Rights, resources and the politics of accountability: an introduction

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Many conflicts in development can be understood as struggles by the poor to hold the powerful to account. Contests over the rights and responsibilities of actors in development are increasing in intensity amid clashes between the promotion of a rights-based approach to development and market-based notions of access and entitlement to resources. How these conflicts are played out has enormous implications for efforts to tackle poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Understanding how the poor claim their rights and demand accountability for the realisation of those rights becomes critical.

This book contributes to such an understanding by exploring how poorer groups mobilise around rights to resources in a diversity of settings, employing a broad range of strategies to achieve accountability. It places accountability at the intersection between rights and resources, asking: what is the relationship between greater accountability and people's ability to realise their rights to resources? Struggles over key livelihood resources such as health, housing and labour, as well as natural resources such as water and oil, provide the backdrop to an enquiry into the ways in which poorer groups hold powerful state, corporate

and civil society actors to account. The process of claiming rights provides one (but certainly not the only) way in which they do this.

Accountability has come to assume a central place in contemporary development discourse over the last ten years in the context of increasing donor attention to the idea of good governance. Its association with this agenda has meant that the politics of accountability has been reduced to questions of state reform. Whilst of course state reform is crucial, this book shows that accountability cannot be achieved through institutional reform alone, and it is often the case that state institutions act as rights violators as well as rights enforcers. The conventional focus on the state has created an over-reliance on the law as a mechanism to generate positive social change, without looking at the ways in which social mobilisation also changes the law.

Accountability is not an apolitical project. The leading global actors promoting accountability initiatives, despite claims to the contrary, have a political stake in advancing some forms of accountability and some groups' rights over others. For example, a narrow focus on questions of financial reporting and accountancy fails to address the political processes by which the powerful insulate themselves from accountability to the poor and efforts to promote the private provision of state services without addressing accountability to the poor often serve to create accountability deficits. The global reach of actors such as the World Bank and

other leading donors, however, means that accountability models have often been transplanted from one setting to another with little regard for local context.

An explicitly political framing of accountability in development, on the other hand, requires a different approach. Where earlier work on accountability emphasised change through legal reform and technocratic notions of governance, here we advance an understanding of accountability that is more directly relevant to the lives of the poor, where power assumes a central place. Despite the current fashion for the term accountability in development debates, the term and the relationships it seeks to describe have a much longer history. Contexts of globalisation and neoliberal reform have, nevertheless, fundamentally changed the division of rights and responsibilities between states, market actors and civil society in ways that directly affect the livelihoods of the poor. As the roles and power of key actors in development change so, therefore, do the processes by which people seek to hold them to account. This book documents the strategies they employ to do this: formal and informal, legal and non-legal, collaborative and confrontational.

Capturing this new landscape of accountability politics requires us to look at a range of state and non-state actors, going beyond traditional preoccupations with state reform. Here we look at struggles for corporate accountability in the absence of state protection of marginalised groups, and we explore mobilisations around rights that are conferred by the state but unevenly realised in practice.

We explore the role of community-based organisations and the accountability strategies they adopt to challenge the state and civil society organisations claiming to act on their behalf. Rarely is the state absent in such conflicts, even if its presence is often felt as a failure to act. This being so, it is unsurprising that marginalised groups often claim accountability from below, rather than relying on the state to provide it from above. The challenge is to map the web of accountabilities that flow between these actors in specific contexts in order to understand the directions from which opportunities for change are most likely to come.

Reflecting these new political dynamics also means emphasising accountability processes. These are the strategies, tactics and repertoires of mobilisation by which movements and communities seek to realise rights to livelihood or to express their citizenship. While often hoping to trigger changes within the state or other actors, such strategies can also be an end in themselves, aimed for example at raising awareness about rights or articulating citizenship through accountability claims. Chapter 10 explores the role of theatre as a tool for enabling people to express the barriers they face to realising accountability in their day-to-day lives, while Chapter 8 shows how NGOs in rural India are creating new platforms and arenas for the articulation of accountability claims through informal public hearings and the construction of 'Peoples' Development Plans'. These are a few of the many different methods for demanding accountability that this book will explore.

Understanding the nature of accountability struggles means appreciating the historical, material and cultural contexts in which they take place. By looking at cases in the global North and South and across a range of livelihood resources, we build up an eclectic view of the diverse ways in which disenfranchised groups pursue accountability claims and the context-specific circumstances that enable or frustrate their ability to do this. The cases here also cover a range of institutional contexts which are politically, socially and culturally diverse. We have situations in which a strong state is present (India, the United States, Brazil); in

which litigious legal cultures exist (South Africa, the United States); and where long histories suggest that inequalities can be challenged through social movement mobilisation (Mexico, Brazil, India). In other contexts, corporations have become the dominant actors, with direct implications for accountability (Nigeria, Bangladesh).

A grounded empirical assessment of which accountability strategies work, when, and for whom provides an important antidote to the inappropriate export of accountability models from one setting to another without sufficient regard for key political, social and cultural differences. Each chapter seeks to reflect on those elements that were important to the outcome of the accountability struggle they describe. The chapters are framed around the following key questions:

❑ Does the strategy used achieve greater accountability in relation to access to resources?

❑ When does it work? Under what conditions? (Historically, institutionally, economically, culturally?)

❑ For whom does it work? Who benefits?

❑ What are the implications for contemporary debates about accountability in development?

The book includes examples of mobilisations around a range of resources from more narrowly defined notions of natural resources to broader notions of livelihood resources such as housing and health, for example. We are able to compare struggles around resources such as oil and water with campaigns for better working conditions, access to health services, and housing provision in order to draw conclusions about how different types of resources influence the nature of accountability.

Rather than viewing the lack of accountability as a problem that only afflicts developing countries, we explore 'global' experiences of accountability struggles from North and South. Despite differences of context, there are many interesting parallels, for example, between the experience of mobilising for worker rights in the United States and in Bangladesh, as well between struggles for corporate accountability in the United States and India. Lessons can be learned about accountability strategies in ways that transgress geographical and sectoral distinctions. In so far as they seek to address patterns of inequality and marginalisation that are globally present, but manifest themselves in distinct ways in local settings, accountability strategies aimed at challenging power resonate with poor peoples' experiences the world over.

The next section maps out the relationships between rights, resources and accountability that emerge from the cases in this book.
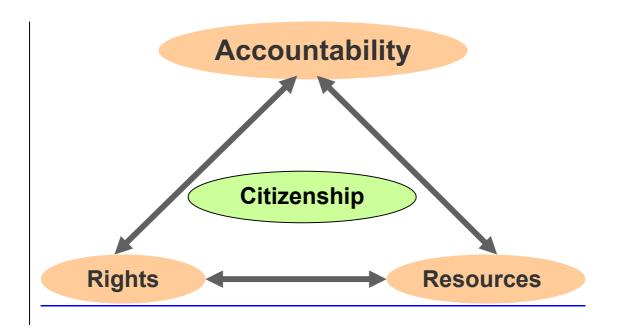
Rights, resources and the politics of accountability

There is a complex and overlapping relationship between rights, resources and the politics of accountability. Figure 1 shows how each is intimately related to the other in a dynamic way. In many ways, the nature of a resource, and who has access to it, defines possibilities for justice, redistribution and change. In this book, resource struggles and efforts to realise key developmental rights, such as the right to housing and water, provide the anchor for an exploration of the relationship between rights and accountability. The centrality of resources to the livelihoods of the poor means questions of access and entitlement are imbued with relations of power and conflict. Hence, while the deprivation of a resource may be predominantly economic in character, gaining the right to access resources and the right to claim accountability is a political project, with citizenship at its core.

