POWER TO THE PEOPLE: MAKING GOVERNANCE WORK FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS

Programme management response to Mid-Term Review

July 2011





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Christian Aid commissioned Rosemary McGee and Patta Scott-Villiers of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to carry out a Mid-Term Review of its Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) – Power to the People: Making Governance Work for Marginalised Groups.

They were chosen not only because IDS submitted the strongest bid, but also because we were keen to commission members of its Participation, Power and Social Change team, in the hope that learning from the review would be relevant to a wider audience in Christian Aid, beyond those involved in day-to-day management of the programme. §

The five-year GTF programme, which runs until 2013, seeks to nurture the development of effective civil society movements to assist marginalised and vulnerable people to hold community, local and national authorities to account. It has received £5m of funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) and involves 15 partners in 10 countries in Africa, Asia and Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

We are very encouraged that the Mid-Term Review, published in May 2011, found evidence not only of delivery against the specific objectives of the programme, but also progress towards the overall goal of securing more accountable governance. It is particularly helpful in providing a structured framework to make and test links between programme objectives and achievements, and we are keen to integrate this framework into our own programme management and review processes.

The review also highlights some problems and gaps in design and delivery of the programme. In particular, we note the issues of monitoring and reporting and our understanding of power, as well as the fact that funds, capacity and support are thinly spread across the portfolio. We are concerned that the review raises 'the possibility that partners are actually having to subsidise their Power to the People projects from other sources so as to meet exacting reporting requirements'.

The key message the results have for us is there is a need to get the balance right between delivering for DFID and KPMG, which together manage the Fund, and delivering for our partners. The review has made us question whether the heavy monitoring and reporting systems we have put in place are delivering sufficiently for either stakeholder group. Creating opportunities for staff and partners to reflect more on impacts, risks, lessons, assumptions and power will be a priority for the remainder of the programme.

While the review strongly endorses both the partnership approach at the heart of the programme, and the work of the partners themselves, it should make challenging reading for partners. It asks them some difficult questions about the strategies and assumptions guiding their work and whether they are really reaching the most marginalised people. This reinforces the importance of supporting partners to reflect on the success of their work and not simply meet reporting requirements.

In giving us some clear vision of where to go to next, the review has been very useful for those responsible for managing the programme. Where it identifies what could have been better, we think the evaluation will also be of relevance to others working on governance within our organisation.

On the following pages are our responses to the conclusions and recommendations in the report.

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 15 local organisations based in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Taiikistan, Tanzania and Uganda.



Programme response

Design

It is recognised that [the GTF programme's] inception was impaired by delays in recruiting a programme manager. Also recognised is the programme's spread (16 [now 15] partners in 10 countries), which, taking into account Christian Aid programme management costs, stretches funds very thinly indeed. The tensions arising are compounded by ambiguities and shifts in the DFID GTF framework and process. Christian Aid has engaged energetically with the related challenges, but in doing so has difficulty balancing accountability to donors against accountability to partners.

Christian Aid has learnt two very important lessons about design and delivery of programmes from the GTF.

The first of these is to avoid spreading resources too thinly across countries and partners. It is likely that high donor demands for evidence of achievement along the results chain will intensify further, so the allocations of resources to programmes and partners need to be sufficient to provide both capacity and incentives to meet these demands.

It is fair to say that if we had known at the proposal stage what would be required in terms of donor accountability, we would have put together a different proposal.

The second lesson is that if there are delays in recruiting permanent staff to manage a programme, it is important to employ consultant support before programme spending starts, to lead the inception process.

It is reassuring that the evaluation states that we have responded energetically to challenges both of thinly spread resources and delayed recruitment.

The boldest, most innovative and potentially transformative characteristic of [the GTF programme] is that it has put power issues squarely into the frame. This is a noteworthy achievement and a good basis from which to shift from spreading power analysis to deepening its application for governance and social justice impacts.

We are pleased to have our focus on power recognised and endorsed by the evaluation. We are still in the early stages of developing approaches to power analysis within our country programmes, and GTF is therefore particularly significant as it is providing an opportunity to work directly with partners to refine this process.

Relevance

[The GTF programme] is very relevant to DFID, Christian Aid and the marginalized people it supports. Our visits to Brazil, Sierra Leone and Dominican Republic testify to a high relevance to local social actors and their grassroots. Accountable governance is one of Christian Aid's five core thematic areas and [the GTF programme] exemplifies Christian Aid's historically rights-based solidarity with and support to organizations that champion the rights of the very poorest and most marginalized and of women. [The GTF programme] also fits closely with DFID's Capability, Accountability and Responsiveness framework.

