

Partnership, power and adaptive programming: learning from Christian Aid's governance service contracts

Influencing power dynamics

Christian Aid believes poverty is structural, driven by the uneven distribution of power. Our strategy, *Partnership for Change*, aims to alter the power structures and dynamics that keep people poor. Christian Aid governance programmes are built on this understanding of power, and have an important place in our international work, delivered exclusively through local partners. Governance strategies also continue to play a significant role in Christian Aid's health and resilient livelihoods programmes.

Governance, accountability and transparency initiatives have grown in significance in international development. The Department for International Development (DFID), for example, has spent billions on governance programmes over the past five years. Many actors, donors, implementers and researchers alike are now keen not only to understand what these programmes are achieving, but increasingly, how change takes place.¹ Furthermore, in a funding environment increasingly reliant on institutional donors, there is growing interest in how donor policies and funding mechanisms affect programming, especially the embedding of politically informed approaches, understood to be necessary for effective development.

Since 2010, Christian Aid has steadily gained expertise in delivering governance and civil society programmes, especially through donor-funded initiatives and large supplier contracts, in which DFID is the lead donor.² Much of Christian Aid's experience with DFID-funded service contracts has been in governance programmes. Christian Aid's first governance service contract was the Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) in India, in 2010. Enhancing Citizen and State Interaction (ENCISS) in Sierra Leone was our second governance service contract, and Civil Society Fund (CSF) our third.

In 2014-15, Christian Aid carried out a learning review of our donor-funded governance programmes,

drawing on our experience of designing and implementing these programmes, to build a common understanding of how governance can be improved in different contexts. The review was led by Africa Programme Adviser (Performance) Shuna Keen, and Pascale Hall, Programme Adviser (Institutional Funding). It comprised a short literature review, a desk review of programme documentation (including mid-term reviews and final evaluations, where available), plus key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

This synthesis paper aims to share key insights from the review, with a view to contributing to the growing body of learning from civil society programming on governance. It focuses on insights around partnership, power analysis and adaptive programming, with particular reference to the three service contracts which were examined as part of the review. Table 1, overleaf, provides an overview of these three programmes managed by Christian Aid in India, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Our partnership approach

Christian Aid's partnership approach rests on the assumption that development is most effective and sustainable when it is driven by empowered local actors. As stated in *Value for People: On the added value of Christian Aid's partnership approach*, 'for Christian Aid, development ...requires a long-term commitment: local people and their organizations are the driving force behind change processes. The empowerment of marginalized groups can only be sustainable and legitimate when it is locally owned and driven'.³

The PACS, ENCISS and CSF service contracts each included a substantial grants-management component. They contrast with the 'traditional' model of partnership in Christian Aid's country programmes in various ways: first, the scale of the service contracts entails a much larger volume of grants than is generally managed by country programmes without ▶

Table 1: PACS, ENCISS and CSF service contracts

Programmes	Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS): Service contract (£32m)	Enhancing Citizen and State Interaction (ENCISS): Service contract (£10.5m)	Civil Society Fund (CSF): Service contract (£12.2m)
Timeframe	2009-2016	October 2010 – January 2015	July 2010 – December 2014
Purpose and goals	To reduce the gap between the socially excluded population and the general population, with the purpose of improving the uptake of entitlements by 9 million socially excluded people	To improve accountability and strengthen citizens' voices, participation in decision making and access to information. To strengthen the relationship between society and state, and support Sierra Leone's poorest communities	To strengthen the democratic framework in DRC and increase access to, and citizen participation in, the political system. Civil society organisations (CSOs) promote the voice and channel the interest of citizens, hold the government to account and promote good governance
Donor(s) and funding type	DFID service contract	DFID service contract. DFID funded £6.3m and the EU £4.2m	DFID service contract with contributions from the UK (£10m) and Sweden (30m SEK). DFID is the lead donor
Overview of grant making	89 partners, £12.4m in grants by March 2016	243 grants worth £3.8m for capacity building across 5 thematic areas through 3 calls for proposals	108 grants, worth £5.9m, through 5 calls for proposals, managed through competitive thematic calls for proposals
Non grant-making activities	Capacity building and networking support with CSOs (and the community-based organisations they support) through training and networking events	Partner capacity development through policy dialogue forums, accountability platforms and communication. Training, mentoring, documentation and lesson learning	Training provided in financial and project management, monitoring and evaluation, communication, advocacy effectiveness, consortium management
Locations	90 districts in 7 states in India	8 districts in Sierra Leone	5 provinces in the DRC

► service contracts; second, the service contracts have applied an open and competitive process for the selection of partners to be funded.⁴ Given the size and nature of these grants-management contracts, they have required Christian Aid to identify and develop many new relationships with different actors beyond our existing partner portfolio, and to work at scale in a new and different way in each of the three countries.

