*.¹¹ This definition includes organisations that behave in ‘uncivil’ ways – and there are plenty of them. In India, for example, this definition includes *not only* associations of ex-untouchables, poor women’s self-help groups, etc., *but also* big landlords’ associations that work against the poor and the Bajrang Dal which preaches hate and violence against religious minorities. By using this broad definition, we recognise that ‘civil society’ contains both destructive and constructive groups. In Sida’s work and in this Guide, most attention obviously focuses on constructive organisations, but we must not overlook the destructive forces within civil society – because they can hinder efforts to promote social justice.

20 By including *all* of these organisations, we also extend the definition beyond big non-governmental organisations which are the only organisations that some writers and development agencies look at when they discuss civil society. In other words, ‘civil society’ includes everything between and including big non-governmental organisations and small, informally structured organisations that tiny handfuls of villagers form in remote areas of a less developed country.

¹⁰ This definition excludes the private sector from ‘civil society’ – see paragraph 21.

¹¹ We must avoid “the elision of normative views of civil society and empirical reality”. Howell and Pearce, *Civil Society and Development...*, p. 232.

21 By limiting the definition to *voluntary* associations, we exclude several types of groups. We exclude groups into which a person is born – involuntarily. So the Kikuyu ‘tribal’ group in Kenya is not part of ‘civil society’ – although a Kikuyu *association*, which a person joins voluntarily, *is* part of ‘civil society’. We also exclude businesses because they are not strictly voluntary in nature – although *associations* of businesses which individual firms join are part of ‘civil society’. (We must make one exception to this rule, by including privately owned newspapers and radio/television stations in ‘civil society’ – mainly because they often play a very important role in encouraging it.¹²)

22 The inclusion of organisations with *significant autonomy* from the state has implications worth noting. In some countries, labour unions, womens’ and young peoples’ organisations, etc., are totally (or almost totally) controlled by the government – they are ‘front’ organisations for the ruling party. In such cases, these organisations cannot be included in ‘civil society’. But note that in recent times, some of these organisations have begun to develop a significant degree of autonomy. The All China Women’s Federation is an example.¹³ When that happens, we should see such organisations as hesitant entrants into ‘civil society’. We must not insist that organisations have *total* autonomy from the state because in many countries where governments seek widespread control, that is very difficult to achieve.¹⁴

23 Because civil society includes such a large diversity of organisations, it is necessary to disaggregate this category in order to do useful analysis. In this Guide, civil society is broken down in two main ways. First, the principal focus is on *pro-poor* CSOs – a smaller (and often a *much* smaller) category than ‘civil society’ more generally. Second, we break the discussion into two parts – at higher levels and at the local level. At times in this text, we also disaggregate further – by discussing various *roles* that pro-poor CSOs may play.

‘Civil society’ is not identical to ‘society’

24 The size of ‘civil society’ in relation to ‘society’ as a whole (that is, the totality of individuals and groups in a country), varies from country to country. Figure 1 below illustrates this. Each of the three large circles represents the whole of ‘society’, and the smaller circle within it represents the portion of ‘society’ that can be included within ‘civil society’. It is jokingly said of Norwegians that as soon as three or four of them gather, they form an association. Most Norwegians are members of voluntary organisations. So the inner circle on the left is almost as big as the outer circle. India has a sizeable and vibrant civil society, but poverty and illiteracy prevent many people from joining voluntary organisations.

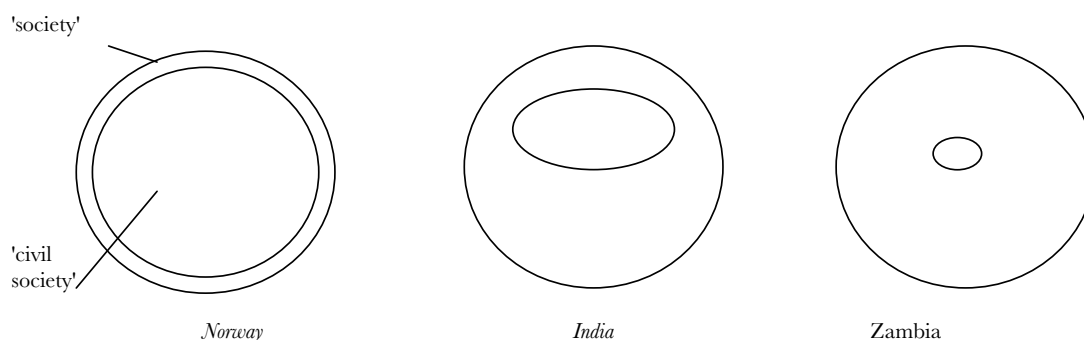
¹² The advisability of including them is plainly apparent from the Ford Foundation’s four-year project on ‘civil society and governance’ in 22 countries, which this writer coordinated. The private sector may establish policy research centres or educational institutions which enjoy a substantial degree of autonomy – and so may the state. When such entities possess substantial autonomy, they can be included within ‘civil society’.

¹³ I am grateful to Jude Howell of the London School of Economics for this point.

¹⁴ One other issue often arises: are political parties part of civil society? Parties in power clearly are not, since they control the state and thus are not autonomous from it. Opposition parties may be seen as part of civil society, but it usually makes more sense to see parties as bridges between civil society and the state, rather than purely as elements of civil society.

So the inner circle in the centre for India is much smaller than for Norway. In Zambia, the government is more hostile to civil society than in India, and poverty and illiteracy take a heavy toll. So the inner circle on the right for Zambia is much smaller than that for India.

Figure 1: The Size of 'Civil Society' in Relation to 'Society' as a Whole



Civil society has both promise and limitations

25 The potential of civil society is grossly underestimated by some people, and grossly overestimated by others. At a recent international conference, this writer was asked by an official of a European development agency why he kept talking about civil society. She argued that its day had passed – it had been important in producing political transformations in places like South Africa and the Philippines, but that was surely the end of its usefulness. She did not see that while such transformations were civil society’s moment *par excellence*,¹⁵ it still had much to contribute in less dramatic ways.

26 On the other hand, David Korten – speaking of civil society’s potential – has argued that we now face nothing less than “the necessity and the opportunity to reinvent human society”.¹⁶ If that opportunity is seized, injustice in less developed countries will be swallowed up in a monumental transformation. He does not see that by creating wildly inflated expectations of civil society, he places it at risk. When those expectations lead inevitably to disappointment, some people will give up on civil society – unfairly, since it has real, if more modest, potential.

27 We need to avoid both of these extreme views. Enlightened CSOs in less developed countries have much to contribute. Many are quite effective at constructive experimentation, at understanding and responding to social diversity and to the perceptions, priorities, knowledge and problems of ordinary people – including the poor. But some also suffer from (*inter alia*) internal divisions, limited capabilities and resources, amateurism, and a failure to understand the macroeconomic and other problems faced by government actors. CSOs are often less successful in tackling poverty than in other spheres – in promoting development more generally, for example, or in strengthening democracy. This Guide seeks a balanced, realistic view.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Peter Evans of the University of California for stressing this.

¹⁶ D.C. Korten, “Civilizing Society”, the annual FEASTA Lecture, Dublin, 4 July 2000, available on the internet at: iisd1.iisd.ca/pdf/2000/FEASTA%20Civilizing%20Human%20Society.htm.

The limitations increase when we consider poverty reduction

28 The Guide discusses not what CSOs can achieve *in general*, but what they can do — more specifically — to *reduce poverty*. When we consider that, we again discover some promise — hence this Guide. But we also find that the limitations are *more severe*. So, to introduce much of what follows, let us briefly identify several of these limitations, most of which are discussed in more detail later.

- In all less developed countries, many CSOs are uninterested in poverty reduction, and some oppose it.
- Pro-poor CSOs often lack capacity and reach (see paragraphs 29-33).
- Many governments make it difficult for pro-poor CSOs to develop strength and to tackle poverty.
- Even when governments try to be helpful, they are often ineffective — because some government actors (especially at lower levels) are uncooperative or inept (see paragraphs 122-123).
- In an era of tight fiscal constraints, many governments cannot find funds for poverty programmes which pro-poor CSOs might facilitate. (Not all pro-poor initiatives cost money, but some do.)
- Pro-poor CSOs often find that ‘good’ things which they seek to encourage contradict one another (see paragraph 100).
- There is tension between different kinds of social capital, both of which can help in anti-poverty efforts (see paragraphs 49-58).
- Poverty, disempowerment and social exclusion are often deeply rooted and very difficult to break down.

The reach of pro-poor CSOs

29 Let us now consider one of the problems noted just above. To develop a realistic picture of the limitations of pro-poor CSOs, a practitioner must answer one important question. In the country where s/he works, what proportion of the poor do pro-poor CSOs reach now, and what proportion might they reach in the foreseeable future if they are well supported?¹⁷

30 The answers vary from country to country, but they are often rather discouraging. Consider for example Bangladesh, a country with strong pro-poor CSOs at the national level which reach a larger proportion of the poor than most of their counterparts elsewhere. In 1993, a leader of one of the strongest of those CSOs stated that *all* of the large pro-poor CSOs in Bangladesh (together) reached about 20% of the population.¹⁸ Things have improved somewhat but not dramatically since then.

31 His comment overstates the limitations of civil society. It leaves out the efforts of smaller CSOs at lower (especially the local) levels.¹⁹ But the problem of limited ‘reach’ is serious. Glance again at Figure 1 above.

¹⁷ CSOs may ‘reach’ poor people through various types of activities — service delivery, representation of their interests, capacity building, mobilisation, etc.

¹⁸ Interview with a very senior figure in Proshika, Dhaka, 21 February 1993.

In the Zambias (and even in the more promising Indias) of this world, civil society *in its entirety* is much smaller than the whole of society. And *pro-poor* organisations make up only a part of civil society more generally.

32 Sida and similar agencies can help to extend the reach of pro-poor CSOs – a high priority — and this Guide suggests ways that they might do so. But this and the other limitations listed above remind us that civil society (like this Guide) is no magic bullet. The struggle against poverty requires far more than pro-poor CSOs — even though they can make important contributions in opening up governments and checking their excesses, in holding sometimes despotic markets to account, and on many other fronts discussed below.

33 Partly because civil society faces serious limitations, we must not overlook the potential importance of *governments* in poverty reduction. All but the most incapable of governments have considerable resources and reach – usually more of both than pro-poor CSOs have. That is partly why this Guide often discusses how those CSOs might interact with governments to address poverty — as well as the dangers that interaction poses (see paragraphs 62 and 64).

Governments are very important in shaping civil society

34 It may seem strange in a Guide on civil society, to devote space to governments, but they have an immense influence on the shape and condition of civil society. Their attitudes, regulations, laws and policies can determine the success or failure of practitioners' efforts to work with civil society. (For example, the aggressive pursuit of economic liberalisation may have weakened CSOs like labour unions that sometimes play important pro-poor roles.) You will not learn this from most of the literature on civil society and social capital, since it focuses intensely on the social sphere and marginalises or omits governments. But recent empirical studies, which are only beginning to find their way into print, clearly demonstrate this.²⁰

Types of governments

35 Because governments are important, a practitioner in a specific country needs to develop a clear idea of the type of government s/he is working with. Different types of governments present different problems and opportunities to pro-poor CSOs within their countries — and to practitioners. (Sida is well aware of this, and has taken useful steps to understand partner governments – indeed, its “point of departure” is always “the capacity and determination of the government of the country to combat poverty”.²¹) When practitioners ask themselves what type of government exists in the country where they work, the choice of a typology is important.

¹⁹ And note that it is estimated that 52% of the poor of Bangladesh are reached by micro-credit programmes – not all of which are the work of CSOs. (I am grateful to Farah Hasin of the University of Dhaka for this point.) In very few other countries do so many poor people participate in such programmes.

