

GOVERNING FOR THE COMMON WEALTH? THE WORLD BANK'S APPROACH TO POVERTY AND GOVERNANCE

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The World Bank's 1989 document *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* signalled a turning point in the World Bank's policy agenda for Africa. The report contained the seeds of two important new policy agendas: a concern with national institutional capacity for economic, social, and political management, or governance, and a sharper focus on poverty reduction. Both the Governance and the Poverty agendas are central to the Bank's response to disappointments with structural adjustment, and both mark a departure from – or at least temper – the Bank's traditional singular focus on economic growth. By relating, at least implicitly, issues of power and governance to the causes of and responses to poverty, *From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* also contained elements of a more politicized analysis of development problems than is common in Bank documents.

Since 1989, however, the Governance and Poverty agendas have moved away from this. They have received separate treatment, elaborated through a range of policy documents which do not explicitly address the politics of poverty.¹ This paper argues that this undermines an important policy opportunity: to enhance the accountability of governments to the needs of the poor – which is after all presumably the hallmark of 'good governance' in poor countries. These two agendas have been taken up differently by other development institutions. Here, however, we focus on the World Bank's interpretation on the grounds that as a prime policy direction-setter in the development field, its policy discourses have an important role in shaping the way other development actors interpret new policy agendas.

1 POVERTY, POWER, AND GOVERNANCE

From Crisis to Sustainable Growth identifies 'a crisis of governance' behind the 'litany of Africa's development problems' (World Bank 1989: 60). The document defines governance broadly as the 'exercise

of political power to manage a nation's affairs' (*ibid.*), and it argues:

African governments (...) need to go beyond the issues of public finance, monetary policy, prices, and markets to address fundamental questions relating to human capacities, institutions, governance, the environment, population growth and distribution, and technology (*ibid.*:1).

This list of 'fundamental questions' carries normative overtones – not so much about the form of government as about the values and purposes towards which it should be oriented. Connecting these 'fundamental questions' to patterns of governance means a recognition of the importance of political issues – questions of government legitimacy and the relationship between states and their citizenry – in determining what happens to the project of human and social development.

Questions of the exercise of power are central to problems of poverty. At the most obvious and general level, poverty is the outcome of the lack of economic, social, and political power of certain groups, and of the direct exercise of power by other groups situated structurally by virtue of class, gender, race, age, or ethnicity to exploit privilege. The project of reducing poverty inevitably challenges the privileges of the powerful; it poses tremendously difficult political problems related to means of reorienting institutions to favour the interests of the poor, and raises fundamental issues of social conflict over resources and civil rights. In development contexts the state and its bureaucracies are central arenas for conflicts over resources and values in development as they often hold a near-monopoly on resource mobilization and policy formulation.²

Implementing the Bank's Poverty agenda, which was articulated in the Bank's 1990 World Development

¹ The Bank's recent work on participation is beginning to bring the two agendas back together again, through its recognition of power issues which affect the meaning and nature of participation.

² The problems of sub-Saharan African states and economies are the central focus of both the Poverty and Governance agendas, although both these agendas in principle apply across the full geographical range of Bank operational activities.

Report, raises a set of political problems directly related to government legitimacy and the meaning of citizenship for the poor. Poverty reduction requires national commitment to a set of policies which respond to the interests of the poor. Redistributive policies are classically resented and obstructed by the powerful (Lowi 1964), and the political feasibility of pro-poor policies generally hinges on the degree to which they leave vested interests, and hence underlying structures producing poverty, intact (Nelson 1989). Policies which challenge deeply internalized systems of inequality, such as efforts to integrate excluded ethnic groups, or to reduce women's disprivilege, arouse even more profound hostility (Staudt 1985). While grand and visible projects have been welcomed by governments in power – as tangible symbols of leadership – poverty reduction programmes have traditionally not been high on the political agenda.

Effective pursuit of poverty reduction strategies requires substantial national-level commitment and considerable institutional capacity to resist capture by dominant groups and to defend the interests of the poor. The Bank's Governance agenda is oriented precisely towards institutional capacity building to improve the accountability of public institutions. The following two sections identify the place of concerns with poverty reduction and distributional equity in prescriptions for 'good governance'. It also explores the place of governance concerns in the Poverty agenda.