The chapters in this book show how resources are not a politically neutral variable in the relationship between rights and accountability. Beyond a deterministic, single-dimensional understanding of the relationship between resources and politics, we focus on the impact of the dynamics of institutional practices and cultural values upon the realisation of resource rights. Questions of access, management and distribution depend on whether we are talking about water, oil or health. Each implies a different infrastructure, brings different actors

into conflict, implies different sensitivities and is symbolically and culturally understood in a distinct way. Themes we pick up throughout the book on the materiality of resources, the importance of law and institutions and competing cultures of accountability help us to explore these themes.

Figure 1.1 The relationship between rights, resources and accountability

Mobilisations to claim rights can produce new forms of accountability, just as the ability to claim rights and have them realised assumes relations of accountability between the state and citizens. For example, the trajectories of mobilisation

around rights in India, Brazil and South Africa have informed and shaped the meaning of rights within those countries, from the way rights are used in practice to the encoding of specific rights in national constitutions (Wheeler and Pettit 2005). The relationship between rights and resources hinges on issues of access in terms of who controls and benefits from particular resources. The relationship between resources and accountability is informed by power, as more powerful groups monopolise control over resources and undermine accountability. This book focuses, then, on rights as a tool of accountability, where disenfranchised and marginalised groups use rights claims around key resources in order to demand greater accountability from state, private sector and civil society actors.

Cutting across processes of demanding accountability and claiming rights over resources, and at the centre of the triangle that we use (Figure 1.1) to describe the relationships between rights, resources and accountability, is the notion of citizenship. Citizenship relates to the claims that people believe they should be able to make of institutions, as well as their entitlements to access to material resources. We return to this theme in the conclusion to this chapter. Given the broad nature of this overview of the triangular relationship between rights, resources and accountability, the next section explores each of the dimensions of this relationship in more detail.

Rights and accountability

It is perhaps the case that more people are now claiming more rights than ever before (Jones 1994). The proliferation of types of rights claims is occurring in parallel with the increasingly salient discourse of rights in development (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2005). Though rights-based approaches have gained in popularity among the development community, their value, application and reach remain contested (Piron 2005). On the one hand, rights claims can provide a greater measure of access to justice. The long history of mobilisations around rights shows that they have the potential to provide a measure of access to justice that regulation does not, to support claims that other legal procedures do not recognise, and to ignite a level of activism that claims grounded in other discourses often fail to achieve. Framing a claim in the language of human rights gives it a certain status, legitimacy and moral weight; it constitutes a title which, at least in theory, others must recognise and respect (Dworkin 1978). On the other hand, 'rights talk' has increasingly been adopted in development debates in ways that render it vacuous and abstract. 'Rights talk is both pervasive and exciting ... rights talk is also frequently confused and inconclusive' (Merills 1996: 25). This has serious implications for those whose rights have been denied or who are seeking to have their rights protected and respected (Pettit and Wheeler 2005).

Like accountability, rights and rights-based approaches, therefore, have a complex role within development. Rights and rights-based approaches have the potential to oppose technocratic top-down interpretations of accountability

discussed earlier, but, as some of the chapters in this book show, powerful groups have also used rights discourse to advance their own agenda. Nonetheless, a conception of rights is at the heart of many mobilisations for accountability, a fact that becomes particularly clear in relation to struggles for resources. Our interest in rights here is guided by the ways in which poorer groups employ them to secure accountability from key actors, claiming basic development rights and rights to resources in order to enhance their livelihoods. We suggest that the right to claim accountability is fundamental to making other social and economic rights real, an idea we explore further in the final section of the chapter on citizenship. Hence, in considering rights in relationship to accountability, it is important to ask:

- How do marginalised or excluded groups use rights as part of a strategy for improving accountability?
- Under what conditions do rights enhance accountability to the poor?
- What is the relationship between the right to demand accountability and the protection of a broader set of economic and social rights?

Many rights, in and of themselves, are not *de facto* accountability tools; they have to be fashioned as such through processes of claiming, mobilisation and struggle. This becomes clear in Mexico, for example, where obstacles to accountability are derived from the highly politicised disputes about different meanings and interpretations of rights (chapters 4 and 5). Similarly, in Brazil and

South Africa, it was through sustained social protest that formal legal recognition for rights was achieved (chapters 3 and 7).

Since accountability is not just about promoting answerability but also about delivering enforceability, the process of how these rights can be realised is important. It is in this context that we encounter the limits of an (over-)reliance on rights. Many of the accountability strategies and tools that we explore in this book take as their starting point the lack of recognition or implementation of rights of particular groups, such as the right to water in South Africa, to adequate housing in Kenya and to a living wage in the United States. There is a difference therefore between *rights in theory* and *rights in practice*. Our concern is more with the latter and the ways in which poorer groups secure rights through a multitude of formal and informal creative strategies of accountability. The diverse forms of mobilisation that we explore in this book are reflective of this dynamic. In so far as the law is the medium through which rights-based claims are traditionally expressed, our work helps to explain the limitations of legally based constructions of rights and the ways in poorer groups often employ 'living' notions of rights that reflect more adequately the material deprivation or social exclusion they experience (Clark, O'Reilly and Wheeler 2005). The lack of protection provided by the law to poorer communities of colour in the US – despite civil rights claims – has given rise to notions of environmental justice that better embody people's experience of environmental harm (Chapter 12).

Nevertheless, claiming a right is not a short-cut to avoiding, pre-empting or reducing conflict over resources. Rights claims compete; they have to be balanced or reconciled, as the cases from Chiapas and Veracruz clearly show (chapters 4 and 5). There is also a political risk that attaches to efforts to politicise claims by invoking rights claims; the attention of rights violators, whether they be states or private actors, is drawn to vulnerable groups who may suffer the recriminations of highlighting the negligence of powerful actors, as the cases from India demonstrate (Chapter 8). The value of a resource subject to conflict may mean that political freedoms are often denied and strategies of intimidation and violence invoked as the chapters from Mexico, India, and Nigeria show (chapters 4–5, 8 and 10). Particularly when confrontations with powerful actors are implied by an accountability struggle, the merits of action over silence or acquiescence need to be carefully evaluated. Accountability claims, therefore, are not easily made. Neither are they free of the costs and trade-offs that characterise other forms of mobilisation and claim making.

Rights are just one, albeit a very important, means by which the poor seek accountability from those that exercise power over them. Social actors have to be clear about what is to be gained by framing a question in terms of rights and whether the same result could not be achieved equally well by other means. The choice of which strategy to pursue is a critical one for community-based organisations such as the tenants' association in Mombasa, Kenya with very limited resources and ambitious goals (Chapter 6). The appeal of global reach

should not mislead us into believing that the process of realising those rights demonstrates uniformity across the world. The limits of attempts to secure workers' rights through supplier-imposed labour standards in Bangladesh are a case in point (Chapter 11).

This is not just a book about how the poor claim, contest and secure rights, however. It is also a book about the rights of the powerful, used to defend their privileges, control of resources and access to power. At issue here is not just the rights of the state to claim land in the public interest for industrial development, as we see in the India case, or the right to admit investors to locate in economically impoverished but resource-rich areas of a country (Chapter 10). It is also the rights that have been conferred upon corporations, or in some cases assumed by them, to relocate their operations without offering compensation to communities that host them, to invest where they choose and to socialise costs while privatising profit. The struggles we explore in this book about campaigns to secure a living wage (Chapter 12) or to contest the social, economic and environmental effects of capital mobility and the economic blackmail that is used to suffocate communities' rights claims (chapters 8,9), provide evidence of attempts to challenge the privileging of rights to profit over rights to welfare and social justice.

