

MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT



MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT

THE QUESTION OF INCLUSIVENESS

A think piece for the *Making All Voices Count* programme
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June 2014



INTRODUCTION

This think piece draws from a desk review of experience in ICT-mediated citizen engagement, and an exchange of ideas in an e-dialogue between practitioners and scholars in late January 2014. The review took in scholarly work and grey literature (including, in some cases, ideas expressed in blogs) on patterns of differential access to ICTs in developing countries, lessons emerging from the previous and latest generation of ICT-mediated citizen engagement initiatives (such as e-government services and citizen reporting projects) and insights from non-tech-based accountability and transparency interventions.

The work on which this think piece is based is not a systematic or exhaustive review. It reflects a selective, purposive and partial gathering and reading of available recent literature and practice, and a situated analysis of it from our position within the Making All Voices Count programme.

Inclusiveness is a persistent theme in development thinking and practice. Concerns about who to include – and therefore who to exclude – how and at what level, lie at the heart of initiatives aimed at supporting expression, representation and influence. As such, inclusiveness is a central value of the Making All Voices Count programme, with clear links to how voices can be amplified, what forms voices can take and how they are mediated, and what result they attain in terms of government responsiveness.

The tools and strategies for engagement that emerge through processes of innovation can facilitate participation for some groups, while unintentionally contributing to a further marginalisation of others – most especially those with limited access to technology, or the ability to communicate in a majority language, in which most technology is codified. Participant involvement in shaping the tools and spaces that contributors use and occupy is an aspect sometimes neglected in technological innovation. When it comes to ‘voice’, the opinions, ideas, and facts reported and expressed are inextricably connected with participants’ identities. They carry more meaning when one is aware of ‘who’ voices them. Claims about legitimacy and relevance to policy and practice often hinge on scale (have enough participants being reached and mobilised?) and representativeness (do participants really express the opinions of the wider group?).

This think piece examines emerging and persistent debates about inclusiveness in attempts to promote citizen voice. It aims to capture where the conversation is at and which lessons are applicable from past and recent experience with inclusiveness in ICT-mediated citizen engagement.

FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

The review and online discussions revealed inclusiveness as a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept that needs to be grounded in the context of a highly uneven and rapidly changing landscape of access.

Much of the initial scepticism of the development community about the internet's ability to support developmental outcomes was founded on the assumption that these technologies excluded, almost by default, many of the poorest people in developing countries. Mobile technologies seemed, for a time at least, to have solved this challenge. Although much progress that has been made with regard to 'access', at least in the form of access to (some types of) mobile phones, recent evidence suggests that geographies of access and connectivity remain highly varied and skewed.

A recent study of mobile phone users in Rwanda indicates that they are disproportionately male, better educated and coming from larger households than average Rwandans (Blumestock and Eagle, 2012). However, one should be cautious of generalisations. In South Africa and Cameroon, more women than men appear to own a mobile phone (Gillwald et al., 2010). Phone ownership is in fact complicated. In many countries people may use multiple SIM cards to take advantage of air-time deals. Shared access appears also to be a common practice in many African countries, with one mobile often being shared across a household or a social group (Burrell, 2010). A closer examination reveals that people tend to share the phone easily with those in dire need, such as the sick or invalid, but much less so with women.

Deeper disparities emerge if we start to take into account the wider information landscape. A large household survey on ICT usage in four African countries shows that very few, even relatively affluent households owned a computer and Internet connection (May, 2012). Poor households lacked not only access to computers, landline and internet across the board, but also to comparatively

well-established and cheap ICTs such as radio. The study also indicated a significant difference in mobile phone ownership across the urban-rural divide, with only 50 per cent of rural households owning a mobile phone. This bias is also reflected in access to Internet cafes, with few cafes available in rural areas. Lastly, broadband access remains highly problematic for most of Africa, in terms of both availability and pricing.