²⁰ Among these studies are the Ford Foundation's project on 'civil society and governance' in 22 countries; the Johns Hopkins University project on the 'third sector'; and the work on Japan of Robert Pekkanen of Harvard University.

²¹ Sida, GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATION..., p. 4.

36 Two typologies that had importance in the past are now less useful than before.

- The old typology that placed governments along a spectrum extending from the *left* to the *right* should now be largely set aside, because we live in an era of *centrist* governments.²² 20 years ago, there were many rightist, leftist and populist governments in less developed countries, alongside many centrist regimes.²³ But since the early 1990s, most governments – even those in places like Vietnam and China that espouse leftist ideologies – have in *practice* become centrist.²⁴ They have been forced towards the centre by two things. The international economic order has imposed tight fiscal constraints and deprived governments of many of their former powers over important economic levers – so they cannot spend huge sums on expensive government programmes that were often favoured by leftists (and some rightists). The introduction of democratic processes in many countries has driven governments towards the centre because in most democracies, elections are won by capturing the centre ground.²⁵
- A second typology that places governments along a spectrum — from ‘autocracies’ to ‘democracies’ with ambiguous or ‘transitional’ cases in between — still has some uses in political analysis. But it is not especially helpful in indicating where civil society can play a strong, constructive role – in general, and more specifically, in assisting poor people.²⁶ This is true partly because some rather autocratic governments surprise us by opening up limited spaces for CSOs and participation from below. More importantly, some democratic governments operate in a highly centralised manner, distrust both civil society and independent power centres within government, and seek to maximise top-down control — South Africa is an example – all of which create problems for pro-poor CSOs and for practitioners who seek to support them.

37 A more useful typology classifies governments according to (i) their capacity to perform key tasks, (ii) their degree of centralisation, and (iii) the manner in which they seek to make their influence penetrate downward into society. The typology is set out in detail in Figure 2 below.

38 Governments that fall into Type I (described in column I of Figure 2) have low or very low capacities to perform key tasks like revenue raising, the design and implementation of development policy, responses to interest groups, etc. They are quite centralised, and find it difficult to make their influence penetrate into society by any means other than

²² ‘Centrist’ governments should not be confused with ‘centralised’ governments. As we shall see presently, ‘centrist’ governments may be highly centralised, quite decentralised, or fall between these extremes.

²³ The classic study of this is W. Ascher, **Scheming for the Poor: The Politics of Redistribution in Latin America** (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1984).

²⁴ There are remarkably few exceptions. Cuba remains largely leftist and, in the North, the United States government is plainly rightist – but they are eccentric cases.

²⁵ To say this is not to argue that the current predominance of centrists will last forever. It will not – but it is what we face for the time being.

²⁶ There are other problems with this typology. See Thomas Carothers’ excellent “The End of the Transition Paradigm”, **Journal of Democracy**, vol.13, no.1 (2002).

coercion (and they are sometimes unable to achieve even that). Governments in Type III have high or very high capacity to perform these roles, which makes them very different from Type I. But *like* those in Type I, they are highly centralised, and they tend to make their influence penetrate downward by pursuing control, cooptation, and rule by *diktat*, at times through coercion.

39 Governments that fall into Type II differ in crucial ways from both Types I and III. They have medium-to-high capacities to perform basic tasks. They are much more inclined towards decentralisation. They tend to make their influence penetrate downward by way of accommodation, by encouraging bottom-up processes and independent power centres.

40 Type II governments are also willing to share powers and resources with diverse interests within and especially *beyond* government – that is, with civil society. Type I governments are oblivious or hostile to civil society, and often seek to repress it. Those in Type II try to strengthen it, and to give it space in which to operate and the freedom to act autonomously. They may even seek genuine partnerships with CSOs. Those in Type III tend to be suspicious of civil society. They often attempt to contain, coopt, control and intimidate it.

Figure 2 – Types of Governments: Capacities and Postures

I. Low Capacity/Centralised	II. Medium-to-High Capacity/Accommodative	III. High Capacity/Centralised
Low or very low state capacity; inability to perform many key tasks, except the use of coercive power.	Medium or high state capacity; some or much emphasis on downward accountability and responsiveness.	High or very high state capacity, with strong top-down emphasis.
Often a high degree of centralisation; but since little institution-building has occurred; power tends to be personalised; little penetration of lower levels.	Less centralisation; some, and often much awareness that decentralisation improves regime legitimacy and developmental outcomes; substantial building of institutions (some autonomous); medium-to-strong capacity to penetrate lower levels.	High degree of centralisation, with substantial institution-building; but institutions mainly geared to top-down control and penetration of all levels, including local; power sometimes personalised.
Aspirations to control, but they are achieved only to a very limited extent.	Aspirations to yield some control, in order to gain legitimacy and improve developmental outcomes; middling to high achievement.	Aspiration to control all levels and power centres (except, in many cases, the private sector), and control is widely achieved.
Few (or almost no) roots in society due to state incapacity, serious organisational weakness of ruling party, and unwillingness to be responsive.	Middling or deep penetration of society via sharing of powers and funds, and via responsiveness to social groups; party organisations moderate-to-strong.	Deep downward penetration by government and strong party organisation gives solid roots in society; but their purpose is to coopt and control.
Suspicion and hostility towards independent power centres (autonomous institutions) within government.	Some or much encouragement to independent power centres within government – to autonomous institutions and elected lower-level bodies.	Suspicion and hostility towards independent power centres within government – towards autonomous institutions.
Oblivious or hostile towards civil society; often repressive.	Efforts to strengthen civil society, to permit it to operate autonomously, and to form partnerships with it.	Suspicion of civil society; attempts to contain, coopt, control and/or intimidate it.
Little clarity in definition and perception of development and poverty.	Define development and poverty in broad, multi-dimensional terms; see the need for empowerment; seek to tackle multiple aspects of poverty.	Define development and poverty – for the most part – economically; stress economic solutions.
Little legitimacy in the eyes of the populace.	Legitimacy based on openness and responsiveness, <u>plus</u> economic and developmental performance, including growth.	Legitimacy based on economic and development performance – mostly economically defined – with emphasis on growth.

41 The key point here is that pro-poor CSOs, and development practitioners who support them, are more likely to achieve successes under Type II governments. Governments in Types I and III create inhospitable conditions for Sida's emphases on openness, responsiveness, decentralisation, and the need to address poverty not just in economic terms (by way of growth) but also through efforts to empower ordinary people – especially the poor.²⁷ It is in terms of empowerment that successes are more likely under Type II governments – with 'successes' here meaning increased opportunities for poor people to influence the political and policy processes; and the enhancement of their awareness, self-confidence, organisational strength, political skills and wider connections.

42 To illustrate how this typology works, Figure 3 below locates a number of governments – some of which are Sida partners — within it.

Figure 3 – Countries' Location in the Typology

I. Low Capacity/Centralised	II. Medium-to-High Capacity/ Accommodative	III. High or Very High Capacity/ Centralised
Bangladesh Indonesia Zambia Zimbabwe Laos Nepal	India ²⁸ South Korea The Philippines Brazil Botswana	South Africa China Vietnam Malaysia

43 This typology, like all others, sets up ideal types. Figure 3 indicates the different degrees to which some governments conform to the ideal type. Two points are worth stressing here. First, some governments (especially in Type II) that favour reforms of political institutions which create opportunities for bottom-up influence are nevertheless suspicious of civil society. We encounter this surprisingly often in governments that undertake serious efforts at democratic decentralisation. They see elected councils at lower levels as legitimate because they are elected, but express doubts about CSOs because they are unelected. Second (as that first point suggests), some governments share most but not all of the characteristics of a single type. Notice that some countries in columns I and III are closer to column II than others. That is because they are more accommodative. Some governments might even be seen to *straddle* lines dividing column II from the other columns. The South African government, for example, falls into Type III in most respects. But it seeks to assist and empower ordinary people, not least the poor – a feature that we find in Type II. Thus far, however, its (largely unsuccessful) pursuit of

²⁷ In theory, a fourth type might exist – 'Low Capacity/Accommodative' governments. But in the 'real world', we find none. This is mainly because accommodation, when governments are prepared to pursue it with some consistency, tends to generate certain kinds of state capacity and in some cases – see examples later in the text – moves governments from Type I to Type II.

²⁸ Within India's federal system, state governments vary. Most fit into column II, as does the central government. But at least two major states (Bihar and Orissa) fit into column I, and one or possibly two major states (Andhra Pradesh and possibly West Bengal) fit into column III.

economic growth has caused it to impose such tight fiscal constraints upon itself that its ability to assist and empower people is seriously reduced. So it belongs mainly in Type III.

44 Also note that as we move from Type I to Type II and then III, we do not necessarily move from poor to rich countries. Rich OECD countries almost all fall within Type II. Indonesia, in Type I has higher per capita GDP than India in Type II. Vietnam in Type III has lower per capita GDP than South Korea in Type II.

45 Governments *sometimes move* from one category to another – and thus become more (or less) congenial to pro-poor CSOs and Sida’s approach to development. Ten years ago, Indonesia fit into Type III, but recent changes have moved it into Type I – which implies a degeneration of state capacity (although in certain ways, it has become more accommodative). But degeneration is not the only thing that happens. For example, over the last 20 years, Taiwan, South Korea and Brazil have moved from Type III to Type II — as those governments have become more accommodative and now qualify as legitimised, consolidated democracies. And witness the movement over the same period of the Philippines from Type I to Type II. As the movement of Indonesia from Type III to Type I suggests, Figure 2 would be more accurately represented by a cylindrical diagram in which the right- and left-hand edges of Figure 2 were joined. It is impossible to show that in a two-dimensional sketch, but the point should be clear.²⁹

46 One other thing is worth stressing. Accommodative governments in Type II have clearly done more to make the political and policy processes more open, accountable and responsive than governments in Types I and III. But hard evidence indicates that when governments in Types I and III make such constructive changes, they have much greater political and psychological impact than such changes in more open, accommodative systems. Evidence for this comes from recent efforts by the government in Mozambique (a Type I country) to decentralise powers to elected municipal councils.³⁰ Evidence also comes from two countries in Type III – Vietnam and China – where the governments have created, respectively, elected local ‘user committees’ to oversee certain development sectors, and elected village councils.³¹ In all of these cases, openings by governments were in such marked contrast to their mainly centralised approaches that their impact was dramatic – and very constructive.

47 Once a practitioner decides which type of government s/he is dealing with, s/he should look at each of the items in Column I, II or III to see if that government conforms to every one. There may be exceptions, and any exceptions will be important in developing a strategy. Most practitioners already know the answers to most of the questions implied here, but pulling them together systematically like this may be useful. This will obviously not tell practitioners everything that they need to know, but it will take them a long way.

²⁹ I am grateful to Lennart Nordstrom of Sida for making this point.

³⁰ These comments are based on the doctoral research of Fidelx Kulipossa at IDS, University of Sussex.

³¹ Communications from UNDP officials in Vietnam, and from social scientists in Beijing.

Civil society and social capital at different levels in political systems

48 The key issues surrounding civil society and poverty reduction are somewhat different at different levels in political systems, and this presents practitioners with different challenges and opportunities. At higher and lower levels, they encounter differences in (among other things) types and activities of CSOs, and the political and policy processes. That is why the next two parts of this Guide deal separately with ‘higher levels’ and the ‘local level’. The term ‘higher levels’ refers to the national level and higher sub-national levels such as provinces, states (in federal systems), districts, countries, etc. The term ‘local level’ refers to cities (or parts of cities such as ‘wards’), towns and villages.

49 The differences between levels will become fully apparent in Parts 2 and 3, but one illustration is appropriate here – to set the stage for what follows. There are important differences in the *kinds of social capital* that tend to be generated at higher levels and at the local level.

50 Let us define ‘social capital’ as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions”.³² Recent empirical studies show that it is harder for CSOs at *all* levels to generate *any* kind of ‘social capital’ than the literature on it suggests. Nevertheless, some ‘social capital’ is still produced, and it can help pro-poor CSOs to tackle poverty.

