

EMPOWERING POOR PEOPLE and STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY

This paper provides an overview of why and how DFID is aiming to enable poor people to exercise greater choice and control over their own development and to hold decision-makers to account.

The challenge

Despite some progress towards the MDGs, significant poverty persists globally. In many places gaps are widening between the rich and the poor and there is significant inequality of opportunity.¹ This is in part because current development measures attempt to tackle the symptoms of poverty but do not always address its causes. Poverty may persist where:

- Poor people lack the power to make choices and access the opportunities, resources and services that would help them and their families out of poverty.
- Poor people struggle to make their views heard and to make changes in the institutions that affect their lives.
- Political elites ignore the concerns of poor people and public officials do not act on commitments to deliver the choices and opportunities they need.²

These challenges are particularly acute in fragile and conflict-affected countries. One- and – a-half billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict or large-scale, organized criminal violence. No low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has, to date, achieved a single MDG.³

These underlying problems mean that aid does not always reach the people it is supposed to benefit and even where resources and improved services are delivered, impact may be limited because of access barriers. In order to make every penny count and increase the reach of development initiatives, we have to ensure that officials are accountable for their commitments and the poorest people are able to access available opportunities, resources and services.

The Secretary of State has called for a change of approach to address these challenges: “a fundamental change that empowers people.”⁴

DFID’s response

DFID is responding to this call through its work on empowering poor people and strengthening relations of accountability.

DFID defines empowerment as enabling people to exercise more control over their own development and supporting them to have the power to make and act on their own

¹ See, for example, UNDP’s Human Development index adjusted for inequality: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/ihdi/>

² For an overview of these issues and see DFID 2010. The politics of Poverty:Elites, Citizens and States

³ WDR 2011. Conflict, Security and Development

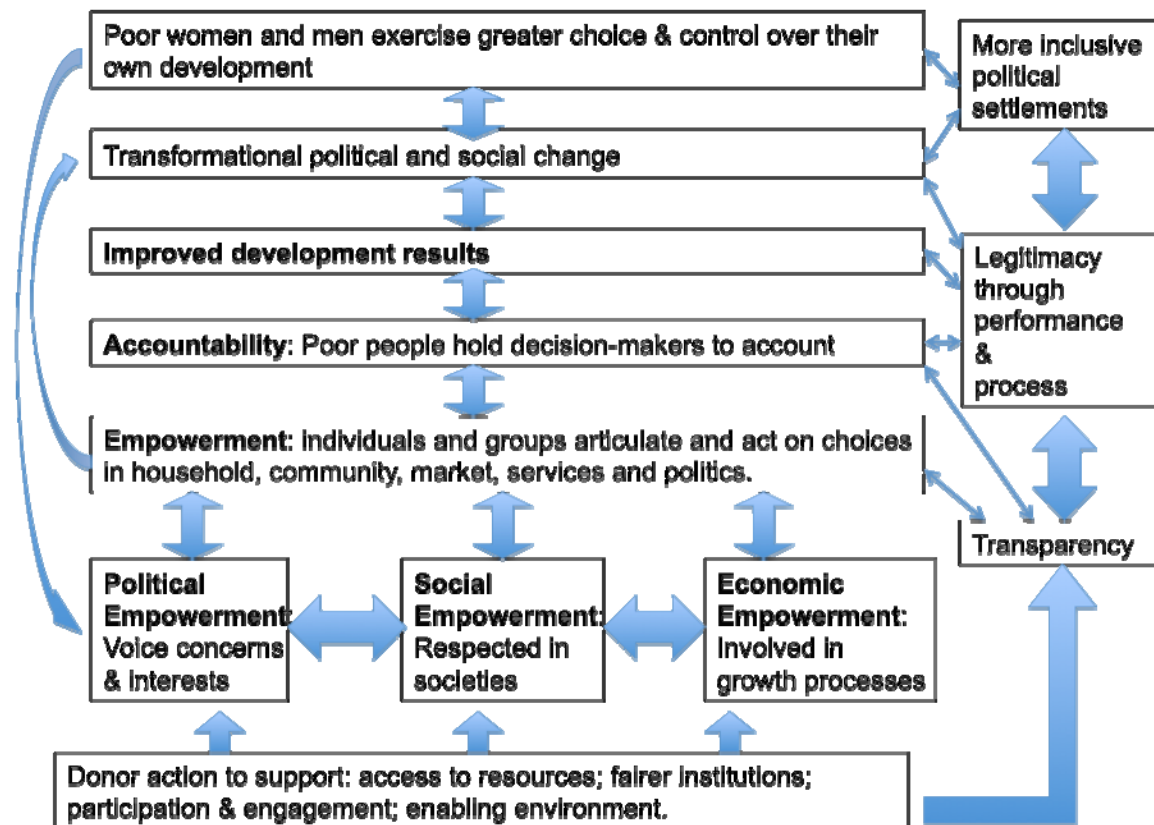
⁴ Secretary of State Oxfam Speech, June 2010