Participatory development practice and literature has highlighted the many dimensions in which power operates and the subtle and less subtle ways in which participation can be rigged. Experience shows that having a seat on the table is not a guarantee of having one's voice heard. If people who are not used to being listened to are invited into a space where others set the rules and define the agenda for engagement, they are likely to remain silent. Important biases can be introduced by other factors framing participation, for instance by requiring written feedback (including SMSs) amongst groups with a high level of illiteracy, or with little knowledge of the mechanics of SMS texting, or by asking people to participate in meetings when taking time away from work to attend could impact on a family's finances.

A useful set of questions to ask for ICT-mediated engagement projects to test the extent of citizen participation or usage at different levels is:

- Do participants/users have a say in the way in which the initiative is set up, from the beginning?
- Did they help define the questions that are being raised or the data that are being collected?



- Do participants have control over the data that is being produced, including vetoing the collection or publication of data that might put at risk themselves or their community?
- Do they have access to the products of the projects, tools and know-how necessary for analysis?
- Do they have a clear understanding of the policy processes that the initiative is meant to influence?

- Who are the non-participants/non-users, and why have they not participated?

Although these dimensions echo those of non-tech citizen engagement initiatives, the use of technology provides an added set of concerns. It demands an awareness of which choices are important, which capabilities and whose capabilities matter: in short, where power lies when the offline and online, the technical and the social intersect.



2 INCLUSIVENESS AS PART OF THE ON-GOING NEGOTIATION OF POWER WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE INITIATIVE

Gaventa and Barrett (2010) define inclusiveness as a greater sense of inclusion of marginalised groups, and a greater sense of social cohesion across groups. The recognition of identity and dignity is fundamental for the participation of groups that are often exposed to stigma and rejection. However, an important question here is whether participants, and the more vocal ones at that, represent the group they claim to belong to. Like nested dolls, hierarchies exist not only across social groups but within groups as well.

Moreover, the positions of power that people occupy are almost always relative. Someone who could be considered empowered in one setting, may remain weak in another and vice versa (Chambers, 1997). This relational nature of power has attracted little attention in the mainstream 'information and communication for development' (ICT4D) literature, where the poor are often conceived of as a homogenous group, with identical socio-

economic characteristics. It rarely surfaces in discussions amongst ICT practitioners.

Yet it is important to understand how the empowering effects of certain initiatives may translate across the social spectrum. A study on the inclusion of dalits (a marginalised caste in India) in local councils indicated that although the group obtained some gains through their participation, they remained socially ostracised (Mohanty, 2010). This dimension of inclusion is rarely considered in ICT-based citizen engagement projects, where the priority is to involve as many people as possible from the targeted groups.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF REVIEW FINDINGS FOR ICT BASED CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES



How can these lessons inform the Making AllVoices Count programme and other initiatives concerned with promoting citizen voice and engagement? What are the critical questions one should be asking?

What counts as an appropriate, well-informed access strategy in highly uneven information landscapes?

The findings of the review of experience and the insights emerging from the e-dialogue indicate that many assumptions that may hold true for developed countries, such as individual phone ownership, need to be carefully examined when working in a developing country context. The sharing of access to mobile phones raises practical issues and also important ethical issues. Vulnerable groups may be put at risk, since their mediated exchanges are visible by others (imagine, for instance, a project enabling victims to report domestic abuse). The insights also point to the need to qualify assumptions about the widespread use of mobile phones. Persistent biases associated with geographic location, age, education and socio-economic group need to be carefully thought out as they considerably limit the reach of engagement. Designers and programme implementers may not be reaching those they think they are reaching if they are not clear on the divisions created and perpetuated by access constraints.

Despite their wide availability, mobile phones pose a real limit to what people can do with technology. People cannot read or analyse information on small mobile screens and they cannot use their phone to deliberate, discuss, or contest the issues at hand with others.

An appropriate access strategy that aims to involve people as more than data sensors needs to take these very real restrictions into account and to provide informed alternatives and supplementary channels of information. This implies a good knowledge of people's information landscape and its politics: for example, not only what radio stations are available, but also whose views these stations express, or whether the languages broadcast are accessible to marginalised groups within the communities.

How should the many dimensions of inclusion be prioritised?