51 We need to consider two kinds of ‘social capital’:

- ‘*bonding*’ social capital – that which develops *within* relatively homogenous social groups, and
- ‘*bridging*’ social capital – that which develops *between* rather different social groups.³³

Both types of social capital can help to facilitate poverty reduction. But many writings on the subject concentrate *only* on its promise – and ignore a significant problem. A certain dissonance or tension exists between these two types of social capital, and they pull people in different directions. When ‘bonding’ social capital is generated, people within a homogeneous group focus on the things that unite them – which is to say, the things that make them *different from* other groups. When they develop a sense of solidarity around a distinctive identity, this often makes it more difficult for them to cooperate with other groups that are increasingly seen as aliens because they are different. In other words, it often makes it more difficult to generate ‘bridging’ social capital.

52 We can also turn the logic around. If bridges are built between different social groups, it can make it harder for individual groups to

³² R.D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993) p. 167.

³³ One writer describes ‘bridging’ social capital as that which helps to “span social gaps to mobilize cooperation among diverse stakeholders who cannot solve problems by themselves”. L.D. Brown, “Development Bridging Organizations and Strategic Management for Social Change”, IDR Reports, vol. 10, no. 3, under ‘publications’ on the following website: www.jsi.com/idr. The most important document on both types of social capital is D. Narayan, “Bonds and Bridges: Social Capital and Poverty” on the World Bank website at www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/library/narayan.pdf.

generate a sense of internal unity and solidarity ('bonding' social capital). This can happen, in part, because some members of the group may feel that others within it have made too many compromises with alien groups. When this occurs within *poorer* groups, it is especially damaging since they often badly need to bond, to develop a sense of collective strength and confidence in order to compete with prosperous groups.

53 There is another way in which 'bridging' social capital may injure poorer groups – and become self-defeating in the process. It is common in less developed countries for coalitions that include diverse interest groups to form around a shared purpose. They may want to change an unjust law or policy. Poorer groups (and pro-poor CSOs) may respond to an invitation to join these coalitions, even though the issue in question has little to do with the specific problems of the poor. They often do so because a victory for the coalition would serve the public good — and in the hope that the bridge-building which results will help win the support of non-poor groups later, when issues that concern the poor are at stake. But they often discover that this latter hope is dashed because non-poor groups turn out to be uninterested in issues that do not affect their own narrow interests. This inspires alienation within poorer groups, and ends up making 'bridging' (and indeed, further 'bonding') more, not less difficult in the future. (These issues are examined in more detail when we discuss 'coalitions' of CSOs in paragraphs 89-100 below.)

54 Development practitioners often (and rightly) seek to encourage the formation of both types of social capital. They see that 'bonding' social capital within poorer groups helps to empower them. And they see that bridges between such groups and non-poor groups are often necessary if poor people are to make gains. If the poor possess only one of these types of social capital but not the other, they face serious problems – so a balance between these two things is worth pursuing (although as we see in paragraph 57, at the local level the pursuit of 'bonding' is usually more important). But practitioners need to understand the tensions that often exist between the two.

55 It is also important to recognise a crucial difference in the process by which 'social capital' is generated at higher levels and at the local level. At *all* levels, it is usually easier to generate 'bonding' social capital than 'bridging' social capital. *But* it is easier to generate 'bridging' social capital at *higher* levels than at the *local* level.

56 This may create problems for practitioners, but it is also good news in one sense. 'Bridging' social capital is *more important at higher levels* in political systems, for two main reasons:

- i. because if pro-poor initiatives by governments (which are often crucial to poverty reduction) are to succeed, it is usually essential that coalitions support them to develop, especially at higher levels – and include both pro-poor and other non-poor groups/organisations; and
- ii. because such coalitions have more impact on policy and political processes at higher levels than at the local level, even though the effects of changes at higher levels are often felt at the grassroots.

57 At the local level, the things that poorer groups need mostly are the political awareness, skills, organisational strength, confidence, and the external connections (often meaning connections between non-poor individuals and groups) if they are to be empowered to compete more effectively with prosperous, high-status groups. The first three of these things develop when ‘bonding’ social capital is generated. Only the fourth thing – external connections – develops when ‘bridging’ social capital is generated. At the local level, the first three things outweigh the fourth in importance – unless severe conflicts between different social groups prevail within a specific locality, and damage the interests of the poor. So it is usually a more urgent priority to generate ‘bonds’ than ‘bridges’ at the local level – and ‘bonds’ are much easier to generate there than ‘bridges’.³⁴

58 We explore social capital further below, especially in paragraphs 81-85 and in the sections thereafter.

³⁴ The comments in paragraphs 55-57 are based on several of the case studies in the Ford Foundation’s ‘civil society and governance’ project, and on discussions with civil society and social capital specialists at Johns Hopkins University, the World Bank and the University of California, Berkeley in 2002.

Part 2: Civil Society at Higher Levels

Assessing the promise and limitations of civil society as a force for poverty reduction in a specific country

59 This may seem a difficult task for practitioners who are already overburdened. But (i) it is likely that they *already know* most of this, thanks to Sida's "country analyses", ³⁵ and (ii) they only need to develop *rough estimates*, not rigorous calculations, because they are partly considering the future which cannot be anticipated with precision.³⁶ These assessments are mainly about CSOs at *higher* levels, but they have implications for the *local* level too.

60 Practitioners need to estimate how large and vibrant civil society *in general* is in the country, and what roles CSOs mostly play. They then need to answer the following questions about *pro-poor* CSOs.

- How strong are pro-poor CSOs? How many of them exist? Are they large and well organised, and do they have much political influence?
- Where are they? Are they mostly at *higher* levels in the political system, or in *urban* areas, or in *certain regions* of the country?
- Are there strong (or any) links between pro-poor CSOs at higher levels, and between those higher-level organisations and pro-poor CSOs at the local level (see paragraphs 86-88 on 'networks' below)?
- Do higher-level CSOs use participatory techniques among the poor to ensure that their agendas do not simply replicate Northern priorities (see paragraphs 133-135 below)?
- What proportion of the poor in the country do they 'reach' (see paragraphs 29-33 above)?

³⁵ Dag Ehrenpreis describes the 'country analysis' as "the most important instrument and basic document for producing the country strategy". See his "Poverty Reduction in Swedish Development Cooperation" in A. Booth and P. Mosley (eds.) *The New Poverty Strategies: What Have They Achieved? What Have We Learned?* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003) p. 53. Similar analyses are conducted in many other international development agencies.

³⁶ Practitioners also have access to knowledgeable informants – in other development agencies, in CSOs, in academic institutions, and in government – who can assist in developing answers. They should also know of two major research projects which have done 'mapping' exercises on civil society in many less developed countries. These are the Ford Foundation's 'civil society and governance' project, with mapping exercises available at www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/index; and the printed mappings (working papers) done by the Johns Hopkins University project, contactable through Lester Salamon at lsalamon@jhunix.hcf.jhu.edu.

- What *types* of pro-poor CSOs predominate – membership-based, organisations without many (or any) poor people as members, lobbying organisations, professional/academic organisations, organisations are linked to traditional leaders/structures, etc.?
- Are labour unions, and professional and students' associations that have been potent pro-poor forces in some countries (i) in decline, (ii) focused on their (perhaps privileged) members interests, or (iii) controlled by government?
- Do pro-poor CSOs play many different roles (capacity building, asset creation, representation/lobbying, advocacy, service delivery), or do they concentrate mainly on one activity (often service delivery)?
- Do things other than pro-poor sentiment play a powerful role in uniting pro-poor CSOs – such as religion, language, ethnicity, geographical proximity, a desire for political reform, etc.?

61 Practitioners also need to make rough estimates of the strength and attitudes of *other* non-poor CSOs towards poor people and pro-poor CSOs.

- How many are potential *allies* of pro-poor CSOs – perhaps because they have joined coalitions with them in the past (see paragraphs 89-94 and 98-100 below)?
- How many are likely to remain *neutral* on poverty issues?
- How many are potential *opponents* of pro-poor CSOs because they defend hierarchy and privilege?
- How formidable are each of the three sets of CSOs listed above?

62 Practitioners also need to estimate the strength of connections between pro-poor and various non-poor CSOs (on the one hand) and government actors (on the other).

63 In thinking about all of this, practitioners will naturally recognise the damaging potential of any extreme contextual factors that may exist – especially: brutish, corrupt or immensely incapable governments, autocratic regional or local bosses, and severe social conflict between haves and have-nots or between 'ethnic' or other groups.

Interacting with governments – practitioners

64 We saw in Part 1 that governments greatly influence the size, composition and capabilities of civil society – for good or for ill. We also know that even governments that seek to help pro-poor CSOs to tackle poverty often fail to achieve much – because they lack capacity, or they face fiscal constraints, and ineptitude or resistance from some government actors. But governments still have a constructive role to play – indeed, when they work even somewhat well, they have clear advantages over CSOs. Governments have greater financial resources than do CSOs, and they reach far larger proportions of populations. Because of their greater (usually comprehensive) reach, governments are better able than CSOs to scale up from successes in one locality in efforts to replicate

them more generally. Governments (unlike CSOs) offer people a legal basis on which to organise to ensure that programmes deliver what they promise, so that government's anti-poverty programmes may be more effective at mobilising poor people around legal rights than initiatives by CSOs.³⁷ State failure is a familiar theme in the development literature, but in most countries *state potential has not been extinguished*. It therefore usually makes sense *both* for international development agencies, *and* for pro-poor CSOs, to interact with governments. Pro-poor CSOs — by challenging the power of governments, by assisting poor people to make demands of governments, and by pressing governments to respond to those demands and to permit more participation from below — can build the capacity not just of poor people but of governments.³⁸ We discuss practitioners' role in this section, and the role of pro-poor CSOs in the next section.

65 Practitioners from donor agencies need to encourage governments to take constructive action. Their dialogues with government actors almost always occur at higher (usually national) levels – hence the placement of this section in Part 2 – even though the impact of government actions are often felt mainly at the local level. (When practitioners are able to interact with powerful figures at the local level such as elected leaders, low-level bureaucrats, police officers, etc., efforts at that level are also plainly worth pursuing.) The emphasis throughout such dialogues should be upon how constructive action towards civil society serves the interests of government actors.³⁹ Practitioners can encourage governments to do a number of things.

- Adopt more sympathetic postures towards civil society in general and especially towards pro-poor CSOs.
- Make or strengthen commitments to freedom of association, speech and the media.
- Devolve significant powers and resources onto elected bodies at lower levels – *unless* there is evidence that elites at lower levels are more hostile to poor and socially excluded groups than are elites at higher levels (see paragraphs 124-128).
- Make provision for the representation of poor people (and possibly pro-poor CSOs⁴⁰) on those elected bodies (see again paragraphs 124-128).
- Ensure that poor people are represented on single-sector 'user committees', and give members of those committees significant influence over policy matters (see paragraphs 129-132).
- Establish participatory devices at lower levels, and/or welcome and learn from participatory devices which pro-poor CSOs develop (see paragraphs 133-35).

³⁷ A. Joshi and M. Moore, "Mobilising the Poor Effectively: Rights and Institutions" in A. Booth and P. Mosley (eds.) *The New Poverty Strategies: What Have They Achieved? What Have We Learned?* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003) pp. 205-22.

³⁸ M. Grindle, *Challenging the State: Crisis and Innovation in Latin America and Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), especially chapter eight; and J. Manor, "Democratisation with Inclusion: Political Reforms and People Participation at the Grassroots", draft chapter for the Human Development Report 2003 (UNDP, New York, 2003).

³⁹ The ways in which their interests are served are set out in detail in Manor, *ibid*.

⁴⁰ This has occurred in only a tiny number of countries – most notably Bolivia and the Philippines.