2 THE GOVERNANCE AND POVERTY AGENDAS

The Bank's Articles of Agreement forbid explicit consideration of politics or issues such as democracy, and as such, unlike some other multilateral institutions and bilaterals, its approach to governance does not bear on the form of political regimes but on the management of a country's economic and social resources, and on the capacity of government to design, formulate, and discharge its functions (World Bank 1994: xiv)³.

³ DAC members, for example, are more explicit in relating regime forms to development outcomes. 'DAC members believe that sustainable development requires a positive interaction between economic and political progress. This connection is so fundamental that participatory development and good governance must be central concerns in the allocation and design of development assistance. The interest of the DAC members is particularly in supporting the road towards democratization in developing

In Governance documents, poverty issues are raised primarily with respect to the operational rubrics of accountability and the legal framework. Micro-level accountability, to be achieved through decentralization, competition, and participation, relies on interest groups' capacities to exercise effective 'voice' to influence service provision⁴. Similarly, legal reform measures require the effective exercise of 'voice' in deploying the law in 'the struggle against discrimination, in the protection of the socially weak, and in the distribution of opportunities in society' (World Bank 1994: 23). There is no discussion, however, of the many obstacles which prohibit disenfranchised groups from using 'voice' effectively, nor of mechanisms to ensure that their perspectives are institutionalized in accountability mechanisms. Effective utilization of new accountability measures or the law requires changes to institutions like the police, the judiciary, or local government to reorient them towards the interests of the poor, or other marginalized groups like women, or certain ethnic groups. The accent, however, is on opening opportunities for access, not on enforcing positive responses to disprivileged groups. At best, new consultative mechanisms for improving the expression of local needs are envisaged, while measures to monitor and regulate the effectiveness of these mechanisms are thin on the ground – the exercise of consultation is taken as a proxy for accountability.

An important part of the Governance agenda which addresses some of these concerns is the accent on participation. The promotion of participatory development, 'thought of as a local-level reflection of good governance' (World Bank 1994b: 42), is implicitly tagged as the basis of effective accountability of public institutions. It is here that the poor feature most prominently in the Bank's Governance discourse, with a recognition of their lack of access to public services or effective voice in the political decision-making process. Effective participation is expected to flow from good governance policies – including staff incentives, skills training of civil servants, administrative and fiscal

countries, reflecting the basic aspirations of their peoples.' (DAC 1994: 7).

⁴ Samuel Paul defines 'voice' as the management of participation and/or protest to induce service providers to perform. 'Exit' is another mechanism for improving accountability – where people turn to alternative service providers (Paul, 1992: 1048).

decentralization, and dialogue between governments and civil society. The other instruments for participatory development are primarily methodological, relating to the nature of the Bank's dialogue with governments, the use of stakeholder⁵ analysis in Bank projects, the use of participatory research methods in research on poverty, and the involvement of communities and NGOs in project implementation (World Bank 1994: 44).

Interestingly, the emphasis on participation provides the Bank with a nominally apolitical means of injecting a normative orientation to its governance proposals – it cannot directly advocate democracy or distributional equity as values for, or outcomes of, good governance, but it can imply that through participation, these values may find a place in policy formation and implementation. In this respect, considerable faith is shown in the inherent democracy and equity of participation and community action by the poor. Also, participation is assumed to ensure that growth results in more equitable distribution. There is no consideration of the interests which divide the poor, let alone of the fact that consensus-based local activism can produce socially corrosive forms of association, such as those associated with ethnic loyalties or religious fundamentalisms.

Using Bank deduction, then, good governance results from continuing economic liberalization and decentralization, carried out by accountable and efficient bureaucracies to produce an economically enabling and in turn politically empowering environment. The evolution of political pluralism and social justice that contributes to the strengthening of institutions will reinforce the capacity building enterprise of the state and society. Progress towards this enabling and empowering environment relies rather heavily on assumptions about market neutrality and the capacity of groups in civil society to ensure socially positive outcomes. The Poverty agenda operates in tandem with this to promote human resource development as a means of enhancing the economic and social capacities of the

powerless to access the opportunities that come with growth.