Rights and resources

Contests over rights of access to resources and to the benefits that derive from their exploitation define many contemporary and historical struggles in development. They affect the interests of the powerful and the poor simultaneously, often bringing them into conflict with one another. The political and economic histories of resources and commodities as diverse as oil, sugar and coffee offer, in microcosm, a history of colonialism, capitalism and the origins of the modern order (Mintz 1986; Wild 2005; Evans, Goodman and Lansbury 2002). We see in the Nigeria case, for example, how contemporary accountability problems have been exacerbated by the country's experience of colonialism. Contests over how resources are to be used, for what, and by whom assume fundamental relations of social power. The chapters in this book suggest that it is this social power, related as it is to political and material power, that defines the context determining who is in a position to hold who to account and the means by which they are able to do so.

What emerges, then, is a *political economy of rights* in which questions of access to and distribution and production of resources are paramount. A focus on resources changes the way we think about the relationship between rights and accountability. The challenge is not to overemphasise the material dimensions of this relationship and to acknowledge instead that economic rights are in many ways indivisible from social, political and cultural rights. Realising the former is in many ways contingent on having access to the latter rights. Though it is often a

felt deprivation of resources that drives accountability demand making, the right to claim accountability presupposes all other claim making.

Indeed, it is often the absence of responsiveness from states, corporations or even community-based organisations that fuels situations of conflict around resources. For example, in Nigeria, the juxtaposition between the extreme poverty in the Niger Delta and the large amounts of wealth generated by oil extracted from the region is the starting point for many of the struggles over accountability. When people are denied shelter as in the case from Kenya, unable to get access to water or fail to receive compensation for land taken from them as in the cases from Mexico and India, they seek redress by locating responsibility for upholding that right or providing that service.

Increasingly this process takes place across different arenas and levels of decision making. In the case of the Tuxtlas Reserve in Mexico, there are multiple and overlapping institutions involved and establishing lines of accountability becomes very difficult. Even those conflicts which appear to be local in scale and orientation are often implicated in, and affected by, broader regional and global dynamics. For example, in Bangladesh, global standards set by powerful international buyers and trade unions can undermine the ability of groups of garment workers to define and claim labour rights they judge important. Efforts to conserve biospheres in Mexico illustrate how regional and global agendas make themselves felt at the local level, changing the balance of accountability relations.

Our concern here is less with key civil and political rights, though these often form the bedrock of all other struggles: the givens and prior enabling conditions of a broader social struggle such as, for example, that for the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination in the United States, is the premise for later mobilisations around environmental racism (Chapter 9). We look instead at material struggles for subsistence and survival focused on resources such as water and oil, and rights such as those to health, housing and a living wage. Clearly this constitutes a broad spectrum of rights and ensuing chapters will show that there are important differences between these rights in terms of how claimants articulate and mobilise around them, and how *justiciable* and *realisable* they are.

The limitations of a notion of legal indivisibility of rights should not be confused with the interrelatedness of particular rights in practice and the struggles around them. In Kenya, for example, attempts by the tenants' association to uphold the right to shelter are difficult to separate from political rights to organisation and information, as well as citizenship defined by having access to a legitimate residence. Resource rights, therefore, are often indivisible from other forms of rights claims. In a close parallel to the India case, Zarsky (2002: 45) notes that 'Worker exposure to hazardous chemicals, for example, is at once a labour rights and an environmental concern. The expropriation of indigenous peoples from ancestral lands to make way for a mining operation has implications for both

human rights and environmental protection.' These interrelations help us to understand the coalitions that activists form, recognising and consolidating these links.

Resources and accountability

This book takes a broad approach to resources, where cultural understandings of resources, the political economy of who has rights to resources, and the varied institutional configurations that mediate societal relations make for very different forms of accountability politics. Though much of our work explores accountability struggles around key resources such as oil and water, we are anxious not to draw conclusions about the possibilities of pro-poor action that are unduly determined by the nature of a resource, as debates on the resource curse reviewed in Chapter 10 tend to. Our emphasis, instead, is on the ways in which institutions and the relations of social power that underpin them mediate the relationships between rights, resources and accountability.

Accountability challenges do, nevertheless, differ according to the resource in question. There are important differences between the politics of access, process and redress, depending on whether the struggle is for resource rights, rights to environmental protection or rights to welfare in the form of health and housing. Factors such as the centrality of a resource to a country's economy or, in turn, the location of that country in the global marketplace can have a strong bearing

on which accountability mechanisms can be utilised and by whom. The seasonality of the garment industry in terms of fashion cycles and corresponding orders gives some advantages to workers demanding their rights, as they can use pressures from buyers on delivery deadlines to extract gains from factory owners (Chapter 11). The high value attached to oil, and its location in often remote and disputed territories, places it at the centre of many conflicting rights claims around land, livelihood and compensation (Chapter 10). Oil production both reflects and reproduces divided communities and petro-states complicit in rights violations, inevitably constructing a particular type of accountability politics in its wake where violence and intimidation are the tools of enforceability. Sometimes, it is not merely the material value attached to a resource, but competing perceptions of its worth and cultural significance that generate accountability conflicts. Radically different understandings of the environment and nature as a resource, when combined with institutional complexity in Mexico, create a context where accountability is very difficult to achieve through institutional design.

Just as people clearly attempt to demand accountability from different starting points, so too institutions and the élites that manage them feel different degrees of responsiveness to those they claim to represent. While in Mexico and Brazil, for example, there are legal provisions for citizen participation in major sectors of public policy such as health, in contrast, the state structures of Bangladesh and Nigeria are not orientated towards a significant level of accountability towards

their citizens. While accountability towards poor and marginalised groups is imperfect in every case, the scope for particular states to respond to accountability demands varies enormously. It is when rights claims come into conflict over specific resources that we are able to see which accountability ties pull strongest, and power reveals itself.

Beyond issues of materiality or the nature of a particular resource and the institutional structures that mediate access to resources, there is also a cultural politics of resources: processes of constructing and attributing meaning to resources, which generate expectations about rights, duties and, therefore, accountabilities (Baviskar 2003; Mehta 2003). These can be derived from societal givens, religious and spiritual beliefs in ways which fundamentally alter the practice of accountability politics. They derive from the 'complex material and symbolic dimensions of how "natural resources" come to be imagined' (Baviskar 2003: 5051). For example, indigenous perceptions of water and the sacred meanings associated with water in Veracruz have informed the nature of accountability politics there. Hence there are symbolic as well as material dimensions to conflict, partly derived from the fact that 'Each resource has distinctive use values that emerge in relation to particular modes of production' (Baviskar 2003: 5052). In this sense, culture itself becomes a site of struggle where inequalities and exclusions around resources get challenged and reproduced.

Earlier work on the role of environmental movements in broader struggles over democracy and development (Garcia-Guadilla and Blauert 1994) and studies of the democratising potential of social movements in redefining notions of development (Peet and Watts 1996; Escobar ad Alvarez 1992) have usefully drawn attention to the politics of these struggles. As the chapters in this book on Mexico, South Africa and Brazil show, such campaigns are often focused on specific resources, mobilised around certain rights or targeted at specific institutions. There is increasing attention, however to the global political dynamics of such mobilisations[1], reflecting the increasing implication of globalised actors in local resource struggles – as shown by the chapters on the living wage in the United States, the garment industry in Bangladesh, and disputes over knowledge rights in Mexico. This book reinforces the idea that people's experiences of and struggles over social and environmental rights are globally lived but locally felt (Eckstein and Crowley 2003: xiii).

