Just and Democratic Local Governance

Democracy

Justice and Accountability at the Local Level

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Human Rights form the Basis for
ActionAid's Work

ActionAid believes that poverty violates human rights and that this happens because of unequal power relations which start in the family and extend up to the global level. Violations of Human rights are often a result of failures in governance. Governance is about the relationship between citizens and the state and the way the state uses its power and authority to manage its political, economic and administrative affairs. ActionAid believes in democratic people-centred governance where governance processes and the exercise of power are guided by human rights principles and values. Together these constitute the idea of rights-based, people-centred governance based on the rule of law and principled on democratic values of participation, equity, justice and fairness.

ActionAid's approach to human rights is explained in the publication: ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach – People's Action in Practice. This publication informs the Just and Democratic Governance series which this title is a part of.

The **Just and Democratic Local Governance Resource Book Series** is intended for civil society practitioners and activists working at the local level. The five books can be read independently, but they complement each other and contribute to a more overall picture of key governance issues of central importance to ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach. The series focuses on the local level and will support practitioners in their efforts to achieve ActionAid's strategic promises of improving service delivery for poor people and achieving a fairer distribution of resources to finance public policies aimed at reducing poverty.

It is now generally acknowledged that strengthening accountability mechanisms and holding the state to account plays a crucial role in securing improvements in service delivery. Citizens can most easily influence the state at the local level. Decentralisation reforms in many countries have enabled citizens to form responsive local governments and hold these and other state institutions at the local level to account. Civil society action has demonstrated that considerable improvements can be achieved even without extra external resources by simply focusing on improving local accountability relationships and decentralised governance systems. This approach can achieve significant improvements in a short space of time for the most marginalised, many of whom only have limited access to any type of service.

Clearly many problems cannot be solved at the local level. National and international policies, global patterns of wealth generation and distribution are factors that impact on the local level and determine how much room there is to manoeuvre. The struggle for democracy and human rights at the local level must therefore necessarily be linked to national and international campaigns.

The five books in the series cover issues from a general perspective and do not take specific national contexts into account. However, support will be given to developing national versions of these resource books and translating them into national languages. The current series of five titles is focused at the local level and we hope that it will assist practitioners in improving services for the poor. Forthcoming titles will focus on how the local level can effectively link up with national struggles.

Democracy - Justice and Accountability
at the Local Level

The Just and Democratic Local Governance series focuses on key governance issues of central importance to ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach. The series supports frontline staff and partners in their efforts to achieve ActionAid's strategic promises of improving service delivery for people living in poverty and achieving a fairer distribution of resources to finance public policies aimed at reducing poverty.

This title: Democracy – Justice and Accountability at the Local Level is a foundation text for the series and introduces key governance issues for promoting just and democratic governance at the local level.

The resource book presents a people centred, participatory and rights based approach to local democracy. It analyses democratic and decentralised local government and explores the challenges faced by civil society in championing this vision. It examines the crucial link between the political mandates that determine the scope for local democracy, and the fiscal and administrative requirements needed to support them.

Closely connected to this is the interaction between elected and administrative power holders on the one hand and citizens, their accountability work, and claims for voice and representation on the other.

Finally, the resource book also considers the interplay between formal democratic power versus hidden or parallel power.

Governance, Democracy and Rights – essential concepts

- Many people see democracy as the way to build a more just and fair society

Democracy has become a cornerstone of development and social change processes in recent years. Democracy is seen as a guarantor of more responsive government and just society where people's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled through democratic processes.

Articles 19, 20 and 21 from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide a common global entry point for thinking about democracy. Article 19 establishes the right of people to have access to information, hold opinions and express these publically. Article 20 establishes people's right to form organisations and

associations and hold meetings, while Article 21 guarantees people's right to participate in government and governance processes, either individually or through chosen representatives.

Article 21 also establishes that all people have an equal right to receive public services provided by the state and further that governments should be formed on the basis of elections which all adult citizens have the right to participate in. Elections should be free and fair and held at regular periodic intervals and leaders must accept the outcome of elections and resign if they lose. Elections thus represent a method for transferring power

from one leader to another without disrupting or destroying society.

A country will have to fulfil these human rights in order to be considered a democracy. In many countries the issue is the extent to which these human rights are fulfilled and in many places achieving and maintaining democracy is an on-going process.

Democracy as rules

Democracy as rules is about how we define the system of democracy in each country and how the system is supposed to function. The constitution of each country is the overarching document which defines democracy and indicates how democracy is intended to work. Other laws and rules define other key areas, for example the electoral system, the judiciary and courts, the parliament and the government. For democracy to function, these rules and
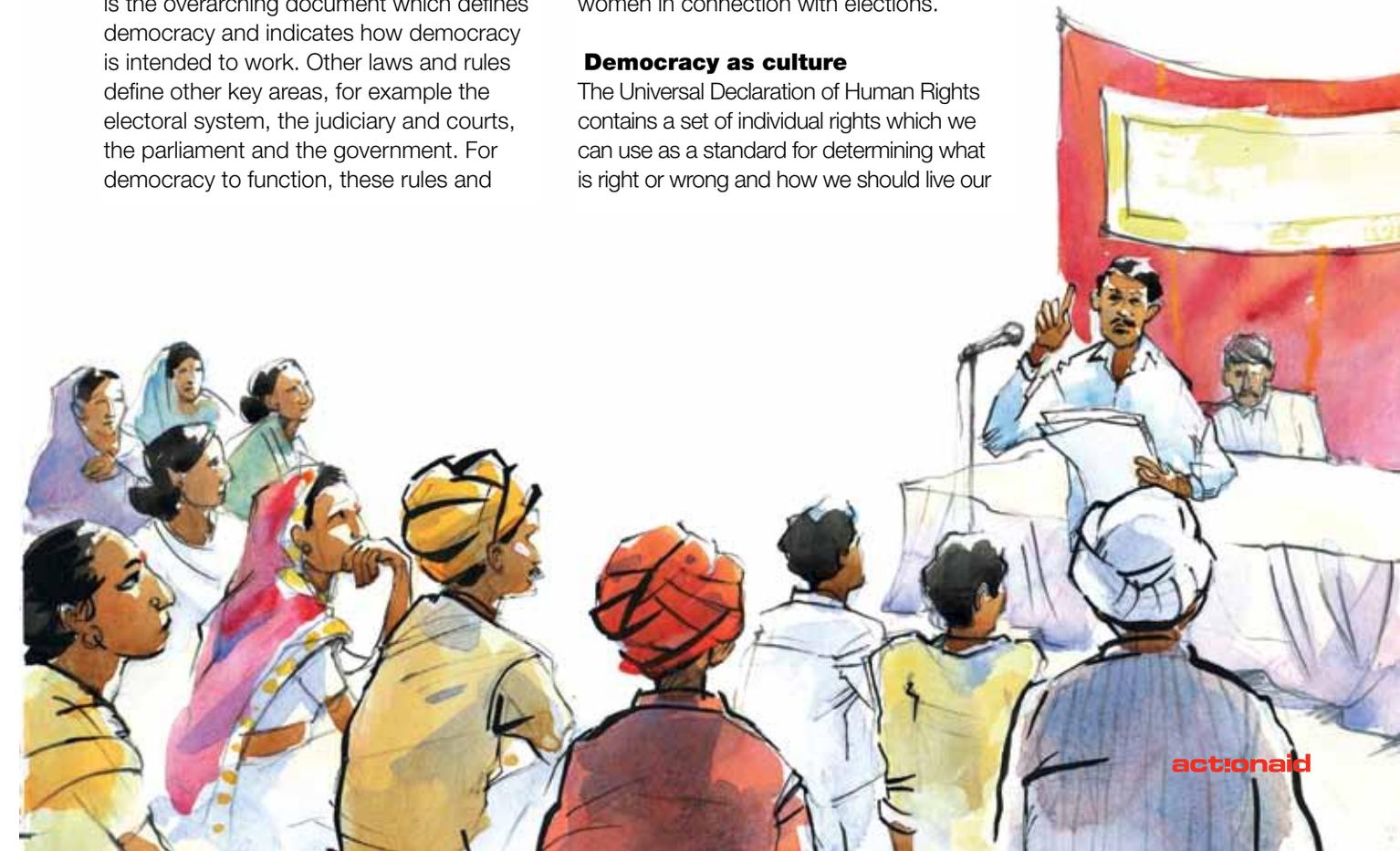
Separating power...
To protect people's rights, many countries separate the judiciary (courts and justice system), the legislature (law making body/parliament) and the executive (the government/rulers in power). To what extent are these institutions separate and independent in your country?

regulations have to be followed by all and administered fairly and equally. In terms of equality, it is essential that the constitution and other laws have adequate provisions for ensuring that women's rights are fulfilled. This could include reserved quotas for women in connection with elections.

Democracy as culture

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains a set of individual rights which we can use as a standard for determining what is right or wrong and how we should live our

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Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 19
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21
(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

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- Democracy is about our right to participate in governance, but it is also about our obligations to our fellow citizens

lives. These rights apply to us individually, but also to everyone else. So just as much as we can demand that our rights be fulfilled, we also have an obligation to make sure that we live up to human rights standards in our own behaviour to others.

This calls for tolerance, compromise, gender equality and empathy – the ability to see the world from other people's perspectives. These values must be reflected in meetings where people have the confidence to speak out, listen carefully and respond respectfully to one another; it must be reflected in the way government officers interact with citizens, in schools where teachers must respect students, in civil society organisations where leaders must respect their members and in the family where men and women, young and old, must respect one another. Learning about democracy and human rights is one

thing, but to live out these values is quite another challenge! You therefore need to develop good skills of communication, decision making, cooperation, participation and peaceful conflict resolution.