It is reassuring that the evaluation sees high levels of relevance between the programme and the wider organisation, its partners and DFID's broader strategy in this area. Power and governance will be at the heart of our new organisational strategy, so learning from the programme will be highly relevant to this process.

Programme response

Efficiency

One full-time staff member is scant human resource for managing a programme of this budget, spread and complexity. The manager has taken on sizeable M&E [Monitoring and Evaluation] tasks, often bridging gaps in Christian Aid country office capacity. The apparently low level of support to [the GTF programme] from some teams/colleagues and the lack of formal accountability towards [the GTF programme] and its manager on the part of other Christian Aid staff are cause for concern.

Given the 15 per cent cap on Christian Aid (as opposed to partner) costs relating to the project, there is limited scope to increase central management support or capacity. Engagement by country teams varies considerably due to: technical capacity, time and the degree to which GTF is prioritised. (It must be remembered that GTF generally only provides small grants for one to two Christian Aid partners within a much bigger portfolio). It is this variance – rather than a 'low level of support' – that has proven challenging for central GTF programme management, and required very different approaches to be taken in different places.

We recognise that this problem has been compounded by a tendency for programme staff to be seen as 'conduits', simply communicating central requirements, rather than investing in programme staff capacity to manage partner engagement with GTF at a country level. This is something we plan to address for the remainder of programme, creating a requirement for programme staff to document dialogues with partners on project impact and learning.

Partnerships

The set of established and trusting relationships within which the programme unfolds has facilitated good project work and some synergy, scaling-up and learning. Partners generally feel their experience of their contexts is valued. Some have been disappointed by the lack of opportunity to play more of an agenda-shaping role in international learning events.

The programme relies heavily on partners' experience and expertise about what works and what is needed in their area. We are pleased the evaluation strongly endorsed the value of this approach – which is so core to Christian Aid's way of working. However, we accept the evaluation finding that some partnerships have suffered through participation in this programme and that it is important to give partners more voice in the ongoing evolution of the programme. We are pleased that partner voices were so prominent in this evaluation.

Reporting

For some time Christian Aid has suffered a major organisation-wide inefficiency in the form of its project management information system (PMIS). We ascertained that Christian Aid is taking every step to resolve this unsatisfactory situation, but it is an institutional inefficiency which has obliged [GTF] partners and staff to duplicate monitoring and evaluation systems and efforts so as to account satisfactorily to Christian Aid and DFID.

The lack of a strong PMIS has presented challenges to the programme. However, we feel the evaluators overstate the issue of duplication. Our new system, PROMISE, which will go online later this year, is based on evaluations by programme staff of partner reports and monitoring visits.

In the case of donor-funded programmes, however, contract managers will continue to design templates for partner reporting in order to get the information needed. These reports will then be stored in PROMISE so that they can be more easily accessed when preparing analyses for donors. The new PMIS would not have alleviated the requirement for GTF-specific reporting so we do not see an issue of duplication.

What PROMISE offers is a way of strengthening programme analysis of partner projects (shifting from activities to impacts, for example) so it will be invaluable in getting more of a balance between partner and programme assessments of progress (see the response to point 4 above).

Programme response

The unexpected requirement for project logframes and TripleLine's request for SMART indicators led to a perceived need to tightly standardise the M&E system. Getting the basics of this in place has involved much time, anxiety and confusion, meaning that time for learning was reduced or delayed.

We perceived a significant increase in the accountability demands of the donor from proposal to inception stage. While we recognise the impact of delayed recruitment on this, it was a challenge to pull together a tight, European Commission-standard programme out of a much looser portfolio, with a lighter design. We have consistently felt pulled between meeting the requirements of the donor and the capacity constraints of our partners and are not convinced that this tension could have been prevented through better design of proposal, programme and/or systems.

It would have been good to be able to draw more from the expertise available in Tripleline (the consultancy that manages the GTF budget) to think through ways of strengthening the programme, as well as identifying weaknesses to which we need to respond. A lesson then for DFID and KPMG for future programmes could be the value in investing in technical support to intermediary organisations – such as Christian Aid – to help them bridge the gap between donor demands and partner capacity.

The development of parallel reporting systems, while inefficient, has allowed a flexible and tailor-made approach. Innovation and Learning Division staff have adopted an experimental, iterative, grounded, thematically-specific approach to building an adequate PMIS for an advocacy-oriented governance programme. The final results of this are not yet clear, but they could generate significant advantages for [the GTF programme] and for Christian Aid and governance partners more widely.