choices. Accountability is about officials and politicians answering for their actions and being held to account for delivering on their commitments and responsibilities.⁵

Work on **empowerment** and **accountability** encompasses interventions that enable poor people to have the resources and capabilities to exercise greater choice and control over their own development and to hold decision-makers – including governments and service providers – to account. It assumes that inclusive, sustainable development requires actions to address power relations at all levels from households through to national political systems and the international drivers of elites’ actions.

Drawing on existing evidence and literature, we are developing an outline of the step changes that may lead to poor people exercising more choice and greater control over their own development. Our understanding of these step changes is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Empowerment and accountability – step changes to enabling poor men and women exercise greater choice and control over their own development



⁵ There are many different understandings of empowerment and accountability and the link between them For example see Rosemary McGee and John Gaventa (October 2010) *The Impact and Effectiveness of Accountability and Transparency Initiatives*, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies; Deepa Narayan (2005) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, Washington World Bank; Rosalind Eyben, Naila Kabeer and Andrea Cornwall (2008) *Conceptualising empowerment and the implications for pro poor growth*; Sussex IDS. *Making services work for poor people*; World Development Report 2004, World Bank; *Who Answers to women? Gender and Accountability*, UNIFEM 2008/2009

Donor action to facilitate these step changes is likely to include interventions in the following areas:

- **Access to resources.** Facilitating poor people's access to strategic resources and building individual and group capabilities so they are more able to make choices and act on them. These resources include cash, information, access to and use of ICTs, health, education, self-confidence and organisational skills.
- **Fairer Institutions.** Changing formal and informal institutions so that the rules of the game support equal opportunities and enable poor people's access to resources. For example through challenging and reforming: laws and practices that prevent women from owning property; regulations and norms that shape access to and provision of services; laws and practice that restrict freedom of information and political representation of poor and marginalised groups.
- **Participation and engagement.** Enabling participation and engagement between poor people and decision-makers in order to strengthen accountability, increase responsiveness and encourage political representatives to address poor people's concerns. Approaches include use of citizen report cards, social audits, participatory budgeting and monitoring, community service management committees, facilitating coalitions between organisations of poor people and groups from the middle classes and political elites, supporting electoral reform, and building democratic accountability.
- **Enabling environment.** Addressing the broader enabling environment in order to strengthen legitimacy of public institutions and enable more inclusive political settlements by, for example, supporting measures to increase the transparency of governments, private sector and voluntary organisations as well as donors.

Entry points for action may be at different levels: **individual, community, national and international**. Table 1 at the end of this document provides an indicative overview of possible actions at different levels. Strategies may involve working **holistically** across sectors, supporting **vertical links** between local and national and international levels, and **scaling up** small-scale initiatives.

