Voice, Accountability and Civic Engagement

A Conceptual Overview

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Voice, Accountability and Civic Engagement Think Piece

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1. Background

The Bureau for Development Policy/Oslo Governance Centre, Civil Society Organisations Division (Partnerships Bureau), and regional advisors are collaborating to develop a strategy for civil society and civic engagement. The 2008-2011 Strategic Plan lays out a renewed commitment to strengthen civic engagement at all levels, with a particular emphasis on bringing the voices of the poorest groups in society into policy processes. With the approval of this plan, a new cycle in global and regional programming is starting. This is therefore an important juncture for UNDP to develop a more strategic focus on engagement with civil society, considering how to operationalise broader concepts of civic engagement.

To contribute to this process, the Oslo Governance Centre is commissioning a 'think-piece' which lays out recent shifts in the broad intellectual terrain around voice, accountability and civic engagement, with an emphasis on how this relates to the development field, and how it impacts on the positioning of UNDP programming and other activities.

2. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the quality of governance has been recognised as one of the central factors affecting development prospects in poor countries. Governance goes beyond the formal institutional framework of the state to encompass the interaction between formal and informal institutions, rules, processes and relationships. It is a process of bargaining between those who hold power and those who seek to influence it.

Thus, Voice and Accountability (V&A) are important dimensions of governance: it is widely acknowledged that citizens as well as state institutions have a role to play in delivering governance that works for the poor and enhances democracy. In particular, citizens' capacity to express and exercise their views has the potential to influence government priorities or governance processes, including a stronger demand for transparency and accountability. However, citizens need effective 'voice' in order to convey their views; and governments or states that can be held accountable for their actions are more likely to respond to the needs and demands thus articulated by their population.

Civic engagement outlines multiple ways that the citizen can engage with the state, although it is rarely the individual citizen that can interact with the state but a collection of individuals. Citizens can be organised in civil society organisations, political parties and organisations as well as the private sector. Thus, civic engagement is a much broader concept than civil society for it includes a wider range of actors and the multiple relationships between them. Civic engagement is also broader than the notion of participation for it is a process, not an event (or series of events). It is about a role for citizens in deepening democracy by participating in decision making processes that affect their lives. At its core, civic engagement is concerned with establishing channels for voice with a more responsive and accountable state.

However, there are significant concerns with the uncritical acceptance of concepts of voice, accountability and civic engagement when they do not take into account imbalances of power, inequality and prejudice. This can lead to the marginalisation of the voice of some (most usually vulnerable groups) and the dominance of the voice (and

interests) of more powerful groups. There is the need to be aware of the strong possibility of elite capture at national and sub-national levels, within the state but also within civil society and other groups purporting to represent "voice" and interests of the people. Thus, concerns with legitimacy and accountability apply to non-state organisations as much as they do to state institutions.

This discussion will be further elaborated in section 2 of this paper, along with a closer examination of the concepts, their definitions and the links between them. Section 2 also examines a number of policy processes where increased civic engagement is leading to greater citizen voice in decision making as well as increased accountability of the state. Section 3 takes lessons learned from a number of recent evaluations and studies on the subject, including academic literature, policy briefs and articles.

Section 4 provides an overview of general recommendations that are relevant to UNDP, and follow on from the lessons learned in the preceding section. The lessons learned and recommendations contain information that UNDP staff can then make directly relevant and applicable to their work. It was beyond the scope and timeframe of this paper to provide an in-depth analysis of UNDP as an organisation, its current programme portfolio and engagement and its future strategy. Instead, this think piece aims to provide UNDP with a broad overview of the current thinking, emerging lessons and relevant recommendations resulting from recent evaluations and studies.

3. Voice, accountability and civic engagement

This section will outline the concepts of voice, accountability and civic engagement whilst examining the linkages between them. It will then highlight some key examples where the concepts have been operationalised and used in practice.

3.1. Voice

Voice refers to a variety of mechanisms – formal and informal – through which people express their preferences, opinions and views. It can include complaint, organised protest, lobbying and participation in decision making, product delivery or policy implementation (Goetz and Gaventa 2001).

Goetz and Jenkins (2002, 2005) suggest that voice matters for three related reasons. First, voice has intrinsic value – it is good for people to have the freedom to express their beliefs and preferences. Second, voice is an essential building block for accountability. Third, the exercise of voice, and the conversations that result, plays an important role in enabling communities to arrive collectively at the standards – the values and norms of justice and morality – against which the actions of power-holders will be judged. Additionally, voice matters because if people do not speak up, there is little or no chance that their preferences, opinions and views will be reflected in government priorities and policies.

Voice can be seen to contain a number of components which are almost sequential, or overlapping at the margins. First, there is empowerment and a conceptualisation by the individual that they have rights, and the state has an obligation to meet those rights. Then there is the ability of people to come together with a shared agenda, progressing on to the ability to enter into previously closed spaces, and finally to demand and scrutinise information.

However, the exercise of voice is not necessarily straight forward and simple. The way in which it is expressed is likely to vary depending on context, specifically on the extant capacities for voice. Such capacities will include the personal capacities of those seeking to exercise voice – their awareness of the issues and their degree of empowerment – as well as the institutional capacities or environment, including the socio-cultural environment, the political and legal framework and accepted notions of citizenship and rights (Gloppen et al 2003).

There is also a risk of voice undermining democratic processes, particularly in contexts where institutions are relatively weak and unable to handle multiple, and often competing, voices. The fear is that a society without capable democratic institutions that can create an enabling environment, through rules and safeguards, could lead to situations where greater participation undermines civic engagement. "A high level of participation could be antithetical to democracy, for it may endanger freedom and rights, impede governability and destroy pluralism"[1]. Additionally, there is a risk that increased participation in dialogue may reduce its quality, also potentially undermining democratic processes. Quality dialogue with the state depends on citizens having sufficient knowledge and interest about the issues being discussed, but on any issue the number of individuals with such knowledge is usually small. Improving the quality of dialogue may limit participation, while expanding participation may diminish quality. Achieving both participation and quality dialogue can be difficult, and may involve trade-offs.

Furthermore, high levels of the exercise of voice and greater participation have cost implications. As noted by Malik and Waglé, "Civic engagement as a process needs to be managed and requires resources. In developing countries, where many equally deserving ends compete for scarce resources, opportunity costs in terms of money and bureaucratic capacities diverted to manage a participatory process may be significant."

Thus, there are certain challenges and costs to the exercise of voice. Voice is regarded as intrinsically important as most would agree that strengthening citizen's capacity to engage in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives is positive and is considered to be instrumentally valuable for improving democratic governance. Initiatives aimed at strengthening voice are intended to move citizen engagement with the state beyond consultative processes to more direct forms of influence over policy and spending decisions. However, amplified voice will have little impact if the state is not responsive to the needs of its citizens and upholds their rights.

3.2. Accountability

There are as many definitions of accountability as there are relationships between those that hold power and those that are subject to their rules. Thus, there are many types, forms and relationships of accountability. This paper will outline some of the key accountability definitions that are particularly pertinent to the relationship between the citizen and the state. Increasingly, there are various accountability relationships involving a multitude of actors, some of whom can be demanding accountability whilst at the same

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[1] See Agrawal (1999) quoted in Malik, K. and Waglé, S. "Civic Engagement and Development: Introducing the Issues".

time being subject to calls for them to demonstrate their own transparency and responsiveness.

UNDP defines accountability as "the requirement that officials answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their powers and duties, act on criticisms or requirements made of them and accept (some) responsibility for failure, incompetence or deceit"[2] whilst DFID's white paper 'Making Governance Work for the Poor' extends this definition to "the ability of citizens, civil society and the private sector to scrutinise public institutions and governments to hold them to account."

As the UNDP definition demonstrates, a simple accountability model refers to the nature of a relationship between two parties. In a relationship between two parties, A is accountable to B, if A is obliged to explain and justify her actions to B, and B is able to sanction A if her conduct, or explanation for it, is found to be unsatisfactory (Goetz and Jenkins 2002, citing Schedler 1999).

