

GETTING GOVERNMENT TO DELIVER IN NORTHERN IRAQ

Although we are used to seeing images of conflict, insecurity and displacement in Iraq, the country's semi-autonomous northern region is relatively stable. It is there that our partner Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health (REACH) is helping communities to secure delivery of services essential to their survival.

As a result of REACH's work, last year, local authorities restored 27.5 kilometres of rural roads in Harier district near Erbil, helping people who were previously forced to undertake difficult journeys on terrible roads to access healthcare and jobs. It also led to authorities in Suleimanieh distributing livestock vaccinations to 25 rural villages in Kalar district, assisting at least 400 poor farmers who faced losing their livelihoods because of livestock disease.

'People are concerned about development. They want social and economic development and political participation'

Dana Hassan, director of REACH

Neither the rural roads nor the animal vaccinations was a result of a 'new' decision by these authorities. Resources had been allocated but implementation was dragging – something that is not uncommon in the region, as officials tend to deliver programmes such as these at more opportune moments (such as before an election).

As well as supporting local groups to increase people's awareness of their entitlements and how to lobby the local authorities, REACH works with those in power, too. Aware of local governments' constraints – such as limited planning skills, weak data and no regular contact with the communities – REACH provides information and convinces them of the value of engaging with citizens.

These early successes show that REACH's approach is working – a significant change in a region where this is not common practice.



Women at a meeting of a community-based organisation supported by REACH in Iraq

Instituting wider change will take many years, but this is a positive sign that people are beginning to stand up for their rights.

'People are concerned about development,' says Dana Hassan, director of REACH. 'They want social and economic development, and political participation.'

Fast facts: IRAQ

- A quarter of Iraqis live below the poverty line, while one in five (around 6 million) lacks access to clean water.
- The security situation, especially in the south, is a serious obstacle to development, while state and social institutions are fragile.
- The Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq is semi-autonomous with financial independence, its own foreign policy and international recognition.

PUTTING POWER BACK INTO GOVERNANCE

Understanding and responding to local power dynamics is central to successful governance work. That was the message that came out at a conference hosted by Christian Aid in September 2009, looking at how local organisations and poor communities can secure better governance for themselves.

Bringing together GTF partner organisations, academics and practitioners, the conference highlighted some exciting examples of communities prompting authorities to meet their demands.

These included a massive march in India that resulted in land being distributed to hundreds of thousands of landless people, a citizen monitoring project that led to an overhaul of Ghana's national school dinners programme, and a legal case that revealed the Dominican Republic government was contravening the country's constitution by denying children of Haitian migrants an education.

Discussions showed that forging alliances – whether these be with other organisations with complementary skills, international actors such as the UN or allies in government itself – can help local NGOs effect change within communities.

Participants also highlighted challenges to empowering communities to demand better governance. Experience shows that tactics used in one situation cannot always be successfully replicated in another – a mass march, for example, is not possible in a repressive state.

Meanwhile, short-term donor funding and a demand for rapid results are obstacles to 'bottom-up' community mobilisation, an often time-consuming method where people come together to effect change.

One approach discussed was to encourage communities to attempt to reshape the state, rather than merely trying

to influence it. This means not only seeing if governments have done the things they promised, but also influencing those promises – to deliver policies, budgets and laws – in the first place.

Most importantly, it means establishing ways in which citizens' engagement with decision makers can be institutionalised, so they can be part of governance, rather than just being affected by it.

Conference participants were keen to adopt practical tools to help them integrate an analysis of power – to consider who has it and how it can be redistributed in the interests of poor people – into their governance activities. This will be a key focus area of Christian Aid's GTF programme.

Power to the People: Issues and Approaches in Strengthening Demand-side Governance, 9 September 2009, included presentations by John Gaventa, the Institute of Development Studies; Charles Abugre, Christian Aid; Paolo de Renzio, Oxford University; and Mark Lattimer, Minority Rights Group.

The work of Christian Aid partners Ekta Parishad (India), Social Enterprise Foundation (Ghana), and the Jesuit Refugee Service (the Dominican Republic) was also presented.

Power and Governance, a workshop report by Dr Cathy Shutt, is available here:

www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/rights-and-justice.aspx

For more information about power analysis, please visit www.powercube.net produced by the University of Sussex's Institute of Development Studies.

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Christian Aid's Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) programme 'Power to the People: Making Governance Work for Marginalised Groups' is a five-year multi-country initiative aimed at helping marginalised groups to demand better governance successfully.

Funded by the UK's Department for International Development, the programme works with 17 local organisations in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Tanzania and Uganda.

CHANGE STORIES: LESSONS FROM BRAZIL



Raquel and her classmates convinced local authorities to allocate more than £350,000 to school refurbishment

Christian Aid staff and partners have learned from the experience of some Brazilian schoolgirls who took on their city's council and secured more than £350,000 to fund vital maintenance work in schools.