- Ensure that partnerships between government and pro-poor CSOs (for example, for service delivery) give genuine influence to CSOs and are not intended to coopt and control them (see paragraphs 98-99 and 139-141).
- Press bureaucrats at lower levels to deal sympathetically and responsively with poor people and pro-poor CSOs (see paragraphs 122-123).

66 It may be hard to persuade governments — especially but not only Type I and III governments — to do these things. It usually (but not always) makes sense for practitioners to stress not *huge* reforms, but small, *incremental* changes — and most of the items in the list above entail incremental change — if governments are to be won over. And incremental changes are also, of course, easier to implement.

67 This writer has presented arguments elsewhere that may persuade government actors that such changes are *in their interests* — something that is almost always truer than they think it is.⁴¹ One key point, which is often quite compelling to powerful government figures, is worth stressing. The thing that politicians usually hate most is to be *boring*. They want to appear adventurous or, if possible, heroic. But in this era of tight fiscal constraints, they are largely unable to introduce expensive new programmes that look adventurous. The items in the list just above offer them a way out of this problem. These actions can be publicised in ways that make politicians appear adventurous and become more popular, but none requires much (or in some cases, any) new spending.

68 It is also worth stressing that while Type I and III governments are usually more reluctant to take such actions, their interests are always *more powerfully served* by them than are those in Type II. That is because (as we have seen) when Type I and III governments take such actions, the psychological, political and developmental impacts of the changes are greater than under Type II governments which have done many of these things already. So it is worth interacting with *all* types of governments.

69 When practitioners try to persuade government actors to make such changes, two other things may help. First, it is often useful to point to the benefits that similar governments in other less developed countries gained when they made such changes.⁴² The idea for change therefore comes not from a European but from people like the government actors themselves. (It is unwise, however, to use examples from countries which are viewed as rivals or with hostility by those actors.) Second, in trying to persuade government actors to look more sympathetically on civil society, practitioners can stress their own positive experiences with CSOs — especially pro-poor CSOs — and the constructive work that such CSOs have done.

70 Finally, when practitioners seek to persuade governments to make pro-poor changes (and when they seek to encourage non-poor CSOs to join pro-poor groups in coalitions on pro-poor issues — discussed in paragraphs 89-100), it makes sense to pay attention to certain elite

⁴¹ Manor, "Democratisation with Inclusion...."

⁴² For example, see *ibid.*

perceptions of poverty and poor people. (These perceptions exist within elites inside and outside governments.) Some elite perceptions lend themselves to pro-poor changes. For example, in many countries it is widely agreed that in this information age, future prosperity depends on a strong education system. This can be stressed when mounting efforts to deliver basic education to all citizens – a policy from which the poor will gain disproportionately.

71 Other perceptions are less helpful and need to be challenged. Elites often underestimate the breadth and depth of poverty in their countries – classic examples (noted earlier) are widespread failures to see *rural* poverty and poverty among *women* as serious problems. These can be tackled by publicising evidence on the seriousness and the extent of poverty in these sectors. Also, elites sometimes believe (wrongly) that poverty does not threaten them. Here, practitioners can point to evidence to show that (for example) certain communicable diseases which are bred by poverty – often, tuberculosis — pose real threats to *all* social groups.

Interacting with government – pro-poor CSOs

72 It also usually makes sense for pro-poor CSOs to interact with governments. But we need to stress the word “usually” here. Sometimes, governments that fall into Type I in Figure 2 are so utterly incapable, or governments that fall into Types I or III create such hostile environments for CSOs, that it is unfair or even dangerous to urge them to do this. And even when that is not true, practitioners should respect the wishes of some CSOs to remain entirely aloof from government. Such organisations often do valuable work, especially advocacy – and may deserve support to strengthen their capacity, their links to other pro-poor CSOs, etc. In deciding whether to urge CSOs to interact with governments, *timing* is also important. Even Type II governments which have recently experienced shocks, or which face unusually severe short-term crises, are often best left alone for a while.

73 But to repeat, it *usually* makes sense for CSOs seek to interact with governments. Those interactions can be (and in many cases should *mainly* be) a little *distant* – for example, lobbying, petitioning, demonstrations of support or of protest, etc. – so that they do not compromise CSO autonomy. Or interactions may be *close* – for example, partnerships for service delivery (but see the dangers that this may pose in paragraphs 139-141 below.)

74 When practitioners decide that it is both safe and advisable for pro-poor CSOs to engage with governments, they should encourage them to seek out *sympathetic* government actors. They may be able to tell CSOs who some of those actors are. Governments are, of course, not monolithic – and practitioners may have more knowledge than CSOs of certain individuals within governments who are especially open, imaginative, responsive and pro-poor.⁴³

⁴³ Recent empirical studies of civil society and social capital confirm this point. See for example, A. Bebbington, A. Kopp and D. Rubinoff, “From Chaos to Strength?: Social Capital, Rural People’s Organizations and Sustainable Rural Development” on the World Bank website at www.worldbank.org/library/view/6303/.

75 The utility of reaching out to such people in government may be more obvious to practitioners than to people in pro-poor CSOs. The latter may have had unpleasant encounters with officials, and they may (often with good reason) view government as predatory and brutish. Their views need to be respected, but it may still be worth encouraging them to communicate – if only experimentally – with sympathetic officials. Practitioners might even act as intermediaries or, at a minimum, explain to CSO activists how such officials might best be approached and cultivated.

Specific conditions that impede constructive change by governments

76 In their dealings with governments, both practitioners and pro-poor CSOs need to be aware of three conditions which make many governments reluctant to open up policy processes and become more responsive to pro-poor CSOs, to poor (or any) people, or to participation from below.

77 *When change is sought in sectors that yield significant financial resources to governments and/or government actors, and/or powerful private interests.* Governments often gain substantial revenues from taxation in certain sectors – for example, forestry, through the sale of forest products or taxes on logging. And it is well known that private interests frequently profit massively from logging – often pursued illegally in concert with corrupt governments or their officials. In such circumstances, government actors are exceedingly reluctant to make changes that curtail their traditional revenues or profits. Top-down approaches often to survive as a result.

78 *When sectors are technologically or technocratically complex.* Government actors often fear that if they open such sectors up, they will yield decision-making power to people without the sophistication to understand and manage them properly. They are likely, for example, to be more reluctant to open up the management of watersheds (a complex sector) than the comparative simple business of grasslands management.⁴⁴

79 *When government employees have traditionally played a policing/enforcing role.* This arises only in certain sectors – forestry is again a classic example. Members of government forest services have often had an adversarial relationship with ordinary people. They have been responsible for preventing citizens from intruding into forests and taking away forest products to use as fuel, fodder, etc. When they are pressed to develop partnerships with (usually poor) local residents or pro-poor CSOs who work with them, they find it difficult to make the transition to responsive behaviour.

80 It may be advisable for practitioners and pro-poor CSOs to focus their efforts on sectors where these three problems do not arise – or at least to *begin* working in such sectors, in order to develop the momentum of constructive change. Sectors which are affected by these difficulties are often crucial to the well being of poor people, and therefore hard to ignore for very long. But it can be tactically unwise to plunge straight into them.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Robin Mearns for this point.

Three products of 'bridging' social capital

81 The creation of 'bridging' social capital (see paragraphs 48–58 above) can produce diverse results, which have different implications for poor people and pro-poor CSOs. We must consider three possibilities.

- Networks of pro-poor CSOs – which tend to be fairly tightly integrated and focused on pro-poor issues
- Coalitions of CSOs – including either pro-poor plus *other* CSOs, or only the latter – and which are usually more loosely integrated
- Social movements

82 The line between the second and third items above is blurred. Social movements are coalitions of CSOs which have acquired such *fervour* and *force* that the word 'coalition' is too mild to describe them. Social movements – especially in Latin America – *often* include poor people and pro-poor CSOs, and they *sometimes* focus on pro-poor issues. But some social movements do *neither* of these things. Latin American examples – not least, Brazil – have persuaded some analysts that social movements offer great promise for poor people right across the developing world. But some social movements are irrelevant to the poor, or even threatens their interests. The most potent social movement in South Asia today is arguably India's *sangh parivar* – a 'family' of Hindu nationalist organisations, most of which preach hysteria and practice violence against minorities. Other social movements elsewhere offer poor people damaging distractions rather than assistance. Some sub-Saharan Africa specialists believe that, since South Africa's United Democratic Movement helped to overturn *apartheid*, no progressive social movement has existed in that continent.

83 A practitioner may find that, in the country where s/he works, a social movement exists or might be created which can serve pro-poor purposes quite well. If so, the movement – or pro-poor CSOs linked to it – deserve support. But s/he must analyse the situation carefully, because in many countries, this will not be true.

84 The first two items in the list above are potentially important in more countries than are social movements. Sida and similar agencies often have limited numbers of staff available within a less developed country, and this imposes tight constraints on the number of CSOs that practitioners can work with directly. So practitioners often (and understandably) prefer to work with (i) large (often national-level) non-governmental associations that claim to have constructed *networks* of pro-poor CSOs which reach down to the local level, and/or with (ii) *coalitions* of CSOs. Coalitions are more internally diverse than networks of pro-poor organisations. They often contain both pro-poor and *other* CSOs that are not especially (or at all) concerned with poor people – or they may exclude pro-poor CSOs altogether.

85 Practitioners need to decide – on the basis of the comparative promise of networks and coalitions in a specific country – whether to

work with just one of these social formations or both – and if both, whether to stress one over the other. If neither appears promising, it is usually wise to support network-building.

Networks of pro-poor CSOs

86 Let us first consider networks (coalitions are examined at length below). The claims of large, national-level CSOs to have constructed networks of pro-poor CSOs reaching down to the local level are usually exaggerated. Sometimes they are almost entirely fictional. Different development specialists offer different views on the seriousness of this problem. World Bank staff argue, for example, that effective networks of this kind exist in only one Latin American country (Brazil), in none in Africa, and in only three in Asia (the Philippines, India and Bangladesh). Ford Foundation staff are more optimistic about the potential of such networks, but their list of countries is not much longer than the World Bank's.⁴⁵ So practitioners need to be sceptical of claims by large national CSOs to have built such networks.⁴⁶

87 In those few countries where effective networks exist, they take rather different forms. In India, the best of them is a federation of pro-poor CSOs in various states — all of which are 'generalist' in nature, in that they seek to assist poor people on a diversity of fronts. Each coordinates and supports a sub-network of pro-poor CSOs within its state, some of which are 'generalist' while others pursue specialised tasks.⁴⁷ In Bangladesh, large, formidable national-level CSOs tend to maintain their own sub-units across much of the country.⁴⁸ In the Philippines, we find national confederations of CSOs, several of which are specialised — offering legal advice, technical advice on development, capacity-building programmes, etc., to grassroots CSOs.⁴⁹ But whatever form they take, they offer practitioners major opportunities.

88 *But* we do not find effective networks in *most* less developed countries. Large CSOs often claim to have constructed them, since this enhances their chances of receiving grants, but the claims are commonly overstated. Practitioners need to examine such claims carefully. If they discover that they are inflated, there may still be a strong case for working with these organisations — although the emphasis should fall on the *construction* of networks that are *said* to exist already. Sida practitioners may find it useful to collaborate in this with other development agencies that also work with those organisations. (The Ford Foundation is arguably the most sophisticated in this field.)

⁴⁵ These comments are based on consultations with World Bank and Ford Foundation staff members in mid-2002.

⁴⁶ In some countries, one or two powerful Christian denominations may have networks of churches that reach large proportions of the population. Churches are voluntary associations, but these networks seldom qualify as pro-poor agencies. They often contain substantial conservative and prosperous interests. These churches may have special agencies which seek social justice, and those agencies may qualify, but their claims that their organisations penetrate down into many regions and localities need to be carefully examined.

⁴⁷ See J.Manor, Report to Sida, New Delhi on the work of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) to support democratic decentralisation in India (2002).

