

Methods of Analysing Power – A Workshop Report



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Foreword

The Power analysis and Drivers of Change approaches have developed on the basis of Sida's, DfID's and other bilaterals' and multilaterals' attempts to address one of the traditional problems faced by donors. Commonly termed 'political will', its impact on pro-poor change programmes and policies is the missing link between understanding a country's political framework and context and their relevance to development and poverty reduction.

This approach involves gaining a deeper understanding of the political, social, cultural and economic issues at play in a country; the power relationships between actors and at the societal level and the incentives of these actors to affect or impede change. The studies conducted by different donors have focused on the structural and institutional factors likely to 'drive' or impede pro-poor change and to the underlying interests and incentives that affect the environment for reform. These studies usually take the local situation as the basis for analysis, rather than standard existing policies.

On October 27, 2003, Sida and the Collegium for Development Studies at Uppsala University organized a workshop in Stockholm to scrutinize Sida's methods of analysing power – actors, processes and structures – as part of the country strategy cycle. The purpose of the workshop was to come up with *operational recommendations* as to how Sida's future power analyses could be improved. Focus was on the following issues:

- Are power analyses a useful tool in identifying pro-poor organized interest groups or actors, among the elite and/or among poor men and women?
- To what extent was lack of power, as one dimension of a multi-dimensional poverty concept, captured by the terms of references and the power analyses?
- Do the terms of reference utilized so far pose relevant questions bearing in mind Sida's aim to understand power structures, relations and perceptions of power in a particular country?
- Should terms of reference/questionnaires be generic, country specific or a combination of both?
- Which are the potential links to conflict assessments?

The following report includes the contributions of the invited experts, Mick Moore from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex,

UK, Lise Rakner from the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway and Jeremy Gould from IDS in Helsinki, Finland. Also included is a brief report by Sue Unsworth from similar work done by DfID, UK. The final part consists of a short summary of the group discussions.

The workshop was an integral part of a series of conferences and workshops on democracy/democratization/democracy promotion assistance organized jointly by Sida's Division for Democratic Governance and the Collegium for Development Studies at Uppsala University.

Lennart Nordström
Division for Democratic Governance

Introduction

Helena Bjuremalm, Division for Democratic Governance, Sida

When a country strategy for Swedish development cooperation with a particular country is drafted, it is done on the basis of a country analysis. In turn, this country analysis is based on a number of studies: conflict assessments, gender profiles and democracy and human rights assessments. Which studies and how many of them to make is always a controversial issue. The final decision is usually taken by the Regional Departments and Embassies, not by the functional departments responsible for commissioning the studies.

Some time ago, Sida/DESO finalized work on a number of methodology development projects, one of them concentrating on some of the key political institutions (parliaments, party systems and elections). One of the recommendations in this document was to look for *causes*, not *symptoms*, of the democratic deficits in our partner countries. Accordingly, Sida should conduct more thorough analyses of the *societal preconditions* when planning programmes. The need to build underlying interests and power relationships into programmes requires a thorough insight into the recipient society, a depth of knowledge that we normally do not have the time to acquire.

At this point in the process, Sida and the Collegium for Development Studies at Uppsala University began their cooperation in a joint conference on *Democracy, Power and Partnership*, held in Uppsala in May, 2002.

The focus on power aspects clearly pointed to the need to analyse power relationships in the country, and the democracy and human rights assessments we had done until then did not quite fulfil those needs. They tended to focus on formal structures – that is, the constitution, the political system as set up according to the constitution and so on.

We decided to try another way of painting the political landscape, with more shades and nuances – a power analysis, covering *formal and informal* power relations and structures. The analysis of actors, interest groups and structures will ideally show where the *real power* in a society lies and how power is *distributed* (central/local level, elite groups/people in general, private/public, class/race/gender/age). It may also point to *what kind* of power is being exercised and *how*, as well as how this is *understood* or perceived, and *by whom*.

Sida's experience of conducting power analyses is so far rather limited. The first round of analyses covers Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso

and Mali. In principle, they were desk studies carried out by experts on those countries and were thus not designed as research projects. Sida has a number of other means of financing research into developing countries in Sweden, research networks at regional or global level and so forth. All these analyses were carried out as an integral part of the relevant country strategy process. Several divisions – as diverse as infrastructure, gender policy and natural resources management – contributed to the Terms of Reference.

This has very much been a learning-by-doing process and in some cases politically sensitive. Before embarking on a second round of power analyses, we would like to step aside and learn from our experiences so far. That is why this workshop was initiated.

Methods of Analysing Power

Consultant's Report on published Studies, Principally on Burkina Faso and Ethiopia

Mick Moore, The Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK

This is a contribution to the assessment of the country 'power analysis' reports produced for Sida to date. I have concentrated on the reports dealing with Ethiopia (*Ethiopia. Structures and Relations of Power*, Sida, March 2003, by Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll) and Burkina Faso (*Burkina Faso: Une Etude des Structures et Relations de Pouvoir Politique, Social, et Economique*, mimeo, no date, place or authors). I have also looked at the studies done on Kenya and Mali, but have left them principally to my colleague Lise Rakner.

These studies are experimental, and the purpose of the current exercise is to see what we have learned. Any apparent criticism in this report of the ways in which these studies were commissioned or conducted should be understood as a contribution to that learning process. It may be worth pointing out here that other aid donors are attempting similar exercises, and that there is no one good model out there of how this kind of knowledge is best acquired.

Let us start from the assumption that the purpose of commissioning these studies is to provide information or understanding that is (a) in some way directly relevant to the design and management of Sida's cooperation programmes in these countries and (b) sufficiently useful in relation to the costs of commissioning the studies and of accessing (i.e. disseminating, reading and absorbing) the reports that the overall benefit-cost ratio is positive. By far the best judges of the degree of achievement of these objectives are the relevant Sida staff members. The appropriate questions for them are: (a) 'If you could command the financial and human resources devoted to these studies, is this the way in which you would use those resources to obtain the kinds of "political" understanding that you need?' and (b) 'If the answer is "no", what is your suggested alternative?'

General Assessment

My own guess is that many Sida staff would not give a very positive response to questions about the usefulness and benefit-cost ratio of these studies. I suspect the typical response might be some mixture of: (a) 'It was interesting, but I knew a lot of that already'; (b) 'This is not very different from what one can find in standard diplomatic country reports or in-depth journalism'; and (c) 'But it does not really help me at all in

deciding what to do'. To some degree, these are the typical, inevitable reactions to most consultants' studies, especially reports that are not tightly tied to precise operational goals. They are also, to some degree, the inevitable reactions to any kind of general political analysis of this nature.

However, I think these studies might possibly have been more useful. How far they might have been improved in actual implementation is not clear to me, largely because I detect three significant, interacting weaknesses in *design*. It is on these design issues that this report concentrates. I label them (a) *the concept of power* (b) *the purpose problem*, and (c) *the ambition issue*. Because I find the problems to lie at this level, I am not going to say much here about the detailed content of the Burkina Faso and Ethiopia studies, (which I find very good from some perspectives). The initial part of my report in particular might sound rather abstract and academic to most readers. It is, however, extremely practical.

Design Issue 1: The Concept of Power

The terms of reference for these studies imply that the concept of 'power' is relatively unproblematic. The researchers are commissioned to 'show where the *real power* in a society lies' and 'how power is *distributed ...*' among different actors, categories and groups. The problem is not that the concept of power is a little fuzzy, like concepts such as 'employment', 'law' or 'democracy', where people can argue different theoretical positions quite vigorously, but find out that, when presented with actual empirical cases, they largely agree most of the time. The problem is actually more fundamental: *the concept of power is 'fundamentally contested'*, i.e. people mean a range of very different things when they use the term.

The divergence is so great that, presented with the same empirical case, some observers might see a clear exercise of power while others would deny there is any exercise of power at all. The concept of power is about as diffuse as the concept of 'love', where we use that term to apply to a very wide range of emotions and behaviours, ranging from the urgent, promiscuous sexual needs of teenagers through the deep attachment of parents to children to the kinds of feelings about humankind and the world more generally expressed in Christian notions of 'the love of God' and 'love thy neighbour'.

However, we can say a few things about 'power' that are more precise and consequential. There are two major contentious issues that, in different forms and under different names, emerge around different uses of the term. I present them below. It is worth stating in advance the main conclusion: *While we have no practical alternative but to continue using 'power', like 'love', as a very broad concept, it is practically confusing and misleading to imagine that it is anything like a commodity, that looks similar in its different manifestations, or can be measured or weighed on a single scale.*

Controlling versus constructive concepts of power

The distinction here might equally be phrased in terms of a difference between '*power over*' and '*power to*', and is in political science jargon sometimes termed the difference between '*despotic power*' and '*infrastructural power*'. It is essentially a matter of whose perspective one takes. Does the Director of Institution X have a lot of power? Her subordinates might indeed, accurately, perceive that she has a great deal of ('despotic') power over them. She can hire, fire, transfer, promote, and otherwise reward or penalise them with little reference to any other authority. That is indeed controlling (or despotic) power. The Director, in exactly the same situation, might quite accurately perceive that she has very little (construc-

tive, infrastructural) power over the organisation: very little capacity – because of limits set by the labour market, her budget, the culture of the organisation, etc. – to get people to work together, to work hard, to be enterprising, to adopt innovations, to cooperate actively with other organisations, or generally to use the latent power of the organisation to change the world. That kind of micro level example might seem relatively trivial. But the difference between the *controlling* and the *constructive* concepts of power is embedded very deeply in our contrasting notions about the good society, good governance etc. Most of us are biased toward one view or other, depending on context, but are often not explicit about it.

In summary form, there is in Western culture a deep-rooted and continuing fundamental divide between two attitudes to authoritative political institutions, especially to the state, that maps precisely onto this difference between the *controlling* and the *constructive* concepts of power.

‘Liberals’ (according to the classic meaning of the term) view institutional/state power primarily as a (potential) threat to the well-being of members/citizens, and define good governance primarily in terms of legal, constitutional and other arrangements that protect against this threat, by limiting institutional/state power. They are worried about the *controlling* use of power, and warm to terms like *accountability*, *democracy* and *participation*.

By contrast, ‘collectivists’ see the state (and other authoritative organisations) primarily as a means of aggregating power and resources that may be used for the collective good. They view the weakness of government – manifested as disorder, vulnerability to external threat, or failure to provide public services – as the prime potential problem. ‘Collectivists’ therefore tend to interpret good governance in terms of arrangements that promote the coherence and effectiveness of the state and other organisations. They warm to terms like *authority*, *order*, and *capability*. They emphasise the need for more state power, of the *constructive* kind.

Neither the Burkina Faso nor the Ethiopia studies acknowledge or deal with the tension between *controlling* and *constructive* concepts of power. However, it seems fairly clear to me that both were written very much from the ‘liberal’ perspective. The excessive (controlling) power of government appears to be a key problematique, and both studies are in fact organised in terms of an analysis of the prospects for democracy, i.e. with a strong if unstated emphasis on the need to limit (*controlling*, despotic) state power.

Empirically, for those two countries, that may be an appropriate emphasis. The authors may be right that emphasis should be placed on the reduction of *controlling* (state) power through the dispersal of power from the national (male-dominated) central government executive to: other agencies of government, such as the legislature and the judiciary; local government; voters and citizens; women; the media; civil society organisations etc. (See especially the final Recommendations of the Burkina Faso study).

But it would be surprising if this were the sole power issue that needs to be addressed in these countries. Assuming that Burkina Faso and Ethiopia are like most developing countries, their governments suffer as much from the lack of *constructive* power – the capacity to organise, to actually command their civil and military bureaucracies, to direct public money where they wish, to obtain the trust and willing compliance of citizens – as their citizens suffer from the concentration of *controlling* power.

Whether and how any reduction in *controlling* power might contribute to or help alleviate the problem of lack of *constructive* power are empiri-

cal but possibly unanswerable questions. The point is simply that the issue of the need to construct *constructive* power is ignored – and perhaps implicitly denied – in these studies. And this is directly relevant to the *de facto* focus of both these studies on possible progress toward democracy. The existence of authoritative government is one of the first conditions for an effective democracy. Only authoritative governments can actually organise free and fair elections. When people vote, they should be choosing a leadership able to carry out their will, rather than nominal leaders lacking resources who are captives of other interests – the military, wealthy people, the state bureaucracy, organised ethnic or regional blocs, aid donors or other foreign powers etc. *For most developing countries, progress toward democracy tends to require both (a) some reduction in the controlling power of the central state executive and (b) increases in the constructive power of various parts of the state apparatus.*

Let me briefly re-cap the main points here: (a) we cannot sensibly begin to think of measuring power, because it is so different in its different manifestations; and (b) different conceptions of power correspond to different ideologies about the organisation of public life. These same conclusions are affirmed and strengthened in the next sub-section, which deals with the second big conceptual debate about power.

The observability problem

There is a vast political science literature on this problem, and I am only going to summarise the essential issues here. In this case, we can think of different conceptions of power not as being dichotomous (as with the *controlling* versus *constructive* issue above), but rather as ranged on a continuum. We can begin by presenting the dispute as being about research or observation methods for identifying the exercise of power, but, as we shall see, differences on this spectrum correspond closely to deep ideological differences.

Let us begin with an example. Yet another irregular foreign-backed militia marches into the town of Boma – the sixth in 18 months. Most of the population come out onto the streets, dance, cheer, wave flags and look happy. Is this because of some exercise of power, or is it genuinely voluntary? If we see armed men at the back looking threatening, and poking their AK47s into the ribs of anyone who does not appear enthusiastic, then the answer is clear. Suppose there is no sign of any such direct intimidation, and the people say that they are really happy because they have heard these are good guys who will not harm them, and they are pleased to be liberated? What do we conclude? The issue is potentially disputable, especially if we have the relevant contextual knowledge that last time a new militia came in and did not receive a great welcome, they did a little massacring. Maybe the implied threat is clear, and the people are responding to it? But suppose there is no such local experience, but only stories from a different part of the Congo, and we don't know how and in what form the Boma people have heard them? Then suppose even further that there are no such 'instructive experiences' from recent history, but that it is part of 'local culture' – transferred through the generations, perhaps even taught in schools – always to welcome a new authority with apparent enthusiasm? I could go on.