These values, principles and beliefs form a democratic culture which underpins democratic governance. If people do not internalise these beliefs and live by them in their daily life, it will be difficult to organise society based on democratic governance.

Democratic Governance

When citizens of a country embrace the values and principles that make up democratic culture and when the laws and rules that define democracy in a given country fulfil international human rights standards and when these laws and rules are implemented equally and fairly and

enjoyed by all citizens, then we can talk about democratic governance. Democratic governance is the combination of democratic laws and rules and democratic culture. It involves the widespread participation of citizens in making decisions which affect their lives. It is the goal we seek to achieve by focusing on governance in our work. Democratic Governance is about behaving and interacting with other citizens in ways which live up to democratic and human rights standards. From this perspective, it is important to distinguish *governance* as something very different from *the government* which is the group of people in control of a country, headed by a prime minister or president.

Democratic Deficit

In an increasing number of countries, democracy is focused on multiparty, representative democracy which means that citizens have the right to vote, that there are political parties which people are free to vote for, that the parties form governments which then take decisions on behalf of citizens and that some liberal rights for citizens are guaranteed in the constitution. This is called a pluralistic representative democracy.

Representative democracy has a number of important democratic features, but often representative democracy on its own is not enough to guarantee democratic governance. It is relatively easy for powerful leaders to dominate political parties. The choice of candidates in a political party can be controlled by the party leadership and election processes can be manipulated

to ensure that the same powerful people are elected from one election to the next. In particular, this can result in women and marginalised groups being excluded from political processes and representation. During elections, political leaders may proclaim that they will bring development and justice to the people, but all too often

Elections…
Many countries hold elections but often elections are tightly controlled or manipulated by powerful people who want to control or influence outcomes. There are many ways in which this can be done. Some sitting presidents have been able to change the constitution, thus enabling them to enjoy a third or fourth term of office. Often the political system is dominated by one party. Candidates for election are decided by top party people, rather than by party members. Elections are also expensive – especially if you are going to win. You need a campaign to get people to vote for you and money is sometimes used to "persuade" people to vote for a particular candidate. This means that rich people, or people who are sponsored by rich people, tend to get elected. Finally, elections can be manipulated; ballot boxes can be stuffed or simply disappear and results falsified.

Democracy as a way of life - everyday examples of how you can practice democracy in your daily life.
• Participate actively in the development of your community by taking part in decision making and implementation of agreed plans.
• Vote for responsible leadership. Leaders are expected to be honest, impartial, dedicated, visionary, and trustworthy. Look for the same qualities when electing civil and political leaders.
• Hold your leaders accountable for their plans and actions, e.g. by reminding them of their election promises and manifestos. Don't re-elect leaders who are known to be corrupt or unaccountable.
• Be prepared for meetings by keeping yourself updated and by demanding the necessary background information in good time so that you can make informed arguments.
• Be tolerant and accept other people who hold views different from yours. Not only about politics, but also about any other issue.
• Practice democratic principles by involving all family members in your home in decision-making, also children.
You can also give your staff or colleagues the opportunity to air their opinions about your ideas and plans.
You can listen, accept and learn from other people's views or criticism.

Adapted from: Democracy as a Way of Life – Your Handbook. ActionAid Denmark (2006)

- In many established democracies, people only become involved in governance issues at election time.

these remain empty promises which they do not intend to honour. In this situation, democracy faces a crisis.

Even in established democracies there are many people who are concerned about the quality of democracy. There is a concern that patterns of political participation are declining, particularly collective citizen action. Instead political processes are being taken over by special interest groups which promote their own agendas which may not be in the broader collective interest. A consequence of this is that citizens experience a greater distance between themselves and their leaders and less ability to influence. Some commentators have coined the phrase 'Democratic elitism' where politics 'is stripped of its horizontal elements, which are replaced by the political authorization of elites through elections' (Avritzer 2003:23), and these democratic elites are usually dominated my men.

Democracy and Human Rights
Today there are 196 countries in the world and 117 have adopted electoral democracy as their form of governance which is expressed in their constitutions (based on Freedom House data). This is a large increase compared to earlier times when countries were ruled by a dictator, a monarchy or a colonial power. There has been a similar development in terms of the focus on human rights. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, all UN Member States have ratified at least one core international human rights treaty, and 80 per cent have ratified four or more. (There are 192 UN member states). These developments do not mean that democracy and human rights are necessarily protected, respected or fulfilled in all these countries, but they do indicate an increasing trend or movement in this direction.

Deepening Democracy
In the light of the above there is much debate today about *deepening democracy,* which is essentially about developing greater citizen empowerment, participation and gender equality in political process than is normally found in liberal representative democracy (Gaventa 2006). The deepening democracy debate argues that citizenship should involve the building of broad coalitions and people's mobilisation with the potential to frame new agendas and provide a counterbalance to state power by encouraging citizens to voice demands and play a watchdog role and hold leaders to account, both individually and through people's organisations. Others see deepening democracy as being a process where citizens are *heard* by the state to a much greater degree and where citizens participate directly in deliberation and decision making on political and policy issues as opposed to their interests being managed by powerful third party patrons or representatives who intercede on their behalf (Schattan et al 2010:3).

Notwithstanding this, other commentators warn about assuming that the growth of civil society necessarily equates with increasing democratisation. Many commentators note that there is nothing inherently democratic about CSOs and social movements. There can be a serious *disconnect* between the practice of democracy as advocated by CSOs and the everyday realities of clientelism, patronage and authoritarian local politics experienced by people on a daily basis (Houtzager and Acharya 2010). Much work on democracy

Deepening Democracy – different approaches

Participatory democracy strives to create opportunities for all members of a population to make meaningful contributions to decision-making. It attempts to go beyond the role of citizens as voters and watchdogs by enabling citizens to have a direct role in decision making that affects them, particularly at the community level, where citizens and officials engage as more equal partners in more inclusive processes aimed at ensuring greater citizen participation, particularly among women and marginalised groups.

Direct democracy is a form of government in which people vote on policy initiatives directly, as opposed to a representative democracy in which people vote for representatives who then vote on policy initiatives. Forms of direct democracy that are in use are *referendums* where an entire electorate is asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal by voting for or against it. Another form is the *citizens' initiative* which, if signed by a certain minimum number of registered voters, can force a public vote on an issue. Also worth mentioning is the option of *recall elections* which is a procedure by which voters can remove an elected official from office through a direct vote before his or her term has ended. Recalls are initiated when a sufficient number of voters sign a petition demanding a recall.

Deliberative democracy is a form of democracy which emphasises the importance of thorough in-depth discussion in decision making processes. Deliberative democracy sees discussion as the primary source of legitimacy for law making processes rather than simply voting on an issue. Voting is seen as a process where there is a tendency for powerful representatives to focus on collecting votes for their proposals rather than focusing on the merits or detriments of the proposal itself.

building during the last decade has focused on civil society building and state reform, but this has usually happened in an unconnected way. Many commentators argue that this separation between the *civil* and *political* needs to be re-considered.

Deepening democracy envisages an increasing interaction between the state and citizens in processes of *co-governance* where citizens are involved in decision making forums. The challenge is to understand better the intersection of the two spheres - the civic and political, in order to strengthen the depth and quality of their overlap. As civil society engages with the state in new ways, many argue that it

must also go beyond what some people see as being essentially a non-political form of participation and deliberation and become more political in nature and engage on issues of privileged interest and unequal power distribution, arenas that are otherwise dominated by political actors. In short, to be meaningful, deepened democracy and participatory processes must engage with and change political power (Gavanta 2006).

In this sense democratic governance is an on-going project all over the world. It is not a thing like a building or a machine that once constructed is just there and functioning. In all countries there is a

- Democracy is not just about elections. It is also about all the laws, institutions and organisations that together ensure that our rights are protected and democracy upheld

constant flux of improvements and setbacks for democracy. Some countries have gone far in implementing a democratic culture, rules and political systems; others are still dictatorships, where a small elite controls everything.

Making Democratic Governance Function – key building blocks

Democratic governance is not something that can function by itself. People have to make it function and protect it from being eroded or replaced by other forms of government or governance. The following six sections highlight some key issues in relation to establishing a foundation upon which democratic governance can flourish.

1) Citizenship

Democracy implies that all people have the right to participate in governance processes and receive services supplied by the state. Accessing these rights is often seen in terms of being a citizen of a particular country and obtaining citizenship is often seen as being bestowed through the citizenship of ones parents or place of birth. However, in many countries there are exclusionary mechanisms which consign certain groups of people in society to a status of lesser citizens or non-citizens. This is particularly so in the case of women. In liberal theory it is essential that you have individual, personal relationships with the state, and men have such relationships. They enter into a contract, they pay tax, they get a service, and they get certain rights. However women are often denied these rights as they are considered part of the family, and subordinated to men and

the relationships they find themselves in (Goetz 2006). This type of exclusion can be extensive and result in the loss of assets, land and other property; the denial of access to credit, exclusion from business opportunities, and gender exploitation and discrimination in the labour market in terms wages and labour activism.

2) Rule of law

Democratic governance is dependent on democratic values and principles being respected which itself requires society to be governed by laws which the majority of people consider fair and reasonable and which uphold human rights. The rule of law must apply to everybody equally and be enforced and administered justly, equally and openly and also apply to leaders, decision makers and administrators themselves.

3) Participation of citizens

Much emphasis has been put on increasing citizen participation in governance. This is extremely important, but greater participation is not necessarily women's participation. Minorities and excluded groups can easily be left out or forgotten by the majority winners, and elected representatives are often loyal to the aims of their party leaders rather than their constituents. This is particularly the case in relation to women who face a number of barriers preventing them from participating in politics and decision making which are not faced by men. Often institutions are gender-neutral and ignore the reality of differing power and status between women and men or they are gender-blind

and do not promote a model of society and development that is based on the transformation of relations between men and women.

