

# **POWER AND GOVERNANCE: LESSONS AND CHALLENGES**

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April 2010



Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.

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### **'Power to the People': Christian Aid's Governance and Transparency Fund programme**

'Power to the People: making governance work for marginalised groups' is a five-year multi-country programme aiming to assist groups who have been pushed to the margins of society and left out of decisions to successfully demand better governance. Funded by the UK's Department for International Development through its Governance and Transparency Fund, the programme works with 17 local organisations based in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Tanzania and Uganda.

**Funded by UKaid**



**The author would like to thank the speakers for their illuminating presentations, Olivia McDonald for her editorial support and all the conference participants for sharing their experiences.**

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# CONTENTS

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<b>Executive summary</b>	2
<b>Introduction</b>	5
<b>What is demand-side governance?</b>	6
<b>The challenges of demand-side governance work</b>	9
<b>Playing with power: the key to enhancing governance work?</b>	11
<b>Conclusion</b>	15
<b>Endnotes</b>	16

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years 'governance' has become a priority for donors and civil society actors committed to achieving the millennium development goals. Traditionally, this support has focused on enhancing the capacity of governments to carry out their work, which has been called 'supply-side' governance. Increasingly, donors have recognised the importance of also supporting 'demand-side' governance initiatives, which aim to increase the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs) and marginalised people to hold local and national authorities to account.

In September 2009 Christian Aid organised a one-day conference to identify lessons, challenges and future priorities to help strengthen our work and that of our sector on demand-side governance. The Christian Aid conference brought together partners supported through its Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) programme with staff, academics, donors and representatives from other international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

## The conference:

### 'Power to the People: Issues and Approaches in Strengthening Demand-side Governance'

9 September 2009, London South Bank University

#### Speakers

##### Scene-setting

**John Gaventa,**  
Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, UK:

'From rights training to rights claiming'

**Charles Abugre,**  
Christian Aid, UK:  
'Getting governments to listen... and act'

**Paolo de Renzio,**  
Oxford University:  
'Lessons in civil society-monitoring initiatives'

**Mark Lattimer,**  
Minority Rights Group, UK:  
'Equal access in unequal states'

**Daniel Jones,**  
Christian Aid,  
Power and Rights Analysis

##### Case studies

**Sifa Kamara,**  
Social Enterprise and Development Foundation, West Africa:  
'Supporting citizens to monitor government services in Ghana'

**Ray Hasan,**  
Christian Aid:  
'Mobilising people to claim their land rights in India'

**Digna María Adames Núñez,**  
Jesuit Refugee Services (SRJM) with Sophie Richmond, Christian Aid:  
'Fighting discrimination against Haitian migrants and their descendants in the Dominican Republic'

The conference considered how civil society actors might become more effective in their efforts to secure improved governance for poor and vulnerable people, focusing on the following questions:

- How successful have the approaches employed by donors, CSOs, INGOs and donors been to improve demand-side governance?
- CSOs are believed to be good at helping poor communities speak out, but how good are they at getting governments to respond to the demands of poor people?
- Rights-based training activities are a common approach used by these organisations, but do they always lead to more people actively claiming their rights from their governments?
- How successful are CSOs at strengthening links between the state and citizens who are discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability and/or the locations in which they live?

The conference showed that CSOs are using **different approaches** to strengthen demand-side governance. Some approaches focus on raising people's awareness of their rights and encouraging them to monitor government delivery on current commitments, such as those made in the budget. Others are more forward-looking, supporting citizens to influence policies and budget decisions in existing, invited spaces such as formal consultations. And, finally, others focus on getting new spaces created where citizens can engage with the authorities and assert their rights – encouraging them to have a greater voice and a sense of citizenship. Many organisations use a mix of these approaches.

The conference identified the ability to develop relationships as a key **success factor**. This included developing alliances of organisations with complementary skills, such as community-level research, economic analysis and influence over the media and public opinion. Strategic alliances with international actors and allies in government provide some initiatives with more clout to secure changes that truly benefit poor and marginalised people.

## Challenges

Although there have been encouraging developments, conference participants agreed that much more needs to be done if demand-side governance initiatives are to make a substantial contribution to social justice. There may be **limits to the changes** approaches such as rights awareness-raising and participatory budget-monitoring can secure, and there are areas where more focus is needed, such as

enshrining the right for people to be part of the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Unfortunately, working on governance brings with it many challenges and can feel close to impossible for those working in **repressive and violent contexts** with little democratic space. CSOs operating in such contexts were advised to focus on activities that increase space for civil society to operate and to identify levers for gradual social change.

Experience shared suggested that increasing citizen participation may also not be easy for those operating in more democratic environments. Pressure for **rapid results** and management tools commonly used within the aid system do not **provide the flexibility required** to nurture active citizens and movements. Indeed, there was a sense that there was a tendency by donors and some international and national NGOs to favour a more technocratic replication of activities without enough analysis of context. This probably explains why participants found discussions of power analysis particularly engaging.

Some participants felt that involvement in decision-making processes that **legitimise government action** could cost them their autonomy and contradict their roles as watchdogs responsible for holding the government to account. Involvement in policy-making may make them vulnerable to cooption by the state – essentially being used to make those in power look good or increase their influence over communities without gaining any real influence on their actions. Participants also remarked that the complex relationships required for governance work might lead to social movements being coopted. Many CSOs involved in budgetary analysis and policy-making receive some financial support from donors but were concerned that criticising donor influence on national policy priorities may effectively be 'biting the hand that feeds'.