⁴⁸ This writer worked extensively with one of these — Proshika — in 1993.

⁴⁹ I am grateful to Gary Hawes of the Ford Foundation for information on the Philippines.

Coalitions of pro-poor and *other* CSOs

89 Let us now turn from reasonably tight *networks* of CSOs which share a common pro-poor focus, to more diverse and more loosely integrated *coalitions* of CSOs which contain *both* pro-poor CSOs *and* others that have little concern for poor people.

90 It is often necessary to assemble such coalitions in order to achieve change – because the opponents of change in society are so strong, and governments are so disinclined to change that broad-based pressure is required. Crucially, when *centrist* governments hold power (as they do in most less developed countries today) and undertake pro-poor initiatives, such coalitions are *almost always essential* to the successful outcomes.⁵⁰ But such diverse coalitions can also pose serious problems for poor people and pro-poor CSOs.

91 If such coalitions exist, practitioners need to ask what their aims are. They may seek changes that will benefit civil society in general – for example, constitutional or legal reforms, or more open, accountable and responsive governance. This may justify support from practitioners, but they must beware of three potentially serious problems.

92 First, such coalitions may pull in pro-poor CSOs to increase pressure for change, but give them little influence. If they achieve reforms that create greater space for civil society, CSOs representing prosperous groups may seize that space and use it to the disadvantage of poor people and pro-poor CSOs.

93 Second, when pro-poor CSOs join such coalitions, they often have to *postpone* efforts to campaign on poverty issues. They often do so in the hope of future support on anti-poverty issues from *other* CSOs, but delays can be costly.

94 Third, when pro-poor CSOs later seek help from *other* CSOs to tackle poverty, their old allies may decline to assist. This can cause damaging disillusionment among poor people and within pro-poor CSOs. Those unhelpful allies may even include labour unions and other organisations which we expect to be progressive, but which focus too exclusively on the interests of their (often non-poor) members to support poor people.

95 If any of these things is true, practitioners need to ask whether support to such mixed coalitions is wise. Pro-poor CSOs within them may well be worth supporting.

If coalitions *exclude* pro-poor CSOs

96 Sometimes coalitions consist entirely of non-poor CSOs and *exclude* pro-poor CSOs. Since Sida seeks to strengthen civil society in general, it may be tempting to support them. But practitioners must ask whether this is consistent with a commitment to reduce poverty.

⁵⁰ In very rare cases — when political leaders design pro-poor programmes that do not excite resistance from prosperous groups, or when CSOs (including those that represent prosperous interests) is seriously under-developed — such coalitions may not be necessary.

97 Sometimes such exclusive coalitions *damage* the interests of the poor. Often, they do little or nothing for poor people, but place pro-poor CSOs at a greater relative disadvantage. In *either* case, support for pro-poor CSOs is a better option.

Coalitions of CSOs to support governments' pro-poor initiatives

98 Centrist governments (which hold power in nearly all less developed countries today) sometimes develop pro-poor initiatives — out of conviction, or to achieve popularity among poorer voters who have great numerical strength. If pro-poor initiatives are to succeed politically in the teeth of opposition from prosperous interests, it is *almost always essential* that they be supported by coalitions that include *both* poor and some non-poor interest groups — a term that implies both CSOs (*voluntary* organisations) and other groups.

99 Practitioners should therefore stress to pro-poor CSOs the critical importance of such broad coalitions. They should urge those CSOs to join such coalitions — and to strike a balance between efforts to maximise the pro-poor impact of government initiatives and restraint/diplomacy to keep non-poor groups within supportive coalitions. Pro-poor CSOs need to recognise the political utility (to them) of advantages that non-poor groups may derive from such government initiatives. In some cases, it may be helpful — *before* governments undertake such initiatives — for pro-poor CSOs to signal their willingness to provide support for them, and to deal diplomatically with non-poor groups in order to maximise support.

Coalitions must strike *balances* between competing 'goods'

100 A number of dilemmas confront potentially constructive coalitions of CSOs. They often need to strike balances between pairs of 'goods' — that is, desirable things — which are in conflict with one another. Practitioners should be sensitive to these dilemmas, and possibly intervene gently if they see dangerous *imbalances* emerging.⁵¹ Coalitions need to strike balances between the following sets of 'goods'.

- *Between effective decision-making and accountability.* Coalitions need to make decisions quickly and change tactics and bargaining positions in response to frequent changes by government actors and others. But they also need to consult the people and organisations that they represent, to maintain accountability.

The two things often come into conflict. That conflict may be severe or modest. It can be made less severe if coalitions develop mechanisms both for swift, coordinated decision-making, *and* for consultation with their constituents. Donors may encourage coalitions to put both things in place at an early stage, but coalitions often find this

⁵¹ This discussion is based on an important study of the Philippines, where recent governments have been quite sympathetic towards civil society, and where civil society is especially vibrant. But the study's insights also apply to countries where greater problems exist. V. Miller, "NGO and Grassroots Policy Influence: What is Success", IDR Reports, vol.11, no. 5 (1994) available on the web at: www.jsi.com/idr/web%20reports/html/11-5.html. Despite its title, the main importance of that paper for this Guide is for higher levels in political systems.

difficult to do. One useful goal here is the development of effective procedures for communicating changes of approach to those whom coalitions represent.⁵²

- *Between messages that appeal to different elements within the coalition.* Coalitions are diverse, so campaign issues need to be framed in ways that appeal to different interests within them. To ensure strong grassroots support, messages should address the immediate concerns of poor people. But too much emphasis on these things may obscure larger issues of policy and principle which are important in their own right, and which are essential to maintain broad support for a campaign. Attempts to balance different concerns can undermine the clarity of messages that coalitions send – and clarity is sometimes crucial in focusing pressure for change.

Tensions sometimes develop between the agendas of westernised groups at the national (or even the international) level and the agendas of poorer folk at the local level. This is a classic problem in women's movements, but not only there. There is no easy solution to this dilemma. But practitioners need to be sensitive to it, and to encourage coalitions to do the same. They must take special care to avoid emphasising an international agenda too strongly.

- *Between messages that appeal (i) to coalition members and (ii) to external actors.* Coalitions need to send messages to their members to show them that their concerns are taken seriously. But there is often a tension between this and messages that they must send to external actors outside the coalition. They need to send messages to potential allies who may assist them. And they must often send messages to governments and to their opponents within society, to persuade them to make concessions. This is a delicate, subtle business.
- *Between the use of technical expertise by high-level professionals and the empowerment of grassroots organisations.* Coalitions often succeed because high-level professionals in large CSOs (lawyers, publicists, lobbyists, etc.) bring their expertise to bear. But this may not empower organisations at the local level – indeed, they may feel disempowered, which can discourage them from further efforts. It is therefore important that those with expertise explain technical issues to representatives of grassroots CSOs, and give them some voice in coalition decision-making – in order to achieve balance. This builds technical sophistication among leaders (and even members) of local organisations, and builds their capacity. It also strengthens links between the apex and the base within coalitions.
- *Between narrow and broad objectives* Campaigns may focus on small, incremental gains or on sweeping changes that will transform policies and basic structures – or on both. The former are easier to achieve,

⁵² This is a slightly more academic point, but it sometimes has practical importance. In some cases, vibrant civil societies (and coalitions that develop within them) have been less effective in persuading governments to make constructive changes than less vibrant civil societies have been. This can occur when such a huge diversity of lively CSOs are present that it becomes impossible to develop the kind of solidarity and unity among many of them that is needed to get an obdurate government to respond. In other words, vibrance and effectiveness – each of which can be described as a 'good' – may be at odds with one another, some of the time.

but may be too limited. (If they are stressed, it makes sense to concentrate on changes that may trigger broader transformations.) Choices need to be based on estimates of how much change is realistically possible.

- *Between short-term gains and long-term goals.* This is similar to the previous point. There is often tension between immediate gains and longer-term objectives. Opponents of coalitions may make short-term concessions to defuse a campaign, in the hope that people will abandon their struggle once minor victories have been won. Coalitions leaders must be alert to this and have pragmatic plans to accept only some of the gains that they seek. They need to concentrate on immediate gains which are *strategically important*, so that they inspire long-term enthusiasm among potential members of CSOs. (This may mean changes in processes or laws which will provide CSOs with mechanisms that they can use to hold prosperous groups and/or the government to account.) Otherwise, when people relax, governments or other opponents of coalitions may go back on their commitments.
- *Between autonomy and cooperation, once victories are won.* When a coalition wins a victory in an encounter with a government, there is a danger that some of the organisations within it may be drawn into a cooperative relationship with that government which limits their freedom. They may become reluctant to engage in critical advocacy, lest they alienate key government actors. They may even become coopted and controlled – an especially serious danger when governments offer contracts for service delivery (see paragraphs 139-141). This can create damaging divisions within the coalition and within civil society more generally – especially if some organisations in the coalition are intensely anxious about cooptation. The need for balance between autonomy and cooperation is critically important. (Indeed, pro-poor CSOs may even lose autonomy by joining coalitions in the first place.)
- *Between gains for large, high-level CSOs and for grassroots organisations.* Sometimes the concessions which coalitions' opponents or governments offer benefit large CSOs that operate at higher levels or grassroots groups, but *not both*. It is common for the former to gain more than the latter. This is dangerous, since it can alienate people at the local level. Practitioners and leaders of large CSOs who often dominate coalitions, need to be acutely aware of the need for balance here.
- *Between efforts to change conditions/policies, and the strengthening of the solidarity/capacity of CSOs/coalitions.* Coalition leaders sometimes find that if they compromise too much in order to achieve a change in (for example) government policy, they inspire disillusionment within elements of their coalition. If they value capacity-building and solidarity within the coalition, or within individual CSOs, they may decide not to make such compromises. When campaigns largely fail to change conditions and policies — and empirical research shows that they often do — the gains made in capacity building may offer some compensation.

If support for pro-poor networks or coalitions is politically sensitive

101 Networks of pro-poor CSOs are *always* worth supporting. Coalitions of CSOs are worth supporting *if* they benefit poor people. *But* such support is sometimes politically sensitive under Type I and III governments. This is especially true when coalitions mount tough challenges to governments or begin to look like social movements.

102 As most practitioners understand, there are ways to provide support that are comparatively uncontroversial. They can, for example, produce useful results without rustling government feathers by pressing governments to ensure that information about official programmes passes down through the system as effectively as it is supposed to do. Support can (and perhaps should) go to specific (and less controversial) CSOs within coalitions rather than to (the often more controversial) coalitions in general. Some CSOs are easier to support because they adopt apparently more moderate postures towards government than others – even though their aims may be quite radical. In India, Sida rightly supports both types of CSOs,⁵³ but under less accommodative governments, it may be necessary to confine aid to more moderate CSOs.

103 Certain types of support to either type of CSO can be said to conform to governments' stated aims and policies – even if government actions contradict their statements. This can provide practitioners with a justification. They may also find that aid to activities conducted at *lower* levels in the political system is less controversial than at higher levels.

Estimating the impact of efforts by pro-poor CSOs

104 Practitioners need to estimate the results of pro-poor efforts by CSOs. (The word 'estimate' here is more appropriate than 'measure' because precise measurements of such things are almost impossible.) To estimate results, practitioners need to ask how significant the gains (if any) were on three overlapping fronts.⁵⁴

- *Law and policy:* Have changes in law, policy or procedure (including the introduction of new participatory or consultative mechanisms to promote government accountability and bottom-up input into the political and policy processes) occurred? Do they give poor people and/or pro-poor CSOs (large and small) greater political influence and access to opportunities?
- *Democracy:* Have changes given pro-poor CSOs greater space in which to operate, greater freedom, and more acceptance by politicians and bureaucrats, by elites outside government?
- *The capacity of civil society:* Have pro-poor CSOs become more capable of performing important tasks (strategizing, recruiting, decision-making, innovations, service delivery, advocacy, lobbying, negotiating, etc.)? Have they acquired new members, and greater legitimacy in the eyes of members? Have they become more internally democratic

⁵³ This comment is based on work with the New Delhi office of Sida in 2002.