Christian Aid's approach to partnership in these service contracts is also distinct in terms of partner portfolio, and to varying degrees, they represent a shift away from working with civil society actors as the primary protagonists, to more substantial engagement with national and local authorities. Engagement of Christian Aid, with both civil society and the state, in a brokering role or through advocacy capacity building, has been an important component of all three contracts, alongside provision of grants.

PACS' partner selection processes were informed by Christian Aid India's understanding of identity-based social exclusion, and were thus designed to reach

out to organisations working in the remotest areas with socially excluded groups. The process of scoring applications included a proportion (50%) reserved for organisations led by excluded communities such as Dalits, tribal people, Muslims, women and people with disabilities. According to the *DFID PACS Annual Review 2014*, there is evidence that, as a result of support from PACS, community-based organisations (CBOs) have gained strength on the ground, in terms of concrete action and finding space in local governance processes.⁵

ENCISS partner selection was carried out through a series of three calls for proposals based on priority themes: large 'strategic grants' (up to two years in duration) targeted national actors; medium-sized 'project grants' (up to 12 months) targeted actors working at provincial level; and 'micro-grants' (up to six months) targeted actors working at local level such as district councils and bodies, chiefdom ward structures and CBOs. The inclusion of micro-grants, in particular, allowed Christian Aid to reach out beyond the better-established urban-based civil society actors,

to those in more remote areas. The final evaluation, published in 2013, found that ENCISS was unique 'in comparison to other civil society-funded projects in Africa ...in that it focuses on hard-to-reach areas and funding smaller organisations'.⁶

By comparison, the CSF programme struggled to establish and maintain coherence within a strategic funding approach. Calls for proposals were not focused thematically and the strategic intent was less clear, with the result that partner selection amounted to a fragmented 'scattergun effect'.⁷ This affected the overall impact achieved by the programme. Christian Aid staff interviewed in Kinshasa commented: 'When you divide the money up into small packets, all covering different areas, it doesn't lead to important results. Not only did you start without working out the problems to address, but then there were also too many projects to manage.'⁸ Furthermore, the CSF Final Review⁹ concluded that competitive grant making was not appropriate in the DRC context and was even counter-productive, leading to the creation of substantial opposition to the CSF within the CSO community, and generating large volumes of applications that required significant investments in time and effort to process.¹⁰

A recent Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) review of DFID programmes has similarly raised concerns about standardised grant-making processes for funding civil society in Ghana and Malawi, which can work against funding strategically and effectively.¹¹ ICAI found that the higher the volume of grants a fund provides, the more difficult it can be to maintain a clear strategic approach, leading instead to 'fragmented portfolios' and a 'substantial management burden, allowing the programme management teams limited time to work with individual grantees on their strategies'.

From transactional to relational

In all three service contracts, Christian Aid has provided some level of training and/or broader accompaniment alongside grants. In ENCISS, it was the micro-grants channelled to local-level actors that demonstrated greatest potential for transformational impact. According to the ENCISS III final evaluation: 'Micro-grant interventions were the most effective and made the biggest difference in terms of addressing the problems that undermine citizen-government interaction and governance processes for equitable service delivery.'¹² Some of these grantees were accessing external funding for the first time and they appreciated the role played by ENCISS in providing learning opportunities. Although many of the micro-grantees had low organisational capacity and required close accompaniment to deliver at the required level, they created value for the communities with which they worked.¹³ The final evaluation nevertheless recommended that, to be sustainable, micro-project funding should last longer, for example 12-18 months.