## Power

The dominant issue arising from the conference was undoubtedly power. It shapes the relationships of everyone involved in the governance game: donors and the state; the state and citizens; INGOs and local CSOs; and citizens from different social groups. People instinctively understand power, but were keen to understand more about translating their power analysis into action following compelling presentations arguing for donors and CSOs alike to integrate more systematically an analysis of power – who has it and how it could be redistributed in the interests of poor people – into the design of governance activities.

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A greater focus on power can be used to help identify groups who are discriminated against by fellow citizens as well as by powerful state actors. Many individuals face **discrimination** on the basis of a number of criteria, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, literacy, religion and/or where they live. Presenters argued that greater recognition of power dynamics between everyone involved could lead to strategies that could enhance both the inclusivity and success of initiatives on citizen participation.

## **Conclusion**

Conference presentations suggest that some of these participant initiatives are beginning to have an impact. They are making governments more responsive to poor people, and lessons are emerging about internal and external factors that contribute to their success. The conference indicated that many CSOs have an appetite to try to make power analysis more integral not only to their policy and strategy formulation, but also to their everyday operational practice. This is something Christian Aid is trying to support through piloting approaches that will support staff and partners to do just that.

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# INTRODUCTION

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This report summarises key issues and debates that emerged during Christian Aid's 'Power to the People' conference in September 2009. It is both a record for participants and a reflection for others working in this field. It begins by unpacking the term 'demand-side governance' and goes on to describe a number of successful initiatives shared during the conference, highlighting lessons emerging from practice. A discussion of issues and tensions relating to the challenges of governance work follows. These concerns, raised by participants, draw attention to the central role that power plays in governance work. They lead into a section that summarises perhaps the key message coming out of the conference – demand-side governance approaches could have more impact on the lives of poor and marginalised people if power analysis were better integrated into governance work. The section ends with a critical reflection on a process undertaken by Christian Aid to do just that.

The report concludes that while CSOs have made some gains in strengthening demand-side governance, conference participants believe that much more needs to be done. Although not without risk and challenge, many have an appetite to try to make power analysis more integral, not only to their policy and strategy formulation, but also to their everyday operational practice.

# WHAT IS DEMAND-SIDE GOVERNANCE?

As part of their commitment to improving governance in aid-recipient countries, DFID and other donors have allocated considerable resources to help recipient governments become more 'capable, responsive and accountable to their citizens'.<sup>1</sup> Much of this support focuses on the 'supply side' of the governance equation, aiming to enhance the capability of recipient states through establishing and institutionalising democratic electoral systems, as well as legal and policy frameworks. Donors envisage that states able to develop robust governance policies, structures and systems will have the capability to provide services to their citizens.

INGOs and other CSOs are involved in improving the 'supply side' of governance to some extent, for example by providing training to parliamentarians and local government officials. However, CSOs generally focus most of their interests on the demand side. Demand-side interventions aim to support initiatives by local CSOs to empower marginalised and vulnerable people to hold local and national authorities to account. Some approaches focus on raising people's awareness of their rights and encouraging them to monitor government delivery on current commitments, such as those made in the budget. Others are more forward-looking, supporting citizens to influence policies and budget decisions in existing, invited spaces such as formal consultations. And, finally, others focus on getting new spaces created where citizens can engage with governments and assert their rights and make claims – encouraging them to have a greater voice

and a sense of citizenship. Many INGOs and other CSOs use a mix of these approaches.

## Promising progress and potential lessons

Case studies shared by conference participants demonstrate that different types of CSOs are using a variety of strategies and approaches, and that lessons are emerging from successful initiatives. Several Christian Aid partners are facilitating participatory monitoring of budget expenditure, service delivery and the implementation of other aspects of government development plans. Some are combining these monitoring activities with media and lobbying work to highlight instances where governments fail to deliver on commitments, as the example below from Ghana shows.

The lessons from Ghana were similar to those published following recent multi-country research into the integration of budget analysis and advocacy by the International Budget Project (IBP) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University. Paolo de Renzio shared the findings of the research from Brazil, Mexico, Croatia, India, South Africa and Uganda, which has integrated budget analysis with advocacy work. It provided examples of CSO demand-side governance initiatives that are going beyond monitoring government delivery on existing budgetary commitments – some are also having modest influences on future policy and

## Research and advocacy enhances the implementation of Ghana's School Feeding Programme

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) is an important pro-poor initiative which, by guaranteeing school children one meal a day, aims to help increase school attendance and reduce childhood malnutrition. The Social Enterprise and Development Foundation of West Africa (SEND) scrutinised the programme using a combination of economic literacy training and rigorous research.

In March 2009, it published *The Challenges of Institutional Collaboration*, a report which revealed that the governance

structures put in place to facilitate the implementation of the GSFP were not functioning well. SEND then took advantage of strategic relationships with various media organisations to publicise the weaknesses in the programme's implementation.