3 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Poverty reduction as economic opportunity creation is explicit in the Bank's Poverty agenda, as articulated in the 1990 World Development Report *Poverty*. Its two main strategies are to increase opportunities for the poor to use their most abundant asset – labour, primarily through agriculture-driven growth, and to enhance the quality of their labour through improved targeting of social services (World Bank 1990: 3). As the preface to *Poverty* explains: 'the first component provides opportunities; the second increases the capacity of the poor to take advantage of these opportunities' (*ibid.*: iii). A subsidiary strategy involves the provision of social safety nets or targeted transfer programmes for residual poverty groups which cannot benefit immediately from the first two measures.

This three-pronged strategy – labour-intensive growth, improved social services, and safety nets – has important implications for the direction of institutional change, the quality and meaning of participation, and competition over public resources – all of which are deeply political issues. The following two sections explore how the political and institutional context of poverty reduction are addressed, making reference primarily to the Bank's Poverty Assessments which are being prepared for each borrowing country.⁶

3.1 Conceptualization of poverty

A recent IDS study of the Bank's process of implementing its Poverty agenda in sub-Saharan Africa⁷ identified a range of conceptual and analytical problems in the approach to poverty reduction which affect the way issues of power and the dynamic of change are addressed. These relate to the definition and measurement of poverty, and the analysis of policy and institutional constraints on poverty reduction.

⁵ Stakeholders are 'those directly affected by a proposed intervention, i.e. those who may be expected to benefit from or lose from Bank-supported operations; particularly among the poor and marginalized'. (World Bank, 1994b: 2).

⁶ These PAs are expected to be conducted in over 80 Bank borrower countries by the end of 1995, and a total of 20 PAs for African countries were to have been completed by the end of 1994.

⁷ This examined the Bank's Poverty Assessments in eight countries (Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Uganda, and Zambia), and traced their impact on other important economic planning instruments used by the Bank, such as Public Expenditure Reviews and Country Assistance Strategies, as well as actual Bank loans. It was commissioned by the ODA and SIDA as a contribution to the deliberations of the Working Group on Poverty and Social Policy of the Special Programme of Assistance for Africa – the group of donors contributing to the Bank's IDA lending facility.

A key starting point is the identification of the poor and of the causes of their poverty. As evident from a range of PAs, the Bank relies primarily on an economic definition of poverty, where poverty is the condition of falling short of a reasonable minimum level of economic welfare. In essence, this consumption-based definition becomes a proxy for the many wider aspects of deprivation, and a condition or symptom of poverty – low income – comes to be treated as its cause. Many of the PAs do disaggregate their poverty profiles to identify sub-groups of the poor, classified according to a range of criteria – sociological factors (gender, age, disability), geographical differences (region, land quality), or political factors (retrenched civil servants, demobilized soldiers, refugees) (IDS 1994: 9-10). However, there is often little analysis of the causes, intensity, or incidence of the poverty of these groups, and insufficient care is taken to distinguish institutionalized disadvantage from temporary vulnerability. Poverty sub-groups appear to be identified primarily on the basis of social characteristics, rather than their structural location within inter-locking systems of disprivilege (Goetz, Maxwell, and Manyire 1994: 16). As a result, the effort to disaggregate poverty groups has a residual character – these are categories whose livelihood crises are inadequately mitigated by the market or traditional safety nets.

The narrow consumption-based concept of poverty has advantages in simplifying problems of measurement and comparison, but these are outweighed by the negative policy consequences of ignoring the many non-material aspects of deprivation, the resolution of which can require strategies which go beyond providing productive opportunities. Conceptualising poverty as an income problem creates 'a scenario of lack of enrichment, or failure to respond to economic opportunity rather than the classical problem of impoverishment' (IDS 1994: 8). The result is a static picture which underspecifies processes of immiseration related to livelihood insecurity, vulnerability and different socially institutionalized forms of inequality which limit the survival capabilities and contain the socially legitimate entitlements of certain categories of people. To capture these dimensions of poverty, closer attention to the social processes reproducing poverty is needed, as this will influence the poor's

response to poverty reduction interventions. The lack of attention to the politics of inequality, which occur in a range of contexts from the intimate arena of the family, to the market, and to the various points of interface between the state and the poor, is even more evident in the treatment of constraints on poverty reduction.