In some countries women's participation in governance has been significantly increased, but participation in itself does not necessarily lead to more gender equality in decision making and budgeting. The exclusion of women is often related to local tradition, culture and religion, but other barriers reflect fundamental inequalities that continue to exist between men and women, for example lower literacy rates, less access to education, health care and higher rates of poverty, all of which effectively limit opportunities for women's participation. It is therefore essential that women are encouraged to stand for

election and become involved in decision making processes, otherwise they will continue to be side-lined.

People's participation in governance and community life also presupposes that people embrace democratic values and principles. Participation is not automatically democratic. It can be dominated by a few articulate and powerful groups who are only interested in securing resources and privileges for themselves at the expense of others. Overcoming this tendency involves assisting people to become democratically empowered.

4) Democratic Associations and Political Parties

The formation of associations and political parties is an integral part of democratic

- Democracy is also about achieving equal relations between women and men

- Citizens' organisations that promote democracy must also practice democracy themselves

governance. It enables individual voices to be represented in wider forums at different levels in society and political parties play a major role in electoral process and are involved in forming governments. If the goal of democratic governance is to be upheld, it is crucial that citizen's associations and political parties are themselves transparent and democratic, uphold women's rights and abide by the law. Political organisations that are corrupt, undemocratic, gender biased and prepared to break the law in order to obtain power will also corrupt attempts to establish democratic governance.

5) Media and freedom of information

Democratic governance is also dependent on a free, independent and objective media. Information and knowledge are essential for people's participation. Citizen's preferences and choices can only be made on the basis of available information and if information is restricted, biased or simply false, then opinions can easily be manipulated. There are many examples of large politically motivated international media companies which dominate media channels with their own interpretation of events and issues. Similarly, many countries restrict and prohibit a free flow of information about government affairs which again makes it difficult for citizens to know what is happening.

6) Legitimacy and Accountability

A key element of democracy is that citizens elect their leaders and that leaders will act for the greater good of society. If the state is going to govern with the best interests of its citizens in mind, it is essential that there are *relationships* between citizens and their rulers. Two important relationships are *legitimacy* and *accountability.* For leaders, legitimacy is about being recognised as *the rightful legitimate* leader who has the support of the people. For citizens, accountability is about leaders being *answerable* to the people. One of the most serious forms of governance failure occurs when these relationships break down or do not exist. The state and its citizens become *disconnected.* In other words those in power have little incentive to listen to those without power, and those without power have little influence with which to make their leaders listen.

From the citizen's perspective, key issues about leaders are: whose interests do they represent, what power do they have, how did they get into power, who are they accountable to, and how do you get rid of them? These issues become particularly relevant at election or appointment time. For citizens, the ultimate issue is: do election or appointment processes function free and fairly. In other words, is there a *democratic governance relationship* between leaders and citizens in terms of the exercise of power and does it function?

A similar relationship exists between the state as a provider of services, (for example: the transport system, schools and hospitals and the police), and citizens who are required to pay taxes to finance these things. *Ideally,* leaders are dependent on taxpayers, and citizens are dependent on the state for providing services. This reciprocal relationship is one of the strongest ways of binding citizens and leaders together in a mutually dependent relationship. However, in many countries internally generated revenues from taxes and duties are very low and do not play a significant role in financing the state. There is therefore no need for rulers to listen to citizens, as a broad mass, as they are able to get finance from a few internal sources like minerals, oil or commodity exports, as well as large loans from international financial institutions and grants from donors. This enables them to rule over their citizens in a relatively unconstrained manner, which means that they can do what they like as their citizens have little leverage or bargaining power with which to stop them.

In conclusion: In this chapter we have discussed some of the key elements of democratic governance and explored the links between democratic governance, human rights and our objectives of advancing the political influence of people living in poverty. In the next chapter we are going to discuss our approach to governance work.

- Democracy is about the relationship leaders have with their citizens – the most important relationship is accountability – a leader should be accountable to the people

- Leaders must understand that their power comes from the people - not from themselves

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Working with Governance, Democracy and Rights – our approach

- The fulfilment of human rights goes hand in hand with building democratic governance

In this Chapter we look at how we work for democratic governance in practice within the framework of ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach. In Chapter 1 we explored how the fulfilment of people's rights is closely bound up with democratic governance. Without democratic forms of governance, it is unlikely that the fulfilment of rights can either be achieved or sustained. So the fulfilment of rights has to be accompanied with a quest for democratic governance.

What this means in practice is that when we work, for example, for people's right to a supply of clean drinking water, we must also work for systems of democratic decision making and administration in relation to the supply of water and these governance systems themselves have to be anchored in wider governance frameworks. In Chapter 1 we saw that people's participation in decision making was an essential element of democratic governance and a human right in itself and this is indeed the starting point for our work and where we begin this Chapter.

How do we work – people's agency
People's agency refers to the ability of people living in poverty to initiate, manage and lead change process themselves that address injustices and lead to the fulfilment of their rights. We believe that our role as activists working for social justice is to facilitate, support and assist people's own campaigns, not to lead them and not to take on the role of a service provider. Therefore, much of our work starts with the empowerment of the people we work with. The first step is to build their awareness of rights and their critical consciousness.

1) Empowerment – a prerequisite
A prerequisite to all our work is people's empowerment. Earlier we discussed that people's participation is a key element of democratic governance and a key human right. In order to participate and become involved in democratic work people need to be empowered. Too often people are unaware of their entitlements and rights; they have a passive or fatalistic view of the world where, for example, they see government provision of basic services as a form of charity for which they should be thankful. Moving towards a more active view of the world in which government services are seen as basic rights is a fundamental step. Building people's awareness of their rights is an important component of becoming empowered and aware.

People who are empowered have an opinion about their life and the situation they are in. They have a vision of how things could be changed. This is the moment where empowerment transforms into action. Once people are empowered, they can consider what action they want to undertake and organise their action in campaigns.

2) Campaigning
A campaign is a step-by-step approach to tackling a particular issue or a problem that people have decided that they want to address and which they feel is possible to change through people's collective action. A campaign typically has a number of phases such as: mass mobilisation of people, building evidence through research or investigation, advocacy, lobbying, mass communication, dialogue and negotiation. The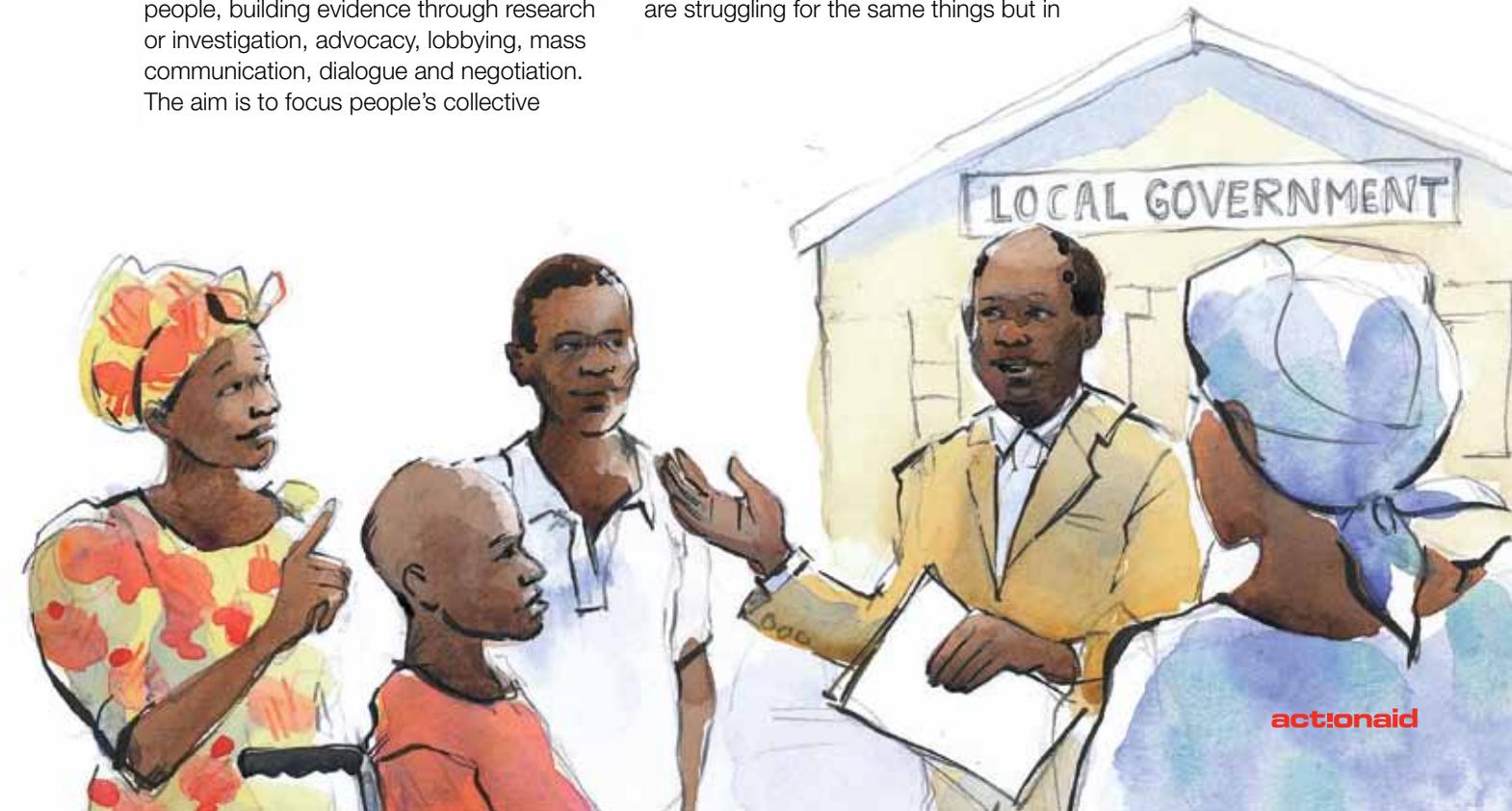 aim is to focus people's collective action around a simple and powerful demand, in order to achieve a measurable political or social change to the structural causes of poverty.