Figure 1.   The accountability relationship: a static model
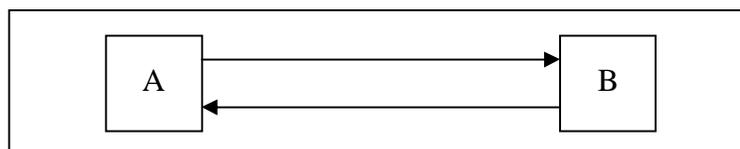
These are the two dimensions of accountability – answerability and enforceability (also called controllability or sanction) – which must exist for there to be real accountability (Goetz and Jenkins 2005). In addition, both dimensions of accountability require that there is transparency, for in the absence of reliable and timely information there is no basis for demanding answers or for enforcing sanctions (Moore and Teskey 2006).

Another dimension to accountability is responsiveness. Responsiveness is what citizens want when they exercise their voice and is fostered by the existence of soundly functioning accountability mechanisms. Responsiveness and accountability are the "critical missing elements in our understanding of the relationship between the powerful elites and the disempowered poor who are asserting their rights" (Gloppen et al 2003: 1, citing UNDP 2002).

Table 1.   Language used to describe roles in accountability relationships

Agent being held accountable	Agent asking for answers and enforcing sanctions
A	B
Supply-side	Demand-side
Duty-bearer	Rights-holder
Accountee	Accounter

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[2] http://www.undp-pogar.org/governance/transparency.asp

Forms of accountability

Vertical accountability is imposed externally on governments, formally through electoral processes or indirectly through citizens and civil society, including mass media, whereby these external actors seek to enforce standards of good performance on officials.

Horizontal accountability is imposed by governments internally through institutional mechanisms for oversight and checks and balances, and refers to the capacity of state institutions to check abuses by other public agencies and branches of government, or the requirement for agencies to report sideways. As well as mutual checks and balances provided by the executive, legislature and judiciary, other state agencies that monitor other arms of the state (institutions of 'horizontal accountability') include anti-corruption commissions, auditors-general, human rights machineries, ombudsmen, legislative public-accounts committees and sectoral regulatory agencies.

Hybrid accountability, or diagonal accountability, refers to the participation of citizens/civil society (i.e. actors from "vertical" accountability relationships) in some "horizontal" accountability mechanisms (e.g. state oversight/watchdog mechanisms such as anti-corruption commissions). Therefore, diagonal accountability involves citizens in new watchdog roles in state oversight functions, breaking state monopoly of "official executive oversight" and aiming to overcome the limited effectiveness of civil society's traditional watchdog role (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001).

Box 1: Vertical Accountability and Citizenship

Citizenship is a useful concept through which to express some of the complexities relating to vertical accountability. Vertical accountability is used to describe the accountability relationship between state (or more accurately the public officials within it) and citizenry (voice). It is useful because it captures the roles within this relationship: the authority that public officials have to make and implement the rules that citizens are subject to and the extent to which public officials have been delegated this authority by society and therefore are accountable for the stewardship of it. However, when using the language of vertical accountability it is important to situate this in relation to other accountability relationships, to recognise that state and society are not unitary actors and to be cognisant of the fluidity of roles and the importance of context.

Citizenship is by definition about the vertical relationship or social contract between state and citizen, connoting the rights and responsibilities that a citizen can legitimately claim from the state and which the state can legitimately expect of its citizens. As Newell and Wheeler explain (2006: 29), "in order to be able to make accountability claims, there must be an implicit assumption [a social contract] about the roles and responsibilities of the state, as well as the rights and entitlements of citizens". The nature of citizenship varies from place to place, depending upon the institutional and legal framework, the degree to which state actors operate within the legal framework and the capabilities of the citizenry. The nature of citizenship will itself shape the ways in which citizens exercise voice and demand accountability, and the extent to which the state responds to the voices of its citizens and makes itself accountable to them (Goetz and Gaventa 2006). As Newell and Bellour put it (2002: 23): "Citizenship is in many ways the concept that brings accountability and participation [voice] together. Who has the right to hold to account, and who should be held to account? Who is entitled to participate in public (and private) decision making and who is not? The answers to these questions will tell us something about the different uses of the term citizenship".

Source: Voice and Accountability: A literature review

Types of accountability

Accountability types can be defined in a variety of different ways, depending on the subject matter. The box below highlights the key accountability types relevant to this discussion on relationships between the citizen and the state. As can be seen in the definitions, there is a role for citizen engagement in all three types of accountability, thus highlighting the links between citizen's voice and accountability.

Box 2: Types of accountability

Social accountability
- Focuses on citizen action aimed at holding the state to account using strategies such as social mobilisation, press reports and legal action.
- Addresses issues such as citizen security, judicial autonomy and access to justice, electoral fraud, and government corruption.
- Provides extra sets of checks and balances on the state in the public interest, exposing instances of corruption, negligence and oversight which horizontal forms of accountability are unlikely or unable to address.

Political accountability
- Consists of checks and balances within the state including over delegated individuals in public office responsible for carrying out specific tasks on behalf of citizens.
- The state provides an account of its actions, and consults citizens prior to taking action in order to enforce rights and responsibilities.
- Mechanisms of political accountability can be both horizontal and vertical. The state imposes its own horizontal mechanisms, such as ombudsmen and parliamentary audit committees. Citizens and civil society groups use vertical mechanisms, such as elections and court cases.

Managerial accountability
- Focuses on financial accounting and reporting within state institutions, judged according to agreed performance criteria.
- Mechanisms include auditing, to verify income and outgoing funds.
- New trends in managerial accountability are moving towards incorporating different indicators of financial integrity and performance such as social and environmental audits.

Source: IDS Policy Briefing, Issue 33, November 2006.

Th..e, in..nt R..of 'making services work for the poor'. It defines social accountability as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Social accountability mechanisms refer to a broad range of actions (beyond voting) that citizens, communities and civil society organisations can use to hold government officials and bureaucrats accountable. These include citizen participation in public policy making, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, citizen monitoring of public service delivery, citizen advisory boards, lobbying and advocacy campaigns. Mechanisms that involve participation of citizens in the process of managing public resources have proved to be particularly effective."

Whilst social accountability is the relationship specifically focused on the citizen and the state, it can be seen (in the box above) that the other forms of accountability also involve citizens' voice. Hence, voice and accountability as a concept is broader than simply social accountability, where it is often assumed is the only relationship with a role for

citizens. For example, in managerial accountability, citizens make their voice and role heard in budget monitoring processes whilst within political accountability there is increasingly a role for citizens to participate in policy processes and provide an additional "check" on state behaviour.

The figure below is taken from the WDR 2004 and outlines the accountability relationships and the role of citizens within service delivery. The concepts of short and long routes to accountability can be applied to other accountability relationships involving more than two actors.

Figure 2: Short and long routes of accountability
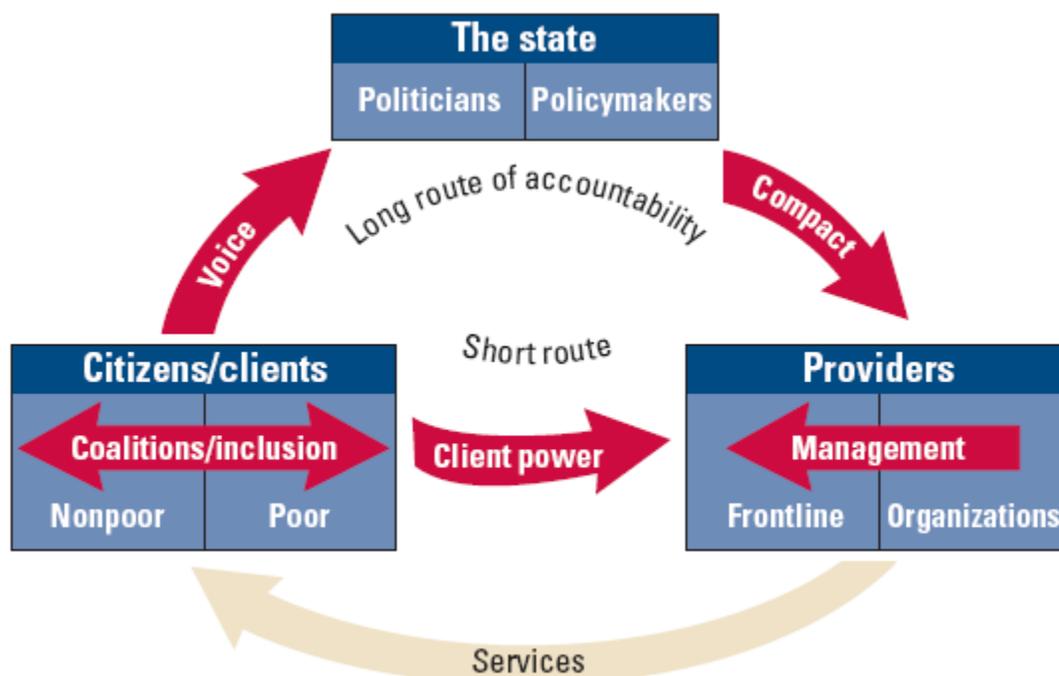
Increasing complexity of modern accountability relationships