The core point is that power is actually exercised with different degrees of directness, and only when it is very direct can we be fairly sure that it is being exercised. Once we get to the relatively indirect levels – when people do things that appear to be in the interest of someone with authority, but nevertheless appear to do them voluntarily; and

indeed themselves genuinely describe their behaviour as voluntary – we can get into serious disputes. If the industrial proletariat is not revolutionary, despite the absence of any clear repression, is this because (a) they are basically content or (b) as Antonio Gramsci and many others have suggested, in many different ways, this is because power has been used to so shape their thinking – through education, the media, the definition and content of ‘culture’ etc. – that they are unable to see the logic of the revolutionary path? This last point signals the extent to which differences over the observability of power can correspond to ideological positions. Generally speaking, those who wish to limit the concept of power to observable instances of its direct application are of a conservative persuasion, because indirect power (a) is normally exercised by, or to the benefit of, well-entrenched interests power; and (b) is illegitimate by legal and democratic standards.¹

The authors of the Burkina Faso and Ethiopia case studies do not deal at all squarely with the problematic nature of the concept of power. Their terms of reference do not require them to do so and, by providing a ready-made discussion of the concept of power, can be read as implying that, in Sida’s view, there are no knotty problems to be tackled.² Following the terms of reference – and sometimes simply copying exact phrases and sentences – both sets of authors profess allegiance to the notion of power as relational. I have no problem with that, but it is actually not much more profound a statement than the discovery that one normally speaks in prose. What else could power be than relational?

The Ethiopia authors discuss the issue in more detail, sometimes in terms so abstract that I find it difficult to understand. They put more emphasis than the Burkina authors, in their conceptual discussion, on the ‘knowledge’ dimension of power. I am a little wary of an approach that appears to emphasise ‘knowledge’ over other relevant dimensions of power, such as ‘practice’, ‘coercion’, or ‘interest’. But I take this concern to be an acknowledgement of the issues about the (un)observability of power mentioned above. And anyway it does not really matter, because the substantive content of the two studies does not appear to be significantly affected by this adhesion in principle to the idea of ‘power-as-knowledge/knowledge-as-power’. The studies actually deal almost entirely with the standard political and government institutions, in a rather familiar way. In coverage and tone, they read very like, for example, the Democracy and Governance Assessments produced by USAID; and the latter do not, in my experience, worry at all about ‘the meaning of power’.³

Let me end this section with a few interim conclusions:

- The absence of any serious treatment of the ‘fundamentally contested’ nature of power – and the genuine analytical problems that this generates – appears to follow directly from the terms of reference provided to the country authors.
- However, the actual content of the Burkina Faso and Ethiopia case studies is not much affected by contentious conceptions of power, be-

1 The problem for the (intellectual) radicals is that, in order to analyse the indirect exercise of power, they have to make assumptions about how people might behave and think if there were no indirect exercise of power. Note also that the question of whether and in what ways it is helpful to think of ‘political power’ as different or distinct from power in ‘social’ or ‘economic’ interactions to a large degree overlaps with the question about the observability of power.

2 I note however that there is some implicit acknowledgement of the diversity of concepts of power in both the (near-identical) terms of reference for the Burkina and Mali studies (“Rather than imagining that the question of power is settled simply by deciding who ‘has’ it, one can instead pay more attention to the question of what kind of power is being exercised, and how this is understood and perceived...”)

3 The key organising concepts used in these Strategic Assessments are: consensus, rule of law, competition, inclusion, and good governance. The manual on how to do them is on <http://www.usaid.gov/democracy/pdfs/pnach305.pdf>

cause both have largely been shaped by relatively consensual (within the aid business) concerns about democratisation, and about the kinds of processes needed to promote democratisation.

- As ‘assessments of progress toward democracy’, they are rather good studies.

Let us move now to the second major design issue, which sounds much more practical than the first, but does in fact intersect and overlap with it quite closely.

Design Issue 2: The Purpose Problem.

The issue here is simple: ‘What are these studies for?’ On the basis of zero knowledge about the process within Sida, but some understanding of what has gone on in other aid agencies recently, let me hazard a guess about the mechanisms that got us to where we are:

- There was a general feeling that, since Sida is in the business of promoting democracy and being ‘pro-poor’ in its programming, it would be very helpful to know more about the internal politics of partner countries.
- People might have taken the view that the ‘real politics’ of partner countries are somehow less formal and less easy to observe than at home, and that this meant that special efforts had to be made to find out what was ‘really’ going on. (The distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘real’ politics appears in all the terms of reference).
- There was quite a lot of discussion about the purpose and focus of these studies, a number of different views, and no single compelling line. So the result was a compromise between the main concerns: (a) understanding the ‘real politics’ (phrased in terms like ‘where does power really lie?’); (b) an emphasis on the actual or potential role of poorer people – or pro-poor interests – in politics and policymaking; and, to a lesser extent, (c) making some connections with analyses of conflict.
- This compromise was not made explicit in the terms of reference. The authors were not given any indication that to focus on the politics of both democracy and poverty might require them to consider potential conflicts, choices and trade-offs. Rather, to be rather blunt, the issue was ‘fudged’. The potential problem of competing emphases on (a) *democracy* and (b) *poverty* is defined away, in the terms of reference, by presenting them as differing aspects of the same set of phenomena.⁴ Any judgement about how far this conflation is valid for particular countries or cases will depend on a number of big assumptions, as well as on more empirical observations. I do not think it is useful to enter that debate here. I suspect the problem here is that a general and highly abstract proposition about synergies between democracy and poverty reduction, that is (a) useful – perhaps essential – to Sida for a range of its own operational reasons (presentation, sense of direction, morale etc.) and (b) possibly even empirically defensible at some high level of generalisation, has been used inappropriately in a specific context. This use may have helped obscure questions that need to be made explicit.
- The commissioned authors were given quite wide and imprecise terms of reference. These included directions to address, among other

⁴ See for example the opening statement of the Terms of Reference for Burkina Faso: “Sustained poverty reduction requires equitable growth – but it also requires that poor people have political power. The best way to achieve that in a manner consistent with human development objectives is by building strong and deep forms of democratic governance...”

things, some very deep and difficult-to-research issues (see *Design Issue 3* below), as well as the implications of some very recent events (especially in the Mali study). And they were each asked to produce a report of no more than 50 pages.

- The authors therefore had considerable *de facto* autonomy to decide how to operationalise their terms of reference, i.e. to select a focus, and limit the range of issues to what was manageable given their own constraints.
- The authors in practice – and without necessarily being very explicit about it even to themselves – ended up producing the kind of product for which there were the most ‘models’ and examples around: studies that focused on (a) the shortfalls between current political practice and a broad conception of democracy and (b) the steps that had been taken, and might need next to be taken, to reduce that shortfall. To focus on these questions is essentially to deal with familiar issues about political and government institutions and law. It is easier for political scientists – and even more so for people not trained in political science – to deal with these familiar issues than with the ‘politics of poverty’ (see next point). These institutional, political and legal issues are the routine daily business of many NGOs and civil society organisations in poor countries.
- The set of questions in the terms of reference about the political dimensions of poverty received little attention in practice. This may have been because, in countries like Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, the ‘politics of poverty’ – as opposed to the politics of democracy – refers to a very diffuse set of phenomena. In the absence of a central government able to engage either in fiscal redistribution or some dramatic asset redistribution (e.g. land reform), to ask someone to investigate the ‘politics of poverty’ is to invite them to look at a wide range of distinct sectors, each with their own issues, institutions etc.: health care; vaccinations; primary education; road construction and maintenance; agricultural extension; urban sanitation etc. Each sector might be different. To investigate in this detail requires a great deal of time, effort and data. In any or all of these sectors, any distributional inequities between citizens might appear less important or urgent than the general weakness of public provision of any kind for almost anyone.

My hypotheses about the processes that led to the writing of these studies may be completely wrong. Nevertheless, three important interim conclusions emerge:

- (i) Broad, ambitious but diffuse terms of reference leave consultants with considerable practical freedom to choose to focus on some issues, and (largely) ignore others.
- (ii) The previous point is especially valid when consultants are asked to do a range of very difficult things for which there is no clear model.
- (iii) In countries like Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, it is easier in practice for consultants to produce coherent political studies around ‘obstacles to democracy’ than around issues of poverty.

Design Issue 3: Ambition

This section is largely a continuation – and exemplification – of the previous discussion, and can be relatively brief. It concerns the range of issues that the authors were asked to examine. They had a great deal to cover in relation to their time input. (The Ethiopia study in particular is a lengthy and ‘professional’ monograph. The writing alone must

have consumed a great deal of time.) At one level, excess ambition is not a problem, and may indeed be a virtue, to the extent that it ‘stretches’ consultants. It becomes a problem if the commissioning agency genuinely wants considerable attention to be paid to some particularly difficult problems. These will be the ones that get little attention from consultants, because dealing with them would leave little time for anything else.

Let me link this general point to the treatment of the actual and potential influence of aid donors in these two studies. This is required in their terms of reference. The Ethiopia authors appear to have side-stepped the issue entirely, and the Burkina authors give it a brief and very summary treatment, that I cannot see is likely to add to the knowledge of local Sida staff. I would not blame either set of consultants. I would have done the same thing were I in their position, because the actual and potential roles and influence of donors is extremely difficult to deal with, and very difficult to research.

There are at least three interacting problems why the academic literature on this is thin and unsatisfactory. One is that many donor staff still discourage any real appraisal of their role. Another is that their influence is often both indirect and relatively pervasive, such that it is difficult to research it in any consistent or ‘scientific’ way. And the third is that there are typically so many (official and NGO) donors in Sida’s partner countries, to a large degree in some tension or competition with one another while to some degree trying to cooperate – and always obliged to appear to be cooperating – that the previous two researchers’ problems – obtaining genuine information from donor staff and the indirectness of much donor influence – are exacerbated. To produce any genuinely informed view about the actual or potential role of donors in Burkina Faso or Ethiopia would be a substantial project in its own right.

Concluding Comments

- (i) Politics and political institutions in developing countries tend to be ‘uninstitutionalised’ and even more in flux than in most OECD countries. There are questions about how far and for how long a period of time a single document, however well produced, will be valid. Are there better ways of capturing and up-dating the relevant knowledge?
- (ii) For a range of reasons, Sida could commission alternative ‘power analyses’ of the same country at the same moment from different people, and end up with very different products. One specific reason is that different authors might understand ‘power’ very differently. More generally, the potential variation in end product is much greater in the case of political science than, for example, equivalent products from economists, because ideas, concepts and paradigms are more diverse and less agreed in political science (and sociology, social anthropology) than in economics.
- (iii) There are quite a number of links in the logical chain that might lead from ‘donor Y understanding more about the politics of partner country Z’ to ‘donor Y operating more effectively in country Z’. Let us politely leave aside any doubts about the capacity of the staff of donor Y to engage in delicate subjects. The staff of donor Y first has to work out how any kind of external intervention might be useful. They then have to work out what donor Y – typically only one of up to 20 or more aid agencies jostling for attention – can most effectively do, alone or in concert with other aid donors.

- (iv) Aid donors do not yet appear to have cracked the problem of how to commission useful studies of 'political processes' in donor countries, but several seem to be experimenting. Is there any reason why they have individually to invent the wheel?

I do not feel able to suggest what, if anything, Sida should do in future in terms of 'political studies' in partner countries. Let me rather conclude by listing the main types of such 'political studies' that aid donors appear to commission, or have access to. The implication is that it may be useful to think of 'value-added' in relation to existing sources of political analysis.

- (i) USAID conduct country-level Democracy and Governance Strategic Assessments, that are in general tone and approach similar to the Burkina Faso and Ethiopia studies (see above). My own limited experience suggests that, provided one is willing to accept the 'democratisation' paradigm and assumptions that underlie these studies, they tend to be done well, and to be useful. They are relatively action-oriented, in terms of democracy promotion.
- (ii) Embassies produce regular political analyses that are presumably quite well informed and insightful about recent events and potential short-term future scenarios.
- (iii) Various donors have at different times in recent years produced 'governance assessments', that essentially measure up countries in terms of the shortfall between sets of actual institutions and practices and some notion of where they should be aiming. These may have fallen a bit out of fashion, as have at least in DfiD, as being labour intensive, perhaps too general and broad-brush, and not directly action-focused. Again, they are based on paradigms about 'good governance' that are not universally accepted.
- (iv) Some donors feel that intensive examinations of policymaking processes in particular sectors or institutions in country X will give us fundamental, general knowledge about policy processes in that country. While I find this approach more useful in principle than the notion of general 'power analysis', we need to be a little wary. Policy processes can vary widely from sector to sector, and change quickly as personalities change. These things are especially likely where, as in most Sida partner countries, politics and policymaking processes are relatively uninstitutionalised.
- (v) DfiD has recently begun a round of 'drivers of change' studies, that are designed to use political and other kinds of broad social scientific analysis to identify (a) the main lines of actual and potential political, economic and social change, especially of the more positive kind; and (b) the ways and modes through which DfiD might intervene to give positive support to positive long term changes. These studies are, at least in conception, very much action-focused, but with a definite emphasis on strategic and long-term interventions on the part of the aid donor, not on day-to-day or project-focused issues. Their usefulness is as yet unproven. (See contribution made by Sue Answorth, p 34, the principal inspiration behind these studies within DfiD.)

Methods for analysing power

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Introduction

This commentary is based on the Terms of Reference for four power analyses; Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Mali and Kenya. Secondly, I have studied the analyses of Kenya and Mali (draft only) in some detail. The commentary is divided into three sections. First, I provide some general comments on the methodology and terms of reference for power analyses. In the second part, these comments are exemplified with references to the empirical studies. In the third and final part I suggest a framework that may enable a better integration of the concepts of power, poverty and governance/rights. Suggesting that power entails that poor groups have a *voice*, that central institutions and actors are *responsive* to the concerns of the poor, and that mechanisms are in place to hold these institutions and actors to *account*, the model stresses that both political authorities, civil society and the international community should be held accountable to the overriding goal of poverty reduction.