3.2 The analysis of constraints on poverty reduction

In effect, many of the Bank's PAs substitute an account of the impact of recent macroeconomic changes on the agricultural sector and on social sector spending for an analysis of poverty. Most lack any perspective on the historical and political causes of poverty – causes which would include an understanding of extractive colonial policies, legacies of regional neglect, contemporary political opportunism, the distribution of land and assets, as well as vulnerability to shocks in global commodity markets, and the constraints represented by severe indebtedness. Instead, the economy-wide impact of adjustment packages are assessed, with little analysis of the impact of macro and sectoral policies on specific poverty groups. The IDS report points out that this 'reflects a belief that the 'right' macro-policy mix will have sufficiently wide-ranging effects on incomes that a more detailed and disaggregated policy analysis is unnecessary, or at least premature' (IDS 1994: 20). This sometimes produces an unwarranted optimism about the impact of adjustment policies.

Overall, the bias of policy and institutional assessments tends to be towards identifying obstacles to efficiency and growth rather than direct obstacles to poverty reduction. By association, the causes of poverty are defined as shortcomings in institutionalising market-driven labour-intensive growth strategies. To quote the IDS study again, this analysis 'is in danger of making mechanical generalizations about the opportunities created for the poor by market liberalization without giving adequate attention to institutional and informational constraints that restrict participation by the poor in the opportunities created by newly liberalized markets' (IDS 1994: 20).⁸ Poverty reduction is about growth, certainly. But it is also about equity. About ensuring fair distribution. And this is something the market has historically been indifferent to.

⁸ The Zambia PA is an important exception, creating a useful counterfactual in its assessment of post-1992 macro-policies by comparing them with more pro-poor policies which might have been followed, and concluding that adjustment may have

exacerbated poverty in the short term. It also provides a model for assessing the impact of the incentive and regulatory framework on the economic opportunities of a disaggregated profile of the poor in the urban informal sector (IDS 1994: 21-22).

Identifying constraints to equity and illuminating deeper structural issues related to the distribution of land and assets therefore ought to be central to a discussion of constraints on poverty reduction. A poverty-focused analysis of the functioning of local institutions – such as the institution of the gender division of labour, or traditional safety nets, or of course, the market – would contribute to an understanding of constraints on poverty reduction strategies. This would permit an assessment of the range of entitlements of different groups of the poor according to the nature of their membership of (or exclusion from) social and economic institutions, and the range of policy responses which would be appropriate. Take for example the way the gender division of labour in certain contexts can affect the impact of a labour-intensive agricultural growth strategy for poverty reduction. The strategy assumes relative mobility of labour in response to changing price incentives, and also assumes a surplus of labour time on the part of rural producers. The labour of women producers, however, is often over-extended between productive and reproductive activities. In addition, their command over their own labour, land, and non-labour resources, as well as their access to certain markets, can be constrained by patterns of gender relations in the household and community which can limit their capacity to respond to changes in the market.

Another important area in which an analysis of the politics of distributional patterns could be carried out is in analyses of the functioning of public development delivery systems. This could identify constraints on effective pro-poor resource allocation. Formal institutions such as agricultural extension services, marketing boards, health services, and so on, often mirror and reproduce social patterns of discrimination and exclusion, affecting the capacity of different poverty groups to gain access to resources and to realize entitlements. The analysis of public institutions in the Poverty agenda, however, is less concerned with these issues than with the public sector management concerns which also animate the Bank's Governance agenda. For example, in the Uganda PA a lengthy discussion of the public sector details problems of low capacity, poor accountability, and rent-seeking, but no stakeholder analysis identifies the nature of the interests shaping these outcomes, nor are public sector

management reforms assessed in terms of their capacity to make public institutions more responsive to the poor. Improved accountability to the poor in particular may require changes to modes of access, representation, and participation.

Without an analysis of the entrenched interests which sustain inequitable distribution, policy proposals to include the poor as beneficiaries are unrealistic. For example, in reference to the need for more access Poverty states that 'in general, the poor have less access to publicly provided goods and infrastructure than do other groups. On the whole, governments fail to reach the rural poor. Even in urban areas, poor neighbourhoods are less well-supplied with services than well-to-do ones' (World Bank 1990: 37). Public services are provided to those with greater political voice as is evident in the fact that urban poor have less publicly provided services than other urban groups. But when it comes to policy, supplying resources to increase access is given more importance than questions regarding opportunity of participation and power relations and their influence on the delivery of public services. The emphasis is on service provision, not structural change.