With CSF, staff felt there was limited opportunity to accompany and build relationships with grantees,

because the funding contracts were short, and there was no continuity between the calls for proposals, contrasting with Christian Aid's usual approach to partnership in the DRC and globally. The relationships were described as more 'transactional' than 'relational'.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the review suggests that CSF's approach was still appreciated by partners and was experienced as more empowering than is often the case in the DRC. As Jacques Tshimbalanga from CSF partner CONEPT explained: 'Usually we have donors who fund you, then leave. This is the first time I have seen a donor that builds capacities before the implementation of the project...hats off to CSF.'¹⁵

Partnership in PACS has been characterised by equality and mutual accountability, working for the common cause of non-discriminatory access to state services and resources. In an interview, one partner explained how PACS/Christian Aid's value-driven approach is distinguished by 'equal terms of dialogue' in which 'opinions can be shared honestly'.¹⁶ The partner went on to explain that working with PACS is empowering, notably because, through knowledge brokering, PACS shares its aggregated, bigger picture of governance and social exclusion in India with partners working at sub-national levels. PACS' responsiveness in meeting partners' urgent technical support needs was also empowering.

While it is difficult to summarise across three different settings, there is clear evidence that we have been able to adapt our partnership values and approach to managing open grants programmes in service contracts, through principles of open dialogue and accompaniment, focusing on differing levels of grants to ensure the voices of the most marginalised people are represented. A thematic approach to funding partners is also important, and building the magnitude of change requires working at national and local levels to broker state and civil-society dialogue.

Power analysis and working politically

Christian Aid understands power as 'the ability to create or resist change'. Addressing power imbalances is key to overcoming poverty; for example, increasing poor and excluded peoples' power to have their say and be heard, or to know their rights and demand them; the power to access essential services or to share fairly in the world's resources; to live in the security not only of surviving, but of thriving.¹⁷

In line with wider sector practice, Christian Aid has increasingly used power analysis across our governance work, although this approach was not as prevalent when we first started our three governance service contracts. The multi-country Power to the People (P2P) programme (2008-2013), funded by DFID's Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF), was one of the first to use power analysis explicitly. Through P2P, Christian Aid sought to 'test an explicit, systematic, participatory power analysis approach to voice and accountability work'.¹⁸ The widespread use of power analysis was an innovation for Christian Aid and has led to our applying this approach to all that we do.

Learning from our broader governance programmes highlights the importance of analysing the local context, political and power structures, using appropriate methods, in order to respond effectively to governance challenges. The experience of embedding power analysis into the service contract grant management funds (CSF, ENCISS and PACS) is varied, reflecting the different sets of contexts, circumstances and donor relationships. Social exclusion analysis was fully integrated into the PACS design and grant-making processes, reflecting the historical exclusion, in India of specific groups based on caste, religious identity and gender. Grant applications required potential partners to demonstrate the link between their analysis of social exclusion and their proposed intervention.

By contrast, power analysis was not systematically incorporated into ENCISS or CSF. The CSF Final Review concluded that the lack of analysis meant there was not a strong enough understanding of power dynamics at work, or of the 'drivers of change', to inform programme design and grant selection processes and criteria, appropriate for the DRC context.¹⁹ CSF did, however, conduct stakeholder analysis and advocacy training which enabled partners to analyse more effectively their relationships with, and behaviours relating to, government, to improve strategic engagement with decision makers.²⁰ This learning review has also revealed that, in the Christian Aid context, power analysis is often carried out intuitively by local partners, but capturing and documenting partners' knowledge of the political landscape and power dynamics can be a challenge. In some instances, it is not appropriate to document and share politically sensitive details revealed by power analysis.

The practice in Christian Aid's DFID-funded service contracts has since evolved. Our newer service contracts (such as STAR Ghana) are now built on a systematic and intentional use of power analysis, and this enables us to position ourselves better to manage political risk.

However, in some country contexts, working politically carries the risk of reprisals, repression and backlash. Given the nature of governance work, in which partner protagonists are calling for change, there can be significant risks, both to organisations and individuals. From other programme settings, there have been reports of incidents of widespread and targeted violence that have affected civil society actors directly, or caused subsequent problems.

The PACS programme has used a number of strategies for minimising and mitigating political risk, including:

- rigorous context and power analysis, enabling Christian Aid and partners to identify and manage political risks
- careful design and monitoring of media statements by PACS staff

- partner visibility in all activities, maintaining an open dialogue between actors, and a high profile in the media to help build a relationship with people in power
- the building of a trusting relationship with the government; PACS' collaboration at state level is open and collaborative, identifying common interests, while asking critical questions.

