

Innovative thinking and practice in local governance

A synthesis of research papers produced for the Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance Network (DLGN). Face to Face (F2F) Meeting, Aswan, Egypt, May 2013

The outline of research papers contained in this overview is an effort to identify knowledge gaps, propose practical approaches, and scan new horizons that enhance development thinking and practice. The goal of these research summaries – and their corresponding papers – is to help inform and expand development initiatives of the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency (SDC) and their DLGN partners.

Some of these papers have surveyed latest development thinking to challenge and propose fresh questions: “Why and when do citizens prefer local informal institutions to provide ways of service delivery?” Or “How can social accountability be enhanced in a post conflict context?” Other papers like the ‘Practice guide to political economy and power analysis’ offer guidance to practitioners to maximise SDC’s development impact. Our overall goal is to stimulate innovative thinking on how to produce improved, inclusive, transparent and sustainable development interventions at the local level.

A number of printed copies of the full research papers will be available at the F2F or they can be downloaded from the SDC-DLGN site at <http://bit.ly/1244a9v>

Practice guide: a combined approach to political economy and power analysis

*Andres Mejia Acosta and Jethro Pettit
(a.mejiaacosta@ids.ac.uk; j.pettit@ids.ac.uk)*

The purpose of political economy and power analyses (PEPA) is to explain power relations and political dynamics in the formulation, adoption and implementation of development initiatives. Despite having different backgrounds and methodologies, both frameworks share the common objective of unpacking the visible, invisible and hidden relationships between key actors involved in producing (or blocking) meaningful changes.

The practice paper offers a simple step-by-step guide to help development practitioners identify the critical actors and institutions needed to facilitate or block new policies, including:

- a stakeholder analysis to understand the motivations, interests and strategies of key development actors

- an understanding of the formal rules and informal practices that shape their behaviour
- an analysis of the formal and informal mechanisms they use to ensure cooperation over time
- a discussion of the theories of change involved and the existing or alternative narratives justifying development interventions.

This practice guide uses several examples and testimonies from SDC project assessments, as well as experiences obtained from practical PEPA workshops.

“Political Economy and Power Analyses share the common objective of unpacking the visible, invisible and hidden relationships between key actors involved in producing (or blocking) meaningful development changes”



Photo: Panos/Adam Hinton
Male and female protesters shout and wave flags and placards during a demonstration in Tahrir Square, November 2012

Egypt: unfinished transition or unfinished revolution?

Mariz Tadros (m.tadros@ids.ac.uk)

This paper cautions that if external political analysis fails to capture the pulse of the street in Egypt today, a situation much like that at the wake of the uprising of January 2011, where change happens through actors, spaces and mechanisms that are least expected, could come around again. The paper focuses on Egypt's transition, and offers a number of findings:

- in the post-Mubarak era, a liberal western procedural approach that equates ballot box activity with democracy is too simplistic
- an engagement with a broader array of indicators would in fact suggest that ballot boxes and authoritarianism can thrive side by side.

In order to avoid the kind of disconnects from citizen realities that characterized analysis during Mubarak's era, it would be helpful to understand the spaces and forms through which unruly politics is thriving in Egypt today.

Decentralisation and social cohesion in religiously heterogeneous societies in transition: a case study from Egypt

Mariz Tadros (m.tadros@ids.ac.uk)

This paper explores the linkages between decentralisation and social cohesion within communities of differing religious backgrounds. It builds on the case of post-Mubarak Egypt, where an increased but informal devolution of power to

manage relations between the majority Muslim and minority Christian populations has not alleviated community tensions. The paper uses a power analysis framework to understand the impact of devolution on social cohesion.

Key messages from the research include:

- devolution of power, if not accompanied by measures to ensure inclusive politics, may undermine social cohesion and increase violence against minorities
- the emerging balance of power after the revolution has increased tensions between different religious groups and eventually undermined social cohesion
- in the post-Mubarak context, the use of informal conflict resolution mechanisms and other practices associated with decentralisation have further undermined social cohesion

“ devolution of power, if not accompanied by measures to ensure inclusive politics, may undermine social cohesion and increase violence against minorities ”

Connecting citizens to the state: informal local governance institutions in the Western Balkans

Shandana K. Mohmand, and Snezana M. Mihajlovic
(s.mohmand@ids.ac.uk)

Informal institutions, that lie wholly or partly outside formal state structures, have tremendous potential to strengthen citizen participation, encourage inclusive decision-making and promote improved service delivery at the local level.

The authors discovered that local informal governance institutions are widespread throughout former Yugoslav countries, but empirical research on these models is limited. The paper reviews the existing literature and reported practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia. The authors key question is, how do informal local governance institutions facilitate relations between citizens and the state around service provision and other governance functions?