The success of SEND's work not only depended on the quality of its research and relationships with the media, but also on its relations with actors working at different levels of government. Alliances between SEND and individuals in government

were facilitated by the stable political environment and government openness to the governance agenda, which welcomes constructive engagement between CSOs and state actors and the watchdog role of CSOs. These environmental conditions enabled SEND to convince the government that it could help fill capacity gaps in state-monitoring mechanisms and add value to the government's efforts to meet poverty-reduction strategy goals.

The results of this advocacy have been significant. The

GSFP secretariat was restructured to include other sector ministries such as health, agriculture and education in the implementation of the programme. Now, meals are planned with the right calorific requirements and there is a requirement to use locally produced foodstuffs, which helps poor farmers. In the Sisala West District, for example, the local chief released 10 acres of land for community farming. The produce from this farming will be sold directly to caterers feeding children under the GSFP.

budget decisions that drive such commitments.

## Analysis and advocacy increases budgets for tribal groups in India

Analysis by the Development Initiative for Social and Human Action (DISHA) in India revealed that government spending on the advancement of tribal groups was below mandated levels and not being utilised effectively. Demonstrations

organised by unions affiliated with DISHA helped publicise this finding and influenced the government to increase budget allocations to the Tribal Sub-Plan, as well as to ensure those allocations were delivered.

Conference presenters argued that **investing in widespread economic literacy programmes** is an essential building block for participatory budgeting and monitoring work. They also emphasised that **democratic and political stability** was crucial to the success of the cases shared.

The research from IBP and IDS highlights a number of **internal factors** that influence the ability of an individual organisation to advocate on budget policy. These included:

- organisational leadership
- the priority given to governance work
- the mix of advocacy and technical skills.

There was general consensus among conference participants that **building alliances and relationships** with various groups of actors is critical to effective governance work. Budget-advocacy approaches, in particular, often require different competencies, such as grassroots budget monitoring, rigorous research, economic analysis and media and lobbying skills. Successful initiatives therefore rely on the development of complex alliances that include CSOs operating at local and community levels, national CSO networks, academic institutions and media organisations. Some presenters stressed that building relationships with allies in government at local or national levels is key to the success of budget monitoring, analysis and advocacy work, as well as with international donors who can exert influence on governments' national development plans.

The cases presented illustrated the important role played by **legal and institutional frameworks** in budget advocacy. Access to information legislation is often a prerequisite for securing access to government budget information and revealing corruption. The IBP/IDS research shows how, after successful advocacy on the right to information, CSOs in

Mexico accessed information that revealed funds intended for HIV/AIDS treatment had been diverted to a right-wing pro-life group. The group were subsequently asked to return the money and barred from receiving further government funds for 15 years.

In instances of government intransigence, **international legal frameworks** can provide CSOs with rulings that sanction government failure to respect international legal commitments. Christian Aid's partner the Jesuit Refugee and Migrants' Service (SJRM), presented an example that showed international law and media work to be powerful tools to hold the government to account for its treatment of Haitian migrants and their descendants.

## International law overcomes government intransigence in the Dominican Republic

The SJRM, uses a combination of rights-awareness raising, mobilisation, legal advocacy and media work to put pressure on the government to recognise the rights of Haitian migrants and their descendants. In the Dominican Republic people are often asked for proof of citizenship to access government services. However, the children of migrants cannot always get their citizenship recognised which, in turn, means they cannot access essential services such as education.

In 2005, SJRM was part of an alliance of Dominican CSOs that took a case about the legal identity of two children of Haitian descent to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, of which the Dominican Republic is a signatory. The court subsequently ruled that denying citizenship to those born in the Dominican Republic, including the offspring of undocumented Haitian immigrants, was in

contravention of their own constitution. Following this ruling, which put pressure on the government to recognise the rights of Haitian migrants, SJRM was able to further its aims by getting education for the children of migrants on the agenda for constitutional reform.

Legal wins such as this play an important role in generating external pressure on the state, but do not challenge the attitudes that drive governments to discriminate in the first place. SJRM also believes in changing attitudes and has a strong media component in its work through which it challenges Dominicans to be more tolerant and advocates for more positive legal changes. Regular monitoring of the media allows it to assess the public debate on migration. It also uses local radio and TV to communicate with migrants, particularly near the borders with Haiti.

Conference presenter Digna María Adames Núñez of SJRM suggested that a legal victory in the international courts can prove an important catalyst for CSOs involved with furthering social justice and the realisation of civic rights. This particular example showed how CSOs use legal frameworks to advocate for the realisation of people's rights already recognised in law, if not in practice. For some CSOs the focus is on getting rights enshrined in the first place, as illustrated by the story of Janadesh or People's Verdict, a landless people's movement that used **grassroots mobilisation and protest** to secure land rights.

## People power in India

In 2007, Indian CSO Ekta Parishad organised a mass mobilisation of over 25,000 rural poor landless tribal people called Janadesh. Supported by INGOs such as Christian Aid, who helped facilitate the involvement of the Dalit groups in the march, Janadesh was at its heart a grassroots campaign with a non-hierarchical approach to mobilising people. This contributed to a strong sense of ownership right from the start. Janadesh was particularly symbolic in bringing together disempowered people from the Adivasi and Dalit rights movement, who were almost entirely excluded from the benefits of India's growth and land-reform programme. These people had a message – they were no longer prepared to be silent. After two years of preparation, the march commenced, covering 340km of national highway in

28 days before arriving in Delhi.