I: General comments on the exercise and Sida's Terms of Reference

Having benefited from reading (and listening to) Mick Moore's presentation, my comments will focus less on the concept of power per se. Instead I will focus my comments on the linkages between the concepts of power, poverty and rights and venture to suggest how studies of the relationship between power, poverty and rights may be more systematically integrated in future studies. However, it may be useful to remind ourselves of similar exercises in our own countries. As some of you may know, a power analysis or 'Maktutredning' has recently been finalised in Norway. Some 20 researchers, 5 full time, have been employed for 5 years and produced around 20 books, 40 reports, and a large number of papers. Norway is a small country and the political institutions well developed. Nevertheless, the core research team split and disagreed on the final findings. This testifies to Mick Moore's argument; power is a contested and multifaceted concept, as are the concepts of democracy, poverty and conflict.

1. The Terms of Reference

Starting with the four Terms of Reference presented, I would like to emphasise that these documents were impressive in their depth, scope

and attempt to combine generic/comparative aspects and country specific issues. However, it was interesting to note that the documents were silent – or at best unclear – on the actual *purpose* of the exercise, i.e. how the studies were intended to be used by Sida. Sida's *rationale* for conducting power analyses was given explicitly in the Terms of Reference for the Kenya study. It was argued that more knowledge was needed about the role of political parties and legislatures as well as informal power relations because available governance studies had primarily focused on executive relations and excluded political parties, parliaments etc. The ToR also stated the need to focus on the relationship between social, political and economic power. However, how this knowledge is intended to inform or shape Sidas future aid policies was not disclosed.

2. A general comment on the four power analyses presented

Concerning the four studies carried out on the basis of the ToRs presented by Sida, generally speaking, I am very impressed. The depth of analysis, broad perspective and amount of issues covered in the studies provide very interesting reading and valuable information. These studies would be quite pointless unless they were carried out by people with extensive knowledge of the countries in question. From what I can gather from the studies I have read, Sida has succeeded in finding qualified consultants.

But, echoing Mick Moore, the broad and ambitious ToRs left a great part of the work to the consultants in terms of narrowing the perspective and scope of the exercise. The terms of reference provided were ambitious both in analytical and empirical terms. The time frame (10-15 weeks total per study), the desk study format and the 50 page limit presented in the ToR (note that the Kenya and Ethiopia studies are well above 100 pages) meant that the researchers had to make some 'hard' choices! One speculation may be that the studies produced turned out to be more similar to 'conventional governance studies' than the ambitious ToRs provided by Sida had intended for: The authors have predominantly studied formal political institutions, and may run the risk of duplicating already existing governance studies and reporting information already known to the Sida staff.

3. The missing link between power, poverty and rights

Due to the governance perspective adopted in most of the studies, the studies provided useful information on formal political institutions. The main problem is that while information on other aspects of power, on the poor, on poverty, conflict and aid was presented as well, none of the studies succeeded in actually integrating these concepts. As a result, I will argue that the power-analysis exercise in its present state only provides weak linkages between poverty, power and rights. Partly, this is explained by the fact that none of the studies deal analytically with the concept of poverty. As an example, references to 'who are the poor' are only loosely related to the analyses of political, social and economic powers. I will return to this issue in the final part of my presentation. Furthermore, while aiming to discuss both formal and informal power structures, the failure to systematically link discussions of power to poverty has left out the issue of the prevailing political culture and the political will of key actors to redress the plight of the poor.

4. The failure to analyse the role of aid

Overall, maybe the greatest disappointment of the power analysis exercise is the failure to recognize how donors, by empowering one set of

institutions and actors over others, shape the power dynamics in poor, aid recipient societies. None of the ToRs or studies have considered the challenging question of how power, and the relative distribution of power in aid recipient societies, may be affected by international aid transfers. The influence of international public actors and institutions has increased dramatically in recent decades in poor, indebted nations. Today the IMF and the World Bank lend exclusively to developing and emerging economies. The loans and policy prescriptions of multilateral and bilateral donors are linked to conditions that increasingly impinge on the domestic policies of the state. It is essential, therefore, to acknowledge that in poor countries external actors are active stakeholders in the domestic policy arena, through agenda-setting and orchestrating alliances between interested players.

In all four countries considered, in the absence of both local and international investments, international aid represents the main linkages to the international markets. Aid transfers contribute approximately a quarter of GDP and almost the entire investment budgets in many sub-Saharan African countries. Despite the fact that much of the aid transfers since the late 1980s have been tied to specific economic and political reforms, the role of donors and international aid as agents of change remain questionable. But considering that powerful political actors and institutions are shaped by who the donors wish to empower, it is problematic that these issues were not discussed. International donors and aid distribution may have major implications both for formal and informal power relationships. The country studies *do* discuss aid and present information on the kind of aid that has been contributed, the amount of aid and major reforms within the donor-recipient relationship. The studies of Kenya, Ethiopia and Mali also provide information on the recently conducted Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes. But the following examples illustrate the missing linkages between the information on aid provided in the four studies and the power dimension:

- The Ethiopia study mentions that the decision to provide state-to-state aid to the government after EPRDF came to power in 1991 had consequences for civil society. The relative power of the executive vis-à-vis civil society increased related to these changes in aid policies/allocations. That changing aid policy affected the power relationship between the executive and civil society (as well as other political institutions) is not reflected upon.
- In the Kenyan study the ToR explicitly asks the consultants to reflect on the dualism in Kenyan politics between poor governance practices at the executive level (at least until the 2002 elections) and a vibrant and dynamic civil society. While the study does a good job of laying out the various aspects of civil society, the study is silent on to what extent donor aid has empowered some sectors of civil society above others. In the case of Kenya, a relevant question could be to what extent economic interest groups, due to their strong ties to the Asian business community, have been relatively less favoured with institutional support from the international donor community than non-governmental organisations.
- The Mali study describes processes of decentralisation in some detail. But it does not consider to what extent donor support to decentralised institutions and agencies may affect existing power relations at the local level and the relationship between the local and central level. It is by no means certain that the present decentralisation processes carried out across sub-Saharan Africa (all supported by donor aid) will

have any affect on existing formal and informal power relationships. Yet, this would have been an exceedingly interesting point to discuss in relation to international aid, and power relationships at the local level.

- The recent poverty reduction strategy processes carried out across sub-Saharan Africa are mentioned in all studies. However none of the studies make any attempt to link these discussions to the discussion of formal and informal power dynamics. Recent analyses carried out in Malawi, Zambia, and Tanzania suggest that the PRS processes to a large extent influence power dynamics. In Malawi and Zambia we have found that a new accountability relationship between non-governmental organisations, the administrative arm of government (Ministry of Finance primarily) and the international donor community have been formed. However, the traditional institutions of accountability, the parliaments and the political parties, have been sidelined in these processes. This is one important example of how donors and donor policies in poor and weakly institutionalised recipient countries shape power relations. The studies have not dealt with these issues.

II. Some further comments on the specific studies

I assume that many of you have not been able to read the power analyses. Of the four studies presented, clearly, the Ethiopian and Kenyan studies were the most completed. Unfortunately, in the case of Mali, we so far only have a draft and some parts of the study are still missing. In order to illustrate the general points I have raised so far, I will therefore briefly present some of the main points raised in the Kenya country study.

The ToR prepared for the Kenya study takes as its point of departure that the developments in the country may be described as a paradox, which has created a two-sided picture of Kenya. That is; the political leadership has failed to safeguard the human rights of its citizens and to implement necessary reforms while; on the other hand, a dynamic society with active citizens in different capacities has expanded the democratic space during the last decade. There is thus a paradox: human rights have been ignored but nonetheless there is guarded optimism concerning the country's long-term development. Linking this observation to the overriding goal of Sida's development assistance, poverty reduction through a greater focus on democracy and human rights, presents the rationale of conducting a power analysis:

“In this context it could be mentioned that a power analysis also could be seen as an analysis of poverty with a human rights perspective. This aspect of power analysis is specifically important in this study as its purpose focuses on development cooperation to poverty reduction in Kenya, as mentioned above, through a greater focus on democracy and human rights in a context described as a Kenyan paradox.....

Based on the above, a comprehensive analysis will be done of political, economic and social power structures and power relations in society, – as they manifest themselves in both formal and informal decision-making at different levels of the society -, as well as their implications for poverty reduction and development in Kenya. The study also aims at helping Sida to identify different processes and initiatives in the Kenyan society and which could be supported within the Development Cooperation between Sweden and Kenya, which

may contribute to poverty reduction, democratisation and economic development in the country”

(Sida: TOR Kenya Power Study 2002: 8).

The Kenyan ToR illustrates the documents prepared for all the country cases: It is an excellent document that captures both the generic/comparative elements coupled with country specific assessments. However, it is left to the consultant team to weigh the various components asked for in terms of importance/scope and to provide possible linkages between the issues raised. Of the three studies that I have read, the Kenyan study appears to follow the ToR most ‘faithfully’. Generally, the study covers most of the issues raised very well and provides highly interesting information. In six chapters, power (understood as formal and informal, political, economic, and social power), poverty, conflict and Swedish aid is assessed. The result is a large document with good discussions of a whole range of issues that both in its various sub-parts and as a whole provide valuable information. One of the main conclusions arising is clearly relevant for the poverty-power-rights dimension:

Policymaking has not reflected the wishes and aspirations of the poor largely because executive dominance reduces access of most people except those with organic links to the state, which is principally influential groups and business. Whatever consultation takes place is mainly accessible to organized groups based at the centre. At this stage, informal networks and patronage dominate influence. This is further compounded by the realisation that champions for the poor are either missing or not articulate enough. Given this situation, it appears that the development and maintenance of an anti-poverty focus as well as the development of a clear rights based agenda will not arise out of the organisations and pressure of poor people only and their civil society (Maina et al. 2003).

The Kenya study also goes the furthest in including the role of aid in the power analysis. Concluding overall that executive dominance is excessive in Kenya, the section on aid argues that most of the international development support has gone to Government. In the early 1990s, donors started to provide assistance to civil society, a shift accompanied by the shift towards democratisation. However, the study argues, the said assistance to civil society and movement of assistance through non-state actors has never been as significant in volume as that made available to government. This finding is relevant to the power-mapping exercise, but it is not discussed in the context of rights-poverty and power. The section on conflict also brings forth important information relating to aspects of formal and informal power. Again, due to the lack a framework that could enable a systematic linking of issues of conflict to power, poverty and rights, it is left to the reader to interpret the findings of the various sections of the study.

To summarise, to what extent will these reports facilitate Sida’s effort in designing aid policies that link poverty reduction to a rights based approach? My tentative conclusion is that the documents produced have at the same time provided too much, and yet not enough information for policymakers. A great deal of highly relevant information is provided. But because information on power is not systematically linked to issues of poverty and human rights, the comparative findings of the four studies are limited and the policymakers are left to ‘read between the lines’ to make the necessary interconnections between sections on power, rights,

conflict and poverty. Furthermore, as the power analyses are asked to focus on national actors and institutions, I find that a major aspect of the power relationship is excluded; that of international aid.

Sida's aid policies explicitly link poverty reduction to governance. I will argue, therefore, that power analyses may be an important tool for emphasising processes, projects and actors of relevance for aid policies (and funding). These studies may further provide relevant, comparable information on how power relations affect issues of poverty and what possibilities a rights based approach may have for altering this relationship. If the power analyses were given a structure that 'forced' the consultants to systematically link the issues of power, rights/governance and poverty, I believe they would be of greater use than in their present state. In the final part of my presentation, I present one attempt to link the issues of power and poverty within a governance or rights perspective in order to start a discussion on how in the future, power analyses can be improved to better integrate the issues of concern.

III: An attempt to link the concepts of power, rights and poverty

The framework presented was first developed in collaboration with UNDP for a somewhat different purpose; the aim was to emphasise mechanisms and processes that could enhance accountability toward poverty reduction from a range of actors and institutions. The exercise deliberated on the responsiveness of various agents and agencies to the concerns and needs of the poor and attempted systematically to address the multitude of mechanisms whereby agents and agencies mandated to reduce poverty can be held to account. While reading the power analysis of the four countries in question, I found myself placing the various pieces of information into the voice-responsiveness-accountability typology developed for the UNDP project. Developed for a different purpose and set of questions, the example provided may not fully fit the power analysis format. The aim is to use this example of systematically linking concerns of poverty, rights and power to stimulate the discussion on further work on power-analyses within Sida's overall framework of rights-based poverty reduction.

The starting point of discussions linking poverty to governance and rights is an understanding of the concept of poverty is a multidimensional concept including *deprivation* (of income and the basic means of livelihood and well-being) as well as *vulnerability* and *powerlessness* (arising from both lack of knowledge and opportunities for participation). The notion that poverty is rooted in powerlessness and that poverty reduction requires poor groups to gain a voice as well as adequate channels to voice their concern, informs Sida's aid policies (as well as most other OECD countries). The overriding question in international development aid, also clearly stated in Sida's aid policies and the ToR for the power analyses in question, is the following: How can we increase the responsiveness of decision-makers to the concerns of the poor and hold them accountable for their commitment to reducing poverty? Further, who are the actors expected to be responsive to the concern of the poor and accountable for their commitment to reduce poverty?

Poverty, understood as powerlessness, is linked to rights/governance along three important dimensions:

- The ability of the poor and their advocates to articulate their concerns (information, knowledge and organisational capacity at the grassroots level);

- The institutional channels and arenas for effectively voicing these concerns (elections, hearings, litigation, participatory policy-making processes, lobbying, media).
- The legal basis of poverty reduction, i.e. to what extent are the rights of the poor to be non-poor embedded in legal instruments?

In order to capture these three dimensions of powerlessness, a typology of *voice-responsiveness-accountability* may allow us to acknowledge the overall complexity of the problem at hand, while facilitating a systematic focus on the key actors and mechanisms.

The Voice-Responsiveness-Accountability typology

Voice. First of all, power entails that poor groups have a voice to raise their concerns. Within this category we ask how the concerns of the poor are articulated and expressed, and how their articulation can be made more effective. Questions to address in power analyses could include: What are the central agents and organisations providing a voice to the poor? How can empowerment and organisational capacity among the poor be increased through community-based organisations and NGOs? What are the most important arenas for articulating the interests and demands of the poor? How may effective institutional channels be established for the poor to voice their concerns and to create opportunities for broader participation?