Again, we do not recognise the characterisation of 'parallel' systems. We have tried to learn and innovate through the GTF programme, particularly around M&E, and are already bringing in tools, techniques and lessons from GTF to other programmes, including two civil society funds we are managing for DFID in Sierra Leone and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The recent *mid-term reflection* exercises brought about some high-quality reflection in most partner organisations on their [GTF] projects, in many cases scant until now. In some cases they usefully showed up design problems, for example in Output-to-Purpose links. In some cases they began to piece together fragments of their projects' rather buried theories of change or causal pathways.

We are pleased that the review confirms the value of these exercises. It was very important for us to ensure that reflection at this mid-term point was done by staff, partners and even project participants, as well as by the consultants commissioned to carry out this evaluation. Alongside the Mid-Term Review, these provide a useful starting point for discussions about theories of change, which will be more of a focus for the remainder of the programme.

Programme response

Financial systems appear to work very well at the level of Christian Aid's headquarters and its financial relationship with DFID/KPMG. At the level of financial relationships between Christian Aid and partners, these are also working very well except in the case of east Africa.

It is good to get this feedback.

Value for money, insofar as we can determine it, is demonstrated, except in the case of a handful of partners. Overall, our concern is less about whether Christian Aid and DFID are getting good value for money from GTF funds than about the possibility that partners are subsidising [GTF] projects from their own overtime to meet exacting reporting requirements.

We are pleased that value for money is being demonstrated and are in the process of reviewing cases where the consultants had concerns. A challenge has been ensuring that partners budget adequately for M&E, in terms of staff time as well as other costs, to do the work concerned. A lesson for future programmes is that the time and cost implications of partners' M&E need to be worked out by country programme staff at the outset.

19 Silos

We found little evidence that governance learning has been flowing between [GTF] and the rest of Christian Aid's accountable governance portfolio, in either direction. [GTF] partners and projects appear to have stronger connections with the [GTF] management and – to some extent – other [GTF] partners than with Christian Aid country programme staff in some cases, or other partners within the same country programme, even those working on governance. This limits the scope for synergies and 'economies of scale'.

As noted elsewhere, we recognise the need for greater investment in documenting learning and this will be a major focus of the second phase of the programme.

Given the need until now to focus on start-up, programme management and quality issues, we are reasonably satisfied with the progress that has been made in terms of disseminating learning. As noted above, some learning from the GTF programme has been directly fed into the design and development of other governance programmes, and general lessons have been shared with the organisation through the intranet.

While we accept the constraints identified in terms of uptake of learning, we feel that these primarily reflect wider organisational factors that are not within the programme's control. We will therefore pursue a more targeted dissemination and engagement strategy, focusing on international department management, country programme teams and those working on accountable governance in the organisation. We see disseminating this Mid-Term Review as a priority in the coming months.

Programme response

Effectiveness By building awareness, skills and confidence, [GTF] has contributed across the board to the ability of marginalised people to take a stand claim-making, lobbying, advocacy and/or dialogue with the state. Some partners are active in monitoring of government performance and new and improved opportunities for dialogue between marginalised communities and authorities are being found in most countries. Issues like gender and sexual discrimination demand not only public strategies, but also private debates and forms of 'conscientisation', all of which could fit within the programme's notions of skills, knowledge, alliances, learning and action.

It is good to see there is clear evidence of delivery in these areas – that is, in giving people the skills, information and confidence to demand their rights and communicate with parliaments, media and research bodies – and we note the need to ensure space to adopt private strategies alongside public strategies when addressing issues such as gender and sexual discrimination.

We find evidence of increased civil society cooperation in all cases. Amid this collaboration (although not in all cases), groups of people marginalised for their poverty, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and/or migrant status are being activated to seek accountability. In a few cases those who have organised are not marginalised, but are advocating for rights of marginalised people, so the skills and confidence are not necessarily reaching the marginalised themselves. With oversight actors such as media, parliament, ombudsmen, the courts, or research institutes, there is interaction, but at this stage there are few examples of extensive collaboration except in Brazil. On the side of learning, events, newsletters and website have so far only made a limited contribution, possibly because some are more about communicating than about learning.