⁵⁴ This discussion again adapts material in Miller's "NGO and Grassroots Policy Influence...", pp. 23-24.

and accountable? Have the organisations and/or poor people developed more political awareness and skills, greater self-confidence, and more connections to influential people within government, in other CSOs, and in society more generally?

Pro-poor CSOs – important informants of practitioners and governments

105 This Guide often refers to things that practitioners need to find out, but how can they do this? Research by various development agencies (and sometimes by governments), and commissioned studies by social scientists or participatory specialists can help. So can Sida's own investigative procedures.⁵⁵ But these approaches have their limitations, especially in obtaining the views of poor people themselves which Sida rightly stresses. Pro-poor CSOs are often the best sources of such information, since they usually have ties to and the trust of poor people — especially if they have the capacity to conduct surveys and/or participatory appraisals, or to organise focus groups. As we saw above, practitioners need to investigate claims by pro-poor CSOs at higher levels that they have extensive links to poor people at the grassroots, and that they actually possess information-gathering capacity. They often exaggerate — which may mean that when they claim to speak for the poor, they are actually voicing their own concerns. If their capacity to gather information is weak, practitioners should seek to build it.

106 If pro-poor CSOs possess or eventually develop information gathering capacity, they can provide extremely useful insights on several fronts. If they are prepared to learn from objective analyses, they can help to assess impacts discussed in the previous section. Sida has also long recognised that it is important to look beyond poorer groups that have *already* been marginalised or have lost their traditional livelihoods — to other groups which are in danger of suffering the same fate.⁵⁶ Pro-poor CSOs can help to anticipate these trends, and they can provide useful intelligence on other problems (actual and potential) of the poor.

107 *Governments* can also gain useful insights from pro-poor CSOs, although many (especially but not only Type I and III governments) need to be persuaded of this. Practitioners from Sida and similar agencies are often well placed both to stress this to government actors and to foster consultations between those actors and pro-poor CSOs. Some governments have gone so far as to commission reports from CSOs that excel at information-gathering — because they see that it is *in their interests*.⁵⁷

Making the numerical strength of poor people count

108 Early in this Guide, we noted that it is unwise to define 'the poor' in any country as those people who fall into the lowest decile or quintile in terms of per capita income. In many less developed countries — those

⁵⁵ See for example, Sida, GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATION..., p.2.

⁵⁶ D. Ehrenpreis, Poverty Reduction in Swedish Assistance: Policy and Practice, Working Paper 6, Task Force on Poverty Reduction (Sida, Stockholm, 1996) section 3.

⁵⁷ For example, Bangalore municipality in India has commissioned 'report cards' on service delivery from a CSO, the Public Affairs Centre.

with very low GDP per capital, and those with high levels of inequality — far more than 10% or 20% of the population qualify as ‘poor’. This is in most ways bad news, since large numbers of people suffer deprivation. But it is, in one sense, good news — since ‘the poor’ possess great numerical strength.

109 That matters little in countries governed by autocratic regimes. But most less developed countries are now — to some degree — democratised. This opens up the possibility that poor people can make their numerical strength *count* in the selection of governments and leaders at all levels, and thus acquire greater influence over and benefits from the political and policy processes.

110 How might this happen? One important way is to persuade power holders and aspiring leaders — who are usually members of prosperous, high status groups — to *compete* for the votes of poor people. To attract their votes, leaders need to offer poor people something. At first, they tend to offer mere rhetoric and promises, which may turn out to be empty. But over time — as poor people become adept at recognising and rejecting such tokenism, and as multiple aspiring leaders and parties begin to compete — votes will tend to go to those who deliver real substance to the poor. This is something that politicians (even near the local level, but also higher up) learn naturally and instinctively — mainly from electoral defeats, a very vivid experience for them. But as we see in paragraphs 111 and 112 below, activists within pro-poor CSOs and even practitioners from agencies like Sida can speed up the learning process.

111 Pro-poor CSOs are well placed to encourage this kind of competition for the support of the poor. They can work to inform poor people of the promises of different politicians and parties, and about the likelihood that they will be fulfilled. They can explain to the poor that their votes may give them political leverage. Once elections have taken place they can then lobby elected leaders to deliver on their promises. They can help to organise public demonstrations of support when leaders and parties respond, or of protest when they do not. This can, over time, make the votes of the poor count, to some degree at least. (These things can happen both at higher levels in the political system and — when democratic decentralisation has occurred — at the local level.)

112 Practitioners can encourage pro-poor CSOs to undertake work in this vein, and support them when they do so. They can also stress the numerical strength of the poor in their own conversations with government actors. This may be difficult in countries where governments (especially those that fall into Types I and III) are highly sensitive to political interference. But even there, practitioners can make an impact if they proceed carefully and delicately. They are, after all, only seeking to deepen the democratic process — to which most governments proclaim a commitment.

Part 3: Civil Society at the Local Level

113 We saw in Part 2 that the number of Sida practitioners in any country is often rather limited, so that to have a broad impact at higher levels, it is useful to work with pro-poor CSOs. This is even more true at the local level. The number of local arenas is huge, they are widely dispersed, and it is often in the remote arenas that poverty is most severe.

114 Practitioners can do much, directly, at higher levels to encourage policy change by governments and to strengthen high-level pro-poor CSOs. But to reach local arenas, they must mainly act indirectly, usually through higher-level CSO networks or coalitions. Networks are especially important here. The accuracy of claims by pro-poor CSOs at high levels to have vertical links to similar CSOs at intermediate and local levels is a crucial issue here. If practitioners have doubts about them, they should support CSO efforts to strengthen vertical links. They can encourage CSOs to pursue this by stressing that not only their impact at lower levels but their credibility at higher levels will be strengthened if they have firm links to pro-poor CSOs at lower levels.

115 Practitioners can also, of course, influence events at the local level (again indirectly) by encouraging *governments* to adopt approaches that will be helpful to poor people and pro-poor CSOs operating at the grassroots. The three types of governments matter a little less at local than at higher levels, but they still matter. Type II and Type III governments usually make their influence penetrate into or at least near local arenas, but in *different ways* – mainly through accommodation in the first case, and more by top-down means in the second. And the fact that Type I governments often *fail* to penetrate is also significant – what does *not* happen is as important as what does.

116 We saw (briefly) in Part 2 that variations between regions of a country are often important for practitioners' efforts at higher levels. They are even more important when deciding how to assist pro-poor CSOs working at the local level – because local dynamics may differ greatly from region to region. Local-level CSOs involving poor people may be much less evident, and much less well connected to pro-poor CSOs at higher levels, in some regions than in others. Inequality, severe poverty, social conflict, scarcities of natural resources, etc., may be more marked in certain regions. These kinds of things need some investigation by practitioners.

Social capital at the grassroots

117 We saw earlier that civil society finds it more difficult to generate social capital than most of the literature suggests. This problem is usually more acute at the local level than higher up. The main need, initially, of poor people at the grassroots is ‘bonding’ social capital among themselves – since it will help them to acquire some security, self-confidence and possibly some influence. And as we saw, ‘bonding’ social capital is usually more readily generated at the local level than is ‘bridging’ social capital. But groups of poor people also need some of the latter, lest they become dangerously isolated or caught up in serious conflict with other tightly bonded groups. Some ‘bridges’ can sometimes be built to other social groups within their localities. But the most useful kind of ‘bridges’ are those that link them to individuals and groups *beyond* their locality – to similarly poor groups elsewhere, to pro-poor CSOs reaching down to the local level from above, and perhaps to enlightened government actors just above that level.

118 The best agencies to assist in generating such ‘bridges’ are precisely those pro-poor CSOs. They should be encouraged and supported by practitioners to send activists into localities who can bolster solidarity among and the capacity of poor people’s groups or CSOs (that is, reinforce ‘bonding’) — while at the same time building ‘bridges’ to any wider CSO networks that exist, to groups of poor people elsewhere, and possibly to government actors beyond the locality. This can be extremely important in avoiding the dangers that may arise when *only* ‘bonding’ takes place.

119 Let us now consider several more specific issues in some detail.

Stress efforts to reach poor women at the grassroots

120 Recent empirical studies indicate that attempts by pro-poor CSOs to assist poor women are especially deserving of support. Swedish aid has emphasised this from its inception — for longer than most similar agencies⁵⁸ — but there is a good case for *even more* effort in this vein. This is true not just because poor women are often worse off than men — although they are. Recent research also shows that efforts to assist women often have a particularly potent impact, not least because women are usually the gatekeepers between households and important services. This is especially of health care, but also of basic education and programmes to improve nutrition and sanitation. And as Sida recognised at an early stage, women are also often not just food producers, but also (potentially or actually) important economic actors.

121 The roles of women of course vary from society to society, and this needs to be considered in designing strategies to assist them. But efforts by pro-poor CSOs to enhance the capacity of poor women to create and use assets, to acquire and exercise influence in the public

⁵⁸ Ehrenpreis, Poverty Reduction in....

⁵⁹ See P. Collier, Social Capital and Poverty, Social Capital Initiative Working Paper No. 4 (The World Bank, Washington, 1998) p. 24; and K. Burger, P. Collier and J.W. Gruning, "Social Learning: An Application to Kenyan Agriculture", mimeo, Free University, Amsterdam, 1998.

sphere, and to obtain adequate information about economic and policy matters (an underestimated need⁵⁹) are even more worthy of donor support than at present.⁶⁰

Tackling destructive actions by low-level government actors

122 Pro-poor initiatives that originate at higher levels within governments often fail to produce results at the local level because low-level government actors – usually bureaucrats – refuse to implement them or drag their feet. This is especially likely under Type I (and, to a lesser extent, under Type III) governments, but it can happen anywhere.

123 National networks linking pro-poor CSOs at higher levels with local-level CSOs can help practitioners to discover when and where this is occurring. Such networks can help to persuade high-level government actors to address such non-compliance by transmitting evidence from poor people at the grassroots to those actors. Practitioners and high-level CSOs atop networks can also lobby with higher authorities to press low-level government actors to change their ways. Practitioners are often better placed than CSO networks to do this. Several approaches are available to higher authorities to produce results among low-level bureaucrats – they entail both carrots and sticks.⁶¹ Action on this front can often make a significant difference for poor people at the local level.

Democratic decentralisation and pro-poor CSOs

124 When we consider poverty reduction and the devolution of powers and resources to elected, multi-purpose local councils, we encounter wildly optimistic and pessimistic views similar to those that are held about the promise of civil society. The head of one European development agency (not Sida) in New Delhi recently told this writer that democratic decentralisation was the main weapon in his anti-poverty arsenal. And yet the head of the governance team at another agency in Europe has decided that democratic decentralisation always damages the poor, so he is dead against it.

125 Extremists of both kinds are mistaken. Democratic decentralisation has a mixed record. Its impact on poverty is sometimes more or less neutral. In some countries – especially those where local-level elites are more hostile to the poor than elites at higher levels – it undermines poverty reduction by empowering arenas dominated by those hostile elites. But sometimes (especially under Type I governments) high-level elites are immensely corrupt and brutish, or (under some Type III governments) so inclined towards top-down *diktat*, that even modest openings for elected local councils can produce less damaging results for poor (and non-poor) people. In numerous cases (under all three government types) democratic decentralisation creates opportunities for poorer groups to influence the policy and political processes, and to compete on more equal terms with non-poor groups. It usually takes time for both of

⁶⁰ This view emerges from many of the case studies done in the Ford Foundation's project on 'civil society and governance' which this writer coordinated between 1998 and 2002.