Responsiveness. Secondly, for voices (of poor) to be heard, there must be mechanisms in place in a given country/locality for making agencies at various levels responsive to the voice of the poor. Key questions in terms of enhancing the responsiveness to the concerns of the poor and thus enhance their power include: How can we add to the weight of the poor relative to other interest groups? Are the political culture and professional norms of the decision-makers receptive in this regard and how can they be made more sensitive? How can the ability of the decision-makers to comprehend poverty concerns and to plan and implement policy in response to them be strengthened?

Accountability. Finally, we need to identify and create mechanisms for holding agents accountable for their decisions, priorities, policies and faults of omission as they bear on poverty. Such mechanisms should be sustainable and capable of being institutionalised. They may relate predominantly to *transparency*, such as systematic reporting on the poverty profile of public spending; to *answerability*, by instituting consultation procedures giving all affected parties a right to be heard; or to *controllability*, by introducing court-like structures of sanctioning.

My suggestion related to the power analyses presented here is to group the information on formal, informal, political, economic and social power presented into the rubrics of channels for voice, responsiveness and accountability to the concerns of the poor. By grouping the information provided into these rubrics the various elements of power (social, economic, political, formal and informal) are systematised. Furthermore, we ensure that the discussion of power is linked to the overriding concern with poverty.

Actors to be made responsive and accountable to the concerns of the poor

The second question to address is *who* owes accountability for the reduction of poverty? This apply most clearly to those institutions and actors whose mandate includes poverty reduction or are otherwise committed to the same goal. Again, the power analyses provide a wealth of informa-

tion on this subject, but it is not systematised. The table below identifies three sets of actors and institutions at three levels.

Table 1: Actors accountable for poverty reduction

	Public	Civil Society	Market
International	UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO, bilateral donors	International NGOs, international media	Transnational corporations, foreign investors, international finance
National	Governments (executive branch, legislature, judiciary and other institutions of restraint, civil service), parties	National NGOs, national media, national elites/opinion leaders	Large national corporations, banks, business and labour organizations
Local	Local government and administration, local parties	Community based organisations, NGOs, local media, and elites	Local businesses, financial institutions, business chambers, local organised labour

The obligation to be responsive and accountable for poverty reduction applies, first and foremost, to those mandated to govern on behalf of society. This category comprises all the actors and institutions listed in the ‘public’ column above: political leaders (with legislative and/or executive functions), ‘non-political’ public officers (members of the judiciary, ombudsmen, ‘independent’ commissioners of various types), as well as the civil service at national and local levels. What sets the accountability obligation of these public servants apart from actors in other spheres is that the former (at least in a democratic society) are explicitly *acting on behalf of* the poor. They are entrusted with a *mandate* and the powers to implement it in accordance with specified rules.

While the focus has predominantly been on the accountability of actors at the national level, the accountability and responsiveness obligations apply equally to their counterparts at the international level. In the developing world *public actors at the international level* may be as influential as national governments in terms of the distribution of goods and services and the shaping of the social structure (which in turn defines the opportunity structure for the poor). The most relevant inter-governmental organisations are the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, as well as regional organisations such as the AU, the ASEAN, and bilateral donors.

In addition, global economic integration and political liberalisation have reshaped the environment in which state institutions operate and bring to the fore international, national and local non-state actors. The most important are *international businesses* (transnational corporations), and *international civil society* (international NGOs and international media). As indicated in Table 1, the responsiveness and accountability of civil society and market agents are relevant, not only at the international level but also nationally and locally. These actors do not have an explicit mandate ‘to serve the public interest’ and by implication the poor. But particularly in weak states, where the majority of poor people live, many non-governmental agents vastly influence the policies pursued. Their behaviour often bears decisively on the overall responsiveness and accountability of the political system to poverty reduction.

The three-by-three table presented here includes a wider set of actors than the power analyses have focused upon. There are a number of very

good reasons for *not* adding a substantive list of actors and institutions to future power analyses! But, I think it is important to have this encompassing perspective in mind in order to stress the complexity of the issues involved. The framework also allows us to make *explicit* decisions on which sets of actors that are the most useful in terms of power analyses in a poverty-rights based perspective. Tables 2, 3, and 4 illustrate how the voice, responsiveness and accountability of public agents, civil society and market may be enhanced to further the interest of the poor. I find that much of the information included in these tables have been presented in the four power analyses. However, in their present form, these analyses do not forcefully stress the interconnections between poverty, power and rights/governance. To what extent the typology I have suggested here will enhance that process is a question for discussion.

Table 2: Responsiveness and accountability of public agents at national and local levels

Institutional Focus	Means of strengthening the <i>VOICE</i> of the poor	Mechanisms for strengthening the <i>RESPONSIVENESS</i> of decision-makers	Mechanisms for strengthening the <i>ACCOUNTABILITY</i> of decision-makers
National government (executive branch)	– Civil and political rights – Legal basis of social and economic rights – Free and fair elections – Improved voter registration procedures – Voter education – Participatory process (budgets, policies reporting, etc) – Capacity building – Media focus on poverty	– Legislative/constitutional basis of social and economic rights – Political culture/ethos, political will – Training/awareness (human rights of the poor, equality, etc.) – Affirmative action (recruiting people from diverse social backgrounds into civil service) – Civil society partnerships/ participation (budgeting, policy formulation, reporting, etc) – Human Rights Commission reporting on status regarding social and economic rights	– Free and fair elections – Electorate awareness? – Vote of no confidence – Parliamentary oversight (budget) – Media and civil society/ donor scrutiny of pro-poor performance (gender budget) – Legal obligation to provide information – Legal obligation to provide reasons for decisions on request – HRC reports on socio-economic rights – Social rights litigation
Local government	– Decentralisation from central to local levels? – Local government elections – Participatory planning process	– Political culture – Training/awareness/capacity-building – Affirmative action – Participation/partnership – Accessibility	– Free and fair elections – Tracing of public funds – Budget oversight – Obligation to give information – Obligation to give justification – Media, civil society awareness – Appeal procedures
National legislatures	– Free and fair elections – Information – Participatory process (hearings on legislation etc.)	– Funding – Information – Training – Capacity building – Committee system	– Elections – Recall – Referendum – Tied mandate
Political parties	– Freedom of organisation – Lasting party organisations – Representation at local level – Autonomous funding (not from executive) – Local nomination procedures	– Issues of poverty reflected in party programmes and campaigns – Identifiable political platforms – Nomination processes and criteria (quotas for women, social groups such as unemployed)	– Replacement – Tied mandates – Secure national/international party funding (autonomy from elite/business) – Media awareness – NGO awareness

Judiciary	– Legal literacy programmes – Legal aid schemes – Legal aid by NGOs – Training, exchanges of experience – Court procedure, criteria for standing	– Change legal framework – Reform court system – Appointment of judges (social representativeness) – Sensitivity training (social rights, equality legislation) – Juries, lay assessors – Invitation of amicus' briefs	– Appeal procedures – Reporting of judgements – Plain language initiatives – Civil society debates
Special institutions of restraint (ombudsmen, HRC, IEC, AG, etc.)	– Outreach – Accessibility – Consultations	– Composition – Training – Funding – Mandate	– Media awareness – Withholding of funding

Table 3: Responsiveness and accountability of public agents at international level

Institutional Focus	Means of strengthening the <i>VOICE</i> of the poor	Mechanisms for strengthening <i>RESPONSIVENESS</i> of decision-makers to the poor	Mechanisms for strengthening <i>ACCOUNTABILITY</i> of decision-makers to the poor
Bilateral donors	– Participatory processes (policy formulation, project development, implementation and assessment) – Information – Capacity-building for interest articulation	– Mandate (from national parliaments in donor country) – Donor co-ordination? – NGOs/CSOs in donor co-ordination meetings – Staff composition (social background, training, professional culture) – Incentive structure – Policy coherence	– Sanctions (by parliaments in donor country) – Public evaluations of pro-poor performance – Pressure from executive/parliaments in recipient country – National, international media, NGOs, reporting on pro-poor performance – Institutional mechanism to enforce commitment to long-term strategy of poverty reduction
International financial institutions	– Participatory processes – Information – Capacity-building for interest articulation	– Mandate – Donor co-ordination? – Staff culture, incentive structure, training – Policy coherence	– Increased vote of poor countries – Answerability for decisions made/not made, (institutional mechanism to enforce commitment to long-term strategy of poverty reduction?) – NGOs /public bodies regularly reporting on pro-poor performance – Media scrutiny
Multilateral organisations with a mandate for poverty reduction (UN)	– Increased vote for poor countries – Participatory processes – Information – Capacity-building for interest articulation	– Mandate – Representation and voting rules – Staff (composition, training, incentive structure)	– NGOs /public bodies regularly reporting on pro-poor performance – Media scrutiny – Institutional mechanism to enforce commitment to long-term strategy of poverty reduction?
Multilateral organisations with significant impact on poverty, but no explicit mandate (WTO, OECD)	– Increased vote for poor countries – Information – Capacity-building for interest articulation	– Mandate – Representation and voting rules – Staff (composition, training)	– NGOs /public bodies regularly reporting on pro-poor performance – Media scrutiny – Institutional mechanism to enforce commitment to long-term strategy of poverty reduction?
Regional organisations (AU, EU)	– Increased vote for poor countries – Participatory processes – Information – Capacity-building for interest articulation	– Mandate – Representation and voting rules – Staff (composition, training)	– NGOs/public bodies regularly reporting on pro-poor performance – Media scrutiny – Institutional mechanism to enforce commitment to long-term strategy of poverty reduction?

Table 4: Voice, responsiveness and accountability of civil society and market agents

Institutional Focus	Means of strengthening the <i>VOICE</i> of the poor	Mechanisms for strengthening <i>RESPONSIVENESS</i> of decision-makers to the poor	Mechanisms for strengthening <i>ACCOUNTABILITY</i> of decision-makers to the poor
Transnational business corporations	– International media focus – Information/ transparency – NGOs – Litigation – Lobbying	– Corporate culture – Codes of conduct – Training, raise awareness, knowledge (business ethics, poverty issues) – Business-NGO partnerships	– Negative publicity – Official/consumer sanctions – National/international courts to rule on human rights violations against poor – Business-NGO partnerships
National/local business	– Media focus on poverty and the poor – Information/training – Participation in “tripartite” bodies (government, labour, business (+ civil society))	– Corporate culture – Codes of conduct – Raise awareness, knowledge (business ethics, poverty issues) – Business-NGO partnerships – “Twinning” arrangements with corporations in other countries	– Horizontal application of rights (non-discrimination, affirmative action, social rights) – Labour legislation – Court cases – Local media – Local NGOs – “Tripartite” bodies
International NGOs	– Information/ transparency – Capacity development of local NGOs and informal CSOs – Knowledge of local context – Constituency – Fund projects to empower the poor	– Knowledge – Engagement in public policy – Public education programmes in poor countries – Advocacy for policy changes/development – Funding (adequacy, security)	– Clearly articulated mission, aims and objectives – Transparent and robust accounting systems – Systematic, regular feedback to constituency – Member-based sanctions – Donor reporting/sanctions – Media – Court cases
National/local NGOs	– Information/ transparency – Presence at the local level – Constituency within poor groups – Grassroots focus/ work in partnership with the poor on local level projects	– Organisational culture – Composition of staff – Training, awareness and knowledge on poverty issues – Advocacy for policy changes with INGOs and NGOs	– Clearly defined objectives – Independent and legally registered board of trustees – Regulatory framework – Direct representation/ elections – Systematic and regular feedback to constituency – Transparent accounting systems – Media focus – Member sanctions – Sanctioning donors (international and national) – Court cases

International media	– How to 'market' poverty issues? – Training, information – Capacity – Local branches	– Financial conditions/ ownership structure – Mandate – Codes of conduct – Composition of staff (social background, training, professional norms) – Local presence in poor areas	– Financial conditions/ ownership structure – Regulations – Codes of conduct – NGOs/public bodies reporting on performance from perspective of poor groups (exposure)
National/local media	– Establishment/ funding to local, community based radio stations – Training, information – Capacity – Local news desks	– Financial conditions (ownership, resources) – Mandate – Public media boards – Code of conduct – Background of staff – Training, information – Capacity building – Local presence	– Media laws – International donors (funding) – Codes of conduct – NGOs/public bodies (such as Human Rights Commission) reporting on performance from perspective of poor groups

Intervention or reflection?

On the knowledge interests linking aid and politics

Jeremy Gould, Academy of Finland/University of Helsinki

It is a rare honor and treat to be asked to reflect on the thoughts of such esteemed colleagues as Lise Rakner and Mick Moore – among the most experienced and innovative scholars working on politics, aid and development. I am grateful to Sida for this opportunity.

I also consider this a very serious assignment: Sida – as an expression of the tradition of Nordic welfare democracy – is a pivot of endangered efforts to work toward a global consensus around critical issues of solidarity, justice and equity. Sida's mandate and policy platform reflect a long-term commitment to promoting global co-operation for the regulated redistribution of the means to the access to welfare among all members of our species. This vision has never been more pertinent. It is thus a worthwhile challenge to engage in dialogue about the conceptual and normative grounding of Sida's work. Relative to the seriousness of the task, there was not much time to prepare, but luckily we gained an extra hour night before last, so one should not complain.

The moment we are having this discussion also accentuates the challenge. Never more so, at least in my lifetime, have the values of consensual global regulation driven by compassion and solidarity been so directly and explicitly threatened. As we speak, military might and the threat of indiscriminate violence against entire nations (including the inevitability of widespread 'collateral damage' to civilian populations) is employed as a routine measure to address problems which are so obviously grounded in the structural inequities of the global economic system. It is especially sobering that this mode of operation has achieved such a strong foothold within the community of the so-called modern, democratic nations.

This sort of alarmist diatribe may feel out of place in this context, but there is an important relevance to our deliberations. In the broadest possible terms, we are discussing the relationship of 'development' and 'politics'. Both of the commentators call attention to the fact that the 'power analysis' exercise deals with the development/politics link in a somewhat hermetic fashion. Pushing a bit, both might be seen to be making the normative point that the interest in 'politics' *should* be more explicitly linked to broader contextual debates. For Lise, this broader agenda is 'human rights' and for Mick, 'poverty.'