The next section develops the links between these themes further through reference to cross-cutting themes that are developed in the book, summarising what we learn about accountability from the case studies and setting us up to explore the implications of this for contemporary debates about accountability and development in the final section of the chapter.

Key themes

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[1] See, for example, Edwards and Gaventa 2001; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Cohen and Rai 2000.

Accountability aims and outcomes

Existing work on accountability suggests there are two key dimensions to effective accountability mechanisms: answerability (the right to make claims and demand a response) and enforceability (mechanisms for delivering accountability, for sanctioning non-responsiveness) (see Chapter 2). Accountability, in many of the cases in this book, is not an end in itself. It is a means to achieving a wider set of goals such as broader forms of social and political change, including greater justice, equity and the redistribution of resources. This is an important point, given the often-technocratic and target-driven approaches to accountability, and the often-apolitical approaches to rights in development (see Pettit and Wheeler 2005).

We see in this book how accountability is not only an outcome, but also a process, where both answerability and enforceability are achieved through ongoing engagement between citizens and institutions. This is a crucial point in cases where the formal or legal mechanisms are in place for accountability, but the enforcement of these rights and standards is weak. Mehta explores how, in South Africa, the constitutional provision of 20 litres of free basic water for all is unevenly translated in practice – and has led to a series of court cases to establish lines of accountability between different levels of government in fulfilling this right. As Luce shows in her contribution, the victories of the US labour movement in the first half of the twentieth century have been eroded: campaigns

for a living wage have had to struggle for new labour rights legislation to be adopted, and then use leverage over the municipal governments to enforce living wage standards. The chapters in this book explore the complexities of both accountability processes and accountability outcomes, and the ways in which processes inform outcomes.

Struggles for accountability driven by different aims and processes inevitably lead to the construction of distinct forms of accountability politics. If the aim of the struggle is to expose state corruption, gaining media attention – as the tenants' associations do in Mombasa – is an appropriate strategy. If, on the other hand, legal recognition of the right to housing is also an aim, then drawing on international legal agreements to secure that right is the preferred choice. This point is further illustrated in Luce's chapter, which looks at the difference between standards and rights in terms of the living wage campaign in the United States. The standard of the minimum wage in the United States, which was gained through sustained mobilisation by trade unions, has been drastically eroded. As a result, living wage campaigns have organised around the right to a living wage, which is contextually determined. Standards provided important gains in labour rights, but have not been sufficient to guarantee substantive rights to a living wage.

Several of the chapters in this book show how the presence of multiple actors involved in any accountability struggle serves to blur lines of accountability.

Cortez and Paré explore how, in the biosphere reserves in Southern Mexico, a tangled web of actors including indigenous groups, international conservation NGOs, pharmaceutical companies, and state and federal government agencies all have competing interests in relation to the environment, inhibiting the development of clear accountability mechanisms between them. Local accountability conflicts are increasingly embedded in global politics in a context in which relations between public/state and private/market actors are undergoing change. The commodification and commercialisation of resources (water, indigenous knowledge, oil, labour) is accelerating these changes – and catalysing conflict over rights to resources. This produces gaps and deficits, creating accountability challenges across multiple levels from community organisation up to global institutions as global market penetration creates more opportunities for actors to encounter one another in new ways.

Another crucial theme is the way in which many of the actors and stakeholders involved in accountability politics often perform contradictory roles. The cases of India, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria and the United States illustrate how the state can act as both the guarantor and the violator of rights. Caught at the competing intersection of rights-based and market-based approaches to the provision of water, the South African government engages in 'sins of omission and commission', as Mehta puts it, enabling some rights while denying others. Newell *et al.* show how the government in India, far from being a buttress against corporate irresponsibility, is implicated in acts of negligence resulting in serious

environmental degradation that disproportionately affects tribal and lower-caste groups. Similarly, in cases where the state apparatus is weak or being eroded (such as Bangladesh and Nigeria), the increasing influence and power of corporate actors diminishes the ability of the state to act as the enforcer of accountability.

Contradictory and competing obligations are not just issues faced by states and corporations. Within particular communities, the very people who are demanding accountability can themselves undermine it, as in Nigeria when internal divisions between traditional authorities and youth groups have led to increasing cycles of violence. The chapters in this book explore the many dimensions of accountability – from different meanings and goals, to the variety of actors involved. Overall, this points to the importance of context in understanding how accountability can lead to real gains in social, economic and political equity.

How does context matter?

It is clear that context matters in understanding struggles for accountability and rights, but certain elements of context have greater salience in explaining the conditions and prospects for improving accountability. First, the institutional complexity described above is an important contextual factor. We see throughout the book how a wide range of institutional actors with responsibilities for accountability can generate confusion and disable action. These actors often represent a diverse and shifting set of interests cutting across private and public

spheres, so the strategies for achieving accountability and the types of accountability relationships that can be established are also shifting. In her chapter on the Mombasa tenants' association struggle, Nyamu-Musembi suggests that one of the most difficult challenges for grassroots organisations is to gauge the appropriate strategy given their goals and the rapidly changing map of actors and political interests. As Paré and Robles emphasise in the Veracruz case, changes in government administrations can easily undermine years of careful work to build stable relations of accountability between different institutions and actors.

Legal settings and traditions also have important implications for increasing accountability to the poor. This book challenges assumptions that law generates social change by looking at ways in which the reverse is equally true. Approaches to accountability that rely solely on legal reform are unlikely to appreciate the limits of the law, in terms of access and reach, for the majority of the world's poor. For example, constitutionally guaranteed rights (as with the right to water in South Africa and the right to health in Brazil) can create new possibilities for demanding accountability. Yet the difference in how these rights fit into legal traditions is critical. In Brazil, social mobilisation around constitutional provisions has provided an entry point for political struggles over accountability because the judiciary does not fill that space, while in South Africa court cases such as Grootboom have had a more central role. In the United States, where there is a strong tradition of litigation, environmental justice groups have

employed 'judicial activism', invoking civil rights and environmental legislation to hold polluters to account. By contrast, in India, despite the fact there is a strong tradition of using public interest litigation, there has also been resort to mock legal processes such as citizen hearings. And in Mexico, where there is little possibility of resolving accountability struggles through legal structures perceived to be convoluted and corrupt, social mobilisation around political objectives is key to increasing accountability. While law often allows for equity of treatment, it can also reinforce social inequities. In Bangladesh, the laws covering workers' rights date from the colonial period and heavily favour educated men. Women, who work almost entirely in the informal sector, do not fall under the auspices of these laws in practice. In Kenya and India the colonial Land Acquisition Act has been invoked to remove people from their land, often without compensation or redress.

An apolitical view of promoting accountability through law reform, capacity building, training judges and the like is unlikely to yield improved access for the poor unless structural barriers and social hierarchies that inhibit meaningful use of the law by the poor are also addressed. The high degree of attention given to law reform by key actors such as the World Bank needs to respond to other reports from the same institution emphasising that legal initiatives alone are not enough to tackle corruption and improve access to redress (Soopramien *et al.* 1999). If building accountability stops at the level of reforms to institutional procedures, it is unlikely to generate the sort of change that only comes through building coalitions to oversee and contest the translation of legal obligations into

lived realities. We see from the chapters in this book the importance of this process of translation, of giving meaning to legal commitments.