The government had no choice but to listen and the march led to the establishment of a national commission on rural poverty and access to land that comprised ministers and CSOs. This was the first step towards creating equitable land-reform policies with significant repercussions. In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh province alone it has contributed to 280,000 people being granted land rights.

Janadesh has also had a number of other equally significant impacts. The sense of empowerment experienced by the tribal people who participated in the march has increased their access to and influence upon local, state and national authorities.

The Janadesh story is an impressive example of what people power can achieve. It proves that movements driven by marginalised people, rather than INGOs, can in some circumstances lead to tangible changes in government policies. It also suggests that grassroots mobilisation can be an effective strategy for shifting power relationships between marginalised people and authorities, creating new spaces and opportunities for people to speak out where normally they were shut out. Recent case studies

documented by IDS's Citizenship Development Research Centre provide similar examples of the rights that demand-side governance work can realise.

**Table 1. IDS successful case studies**

<b>Campaign</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>National Campaign for Land Reform – Philippines</b>	Six million hectares of land (half of the country's farmland) redistributed to 3 million poor households.
<b>Treatment Action Campaign – South Africa</b>	Public recognition and debate about antiretroviral drug treatment issues; 60,000 people benefiting from government supplies of antiretroviral drugs.
<b>Right to Information Campaign – India</b>	National Right to Information Bill passed in 2005, and in nine of 28 states – contributing to greater public accountability.
<b>Campaign to Reduce Maternal Mortality – Mexico</b>	Put the maternal mortality issue on national agenda; contributed to major budget shift; changed the paradigm of service delivery.
<b>Right to the City Campaign – Brazil</b>	Established a national framework for participation in urban planning.
<b>Child Rights and Social Policies – Chile</b>	New framework, resources and social policies for children, leading to concrete improvements in child poverty.
<b>Reforming the Penal Code for Women's Rights – Turkey</b>	New Turkish Penal Code with 35 amendments for women's sexual rights.
<b>Campaign for Reform of the Moudawana – Morocco</b>	Reform of Islamic family law affecting women's rights.

# THE CHALLENGES OF DEMAND-SIDE GOVERNANCE WORK

Although conference participants celebrated the achievements illustrated by these case studies, many raised questions and concerns, in particular highlighting the difficulties organisations may face if they attempted to replicate all the tactics and strategies shared at the conference.

## Contextual constraints

The Janadesh report had a powerful impact on conference participants – while it was inspiring for some, it appeared frustrating for others. A question raised by a participant from Iraq was a reminder that successful initiatives cannot always be replicated in other, very different contexts. Many of the lessons shared are only applicable in countries where there is sufficient democratic space for civil society to operate openly. Interventions that focus on mobilising people to protest cannot be contemplated in some countries, such as Iraq and Burma, for example.

Discussions highlighted the need for CSOs undertaking demand-side governance work to be politically astute and to focus on leveraging and creating space for civil society to manoeuvre in countries with repressive authoritarian regimes. One speaker remarked that CSOs working in such situations could perhaps draw comfort and learn from successful case studies of citizen participation in new democracies such as Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, Morocco and Turkey. These actions mark the culmination of shifts in power relations that have occurred following years of civic action against former repressive regimes.

## Is awareness-raising enough?

Even in situations where there is sufficient democracy for CSOs to operate without interference, raising awareness of rights has not always translated into changes in favour of poor and marginalised people. Research by IDS has raised questions about the effectiveness of rights awareness training that has been widely promoted by donors and CSOs as a means of increasing government accountability. Conference speaker John Gaventa, a specialist in participation based at the IDS at the University of Sussex, pointed to a recent assessment of the impact of rights-awareness training courses conducted by Kenyan CSOs that concluded they were not achieving governance outcomes.

Emerging evidence suggests that CSOs are more likely to have an impact if they go beyond training and use longer term rights-based approaches to facilitate critical reflection that makes people aware of the forces that oppress. This process of ‘conscientisation’, an awakening of critical consciousness through radical non-formal education and dialogue, enables people to identify contradictions in their

experiences and begin to use this awareness to act against states or other citizens that discriminate against them and deny them their rights. Such approaches are more likely to empower people and stimulate the desire to participate in movements and the struggle for rights than training alone.<sup>2</sup>

## Risks of coopting social movements

What was remarkable about the Janadesh experience and several cases reviewed by IDS was that they were initiated or founded by established local movements and unions, rather than INGOs. Questions from conference participants suggest that there is a need for greater analytical clarity about the difference between social movements and movements initiated by national or international NGOs. This was felt to have important implications for the approaches and strategies that INGOs, such as Christian Aid, take to supporting such movements. Some remarked that there is a danger that well-intentioned INGO efforts to support social movements may end up coopting them through relationships involving financial exchanges and associated management tools – professionalising social movements to such a degree they lose their connections with communities.

## Long-term rights-based approaches versus pressure to demonstrate impact

Although many participants were attracted to a rights-based approach to supporting grassroots mobilisation, the current way in which aid is organised can make this more challenging. Short-term funding commitments and demands for rapid results do not allow the kind of support required to nurture the development of active citizens. Rights-based approaches can take considerable time to demonstrate visible impact, and many of the management tools used by donors and INGOs do not support the kind of agility and flexibility demanded by bottom-up approaches to mobilisation. A rights-based approach inevitably requires a different model of funding as it may take some time for a sense of citizenship to develop and/or a particular event that triggers the formation of a movement intent on claiming rights.