Partner participants at the 'Power to the People' workshop used the case of Raquel Rodrigues Ferreira and her friends, from a slum neighbourhood on the outskirts of the capital, Brasilia, as an example of effective rights-claiming.

A major theme discussed at the four-day session in London last September was change – what changes do we want and how will we know if we are achieving them?

Each partner representative presented a 'change story' on which participants reflected together. They agreed that real change makes a difference for a relatively large number of people, empowers poor and marginalised groups, can be replicated in different communities and, most importantly, is sustainable in the long term.

The story which participants felt was the strongest concerned the response of the Brazilian pupils to the state of their school, which was in such disrepair that the roof even fell in on a teacher's head. Inspired by what they learned from the Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC), the students argued their case at a public budget meeting, and secured more than £350,000 from the city council's 09/10 budget for maintenance work in all city schools.

Although initially mobilised around education, the girls now have their eyes set on improving the poor roads and drainage in the area.

'People here are planning to get organised, looking to the future and claiming their rights,' Raquel says, showing that rights claiming is sustainable.

Workshop participants also considered how to measure improvements to governance. They noted that one signal that people's ability to claim their rights is improving is when they have a strategy in place to influence decision-makers. They also felt that a positive response from the local authorities to community feedback on public services is indicative that government responsiveness is improving.

These characteristics have since been used to revise the indicators that Christian Aid's GTF programme uses to monitor change in communities.

Welcome note from Paul Valentin

At Christian Aid, 'accountable governance' used to be a catch-all term for anything that didn't fit into a particular programme category or that was related to local level advocacy. Confusion reigned and any learning was mostly restricted to individual projects. We have come a long way since – across Christian Aid, there is a much better understanding of what this stands for and we are beginning to consolidate this to benefit us, our partners and the wider sector.

The GTF programme, which we run with DFID funding, has been a true catalyst in our understanding of accountable governance. Because of the way it was set up, it ensures a close interaction and sharing of experiences and learning with partners in a diverse range of countries. It is great to see that our work with partners under the GTF umbrella is now being conveyed to wider audiences through this newsletter, which I warmly recommend to all.

From community-level work in Iraq to national campaigns for political reform in Brazil, our GTF work is aimed at changing the rules of the game in favour of those who have traditionally lacked power. It therefore sits at the heart of Christian Aid's work.

Paul Valentin
International director, Christian Aid

BRAZIL: CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GOVERNANCE GAME



Aline (left), a community activist with INESC, believes major political reforms are needed to ensure the voices of Brazil's most marginalised are listened to

Christian Aid's GTF programme is supporting a national campaign to bring power to the people in Brazil. With its 'Platform for Political Reform', the Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC) is striving to help marginalised Brazilians secure a political voice.

With over 100 million voters, Brazil is one of the world's biggest democracies, yet is also one of its most unequal countries. Over 35 million Brazilians live on less than US\$1 a day and are excluded from the country's economic and political processes.

'There are groups here that are practically invisible to the government,' says youth activist Aline Nascimento, who works with INESC.

INESC works partly at the local level, teaching poor people how to demand their rights effectively (see story on page three). However, it remains concerned that political power remains fixed in the hands of the wealthy land-owning elite, and is attempting to tackle this through the Platform.

The Platform is campaigning nationally for candidate lists with equal numbers of men and women, and for political campaigns to be financed from the national budget to give poor candidates a fairer chance.

'If our government today included people who represented our country's diversity, it would really help to eliminate poverty,' Nascimento says.

As well as changing the balance of political power, the Platform wants to transform how the authorities engage with Brazil's citizens. It is therefore calling for constitutional reforms to enshrine people's right to be consulted and

Fast facts: BRAZIL

- The wealth of the richest 1 per cent of the population is equal to the combined wealth of the poorest 50 per cent.
- Over 25 million poor Brazilians live in urban slums or favelas.
- Unlike many countries where poverty is rife, Brazil has the resources necessary to address poverty.
- Indigenous or Quilombola communities (which are descended from African slaves) are disproportionately poor, highlighting the role of exclusion and discrimination in causing poverty.

'If we had people who represented my country's diversity in our government today, it would really help to eliminate poverty. Because then we'd have people who've already lived through this reality... and they'd treat us differently, not exclude us like the government does at the moment'

Aline Nascimento, 19, youth activist with the Institute for Socioeconomic Studies

participate in decision-making. The Platform has recently been successful in its demands that people standing for political office should have a 'clean sheet', with no criminal convictions or cases pending.

Early indications suggest there is enthusiasm for the campaign – a large swathe of Brazilian civil society has already joined. If successful, it will inspire activists around the world to try and change the rules of the governance game.

Find out more at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wl-G0YcZL_o

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

www.christianaid.org.uk