3) Solidarity
Solidarity is geared to supporting and sustaining a movement for change in which people living in poverty take the lead. The additional dimension brought by the focus on solidarity is the connection to people and organisations who are not themselves facing the same conditions but who are sympathetic to the struggles of people living in poverty. Solidarity can be expressed in many ways, for example by donating money to just causes, by linking people together who are struggling for the same things but in

- In order to bring about change we have to know our rights, understand how to engage with officials and ensure that we have the broad support of the people

- Concerned citizens and their organisations have always played a key role in building democracy, often at great cost to themselves

different places and parts of the world, by participating in sympathy demonstrations and communicating issues to wider public audiences as well as building alliances of like-minded organisations. We should always see if we can facilitate broader solidarity and build relationships between people living in poverty and other sympathetic organisations and individuals that can support their struggles as the power of numbers is one of the greatest powers at our disposal.

4) How we see change

It is now acknowledged that civil society has historically played a key role in promoting democratic governance and respect for human rights. Indeed this is our theory of change. We believe that individual and collective action, led by the active agency of people living in poverty and supported by like-minded individuals and organisations is an effective and democratic way to address structural causes and consequences of poverty as well as promoting governance systems that respect, protect and fulfil human rights standards.

How we work
- our governance focus

In Chapter 1 we stated that democratic governance is about adopting democratic rules and democratic culture as a way of managing society. Our objective is to ensure that citizens embrace a democratic culture and are able to participate fully in democratic processes. Key areas in democratic processes are about how decisions get made and then how

decisions are carried out or implemented. Our approach to working for democratic governance therefore focuses on how public policy gets decided and how it is implemented. In this connection we have identified four key areas crucial for democratic governance.

In terms of *decision making,* we focus on issues relating to **power** and issues relating to people's **voice.** Decision making is about how power is exercised and who gets to decide, and voice is about citizen's participation and influence in these processes. In terms of *implementing*, we focus on **accountability** and **budgets,** (money management or fiscal governance).

The four approaches to governance work are captured in the diagram on the next page.
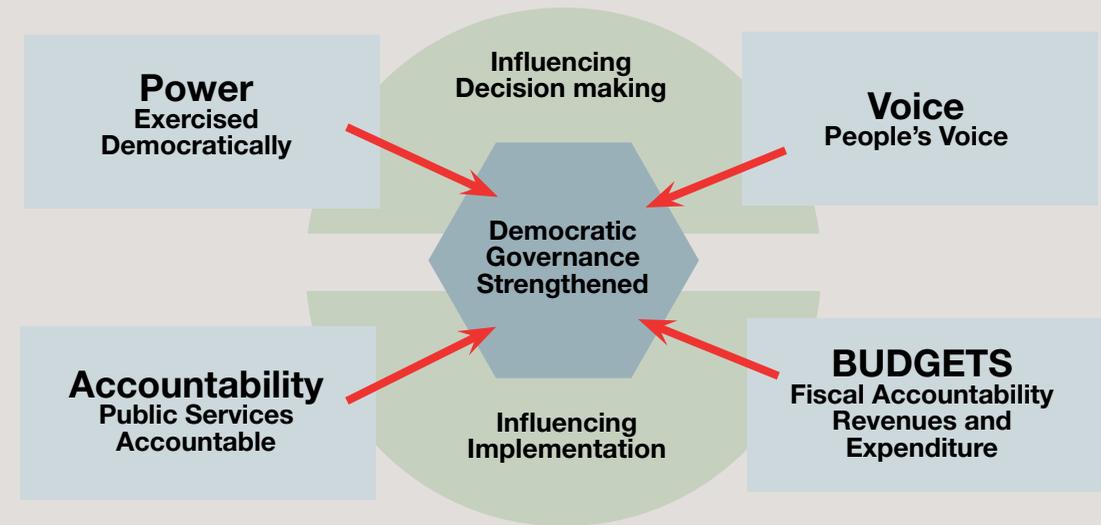
In the next sections we will briefly look at each of these governance approaches.

1) Focus on Power

You cannot change society without having power and influence – change for the better for people living in poverty rarely happens by itself. For your voice to be heard and your demands for change to be taken seriously, you need power. Much of our work is a struggle to influence powerful people by peaceful and democratic means to support a more just, democratic and equitable vision of the future.

Without power, society cannot function. Parents, teachers and leaders have to tell their children, their pupils and their

Strengthening Democratic Governance: A fourfold approach

people what to do and what not to do, what is right and what is wrong. Actions and behaviours need to be rewarded or punished. Power has a lot to do with how humans act and behave.

We often have a tendency to think of power as being negative, the power of one person over another, the power of force and control over people, resources and decisions. Indeed much of our work is about understanding and combating negative power, where power is corrupted and abused for personal gain and where rules, regulations and human rights are ignored or brushed out the way.

However, power and leadership are the means by which we can change society for the better and in this context power is also a positive force which fosters collaboration and people's capacity to act creatively and work together for a better world. Managing power relations is therefore a key focus area for our governance work.

2) Focus on Voice

It is difficult, if not impossible, to influence society unless your voice is heard and your views represented in political processes. Influence is about getting our voice heard, being taken seriously and being listened to. In some societies, citizens have little

opportunity to raise their voice, choose representatives or participate in decision making. Very often decisions are made solely by powerful leaders or strong governments. In such cases, laws, budgets and institutions are imposed on people without their voice being heard. This means that the changes introduced may not be what people want or need. On this basis, citizens' voice and participation in political and decision making processes is essential for building democratic societies and therefore a key governance focus area for our work.

3) Focus on Accountability

Accountability is now widely accepted as a key issue in service delivery improvements. The state is obligated to provide essential services to citizens and citizens have a right to expect the state to deliver. Holding duty bearers to account for the services they are in charge of is an effective way of improving services and making local governance more effective and responsive to the needs and voices of the poor. For accountability relationships to function, sanctions for poor performance or illegal practices have to be a real threat and enforceable. Making accountability relationships function is therefore a key aspect of our governance work.

4) Focus on Budgets

Public goods and services have to be financed. How this happens is a key area of governance that is often neglected. Only when you get to see the budget, can you determine whether your Member of Parliament was telling the truth when he told supporters that health care would now be improved. Many major governance failures have to do with the way money is managed (or mismanaged).

- It is essential for civil society organisations today to have an understanding of how services are budgeted and financed

Providing services involves three major interrelated processes:
1. Firstly, deciding what standard or quality of service will be provided and to whom.
2. Secondly costing it, in terms of staff (e.g. a doctor); fixed assets (e.g. a hospital); and recurrent costs (e.g. maintaining the hospital, paying salaries and providing medicines).
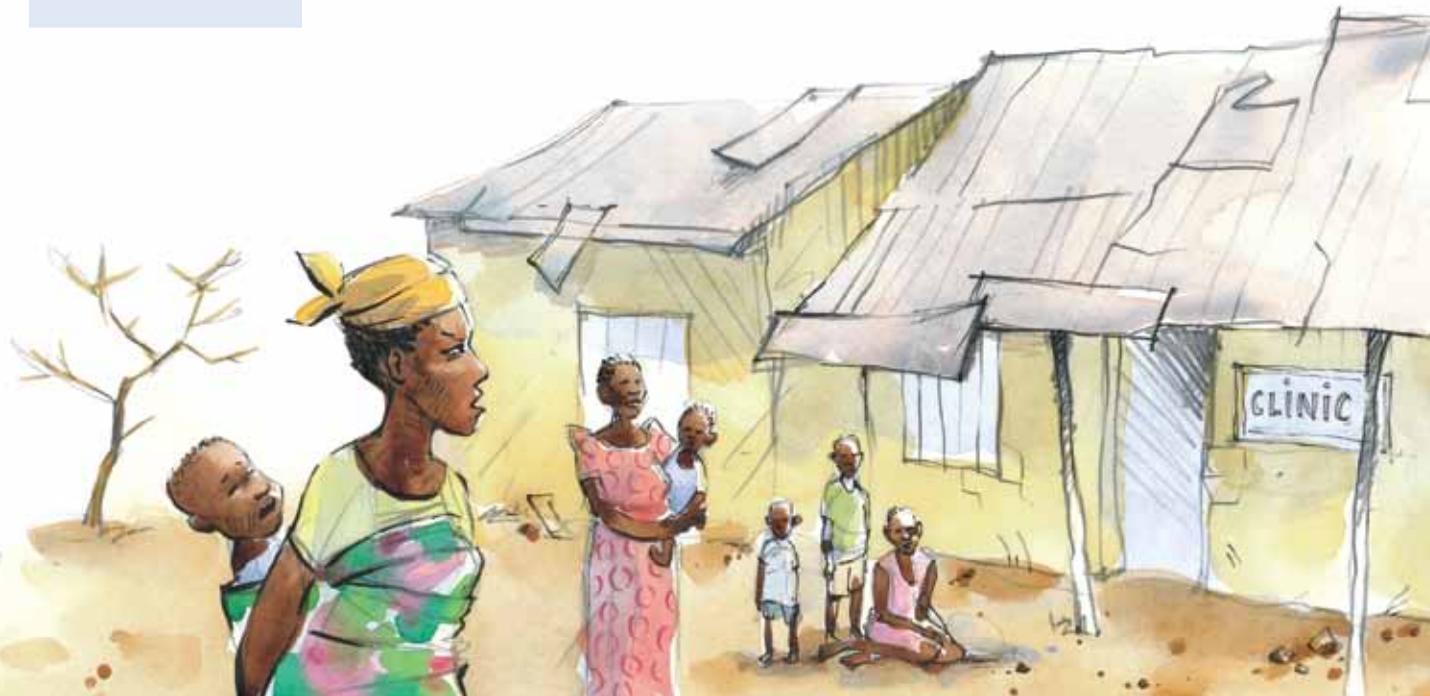3. Thirdly, financing the service.