The IDS examples presented by Gaventa above, however, do demonstrate that long-term, rights-based approaches can have considerable impact, although some are easier to identify and measure than others.

**Table 2. Impacts of rights-based approaches**

	<b>Long-term tangible impacts</b>	<b>Medium-term less tangible impacts</b>
<b>National</b>	Change of policy/legal system	New patterns of decision-making and participation
<b>Intermediate</b>	Better programme implementation	Greater government accountability and capability
<b>Local</b>	Material improvement in quality of life.	Sense of citizenship and capabilities to claim rights.

**Influencing versus monitoring: contradictory or complementary roles?**

Participants acknowledged that although CSOs have made headway in monitoring existing government budgetary commitments, they have made less progress in influencing the policy and budget decisions that drive those commitments and budget allocations. Some argued that this situation must change if demand-side governance work is going to produce more significant gains for poor and vulnerable people. This forward-looking work would require CSOs to make a more conscious effort to engage in policy and budgetary analysis and advocacy related to domestic tax policies as well as tax evasion by transnational corporations. It would also necessitate more critical analysis of, and advocacy about, donor aid allocations as these have significant effects on national development plans in many contexts where Christian Aid and its partners work.

Concerns voiced about the possible implications of lobbying donors and ‘biting the hand that feeds’ reflect deeper and broader tensions experienced by partners trying to reconcile the seemingly contradictory roles they are expected to play under the governance agenda. On the one hand, they are encouraged to participate in policy spaces and legitimate government and donor-policy decisions, which some argue places them at risk of cooption by the state. Yet, on the other hand, they have to play a watchdog role, being prepared to expose weaknesses and/or failures in government responsiveness and accountability. This dilemma is further

exacerbated for NGOs and CSOs who receive money from the state and/or donors to deliver essential services to poor communities.<sup>3</sup>

**Building and maintaining alliances with government reformers**

Many participants acknowledged the value of developing strategic relationships with allies operating within different parts and levels of the state. It can be difficult to sustain these relationships in practice, however, largely due to changes following elections. Moreover, experiences in Kenya suggest that potential government reformers such as former civil society activists often forget their commitment to social justice on entering government. CSOs can play important roles as ‘critical friends’, able to remind former activists entering government of their previous commitments.

**Power relations: the risk of engaging in contentious politics**

The cosy language of ‘partnership’ is ubiquitous in international development discourse. Yet many of the presentations and questions at the conference emphasised that governance work involves CSOs in both collaboration and conflict with others. These tensions can be productive: taking on contentious issues can be essential to confronting unequal power relationships.

But such an approach brings with it risks and can lead to resistance and reprisal from authorities and other actors. Christian Aid partners operating in Colombia, Brazil and the Dominican Republic have all experienced attempts to repress civil society action. The Dominican Republic government saw the international court’s decision (see box on page 7) as interference with its sovereignty. It consequently described CSOs working with immigrants as ‘traitors’ in the national media.

Some conference participants argued that CSOs need to be better prepared for resistance by powerful actors who fear they will lose power as a result of civil society activities. Christian Aid is currently working in alliance with other organisations in Colombia in order to do so. After years of violence against rights activists in Colombia, the alliance has launched a visible campaign that argues that violence against individuals and organisations that are fighting for rights is totally unacceptable.

# PLAYING WITH POWER: THE KEY TO ENHANCING GOVERNANCE WORK?

Many of the issues and challenges noted by conference participants stem from the complex power relationships that lie at the heart of governance work. Power shapes relationships between states and international donors; states and citizens; INGOs and their CSO partners; and between different groups of citizens. Several of the conference presentations and discussions suggest that governance approaches could be strengthened if greater efforts were made to understand how power operates in particular contexts and the implications it has for conceptual frameworks and strategies for change.

## Looking at the dominant aid model through a power lens

Speakers Charles Abugre from Christian Aid and John Gaventa both took issue with elements of the governance model promoted by some donors. They particularly questioned its assumption that rights-awareness training activities will lead poor people to take action to claim their rights. Implicit in their argument was that such a model takes a technical and legalistic view of social change – provide people with knowledge and they will be able to use it to take advantage of legal frameworks to demand justice.

One of the fundamental problems with this model, according to Abugre, is that it frames relations between citizens and state actors in principal/agent terms. States are seen as agents that derive their power from their principals – citizens – through democratic electoral processes. Citizens are assumed to be involved in a social contract with a benevolent and democratically elected state obliged to deliver services to them. When the state does not have the ability to perform its duties, it is envisaged that capacity-building interventions – often driven by international donors – will facilitate a gradual, linear change in state capacity, which in turn will enable it to be more responsive and accountable to citizens.

During the course of the conference, speakers and other participants provided examples that suggest the reality in many countries where Christian Aid and its partners work is somewhat more complex. Abugre argued that people and cultures that have been shaped by a previous experience of colonial rule, which saw people discriminated against and denied their rights, are unlikely to perceive themselves as principals from which state actors derive their power. They are likely to view their relationships with states in quite different terms. In many instances, people will have been socially conditioned to accept that they are in an inequitable relationship with a powerful state. Consequently, they have minimal expectations of a government, particularly if it has not been elected through a truly democratic process.