In both CSF and PACS, the approach to managing political risk emphasises the more collaborative, 'insider' strategies, such as building trusting relationships and maintaining open dialogue with government. Collaboration was often agreed and formalised through memorandums of understanding (MoUs), or other written authorisation signed with the authorities. Advocacy training was a significant means through which CSF supported partners to become more effective and credible actors in relation to government and communities, moving from confrontational approaches to more constructive engagement with local authority and service providers. Similarly, ENCISS has mitigated risk by working through a participatory and supportive approach with government as an 'honest broker', creating a 'safe space' for interaction between government and non-government actors and ensuring credibility by always working with legitimate actors at grassroots level.²¹ Nevertheless, there is a danger that the strong emphasis on fiduciary and financial risk within grants management service contracts leads to deprioritisation of the political or security risks for CSOs.

Institutional donors can play an important role in creating an enabling environment through political dialogue, in addition to funding, and thereby increasing aid effectiveness and value for money – especially in repressive or high-risk environments such as DRC. Promoting civil society space and human rights requires coherence around aid and diplomatic functions, which are often split between government departments of bilateral donor governments. Yet this joined-up approach can be difficult to achieve. There is, for example, little evidence of DFID's programming in support of civil society via the CSF actually informing the political dialogue and diplomacy on human rights and civil society space led by the FCO, or vice versa. Opportunities were also missed for integrating CSF thematic calls with other DFID-funded governance and transparency initiatives running in parallel; for example, in the mining sector.²²

Within Christian Aid, we also recognise that the CSF activities did not inform our global advocacy work on governance and human rights in the DRC in a meaningful or systematic way, which meant that we missed opportunities to maximise synergies and effectiveness.

Adaptive programming to maximise impact

From this review of governance programmes, we have found that being able to change is of critical importance. This is as much about grant and partnership management tools as it is about responsiveness to changing power dynamics. Adaptive programming is about looking for opportunities to maximise impact, adjusting programming to meet contextual changes, responding to learning throughout all stages of the programme cycle, and achieving value for money by regularly evaluating where resources are focused. Christian Aid's adaptive approach also emphasises the importance of locally owned change processes, underpinned by local knowledge and relationships. Christian Aid's experience in governance programming points increasingly to the need for more flexible programme management approaches to facilitate adaptive programming and agile, politically informed decision making in complex settings. We recognise that social transformation processes which involve changing power relations in favour of poor and excluded groups are most often incremental, long term, unpredictable and non-linear.

The review identifies two broad elements in enabling adaptive programming: first, a collaborative relationship between service provider and donor (and arguably, also, between service provider and partners/grantees), underpinned by mutual trust and respect, with a willingness, on both sides, to engage in open dialogue around challenges and lessons, in order to change tack as necessary. A learning-focused, flexible monitoring and evaluation system should also be incorporated into programme design and implementation.

ENCISS' productive relationship and mutual understanding with DFID Sierra Leone, and DFID's openness to change within the programme, allowed some adaptive approaches to be embedded. DFID Sierra Leone was cooperative and supportive while also being challenging, using annual reviews to make evidence-based changes to the logframe, better reflecting the reality on the ground. Donor relationships and timely decision making are pivotal to effective programming, and these enabled the ENCISS programme to adapt and modify its approach, which was most evident in response to the Ebola crisis in 2014. At a time when state resources were redirected from other services into the Ebola response, additional Ebola-related activities were designed and agreed between DFID, Christian Aid and implementing partners, building on ENCISS' existing community-based work.

In India, the PACS senior leaders invested in their relationship with DFID; they drew on Christian Aid India's sound knowledge of the context and expertise in social exclusion, and this helped them to negotiate effectively on certain key areas, leading to a number of adaptations in programme design. For example, PACS advocated that the initial number of districts proposed by DFID was not suitable for PACS implementation,

which was subsequently taken on board by DFID. Key programming tools, such as logframes, were used in a dynamic and flexible way. DFID's openness and shared vision, and its perception of PACS as a credible actor, made changes possible along the way.

The PACS team also developed and used its management information system (MIS) to inform programmatic decisions actively. It generated evidence of progress towards outcomes, ensuring strategies and approaches were appropriate to the context, and identified trends in certain areas that could be scaled up.