Our findings highlighted the multi-dimensional character of inclusion. As is already known from participatory development practice and literature, inclusion is not just about ensuring that the target audience is being engaged and reached to express their views and opinions. It is also about creating spaces and opportunities for people to engage in defining the character and objectives of the development project or social change initiative in question. Participatory development experience illustrates the importance of knowledge of local politics and power relations: in its absence, one might end up privileging the 'uppers', allowing the programme to be captured by elites, and end up recreating the very same power structures that one wanted to challenge.

A prerequisite for expressing citizen voice is a good understanding of the issues at hand. Without this, citizens are hardpressed to make informed decisions on governance processes or outcomes, or to give others ownership of data about them.

Gaining the understanding necessary to engage in an informed way takes time, as does the engagement itself. These needs can stretch the capabilities of all actors involved.

How can the power relations and social dynamics that underline inclusiveness be addressed in the context of rapid innovation?

Findings pointed to the dynamic character of inclusiveness. This involves an understanding of inter-group dynamics and the broader political and social context in which the initiative takes place. Many externally-initiated citizen engagement initiatives perceive citizens as homogenous groups, ignoring inter-group divisions and cross-group relations. Learning about the heterogeneity of citizens or the mythical quality of homogeneous notions of 'the community' requires a willingness to spend time and immerse oneself in citizens' lifeworlds, to observe, take part and develop the relations that can provide one with an insider's perspective on what's happening. The rapid pace of technological innovation, however, seems to run counter to this kind of learning.

The dynamics that dominate in tech-based citizen voice initiatives are often those of tech innovation, development and roll-out, rather than those of real people in real places and real-life situations. While this mismatch of rhythms generally limits the usefulness of the exercise, it particularly leaves the dynamics that exclude marginalized people untouched and threatens to make only dominant voices count, rather than make all voices count.



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RECOMMENDED READING

We have summarised useful literature which was identified in the process of our 'Review of Experience'. These summaries pull out key points from the literature which are relevant to the Making All Voices Count mission and do not attempt to be a complete summary of the full article or book.

SO WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT MAKE?

There has been a limited amount of research linking citizen engagement to positive development outcomes, particularly for poor and marginalised groups. However, this research has tended to be fragmented and country-specific and has not fully measured outcomes of engagement. If citizen participation is to be recognized and legitimized as a tool for democratic development, there is a need for largescale research that seeks to assess its impact on the basis of case studies across contexts.

Gaventa and Barrett(2010) attempt to do just that. Drawing upon ten years of work by the Citizenship Development Research Centre, their report analyses 100 case studies of citizen engagement from 20 different countries. From their analysis, they find that different forms of citizen engagement can lead to a variety of different outcomes. On the theme of 'inclusiveness' in the context of the Making All Voices Count programme, this report is key to uncovering the oft-hidden capacities of marginalised groups to contribute to positive development outcomes through political engagement.

The report documents four types of democratic and developmental outcomes arising from citizen engagement:

- **The construction of citizenship** – this is a change that occurs at the level of the individual. It can result in a personal experience of empowerment and increased agency .
- **Practices of participation** – this refers to a change that could result in the deepening of networks and alliances or the increased capacities for collective action.
- **Responsive and accountable states** – this might include greater access to state resources or increased state responsiveness.
- **Inclusive and cohesive societies** – this could include greater social cohesion amongst diverse groups and/or the inclusion of new actors in public spaces.

Despite substantial positive outcomes, citizen engagement may also have negative implications. For instance, when citizens mobilise to participate but are met with

Gaventa, J., and Barrett, G. (2010) *So What Difference Does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement*, IDS Working Paper 347, Brighton: IDS

violence or an unresponsive state, they may feel disempowered and further marginalised.

Nonetheless, the literature demonstrates that citizen engagement has positive outcomes in 75% of cases reviewed. While the highest levels of positive engagement were found when citizens participate within local associations, less positive outcomes were found when they participate in formal participatory spaces. The authors suggest that a democratic society is not an essential component for positive citizen engagement. This is good news for ongoing civil society projects within authoritarian contexts.