These are all complex processes and it is not uncommon to find that these three areas are poorly coordinated. Fiscal management, budgeting and general accounting problems typically plague service delivery and many services are often underfunded. In addition, where accountability systems are weak, service financing is subject to embezzlement and misappropriation.

Today it is increasingly important for civil society organizations to be knowledgeable about budget matters and have some understanding of fiscal governance. There is a clear link between these issues and more general accountability work which is why this is also a key area for our governance work.

Focusing on Women

In all four of these approaches it is important that we have a clear focus on women in our governance work. In relation to **Power** one of the key areas is the promotion of women's leadership. In relation to **Voice,** it is to ensure that women's voice is indeed heard and listened to and that women's participation also leads to favourable outcomes for women's agendas and does not end in just more participation for its own sake. In terms of **Accountability,** an overriding issue is that much legislation affecting election procedures, decentralisation, the judicial system and public administration is biased against women. When seeking greater accountability from these institutions, it is necessary to do so from the perspective of women, and not just from a more general citizen's approach which tends to be gender blind. In relation to **Budgets,** the situation is similar. Most auditing and budgeting is also gender blind and again requires a special focus on gender responsive budgeting.

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- Bringing about meaningful change for the poor means understanding how governance systems fail poor people and then working to change these failures

- This ultimately involves taking local issues to the national level. The system can only be changed by those at the top.

Working with Governance, Democracy and Rights – implementing programmes

In a Human Rights Based Approach, governance issues lie at the heart of social change processes. Our aim is not to provide services to people ourselves, but to engage with duty bearers and political representatives and advocate for action and reform that will enable the state to take up its responsibility of fulfilling people's basic rights. These advocacy processes are all about governance, in short engaging on issues about how resources are shared and administered. The following sections highlight the various ways that governance can be incorporated in our work.

1) Governance as Cross-cutting Theme
Human rights violations occur as a result of failures in governance. From this it follows that governance is central to development. It is important to make clear that the kind of governance we are referring to is much more than the organising skills necessary for managing society, making decisions and implementing them. An effective dictatorship can deliver development by these means, but it cannot respect, protect and fulfil human rights. In Chapter 1, we also discussed six major building blocks of democratic governance which stem from Articles 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In all the work we do, we will need to

support and strengthen these *building blocks,* both in relation to the specific field we are working in and also more generally across all sectors. These building blocks provide the basis upon which human rights can be respected, protected and fulfilled. Democratic governance is therefore an essential element of all the development and social change work we undertake. Governance is truly a cross-cutting foundational theme.

The four governance areas we outlined in the previous chapter, namely, Power, Voice, Accountability and Budgets, provide entry points for this work in any field we may be working in, be it agriculture, health or education.

2) Governance as a stand-alone theme
Stand-alone governance programmes are programmes which focus on specific governance issues. Typically the type of issues focused on will contribute to securing rights across all or many sectors, not just in one specific area. For example, reform of legislation on the right to information, anti-corruption, participatory democracy, institution building, tax justice and decentralisation will benefit all sectors.

Similarly, in Chapter 1 we also discussed the right to freedom of opinion and freedom of peaceful assembly as well as the right of association and the right to take part in government. We saw how these rights provide the basis for building civil society. Securing these rights is therefore essential for all our work and may involve stand-alone governance programmes.
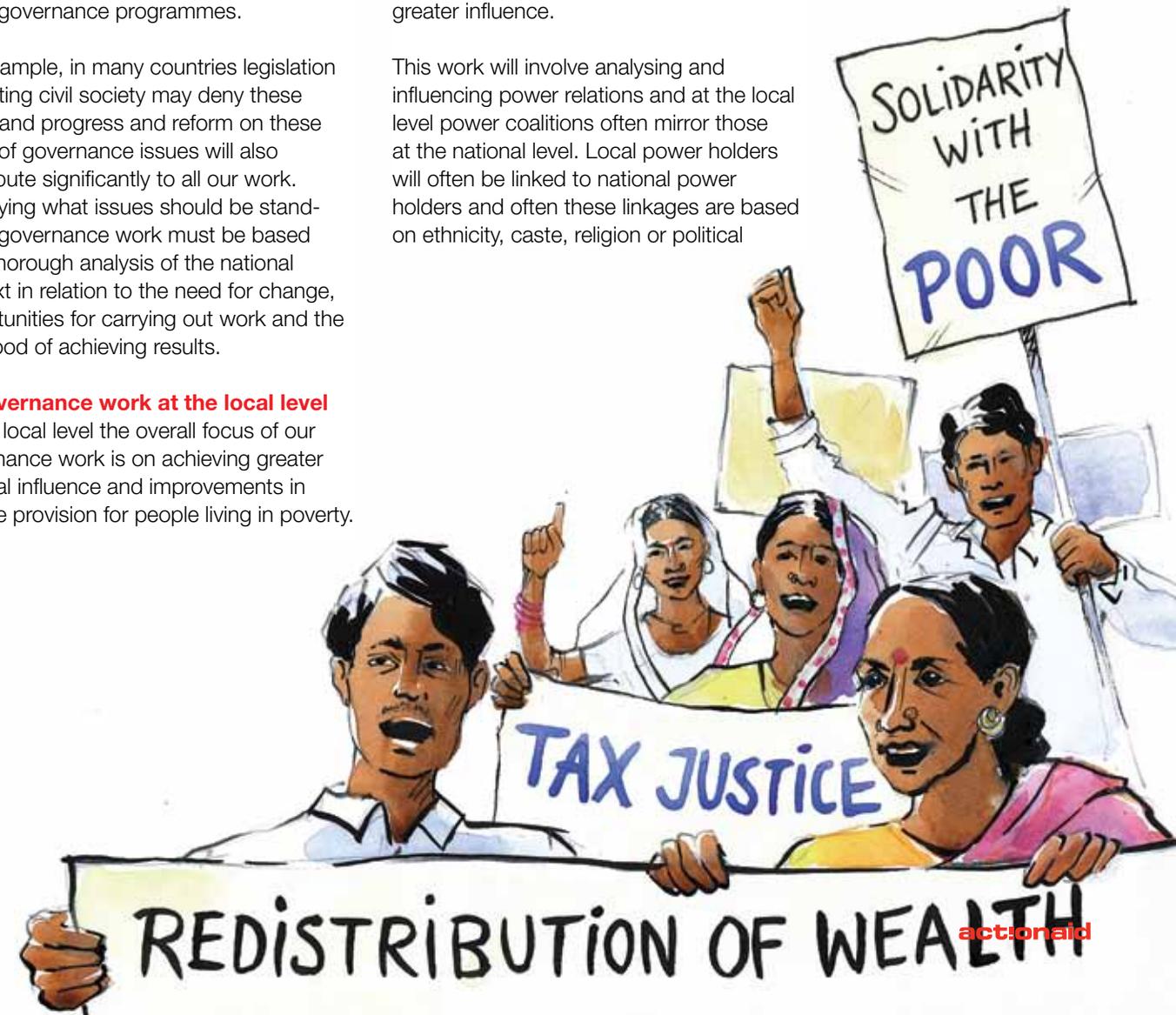
For example, in many countries legislation regulating civil society may deny these rights and progress and reform on these types of governance issues will also contribute significantly to all our work. Identifying what issues should be stand-alone governance work must be based on a thorough analysis of the national context in relation to the need for change, opportunities for carrying out work and the likelihood of achieving results.

3) Governance work at the local level
At the local level the overall focus of our governance work is on achieving greater political influence and improvements in service provision for people living in poverty.

This requires working on people's individual empowerment as well as promoting the development of democratic culture in the family, the community, in public institutions and private organisations in our local community. This is the basis from which to claim rights to voice, representation and participation in local politics in order to gain greater influence.

This work will involve analysing and influencing power relations and at the local level power coalitions often mirror those at the national level. Local power holders will often be linked to national power holders and often these linkages are based on ethnicity, caste, religion or political

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relationships. The aim of this work is to promote more equal power relations. At the same time, we can focus on the quality and equity of local service provision and document where services are sub-standard, absent or mismanaged by collecting evidence at the point of delivery and investigating budgets and fund flows. This information can be used as a basis for dialogue with authorities and for holding local duty bearers to account.

Work at the local level is often easier as political risks are often relatively low, and the 'distance' between people living in poverty and duty bearers is not so great and the potential for immediate benefits and results is higher. Experience shows that focusing on accountability relationships in service provision can often yield quick results that do make a significant difference to people living in poverty. Finding the failings in existing service delivery systems, publicising them and dialoguing with authorities can stimulate remedial action that takes effect quickly. However, we should be mindful that at the local level it is difficult to address structural problems in service failure. These generally need to be addressed at the national level.

It is often relevant to start by focusing on a specific sector (e.g. education), but a purely sectoral approach may easily result in too great a focus on that sector so that other sectors get neglected. For example, the issue of citizen participation in planning processes is not something just confined to the education sector; it is equally relevant for other sectors. Therefore, approaches to

citizen participation need to be coordinated across sectors to ensure an equitable and cohesive approach to governance on this issue. A lot of focus on one sector can lead to local priorities being distorted and undermine a democratic process of setting local priorities across the whole development spectrum.