⁶¹ These are discussed in detail in the second section of Part III of Manor, "Democratisation with Inclusion...".

those things to happen – because poorer groups only gradually acquire the political awareness, skills, organisational strength, confidence, and connections to compete with more prosperous groups. But they are often realistic possibilities – especially where most of the population is poor and/or where elites begin to compete for political support of poor people (see paragraphs 108-112 above).

126 Pro-poor CSOs working at the local level have a crucial role to play in accelerating the development of poorer groups' capacity to make such gains, and in increasing their opportunities to do so. They can encourage and help to equip poor people to contact elected representatives about their concerns and preferences, to lobby collectively, or express their views collectively through petitions and demonstrations of support or protest. They can encourage and help to equip poorer groups to take an active part in any participatory mechanisms (like local mass meetings) that local councils are supposed to employ. They can develop their own participatory mechanisms (such as social audits) to enhance the collective voice of the poor – or of disadvantaged sub-groups among 'the poor' such as 'the poorest' or women. They can forge links between poorer groups in different localities, to break down their sense of isolation and impotence.

127 Many of these things promote information flows from the poor to elected councils and other low-level government actors. But they can also facilitate information flows in the other direction. They can remind poor people that elected representatives are supposed to serve their needs. They can transmit information about local council decisions and government programmes which are supposed to address poverty, but which are sometimes prevented from doing so. They can encourage and equip poorer groups to demand information about the amounts of money supposedly spent on poverty programmes, and official lists of beneficiaries of such programmes – both of which sometimes fail to conform to actual practice. They can encourage demands that wage rates on local construction projects be publicised, along with official lists of persons who supposedly received payment for such work – both of which are sometimes inflated.

128 All of these activities can make a difference, and are worth supporting. If practitioners find that pro-poor CSOs are pursuing only some (or none) of them, they can draw upon a Sida study of a CSO network that is active on all of these fronts⁶² – a useful Southern model.

Single-sector 'user committees'

129 Over the last decade, a vast number of 'user committees' have been created in less developed countries, at or near the local level, supposedly to give ordinary people (including the poor) influence over development projects in *single* sectors (health, education, water, forestry, etc.). Donors have driven much of this trend. They like the idea because it frees them from micro-management of projects and appears to give

⁶² A. Inbanathan, J. Manor and R. Parasuram, Report to Sida, New Delhi on the work of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) to Support Democratic Decentralisation in India (Sida, New Delhi, 2002).

local residents voice. But user committees sometimes fail to achieve the latter objective – and when they succeed, they often give influence mainly to prosperous groups. These problems are less common under Type II governments than under Types I and III, but they exist under some Type II governments.

130 Practitioners should therefore seek answers to three questions.

- *Are members of user committees chosen by free, reliable elections?* They are often (partly or entirely) appointed from above by politicians and bureaucrats who tend to favour prosperous people, or selected through election processes that are often unreliable (no secret ballots, etc.).
- *Do poor people gain enough seats on user committees to exercise significant influence?* They often fail to gain enough seats either because prosperous people win them by appointment or election, or because all members of a group which is dominated by prosperous interests (such as water users for irrigation) are included in the committee.
- *Do user committees actually have significant power to influence decisions?* Because donors often insist on the creation of user committees, governments often see them as an annoying conditionality to fulfil in order to get aid. So they go through the motions – they create user committees, but do not empower them.

131 If all of these questions can be answered ‘yes’, then user committees can benefit poor people, and help pro-poor CSOs to tackle poverty. But since some of the answers are often ‘no’, practitioners need to be sceptical about user committees. If any answer is ‘no’ or in doubt, practitioners should encourage governments to address these problems, and consider reducing support for programmes with user committees.

132 Note that when user committees succeed in giving some influence to local residents under Type I and Type III governments (which are largely closed to ordinary people), the political and psychological impact of this impact of this is greater than under Type II governments (which have already created other opportunities for bottom-up influence).⁶³

Other Mechanisms to Promote Bottom-up Participation

133 A diversity of mechanisms have been created – by governments or by CSOs — in various countries to promote bottom-up participation. They sometimes (but not always) serve the interests of poor and socially excluded groups. When they are created by pro-poor CSOs, they tend strongly to do so. In other cases, they may be made to do so if pro-poor CSOs engage energetically with them. A list of such mechanisms is provided below. It is assumed that that these devices are familiar enough to practitioners that explanations of them are not required. This writer has recently published a detailed analysis of these mechanisms elsewhere.⁶⁴

⁶³ This is examined in more detail in J. Manor, “User Committees: A Damaging Second Wave of Decentralization?” forthcoming.

⁶⁴ Manor, “Democratisation with Inclusion...”.

- Direct democracy at the local level (an alternative to elected local councils — used very rarely)
- Mass local-level meetings to discuss development issues and local councils' operations
- Instruments to permit action to secure citizens' rights and access to justice
- Devices to improve access to information and services
- Exercises in participatory planning and budgeting
- Exercises in participatory implementation
- Exercises in participatory auditing and evaluation
- Joint government/civil society management of development programmes

134 The fourth item in this list deserves a little discussion. We often hear that CSOs have a role to play in informing people about their right to information. But it is not especially helpful simply to *tell* them of this in abstract terms. It is important that they be given *practical demonstrations* of this right, in ways that both acquaint them with this right and provide them with *opportunities to use it* for their own benefit. Pro-poor CSOs can do this by using the mechanisms referred to in the fourth item. These include the approaches noted in paragraphs 123-124 on information flows above. And CSOs may even – as Grameen Telecom (a CSO) has done in Bangladesh – provide poor people with cell phones so that they can learn of current commodity prices in urban areas (to strengthen them in negotiations with middle-men).⁶⁵

135 The questions which Sida practitioners already ask when they assess the extent of poor people's participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes and projects targeted at them⁶⁶ will help to see how pro-poor CSOs might assist in making participatory mechanisms work. But practitioners also need to consider two other things:

- how willing and able the government is to introduce and then use such mechanisms (which may imply that CSOs should support the government efforts), and
- how capable CSOs operating at the local level (sometimes from above) are or developing such mechanisms *on their own*.

Social funds

136 In many less developed countries, large amounts of money (often from the World Bank, and sometimes from Sida) are channelled through social funds (sometimes called 'social investment funds'). "They have become the dominant anti-poverty instrument of the International Financial Institutions...and banks", especially in Latin America and Africa, but increasingly in Asia too.⁶⁷ Practitioners need to be aware of a potential

⁶⁵ Narayan, *Bonds and Bridges...*, p. 39

⁶⁶ Sida, *GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATION...*, p.5

⁶⁷ Joshi and Moore, "Mobilising the Poor...", pp. 219-20.

danger here. Social funds often succeed in their stated purpose of providing poor people with material resources. But in some (and possibly in many) countries, they undermine bottom-up participatory mechanisms.

137 When poor people at the grassroots receive substantial resources through social funds which governments have *not integrated* with bottom-up mechanisms, they are thrust into a passive relationship with the social funds and the government. They tend, understandably, to lose interest in other participatory mechanisms – because social funds appear to offer them far more in immediate, tangible benefits than such mechanisms do. When that occurs, social funds may *ease the material deprivation* of poor people, while at the same time *impeding their empowerment*.⁶⁸

138 Social funds need not – and sometimes do not — have this damaging effect. But practitioners must *carefully investigate* this potential danger. If they suspect that it exists, they should encourage governments to address the problem and possibly reduce support for social funds.

Partnerships between governments and CSOs

139 Many governments develop partnerships with pro-poor and other CSOs that work at the local level — usually for service delivery. Many donors are enthusiastic about this — it is, no less, the subject of the next *World Development Report*. And such partnerships often produce positive results for ordinary folk, including the poor. But practitioners still need to be a little sceptical about these partnerships.

140 In some cases, high-level political leaders use such partnerships to *divide* civil society (between CSOs included in partnerships and others), and to *coopt* and therefore *disarm* it. Even where those at higher levels intend partnerships to be genuine, politicians and especially bureaucrats at lower levels often seek to use partnerships to coopt and control local populations and pro-poor CSOs who are drawn into partnerships. Or their experience of top-down governance may make it difficult for them to change their behaviour and become more open and responsive.⁶⁹

141 If practitioners' investigations reveal such problems, they should encourage government actors at high levels to address the problem (see paragraphs 64-71 above), and possibly reduce support for such partnerships.

Micro-credit programmes and self-help groups

142 Practitioners are familiar with micro-credit programmes that have proliferated in the less developed countries. Pro-poor CSOs that reach into local arenas often play important roles here, and the small groups of poor borrowers at the local level that develop into self-help groups as a result of their efforts also qualify as valuable CSOs in their own right.

⁶⁸ These problems became apparent at a two-day conference at the World Bank in June 2002. I am grateful to Leonardo Romeo of the United Nations Capital Development Fund for insights on this issue.

⁶⁹ Note also that partnerships for service delivery are especially hard to develop in certain sectors. The difficulties are especially great in the health sector. The ranks of professional bodies in this sector are more closed than in some others. CSOs find it hard to organise ordinary citizens for action in this sector, partly because their use of health services is often only intermittent, and partly because when they do use those services, their illnesses make them more vulnerable to manipulation at the time of use. I am grateful to Anne-Marie Goetz of the IDS, University of Sussex for this point.

143 The evidence from empirical studies yields a number of insights about all of this, some of which may be less familiar. First, micro-credit programmes which *governments* sometimes initiate tend strongly to be less effective than the programmes of pro-poor CSOs. Even under quite enlightened Type II governments (and more often under Types I and III), government programmes tend to suffer from excessive red tape, delays, rigidity, and the theft of funds by low-level bureaucrats (sometimes in collaboration with politicians).⁷⁰ Programmes mounted by pro-poor CSOs are by no means infallible (see below), but they are much more deserving of practitioners' support than are government efforts.

144 Most analyses of micro-credit programmes have been undertaken by social scientists who are preoccupied with their *economic* impact. This is an important dimension of the story (although as we shall see presently, it is not necessarily the most crucial). Many of these studies indicate that it is excruciatingly difficult to reach the *poorest* of the poor through such programmes. Some programmes require that borrowers have small enterprises up and running before they qualify for loans – indeed, they are often labelled as ‘micro-enterprise’ programmes. Such initiatives are especially unlikely to reach the poorest because they cannot be expected to have established enterprises. But even when loans are extended to people purely on the basis of a collective commitment among a group of borrowers to repay, they often fail reach the poorest. Micro-credit tends to reach – and to help – the poor, but far less so the poorest.⁷¹

145 Despite this, there is much to commend such programmes – and their main significance may lie in the *socio-political* rather than the *economic* sphere. The most important implication of empirical work on micro-credit is the finding that such efforts can enable poor people – especially women — at the grassroots to develop the kind of solidarity and mutual-ity which can powerfully serve their interests in the public sphere more generally. It shows, in other words, that CSOs (in the form of self-help groups that do more than generate economic assets) can develop among deprived, excluded people.

146 Micro-credit programmes can “over time...socialize poor clients in the methods of formal institutions” – including political institutions and the policy process.⁷² They therefore enhance the capacity of the poor to cope effectively within the social order and the public sphere more generally. Perceptively led pro-poor CSOs that reach into local arenas from above have recognised this, and have provided these small local CSOs with assistance in building their capacity. They draw them into participatory mechanisms of the kind listed above (paragraphs 133-135), and encourage and equip them to use such mechanisms on their own. They draw them into engagement with local councils, user committees, and low-level government actors. They seek to forge links between them and (i) similar groups in other localities, and (ii) pro-poor

⁷⁰ This writer has, for example, encountered these problems in two Indian states whose governments are more committed to bottom-up development and social justice than almost any others in the less developed countries.

⁷¹ See for example, IDS Bulletin (October, 1998); and the doctoral research, on one of the most highly regarded micro-credit schemes in Bangladesh, of Farah Hasin at the University of London.

⁷² Narayan, *Bonds and Bridges...*, p. 35.