More broadly, the chapters in this book also emphasise the different cultures of accountability that characterise specific contexts. In Bangladesh, a culture of accountability is slowly beginning to emerge that goes beyond the current culture of compliance, which is more concerned with meeting the short-term demands of contractors for observable enforcement of workplace conditions than in changing the relations of power that create abuses of workers rights in the first place. Paré and Robles also explore the meanings of accountability within rural indigenous communities in Southern Mexico, where, although the word 'accountability' does not exist in local languages, the meaning of accountability is encoded in certain traditions and practices. In this case, demands for accountability have become combined with prior notions of fairness and community obligation to produce a new definition of accountability based on coresponsibility. In Brazil, dissonant cultures of participation and a history of clientelism within the health care system make it difficult for clear accountability lines to be drawn. In sum, there are different cultures of accountability grounded in different histories of conflict, trust and corruption.

Which strategies, when?

This book surveys a bewildering array of strategies for demanding accountability and realising rights, some of which are summarised in Box 1.1 below. Amid this diversity, however, some important trends emerge. In each case the factors that have inhibited or encouraged increased accountability are explored. The strategies are not static, however; there is often an evolution in strategy as accountability struggles change over time. This can involve a transition from resistance to dialogue and solution finding, as the case of the management of the watershed in Mexico shows, indicating ongoing processes of reflection within movements about which accountability strategies work, when, why and for whom.

Advances in accountability and rights claims are not linear, nor are they irreversible. In several of the studies in this book, setbacks in struggles for accountability have been as important as gains. A common feature across several of the cases, including Nigeria, Mexico and India, are the cycles of negotiation and conflict that have emerged as part of struggles for accountability. In Nigeria, as Abah and Okwori demonstrate, short-term demands for concessions by communities to oil companies have resulted in tangible results. But, at the same time, oil companies have reinforced and exacerbated internal divisions and conflicts within communities by granting concessions and financial windfalls to particular groups. Hence these concessions are only ameliorative and tend to fuel conflict rather than addressing the fundamental rights violations occurring in the Niger Delta. A similar though less violent situation has emerged

in Mexico, where municipal governments appease rural indigenous communities by conceding certain rights and benefits without addressing the underlying causes of the lack of accountability.

Table 1.1 Social actors, strategies, rights and resources

Who?	Types of strategies used		Rights involved	Resources involved
	Formal	Informal		
Indigenous groups in Chiapas and Veracruz, Mexico	Environmental round tables with government	• Armed conflict • Protests • Re-settlement in reserve areas	Land rights knowledge rights	Environmental resources in general
Rural poor in South Africa	Court cases	Refusing to pay for water	Right to water	Water
Tenants' association in Mombasa, Kenya	Using international legal frameworks	Blocking illegal construction Gaining media attention Mobilising residents	Right to housing Right to information	Adequate housing
Community-based organisations in Cabo, Brazil	Participation in government-mandated health councils		Right to health	Adequate health care
Indigenous groups in Veracruz, Mexico	Negotiations with reserve management, municipal government Construction of	Blockading dam to cut off water supply Citizen Water Management Council Participatory environmental audit	Right to water	Water

	alternative plans			
Landless groups in India	Court cases Complaints to government officials	Public hearings People's Development Plans Gaining media attention Citizen health and environmental monitoring	Land rights Right to work Right to a clean environment	Minerals Energy Water
Environmental justice movement, US	Civil rights legislation Court cases Legal clinics Public hearings	Protest Citizen health monitoring	Right to a clean environment	Water Air
Poor communities in the Niger Delta		Theatre Youth groups Womens' groups Protest Sabotage	Right to work Right to compensation Right to a clean environment	Oil
Municipal workers, US	Court cases State labour laws	Boycotts Gaining media attention	Right to a living wage	Labour
Garment workers, Bangladesh	Supplier-led standards State labour laws	Strikes/walkouts Forming workers' associations	Right to fair working conditions	Labour

Many of the chapters focus on the interface between formal and informal strategies for accountability, and the potential for important advances towards outcomes positive to the poor when these strategies combine, as in the tenants' struggle in Mombasa and the living wage movement in the United States. Though much of the current debate about accountability focuses on formal mechanisms of accountability aimed at transparency and redress, for example, the chapters in this book show that informal approaches and strategies are often equally important. Struggles around accountability do not just take place through institutions, but between actors in civil society and the market and among communities. These groups also employ both 'inside' and 'outside' strategies, strategies that work within existing institutional channels as well as those that seek to contest and broaden formal spaces of engagement (see Chapter 12).

Several of the chapters also show how non-engagement in formal processes can also be an accountability strategy by contesting the boundaries of engagement and by opposing particular practices. In Chiapas, as discussed by Cortez and Paré, the position of resistance of the Zapatista movement is predicated on non-engagement with the state. This position has forced the government to address the Zapatistas' demands in different ways to those it adopts when it deals with claims from other indigenous groups in Mexico. Given the limitations of technocratic approaches accountability, social movements are investing their efforts in new spaces for accountability such as creating new institutions;

constructing economic and livelihood alternatives to exit exploitative relationships; and disengaging from interactions with the state when they are perceived to compromise the strength of the social movement.

In all cases where demanding rights is a strategy for achieving accountability, the key questions are: when, how, and for whom do rights make a difference? In many of the cases formal legal rights are an important first step (as in South Africa), but the implementation of rights becomes the central site of struggle. International legal rights can have a similar role. In the absence of national legislation granting the right to shelter, the tenants' association in Mombasa has drawn on international conventions on human rights, to which Kenya is a signatory, that protect this right. But appealing to national or international law and formal rights encoded in those laws can only take the attempts to establish accountability so far. Formal rights (whether derived from national or international legal frameworks) are insufficient on their own to guarantee substantive changes for poorer people. We also need to consider the fact that law and rights are as likely to work for powerful interests as for those without the power to advance rights claims, as we see in the cases of India and Kenya regarding legal provisions concerning land and property.

Implications

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[2] *Ejidos* are traditionally communally-held plots of land, where the right of use is passed through inheritance.

What are the implications of the key themes that we have identified above as emerging from the case studies in this book? In particular, what are the implications of what we have learned for predominant contemporary framings of accountability agendas in development debates?

We noted in the introduction a number of assumptions in contemporary debates about accountability in development: (1) that models of accountability can be transferred from one setting to another, and that what works in one place can be expected to work elsewhere; (2) that accountability is about accountancy; (3) that accountability is provided *by* states *to* citizens; (4) that the law is the primary vehicle for clarifying the respective duties and obligations of states and citizens; (5) that accountability can be created through institutional reforms; and (6) that promoting accountability is an apolitical project. Here we show how the contributions of this work challenge these assumptions and suggest the bases of a broader and more explicitly political understanding of accountability.

Cultures of accountability

There are many issues that arise from the framing of accountability as a problem of institutional engineering, legal reform and better accounting. One is denial of the political and historical context of accountabilities by which people make sense of rights, duties and obligations. Because they emerge from rooted experiences, defined by different cultural expectations of accountability, rights

and duties are shaped by material conditions, which generate or subdue

expectations of what is possible and affordable. Generic models of accountability

reform necessarily encounter local realities, which will more often than not be at

odds with how institutions are 'meant' to operate. Proscriptions of how to tackle

accountability problems based on the experience of a limited number of countries

tend to overlook the context-specific ways in which problems are understood and

need to be confronted. This is true of World Bank 'model contracts' aimed at

helping policy makers and bank executives 'discipline troubled banks' (Roulier

1995) as well as efforts by the same institution to 'transplant' institutions to Africa

(Dia 1996).