Framing citizen-state relations in such historical and apolitical terms ignores the fact that rights are mediated by power. Historically, citizenship and rights have not been bestowed on citizens by benevolent states, they have been born out of resistance and struggle against social, economic and political inequality and injustice. Many citizens are likely to see powerful states as abusers or deniers of rights and this raises questions about the appropriateness of some donor efforts to strengthen the capacity of (sometimes illegitimate) states. Abugre argued that INGOs and other CSOs need to recognise that governance work is a political project and in some contexts it may be more appropriate for CSOs to mobilise citizens to construct or reconstruct the state, rather than merely trying to influence it.

Gaventa and Abugre posited that once donors, CSOs and INGOs start to see through the eyes of poor and marginalised citizens, their view of governance is likely to change and become less focused on getting existing laws and procedures implemented. Very poor people have an innate sense of solidarity and justice, but this is acquired through struggles to find solutions to practical problems rather than knowledge of legal rights. Viewing the situation through a ‘citizen’s lens’ emphasises the need to make power central to effective governance work.

## Power relationships within civil society

The presentation from Mark Latimer, executive director of Minority Rights Group, reinforced the need to use power analysis in activities aiming to support the active participation of minorities and marginalised groups in realising their rights. A greater focus on power can be used to help identify groups who are discriminated against by fellow citizens as well as by powerful state actors. Many individuals face discrimination on the basis of a number of criteria, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, literacy, religion and/or where they live. While this discrimination can be intentional, it can also be an unconscious result of social and cultural beliefs, attitudes and norms.

People who are discriminated against on the basis of just one of the factors above often face barriers to claiming their right to participate in both public and private spaces. Such discrimination is not only directed at minority groups. Women face significant obstacles to meaningful participation in public decision-making forums in many countries.

Latimer argued that many marginalised people are discriminated against on the basis of several factors, which end up reinforcing each other. For example, the Haitian migrants with whom SJRM works in the Dominican Republic are not only disadvantaged by attitudes to their migrant status and the belief that they are a drain on the

economy, but also because many of them are illiterate. Determined efforts must be made to understand how the multiple causes of discrimination reinforce each other when designing aid programmes. Marginalised people should be encouraged to play roles as active citizens in all stages of national development planning and policy-making, although the operation of power through social norms and beliefs makes this extremely challenging.

### Active citizenship: investing in people

Acknowledging that relations between people and the state and different groups of people are shaped by power has implications for the conceptual frameworks underpinning governance work. Gaventa emphasised that rights-based approaches used by Christian Aid, its partners and other CSOs are based on the assumption that all citizens have the right to participate. This is what makes the rights-based approach fundamentally different to other governance approaches that focus on market mechanisms, state institutions and/or electoral processes.

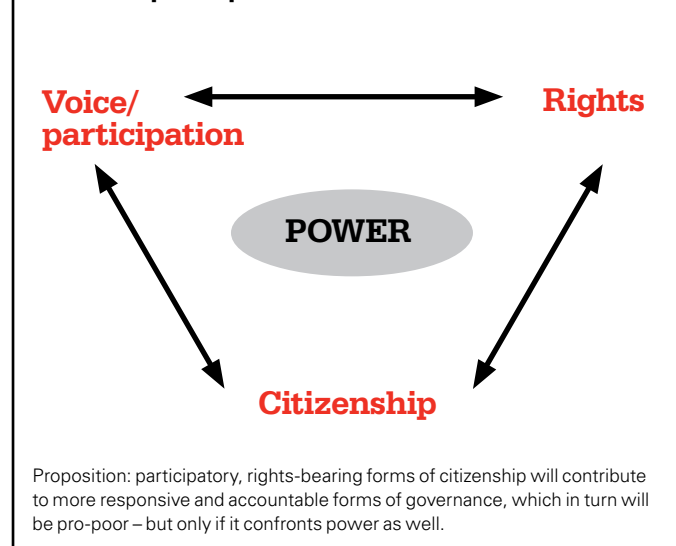
Emphasis on the right to participate acknowledges the inequitable nature of relationships between poor people and the state. Rights are reframed as 'attained' through action, not only 'bestowed' by law. In the governance model proposed by Gaventa (see Diagram 1), which has the core concepts of participation, rights, citizenship and power at its heart, citizens are given a central role in making and demanding rights.

A rights-based approach strengthens demand-side governance through encouraging active citizenship. We saw above that in some contexts, people may see themselves as being subordinate to the state, but citizenship is about trying to 'flip over' the relationship. This is done by convincing people that the state should be subordinate to them, that they **have the right to have rights**, which includes those already enshrined in law and practice and those still outstanding. This sense of citizenship can lead to the desire to confront inequitable power relations and demand the right to participate in existing governance spaces; it can also result in the desire to see new spaces for citizen/state engagement established. In this way, citizens are no longer the beneficiaries of benevolent governments or aid programmes – they are empowered 'makers and shapers' of rights and policies.

While this is not the case in many countries, Gaventa argued that CSOs should be working towards it. This means going beyond rights-awareness raising and monitoring government compliance to existing commitments. Instead, it means a more long-term investment in poor people, facilitating that sense of citizenship which in turn empowers them to

mobilise and speak out. It also means civil society actors should look for opportunities to create new democratic spaces where people can exercise their right to participate. This means moving from being external advocates to governance structures to being part of governance itself.