In all cases, understanding and addressing **power relations** is central and may involve identifying grass roots organisations, 'champions of change', and potential political partners and coalitions that can help to build bridges between poor people, officials and political representatives.⁶ Donors are also increasingly looking at the **international drivers** of national elites' power. For example access to revenues from transnational corporations in the extractive industries sector can distort incentives for national political elites to build relations with domestic constituencies through democratic politics and taxation.⁷ It may be at this level that donors have most leverage to address power relations through initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Box 1 below provides an example of DFID's work to support empowerment and accountability in India. It illustrates how inclusive development is linked to changes in power relations and political processes at different levels.

⁶ For discussion of building citizen-state links see: IDS 2011. Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action Across States and Societies.

⁷ Sue Unsworth 2010. An Upside-down View of Governance. IDS.

Box 1 – India: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)

In Andhra Pradesh, DFID is supporting social audits of the NREGA. The NREGA guarantees every rural household up to one hundred days of paid work at the minimum wage. It builds on successful state level employment guarantee schemes, including the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme. The proposal for a national scheme was included in the Congress party's manifesto for the 2004 election. Following Congress party victory in the election, activists and civil society leaders mobilised the rural poor and campaigned to ensure the proposal was followed up. The resulting NREGA includes provisions for civil society scrutiny of the Act's implementation. Trained social auditors from civil society organisations use the national Right to Information Act to get operational information about NREGA in a specific area. The social auditor then spends 2-3 days recording beneficiaries' statements about work done and payments received and findings are read out at a village assembly. Public hearings of the results of the audit, attended by government officials, ensures everyone witnesses public testimony and officials' responses, with errors corrected and disciplinary action taken if needed. *Sources: 1. DFID 2. Ian MacAuslan 2008: India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: A Case Study for How Change Happens. Oxfam.*

DFID's commitments

The Bilateral Aid Review (BAR) gives a commitment to scale up DFID's work on empowerment and accountability to support 40 million people to have choice and control over their own development and to hold decision-makers to account. The DFID Business Plan 2011-15 sets out how this target will be met through the development of guidance on accountability and empowerment issues and implementation of the commitment that up to 5% of all budget support should go to accountability institutions. The relevant commitments in the Business Plan are as follows:

Use the aid budget to support the development of local democratic institutions, civil society groups, the media and enterprise

- Develop and publish new guidance on implementing the commitment that up to 5% of all budget support should go to accountability institutions.
- Include clear plans for implementation of 5% commitment for all new budget support proposals to support domestic accountability institutions.
- Support electoral processes in at least 13 countries over the period 2011-15, informed by new DFID-FCO guidance on Electoral Assistance.

Give poor people more power and control over how aid is spent.

- Develop and issue formal guidance to all DFID country offices on scaling up participatory budgeting, cash transfers, and other measures which expand choice and empowerment to citizens in developing countries.
- Take forward interventions to expand choice and empowerment and make institutions more accountable to citizens in at least 10 country programmes and report on progress

Offices that are currently supporting or proposing interventions include Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Africa Regional. DFID is supporting a mixture of community led conflict resolution, empowerment initiatives and community led development in Afghanistan (see box 2), Burma, DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen.

Results

DFID has also made a commitment through the BAR and the Multilateral Aid Review (MAR) to increase the results from our investments, improve value for money and ensure that aid is spent in ways that are responsive to people's real needs and concerns.

DFID regards the achievement of empowerment and accountability as valuable results in themselves and expects that supporting processes of empowerment and accountability across DFID's work will lead to improved development results in a number of areas including:

- Increased quality and results from **service delivery**, by providing tools and methods for supporting individual choice and enabling community engagement in decisions about services.
- Poor people's increased contribution to and benefit from **wealth creation** processes by, for example: increasing access by poor women and men to information they need to access markets and secure their livelihoods.
- More **inclusive political systems** where citizens and communities have more voice in local and national decision making and an ability to form coalitions for change around issues that are important to them.
- Better **citizen-state relations** built on **legitimacy** and **trust** as a result of fairer, more transparent and accountable public **processes** and improved **performance** of public services and organisations.
- More **choice** and **control** for individuals and households, for example through cash transfers that allow people to make their own decisions about how to increase their income.
- Improving the lives of **women and girls** by enabling them to have greater choice and control over decisions that affect them.