Accountability is also complex, dynamic and systemic. That is, given the interdependent nature of different levels and forms of accountability – for instance, public, political, parliamentary, financial, etc. – and increased non-state involvement in accountability, the functioning of any one accountability relationship, or the effectiveness of a donor intervention relating to such a relationship, is likely to be shaped by other accountability relationships (Moncrieffe 2001). Additionally, whereas the language of accountability might seem to be a good way of getting a handle on the relationship between those who set and those who are subject to formal rules, such formal rules and relationships can be in tension with informal social rules and relationships which extend beyond the formal political arena but which are integral to its operation.[3]

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[3] For example, informal relations and practices can mean that representation and accountability take on a different meaning from that envisaged when the formal system was designed or

Goetz and Jenkins (2005), in their work on the "new accountability agenda", suggest that to understand accountability one needs to ask a series of questions: who is demanding accountability; from whom is accountability being sought; where – in what forum – are they being held to account; how is accountability being delivered; and, for what are people/institutions being held accountable? In recent years, the range of answers to these questions has expanded. Actors are playing new roles in terms of accountability, blurring the distinction between vertical and horizontal accountability, creating new accountability mechanisms and finding themselves both subject to demands for accountability as well as themselves demanding accountability from others. For example, many civil society organisations, in particular non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have expanded their role from service delivery and are now taking on advocacy roles as well as participation in decision-making process on behalf of their beneficiaries. This advocacy and participation role requires that the NGO is representing the views and opinions of its beneficiaries fairly and accurately, which should involve detailed and lengthy consultation processes with those beneficiaries. Thus, NGOs own legitimacy, transparency and accountability in how it relates, consults and speaks for its beneficiaries, as well as its own decision-making processes, are increasingly under scrutiny. Given that many NGOS participating in policy dialogue or decision-making processes, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes, are often urban-based NGOS run by educated and middle class people they cannot purport to speak for the poor, rural or other marginalised communities without having consulted heavily with them first, on an equal and respectful basis.

In terms of methods and jurisdictions, things are changing too, with, for instance, the emergence of global arenas for accountability and new accountability mechanisms at the local level. The increasing popularity of decentralised government and decision-making at the local level has created new opportunities for a whole new set of actors to engage in decision-making processes and with each other. Municipalities, districts and regions are being given new powers to control resources and service delivery that were once the domain of central government. The belief is that bringing government to the local level brings it "closer to the people" and thus increases the opportunities for citizen participation in decisions that directly affect their lives, i.e. gives them greater opportunity to build and exercise "voice". However, there are significant capacity constraints at the local level, and often greater opportunity for elite capture and dominance by more powerful groups. There can be significant barriers to accountability from issues such as lack of capacity to set up transparent systems to cultural and social norms that accept hierarchy and do not believe in the need for officials to report "down" to local citizens. Thus, decentralisation in itself can create as many challenges for the exercise of voice as it purports to solve. At the international level, national governments are subject to accountability relationships with other actors, most notably aid-dependent countries and their relationship with donor countries, particularly in the context on direct budget

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adopted and which undermine its operation. Chabal and Daloz (1999: 38-9) discuss the meaning of political representation (and, by extension, accountability) in countries where political clientelism is pervasive: "The populace expects to exchange political support for concrete help … What this means is that … there has been no modification in the notion of representation ... The understanding of the concept of citizenship and of the purpose of the individual vote remains indelibly linked to the anticipation of the direct communal (or even personal) benefits which elections offer .. The vote is not primarily a token of individual choice but part of a calculus of patrimonial reciprocity based on ties of solidarity".

support. Accountability is directed "outwards" where answerability to donors takes precedence over accountability "downwards" to citizens. There is also a change in the standards of and for accountability, with increasing attention to outcomes (justice, equity, poverty reduction) as well as process (fairness, soundness). As such, the complexities of accountability are becoming more complex still.

3.3. Voice and Accountability

It can be seen that voice and accountability are important dimensions of governance given that voice refers to people's ability to express their views, and in this way to influence the way they are governed whilst accountability exists when those who manage and implement the rules (public officials) are answerable to those whose lives are shaped by those rules and can be sanctioned if their performance is unsatisfactory. Voice and accountability are therefore important indicators of the nature of the relationship between state and citizen.

Figure 3: Relationship between voice and accountability

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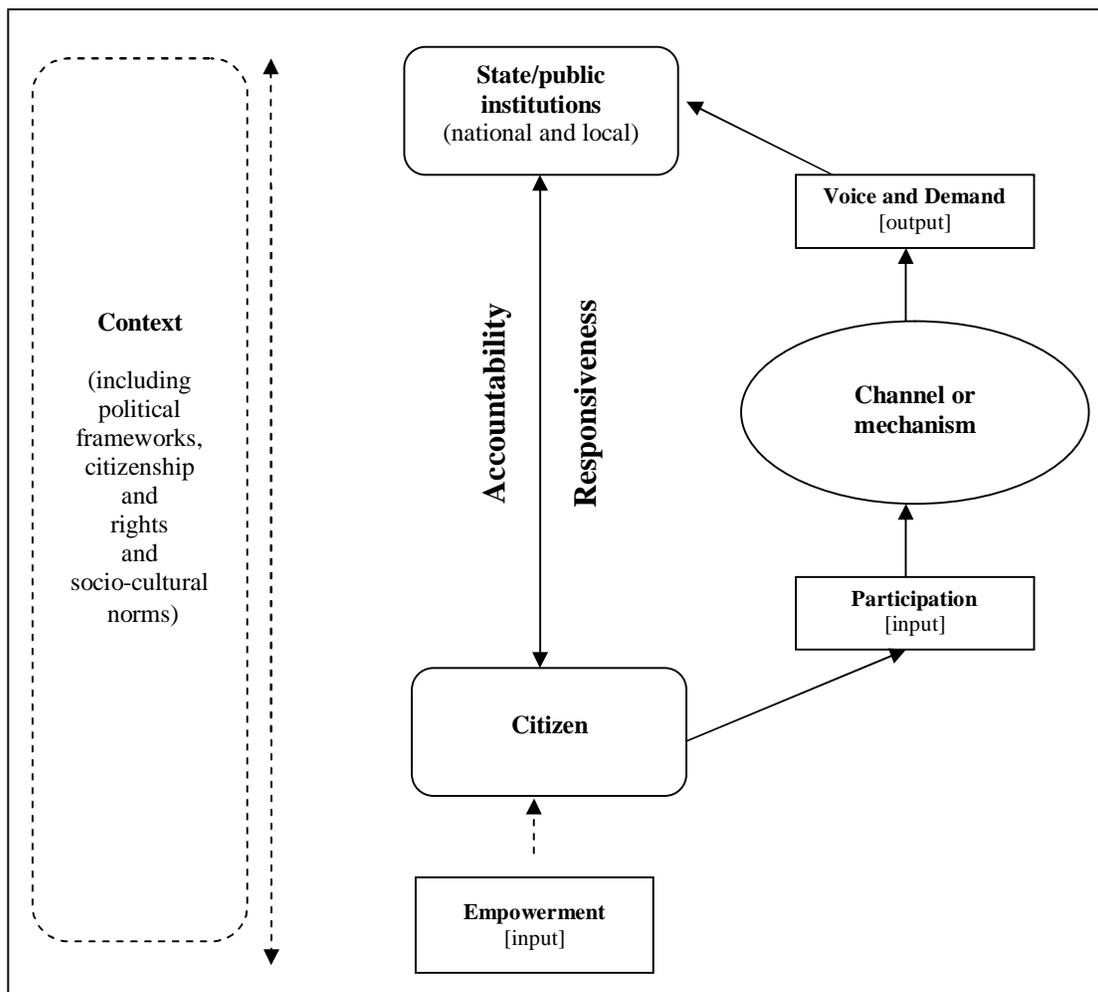
Whilst voice and accountability are intimately related, they are not the same. Voice refers to people expressing their opinions. Accountability is concerned with the relationship between two agents, one of which makes decisions by which the other is impacted and/or which the other has delegated to them. Voice and accountability come together at the point where those exercising voice seek accountability. The figure above attempts to outline the relationship between voice and accountability. It is also important to note that voice can strengthen accountability, including by pushing for greater transparency, whilst accountability can encourage voice by demonstrating that exercising voice can make a difference. In this respect, there is a two-way relationship between voice and accountability.