Work on these issues is generally easier in countries which have a local governance structure. However, organising rights holders to claim space and engage state representatives at the local level is always important and in the absence of a local government structure, people may decide to organise their own local representative structure.

4) Governance Work at the National level

Although work with governance at the local level can yield immediate results and improve livelihoods and living conditions and promote participation in political processes, real change and social justice cannot be obtained at the local level. Local struggles will unavoidably run into obstacles that stem from national structures (government and power coalitions). For example, decentralisation policies can provide more room for manoeuvre at the local level. Fiscal decentralisation and taxation policies that allow for local revenue collection can support people centred decentralisation. A legal framework for credit and social entrepreneurship can promote economic empowerment. Thus governance work at the national level that promotes, policy reform on these issues is

important in helping to remove structural barriers at the local level.

Sector approaches at the local level may successfully be backed up by advocacy work at the national level for policy reform or budget reallocation. But the enabling framework which facilitates such work, for example access to information, participation in planning and policy formulation, and the legal framework around free media, freedom of association, freedom of speech and participation are key stand-alone governance interventions of paramount importance for a rights based approach.

Likewise, work on the national budget, taxation and revenue collection, makes more sense if it is across sectors, as

budgeting needs to be considered equitably. Also, work on elite power and democratic representation at the national level makes no sense from a sector thematic angle as the way power, especially informal power, is wielded impacts across most sectors, not just one in particular.

In addition international links need to be considered. The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund and International Financial Institutions often have considerable influence on national policies. These are not confined to any one sector but affect the whole national framework. A stand-alone governance programme may thus be necessary in terms of considering the impacts of these institutions, ensuring transparency and developing both national and international strategies for addressing these issues.

5) Ensuring a focus on Women's Rights

As indicated, both stand alone and cross cutting governance work should always have a specific priority on women's rights. In terms of realising rights, women are always disadvantaged in relation to men and often face specific gender related barriers often associated with patriarchal cultural practices. Generally, there are far fewer elected women's representatives which in practice often results in gender issues being neglected at the local level. Similarly, in spite of the fact that women often manage to achieve greater participation in governance, subtle processes may result in them being excluded when it comes to decisions about prioritisations and budgeting which tend to remain dominated by men.

Similarly, accountability processes may be designed in ways which make it difficult for women to participate, for example complaints about local services may have to be registered at district headquarters which are located at a considerable distance from their homes. Women's work load is another bias factor, for example in relation to participating in accountability work.

In conclusion

The diagram on the next page visualises the local and national linkages in our approach to governance work. Generally, cross-cutting governance work will occur at the local level and one of the major focus areas for this work is the *civil society - local government* interface. Much of this work is focused on influencing how services are
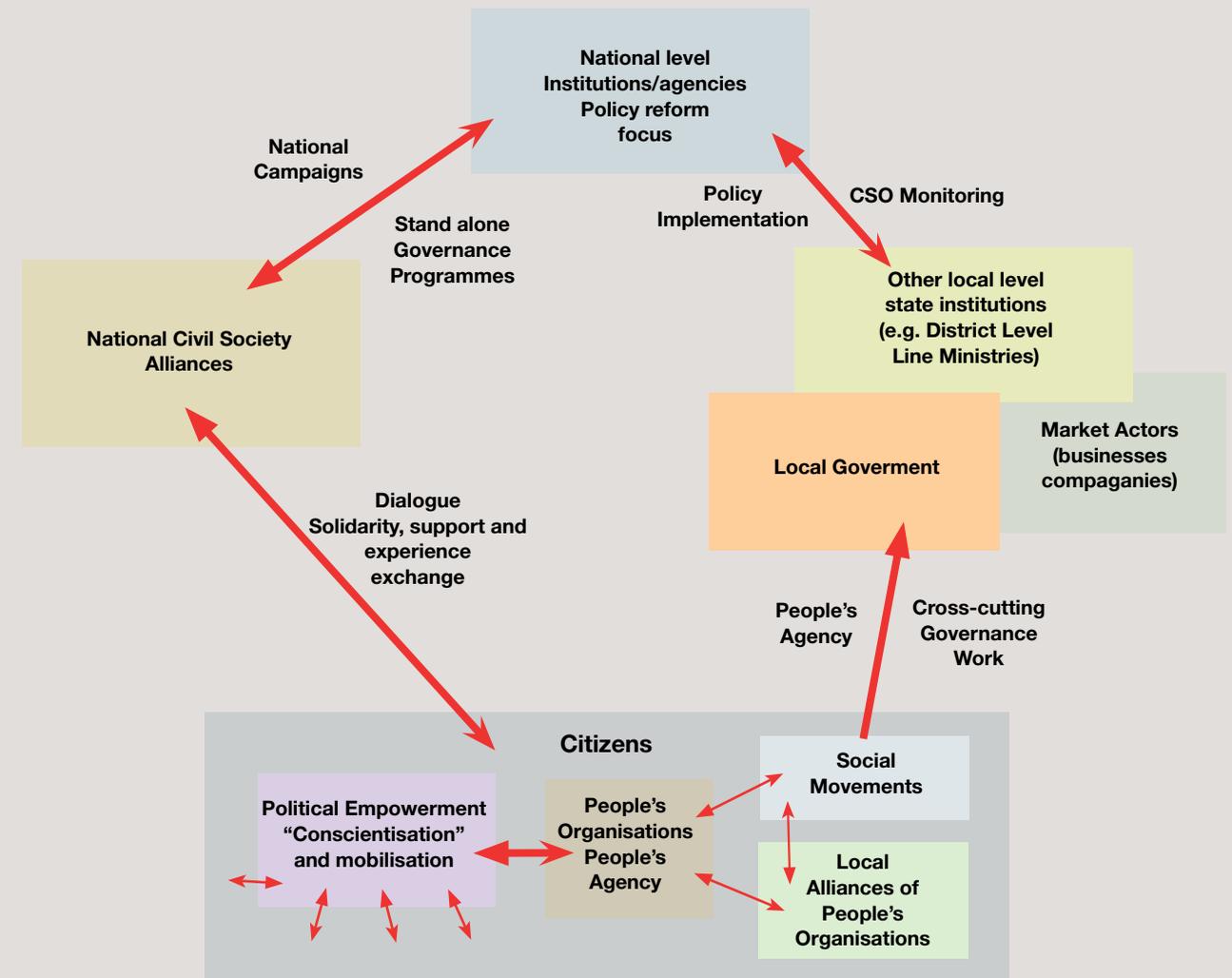
implemented, although many other issues are also relevant.

The civil society local to national link is characterised by sharing local experience upwards to the national level and building solidarity with national alliances. At the national level, local experience from many places in the country can be collected and assessed and on the basis of this a number of stand-alone governance programmes or initiatives can be launched.

The intention of much stand-alone governance work is to influence policy reform on key governance issues, for example decentralisation and freedom of information and similar issues. Policy implementation will then be monitored by CSOs in order to follow through back to the local level.

This chapter has explored the various ways in which governance work can be implemented. In the next Chapter we will look at some of the major challenges facing a Rights Based Approach to governance work.

- It is essential to get more women elected and involved in holding power wielders to account

- One way of doing this can be by having quotas which reserve places for women and ensure a fairer representation of women in politics

Governance work:
Local and National Linkages

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- In our work we often talk about the state, the power of the state and the role of the state…

… We often talk as though all power, authority and responsibility are exercised by and through the state, but often the state is fragmented and weak!

Governance Challenges
– institutions, issues and actors

In this chapter we focus on a number of complex challenges which we will have to be mindful of in our governance work. There are rarely easy answers to these challenges, so we need to keep an open mind, be aware of how other people in other countries tackle these issues and be critical about the strategies we adopt and the assumptions about change that are implicit in the work we do. We will begin by looking at the issue of power.

1. Power
Unequal power relations are a major cause of poverty and our approach to change focuses on the role that civil society can play in changing power relations. However, there are a number of issues about power which we need to be aware of. In our Human Rights Based Approach we make frequent references to the state, the power of the state and the role of the state as the ultimate duty-bearer or primary institution with the legal mandate and authority to ensure that rights are fulfilled.

But we need to ask ourselves whether the state in many countries really has the power, capacity and above all the political motivation to play such a dominant role. In many countries, the state is a discredited institution and in some countries the state does not have any wide ranging authority.

Some states are also compromised by criminal cartels which exert considerable influence.

Likewise our approach to change tends to assume that power is exercised rationally and impersonally in accordance with formal rules and laws that are under the control of the leader or leading party which will be receptive to our demands for greater equality - if we persist long and loud enough. This is true to a certain extent, but there is a risk that we over-estimate the rationality of the state. In many of the countries we work in, power is personal and bound up with personal interests, one of which is staying in power.

In many countries power is not concentrated in one institution such as the state, the government or even in the field of what we normally think of as politics. Nor is decision making concentrated in one person such as the leader or president. Rather power is defuse, competitive and motivated to a large extent by self-interest. Leaders are not all powerful, but constrained by other powerful groups and interests. Powerful individuals, ethnic groups or military coalitions control key areas of what we call the state, the market and civil society in a competitive mishmash of competing interests.

We spend some time discussing these issues in greater depth in the Power Resource Book in this series and focus on the importance of analysing power relationships, but what is important here is to be clear that our fucus on human rights will ultimately require the state to be capable of playing a significant role in enforcing the rule of law and respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights.

In other words, contributing to building a strong state based on just laws and rules is an important, albeit a long term part of our rights based work, as only a strong democratic state can respect, protect and fulfil rights. Ensuring that human rights are respected is a continual process that is necessary in all countries, all the time. If the state is strong our job is to engage with the state to influence it towards ensuring that rights are respected. However, if the state is weak, it is not simply a matter of focusing our efforts on state duty bearers. We have to consider other power holders that are beyond the state.