Interventions and results depend on context. However, actions to support empowerment and accountability can contribute to better development results in all contexts, including those of fragility and conflict. For example, box 2 outlines interim results from the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan.

Box 2: Afghanistan – National Solidarity Programme (NSP) interim results

The NSP is a large-scale programme that supports participation and empowerment in a conflict-affected country. It was initiated in 2003 by the Afghanistan Government supported by a multi-donor trust fund, to which DFID contributes. It aims to improve the access of rural villagers to critical services and strengthen structures for village governance through the creation of Community Development Councils (CDCs) and the disbursement of grants to support the implementation of projects selected, designed and managed by the CDC in consultation with the village community. The impact of the NSP is evaluated through a multiyear randomized control trial which compares outcomes in 250 villages taking part in the NSP programme with 250 villages not yet taking part. The first stage of the evaluation indicates that the NSP:

- Improves villagers' perceptions of a wide range of government figures.
- Increases the engagement of women across a number of dimensions of community life and makes men more open to female participation in local governance.
- Increases the availability of support groups for women and reduces extreme unhappiness among women.

Source: Andrew Beath et al, July 8, 2010. Randomized impact evaluation of phase-II of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme (NSP).

The evidence⁸

Although DFID's approach builds on existing methods and tools, some of these interventions are relatively new to donors (for example, citizens using new technology to map service provision or cash transfers). Others have only been implemented on a small-scale (for example citizens' report cards) or their intended impacts are difficult to measure, such as interventions to strengthen political voice. This means that there is limited evidence about their impact on development outcomes and the evidence that does exist is often descriptive.

Available evidence highlights:

- The importance of country context and the need to ensure that programmes are designed on the basis of sound political economy and social analysis.
- The existence of positive effects in isolated areas. For example: citizen report cards (for example see box 3 below); beneficiary participation in water systems projects; interventions to strengthen education and employment status; and electoral interventions.
- The need to work on supply and demand at the same time and build bridges and trust between officials and citizens.

Box 3: Uganda- Community monitoring and improved health outcomes

The World Bank and Stockholm University in cooperation with the Ugandan Ministry of Health used a randomized control trial to measure the effectiveness of community based monitoring of 50 health facilities in rural areas of Uganda. In half the facilities in the participating districts, report cards were introduced and results publicly reported. The remaining facilities provided the control group. One year into the programme, average utilization of services was 16 per cent higher in the facilities with report cards; provide practices, including immunization of children, waiting time and examination of procedures had improved significantly; the weights of infants under 18 months were higher and the number of deaths among children under five was lower.

Source: Martina Bjorkmann and Jakob Svensson 2006; Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of a Community Based Monitoring Project in Uganda. Working Paper, IIES, Stockholm University.

How we will work: the PD offer

The Politics, State and Society Team aims to support the delivery of BAR and Business Case commitments and improved development results in an interactive, reflective way which will allow us to share lessons, ensure that guidance evolves in response to country programmes needs and findings and supports a best-fit, context-specific response to locally identified problems.

We will be providing guidance through an on-line web resource that includes a workshop where advisers can post questions on their current programmes, seek advice from colleagues and external experts and report on their innovations, challenges and successes.

⁸ This section draws on DFID's 2011 review of the evidence and Rosemary McGee and John Gaveneta 2010 op cit.

We will draw on available evidence and existing experience to identify initiatives that we know can have a positive impact and provide guidance on the most effective ways of scaling up. We will focus on building a robust evidence base through monitoring and measuring results. We will also initiate a meta-evaluation of DFID's empowerment and accountability programmes to ensure that we learn broader lessons from our work

DFID recognizes that there are many local, regional and national and international organisations that already have expertise on these issues. We will work with these organisations in order to learn from these experiences, support their initiatives and find ways to scale up successful approaches and initiatives.