But, whilst voice is necessary for there to be accountability – for questions to be answered, someone must be asking them (Goetz and Jenkins 2004) – it is not sufficient. Voicing demands can strengthen accountability, but it will not on its own deliver accountable relationships. Indeed, the extent to which voice does or does not deliver accountability is something which will vary between societies and political contexts, depending upon existing power relations, the enabling environment, the nature of the state and its institutions, and the social contract between the state and its citizens.

Increased voice will have little impact if the state is not responsive and accountable to the needs and interests of its people. Traditionally, citizen voice and public sector responsiveness reforms have been undertaken separately. To give poor and marginalised citizens a say in the decisions that affect their lives, programmes should focus both on empowering communities to demand change and on strengthening accountability mechanisms that enable the state to respond to these demands. These interventions are equally important and mutually reinforcing.

Greater emphasis is being given to creating more inclusive spaces for dialogue between citizens and the state, for example in Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA), and decentralisation reforms. Citizen-driven accountability measures, such as participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, social audits, community scorecards and budget watchdogs, are being implemented to complement and reinforce conventional mechanisms of accountability such as political checks and balances, accounting and auditing systems, administrative rules and legal procedures. There are also efforts to strengthen these accountability mechanisms by working with state officials to encourage them to be more open and responsive, and to see the direct value and benefit of increased transparency and accountability. There is an attempt to support a culture of accountability so that the state, as well as citizens, have a stake in a more responsive, transparent and ultimately more accountable state.

Box 3 : Other approaches to V&A

Human rights based approach
From a human rights perspective, V&A is concerned with mobilising people around their rights claims and using those rights claims to demand accountability from the state, and other duty bearers like the private sector and civil society organisations (Newell and Wheeler, 2006). Thus, voice is the capacity to express demands in terms of rights and accountability is the obligation of the state to meet those demands or, at least, provide answers.

Citizenship approach
Starting from the grassroots, this approach emphasises empowerment and participation as the constituent elements of citizenship, and prerequisites for exercising voice and demanding accountability (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). Citizenship is imbued with the principles of the social contract between state and citizen, connoting the rights and responsibilities that a citizen can legitimately claim from the state and which the state can legitimately expect of its citizens. Participation has evolved into active engagement in policy formulation and a substantive role in decision-making, such as participatory budget monitoring and citizen report cards. Actors are therefore playing new accountability roles, blurring the distinction between vertical and horizontal accountability, creating new accountability mechanisms and finding themselves both subject to demands for accountability as well as themselves demanding accountability from others.

Governance approach
Voice and Accountability is seen as one of the six key governance indicators in the Kaufman and Kray model (World Bank Institute). According to the Kaufman and Kray model, Voice and Accountability measures "the extent to which country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media". However, voice is not disaggregated from accountability, so a country may be excelling in the creation of voice but without equal success in accountability. Within the broader governance agenda V&A can be seen as an element of good governance, where the state's capacity to respond to demand of its citizens is an integral part of the governance paradigm.

3.4. Civic Engagement

Civic engagement can be understood as the process whereby citizens or their representatives are able to engage and influence public processes, in order to achieve civic objectives and goals. Civic engagement contains a strong element of participation where stakeholders are active in decision making processes (Malik, and Waglé, 2002*)* The UNDP Human Development Report 1993 describes civic engagement as "a process, not an event, that closely involves people in the economic social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives." However, civic engagement can be distinguished from participation as it is specifically associated with efforts to establish channels of voice, representation and accountability at the state level.

Thus, civic engagement is often seen as a tool for deepening democratic governance, through the channels of voice and accountability. Citizens become active participants in some state decision-making processes (and thereby exercising their right to a voice) as well as deepening accountability via a watchdog role by demanding a more transparent and responsive state, and the appropriate justifications for decisions and actions taken. As Korton puts it, "If sovereignty resides ultimately in the citizenry, their engagement is about the right to define the public good, to determine the policies by which they will seek that good, and to reform or replace those institutions that no longer serve." (Korton (1988) quoted in Malik and Waglé, 2002). Thus placing civic engagement in the context of governance highlights its role in deepening state-society relations through the channels of voice and accountability.

By deepening democratic governance, civic engagement is seen as instrumental in achieving a range of other development goals, such as the MDGs (see box below) and poverty reduction.

Box 4: Civic engagement and the MDGs

- First, civil society can hold governments to account financially and morally. Many civil society organizations have a proven capacity for broad-based mobilization and creating bottom-up demand that holds leaders accountable.

- Second, civil society can put pressure to promote that strategies towards the achievement of the MDGs are tailored to the local context. Participation from different stakeholders in policies and strategies that aim to achieve the MDGs is key.

E.g. In Ethiopia, the conventional monitoring and evaluation of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (PRSP) was supplemented by user perceptions of the quality and satisfaction of services. These have been documented through the first citizen report card survey.

Civic engagement, through increased voice and with a focus on accountability, has the potential to contribute to poverty reduction through more-pro-poor policy design, improved service delivery, and empowerment of groups previously denied a voice. Some accountability mechanisms have specifically been developed for use by poor populations and many focus on issues of priority importance to poor people (such as public health, education, water and sanitation services). However, constant effort is required to ensure that civic engagement effectively serve the priority needs of poor people, include mechanisms to overcome potential barriers to their effective participation and leadership in decision-making processes.

Civic engagement and accountability can also have important gender implications. Women are systematically underrepresented in most civil society organisations, state institutions and the government reducing their capacity to promote their own interests. Civic engagement that is focused on promoting the voices of the most marginalised groups in society should be bottom-up, inclusive and demand driven should enhance the ability of women to make their voices heard. A number of accountability tools focus on greater engagement of women, such as gender budgeting and gender disaggregated participatory monitoring and evaluation, have been specifically designed to address gender issues. Particularly in those public sectors of greatest importance to poor people, of which women constitute a significant part.

Voice and accountability mechanisms also focus the attention of civic engagement on public sector reforms, by addressing the demand-side aspects of public service delivery, monitoring and accountability. Such mechanisms have proved particularly useful in the context of decentralisation, helping to strengthen links between citizens and local-level governments and assisting local authorities and service-providers to become more responsive and effective.

And finally, by monitoring government performance, demanding and enhancing transparency and exposing government failures and misdeeds, civic engagement can be a valuable tool in fighting corruption. Indeed it has been argued by some that the only true safeguard against public sector corruption is the active and on-going societal monitoring of government actions and the evolution of more open and participatory anti-corruption institutions. The two boxes below provide examples of the operationalisation of voice and accountability.

Box 5: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: Civic engagement and increased state accountability

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are now one of the primary sources of lending for most poor countries. Although triggered by the Group of Seven (G-7) initiative to relieve the debts of the Highly Indebted and Poor (HIPC) countries, and by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) requirement that countries must articulate how they have sought to channel resources to fight poverty after debt relief, the PRSPs have now developed into an elaborate development policy vehicle of their own. PRSPs are supposed to be prepared in a participatory manner.