We will need to understand how power, especially hidden power, really operates and how we can influence these power holders. This points us towards strategies where we have to go far beyond the simple picture of 'friends and foes' or 'good and bad'. We will need to work together in more loosely organised campaigns with people with whom we agree on some issues, but

- It's fine that we demand that local government provide us with better service, but what can we do when local government has no capacity to fulfil our demands!

- In many cases duty bearers are denied their 'professional rights'. They don't get the minimum of training, budgets or professional support necessary to do their work!

whom we may disagree strongly on others. For example, we may be able to work in a campaign together with progressive business people who want to see the rule of law enforced and corruption eradicated, but who might otherwise be in favour of the privatisation of public services and want to see limits set on trade unions. Coping with this kind of situation will be a challenge but a necessary one.

2. Capacity of the State
Working primarily with rights holders, we support demands for improved services and for duty bearers to be held to account for poor service. We demand the right to free medicines, schools, inoculations and water. Our demands are naturally aimed at the immediate duty bearers, the nurse in charge of the health post, the headmaster, or the local water engineer. This is fair enough, but front line staff like this will simply not be able to fulfil people's demands because the district has not provided its staff with the means to do their jobs properly. Medicine, staff positions, text books and training are not provided. Front line staff, at the lowest level, are not able to complain and demand their 'professional rights' from district managers without the risk of losing their jobs.

Pushing front line staff harder by demanding rights may not necessarily produce results. In a similar way the district may not be able to fulfil its duties because central level institutions do not provide the necessary resources. In many respects duty bearers are 'hostages' in a dysfunctional system that denies them

the resources and training necessary for them to fulfil their duties. In this sense they can also be considered as 'rights holders' as they are denied the means of fulfilling their obligations. In many countries the scenarios described here affect most of the institutions that form the primary interface between citizens and the state.

3. Local Government and Decentralisation
For the last decade or so there has been much focus on decentralised forms of governance which brings government closer to citizens at the local level and encourages their participation. There is no doubt that decentralisation holds great potential, but a potential that still has to be realised in many places. An overriding challenge is that central government tends to maintain tight control over local government for the simple reason that successful local or district governments could become a serious political threat to central power holders.

For this reason many attempts to decentralise tend to be half-hearted, often pushed by donors and other external actors. Many countries have excellent decentralisation laws, which are ineffectively implemented. Typically, authority mandates (laws and guidelines which define precise responsibilities for local governments) remain unclear. Common areas of confusion are *special development funds* administered directly by central government. These can by-pass local government and undermine their authority. Similarly many countries

Sierra Leone: Decentralisation
In 2004 Sierra Leone established the Local Council Devolved Fund (LCDF) which resulted in improved fund flows to local councils which were also given wider powers of discretion in the way they used the money. One of the conditions of the LCDF is that councils prepare Service Delivery Plans based on consultations with citizens. As a result of this there has been a dramatic increase in the level of public consultation and the projects prioritised by this process (wells, clinics, road repairs) appear to reflect better the interests of ordinary citizens. Previously, when plans were drawn up by local councils themselves, they prioritised things like vehicles, offices and equipment. The planning process also requires councils to display information about the resources available for local service delivery, submit budgets and annual accounts on time and make plans for reducing their debts. This improved process for transferring funds from central to local government has increased participation and strengthened accountability.

- Decentralisation – you would think that it's logical that more local government and people's participation would result in better governance for poor people...

...That's right, but often central government isn't interested in local government becoming effective. It would undermine their central power

provide members of parliament (MPs) with personal development funds (often called Constituency Development Funds) which can also undermine local government. There are also often conflicts *between local government and line agencies* about who is responsible for things like primary health care and education. Traditionally these areas have often been the domain of line agencies, but in connection with decentralisation, legal responsibility may be transferred to local governments. These transfer processes often cause great confusion.

Another common problem area is *fiscal decentralisation,* in particular expenditure assignments (tasks to be undertaken by local government). Very often these are under-funded and staff are under qualified and in short supply. Taken together, this means that local government often has little chance to respond to the needs of citizens

or to increase its own capacity. This in turn leads to citizens experiencing little benefit from local government or local service delivery, which means that citizens feel little motivation to participate in local politics. Local politics is, therefore, left to the elite, who continue to capture what limited resources are available for themselves which in turn leads to a further loss of legitimacy on the part of local government and increased frustration on the part of citizens.

Breaking this wicked circle requires new strategic thinking based on a better understanding of local government systems and power relations between the centre and the local level as well as a better understanding of what citizens and CSOs can do to transform these relations. This may include local alliances between citizens and local government staff, more consolidated approaches to evidence

collection aimed at putting pressure on the central level to fulfil their obligations towards local government, as well as establishing broad national level alliances for rule-based governance.

However, in spite of these problems, evidence shows that when councillors are elected locally, they tend to be more downwardly accountable. The evidence also shows that decentralisation is more effective when citizens participate at the local level in democratic forums where they can exercise oversight and become involved in management and planning processes. Where these are in place, local government tends to be more democratic, accountable and responsive to people's needs.

Overall, the evidence suggests that accountability is a crucial issue in relation to strengthening local government. Much can be achieved at the local level and accountability relationships between citizens, front line providers (teachers and nurses etc.) and their immediate managers can be strengthened considerably and result in meaningful improvements. However, realising the transformative potential of accountability requires structural changes at the national level and a national level political environment that is conducive to greater transparency and accountability and above all a willingness to embrace decentralisation more wholeheartedly. In many countries this may be the biggest problem to overcome.

4. The Civil Society - Local Government interface

Local government represents a prime interface between citizens and their organisations and the state and its institutions. It is important for social activists to thoroughly understand how local government in their own context functions and identify where there are entry points for civil society participation. In this section we will consider some of the key challenges faced by civil society organisations and local government councillors and staff in their interaction with each other. We will start by looking at civil society.

Challenges faced by CSOs: CSOs often lack confidence when they engage with local government, due to a range of issues such as low levels of literacy, especially among women, unawareness about rights, roles and obligations when engaging in collaborative relationships, as well as a lack of knowledge and information about key policies and procedures that apply to their local area.

Another set of similar constraints relates to organisational issues and ranges from limited planning, record keeping and proposal writing skills as well as limited internal accountability and transparency mechanisms to their members and society at large.

Furthermore, laws regulating civil society are often unclear. Whether people have the right to assemble, form organisations and make public statements may be poorly understood and CSO registration procedures may also be unclear and in some places CSOs may be banned. Also, there are a variety of different types of relationship between different CSOs and local government. Some CSOs or NGOs have contractual relationships and are involved in service delivery, other relationships are more consultative and based on specific issues and yet others may be based around conflicts of one type or another. This tends to complicate the authority basis upon which CSOs and local governments engage with each other and make CSO wary of being compromised by their involvement with local government, and likewise local governments wary of CSOs.

Challenges faced by Local Governments: Local Governments often have to deal with many CSOs at the same time and many of them have very different agendas, some based on the self-interest of very specific groups that are by no means marginalised. Local governments often do not have the resources or manpower to cope with this and further frustrations are encountered due to capacity weakness in many CSOs, not to mention incidents involving corrupt CSOs. Attempts to coordinate civil society and local government interaction around specific agendas can also be difficult as many smaller CSOs do not have much experience of working in broader coalitions. In many countries there are a variety of 'invited spaces' where civil society and local government can formally interact. These range from user committees to joint planning, budgeting and oversight arrangements. Often local government is expected to both facilitate CSOs involvement in these committees, while at the same time being accountable to them. This can result in confusion and misunderstanding about roles and responsibilities and result in the under-utilisation of these forums.

Think about this….
"It is not enough that everybody has the right to stand as a candidate, if women and poor people never do so. It is not enough that all representatives have an equal right to speak and influence decision making in a village council, if in fact just a few people always dominate. It is not enough to have democratic rule by the majority if they don't care about a poor minority. It is not enough to have opportunities for us to voice our opinion about education or health services, if we haven't made up our minds or simply don't have anything to say, and it is not enough to have local governance, if the government officers don't have the capacity to do their jobs".

Is this situation familiar in your community?

Think about this….
"To participate means to take a part in something that is bigger. This bigger issue could be how our community can become healthier. Now if I sit in a meeting discussing this issue and only think about how I or my family can become healthier, then in fact I am not taking part, because I am not thinking about the bigger picture - how we can all become healthier. If I have been elected to sit on the district council, I need to think of the whole district and how we can make life better for many people – people I don't even know. When we discuss the allocation of projects, I can easily just think about my community or maybe even just my supporters. Being able to think of the bigger picture and the common good is difficult, but necessary if representative democracy is going to be more than a battleground between different interest groups or powerful people".

In your community do people think in terms of 'we', or 'us' and 'them'? What's your experience?

Local governments often have problems in communicating with CSOs and the public in general. Often the role of local government is blurred and not only in the public's perception. At one moment local government is there to serve the people and apparently prepared to listen and the next it is a top down instrument telling people what to do. Local government is often not a people's project and the values and intentions behind it remain unclear and its behaviour on a day to day basis sends mixed signals.

To conclude, civil society organisations can play two crucial roles at the local level in relation to local government. On the one hand they can engage in extracting benefits for their members and supporters; for example, demanding a new well or an additional classroom for a school. On the other hand they can engage local government on broader governance issues such as encouraging the development of a democratic and accountable culture. There is an important question here as to whether participation tends to focus on what specific groups can get for themselves, versus an approach focused on demands for effective and accountable governance across the board. Both approaches are important, but they need to be balanced. Some research indicates that there is more emphasis on CSOs extracting benefits from local governments rather than focusing on building accountable local government. This can have a negative impact as effective CSOs may be successful in capturing more than their fair share of scarce local resources at the expense of people living in poverty.