In sum, this report demonstrates the importance of empowering all individuals to participate as active citizens. For groups who are poor or marginalised, the results of engagement could be even more important. Participation has the potential to lead to positive change not only at a personal level, but also within the broader structures of local governance, the state and society.

DIFFERENCES IN ACCESS AND USE OF MOBILE PHONES IN RWANDA

Mobile phone use has a significant impact on our daily lives. However, larger, transformative impact may be limited if mobile phone use further deepens social differences. We must understand who accesses technology and how they use it in order to identify its potential for change.

In their paper, Joshua Evan Blumenstock, from the School of Information at the University of Washington, and Nathan Eagle, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, examine patterns of mobile phone use in Rwanda. They compare mobile phone users to the whole Rwandan population to analyse what types of people use mobile phones. They also study patterns of phone use within the mobile phone user population. Both levels of study demonstrate that mobile phone access and use follows broader patterns of social privilege.

Blumenstock and Eagle's study indicates who has access to technology and how its use might vary between people. Knowing these patterns is vital for understanding communication technology's potential for transformation. Knowing the social dynamics of current technology use may help predict broader effects from changes in that use.

Blumenstock and Eagle's study found consistent differences in both who owns a phone and how it is used. They found:

- Mobile phone ownership follows patterns of social status. Mobile phone users are more likely than non-users to be wealthy, educated males from large households.
- Men and women mobile phone users show some patterns of difference in how they use their phones. For instance, women are more likely to talk with family, to talk for more time, and to receive calls. Men are more likely to make calls and talk with friends or business partners.
- Differences between richer and poorer mobile phone users are wider than gender differences. Richer mobile phone users talk for longer periods of time, use their phones more often and have more extended networks than poorer users.

For initiatives that seek to promote citizen voice via technology, these patterns in who uses mobile phones and how are good starting points for understanding who will be the 'hard-to-reach' non-users. This should help them to target their initiatives. The patterns also provide awareness of how new users might interact with technology. In particular, the findings tell us:

Blumenstock, J. E., and Eagle, N. (2012) 'Divided We Call: Disparities in Access and Use of Mobile Phones in Rwanda.' *Information Technologies and International Development* 8(2): 1-16

- Mobile phone use follows broader social patterns. Especially strong patterns in mobile phone use emerge according to wealth and gender differences. To have equitable outcomes, mobile-phone-based development initiatives would need to take steps to include the 'hard-to-reach'.
- However, differences in technology use may indicate barriers other than just technology access, including deep social exclusion which will not be overcome by solely overcoming barriers to technology access.
- Access to technology is one thing; how it is used is another. People have different types of use. Wealth differences play an especially strong role in the differences in use. Levels of use may depend on how much individuals can spend on it (for instance, buying air time). Therefore, equitable access to mobile phones does not necessarily translate into equal scope for using them.

HOW 'SHARED' IS ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY?

The use of ICTs as tools for development has been widely documented. In Africa, there is particular enthusiasm around the use of mobile phones as a resource to develop small businesses, receive information about health programmes and, most recently, as a mode of interacting with elected officials. However, technology is never a cure-all solution to development challenges. Instead, the use of mobile phones can be deeply enmeshed in unequal power relations that benefit a few while excluding many.

American sociologist Jenna Burrell (2010) looks at issues of social equality around the use of mobile phones in rural Uganda. She notes that while the idea of 'shared access' to technology has been widely supported in existing literature, in practice, this often fails to account for the power relations that exist within even the smallest communities. Burrell's article raises questions about how to ensure that all citizens have an equal opportunity to engage with different ICTs. It is not enough to simply distribute different types of technology and expect equal access to ensue. Instead, careful attention must be focused on power dynamics within local contexts, and on understanding how these relationships may privilege certain users.

Throughout 2007 and 2008, Burrell looked at several rural Ugandan communities to understand who was able to access mobile phones and for what purposes. She found that while 'the purchaser' of the phone would sometimes lend the phone to community members, in other instances consent was given with strict stipulations or the request was refused.