Where most effective, partner selection includes deliberate mechanisms and policies for reaching out to the most marginalised and excluded groups. Carrying out power analysis, and using it in intervention design, can increase effectiveness. Institutional donors can play an important role in creating an enabling environment through political dialogue at national level. Christian Aid's experience in governance programming illustrates the need for more flexible and adaptive programme management and decision making. This is most easily achieved when there is a collaborative relationship between donors and service providers, based on mutual understanding and commitment to learning.

When using both grants-management systems and power-analysis methodologies side by side, the planning and reporting burden on grantees can become significant. We note that the two can detract focus from one another, and more often the power analysis, although fundamental for strategic intent and effectiveness, becomes secondary to financial and fiduciary systems. As a development community, we are challenged to think about the need for adaptability and how we can promote this, both practically through the tools that accompany grant-making service contracts, and through the way in which political and power analysis sits alongside other processes.

'The fact that adaptive development programming is the way to go in order to deliver transformative development outcomes and impacts is just sinking in among many development agencies. On this path, this publication is timely in that it nicely guides readers to areas that are critical for informed debates to happen so as to encourage mutual learning and good practice among researchers, evaluators and practitioners alike. . . (in the realm of) collective action, iterative learning, local problem solving, and thinking and acting politically.'

Fletcher Tembo, Research Associate, Overseas Development Institute

Endnotes

1. Rosie McGee and John Gaventa, *Shifting Power? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives*, Institute of Development Studies Working Paper, 2011.
2. Service contracts are distinct from traditional donor grants in that they are 'won' through competitive tender and the contract holder is considered the 'supplier' or service provider.
3. W Elbers, J Kamstra, A Kauffmann, *Value for People: On the added value of Christian Aid's partnership approach*, Christian Aid, 2015.
4. Competitive grant making was a new approach for Christian Aid when we set up PACS in 2009.
5. DFID, *Poorest Areas Civil Society II Annual Review*, DFID, 2014.
6. R Kantelberg, *ENCISS Extension Evaluation*, Christian Aid, 2015.
7. As stated in an interview with DFID, Kinshasa, 19 November 2014.
8. Interview conducted with Christian Aid staff, Kinshasa, 21 November 2014.
9. K Curnow, *Final Review Civil Society Fund (CSF) for Good Governance in the DR Congo*, Christian Aid, 2014, p70.
10. K Curnow, *Final Review Civil Society Fund (CSF) for Good Governance in the DR Congo*, Christian Aid, 2014, p9.
11. ICAI, *DFID's Empowerment and Accountability Programming in Ghana and Malawi*, Independent Commission for Aid Impact Report 28, 2013, p10.
12. R Kantelberg, *ENCISS Extension Evaluation*, Christian Aid, 2015, pii.
13. *ibid* (page 25).
14. Ascertained from a focus group with CSF staff, 18 November 2014.
15. K Curnow, *Final Review Civil Society Fund (CSF) for Good Governance in the DR Congo*, Christian Aid, 2014.
16. Interview with PACS partner, 16 December 2014.
17. Christian Aid, *Partnership For Change summary*, Christian Aid, p3.
18. C Shutt, *Power Analysis: What Difference Does it Make? A study of the effects of Christian Aid's investment in power analysis within the Power to the People Programme*, Christian Aid, 2014, p4.
19. K Curnow, *Final Review Civil Society Fund (CSF) for Good Governance in the DR Congo*, Christian Aid, 2014, p8, p26.
20. Focus group discussion with CSF staff, 18 November 2014, and partners, 19 November 2014.
21. ENCISS, focus group discussion, 3 November 2014.
22. DFID interview, 19 November 2014.

Further Reading

Christian Aid's practical power framework, *Power Programme Practice Paper*, 2016, describes, in further detail, our understanding of why power analysis is important, and offers guidance on applying power analysis in development and emergency programmes as well as policy/advocacy work. It is available via our programme policy and practice website. <http://programme.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2016-03/power-analysis-programme-practice-paper-jan-2016.pdf>

- Christian Aid, *Value for People: on the added value of Christian Aid's Partnership Approach*, July 2015. <http://programme.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2016-03/value-for-people-research-report-2015.pdf>
- Christian Aid, *Working in Partnership: delivering value for people*, Research Summary, September 2015. <http://programme.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2016-03/partnership-working-research-summary-sep-2015.pdf>

Further Information

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