I will not take issue with these normative positions (which may or may not accurately reflect Mick's & Lise's intent). Instead, I suggest (following

Mark Duffield's seminal work) that, irrespective of how the our interest in politics *should* be framed in normative terms, the 'objective' fact is that we are in well into a fundamental paradigmatic shift, in which a powerful link is being forged between 'development' and 'security'.⁵ Powerful because it expresses the most powerful interests on the planet.

development $\longleftrightarrow$ politics $\longleftrightarrow$ security

The implications of this, (perhaps this is the worst case scenario), are that coming years will see an increasing encroachment of 'security' concerns into the 'development' agenda. Certainly this trend already well under way – and the explicit subordination of 'aid' to 'foreign policy' removed many obstacles to this. The Finnish FM, just to take an arbitrary example, is currently planning a capacity building intervention into *policing* in Iraq, designed and implemented in conformance with conventional modalities of development aid. If one wants to play with this idea, it is not difficult to see how seamlessly so many of the current key concerns of the aid community – like governance, corruption and poverty reduction – might be subsumed under an over-riding security agenda. Other notions – 'partnership' in particular – are already deeply embedded in the rhetoric of defence/security expertise. No doubt, George Bush is now coming to realize that he should have had better 'power analyses' of both Iraq and Afghanistan before getting so deeply embroiled in the development/security situations in these societies.

The point is *not* that an interest in 'politics' is a precarious step down the slippery slope to the militarization of aid. Heaven forbid! Rather, I paint this somewhat bleak backdrop in order to emphasize how important it is that aid managers think about *why* they are interested in politics. As both of the commentators observe, this rationale is not spelled out very explicitly – or satisfactorily – in the background documents.

So, I want to briefly address the broad contextual issue of the 'knowledge interest' of donor-commissioned power analyses. Mick sketches a speculative scenario about the processes leading to the commissioning of these studies. Mick's is a compelling, ethnographically informed argument which focuses on the organizational culture of aid agencies – i.e., how decisions *really* get made. He has less to say about the possible intellectual antecedents of the current interest in politics, though he does situate the problem formulation (as articulated in the TORs) within what he terms a 'democracy template'.

I think there may be an intellectual lineage to be unearthed which may be more distinct than the 'democracy template' Mick alludes to, which is a kind of cultural script – an idealized distillation of the basic principles underlying 'the West's' transformation into unprecedentedly affluent, post-industrial democracies. Both Sweden and the US think inside the 'democracy template', but clearly there are immense differences in the way this cultural script is 'performed' as concrete activities.

Trying to imagine the intellectual resources that the conception of this power-analysis project may have drawn on (consciously or indirectly), the closest intellectual kin I can think of is Bent Flyvbjerg, Denmark's most celebrated sociologist, of the University of Aalborg. Flyvbjerg is best known for his detailed, two-volume analysis of town planning in his home of Aalborg, Denmark.⁶ Through this study, BF develops a radical

⁵ Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (Zed 2001).

⁶ Flyvbjerg, *Rationalitet og magt. I: Det konkrete videnskab; II: Et case-baseret studie af planlægning, politik og modernitet* (Aalborg 1992); translated as *Rationality and power: democracy in practice* (U.Chicago Press 1998).

approach to social analysis based on the concept of “phronesis.” According to Aristotle, who coined the phrase, phronesis (often translated as prudence or practical common sense) is ‘a true state, reasoned and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man.’ Aristotle, considered phronesis to be a ‘quality [that] belongs to those who understand the management of households or states.’⁷ Without trying to outline all the subtle distinctions of BF’s thought, one can say that the key idea in BF’s phronetic approach is to grasp the ‘rationality of power’ as it operates in politics of planning in Aalborg, and its implications for ‘things that are good or bad for man.’

This involved asking four fundamental questions:

1. Where are we going with democracy in Aalborg?
 2. Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?
 3. Is it desirable?
 4. What should be done?⁸
- (Are these concerns not very similar to those of Sida aid managers?)

To answer such questions one must be very sensitive to *context* in which power is exercised, and to the *values* by which actors rationalize their strategies and actions. Like the commissioners of the power analyses at Sida, Flyvbjerg assumes that the ‘rationalities of power’ and the politics that they engender are not self-evident. They must be revealed by empirical social analysis. In Flyvbjerg’s case, this resulted in revealing the subversive role of private business interests in undermining democratically mandated officials in the planning process.

The next point is especially important. BF’s project of developing a phronetic social science goes further than merely analyzing and publishing the results. Since there can be no ‘objective’ truth about values, he insists that phronetic social analysis must be *validated in public*. After publishing the study, he travelled about Denmark, appearing often with the Alderman, to debate his findings and recommendations. In this way, BF claims to have had a modest impact on the development of democratic planning in Aalborg.

Let us think about the politics of this approach. In pursuing his study of politics in Aalborg, BF enjoyed the implicit (dual) mandate of the citizen/scholar. These were his tax kroner being spent, the decisions of the planners were affecting his immediate living and working environment and the business interests were making a mockery of his vote. As a scholar, he could claim the ethical justification of his professional guild – his commitment was to truth, rather than reflecting the mere promotion of personal interests.

The punchline is as follows: Let us assuming for the sake of argument that Sida is similarly motivated by a ‘phronetic’ interest in unmasking the rationality of power in order to better determine what it should do for ‘the good of man.’ Must we not ask, What is Sida’s mandate with respect to Burkina, Mali, Kenya and Ethiopia? Lise notes, ‘mandated by national Parliament’; One could also say that Sida has the weight of the ‘universal values’ of democracy and human rights on her side. Now, in what sense (of ‘democracy’, for example) are these adequate justifications for intervention into the realm of politics? More precisely, we could ask,

7 B. Flyvbjerg, *Making social science matter. Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again* (Cambridge 2001), pp. 56-7.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

to what extent are Sida's analyses, decisions and actions subject to public validation?

You know better than I do, and I will leave this question hanging for further discussion in the course of the day.

Conclusion

Is political analysis most productively/responsibly driven by the *will to intervene* or the *will to reflect*? Lise's important point that the aid agencies are largely lacking in the analyses (despite their significant political impact) indicates that this is a problematic issue. Politics is not something that 'they' do; we are all involved – in direct proportion, no doubt, to the levels of aid dependence and indebtedness of the 'partner.'

Aid agencies are interventionalist by definition. Lise's thoughtful presentation suggests many possible points of intervention, and are worth thinking about. Indeed, it probably makes little sense to advocate inaction to an aid agency. And yet, we all know that in many situations, restraint can be the most effective mode of action. The problem is, knowing when and when not to act, intervene. This is where reflection comes in. This is especially pertinent when considering the complex role of the aid agency as a political actor.

The questions that need to be asked, then, concern the different ways that we are involved, the concrete instruments of our involvement, the specific sites of engagement, and the various consequences. There are no doubt some generic outcomes – concerning how the notion of 'accountability' is framed, for example. But for the most part, very specific ones. We need to be asking, consequences for what? Human rights, poverty reduction, good governance are the conventional answers. Ok. But there are many other fundamental social processes which the actions of donors as political agents have consequences for (through 'partnerships and alliances, through sub-contracting relations, through media engagement): state formation, class formation, development of industrial capacity, articulation of ideological platforms and of alternative policy visions, for social values and expectations regarding lifestyle and professional orientation of existing and aspiring elites (political subjectivities). Etc., etc.

It is natural for donors to be interested in 'politics' – they are participants. But donors should also, or perhaps primarily be reflecting on what their routine and strategic actions *do* in the political arena – what effects do they have for political relations, institutions, processes and above all agency. Given the many risks involved, prudence – *phronesis* – would seem to be good counsel.

Better government for poverty reduction:

More effective partnerships for change

Sue Unsworth, Chief Governance Advisor, DFID⁹

Summary

Governments are crucial to the enabling environment for poverty reduction. However, some governments – even in formal democracies where most voters are poor – lack the capacity or incentives to promote economic growth and pro-poor policies. This paper asks why, and what aid donors and other outside actors could do to encourage the emergence of better government in poor countries.

The problem goes deeper than weak technical capacity and lack of “political will”. Individuals matter, but so does the context within which they operate. History suggests that more effective and accountable government cannot be achieved just by creating new formal institutions. It is a more uncertain, incremental process which depends on each country’s historical circumstances, and involves fundamental changes in society, economic structures and political culture. It is thus closely connected with other sorts of economic and social progress.

This has some important implications for donors and other external actors in the development process:

- They should start with an analysis of each country’s particular context, not a specific list of policies. Understanding the social, political and historical context will help identify the underlying factors which could promote or inhibit pro-poor change, and the likely impact on political and social institutions of particular policy choices. Starting with specific policies risks restricting options, overloading the agenda, and narrowing the constituency for poverty reduction. Moreover it can mean missed opportunities if the focus is on trying to change the context, instead of adapting the policies.
- Donors could do more to connect economic, social, political and institutional agendas, for example by linking their existing knowledge, contacts and interventions in different sectors. Economic and social changes drive, as well as being driven by, institutional and political change. Seemingly technical issues such as tax and public expendi-

⁹ Under guidance from a steering group which included Roger Wilson, Adrian Wood, Andy Norton and Graham Teskey, and with extensive input from colleagues throughout DFID. Helpful comments on the draft were provided by Mick Moore of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

ture management have important implications for relations between state and civil society. Being more alert to these causal relationships could enhance the impact of development interventions.

- It is important to think about change more strategically. Change, and the management of change, are at the heart of the development process. However, there is a tendency to become preoccupied with current problems and their immediate causes, and with short-term solutions. To counter this, donors need ways of thinking about change which help them keep longer-term, strategic objectives in view, and to identify medium-term, incremental steps to address the root causes of bad government.
- Internal incentives matter greatly in determining how societies use the resources and opportunities available to them. External actors, including donors, can help by supporting a conducive enabling environment – national, regional and international – for growth and poverty reduction. They could do more to facilitate effective learning, and to strengthen local institutions for research, policy analysis and information dissemination.

This approach presents challenges for donors, including how to balance the need for short-term progress in meeting poverty reduction targets against the longer-term objective of supporting local incentives and pressures for change. Making the country context the starting point for interventions implies more than just adding “political analysis” to the donor skills set: it would also require some significant changes in donor practice and culture.

There are no short cuts to better government. However, there are small but cumulatively important ways in which external actors could do more to support a long term process of social, political and institutional change which would benefit poor people. This may not involve doing a lot of new things: many of the changes in donor practice already under way support a more strategic approach. But it does imply a shift of focus – from “what” countries need to do to eliminate poverty, to “how” best to support the processes of change involved.

Introduction

There is strong evidence that better government matters for growth and poverty reduction. But establishing the rule of law, tackling corruption, reforming public services, and getting democracy and markets to work in poor countries is not easy. The challenge is particularly acute in some low income countries which have very weak policies, institutions and governance.¹⁰

This paper asks why some governments seem to lack the capacity and incentives to promote economic growth and reduce poverty, and what to do about it. Part I suggests that the problem goes much deeper than weak institutions and lack of individual commitment. Part II tries to identify some routes to better government from historical experience, along with the processes of economic, social and political change involved. Part III suggests that there may be more effective ways to support change, in particular making the local context the starting point for all interventions.

I: Better government matters, but is hard to get

Some countries, notably in East and South East Asia, have been spectacularly successful in sustaining high levels of economic growth and reducing mass poverty over the past 50 years. Others (particularly in

¹⁰ World Bank task force report of September 2002 on Low Income Countries Under Stress.

Sub-Saharan Africa) have experienced negative growth and increases in poverty. On current trends, 33 countries with more than a quarter of the world's people will achieve fewer than half the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The challenge is particularly great in Africa, but countries in many other parts of the world – including South Asia and Latin America – could also make much faster progress.

Better policies, better government and more resources could all help. There is a lot of evidence about the kinds of policies that have worked in the past. They include creating strong incentives for investment in physical and human capital; fostering trade; and providing broad access to assets and markets for people within the country. Governments have a crucial role in providing the enabling environment for growth and poverty reduction, by controlling conflict; maintaining political stability; protecting property rights and personal security; providing basic infrastructure and services; containing corruption; effectively managing public expenditure; and making and implementing good policy choices.

But we understand a lot less about how to get better government and better policies. What causes governments in some countries to promote economic prosperity, while in others their efforts are at best patchy or weak, and at worst involve the outright theft of state resources?

Democracy provides a safety net, and the worst performers tend not to be democracies. But multi-party democracy is not a panacea. Some countries were democracies at the time they made rapid progress in reducing mass poverty (Botswana, and – albeit autocratic – Malaysia and Singapore). However, others – China, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan – were not. India has been a functioning democracy for fifty years, and poor people use their vote: yet despite pro-poor rhetoric at election time, one third of the population remains abjectly poor, and spending is still skewed in favour of the better off. In virtually every poor country there is widespread public anger about corruption – yet corrupt politicians get re-elected. There is despair in many poor countries about the pitiful state of public services – yet reform remains elusive.

The problem of poor governance includes but goes deeper than weak institutions and lack of “political will”. The remedy does not lie just in capacity building, on the one hand; or in strengthened conditionality, on the other. Of course technical skills and resources matter, but they are not sufficient for effective institutions. Of course the quality of political leadership matters, and the motivation of individuals can make a crucial difference. But political will does not come out of the blue.

The values, incentives and “room for manoeuvre” of individuals are shaped by the social, economic, political and institutional context in which they operate. To get a better understanding of how to encourage government which is both able and willing to address mass poverty, we need to think about the underlying factors which shape the capacity and incentives of political systems, and individual operators within them – including history, geography, economic and social structures, and political and social institutions.

II: What history suggests about better government

There are some basic building blocks...

Getting good government is inherently difficult: historically there has been far more bad government than good. James Madison described the challenge well: “In framing a government to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the gov-

ernment to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself". People who come from relatively stable democratic systems tend to take them for granted; they underestimate the long, sometimes violent historical processes involved in constructing them. Yet many developing countries are still struggling with Madison's central challenge: how to strike the balance between establishing effective control (including physical control over the territory as well as key institutions), while at the same time responding to internal and external pressures from a wide range of organised interests.