The growing interest among donors to try to work on both voice and accountability simultaneously has led them to experiment with some participatory processes, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes. Civic engagement in such policy processes has allowed civil society organisations access into a new domain of policy and decision-making processes. However, donors may have had idealised views of what greater citizen participation was meant to accomplish and there are significant limitations to civic engagement in these PRS processes.

A central question is whether the role of civil society in PRSPs can be said to have contributed to strengthening accountability mechanisms at the national and local levels. The evidence thus far appears to be mixed. On the positive side, according to a recent study of the participation of NGOs in PRSPs, small, local and intermediate NGOs have engaged in information-sharing and awareness-raising at the local level (Driscoll et al., 2004), whereas, large, national NGOs based in the capital and other urban areas have participated in consultations about the policy content of the PRSPs. Many such NGOs have acquired new skills, forged networks with like-minded organisations, and improved their access to government circles. Studies of the process of formulating PRSPs suggest that a new accountability relationship between NGOs, the administrative arm of government (primarily Ministry of Finance) and the international donor community has been formed (Gould, 2005).

However, while PRSPs are intended to be drafted in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, their participatory nature cannot be taken for granted, and it is not always clear that all actors have the same capacity to engage. Many civil society organisations in the South have expressed that their input is often marginalised, and there is often a lack of civil society capacity to work with donors and policy planners in meaningful ways on policy issues. The danger therefore is that CSOs might end up endorsing positions for which they have little knowledge.

Another issue is whether an overemphasis on the participation of civil society organisations in PRS had usurped the central role of parliaments in domestic accountability processes. Budgets have to be approved by parliament, but the weakness of parliaments to scrutinise or challenge governments is a significant gap, despite various donor supported initiatives designed to enhance parliamentary capacity. This may explain why NGOs (and other CSOs) have stepped in to breach this gap and continue to perform a watchdog function, supported by donors.

Box 6: Increasing budget accountability and pro-poor outcomes through civil society monitoring and advocacy

Civil society budget analysis and advocacy has gained increased significance for donors as a result of the Paris Declaration commitments to increase the amount of aid that is provided in the form of sector or general budget support. However, whilst civil society budget analysis and advocacy have become more common in developing countries, there is little systematic evidence to date on the actual impact of these activities. In an attempt to respond to this gap, de Renzio (2007) summarises the evidence from six case studies of the work of independent budget organisations. This study found that it was difficult to assess the impact of these groups on their long-term objectives, such as better governance and poverty reduction, but that it was possible to identify "a set intermediate outcomes that more directly linked to applied budget analysis as a research and advocacy tool". These outcomes were grouped in two categories:

(i) *Budget accountability.* This is the impact on levels of budget transparency, public literacy and awareness of budget issues, and public engagement with budget processes. The evidence suggests that budget groups have played a vital role in expanding, interpreting and disseminating budget information to enable broader civil society and actors to conduct better analysis and advocacy. For example, the Ugandan Debt Network has used community radio to reach a broad, non-literate audience.

(ii) Budget policies. This refers to improvements in budget systems, shifts in allocation and more pro-poor results. The evidence of the positive impact of these activities on budget policies is more limited than that relating to budget accountability. Nevertheless, it was found that budget work can have a direct impact in terms of improved budget systems and on pro-poor budget locations and results. For example, the work of DISHA in Gujarat has resulted in an increase in resources ring-fenced for tribal groups and better actual implementation of these resources.

A key finding is that the impact of the different budget groups was dependent on context. Context was found to matter in three ways:

(i) The influence of *external factors* such as political environment and opportunities to engage with government, legal and institutional framework determining access to budget information, presence and role played by International donor agencies, and overall level of literacy and interest in budget issues.

(ii) The influence of *internal factors* such as focus of the budget group, leadership, technical capacity and expertise around communication/dissemination.

(iii) The importance of the relations that these groups develop with different actors: "Groups which were able to develop wider networks both within and outside government, and more strategic collaborations with different actors, were the more successful ones in terms of achieving actual policy influence.

Source: de Renzio (2007). The full case studies are available at www.internationalbudget.org.

4. Lessons learned

This section will look at a select number of reports, studies and evaluations that have produced key lessons learned relevant for this paper. This section draws from a recent OECD-DAC evaluation[4] of donor supported voice and accountability interventions, as well as other studies used to corroborate and validate the emerging lessons come from a review of multi-donor support to civil society and engagement with non-traditional civil society[5] and a study of support models for civil society organisations for the Nordic+ group[6] of donors. Lessons will also be drawn from academic literature referred to in the section above, including policy briefs and articles published by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and others.

4.1. Understanding context is important, but not enough

In general, donors clearly recognise the importance of context, and are aware of the economic, political and social processes within a given country, that helps to mould their choices regarding what kinds of voice and accountability interventions, which actors and which activities to support. It is in large part in response to contextual factors that donors tend to work either on voice interventions or accountability ones[7]. However, such a strategy may itself prove problematic in terms of increasing voice without a concomitant effort to build the effectiveness and capacity of state institutions to address growing demands and expectations, and it skirts the issue of the need to engage with both government institutions and civil society organisations to create channels for voice that can lead to greater accountability.

However, context awareness has not proven sufficient to enable donors to grapple with key problems/obstacles related to the interaction between formal and informal institutions, the prevalence of the latter over the former in many instances, and underlying power relations and dynamics. Thus formal relationships tend to be more complex and challenging on the ground. In particular, power relations and informal institutions and processes and relations (including social and cultural norms, clientelism, corruption, etc.) fundamentally shape the way formal institutions operate and may limit the impact of voice and accountability interventions intended to transform formal institutions. Whilst lack of technical skills and capacity is a significant constraint, there are significant political relationships and personal incentives that shape the behaviour of both state and non-state actors. Thus, for instance, laws may be passed to enhance women's participation or to decentralise power, but political deadlock and/or gatekeepers may block the implementation of such laws. While donors may be aware that informal institutions and power relations matter, they are often not well placed to engage with them.

There are very few examples of donors being able to effectively engage with the informal sector, given that donors are usually large, inflexible formal organisations. Some donors are attempting to bridge the divide by working with non-traditional civil society

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[4] The evaluation was of 7 DAC donors: BMZ, DFID, DGCD, Danida, Norad, Sida and SDC.

[5] Commissioned by DFID, and was a light touch review on DFID's portfolio.

[6] Donors were from Canada, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and the UK.

[7] In the sample in the evaluation.

organisations such as trade unions, religious leaders and village communities who have direct links and contacts with informal institutions and processes in order to open up lines of dialogue and support. In Indonesia, for example, one donor has been working with Islamic mass based organisations as the affiliation opens doors which are usually closed to "secular" CSOs. This approach has been regarded as innovative by donors in Indonesia and has the potential to reach the grassroots, where religious organisations' legitimacy and popularity tends to be higher than traditional NGOs. In Bangladesh, civic engagement by a social movement (Samata), using entitlement to government land and water bodies, has created a more responsive state, with some property rights realised as a result.

4.2. Voice does not automatically lead to accountability

A linear causal relationship, in which increased voice automatically results in greater accountability, is assumed, with a belief that an intervention supporting voice can have benefits for accountability, without an explicit focus on accountability channels or mechanisms. However, this assumption can be highly problematic. In some cases[8], donors may in fact be acting irresponsibly when they put so much emphasis on support to the voice side of the equation, without being able to support effectively the accountability side, and without necessarily considering the destabilising effects of raising expectations that cannot be satisfied. For example, this could be true in post-conflict, unstable or fragile setting, where there is considerable political transition and the country is in the process of redefining the nature of the relationship between state and society and reshaping the political settlement or social contract that binds them together. For example, both Bangladesh and Nepal are fairly unstable states with weak and ineffective state institutions. Partly due to a lack of a legitimate government to work with recent donor supported V&A efforts have focused on strengthening civil society organisations. However, sustainability of those efforts is being undermined by the donors' lack of engagement with state institutions with which civil society must interact if their increased voice is to lead to a more responsive and accountable state.

An ODI Briefing Paper[9] argues that '[l]inking "voice" and "accountability" can only be meaningful when citizens have the knowledge and power to make demands, and those in positions of power have the capacity and will to respond' (ODI 2007). Thus, engagement with both government institutions and civil society organisations is crucial to create channels for voice that lead to greater accountability.