CSO networks spanning wide areas. Such initiatives, which develop a broader array of skills, greater self-confidence, organisational strength and connections beyond the locality, are all well worth supporting.

In Summation: Be Cautious about Jumping to Conclusions

147 When we think about civil society and poverty reduction, we need to be careful about concluding from one piece of evidence that something else – which may appear to follow logically from that evidence – is true. In many cases, such leaps of logic lead to mistakes. The following examples (with brief explanations of each) are intended to be a user-friendly way of reviewing much of what has been said earlier in this Guide.

148 The first set of examples *focuses mainly on civil society*.

- *If civil society in a particular country has grown and become more active in recent years, do not assume it has become more capable of generating social capital.*
Recent studies of actual events indicate that the (often theoretical) literature overestimates the capacity of CSOs to generate social capital – that is, to generate denser networks of interaction which inspire trust and a sense of mutuality. Just because there are more CSOs doing more things does not necessarily imply a major increase in social capital.
- *If civil society DOES show signs of generating social capital, do not assume that it is producing the kind of social capital that is needed to develop pro-poor coalitions which are often essential if poorer groups are to be helped.* Those same empirical studies indicate that CSOs are usually better able to generate ‘bonding’ social capital than ‘bridging’ social capital. That is, they are better at building trust, solidarity and mutuality *within* (rather homogeneous) organisations than at building trust, etc., *between* (rather different) organisations. This is important for poverty reduction because if pro-poor initiatives are to succeed, it is usually essential to construct supportive alliances of both poor and non-poor CSOs. They require ‘bridging’ social capital.
- *If ‘bonding’ social capital is being generated, do not assume that this will make it easier for ‘bridging’ social capital to develop.* The creation of ‘bonding’ social capital within rather homogeneous organisations can strengthen those organisations and the self-confidence and security of people within them. But this may also make those people more inward looking and suspicious of other organisations – so that it becomes harder to develop ‘bridging’ social capital.
- *If a broad alliance of CSOs – including poor and pro-poor organisations, but also others – forms to campaign on a certain issue which is not an explicitly pro-poor concern, do not assume that similar alliances on pro-poor issues will develop later.* We sometimes find that CSOs which are pro-poor or consist of poor people coalesce with other organisations to pursue changes in laws, constitutions or policies. They do so because the issue in question is important to all interests, and perhaps because they hope that this will make it easier to develop similarly broad alliances later on pro-poor issues. Studies of actual events in numerous countries suggest that

this hope is often impossible to achieve. And sometimes broad alliances on issues of common concern damage the interests of the poor because they force the postponement of campaigns on other issues of specific interest to the poor.

- *If civil society has become larger and more active in recent years, do not assume that it has become more capable of assisting poor people.* Most of the CSOs that gain strength and influence may represent the interests of prosperous, high status groups. Organisations among the poor and their pro-poor allies may gain far less strength, so that in relative terms, the disadvantages that they have always faced become more extreme. Civil society, as a whole, may thus become *less* likely to assist the poor. (But see the next point.)
- *If CSOs representing prosperous groups gain most of the advantages in such periods of growth, and initially seize most of the advantages from new openings in a political system, do not assume that they will always be able to do so.* Over time, two things may reverse this trend. First, poor and pro-poor organisations may gradually acquire the awareness, skills, confidence and connections to assert themselves on more equal terms alongside prosperous, high status organisations. Second, political parties and individual politicians may recognise that to gain or keep power in increasingly democratic systems, they need support and votes from the poor – who often have huge numerical strength. Competition may develop between parties or politicians for the support of the poor, and leaders may find that they must deliver tangible benefits to the poor to secure their support. So over time, things may improve.
- *If trade unions are powerful within a specific country, do not assume that this will strengthen civil society's capacity to help poor people.* In European history, trade unions have often been crucial to parties and campaigns to reduce poverty. This often fails to happen in less developed countries. Unionised workers may enjoy privileges that are not available to unorganised or poorly organised workers in the informal sector and rural areas. Unions may concentrate more on maintaining their members' privileges than on the welfare of poorer people in general. Efforts to build bridges between unions and pro-poor CSOs are much talked about (for example, at the ILO). They have borne some fruit, especially in parts of Latin America, but this often proves to be impossible.
- *If large, pro-poor non-governmental organisations at the national level claim to have effective links to pro-poor CSOs at intermediate and local levels (and with poor people at the grassroots), do not assume that this is true.* In most less developed countries, large organisations exist which make this claim, but we need to be sceptical about this. Views on this subject vary. Civil society specialists at the World Bank are extremely sceptical. They argue that such claims are true in only one Latin America country – Brazil – in no African countries, and in only three Asian countries (India, the Philippines and Bangladesh). Practitioners in some bilateral donor agencies take a similar view. But specialists in the Ford Foundation are a little (though not a lot) less sceptical. This is important because where such claims by large national-level organisations are true, they can make major contributions to poor

and pro-poor CSOs at and near the grassroots. They do so by extending specialised advice, legal aid, and by disseminating vital information, organisation-building, training for poor people to operate effectively in increasingly democratic systems, etc.

149 The second set of examples *focuses on the interactions of civil society organisations and poor people with governments.*

- *If a government performs rather ineffectively, do not assume that civil society or even pro-poor CSOs are necessarily superior to government as agencies for poverty reduction.* It sometimes makes sense to work exclusively with CSOs – when governments are decidedly incapable, corrupt, unresponsive, and oblivious or hostile to the poor. But even governments that perform only *somewhat* constructively often have clear advantages over CSOs. They usually have far greater financial and human resources, reach a far greater proportion of the population, are more vulnerable to legal challenges than CSOs, are better able to scale up from successes in specific localities, etc. And in any case, practitioners seldom face an either/or choice between governments and CSOs. They usually need to work with both, and encourage constructive interactions between the two.
- *If civil society in a particular country has become larger and more active in recent years, do not assume that it has also become better able to influence government.* Even when civil society grows (when more organisations are formed and existing organisations gain more members) and becomes more active on many fronts, the composition of civil society may change in ways that *reduce* its influence over governments. Organisations like trade unions, professional bodies and students' associations — which once had political 'muscle' — may have gone into decline at the same time that other organisations emerge. The overall effect may be to make civil society less able to persuade governments to make commitments, and to hold them to those commitments over time.
- *If a country has a democratic government, do not assume that it will also be inclined to decentralise, to develop accommodations with civil society, or to undertake pro-poor initiatives.* Some democratic governments fit into column III in the typology used here. They tend to be quite centralised, to be suspicious of alternative power centres (including CSOs), and to regard themselves (sometimes along with market forces, but no civil society) as the main engines of development. The government of South Africa falls largely into that category, and so do the governments in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and (to a lesser extent) West Bengal.
- *If a government is reluctant to undertake reforms that make it more open, accommodative and responsive, do not assume that such reforms are not worth fighting for.* When governments that are largely closed and centralised (those in columns I and III of the typology) can be persuaded to make *even small* changes that open the political process up a little, the political and psychological impact of such changes – not least on civil society — is far more dramatic than when such things occur in the more

open systems that fall into column II. This is apparent, for example, from decisions by the governments of China and Mozambique to introduce elected councils at the local level, and from the introduction of ‘user committees’ in Vietnam.

- *If a government describes itself as leftist, or left of centre, or pro-poor, do not assume that strong action to assist poor people will follow.* Today, most such governments (and most others) in less developed countries are *centrist* in character – no matter how they describe themselves. They are forced to be centrist by the logic of electoral democracy (since to achieve power, parties must occupy the centre ground) and by the international economic order. The latter imposes severe fiscal constraints upon them which limit their capacity to develop (often expensive) programmes to assist poor people.
- *If a government fits into one of the three categories in the typology used here, do not assume that it will always remain in that category.* Governments sometimes move from one category to another. Twenty years ago, Taiwan and South Korea would have been placed in column III, but they have become more democratic and accommodative so that today they fit into column II. Over the same period, the Philippines and the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have moved from column I to column II – as they have accommodated and, as a result, developed state capacity. In the last decade, Indonesia has moved from column III to column I – as state capacity has degenerated, although the government has lately become somewhat more accommodative.
- *If a government seriously pursues democratic decentralisation, do not assume that it is also enthusiastic about civil society.* Many (though certainly not all) government actors who are enthusiasts for democratic decentralisation are suspicious of civil society. Many of them argue that elected councils at lower levels possess great legitimacy because they are elected, but that unelected CSOs lack such legitimacy and accountability. They may be cool to civil society, or sometimes even hostile.
- *If a government experiments with democratic decentralisation, do not assume that it will produce pro-poor outcomes.* Democratic decentralisation tends strongly to stimulate the growth of civil society and increasing activity within it. Poor and pro-poor CSOs tend to be affected along with more prosperous organisations. But this does not necessarily lead to pro-poor outcomes. Democratic decentralisation is better at reducing poverty that emerges from inequalities *between* regions and localities than that which emerges from inequalities *within* them. And the latter are usually the *main* problem. Elite capture of many new systems of democratic decentralisation is a serious problem, which often thwarts pro-poor outcomes. Over time, this problem may be eased as poorer groups become better able to compete on equal terms with prosperous interests. But this change sometimes is painfully slow in coming.
- *If a government develops partnerships with CSOs which are pro-poor or which consist mainly of poor people, do not assume that benefits to the poor will follow.* Such partnerships sometimes produce welcome outcomes for the poor. But they often do little for the poor and actually damage civil

society. This can occur because governments seek to coopt, contain, or control civil society organisations by drawing them into partnerships. Or it can occur (sometimes unwittingly, and sometimes not) because partnerships inspire damaging divisions between CSOs that are selected as partners and those that are not. Such divisions are especially destructive where civil society is already somewhat weak and divided.

- *If a government (usually with donor support) develops programmes linked to social funds, do not assume that this is all good news for pro-poor CSOs or for the poor.* Social funds often provide very substantial funds that are intended to ease poverty at the grassroots. These funds sometimes flow through poor or pro-poor CSOs or (occasionally) through elected bodies at lower levels – which may become more pro-poor as a result. They are also occasionally linked to devices that promote bottom-up inputs from ordinary people, including the poor, into the development process. But many social funds tend *not* to achieve these things. Indeed, they often undermine democratic bodies at lower levels and give poor people and CSOs that represent them little or no voice. Where that is true — even when they provide poor people with fresh resources — they fail to empower them and the CSOs that seek to assist them.
- *If CSOs win a victory for poor people in an encounter with government actors or with more prosperous groups, do not assume that it will have a lasting effect.* When CSOs (including associations consisting of the poor) lobby or campaign for poor people and win an apparent victory, the expected results often fail to materialise or to last. Agreements made by government actors or by prosperous people may not be honoured – in full or at all. And agreements may last only for short periods. They may be tactical concessions which are abandoned once the ‘fuss’ dies down. Such things are so common that civil society activists (and sympathetic donors) need to prepare poor people and members of CSOs for this possibility – lest they become cynical when they encounter disappointment.
- *If poor or pro-poor CSOs fail in an effort to make gains in one encounter with government (or if they make only very limited gains), do not assume that this represents total defeat.* The empirical evidence on civil society indicates that even when campaigns fail (totally or partly), CSOs nevertheless make other gains that compensate at least a little. They often acquire new political awareness and skills, they strengthen their organisations, and they develop connections with influential people – all of which may be turned to good effect in later episodes.

Annex: Possible Points for Action by Practitioners

This document is intended to help development practitioners to consult the ‘Practitioners Guide’ to civil society and poverty reduction in less developed countries on specific points on which they may wish to take action. It is thus a kind of index to the Guide. It identifies the numbered paragraphs in the Guide that provide information on each issue or ‘point for action’. (The acronym ‘CSOs’ here refers to ‘civil society organisations’.)

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SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

SE-105 25 Stockholm Sweden
Phone: +46 (0)8 698 50 00
Fax: +46 (0)8 698 56 15
info@sida.se, www.sida.se