How did the established democracies gradually evolve systems that were more effective as well as more responsive to increasingly large numbers of their citizens? The next few pages focus mainly on Western democratic systems, because they inform (sometimes unconsciously) so much current thinking about good government. But the analysis will also touch on the experience of countries – with or without democratic systems – which have had more recent success in reducing poverty. The intention is to identify some building blocks of better government; to understand why the absence of those elements can be so damaging for growth and poverty reduction; and to look at the processes of change involved.

The first building block is a sense of *political community* – shared identity, interests and mutual obligations. Without this, the state will tend to lack legitimacy. Building a sense of political community at a national level, and basic control over the territory, has been particularly hard for some states established through recent colonial conquest. It can also be hampered by major physical or social barriers separating communities. Where there is no state monopoly of violence – central control over security forces and key institutions – then private protection networks will flourish (warlords, regional bosses, mafias).

Secondly, there needs to be *political accountability* – a set of arrangements governing the relationship between rulers and ruled – which reinforces broadly based, mutual rights and obligations. The problem in countries with weak governance may not be that there is "no accountability", but that the basis of accountability undermines economic growth and poverty reduction. This will tend to be so if accountability rests on expectations of rulers delivering direct benefits to supporters through patronage networks, rather than protecting a broad range of civil, political, economic and social rights.

In Western Europe there were particular historical circumstances which nurtured political accountability, after a long history of bad governance and corruption. These arose from the need for rulers to raise revenue to fight wars. They therefore had to strike bargains with taxpayers, based on exchanging the right to raise revenue for delegation of certain economic freedoms and guarantees of political rights through representative institutions. As the latter grew in strength they re-enforced civilian control over the military. This set of institutional relationships, developed over a very long time period, gave governments incentives to foster general economic prosperity, and taxpayers the incentive (and the means) to hold governments to account. This in turn provided the foundation for a broad range of civil and political rights. The need to collect taxes stimulated the creation of effective administrative machinery.¹¹

Many developing countries have been less dependent on taxpayers for revenue, whether because of income from oil, minerals or indiscriminate aid (the latter fuelled in the past by Cold War rivalries). So there has not

¹¹ Charles Tilly "Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992, 1992"; also Mick Moore "Political underdevelopment: what causes 'bad governance'?" in *Public Management Review*, 2001

been enough pressure to foster broad economic prosperity, to be transparent about the sources and use of public money, or to build bureaucracies able to collect and deploy revenue effectively. Legislatures have not seen their primary role as watchdogs for taxpayers. Elites can avoid or evade tax, further weakening accountability. Political accountability has been particularly problematic in countries where colonial taxation was seen as extortion, and where state structures inherited from the colonial era were designed for different purposes: to maintain law and order rather than be accountable to local people; and to produce commodities for export rather than to nurture local investment.¹²

A third building block is *political and economic institutions* governed by transparent, publicly accepted rules, which provide them with some autonomy or protection from the sphere of personal relations. In the established democracies such institutions evolved as societies became more complex, and developed more specialised arrangements for conducting business that reflected the existence of different centres of power.¹³ So over long periods of time public resources became separated from a ruler's personal income; political and economic power became more widely distributed and did not necessarily rest only with the socially powerful; and individuals began to play separate personal and official roles. Civil society started to emerge as groups organised to pursue interests in contention with other groups, and with state and local authorities. The process greatly accelerated with the advent of industrialisation, the growth of a business class that constituted a significant, alternative source of economic power outside government, and growing secularisation.

Strong bureaucracies and relatively autonomous state institutions seem to have been particularly important in the success of countries in East Asia, and also of Botswana.¹⁴ In some cases the origins of these institutions go back many hundreds of years – merit based recruitment to the civil service in Korea, for example, or the survival of pre-colonial institutions in Botswana, which protected property rights and encouraged broad-based political debate. Other countries have been trying – over a period of 50 years or less – to build new institutions, on the basis of recent (and sometimes inappropriate) colonial structures.

So there is huge diversity among developing countries. But, to a greater or lesser extent, power is still more highly concentrated than in the OECD countries – particularly where there has been limited industrialisation – and public institutions are much more personalised. Highly personalised systems tend to be less effective (more instability, fewer institutionalised channels at national level for resolving conflict, and a greater risk of inconsistent or arbitrary policy making). They also disadvantage poor people, who do not have direct access to power and influence, or the ability to demand public institutions that are governed by transparent, formal rules, which would provide them protection from the very unequal power relations within society.

Finally, it is crucial to have arrangements for *peaceful competition for political power*, and for mobilising people politically in ways that allow for aggregation of interests and negotiation between different groups. In the established democracies there was a long process of conflict as subordinate classes started to organise, got the vote and became participants in the political process. Industrialisation transformed society in ways that created

¹² Patrick Chabal "Power in Africa: an essay in political interpretation" 1992

¹³ For a very accessible account of this process see Robert Bates "Prosperity and Violence: the political economy of development" 2001

¹⁴ Peter Evans "Embedded Autonomy" 1995; and Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson: "An African Success Story: Botswana" 2001

a new working class which learned to organise to demand political inclusion. A process of negotiation about the balance of power between different classes was essential for the establishment of stable democracy.¹⁵ Political parties had incentives to compete for the votes of newly enfranchised groups on the basis of programmes responding to class interests.

In many developing countries poor people got the vote before they had social and economic power, and before they were organised politically around class or economic interests. Political mobilisation has taken place on the basis of personal, often local, identities – ethnic, religious, and regional. Poor peoples' votes are fragmented between different parties, which weakens their ability to make their numbers count.¹⁶ Political competition has been introduced without institutionalised parties based on political ideology or issues. So competition for power has often revolved around getting access to state resources for particular groups through patronage networks. This has fuelled corruption and distorted economic incentives, encouraging the accumulation of wealth for distribution rather than providing incentives for fostering general economic prosperity or the provision of more universal benefits. Many African countries face particular problems, having inherited economic and political structures from colonial times that encouraged people to see access to state power as a main source of access to wealth.¹⁷

...But there is no simple formula for better government

This historical account does not imply that there is one common path to better government, nor that developing countries will have to go through similar processes of change within similar timescales. The point is that more effective government – including Western models of democracy – evolved over long time periods in response to specific historical circumstances. Where formal institutions of enforcement and accountability (the legislature, the judiciary, auditors) operate effectively, this is because they are underpinned by a particular set of relationships and expectations between state, society and the private sector. The diverse experience of countries that are trying to sustain or introduce democratic systems (from India to Latin America to more recent democratisation in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa) underlines the point. Similar formal institutions operate very differently if they are underpinned by different ideas about accountability, different social and economic structures, and different ways of organising politically.

The importance of underlying structures is illustrated by the experience of countries in East Asia which were successful in reducing mass poverty without formal democratic systems. They had a sense of political community; effective bureaucracies; relatively egalitarian social structures (following land reform); and revenues derived from agriculture and industrial production. There were also particular historical circumstances (including, in some countries, the fear of Communism) which – even in the absence of more formal mechanisms of political accountability – gave governments incentives to foster reform, broad economic growth and wider access to services.

Formal democratic systems are, nonetheless, important. They are the “least worst system” and enable people to remove governments, but do

¹⁵ Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens “Capitalist Development and Democracy”, 1992. Note that while the authors recognise the importance of more autonomous civil society organisations as the means by which subordinate classes were empowered, they still see changes in the balance of class power as being the fundamental factor in explaining the advancement or obstruction of democracy.

¹⁶ See for example a study by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies “Political Systems and Voting Behaviour of the Poor in Orissa” commissioned by DFID, 2001.

¹⁷ Morris Szeftel: “Clientelism, Corruption and Catastrophe” in Review of African Political Economy 2000.

not guarantee good alternatives. Building more effective and accountable states requires ways of managing state-society relations which broadly equate to a democratic model, albeit with plenty of room for local variations. But in thinking about the links between better government and poverty reduction, it may be useful to focus less on formal political systems, and more on the patterns of state, society and market relationships that underpin them.

Governance challenges are considerable in many developing countries. The problems are often particularly entrenched in countries that have done least well in reducing poverty, including those designated by the World Bank as “Low Income Countries Under Stress”. The obstacles include a history of state formation which has resulted in little sense of political community, or in inappropriate institutional legacies; deeply embedded social and economic structures which perpetuate poverty and exclusion; physical problems of communication which limit effective control and political organisation; and sources of revenue from oil or minerals which make governments relatively independent of their own taxpayers.

Many developing countries face particular challenges in building effective public institutions. In the industrialised countries these evolved over a long period in response to economic and social needs, and changing political realities. Developing countries must – within much shorter timescales – make arrangements for handling a wide range of public business, and find solutions which respond to the demands of the modern world while retaining social and political legitimacy. Of course there are advantages in being able to learn from pre-existing models, and the global environment supports faster political and institutional change through rapid sharing of knowledge and new opportunities for networking. But there is limited understanding of how to build new, effective and accountable institutions, or which are the critical ones for promoting growth and poverty reduction.¹⁸ This matters because developing country governments are often overwhelmed by demands to put in place a menu of laws and institutions which are much more diverse and sophisticated than those which developed countries had at a similar level of economic development.

Recent research is highlighting the importance of country specific solutions, which may not accord with best practice models or involve wholesale reform, but which target key local constraints while respecting social and political context.¹⁹ Experience over the last decade also points to a more incremental, country specific approach to building political systems. Early optimism about democratic “transition”, and about positive synergies between democracy, appropriately regulated markets and rights have faded: the reality is much more complex. As Thomas Carothers²⁰ has recently pointed out, the majority of countries hailed as part of the “third wave” of democracy have not achieved well functioning systems, but have got stuck in a “gray zone” from which it seems difficult to advance. Rather than a wholesale transition to a new system, it seems more likely that the process will be a piecemeal one – often sporadic, conflictual and uncertain. As Charles Tilly²¹ has put it: “the actual formation and

¹⁸ See Ha-Joon Chang “Kicking away the Ladder: development strategy in historical perspective” 2002, especially chapter 3 which discusses the advantages of being a late-comer and therefore learning from institutions of developed countries, but also emphasises the need to identify which institutions are essential for growth, and cautions against insisting on standards of global excellence for developing countries. See also Merilee Grindle “Good Enough Governance: Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries” 2002.

¹⁹ Dani Rodrik “Institutions, Integration and Geography: in search of the deep determinants of economic growth” 2002.

²⁰ Thomas Carothers “The end of the Transition Paradigm”, *Journal of Democracy*, 2002.

²¹ Charles Tilly “Democracy is a Lake” in “The Social Construction of Democracy” 1995.

deformation of democratic regimes has more often resembled the erratic evolution of a whole city than the purposeful building of a single mansion”.

The long-term transition is from clients to citizens

There may be no simple formula for better government, but there are grounds for optimism. Historically, there has been a broad direction of political and institutional change that has been associated with higher levels of economic and social development, and has benefited poor people.²² Systems where power was heavily concentrated in the hands of a small number, and in which the poor had to seek access to benefits as clients, have evolved so that power is more widely distributed, institutions more rules-based, and poor people can start to organise as citizens, able to claim access to assets and services as a right.

Processes of broad social and economic change are critically important in driving this kind of political and institutional change (and are in turn influenced by it). Economic growth (especially industrialisation), urbanisation, education, improved transport and communications, and access to information all help to diversify power and interests; widen horizons and encourage a sense of political community; and enhance the opportunities for people (including the poor) to organise politically. Better resourced, more autonomous institutions provide government with the capacity to respond, and also help stimulate collective action around broader interests which can allow poor people to make their numbers count.

However the causal relationships involved are complex, and the pace of change can be unpredictable. The dynamics will vary depending on the starting point of individual countries. There is always an element of luck involved. Moreover the transition from “clients” to “citizens” entails significant risks for poor people, and change can be violent. Patronage systems provide safety nets, and the move to more open, democratic systems often benefits the better-off first. So ensuring that the poor also gain from this sort of social and political change is not straightforward. The critical question for the development community is how best to support – and not hinder – the process.

III: How donors can support better government

How can external actors engage with such complex, long-term processes? They have become much more aware, in recent years, of the opportunities (and risks) arising from globalisation.²³ There is a newly developed agenda for much more coherent international action on issues of critical concern to developing countries, including trade and investment, agricultural subsidies, corruption and conflict management.²⁴ Major changes in thinking and practice are also under way at a country level. Donors have learned that conditionality which is not underpinned by domestic political support is ineffective, and recognised the need for broader ownership of local strategies for poverty reduction. Many of them are shifting from

²² There is a strong statistical correlation between democracy and higher incomes (although it does not follow that democracy can be shown to promote economic growth). However it is not automatic that higher incomes result in better government, and the social processes at work may be slow moving and indirect. See Daniel Kaufman and Aart Kraay 2002 “Growth Without Governance”.

²³ Positives include faster dissemination of knowledge; increasing networking between non-government actors; pressures for business to be socially responsible, and for governments to observe civil and political rights; and regional peer pressure or other incentives (for example through NEPAD). New opportunities are arising for collective action around women’s and environmental issues. Potential negatives include the increasing ease with which elites and middle class professionals can emigrate; and inappropriate external pressure (for example, misconceived responses to child labour). The increasing power of international capital to influence policy makers can be positive (rewarding countries with good policy environments) or negative (contagion).

²⁴ White Paper on International Development 2000 “Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor”.

financing individual projects to a more strategic focus on public expenditure priorities, and to channeling financial support through the budget. There is increasing interest in trying to identify longer term social and economic processes which could strengthen demand for pro-poor change.

But the central challenge remains: how to get public institutions and political systems with the capacity and commitment to promote growth and poverty reduction. Part II of this paper emphasised that better government cannot be achieved just by creating formal economic and political institutions. This points to some different approaches by external actors – not so much in what they do, as in the way they seek to support the processes of change involved. Given the diversity and complexity of the issues, the challenge for donors is to work in ways that maximise their chances of engaging effectively with internal processes of change, while continuing to support a strong external enabling environment. The rest of this paper suggests four main ways of taking this forward: to start with the country context, not with a specific policy agenda; to get better at seeing the links between economic, social, political and institutional development; to think more strategically about change itself; and to do more to support the enabling environment for pro-poor change.

Start with the country context, not with specific policies.