Women in rural Uganda tend to be disproportionately excluded from accessing mobile phones, compared to men. For married couples, husbands generally have primary control of the phone. Sometimes, the woman could only use the phone after the husband had dialed the number and passed it over to his wife. In these instances, women had no control over the address book, nor were they able to send text messages.

On the other hand, Burrell found that high-priority groups (such as those who were ill) tended to have high priority access to mobile phones. This is likely a reflection on the capacity of small communities to take care of their members who are deemed as most in need.

To conclude, there are several ideas that arise from Burrell's article in relation to on the theme of inclusiveness in tech-based attempts to promote citizen voice:

Burrell, J. (2010). 'Evaluating Shared Access: Social Equality and the Circulation of Mobile Phones in Rural Uganda.' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 15(2): 230-50

- While technology may have an important role to play in transmitting the voices of the most marginalised, one must not forget about the embedded power relations that occur within even the smallest communities.
- The distribution of ICTs for citizens to engage with governments or service providers should be done with due attention to the need to leverage in particular the capacities of those citizens who are most deeply marginalised.
- In poor communities, there is an element of prestige associated with having control over certain technologies. Any initiative that alters access to technology (e.g. mobiles) in poor communities is likely to alter power relations, by giving power to those who have primary responsibility or control over these devices.

DIGITAL POVERTY

Technology transforms lives. However, the nature of that transformation depends on what technology users' lives are like at the start, in terms of age, gender, and their ability to make or enjoy a decent living. ICTs like mobile phones and e-mail are becoming more common. We need to understand, though, who uses them to understand what changes they might cause. Using statistical analysis, May seeks to understand how ICTs may be pathways out of poverty. Before understanding the pathways, we must first know what kinds of people have access to ICTs and what kinds of people do not. May analyses data from Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda for his study. He considers different aspects of poverty and how they overlap with ICT access or non-access. He also considers which aspects strongly predict ICT access.

May's findings establish connections between ICT access and other aspects of poverty. These connections could inform attempts to put technology at the disposal of 'hard-to-reach' populations, or to use technology to amplify the voices of particularly marginalised citizens. In particular, they provide information about limitations faced by this target population other than the lack of ICTs. These limitations will shape the potential for ICTs to contribute to change in that context.

The study uses multidimensional poverty indicators and a 'digital poverty' measure. The digital poverty measure categorises people as being in 'extreme digital poverty', in 'digital poverty', 'connected' or 'digitally wealthy'. This measure provides a more detailed picture of ICT access than simply categorising by access or non-access. Similarly, the study's use of multidimensional poverty indicators provides more detailed information beyond just financial poverty. Using this information and statistical calculations, May's primary findings are:

- Financial capital and human capital are the best predictors of ICT access. Controlling for other factors, ICT access is mainly determined by financial capital and human capital. In particular, education levels are strongly related to email and mobile access.
- Urban households have more ICT assets than rural households. The difference in access between urban and rural households is more significant than the difference between poverty levels.
- Using individual data rather than household data shows gender and age differences. Women are less likely than men to have access to ICTs. Gender predicts ICT access even when controlling for difference in earnings between men and women.

May, J.D. (2012) 'Digital and Other Poverties: Exploring the Connection in Four East African Countries', *Information Technologies & International Development*, 8(2): 33–50

These findings provide insight into who ICT users and non-users are. However, the findings indicate connection and not cause. Lack of access to ICTs is not the cause of other dimensions of poverty. ICTs may offer an opportunity to work towards poverty reduction, but they are not a cure-all solution.

Information about who accesses ICTs and the predictors for access is relevant to programmes that seek to promote citizen voice, especially those with a focus on excluded actors and social groups. In particular:

- The findings can be used to identify who the 'hard-to-reach' might be. Rural location, financial poverty, education levels and gender may be especially important considerations.
- Differences in access within the household are evident, especially in terms of gender. This difference indicates that in order to counter existing differences and biases, targeting individuals is a better strategy than targeting households.
- The study provides indications of other limitations ICT users face.