**Diagram 1. Core concepts: participation, rights, citizenship and power**



In a globalised world, active citizenship approaches mean pursuing change at different levels. The 'local' rights of citizens in aid-recipient countries are often affected by the policies and actions of global institutions and richer countries. In the Dominican Republic, SRJM focuses on influencing other countries such as the United States and institutions such as the Inter-American Court of Justice, who in turn can influence the Dominican government.

National policy-makers often find themselves limited in their ability to meet citizens' demands for public services because of the fiscal conditionalities imposed by donors, such as the International Monetary Fund. At the same time, however, the influence of global campaigning on issues such as the right to education may be limited because campaigners cannot get access to those in control of national education budgets.

Therefore citizen action that combines advocacy to local and national authorities with advocacy toward global institutions and donors is increasingly needed. Global campaigns such as the Global Campaign for Education involve analysing complex power relationships to identify entry points for citizen participation in different national and global spaces.

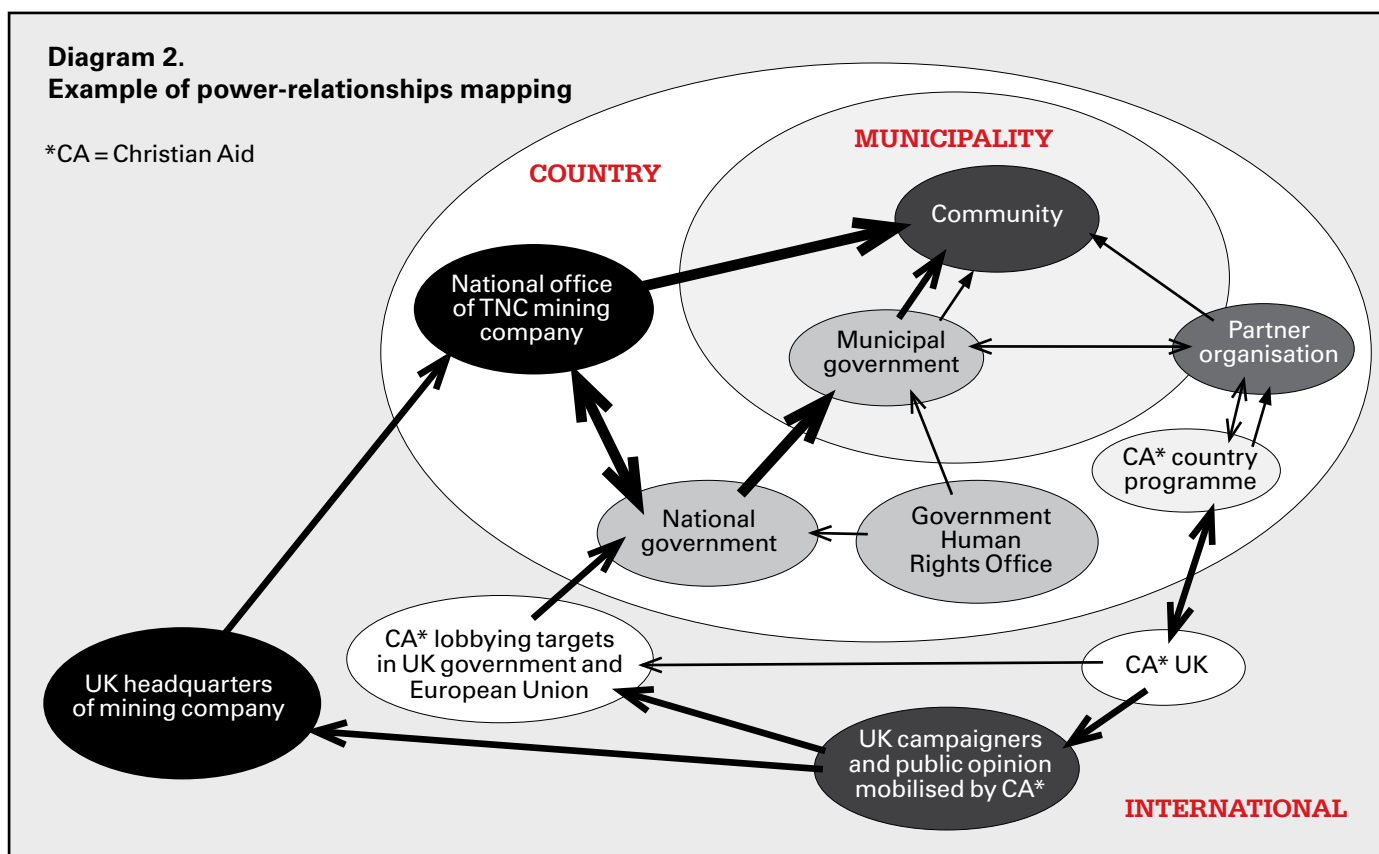
Campaigns such as these thus require an analysis of the power relations that operate within and between CSOs at different levels to avoid unproductive competition and conflict between them.

### Putting the power back in

In its report *No Small Change*, Christian Aid sets out how it pursues structural changes in power relations in favour of poor men and women.<sup>4</sup> It makes it clear that poor women and men have the potential to become active citizens and principal agents of change, with Christian Aid and its partners supporting their efforts to transform the structural power relations that oppress them. *No Small Change* places particular emphasis on the need for change strategies to be based on an analysis of the particular context in which they are to be implemented.