The extent to which rights can be meaningfully exercised and enforced rests on

institutional configurations and cultures of accountability that take distinct forms

in different parts of the world. These cultures of accountability impose different

rights, duties and obligations on 'accountability seekers' and 'accountability

providers' (Goetz and Jenkins 2004). They assume reciprocal ties and social

contracts between key elements within the state, civil society and the market.

They derive from distinct historically constructed experiences of exclusion and

expectations regarding the performance of institutions. Globally led efforts to

promote accountability are often frustrated by such local realities.

This helps us to understand the process we observe in many of the chapters in

the book, when accountability cultures imposed from the outside often conflict

with more indigenous or traditional understandings of accountability. It is expressed, for example, in the difference between 'cultures of compliance' and 'cultures of accountability' discussed here in relation to Bangladesh. Universally proscribed protection only goes so far and there remains a key role for mobilisation around implementation. This book explores the difference between US labour movement strategies aimed at securing a living wage through an international standard and other struggles for that right in diverse settings. By looking at these forms of accountability politics in practice, we hope the insights contained in this book will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the embeddedness of strategies and institutions in particular social, cultural and political frameworks, which are important for making sense of those institutions.

Beyond Accountancy

Technocratic framings of accountability generate a kind of naivety that reform processes can generate pro-poor change without challenging power inequities. This illusion arises through a focus on interventions that are easy to implement, monitor and evaluate (DfiD 2005). By constructing the problem as one of corruption and better service provision, for example (World Bank 2000; 2004), the systemic and institutional biases that permit conscious anti-poor decision making are left unchallenged.

Likewise, with debates about corporate accountability, emphasis is placed on improved systems of auditing, reporting and monitoring, often without questioning the indicators by which performance is measured or, more broadly, whether the activities of a firm are contributing to the achievement of wider societal and developmental goals. Again, the point is not to question the importance of greater transparency in political and financial affairs. Indeed a key theme throughout the book is the importance of rights to information as a precondition for effective mobilisation. Rather, the plea is not to reduce the concept of accountability to the pursuit of improved accountancy. The shift towards defining indicators and measuring accountability is problematic in this sense, with UNDP describing indicators for human rights advocacy as a 'cutting-edge area of advocacy' (UNDP 2000) and Narayan, writing for the World Bank, arguing that 'if empowerment cannot be measured, it will not be taken seriously in development policy making and programming' (Narayan 2005). For Shah, too, 'the power of accountability is significantly reduced if citizens are unable to measure their governments' performance in a meaningful way…. The abstract concept of government performance can only be an effective tool in public debate when there are concrete statistics measuring performance and benchmarks against which asset indicators can be compared' (Shah 2005). Accountability can and should be much more this, especially when viewed from the perspective of tackling those accountability deficits that serve to entrench poverty and frustrate attempts to combat it.

Multiple and embedded accountabilities

We lose a sense of the importance of prior processes of mobilisation and coalition building that generate demands for reform and sustain reform efforts when we assume that institutional change can occur in a social and political vacuum. In other words, without engaging broader processes of social change, institutional innovations, however far-reaching, are unlikely to deliver the sort of reform that is desired. Whether it is anti-corruption strategies that can be reduced to 'six steps' or emphasis on accountability through performance-related rewards for bureaucrats aimed at promoting civil service reform (Dia 1993), the assumption that intra-state institutional change should be the sole focus of policy attention seems increasingly at odds with the momentum for change generated above, beyond and below the state. This means a wider focus on the diverse accountability strategies adopted by the poor to bring about change on their own terms. Hence the contribution of this book is to encourage the shift from an exclusive focus upon intra-state mechanisms of horizontal accountability to exploring more seriously the potential of society-centred models of vertical accountability discussed in Chapter 2. The state-centredness of prevailing approaches to accountability (DfiD 2001), noted above, is problematic, then, in the sense that it runs the risk of reinforcing the reliance of the poor on the very state institutions that have shown themselves to be singularly ineffective in responding to the needs of the poor.

In defence of the primacy of public accountability, Paul, writing about India, argues that 'government and its agencies are the key players in the poverty reduction arena, judged by their own public policy pronouncements and commitments' (2002: 1). By claiming that international institutions and NGOs are of 'marginal significance' in India, and that the commitment of business to poverty reduction is 'indirect and limited at best', Paul focuses on actors who identify themselves as key accountability brokers through their pronouncements and official mandates. In contrast, our approach is to examine critically the roles and performance of the broader range of actors who wield power over the lives of the poor in practice and in increasingly direct ways, rather than to read accountability politics from the formally proscribed accountability roles of actors.

This is clearly not a case for abandoning the state on the basis of its unreformability or structural inability to respond to the needs of the poor. Rather, it is a plea to recognise the many levels at which reform takes place; how informal strategies outside the immediate sphere of the state can serve to generate state reforms; but how also, on occasion, pro-poor accountability strategies emerge in ways and through arenas where the state is not, perhaps should not, be present. Cases in this book from India and Nigeria, for example, illustrate that it is often distrust of the state or an appreciation of the state's complicity in accountability abuses, experienced through resource conflicts, that drives people to construct alternative accountability mechanisms that do not rely on state endorsement or enforcement. The civil accountability that results (see

Chapter 2) raises other significant issues for democratic politics, but failing to recognise their importance as alternative sites of accountability in the face of state negligence would be a mistake.

The importance of deepening accountability within civil society, particularly when representative functions are performed on behalf of the poor, is a theme that runs through the book. Power shifts resulting in part, but certainly not exclusively, from myriad processes of globalisation have altered profoundly the balances of rights and responsibilities and hence accountabilities between state, market and civil society actors (Newell et al 2002). The ways in which this has occurred and its consequences are discussed at greater length in Chapter 2. Here the point is that we need to challenge the bias towards the state as the most appropriate and significant site of accountability reform. By looking in depth at struggles around corporate and civil society accountability, we hope this book takes forward thinking about the ways in which accountability can be deepened in new ways amongst a broader range of actors operating in multiple arenas. Increasing emphasis on 'citizen democracy' (UNDP 2004), 'citizen-centred governance' and 'global accountability' (Kovach *et al*. 2003) can be seen as evidence of the increasing acceptance, in some quarters at least, of a less state-centred approach to accountability. As Shah and Matthews note; 'technocratic approaches to public sector reform are unlikely to succeed…. Instead citizen empowerment through a rights-based approach to demand accountability from

their governments and a rights-based culture of governance holds significant potential for success' (2005).

The politics of accountability

There is a tendency to assume that those actors supporting, funding and overseeing institutional reform for accountability do not have a stake in the reform process themselves. They do. And far from being neutral advocates of pro-poor accountability reforms, the way in which they intervene has an impact on rights that are respected or denied and accountabilities that are created or overlooked. The World Bank is an increasingly important actor in this area, but can hardly be said to be a neutral player in conflicts between competing rights claims, especially when revenues from natural resources are at stake. This book shows how the World Bank's association with the Plan Puebla Panama and the Global Environment Facility's role in local conservation projects in Mexcio have generated suspicion about the intentions of these actors regarding control of environmental resources. The 2003 World Development Report on *Sustainable Development in a Dynamic Economy* advances the idea that the spectacular failure to tackle poverty and environmental degradation over the last decade is due to a failure of governance, 'poor implementation and not poor vision' (Foster 2002). As the report notes, 'Those [poverty and environmental problems] that can be coordinated through markets have typically done well; those that have not fared well include many for which the market could be made to work as a coordinator.' The challenge for governments is therefore to be more welcoming

of private actors through, among other things, 'a smooth evolution of property rights from communal to private' (World Bank 2003). By pushing strongly for the protection of property rights as a solution to many conflicts over resources (Primo Braga *et al.* 2000), the rights of capital are automatically privileged over many communities with whom those rights may be in conflict.