DFID is making its own practices more accountable through a new UK Aid Transparency Guarantee. This will enable both UK taxpayers and aid beneficiaries to see where DFID's money is going and what it is achieving.

DFID's Development Policy Committee has endorsed this approach to empowering poor people and strengthening relations of accountability. We are now working to support initiatives in country programmes and across all areas of DFID's work including: wealth creation; service delivery; programmes to improve the lives of women and girls; state building initiatives; public sector reform programmes.

Table 1: Individual, community, national and international entry points, indicative results and impacts

| Entry point | Possible Results | Examples of Impact |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth registration • Cash transfers • Vouchers • Microfinance • Mobile & branchless banking for savings, loans, remittances • Mobile literacy programmes • Crowd-sourcing for mapping & data collection • Voter registration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More individuals have necessary papers to access services • Increased number of households have greater income to meet basic needs • Stronger accountability and increased consumer choice drive up quality of service • Individuals make better decisions, are based on increased knowledge from wider information and opinions • A more diverse range of citizens views are taken into account • Poor and marginalised citizens have more knowledge about what services are available and what to expect from them • Greater participation in electoral processes | <p>Ethiopia Cash Transfer: more than 3 million people are supported. 75% eat better. 62% produce some food.</p> <p>Bangladesh maternal health voucher pilot: safe deliveries with a skilled birth attendant up tenfold in 1 sub-district</p> <p>Kenya, <i>Ushahidi</i>, ("testimony") a website to map reports of violence after the post-election fallout. 45,000 people submitted reports via the web and mobile phone.</p> |
| <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory schools management • Participatory monitoring • Citizen advisory boards • Forest user groups • Informal local institutions • Citizen led campaigns • Anti-corruption monitoring • National and local media • Citizen on-line journalism and blogging • Virtual support communities (e.g., HIV/AIDS) • Citizen and community scorecards • Transparent/representative local councils • Election monitoring via mobiles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater confidence public funds are used as intended • Services are more tailored to local needs and results improve • Competition stimulates innovation • Spending takes account of diverse needs • Better managed natural resources give poor families higher incomes and a say in community life • Informal institutions result in reduced incidence of violence within communities • Local community concerns are discussed in a public domain and generate debate | <p>Malawi: participatory school management committees in improved literacy (47% compared with 32% in other schools)</p> <p>Nepal, 60,000 households, in 350 community forest user groups, manage 60,000 hectares of forest land. Together, they talk to forestry companies and local government. This makes sure that everyone's long term interests are addressed.</p> <p>Karnataka, India, customary village councils responsible for resolving 80% of local disputes.</p> <p>Uganda: communities using scorecards had 33% fewer child deaths than in other similar communities which did not use scorecards.</p> |
| <p>National</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory poverty assessments • Public expenditure tracking • Information dissemination on | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending increases in poorer areas and for different groups • Increased transparency leads to | <p>India's Right to Know Act: more than 2 million applications filed, uncovering many cases of corruption or embezzlement of public funds. Owing to a change in</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>budgets and outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation on rights • Opinion polls • Political bodies • Anti-corruption legislation/institutions • Electoral legislation • Parliaments, PACs, audit commissions | <p>reduced corruption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorest people are able to claim entitlements • Increased numbers participate in elections • Priorities are driven by service users | <p>the climate of public opinion, supreme court judges felt obliged to publish details of their assets.</p> <p>Electoral legislation setting up quotas has been introduced in almost all countries with more than 30% of parliamentary seats held by women. Leading countries are Rwanda (56% women in parliament), Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa.</p> |
| <p><i>International</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International funds • International anti-corruption initiatives • International civil society alliances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased investment in development and global public goods • Increased transparency leads to reduced corruption • Transnational civil society action amplifies voice of disempowered groups in countries | <p>Global Fund for HIV/AIDS: by June 2010 an estimated 5.7 million lives saved by Global Fund initiatives</p> <p>Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative: 35 countries currently in process of implementing EITI standards</p> <p>Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO). Supports 1 million informal workers in 100 countries</p> |