At the conference, Daniel Jones, Christian Aid’s head of programme innovation and learning, shared Christian Aid’s experience of a project with IDS that aimed to enhance the organisation’s understanding of power dynamics and

the implications of this analysis for its work in developing countries. Participants from Kenya and Brazil wanted to repoliticise their programmes and were keen to pilot the approach. IDS and Christian Aid staff developed a methodology that would enable Christian Aid staff and partners in the two countries to explore their theories of change and deepen their understanding of how the various dimensions of power influence their strategic change aims and approaches. Participants reflected on *No Small Change* and different ways of thinking about power. Staff and partners then mapped relationships between the various actors involved in the strategic changes that they aim to achieve, capturing the relative power of these actors and the nature of the relationships between them. The size of the arrows indicates how strong the relationship is between actors while the direction indicates who influences whom.



## Ways of thinking about power

### Forms of power:

- Power over – domination or control of one actor over another
- Power to – an individual's agency or ability to act
- Power with – collective action, working together
- Power within – self-worth, dignity.

### Faces of power

- Visible – obvious power as evidenced through decision-making
- Hidden – behind the scenes, restricting participation in decision-making through not inviting certain individuals to meetings, keeping issues off agendas, and so on
- Invisible – internalisation and reproduction of norms and belief systems that discriminate against certain groups and sustain injustice and inequity.

Participants in Kenya and Brazil went on to review their strategic change objectives in light of the relationships identified in the mapping exercise. They went through a systematic process to analyse what their change objectives meant for individuals, communities, state actors and private companies involved in change processes in terms of forms and faces of power. They then described what the various changes they want to achieve would mean in terms of the denial and the exercise of rights.<sup>5</sup>

After reflecting on their change objectives through a 'power lens' – analysing power relations – Christian Aid staff and partners reviewed the appropriateness of the existing strategies they were using to bring about shifts in power relations. They considered the questions:

- How does the programme strategy relate to the **change in power relations** we want to see?
- Does it relate to our understanding of **how change happens** in this context?
- How does it deal with existing power relations and actors who are **barriers to change**?
- How does it respond to **opportunities for change** arising from existing power relations, actors and connections?
- How does it engage with **underlying social norms/discrimination**, not just visible power relations?

The strategic analysis of how power influences the organisation's work was not restricted to external actors and activities. Christian Aid staff in Kenya and Brazil turned a mirror on themselves and considered how various faces and forms of power operate in Christian Aid's relationships with its partners and how that might affect the outcomes of its change strategies. Participants considered if and how far Christian Aid exercised 'power over' its partners and other organisations, as well as reflecting on whether the power of Christian Aid and its allies increased through working in alliances, or 'power with'. They also thought about how various relationships enhance the value of the organisation as perceived by those working for it, or 'power within'. Lastly, staff asked themselves if, and how, their ways of working are consistent with the values inherent in *No Small Change* – to respect and reinforce the power of poor marginalised women and men.

Staff participating in the process acknowledged that undertaking strategic power analysis is not a magic bullet to incorporate a rights-based approach into practice. However, they found it useful for facilitating deeper discussions about the changes the organisation wants to see and enhancing their understanding of the levers that can be pulled to create change. Power analysis also raised significant questions about how Christian Aid programme staff should best deal with resistance by powerful actors, as well as gender and other forms of discrimination perpetuated by cultural norms and beliefs. It motivated participants to invest more effort in identifying new levers of change.

Among the more tangible results from the exercise were the commitments made by Kenyan and Brazilian partners to adopt the analytical tools in their own planning and analysis. It was evident that many of the organisations attending the conference are keen to do the same. They requested that Christian Aid provide them with further opportunities to develop the necessary theoretical understanding and practical skills required to undertake power analysis and to better support an active-citizenship approach. Some also volunteered to pilot complaints mechanisms that aim to enhance Christian Aid's accountability to its partners and partner organisations' accountability to poor and marginalised people and, in so doing, make both sets of relationships more equitable.

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# CONCLUSION

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INGOs and CSOs are using a range of approaches to strengthen demand-side governance. Although some are achieving promising results, more needs to be done to nurture and support the kind of inclusive active citizenship that will enable poor and marginalised people to realise their right to participate in all aspects of governance. This will require INGOs and CSOs to spend more time focusing on power and although not without challenge, many are keen to find ways to integrate power analysis into strategy formulation and everyday practice.

# ENDNOTES

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**1** [www.dfid.gov.uk/Global-Issues/How-we-fight-Poverty/Government/Good-Governance/](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Global-Issues/How-we-fight-Poverty/Government/Good-Governance/)

**2** Critical reflection and conscientisation methods are commonly referred to as Freirian methods based on a popular education philosophy developed by Paulo Freire.

**3** A fuller discussion of the potential advantages and risks of CSOs playing this dual role can be found in A Joshi, 'Producing social accountability? The impact of service delivery reforms', *IDS Bulletin*, 2008, 6 (38), pp10-17.

**4** Charles Abugre, Paul Valentin, *No Small Change: Christian Aid's Understanding of How Change Happens*, Christian Aid, December 2007.

**5** Further explanations of power and examples of power tools are available at [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net)

# POVERTY

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.



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