As noted above, donors tend to work on either voice or accountability separately and in isolation. Consequently, the interactive process linking state and society together is either difficult to trace or remains limited. Due to the tendency to work with either voice or accountability, or either governments or NGOs, key mechanisms that can bring voice and accountability together are often missed such as state institutions such as parliaments, ombudsmen and anti-corruption/human rights/electoral commissions, and non-state mechanisms such as the media, watchdog organisations, public consultations and multi-stakeholder processes.

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[8] See Rocha Menocal, A. and Sharma, B. (2008) "Citizen's Voice and Accountability: Synthesis Report", London:DFID, for full case study evidence of the lessons being outlined here.

[9] http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/briefing/bp_dec07_voice_for_accountability.pdf

The media is as a key mechanism, primarily for voice but with potential to be a mechanism for accountability. Donor supported media interventions are varied and it is one of the few sectors that demonstrates innovation and flexibility, given that it can be supported in a variety of country and political contexts. The media is a particularly effective and efficient CV&A mechanism as it is popular, has extensive reach (particularly to rural areas) and is robust at managing a multiplicity of viewpoints and controversial issues. In terms of its voice function the media provides an effective forum for the airing of the public's views, complaints and grievances. In terms of accountability, the media has been able to demand answers from authorities.

Strengthening the professionalism of the media has been a focus for many donor interventions, such as in Nepal, where Danida has been supporting the Centre for Professional Journalism Studies (an NGO) through its Media for Consolidation of Democracy intervention, aimed at civic education and awareness raising. The media have also been effective in advocating for and using the right to information, which has been supported by donors in Nicaragua (via supporting the government to implement a new Information Act) and Bangladesh (supporting civil society's demand for this right).

Donor focus on both voice and accountability in their work with the media seems to reflect an awareness (if not made explicit in any of the case studies) of the dangers of liberalising the media without professionalizing it and holding it to certain standards – as became horrifically evident in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, where political liberalisation produced a number of independent media that deepened the country's social divisions. Beyond this, it is also important to recognise that building up a regulatory framework is only an additional step in an agenda to increase voice and accountability that is likely to be much more challenging. Rules and regulations mean little if there is no capacity, power, and/or will to enforce them (as illustrated by the case of the freedom of information law passed in Nicaragua).

Box 7: Mechanisms that bring voice and accountability together

Multi-stakeholder processes: In Indonesia, a Multi-stakeholder Forestry Project (MFP) has been successful in bringing together a varied set of actors. The context MFP is operating in is characterised by a very complex setting of interrelated problems concerning forestry management and poverty alleviation with a lot of different stakeholders involved. Since neither the government nor civil society are homogenous groups, a lot of different interests and relationships exist. MFP's main approach was to initiate multi-stakeholder dialogue processes and forums.

Among these forums were, for example, different working groups consisting of civil society and government actors to advise the local government on community-based forest management. Another example was a comprehensive Participatory Action Research exercise involving communities, local NGOs, universities and provincial and district government officials to assess problems and conflicts related to natural resource management around the National Park of Gunung Rinjani. It ultimately also led to agreements on how to solve these problems. MFP could connect already well-established networks from community up to district level and to the policy dialogue at national level. In every region MFP was working in they also set up Regional Information Centres managed by local NGOs to increase flows of information between the different stakeholders involved, but also in order to feed information to local media. On the other hand, the Ministry of Forestry took also the initiative to invite major civil society organisations, research institutes and donor programmes to provide their inputs for the revision of social forestry policies, as a result of their successful participation in the multi-stakeholder forums.

The question of who took over the role of a moderator in involving these different stakeholders in a continuous dialogue is most important for its sustainability. Legitimacy, acceptance and sustainability of these moderator institutions are thus crucial factors.

The media: In Benin, donors have been working with the media for approximately 10 years and their programmes have evolved in line with the professionalisation and maturation of the sector. The Benin case highlights a number of key processes (supported by donors) which have led to the recognition of the media as a trusted and legitimate V&A actor. Namely, the establishment of a regulatory framework ensuring media pluralism, the establishment of a national agency responsible for implementing and enforcing the regulatory framework; progressive liberalisation of media including increasing number of radio, print, TV and multimedia players and the enforcement of the right to information and freedom of expression.

This model is also being followed in the DRC, where donors have supported the establishment of the Higher Media Authority (state regulatory body) and are supporting the establishment of a number of radio stations with the objective to provide balanced and accurate reporting whilst airing a range of voices and opinions. In addition, in the DRC, evidence suggests that support to civil society and radio stations has contributed to the high participation in the referendum and subsequent elections, the relatively peaceful election process and the acceptance of the results. However, these successes are more likely to be isolated events rather than representative of a general increase in accountability.

Public audits: (mass gatherings where the receivers and givers come together) have been highlighted in Nepal as a mechanism for voice and accountability as communities are encouraged to participate fully, whilst encouraging transparency and accountability on the part of public officials. This is especially relevant in the management of community funds, as community members are able to review all financial transactions and community decisions, and discuss their impact. In addition to building skills of community leaders to manage collective assets, public audits also encourage broader participation among women, the poor and the socially excluded, such as the *dalit* and *janajati*.

4.3. The creation of voice can be a messy, conflictual and difficult process

The concept of voice remains largely un-deconstructed, with few questions asked regarding the processes of creating consensus, managing conflict and counteracting discrimination. While an emphasis on the need to exercise voice seems essential in terms of enabling the poor to be heard, this in itself does not address the prior fundamental question of whose voice is being heard. The voices of the poor (as well as those of other groups) are far from homogeneous – and these many voices may not necessarily be complementary but may actually compete with one another. Different civil society organisations, even those focused on 'the poor', are driven by different interests, and motivations, and have differing capacities to engage (or not) with other actors, including state institutions, political parties, and international donors. Power imbalances between groups and discrimination serve to undermine and weaken the claims of particular marginalised and excluded groups (including the poor, women and ethnic minorities), which means that not all voices are equal, or equally heard. It remains unclear who is actually excluded by some of the spaces and mechanisms created to encourage 'voice' and participation' (e.g. PRSPs), and the extent to which efforts to support or consolidate them are successful at reducing discrimination.

The findings from recent studies on V&A interventions has found that only when marginalised and excluded groups are given specific focus, attention and support are these groups ever successful in having their voices heard. Simply providing a platform for all voices, and hoping that greater access will lead to greater voice for the most marginalised does not work. Additionally these interventions can differentiate themselves from empowerment programmes because they are focused on impacting the state and its processes, For example, in Bangladesh, donors fund an NGO which works specifically with women politicians, including candidates and elected women members of the Union Parishads (district level government offices). The establishment of networks of women at ward level through to sub district level ensures visibility and mutual support, and that has helped to build the confidence of women politicians and to strengthen their electoral appeal. Thus, this type of external support has been instrumental in supporting women to become more active members of district government and invited to participate in other forums and have successfully contested general district government seats.

In Nepal, excluded groups (*dalit* and *janajati*) have been empowered using the mechanism of village or citizens' committees to create awareness on rights and, critically, assisting people to exercise such rights. One of the most notable results in this regard, was increased access by the *dalit* communities to citizenship, natural resources and basic services, as well as promotion of accountability of public officials.

This also leads to another important question about to whom the state is accountable, and why. In fact, a key characteristic of a democratic process is that multiple groups contend to exercise voice, and the state may respond and be accountable to some of these and not others.[10]

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[10] As demonstrated by non-democratic countries such as South Korea through the 1980s and Vietnam and China more recently, it is also entirely possible for the state to be highly effective in some areas (e.g. promote economic development and improve key human development indices) without necessarily being accountable to certain segments of the population.