Similarly, the neoliberal biases of many development institutions lead them to assume that clients and consumers are more effective accountability seekers and demanders than 'passive recipients' (or non-recipients) of state services. The World Development Report of 2004, for example, emphasises the importance of 'enabling the poor to monitor and discipline service providers' (World Bank 2004). Fiszbein, also writing for the World Bank, argues that the key issue in this regard is 'whether those responsible for designing and delivering services are accountable to the citizens who are demanding the services and also paying the taxes and fees that finance services' (2005). Power exercised through consumer choice in the market is said to improve basic services as firms compete to attract new customers. Corrupt, unresponsive firms will quickly lose customers in this model. The problem with such *marketised* notions of accountability is that they tend to overlook prior issues of exclusion and lack of access to key services. The very poorest, those most in need of services responsive to their needs, are of least interest to private utilities seeking to make a profit. For example, we shall see how in South Africa private contractors have cut off access to water when people are unable to pay, despite their

constitutional right to water. Hence reducing accountability relationships to purchasing power invites an anti-poor bias (Whitfield 2001; Goetz and Gaventa 2001).

Placing power centrally, it becomes easier to discern why some forms of accountability politics are privileged over others, why some actors face more scrutiny than others, why some accountability deficits are addressed and others neglected. As we see in Chapter 2, this has to be understood in relation to the power wielded by key actors in development and their ability to project preferred discourses of accountability. For now, it is sufficient to note that, despite claims to the contrary, the politics of accountability are not value-neutral and key actors advancing the contemporary agenda in development are neither neutral bystanders nor indifferent to the outcomes.

Accountability and social justice

By framing the issue of accountability in narrow institutional terms we run the risk of failing to ask, let alone answer, the question of accountability *for what* and *for whom*? Who benefits, for example, from efforts to reform the state in ways prescribed by global economic institutions? If improved access for the poor is the aim, it is questionable that shifting service provision to private hands in the name of efficiency and combating corruption will achieve that, for some of the reasons stated above. On the other hand, promoting the accountability of corporations to the communities in which they invest through more effective use of public

hearings or efforts to screen investment proposals – measures aimed at enhancing the exercise of social control over economic actors – may bring about a shift in the power imbalances that currently protect the powerful from scrutiny. A key theme emerging from the work presented in this book is that accountability struggles are invariably struggles for a broader social or economic good. They provide the means to an end which has to be specified in order to understand the utility and likely effectiveness of the strategy adopted.

Central to the instances where these strategies lead to improved accountability are a set of methods that rely on the participation of poor and marginalised people. This book touches on a range of these methods, including citizen health monitoring and participatory development reports in India, community-based environmental audits in Mexico, local-level health councils in Brazil, and environmental justice clinics in the United States. Many of the chapters in this book are based on 'action research' engagements, where participatory methods for demanding accountability are part of the research process. Some important questions arise from these examples: how do these methods affect wider political structures and power relations; and what is their potential for contributing to the democratic processes that could contribute to wider social change? The potential of such strategies to contribute towards civil accountability is explored in Chapter 2, as well as more fully in the context of the case studies that describe the settings from which they are derived.

In sum, the project of accountability is not a politically neutral philanthropic exercise aimed at removing the obstacles that prevent the poor from realising rights and accessing justice. It can also seek to fulfil those aims, but it does not necessarily do so. Depending on the actor and the goal in mind, it may even be considered unlikely to do so. Misguided reforms can serve to further consolidate power if extra checks and balances are not introduced simultaneously – and not just within the formal institutions of governance but across society, creating new opportunities for democratic engagement about who performs which roles in society, on behalf of whom, and for what.

Neither is accountability a new concept. Rather it has been a narrative, albeit sometimes a silent or subdued narrative, running through the course of history, that describes the relations of power between those with more and less power. In this sense, the studies contained in this book suggest the need to reclaim the concept of accountability from the bureaucrats, the institutionalists and the development industry in general. It is a potentially powerful and emancipatory concept given that, at its core, it seeks to describe the appropriate relationship between state, market and civil society. Within the good governance agenda, this has been predominantly understood as a legal relationship, devoid of the social contracts that underpin it. This is a mistake, because it negates the politics and practice of accountability as it is experienced and lived by the world's poor on a daily basis. A conversation about accountability should be a conversation about democracy and rights, and how these can be constructed to reinforce one

another. Acknowledging this allows us to engage in a more fundamental debate about what type of democracy we want. Struggles over resources provide one site for this conversation to begin, because access to resources is fundamental to substantive rights and the exercise of citizenship.

Conclusion: the citizenship dimension

Because rights frame the possibilities for making claims, and accountability frames the relationships between actors and institutions that are necessary for these rights to be realised, important implications for citizenship emerge.

Understanding the politics of the relationships between rights, resources and the politics of accountability draws attention to both the risks of greater exclusion and fragmentation, as powerful interests marshal control over important resources, and the potential for an increase in awareness and implementation of rights that can construct substantive citizenship. What is at issue here is the right to have rights, particularly where resources are at stake. Accountability struggles and strategies, through seeking to challenge the power relations that shield state and other actors from answerability, are an important element in making citizenship real.

Though we have argued that accountability, in the first instance, should be about the relationship between the powerful and those with less power, we have noted

that state accountability is privileged over all other forms of accountability, not least within the good governance agenda. The assumption is that democracy will be achieved once the institutional mechanisms that allow citizens to hold states accountable are in place. Yet the strategies for demanding accountability explored in this book demonstrate a variety of actor-orientated forms of citizenship, where the boundaries between state and society are blurred, and citizen participation in accountability struggles is an essential element of how citizenship is constituted (see Leach, Scoones and Wynne 2005).

By shedding new light on diverse strategies and approaches to accountability, a more nuanced picture of citizenship emerges. Kabeer argues in *Inclusive Citizenship*, an earlier book in this series, that substantive citizenship from the perspectives of marginalised and excluded groups is based on justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity. She goes on to make a case for recasting 'vertical' citizenship, based on the narrow relationship between people and states, into 'horizontal' citizenship, which recognises the multiple and overlapping connections and relationships that actually emerge from daily experiences. As many of the chapters in that volume show, collective action has been crucial in addressing 'situations where the state has proved consistently unresponsive to the needs of its citizens' (Kabeer 2005: 23).

Citizenship, then, is also understood in relation to processes of demanding accountability from powerful actors and institutions. Possibilities for accountability

are, therefore, strongly shaped by how citizenship is exercised, enforced and denied. If making accountability demands (on the state, or even the private sector and civil society actors) is a way of expressing citizenship, then there are important linkages between accountability struggles and the character of citizenship. In order to be able to make accountability claims, there must be an implicit assumption about the roles and responsibilities of the state, as well as the rights and entitlements of citizens.

Several chapters in this book also point to how involvement in struggles for accountability can change people's perceptions of their rights, responsibilities and, indeed, their role as citizens. Because demands for rights are linked to accountability, these struggles can change the way people understand citizenship. In Bangladesh, the right of women to work in the garment industry has had important implications for citizenship. Despite the accountability problems in the garment sector, the right to work has challenged certain elements of patriarchy by giving a new sense of entitlement and citizenship to many women. Through increased financial independence, women have gained an awareness about rights and citizenship that might not have been possible otherwise.