Developing countries have very different starting points. Their internal capacity and incentives to support pro-poor change are a product of their individual history and institutions. So while the objective is the same in every country – poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals – the most effective ways of pursuing it will vary. Of course policies matter (although some recent research emphasises institutions – on which policies have an impact – as the underlying determinant of economic growth).²⁵ But donors risk restricting options, and in some cases exacerbating problems, if they make a specific policy agenda their starting point.

There is increasing interest among donors in political economy issues, and in complementing traditional social and economic analysis with better political and institutional analysis. This is welcome. For example, the recent World Bank task force report on Low Income Countries Under Stress recognises that given low capacity and other constraints, “not every desired reform can be undertaken at once”. The recommended strategy is to “choose reforms that meet the least resistance and that offer quick pay-offs to groups that are potential constituencies for further reforms”. The proposal for better stakeholder analysis, and a much more selective approach that avoids overloading weak systems, are clearly moves in the right direction.

However, the objective must go beyond looking for better ways to “sell” or manage an existing reform agenda. The starting point should be an understanding of the underlying causes of poor performance. What matters is not just the short-term political feasibility of proposed reforms, but their impact on key institutions. The question is what sort of policies – short and longer term – might strengthen the foundations of better government, and start to change incentives in ways which would benefit poor people.

This calls for something more than a stakeholder analysis, or a good government assessment of how a country’s institutions measure up against a particular model. It requires a much more open-minded

²⁵ Dani Rodrik, Arvind Subramanian and Francesco Trebbi: “Institutions Rule: The Primacy of Institutions over Geography and Integration in Economic Development” CEPR 2002.

investigation of the opportunities for pro-poor change in a given country context.²⁶ These include very deep-seated factors – the history of state formation, geography, demography, class structures and the resource base of the state – which directly affect political community and the basis of political accountability. Other factors are more susceptible to change in the medium term, including how power is shared between institutions, how relationships are conducted (through personal networks or through more rules-based systems), and the capacity of different groups to organise. These things influence the feasibility and likely impact of different policy choices.

Box 1**A Framework for Basic Country Analysis***Foundational factors*

Is there a political community? Does government control the territory? How have the history of state formation, political geography, geo-strategic position, embedded social and economic structures shaped the basic characteristics of the political system? Is government dependent on taxpayers for revenue?

More medium term, institutional factors

– How “institutionalised” are the bureaucracy, policy mechanisms, political parties, civil society organisations? How embedded is the constitution?

– What is the basis of political competition, and the composition of the political elite? Is political mobilisation based around issues, or personalised patronage networks? How important is ethnicity?

– How is power shared between the political executive, the military, the legislature, the judiciary, other levels of government, the private sector, religious organisations?

Short-term Factors

What is government’s bureaucratic and financial capacity? Key mechanisms for vertical and horizontal accountability? Political resources (including point in the electoral cycle)?

There is nothing very complicated about this sort of basic analysis – its main purpose is to highlight the significance of information that external actors and their partners often already have, but sometimes fail to use. This may be because they are preoccupied with a conventional development or reform agenda, and so neglect more fundamental problems, or fail to link the two (as happened in Rwanda in the early 1990s, or Nepal in the later 1990s). In some cases donors can make problems worse – if they pursue reform without taking account of its impact on deeply rooted ethnic divisions, or if they urge premature support for civil society in a country where central government is weak and there is no state monopoly of power. More often, initiatives are simply mistimed – for example pressing detailed governance reforms on a country pre-occupied with re-establishing basic security and reconstructing public institutions following an internal conflict.

Starting with a focus on policies or specific reform measures can mean that the social and political context comes to be seen as something which gets in the way of good policymaking. This can encourage unrealistic assumptions about the speed with which improvements are possible in governance and institutional capacity. Or (as experience with privatisation has shown) it can mean not thinking enough about the timing

²⁶ For one example of an analytical framework see “Types of Political Systems: A Practical Framework for DFID Staff”, prepared with the assistance of Mick Moore, IDS.

and sequencing of reforms, for example whether the legal structures and market institutions are in place to support new job creation.

There can also be missed opportunities from starting with a policy focus – because questions are being asked the wrong way round. Many economic reform programmes identify weak governance as the key constraint, and then ask what to do about it. But if getting good government is itself a long-term endeavour, and integrally linked to economic and social change, a more useful question may be how to get growth *in spite of* weak governance. Instead of pursuing systemic reform to support an ambitious policy agenda, it may be better to take a more incremental approach, looking for a few feasible reforms which target key constraints. Instead of trying to make the context fit the policies, it may be better to start with the context.

Different constituencies for reform all have their own priorities, so starting with specific policies can overload the agenda. It can lead to a focus on what is wrong and needs fixing, rather than on what is working.²⁷ It can result in too much emphasis on best practice, rather than best fit, and in the development of pre-assembled packages that fail to respect the diversity of different countries.

Perhaps most importantly, a preoccupation with specific policies can unnecessarily restrict options. The international community has become increasingly focused on poverty reduction and the needs of poor people in developing countries. This has been crucial in raising public awareness, getting issues onto the agenda, and changing policy priorities. But it is important not to allow poverty reduction to become associated with an overly narrow set of policy prescriptions, because this would limit the constituency for pro-poor change. There are potential synergies between poverty reduction and other issues of public concern in developing countries, including growth, investment, human development, modernisation, nationalism, security and reputation. The critical thing is for governments to have incentives to support broadly based economic growth, and policies which create universal rights rather than rewarding narrow, sectional interests.

Starting with a standard set of policies can mean using concepts and language that reflect Western values and experience, but may have little local resonance.²⁸ It can encourage engagement with a narrow range of partners – other technocrats who share the same agenda – and neglect of a wider range of opinion formers including religious leaders, traditional authorities, the private sector, teachers and other professionals, as well as politicians. In particular, Westerners consistently underestimate the importance of religious leaders in Islamic countries. Yet they have often been the key to progress on social issues (for example population programmes, child mortality, and women's health) as well as on things such as the conduct of elections.

External actors could do more to engage constructively with elites. Donors tend to be both captured by elites, and to see them as part of the problem (vested interests getting in the way of reform), rather than as part of the solution.²⁹ Of course, a close alliance between economic and political elites to capture state resources is an obstacle to progress in many countries. But elites are rarely monolithic. How they perceive poor people and their needs can be hugely important in driving social change. Poor people have almost always made progress in alliance with

27 See Judith Tendler "Good Government in the Tropics", which stresses the value of learning from what works, and illustrates that with four case studies of successful reform in north-east Brazil.

28 This is a particular problem with much of the "governance" vocabulary. Some words (for example "accountability" or "evaluation") do not translate well into all European languages, let alone Asian and African ones. The concept of "civil society" is not always readily understood, or meaningful where lines between society, state and market actors are blurred.

29 See Mick Moore and Naomi Hossain "Elites and Poverty in Developing Countries: are donors missing opportunities to engage more constructively?" IDS 2001.

more powerful groups (even where there has been a well organised working class). Finding a basis for accommodating the interests of different groups is critical to effective democracy. So presenting poverty reduction in ways that maximise the chances of finding common ground with local power holders and opinion formers should be a much higher priority. A starting point would be for donors to avoid jargon and to look for language that removes unnecessary obstacles to dialogue.

Finally, a better understanding of context could help development actors to avoid superficial judgements about who is a “good” or “bad” performer. Aid donors increasingly use such judgements as the basis for allocating concessional finance. Yet the performance of individuals and countries is usually good – or bad – in parts. Donors need to beware the tendency to become overly pessimistic because of short-term problems, or to equate “good” performance with implementation of a specific economic and political agenda. For example, Bolivia in the early 1990s was regarded as a model performer; by contrast a recent UNDP³⁰ report warns of a crisis of trust, and a worst case scenario of social and political fragmentation and conflict. A better understanding of the context for reform, its likely impact on society and politics, and the strength of underlying institutions could provide the basis for much more balanced and consistent judgements about the long-term direction of change.

Connect economic, social, political and institutional change

There are opportunities for external actors to enhance their impact by better connecting their existing knowledge, contacts and interventions in different sectors. For example, many of the things donors are already doing to support better livelihoods for poor people are also indirectly important for getting better government. But some may be particularly important – such as basic education – especially of women – which promotes intergenerational change and capacity to organise politically; better communications to connect scattered rural communities; small enterprises which provide the basis for economic diversification; and measures to extend property rights to poor people and encourage their inclusion in markets.³¹

Privatisation is another example. It is often pursued to improve the efficiency of investment; but how it is managed also has a crucial bearing on better government. A more autonomous and competitive private sector can provide the basis for genuine pluralism, and a counterweight to highly concentrated political power. But as has been demonstrated in the transition economies, privatisation can strengthen the links between economic and political elites. If it is seen as benefiting already privileged groups, that may reinforce existing conflict and distrust in state-society relations, and even end up undermining the original constituency for reform. The reduction in informal employment will affect the ability of workers to organise politically. These connections need to be much better researched and understood.

Public expenditure management and tax may be the most important areas in which seemingly technical issues impinge on prospects for better government. Better management of public resources is essential for increasing public trust in government, and starting to change peoples’ expectations. Opportunities to make these connections are opening up with the move away from donor financing of projects, in favour of pro-

³⁰ Human Development Report Bolivia UNDP 2002.

³¹ See Hernando de Soto “The Mystery of Capital: why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else” 2000. Giving someone legal title to their property means that they have an address, utility connections and bills, and are included in formal tax networks – all of which can encourage political inclusion.

grammes of general budget support. Pooling financial assistance, and channelling it through a partner government's own allocation, procurement and accounting systems can help strengthen basic institutions. It can also encourage public debate on overall expenditure priorities. It should make funding more predictable, and budgets more transparent. This in turn might (over time) increase incentives for legislators, officials and civil society groups to take more of an interest in broad public expenditure issues, rather than just lobbying for special treatment for their own supporters.

More predictable funding can enable governments to offer basic services (for example universal primary education) as a credible, universal right. This can make it worthwhile for poor people to organise to ensure that their children get equal access – in spite of the risks and time involved. Such action could provide a starting point for more interest – based politics. Conversely, ad hoc donor funding of projects can reinforce relations of patronage. While it can offer poor people short-term benefits, it does not enhance longer-term collective action around rights.³²

Part II highlighted the historical importance of tax in the established democracies. But donors often see it primarily as a fiscal issue. This can be counter-productive if it pushes governments into even more arbitrary and coercive measures in order to meet short-term revenue targets. The links between tax and political accountability are far from straightforward, but in principle the way in which states raise resources has strategic implications for state-society relations. In particular the mobilisation of people around a common set of interests as taxpayers could be a powerful driver of political change. This is a set of issues which donors should explore in more depth.³³

Think more strategically about change itself

Supporting poverty reduction involves promoting change. Yet until recently development agencies have spent more time thinking about “what” needs to be done to reduce poverty and promote better government than about the processes of change involved. The tendency has been to focus on problems and their immediate causes, and to look for corresponding solutions: civil society is weak, so support capacity building for a range of civil society organisations; parliament is weak, so provide technical assistance for Select Committees; corruption is rife, so set up an Anti-Corruption Authority – and so forth.

Long-term, consistent support to institutions is essential (though it needs to be selective, and properly resourced). It can “institutionalise” more rules-based approaches; improve performance; and help develop a corporate ethos and some organisational autonomy. But there is increasing recognition that direct assistance for capacity building needs to be seen in a broader context, and take more account of the underlying causes of weak performance. Earlier sections of this paper suggest a framework for thinking about change which could help donors keep the bigger picture in view.

³² Budget support is not itself a panacea – which financial mechanism to use must depend on individual country circumstances. But decisions should take account of the impact of different mechanisms and programme design on incentives for collective action by the poor. See Anuradha Joshi and Mick Moore 2002 “The mobilising potential of anti-poverty programmes”.

³³ For a discussion see IDS Bulletin Vol 33 No3 of July 2002 “The New Politics of Taxation and Accountability”.

Box 2

A long-term direction of change from clients to citizens: from highly personalised systems where the poor depend on patronage, to more “institutionalised” systems where they can exercise rights

Some building blocks of change: including a sense of political community; political accountability based on mutual rights and obligations; public institutions governed by transparent, agreed rules; and political mobilisation around broad interests or issues

Incremental steps to support fundamental change, including

- a) broad measures to encourage economic growth, industrialisation, occupational diversification, a more autonomous private sector, improved communications, education, accessible public information; and
 - b) more specific actions including improved public expenditure management, tax reform, privatisation, small enterprise development, public programmes offered as credible rights, legal title to property, direct support to institutions, support for collective action around broader interests (by poor people, or the private sector)
-

This is not a model or a framework to be applied mechanistically. It prompts thinking about underlying causes, not just symptoms of problems – and how to support longer term change indirectly, as well as more directly. For example, civil society programmes could do more to consider how the state helps shape the incentives for different groups to organise. Strengthening parliament involves not just help with resources and skills, but longer term action to encourage a different basis of political mobilisation, so that MPs are elected to serve less narrowly based interests. Corruption can be addressed through medium term improvements in public expenditure management, and by encouraging different expectations of government (around key public services, for example), as well as by more direct, short-term action.

Thinking more strategically about change could strengthen the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) process. The long-term goal is national “ownership” of a poverty reduction strategy. But if there is too much pressure to show short-term results, the risk is that (despite all their good intentions) donors get back into the driving seat, and longer term objectives of strengthening local institutions and policy-making processes are undermined. Hence the importance of valuing incremental gains – for example the fact that PRSs are helping to get poverty reduction onto the national policy agenda and stimulating public debate about expenditure priorities. The consultation process is beginning to provide incentives for different groups to organise around more collective, public interests instead of relying exclusively on personal lobby networks. Budget support has the potential to enhance pressures for greater accountability – and so on.

An illustration of thinking more strategically about change is a programme developed by DFID’s office in Bangladesh, entitled “Supporting the drivers of pro-poor change”.³⁴ The starting point was an in-depth look at the underlying social and economic processes which could strengthen demand for pro-poor change. The resulting strategy recognises that timescales for getting better government (including reforming the police, the judiciary and the civil service) will be long – 10 to 20 years. But a convincing case is made for a medium-term approach to support stronger demand for change, in a variety of indirect ways.

³⁴ See Alex Duncan and others “Bangladesh – Supporting the Drivers of Pro-poor change” DFID report 2002.