THE INFINITE AGENDA OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Inclusion is a social occurrence. Efforts towards inclusion cannot avoid the context of social structures. Attempting top-down changes to those social structures without engaging with their underlying values may simply impose new structures, without addressing exclusion.

Mohanty (2010) explores the formation of inclusive local governance institutions (panchayat) in rural India and how they have impacted on dalits (low castes) in a district in Gujarat. Panchayat institutions were formed to ensure economic development and social justice for rural populations. They were designed to ensure that dalits, women and tribals (indigenous people) had representation through reserved seats. Mohanty discusses these panchayat institutions and dalit mobilisation groups in the context of local power dynamics. Mohanty's analysis offers valuable lessons for working in settings with deeply entrenched social divisions.

Although marginalised groups were formally included in panchayat institutions, this inclusion did not change local power dynamics. Even when dalits in the panchayat institutions questioned their inequality and exclusion, their local social and political position did not change.

In response, local civil society organisations mobilised dalits into the social justice committees that were

legislated as part of panchayat institutions. This network of dalits worked to ensure that social justice committees were formed and were effective. They also mobilised to ensure that development activities (such as connections to water and electricity) reached dalits. Finally, the network challenged exclusion by claiming social spaces in the community. The mobilisation efforts sought both political power and dignity through inclusion.

Their main activities however focused on material development. Mohanty finds that the state's framework limited the dalit mobilisation network. The framework only provided channels for working through panchayat institutions and through development activities. Since the mobilisation worked within that framework, activities were limited to it.

From this case study, Mohanty draws three findings:

- Dalits have put pressure on institutions and taken action for more significant inclusion. However, the institutions themselves have remained unable and unwilling to change and provide significant inclusion.
- Social spaces, including those in the institutions, have not opened up long-term for dalit inclusion. This limits their ability to effect change.
- Dalit entry in local government and their mobilisation has accomplished material

Mohanty, R. (2010), 'Infinite Agenda of Social Justice: Dalit Mobilization in the Institutions of Local Governance,' *Mobilizing for Democracy: Citizen Action and the Politics of Public Participation*. London: Zed Books

development. However, without equality and inclusion in social and political spaces, fulfilling material needs only achieves part of the goal.

These findings have broader implications for initiatives that seek to amplify citizen voices and particularly those of marginalised people.

Any initiative will have to work within the context of social structures and power dynamics in place. Formal institutions will have limited ability to change these structures. Initiatives must be aware of them in order to effectively work in and around them.

The formal articulation of certain desired outcomes may limit the potential for other outcomes beyond the scope of that framework. A focus on measurable achievements – for instance, seats in an institution – may actually limit change.

Narrow goals for action, like access to water, may help counteract negative impacts of exclusion. However, they will not target the foundation of exclusion. Achieving transformation requires basing action on seeking more foundational change like social justice and dignity.

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Recommended reading summaries by: Rebecca Hillyer, Alexandra Wanjiku Kelbert, and Martha Kimmel

Commissioned and edited by: Rosie McGee and Duncan Edwards

About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. This Grand Challenge focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. We encourage locally driven and context specific change, as we believe a global vision can only be achieved if it is pursued from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

The field of technology for Open Government is relatively young and the consortium partners, Hivos, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi, are a part of this rapidly developing domain. These institutions have extensive and complementary skills and experience in the field of citizen engagement, government accountability, private sector entrepreneurs, (technical) innovation and research.

Making All Voices Count is supported by the U.K Department for International Development (DFID), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Open Society Foundations (OSF) and Omidyar Network (ON), and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos (lead organisation), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi.

About Research, Evidence and Learning Component

This Review of Experience is developed by the Research, Evidence and Learning component of *Making All Voices Count*. The Research, Evidence and Learning component's purpose is to contribute to improving performance and practice and build an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and Technology-for-T&A. The Review of Experience aims to reach out to and enlist stakeholders for *Making All Voices Count* among practitioner and academic circles. It provides an up-to-date review of experience on cutting-edge questions that are considered relevant by these actors, to be taken up and used by them.



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Disclaimer: This document has been produced with the financial support of the Omidyar Network, the Open Society Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policies of our funders.

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