In so far as citizenship confers material and political (process) rights, it also implies access to resources and channels of representation in decision-making processes that govern their use. Even with an increased awareness of rights,

marginalised and excluded groups are unlikely to consider themselves true citizens if they are unable to access resources and entitlements such as adequate housing, health care, clean water and an unpolluted environment (see Wheeler 2005). When we use a resource lens to understand struggles for rights and accountability, the importance of daily struggles against material deprivations comes to the fore. This highlights the role that the lack of access to resources can play in denying substantive citizenship and unravelling shared imaginings of political community. Watts (2003: 5097) notes the importance of oil to the nation-building process and the creation of an 'oil nation'. He argues that it 'is a national resource on which citizenship claims can be constructed. As much as the state uses oil to build a nation and to develop, so communities use oil wealth to activate community claims.' The lack of access to resources and the politics of gaining that access are, therefore, bound up not only in individual perceptions of citizenship, but also in the overall sense of belonging and recognition that underlies national citizenship.

Though we have sought to locate this book in relation to existing literatures and debates, and to summarise some of their insights for a broader audience, we hope that one of the greatest contributions of these studies will be to illuminate experiences of struggles for rights and accountability from around the world, as lived experiences. As Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley note: 'A full understanding of rights begs for empirically grounded analyses, not philosophical "what ifs"' (2003: 1) 'Ordinary people ... respond to their lived experiences and their

understanding of those experiences, not to the intellectual frames the scholarly community imposes to make sense of those experiences' (2003: 51). The studies that form the basis of this book attempt to engage people's own terms of reference for making sense of accountability and rights struggles. This helps to capture the diverse value systems people have and the cultural repertoires they employ to understand the politics of accountability. We hope that this book offers some insights into the prospects for substantive improvements in accountability, where poor and marginalised groups have a central role in achieving change.

Structure of the book

Chapter 2 provides a critical overview of debates about accountability in development, exploring competing notions of political, social, managerial and civil accountability in relation to the key themes of the book.

The remainder of the book is divided into two sections. The first focuses on cases where the entry point for accountability struggles is formal and informal rights that are directly related to particular resources. The second brings together cases where accountability claims are broader than a specific right to a resource, framed around concerns with land, working conditions or access to resource revenues. This section includes examples where accountability struggles engage more specifically with corporate actors.

The first section of the book includes chapters where rights to a particular resource are at the heart of attempts to claim accountability. In Chapter 3 Lyla Mehta explores the case of South Africa, where there is a constitutional right to water, in order to understand issues of accountability where the state both fails to act and implement the right to water. It looks at how the right to water is implemented in practice – and at the contradictions between a rights-based approach to water and a market-driven approach. This chapter shows both the difficulties of operationalising formal rights, and how the right to water has had mixed effects on the lives of the poor in South Africa.

In Chapter 4 Luisa Paré and Carlos Robles focus on struggles for accountability by rural indigenous groups engaged in the sustainable management of a rapidly declining watershed in Veracruz, Mexico. There are many different actors and overlapping institutions involved, with often competing interests, including traditional/communal structures such as *ejidos*[6] and urban and rural municipal governments. Paré and Robles, on the basis of their long engagement as action researchers in the region, discuss how, together with the indigenous communities, they have been able to implement mechanisms to increase accountability, where the meanings of accountability are deeply rooted in local experiences and culture.

In Chapter 5 Carlos Cortez and Luisa Paré, presenting another case from Mexico, compare the accountability issues emerging from two protected natural

areas (PNAs) or reserves designed to conserve rainforest. As these PNAs are established, conflicts over the meaning of land rights and knowledge rights (especially traditional medicinal knowledge) emerge. These conflicts are in part a result of the overlapping web of actors and institutions involved in the PNAs. Within a context of conflict, where there are fundamental and underlying disagreements about what the environment and 'nature' mean, the prospects for accountability lie in political mobilisation.

In Chapter 6 Celestine Nyamu-Musembi documents the story of a tenants' association in Mombasa, Kenya, which is trying to claim the right to housing and demand accountability from the local government. In the process, the association calls upon international legal frameworks that guarantee the right to adequate shelter. But when the local government proves unresponsive, residents use direct action to challenge the lack of accountability. This chapter help expose dilemmas facing community-based groups who use rights as an accountability strategy.

Finally, Chapter 7 by Andrea Cornwall, Silvia Cordeiro and Nelson Delgado focuses on the right to health in North-eastern Brazil. The main mechanism for accountability in this case is a local health council, mandated by the Brazilian constitution, that acts to oversee health care provision in a particular municipality. This chapter explores how the complex political dynamics involved in the council undermine the prospects for accountability.

The second part of the book explores questions of corporate accountability. Chapter 8 – by Peter Newell with Vaijanyanta Anand, Hasrat Arjjumend, Harsh Jaitli, Sampath Kumar, and A.B.S.V. Ranga Rao – uses three case studies from India to expose the frontline of corporate accountability where communities confront corporations in situations of huge power disparity. The case studies include the controversy surrounding the National Thermal Power Corporation power plant in Andhra Pradesh; the struggles around the development of the Lote Industrial area in Maharastra; and conflicts around tribal rights and mining in Jharkhand. Newell *et. al.* catalogue some of the community-based strategies that have been used to challenge corporate power at a local level, reflecting on their effectiveness and the implications for corporate accountability.

In a similar vein, Chapter 9 by Rohit Lehki and Peter Newell also analyses community-based strategies for corporate accountability. It does so by bringing experiences from the global North into the book, focusing on the environmental justice movement in the United States. The chapter documents some of the strategies used by activists from communities of colour to demand greater accountability from state and corporate actors for the location of sites of hazardous and toxic waste in their neighbourhoods. Reflecting on the role of law in particular, this chapter shows both the importance of judicial activism and the ways in which law can work against the poor.

Amidst the extensive literature on oil and the resource curse in Nigeria, Chapter 10 by Oga Steve Abah and Jenks Okwori explores community-level perspectives on accountability through drama and participatory research. The focus of this chapter is on the meanings and dynamics of accountability at the community level in a context of resource abundance where corporations exert significant influence. Perceived collusion between government and the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta has led to the creation of youth groups and womens' organisations, working with and at times claiming to represent communities in ways that themselves create new accountability challenges. Their activities are understood as a response to the failures of the state to guarantee accountability.

Chapter 11, by Naila Kabeer and Simeen Mahmud, considers the challenge of creating a culture of accountability around labour rights in the context of the garment industry in Bangladesh. They contrast a culture of compliance, deriving from buyer pressure for the adoption of international standards, with a culture of accountability that challenges more fundamental relations of power in the workplace. The competitive and globalised nature of the garment industry, and the poor track record of the state and labour unions in protecting labour rights, mean that garment workers are confronted with difficult choices in demanding accountability from their employers and articulating the rights that matter to them most.

Finally, also on the theme of worker rights, Stephanie Luce returns to the perspective of the global North to document the experiences of the living wage movement in the United States. She shows how the movement has had to use strategies both within existing power structures (in direct negotiations with municipal government) and outside them (through public protest) in order to achieve greater accountability and the implementation of the living wage. Facing the difficulty of setting an acceptable and applicable living wage standard, workers' organisations have fought instead for the right to a living wage that can be tailored to the context in which it is to be realised.

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