Box 3**Bangladesh: supporting the drivers of pro-poor change**

Objective: "The central task...is how, over time, to strengthen underlying socio-economic processes and agents that will sustain pressure for pro-poor change"

Social and economic change is already under way including urbanisation, reduced isolation of rural communities, improving literacy, growing involvement of women in economic life, a growing middle class, and the role of the diaspora

Nine potential drivers of change are identified including the media, NGOs, community organisations, business associations, independent research and advocacy centres, professional associations, donors, reform minded public servants and the Bangladeshi diaspora.

Action for donors includes:

- Continued funding of key pro-poor social and economic services
 - More systematic, long-term support to underlying socio-economic change and agents of reform
 - Working selectively and strategically on reform of public policies and institutions
 - Working in a range of international (and possibly regional) fora to support positions beneficial to Bangladesh on issues such as trade, commerce, environment and migration.
-

Support the enabling environment for pro-poor change

Internal incentives matter greatly in determining how societies use the resources and opportunities available to them.³⁵ There are limits to how far outsiders can really understand how another country and society works, and limits also to their ability (and legitimacy) to intervene. In particular, local actors have to take the lead in developing effective, legitimate public institutions.

Proposing that external actors should start with a much better understanding of country context does not imply that they should engage in ever more sophisticated attempts at social and political engineering. The purpose is to make them more effective at supporting local pressures and incentives for pro-poor change. They can do this by managing development assistance so as to encourage long-term change which will benefit poor people; by doing everything in their power to create an international context in which poorer countries can grow and flourish, and by international action to protect the most vulnerable; and by becoming much more skilled at facilitating effective learning both within countries and from outside.

Much of this paper addresses the first point. The second has been covered extensively elsewhere. The third – facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise – is crucial. Historically, countries which have learned effectively from others have often done spectacularly well, whereas societies which have become isolated have tended to stagnate. Of course sharing knowledge and expertise has long featured in development assistance programmes, and it should be a strong area of comparative advantage for external actors. But there may be a need to value it more, and to become more skilful in execution. Priorities include:

- More emphasis on long-term support to *build local capacity* for research, policy analysis, and data collection, assessment and dissemination by groups within and outside government. Better availability of good

³⁵ See David Landes "Wealth and Poverty of Nations" 1998.

quality, objective information could be more persuasive than any amount of direct advocacy. Absence of such information can allow misconceived ideas and policies to go unchallenged. Experience from Latin America and elsewhere points to the positive influence that a group of like-minded reforming technocrats or private sector actors can have on policy change³⁶ – but they need ways of building skills and knowledge, and generating policy options.

- More support for *networking and learning* from international partners – including non-government and private sector – and especially for regional networking. Interaction with neighbouring countries can be very important in reinforcing success – both in terms of economic growth patterns, but also in relation to more intangible changes in attitudes of elites, exchange of ideas, and building confidence to handle social and political change.
- Supporting high quality national and international *research* on how to get better government, including how to help build effective institutions; which particular aspects of the good government agenda are most important for growth and poverty reduction; and how to limit the damaging effects of corruption.
- Developing *new skills within development agencies*, including much more emphasis on country and regional knowledge, languages, interdisciplinary working, and facilitation and process management skills. Donors need to review ways of assessing performance, to ensure that these do not inadvertently reinforce pressures for them to set and drive the agenda, and for short time horizons. They need new ways of assessing and managing risk, and new approaches to evaluation that capture the impact of more incremental movement towards long term strategic objectives.

Conclusion

History provides a useful perspective on getting better government, and on the way in which – over long periods of time – poor people have benefited. It provides some insights into processes of change, including the links between economic, social, political and institutional development; and into the foundations or building blocks of better government.

None of these insights offers quick fixes, or simple formulas in the search for better government for poverty reduction. But they do suggest small but cumulatively important ways of enhancing the current efforts of external actors. This implies more than just getting a bit better at understanding country context (though that would help); or adding political analysis to the existing skills set in order to better “sell” a particular policy agenda. What is needed is a shift of focus – from “what” developing countries should do to eliminate poverty, to “how” best to support the processes of change involved.

This means being less preoccupied with implementing a specific policy or institutional agenda (while continuing research into what seems to work in particular circumstances, and why). It means looking beyond day to day problems and their immediate causes, and taking more account of state-society relations that underpin key institutions, which in turn shape the capacity and incentives for poverty reduction. It means having a long-term vision of the direction of change which would benefit poor people – from being clients dependent on patronage to being citizens with rights and obligations – and looking for the incremental steps which could support that process. External actors should try to work

³⁶ Merilee Grindle “Audacious Reforms” 2000.

in ways which help to strengthen the foundations of better government – including a sense of political community; expectations of government based on rights and obligations; incentives for collective action around broader interests; and the creation of legitimate and effective institutions.

This presents a challenge for the development community. It means coming to terms with the diversity of individual countries, and moving outside the familiar terrain of policy detail, into the much more uncertain arena of the context for implementation. It also means investing in new skills and knowledge. In striking the balance – as donors constantly must – between the urgency of achieving short-term benefits for the poor and the need to support longer term processes of change, it may mean valuing the latter more.

Many of these changes in thinking and practice are already under way. There are opportunities to build on them – and to enhance existing efforts to support better government for the poor. This may not involve doing very new or different things, but having different starting assumptions which generate different questions and approaches. Moreover these are changes which donors and other external actors could themselves initiate.

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Working Groups' Discussions

DFID struggles with the same issues as Sida. Sue Unsworth argued that the important thing is to look for underlying causes, not symptoms. There are informal as well as formal power structures, both of which need to be looked into, when we are moving away from the normative approach of good governance towards one of finding what is actually going on. The focus will be on poverty reduction rather than democracy.

One of Sue Unsworth's personal starting points was the time she spent in India. The situation there led her to question why people in India are still poor, despite democracy. Sue Unsworth found that people do not vote as individuals for many different parties, instead, arising out of their identity as poor people, they try to support one party that would work for them. So, how do we get an environment benefiting poor people? The process of state building and of strengthening the government's capacity to operate and its accountability is an ongoing one. Can we find a better way of directing change towards benefiting poor people? Sue Unsworth remarked that people rely on their personal relations and personal connections when they want to get something done – and this is not only so in India. People pursue their own personal networks instead of organising around issues, and making the government care.

The aspiration then, is for a system that provides protection for all people, including poor people. How do we institutionalise this? Some broader long-term issues are relevant: infrastructures, economic development, education along with the importance of ideas and perceptions. The importance of tax for the provision of such public good is another.

Sue Unsworth finds that the analyses carried out suggest a new way of looking at the world, tell us to challenge assumptions, provide warning signals and encourage us to look carefully into individual contexts and connect the economic, social and political structures of power. We must also value long-term building of local capacity.

Chairperson Lars Rudebeck started by giving a short commentary on the relationship between democracy, poverty reduction and power. Swedish development cooperation presupposes that poor people need power to change their situation, thus bringing the concept of power into the discussion on democracy as one important aspect of poverty reduction. Power is a part of democracy as well as of the poverty concept.

A short discussion on the concept of power took place, bringing out different views among the participants when it comes to the notion of

power. Some disagreed with Lars Rudebeck's conceptualisation of power, in relation to poverty reduction, as "power over allocation of resources".

The major points of discussion concerned: the usefulness of power analyses; how Sida should go about the definition of power; the purpose of power analyses; the importance of "do no harm"; the need for a framework and what it should look like; the use of existing research; and the international dimension and the role of donors. The following is an excerpt from the deliberations.

Usefulness

- All agreed that power analyses could be useful tools.
- The way terms of reference for power analyses are presently formulated, is not useful for (or aiming at) country strategies as a whole, but rather for finding out which groups to support in order to promote democracy.
- What does Sida think of the four studies so far conducted? According to Helena Bjuremalm, the Burkina Faso study has been quite influential on the country analysis. Local experts with deep experience of politics in the specific country were chosen for the study. The study contributed to putting politics back into the development discussion that had so far been very technical. In that sense, the study has been very useful. It has attracted huge interest in West Africa. The notion of power attracts people more than talk about democracy. The researchers have also been asked to present their findings in seminars in their countries, which could contribute to the political debate in the countries in question. The concept of power, however, needs more attention in the terms of reference.

Definition of power

- How should Sida deal with the concept of power?
- Having a paragraph or two in the terms of reference, briefly discussing the ambiguity of the concept might help.
- One could use the international norms – human rights address all the things that poverty is about and there are international norms agreed upon by lots of countries.
- The poor are not powerless. Rather, the work of donors should be about making the poor realise their rights by using the human rights instruments available.

Purpose

- Having a clear purpose for the power analyses is of major importance. Questions which need answering when doing power analyses are:
 - What will be the outcome of the power analyses?
 - Why are we doing them?
 - How will they be used?
- Since the work is to be central to the analysis it is important to have that made clear in the terms of reference.
- Why?
 - It contributes to Sida's understanding of the country's political landscape.
 - It can be helpful for staff since personnel changes are frequent.

- It could help in discussions about different political options when designing projects; it could help with day-to-day decisions about political choices.
- It could be a possible tool in the dialogue with recipients when stating what donors want.

“Do no harm”

- The importance of not doing harm was another major point of discussion
 - How do we avoid disturbing local processes of policy formation?
 - How do we move forwards enhancing local processes?
- Much is to be learned from conflict situations where aid is given. Ideally, the power analyses should help one see who gains and who loses from the aid given.

Framework

- There must be a framework for power analyses. However, one single document is probably not enough. Some components are more or less the same for all countries, while others are discretionary.
- There could be various frameworks for different levels or issues, because mostly one needs varying information at different times. Then, it would not be necessary to update all of it all the time.
- The country power analysis could be designed as a framework for whatever issues are to be focused on, e.g. it could be worked up in a way that allows it to be used as a flexible blueprint
- There could be a dominant framework, which does not have to be updated all the time, combined with more specific, perhaps short-term comment.
- How should the terms of reference deal with the concepts of *democracy*, *poverty reduction* and *power*, considering that the “judgments” passed on the four studies were critical of the consultants’ way of conducting the studies primarily with the notion of democracy as a goal? Dividing terms of reference according to issues would make it more difficult to disregard the power aspect in favour of the democracy issue.
- There is much to learn from conflict analyses in order to avoid the overlapping that is there today.
- It could be important for Sida to have a common analytical framework for its different staff.

Using existing research but not overlapping

- There is ongoing research in academic institutions of politics; what is the relation between that work and the study being conducted? It is important not to duplicate or overcrowd.
- The Swedish Government bill on Shared Responsibilities – a New Policy for Global Development bill stresses that we should adjust the poverty reduction strategies of the country as well as do “our own work”.

International dimension and donors’ role

- International (and regional) dimensions of power need to be taken into consideration. The importance of this becomes very clear when looking at, for example, the Middle East where there are power relations at international and regional levels that cannot easily be changed.

- The international dimension of power also includes the difficulty with donors and aid dependent countries.
- The terms of reference should pay attention to the role of the international community of donors as an important power factor.
- Look at the international dimension from a historical perspective in order to learn from what others have done.
- To understand the impact of assistance, we must look closer at how we can be more effective in our political dialogue when it comes to addressing power questions.
- Sector and budget support involves much dialogue. What mechanisms do we have to address issues of democracy, human rights, conflict etc. while giving a country sector or budget support?

Power is visible only when in “action”

- Power is only visible when in operation, which means being open to what power may look like and how it can manifest itself. Perhaps it should not be defined before being studied, as has been done in the power analyses so far conducted, if by doing so it provides the answer in advance?

Historical aspects and future scenarios

- A historic type of power analysis is interesting; how people understand their political landscape has historic roots.
- Looking forward is equally important: what future scenarios can we see? This is important for policy implementation.

Summary and operational recommendations

The group formulated its *operational recommendations* based on the discussion held:

- 1) The terms of reference should acknowledge that the concept of power is contested. Power can be conceptualised for instance as: something structural (rooted in society); something that is exercised by actors; power *over/of/to* something.
- 2) Some kind of framework is essential. The types suggested by Lise Rakner and Sue Unsworth are good ones.
- 3) Rather than having one single document/one study that is updated, there could be a basic “fixed” document with complementing (perhaps short-term) ones too, e.g. some sort of “portfolio”.
- 4) The terms of reference should consider the international dimension. It is important to set any power analysis in its international context. That includes the role of donors since they participate in the power game.
- 5) The power analyses must be tuned into different uses and users.
- 6) Existing research in the country in question should be used. Lots of research of relevance to the power analyses already exists and should be looked at (critically) in order not to duplicate it.
- 7) The power analyses must “do no harm”. This ethical point is important to bear in mind since power analyses means intervening in the lives of people. One must be aware of what is being done, both with the power analyses and the aid given.
- 8) The terms of reference should be careful about linking the politics of poverty, democracy and power. Analyses of power concern both of the concepts of poverty and democracy but are not equal to either of them.

Plenary discussion and closing session

By Sara Pettigrew and Sandra Linnéadotter

Helena Bjuremalm summarised the group discussions briefly.

Main conclusion: power analyses should definitely be carried out in the future, but not in the way they have been carried out to date. Not everything should be included in a single study. Major groundwork could be done every five years and updated occasionally. This work could then be combined with studies of a different character. Accordingly, the work should continue but the structure must be extensively changed.

Participants' final comments concluded for example that:

- it is important to consider the processes in the country in question, since use can be made of those that exist; one can influence as well as obtain knowledge;
- country strategies are full of things that need to be worked with or changed, but the important thing now is to develop a few tools to start with instead of trying to solve everything at once;
- we need to find a working dialogue between donors;
- the “country-portfolio” (brought up earlier) seems like a good idea, with smaller pieces of research conducted on a more regular basis, adding up to a continuously updated body of knowledge. This work should also involve others and not just the Division for Democratic Governance at Sida. With the fast turnover of personnel at Sida, this research practice would need to be institutionalised.

In closing, Lennart Nordström remarked that he had, when first reading the comments on the power analyses, been somewhat worried. However, any concerns had been allayed during the day when discussions proved power analyses to be very important. There is a need to know what structures look like and what “the game is all about”. He particularly stressed the importance of interviewing ordinary people in an analysis of this kind, i.e. people not normally consulted, as a good way of ridding oneself of prejudiced views.

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Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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