Even when donors have stated an explicit desire to support the most vulnerable groups, there remains the issue of the difficulty in reaching the most marginalised, most remote, and therefore most in need. Donors have often favoured using NGOs as a reasonable intermediary to reach such groups given that NGOs have greater capacity to deal with the technical and financial aspects of working with donors, and can create the necessary networks to reach out to the grassroots. However, a number of issues that suggest that NGOs may not be the most effective intermediary for reaching the most marginalised groups in society. They are:

- The legitimacy of NGOs is shaped by their perceived representativeness and independence. There are often socio-economic and cultural barriers between NGO staff and the grassroots beneficiaries that limit the former's ability to truly represent the interests of the latter. Additionally, due to a lack of time and resources, NGOs are often unable to build true consensus and simply advocate what they think is the best solution. Furthermore, there is the risk of being co-opted by the interests of institutional funders (e.g. government, INGOs, donors) with undue influence on objectives. There is also the risk of patron-client relations permeating NGO structures and processes and elite capture of participatory processes.

- The need for transparency and accountability applies as much to NGOs as it does to state institutions. NGOs (and other civil society organisations) must also be able to justify their decisions and actions, to funders but particularly to beneficiaries, through transparent and democratic decision-making processes.

- Difficulties associated with identifying credible partners in the NGO community that donors can work with. Given the mushrooming of NGOs in the last 20 years, there are questions regarding their quality and ability to perform, as well as their true motivations and integrity.

4.4. Political relationships fundamentally impact the functioning of state institutions

A general assumption made by donors is that accountability can be supported and strengthened primarily by building the capacity of state institutions to become more responsive, transparent and accountable to citizens, i.e. that lack of capacity is the key constraint for accountability. Whilst lack of technical skills and capacity is a significant constraint, there are significant political relationships and personal incentives that shape the behaviour of individual authorities and state institutions, including lack of political will for accountability reform. Power relations and informal rules also crucially impact how formal institutions work.

Political factors include the rules and incentives embedded in the electoral and party systems in many of these countries, which often lead politicians to align their loyalty with the party leadership rather than their constituencies. Politicians often have no connection to their constituencies (having never lived there and rarely visiting) and their electoral fortunes and future political careers do not depend on voters but rather on the party leadership. In some countries, the leadership and authority of the party system is extremely centralised, and politicians do not risk their political career by going against the party.

Thus, personal incentives include not only career ambitions but also personal financial gains via rent-seeking and corruption, which serve to undermine efforts to increase the accountability of state institutions. Similarly, public officials are used to enjoying certain levels of personal power and autonomy granted them by the cultural norms of acceptance of hierarchy and official powers, where citizens see themselves as subject to their orders, rather than the other way round. Thus, there is significant lack of political will by some such authorities to have that power, autonomy and, perhaps, impunity questioned by citizens.

Power relations within society, often exemplified by social and cultural norms, serve to discriminate against certain groups (particularly the poor and women) and refuse them the same rights as equal citizens. Thus, any focus on working with formal institutions and actors can overlook the role played by informal rules in shaping them. These social and cultural norms and their gatekeepers, typically traditional chefs or religious groups or other informal structures, are currently not significantly involved in donor funded V&A interventions. Clientelism is also a significant power relationship shaping V&A. Thus, formal institutions and informal practices often interact to shape the way in which the formal institutions function.

The political dynamics and power structures between state institutions is also a factor undermining CV&A support, not just those between individual state officials. In some countries the executive is considerably concentrating power in its own hands and weakening other branches of government to benefit the ruling party and its allies. Within the state apparatus oversight mechanisms, such as parliaments and ombudsmen (including anti-corruption and human rights commissions) are often deliberately kept weak so as to maintain the authority and dominance of the executive.

4.5. Traditional intervention design and implementation are ill suited to voice and accountability interventions

The assumption is that voice and accountability support is essentially similar to other work that donors do, and that as a result they can employ traditional programme design and implementation tools. Civil society support is seen as mainly supporting participation and some capacity building, and the emphasis on technical capacity building of state institutions allows donors to assume that voice and accountability support is a non-political endeavour that can be supported with traditional projects. As has been argued above, however, voice and accountability support cannot ignore power relations and is, at its core, a political endeavour. Traditional intervention design and implementation is often not well suited to this kind of work. Most interventions utilise the same funding modalities, reporting requirements and 2-3 year timeframes as other programmes or projects. Issues of scaling up, sustainability and synergy of projects for greater impact and long term change are not always addressed by donors.

Donor funds and support can often be a negative influence on voice and accountability interventions, particularly on NGOs. The increased pressure to deliver quantifiable results means that the focus moves away from supporting behavioural change and power relations to increase focus on activities such as trainings and workshops (where numbers attending and numbers carried out can be measured). There is reduced flexibility to respond to rapid changes as interventions have a duty to deliver agreed objectives, whilst increased donor funding without careful planning can be extremely detrimental for organisations that lack the requisite absorptive capacity.

There is a tension between the long-term processes of transforming state-society relations and donors' need/desire to produce quick results, and donors' need to be more realistic about what can be accomplished in the shorter term. These transformations take a long time and are not necessarily guaranteed. However, most donor interventions have short life spans – 3-5 years, limiting their potential for developing transformative change.

Voice and accountability interventions also tend to be difficult to scale up. The discussion above on power relations highlights the fact that issues related to how voice and accountability interventions can be scaled up and have broader impact become even more challenging if informal processes (such as clientelism and discrimination) are not engaged with. Given that many successful V&A programmes involve high level of human resource input and require long time frames, it is not simply a case of increased funding will lead to more successful programmes. Programmes also have to be adapted to suit the local context, thus simple replication of programmes from one context to another is not feasible either. Thus scaling up programmes faces significant challenges of finding the human resources within donor organisations to work with relevant partners, allowing the programme to run over a longer time span (5-10 years rather than 3-4 years) and a willingness of donors and stakeholders to focus on changing inequitable power relations- an ambitious task requiring patience, local ownership and a different donor mind set.

For example, within Nicaragua some municipal governments are now regarded as best-practice examples of participation in decentralised settings. However, donors face a number of challenges if they are to consolidate and scale up local-level innovation as an input to national-level policy processes. In particular (in the Nicaraguan context), a weak local tax base and lack of decision-making powers on infrastructure expenditure undermines accountability. There may also be a need to translate the aid architecture downwards (including budget support) to better respond to priorities set by municipal governments. Scaling up best practice examples of participation also demands the ability of donors to: (i) fund flexibly to enhance reach to community groups, loosely institutionalised networks; (ii) invest in active facilitation of alliances, and dialogue between civil society and the State; and (iii) work opportunistically to build complementarities with efforts to strengthen key accountability mechanisms of the state (parliament, commissions and ombudsmen).

There are significant challenges to the issue of sustainability of voice and accountability interventions over time. Many of the organisations supported by donors, especially those aimed towards voice (including NGOs in particular) are highly aid dependent, and it is not clear how they are intended to become financially sustainable In addition, there is a lack of synergy and coordination between parallel donor voice and accountability interventions, as well as between voice and accountability interventions and other donor goals. There is also often a lack of strategic thinking in the development and management of programmes and a lack of a coordinated approach to voice and accountability. Although there are a few examples of joint funding (where sometimes UNDP or an INGO is the intermediary chosen to manage the fund), for the most part there is no coherent donor approach to voice and accountability, a situation that often leads to duplication, gaps and unnecessary competition among donors.

5. Implications and Recommendations for UNDP

This section considers the policy and programme relevance of the voice and accountability concepts for UNDP programming and partnerships and makes recommendations about UNDP's potential contribution in this area, taking into account the nature of UNDP as an organisation, its current engagement and the directions set by the new strategic plan.

It has not been the objective of this paper to examine UNDP's strategy, programme portfolio and partnerships profile in depth. The objective has been to highlight key concepts and lessons learned and apply them broadly to UNDP, taking into account the nature of UNDP as an organisation. Therefore, in this section, recommendations flow from the key concepts discussed in this paper (governance, voice and accountability and civic engagement) and are pitched at a general level that do apply to an organisation such as UNDP, but that could be further refined and nuanced by UNDP officers themselves, with attention paid to applicability in specific programmatic areas or geographic locations.

Firstly, it is important to highlight key UNDP operations and strategic priorities that are relevant to this work. They include:
- national ownership
- capacity development
- engagement of citizens/CSOs in designing and implementing national/local development policy/plans
- effective aid management
- poverty reduction and achievement of MDGs
- democratic governance (particularly inclusive participation and accountable and responsive governing)

5.1. Recommendation 1: Take context into account when designing programmes, particularly the impact informal institutions, processes and actors on the formal.