- If there are many CSOs in your area, it's important that they coordinate with each other before engaging with local government. 50 CSOs all making different demands can be overwhelming

- CSOs have to balance their focus on achieving results for the communities they represent, with a focus on building an inclusive and democratic local culture for everybody

5. Resource Capacity – Redistribution, Tax and Economic Development

The fulfilment of rights will necessitate a redistribution of wealth and the provision of equitable services. In terms of our governance work, much of our focus is on trying to change policy or practice towards a fairer redistribution. However, we tend to focus less on how the resources for implementing these changes can be equitably generated through economic development and taxation.

We need to consider that many countries do not have sufficient resources to sustainably fulfil rights and cannot be expected to generate these resources in the short term. It is crucial that we focus on the linkages between revenues, taxes and service provision as these are at the heart of accountability relationships between leaders and citizens in democratic governance. We need to consider what stance we should take in relation to revenue generation and economic development as they are essential for the sustainable fulfilment of rights.

Many of these issues are most relevant at the national level, but many of them have important links to the local level. For example, the revenues generated from such things as tourism, electricity generation and mineral extraction often all go to the state at the central level ignoring the fact that the source of the revenue is local. If a small percentage of these revenues are allowed to remain at source it can provide local governments

Generating Revenue - our governance work could involve some of these issues:

- Taxation reform can be considered as a major political 'state-building' activity which can be conceived of in terms of rights. Tax reform can be an entry point to enhance political accountability and advocate for just and equitable tax systems.
- The limited capacity of the state to generate tax is often closely associated with the way in which power holders have organised themselves (for example by allowing tax exemptions to powerful companies and international consortiums). We should therefore target approaches that focus on these issues.
- The exploitation of natural and extractive resources (oil and diamonds) can both be an endowment and curse and much is determined by the revenue and rent sharing arrangements agreed by those in power. Focusing on these 'arrangements' presents an opportunity for extending the scope of our governance work.
- Aid and loans can distort and undermine efforts to introduce social contracts based on mutual relationships between citizens who pay taxes and a state that provides services and security. This is another potential entry point for governance work.

with significant revenues. It also fosters a different and more positive relationship between local people and the revenue source.

6. Enabling environment

Many political and administrative leaders will find that democratic human rights restrict their ability to remain in power and control society. Therefore, there is a constant temptation for those in power to limit the freedom of speech and the right to assembly and association and the right to take part in government which are essential for building civil society. At the same time as we see a global increase in democratic reforms, we also see a trend in the opposite direction to limit democratic space for civil society organisations. It must be acknowledged that a democratic state has the right to protect democracy from elements who want to overthrow government and the democratic system by undemocratic means; however

such threats are also often misused in order to limit the freedom of legitimate democratic organisations. In recent years the fight against terrorism has been misused in many countries to limit democratic freedoms.

7. Change and Conflict

Working for democratic governance and freedom from poverty entails addressing power relations at all levels which is a highly political process. This can and does lead to conflict. We must recognise that conflict is often a necessary and constructive element of change processes. However, in societies with weak judiciaries and fragmented populations, it is all too easy for conflicts to escalate into violence and intimidation as power wielders attempt to further their own agendas and suppress the interests of rights holders. In addition, many countries are experiencing increasing levels of urban social violence which are also indicative of a breakdown of governance.

- Much service provision is under-funded. When we demand better services we have to also focus on how services are financed

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Think about this….

All countries face potential and real threats from criminal and extremist organisations. All countries also have citizens and organisations which criticise the government or duty bearers for not fulfilling people's rights or providing services to agreed standards. In this connection many countries keep a careful and controlling eye on the right of opinion and expression, the right to information, and the right to assembly and association.

How has your country responded to these issues? Do you think there are limits to what people should be allowed to say in public? How would you build up an enabling environment for civil society which would promote democratic governance?

- Social change involves challenging power which can result in conflict. It is essential that we consider the risks involved

Powerful people can use violence to preserve an unequal distribution of resources. Such people may ally with criminal and violent groups 'behind the scenes'; they may also tolerate or even encourage routine abuses by state security forces; and may fail to deal with the sources of violence within society, and even gain from the illegal wealth accumulation which takes place through it. This creates a climate of insecurity which enables powerful people to offer despotic power as a solution, while preserving their privileged access to wealth and resources.

Under all circumstances, it is important that we analyse risks and carry out power mapping before starting activities so that we are aware of how our work may affect, or be affected by conflict and violence. We need to have contingency plans in place before the event so that we know what do if things get out of hand. These plans should cover issues such as

physical safety, medical treatment and communication channels with authorities, the media and other supporters. Focusing on these issues beforehand often enables you to clarify real risks more clearly and adapt strategies accordingly.

In conclusion

The purpose of this book has been to outline key issues relating to democratic governance, government and human rights approaches to social change. Chapter 1 discussed these issues from an overall perspective. Chapter 2 focused on how we approach governance work from a Power, Voice, Accountability and Budgets perspective. Chapter 3 looked at the way in which we implement governance work and Chapter 4 considered some of the major challenges we face in our work – many of which are complex with no easy answers.
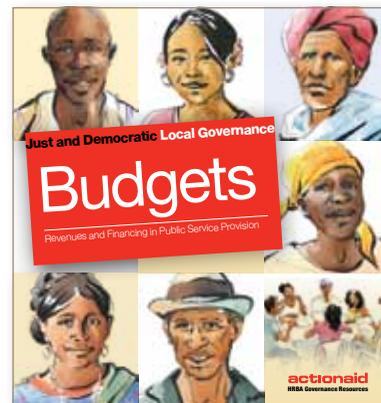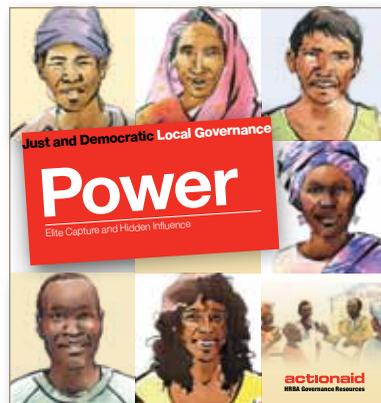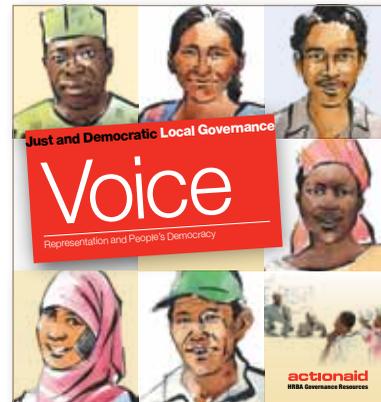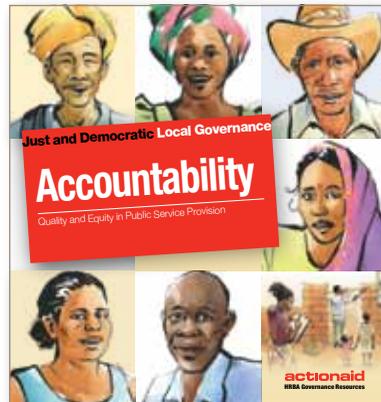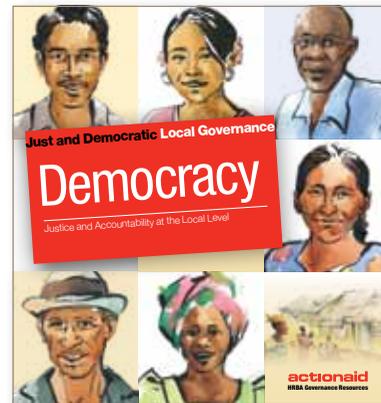
We hope that this book has provided you with a foundation from which to approach governance work and we hope that you will be inspired to read the four stand-alone books on Power, Voice, Accountability and Budgets which go into much more detail and provide tools and strategies you can use in your work at the local level.

Acknowledgement of Sources

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The Just and Democratic Governance Series consists of a series of resource books which aim to support the work of civil society activists in their struggle to reduce poverty and fulfil people's rights. The series supplements ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and focuses on key challenge areas identified in ActionAid's governance work. Under the common title: Just and Democratic Local Governance, the series at present consists of the following titles.

Just and Democratic **Local Governance**

Democracy

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Voice

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Power

Elite Capture and Hidden Influence

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HRBA Governance Resources

Just and Democratic **Local Governance**

Budgets

Revenues and Financing in Public Service Provision

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HRBA Governance Resources

Just and Democratic Governance

Throughout the world, people's demands for democracy are growing louder as many have suffered under oppressive regimes and unaccountable leaders. Without meaningful democracy, elites capture decision-making processes and resources. For many of the poorest and most excluded groups, there is a strong connection between a lack of political space or influence and the perpetuation of poverty and injustice. Seeking alternatives, women, men and youth around the world are taking to the streets; using the internet; and or joining local meetings to demand proper political representation and accountability from the State for delivering on basic rights.

ActionAid works through a **Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)** and is committed to holding governments and corporates to account and improving the quality, equity and gender responsiveness of public services for five million people living in poverty as well as supporting people and their movements to gain significant victories in achieving a fairer redistribution of resources for financing poverty reducing public policies by 2017.

This book is part of a series of books which supplement ActionAid's **Human Rights Based Approach – *People's Action in Practice*.** Under the common title of Just and Democratic Governance, the series focuses on governance issues, approaches and tools that are relevant in all ActionAid's work in Local Rights Programmes. The series supports the work of civil society activists in their struggle for just and democratic local governance systems which respect, protect and fulfil people's human rights.

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Democracy – Justice and Accountability at the Local Level

Accountability – Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision

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