The authors offer a number of conclusions, including:

- informal institutions in these countries play an important role in citizen participation, inclusive decision-making and service provision
- where these institutions work, citizen participation can be truly organic, and need not require external actors and interventions to foster it.

“informal institutions – that lie wholly or partly outside formal state structures – have tremendous potential to strengthen citizen participation, encourage inclusive decision-making and promote improved service delivery at the local level”

Outcome measurement in local governance programmes: a power dimension

*Rosemary McGee and Jethro Pettit
(r.mcgee@ids.ac.uk; j.pettit@ids.ac.uk)*

This paper explores how outcome measurement is understood in several SDC local governance programmes, reviewed in a HELVETAS Learning Project. This critical review assesses the extent to which power issues are recognised, understood and tracked within such programmes and suggests ways to enhance this.

Some highlights of this review include:

- being clear about what power and empowerment mean in a particular context, and how they are expected to change (e.g. with a theory of change), can lead to better indicators and methods for measurement
- the way power is implicitly understood in local governance programmes and outcome measurement can lead to a focus only on the more formal and visible dimensions of power
- the complexity of power means that a more clearly articulated and power-aware theory of change underpinning the intervention is needed.

For democratic local governance initiatives to contribute to shifting power, programme staff need to (1) explicitly define and include power in the initiative's theory of change at design stage; (2) clarify what shifts in power are intended; and (3) determine how these shifts can be observed.

Enhancing decentralisation and local governance in post-independence Kosovo: is there a role for social accountability?

Markus Schultze-Kraft (m.schultzekraft@ids.ac.uk)

This paper claims that conventional notions of accountability that strengthen relationships between citizens and the state and help the effective provision of public services and goods, are often weak or absent in fragile countries that are emerging from violent conflict. The question is: can decentralisation efforts (often associated with strengthening accountability) contribute to building stronger accountability in fragile and/or post-conflict settings?

This paper focuses on Kosovo where despite efforts by the international community to help establish a functioning system of decentralised governance, accountability remains weak. There are two major findings:

- in a context where the international community has used decentralisation as a peace-building tool, the focus on accountability has received secondary importance. The decentralisation strategy has also not taken into account the impact and strength of countervailing forces such as widespread corruption and the absence of an active local civil society
- the paper questions whether citizen-driven, social accountability initiatives still have the potential to re-energise Kosovo's faltering decentralised state-building project.



Photo: Panos/Andrew Testa
Members of the Kosovo Security Force, which will replace the disbanded Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), train in Pristin

Context matters: a causal chain approach to unpacking social accountability interventions

Anu Joshi (a.joshi@ids.ac.uk)

A common premise of development interventions is that context matters for development outcomes, yet there is little understanding of how exactly 'context' affects outcomes and which contextual factors matter most.

The paper focuses on social accountability interventions, to explore macro and micro contextual factors. On the macro side, accountability processes need to take into account larger histories of citizen state engagement and related political processes. At the micro level, local factors can clearly drive the way certain social accountability interventions unfold and the extent to which they are successful, even within otherwise broadly similar contexts.

The research builds on the individual components of accountability and proposes a 'theory of change/ causal chain' strategy to better understand the micro-context.

A number of key points emerge from the paper:

- the existing evidence could potentially be recombined to assess the promise of existing and new interventions by deconstructing the various mini-causal pathways (i.e. in the micro-context) and understanding the contextual conditions that make them work
- existing interventions could be assessed for the extent to which they travelled along the causal chain while identifying the main roadblocks to impact.

Next steps: scanning research horizons

Re-imagining development approaches requires a combination of innovative thinking, direct engagement with practitioners and creative ways of sharing new knowledge. This research synthesis offered a preview of how IDS thinking and practices can contribute to DLGN's development agenda. Looking ahead, these works suggest that we need to better understand: which informal institutions can improve development outcomes and the ways in which they work; how to gauge "the pulse" of the citizens on the street outside conventional ways; or how to apply political economy and power analysis approaches to understand specific sectors such as the financing of local governments.

In the near future, IDS will continue to support DLGN partners through different means, such as exploring these and new development questions, taking our research findings to new contexts, enhancing capacity building options with SDC staff and DLGN partners, and contributing to research dissemination and uptake.

For more information, resources and queries either visit: www.ids.ac.uk/project/the-governance-of-service-delivery or contact: S.Schirmer@ids.ac.uk



Democratization, Decentralization and Local Governance Network



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Credits

This research synthesis was written by Andres Mejia Acosta and Jason Collodi. It had input from Anuradha Joshi, Rosie McGee, Shandana Mohmand, Jethro Pettit, Markus Schultze-Kraft and Mariz Tadros.

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Institute of Development Studies Brighton BN1 9RE UK
T +44 (0) 1273 606261 F + 44 (0) 1273 621202 E ids@ids.ac.uk W www.ids.ac.uk