This requires a recognition and a willingness, internally within the organisation at least, that development cooperation (in the particular case of voice and accountability but also more generally) to engage in political processes and not only focus on technical programmes that might be more palatable to national governments in particular. Whilst UNDP is aware of the political nature of voice and accountability work, it will need to find ways of engaging with political actors that may involve itself becoming part of the political process itself. It also calls for greater awareness that "all good things" do not automatically go together. Paths of change are not linear, and there may be embedded tensions in some of the assumptions made about what brings about (positive) transformations.

There should be an attempt to undertake strategic political economy analyses of power and change in the countries/settings in which they work that move beyond the kind of 'quick and dirty' work that is already done to arrive at a deeper understanding of the interaction between formal and informal institutions and of the incentives framework within which (both state and non-state as well as domestic and international) actors operate, and on that basis, analyse what the operational implications for voice and

accountability interventions may be (in terms of additional entry points, opportunities and threats, for example).

Another issue worth pursuing on this front is whether political economy analyses can be undertaken by sector (e.g. justice, forestry, media, local governance, etc) and not simply in aggregate. This would provide for an even finer and more nuanced understanding of a particular area of interest on the ground that can be used to tailor interventions in a much more targeted manner. Although a remaining challenge is how to utlise the additional analysis and operationalise it in programming, for which there are no easy answers or techniques.

5.2. Recommendation 2: Focus capacity building not only on technical but also on political skills

Whilst there is still a great need for technical capacity building of both civil society and state actors, but a focus on technical capacity building is not enough. More attention should be paid to the lack of substantial *political* capacity of both state and non-state actors, i.e. the capacity to forge alliances, evidence and build a case, contribute to the decision- and policy-making process, and influence others to make change happen. Again, such political capacity is likely to be shaped by the institutional and incentives framework within which actors operate, and that needs to be taken as the staring point:

- State actors, particularly certain state institutions (including parliaments and the judiciary), lack the political capacity to strengthen their own role and autonomy vis-à-vis more powerful state institutions, most commonly the executive. Working with such actors is essential to strengthen horizontal accountability within the state.
- CSOs are being capacitated to understand and monitor technical policy and budgetary processes but are then unable to adequately exert influence to ensure that their views are incorporated and acted upon.
- Political parties need to improve their ability to work better together in parliament to exert greater influence over the policymaking process and thereby act as more effective representatives of their constituents.

5.3. Recommendation 3: Place greater focus on voice and accountability mechanisms that address both sides of the equation within the same intervention

As interventions focus on either voice or accountability separately and in isolation (and especially on the former) rather than on attention to both simultaneously, key mechanisms that can bring voice and accountability together are often missed. Programmes should therefore be designed to work on both voice and accountability more consistently and systematically, rather than assuming that one leads to the other.

UNDP should:
- Seek out ways to connect increased voice with the corresponding and relevant actors in state institutions, such as directly linking empowerment of excluded and marginalised groups with interventions aiming to influence policy decisions and engage actively with the government on these issues.
- Strengthen existing mechanisms at the national level that can function to bring the state and the citizen together, such as parliaments, ombudsmen (e.g. human rights/anti-corruption and electoral commissions) and multi-stakeholder

processes (e.g. participatory budgeting and local development processes). The key is to not only work on building the technical capacities of these institutions (which currently remains weak), but fundamentally to work on changing the perceptions of the actors so that they view engagement with others as constructive, whilst developing the will to become more transparent and accountable in that process, to each other and beneficiaries they represent.

- Strengthen mechanisms at the local level, such as local development committees and consultative councils, and do not rely simply on supporting the decentralization process to bring the state closer to the citizen.
- Work on further developing the media's role to bring voice and accountability together. Donors should continue to work with the media by strengthening the regulatory environment, improving the professionalism of journalists and media bosses, and encouraging greater proliferation of the media (i.e. encourage new channels for multiple voices, especially in rural areas). Donors should be mindful of the dangers of liberalising the media without professionalising it and holding it to certain standards – as became horrifically evident in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, where political liberalisation produced a number of independent media that deepened the country's social divisions.
- Support increased access to information by supporting legislation and the right to information. However, a focus on this formal right is not enough. Access to information should also be supported by improving the capacity of interested actors and watchdog organisations to understand and utilise information correctly, and donors should work closely with domestic supporters of freedom of information laws to give them real teeth.

5.4. Recommendation 4: Diversify channels and mechanisms of engagement and work more purposefully with actors outside the 'comfort zone'

Whose voice(s) is/are heard and levels of inclusion in participatory processes are fundamentally shaped by power and informal relations as well as cultural norms and discrimination. These are difficult issues to engage with. However, being aware of these issues, UNDP should:

- When selecting CSO partners to engage with, pay attention to issues of integrity, quality and capacity (so as to avoid supporting what in the case studies were identified as 'briefcase' NGOs and other CSOs lacking legitimacy). This can be monitored by setting rigorous selection criteria, carrying out capacity assessments, and observing the CSOs more closely in their implementation of programmes.
- Be more selective in choosing experienced partners that have ties to the grassroots and can reach otherwise marginalized and isolated groups (especially in the rural areas). This is important so as to ensure that participatory processes that are more inclusive and representative.
- Engage with CSOs beyond traditional NGOs (such as a social movements, religious organization and trade unions). These have proven successful in empowering and strengthening the voice(s) of key groups among the poor.
- A much clearer and targeted pro-poor approach that is informed by issues related to social exclusion and discrimination should be implemented; and in so doing empower communities to strengthen their voice and provide an enabling policy to increase their access to services and decision-making at village level.

5.5. Recommendation 5: Improve key design and implementation features of CV&A interventions and aid effectiveness

- Provide longer term and more flexible support. Strengthening voice and accountability require longer-term commitments than those usually made in project planning. Building relationships with key strategic actors (both state and non-state) over the long term seems essential to ensure positive outcomes.
- Longer term commitments do not necessarily require longer programming cycles but a commitment to remaining engaged with the issue of strengthening accountability through greater civic engagement over the long term, and not succumbing to the temptation to follow the "fads" and drop the issue when another becomes more popular.
- On the other hand, UNDP also needs to be mindful to build in sustainability features and exit strategy into the design of programmes. For the longer term, the principle of working to strengthen local partner capacities to take on voice and accountability issues (and thereby support 'ownership') should be a central part of donor support for V&A.

6. Concluding remarks

Since the increasing recognition of the importance of governance in development, there has been a renewed focus on the centrality of state-society relations in delivering pro-poor and other development outcomes. This focus has given a new role to civil society and has broadened civic engagement from participation to other forms of engagement in political and policy processes. Those processes include PRS which gives civil society a seat at the decision-making table, as well as more oversight and watchdog responsibilities in budget monitoring process, amongst others.

However, there are significant challenges to civil society being able to fulfill that role that are wide-ranging, multiple and complex. They range from a lack of political will and uneven power relations that undermine citizen voice and civil society's participation in policy processes, as well as increasing attention on CSOs own legitimacy, representativity and accountability with questions being asked around CSO's role vis-à-vis elected bodies such as parliaments.

Recent research and evaluations have demonstrated that context matters and is a significant factor in the success or otherwise of donor initiatives. Crucially, context does not simply include formal political, economic and social processes (which often donors, multilaterals and other external players do understand) but informal institutions and processes as well as power relations that are much harder to engage with. However, research has shown that whilst informal institutions matter, there are still plenty of formal institutions that bring state and society together – where voice and accountability meet – that are currently being somewhat overlooked, and that represent a real opportunity for strengthening accountability, such as ombudsmen, commissions and even parliament, Platforms and spaces such as multi-stakeholder forums and networks are also key non-state mechanisms for strengthening accountability.

Therefore, there is plenty of material to give food for thought. Thinking around civic engagement has broadened to give civil society a greater and potentially powerful role in political processes. How non-domestic external actors such as UNDP and donors can support these actors and processes is a delicate issue, given that they are very much

political processes. A clearer understanding of all the actors involved, their incentives and multiple relationships of power within formal and informal spheres will provide UNDP and others with a clearer guide on how to proceed in this sensitive but important area of work.

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