Again, it is good to see clear evidence of increased civil society cooperation and we hope that by the end of the programme some of the interaction with other actors will have shifted more towards collaboration. We note that in some cases, the main interlocutors for partners tend not to be marginalised people themselves, but those advocating on their behalf. There is a strong assumption that this reaches down to marginalised groups, but we hope to examine whether this is in fact the case through more structured follow-up with partners during the remainder of the programme. We are confident that partner-led learning initiatives, buttressed by two learning events with a focus on power analysis, will ensure greater partner learning and outputs to share with the organisation by the end of the programme.

Programme response

Achievement of the outputs is not enough to lead to accountable governance and empowered social movements except where conditions are already conducive. The programme is reaching or approaching milestones en route to this higher-level purpose. These can be summarised as activation of civil society, activation of powerful allies, changes to the balance of power and stimulation of more civil society action – steps towards sustained, tangible changes in institutional behaviour.

In any governance programme, achieving its purpose is heavily dependent on the context, and changes within it. We find the framework proposed by the consultants to see how partners – and thus the programme – is moving towards the programme's goals extremely useful, and a good supplement to focusing heavily on reporting against indicators, rather than looking around and beyond the issues, which has in some cases been quite reductionist.

1 C Sustainability

Assumptions about poor citizens' readiness to engage in accountability activism are often idealistic when the realities of their lives are taken into account. Christian Aid is promoting power analysis to assist partners to devise realistic ways round unequal power relations and power-related obstacles wherever possible. Although in most of our interviews, partners showed little signs of having really integrated power analysis into their actions, their monitoring of these and their conception and assessment of their desired impacts, Christian Aid is now well-placed to increase emphasis on this activity.

The Mid-Term Review has been particularly useful in helping to reinforce and consolidate our focus in gving partners space, support and tools to conduct power analysis, and pull out and question their – often implicit – assumptions and theories of change. We too recognise the importance of this for ensuring that they are able to continue this work effectively after the programme ends. This is what we would like the legacy of the programme to be.

A major innovation has been to operationalise a power focus and power analysis in Christian Aid. Linked to this, the mid-term reflection exercise is also an important step forward in convening partners to engage in evaluative mode with their stakeholders, and then reflect together and learn from what they have heard. We find the strength of partnership with Christian Aid and the deep commitment of most of the partners to working in often very difficult circumstances on difficult issues with few resources to be an exemplary lesson.

We would concur that the main innovations of the programme are the focus on power and creating space for partners to reflect, together with stakeholders, about their strategies and successes to date.

The greatest asset of the programme, however, is our partners, who have stuck with us through a difficult start-up period and appear to be keen to engage in joint learning processes for the remainder of the programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MTR recommendations Programme response In M&E and reporting, introduce a Accepted. We will bring together programme officers in September light-touch shift in emphasis, away 2011 to ensure they can carry out these conversations with partners from exclusive accounting to donors and on programme strategy and emerging impacts, using the framework towards reviewing progress against impact, suggested by the review. Support from GTF programme management and keeping programme strategy effective will be provided as necessary for this process. and contextually relevant. Use learning funds strategically so as Accepted. Building on learning ideas framed at the recent regional partner to help embed and deepen partners' learning workshops, partners will be supported to develop their own understandings of power and of causal learning proposals – individually or with other partners. GTF programme pathways of change in their own and each management will provide financial and methodological support and other's projects. we will capture reflections on how these initiatives have deepened understanding of power and change through dialogues with programme staff, partner reporting and learning outputs. Review the portfolio of partners, with Accepted. We have already carried out this review, which has resulted in a view to reducing the number and the withdrawal of one partnership in Tajikistan, and a thorough programme concentrating the programme on fewer review is currently underway in east Africa, where the evaluation noted partners and possibly even on fewer specific weaknesses. It is not clear where further consolidation can be made at this stage – especially where no alternative funds are available to countries. programmes and collaborations between partners on learning initiatives have commenced – but we concur fully with the recommendation to avoid commencing new partnerships. Accepted. This recommendation refers to the country programme staff, Clarify and formalise other Christian Aid staff's accountability to [GTF]. who manage the partnerships with the organisations participating in this programme. To do this we will: • provide training and support to programme staff to engage in dialogue with partners on project impact and lessons • require more regular feedback from programme staff, including from monitoring visits

The conclusions and recommendations above are excerpts from the GTF Mid-Term Review. For more information about this, please contact GTF programme support officer Charlotte Harman on +44 (0)207 523 2379 or charman@christian-aid.org

• work with country managers to ensure that GTF responsibilities are captured in the performance agreements of country programme staff.

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Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

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