It must be acknowledged that the Bank's hands are tied in this respect. Its national-level policy instruments are produced in dialogue with governments. Highlighting the extent of the poverty problem in developing countries raises very sensitive issues. Pervasive and worsening poverty represents a failure of the national development project, a project expressing a national vision which is key to the legitimization of many regimes. Indeed, it is in response to this failure that so many governments resort to undemocratic statecraft. Illuminating distributional inequities can support the claims of oppositional forces. Unsurprisingly, many developing country governments have been reluctant to acknowledge connections between poverty and patterns of exercising power, let alone to acknowledge the extent of poverty in their countries.⁹

The Bank is candid on this problem: '... tilting the distribution of new investment in favour of the poor is likely to be more popular than reshuffling the stock of existing assets. If redistribution is impossible, the case for spending more on education and

⁹ In the Bank's Mali Poverty Assessment, for example, it was obliged to avoid the use of the word 'poverty' in the title of its report: *An Assessment of Living Conditions in Mali* (World Bank,

1993), in deference to official ideologies which maintain that low degrees of socio-economic differentiation apply in the country. (IDS 1994,

other forms of investment in human capital is all the stronger' (World Bank 1992: 53). In terms of the political feasibility of poverty strategies this is sensible. However, as the next section suggests, the Governance and Poverty agendas frame the questions of social policy for the poor, the role of civil society, and the general direction of institutional change, in ways which may weaken the potential for structural change inherent in greater investment in human resource development.

4 LINKING THE TWO AGENDAS: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The two policy agendas have the problem of institutional change at their core. Both agendas also see an important role for civil society in driving change in socially positive directions, although this is much more explicit in the Governance than the Poverty agenda. However, the approach to institutional change in the Governance agenda does not identify poverty reduction as an explicit objective, while the poverty agenda underspecifies the politics of institutional change in poverty reduction strategies.

In the following discussion, institutions are understood as described by Douglas North, as the set of formal and informal rules which are administered by organizations (North 1990). In the Governance agenda, the major focus of institutional change is the rapid reduction of transactions costs, understood as the range of institutional practices which decrease efficiency and corrode virtues such as impartiality. In the Governance agenda, the major objective of reducing these costs is to promote economic efficiency. Particular emphasis is put on reducing transactions costs to business, through improving the efficiency of institutional frameworks in defining and protecting clear property rights, and in enforcing contractual arrangements. This promotes a new set of market-oriented institutions to guarantee the security of planned investments, and thereby improve the political and economic sustainability of market reforms.

There are important accountability trade-offs to consider in the effects of this form of institutional change on the changes needed to promote the interests of the poor. For example, streamlining public administration and devolving some of its functions to the market may exacerbate the problems of the exclusion of the poor (and hence, government

accountability). Market-guided economic reforms do not necessarily favour the concerns of the poor, given their deficit in marketable resources. When it comes to managing development services, the poor can be a more expensive constituency than the better-off, in that they may need greater staff attention, and stronger investments in their capacities to make use of opportunities and resources.

Fiscal discipline is not necessarily consistent with equal distribution, unless the objective of distributional fairness is incorporated from the start. The issue here is the **orientation** of institutional change to make it accountable to those it is meant to serve. Here, Schiavo-Campo's adaptation of North's notion of 'path dependence' is helpful in describing the implications of initial choices regarding institutional change, where 'institutional change alters the stock of social capital, albeit at the margin; ... it has a lasting, rippling impact, one must be careful not to embark on a new, inefficient path.' (Schiavo-Campo 1994: 17 fn2). The informal rules which make up institutions extend to cultural variables, including problems of elitist orientations. Unlike formal rules which can be changed with legislation, informal rules are slow to change. If these are to be altered, the problem centres on specifying from the beginning the issue to be addressed by institutional change.

Institutional change efforts are oriented to changing supply signals; while institutionalized demand response constraints receive less attention. Without attention to the differing capacities and resources of poverty groups, social and economic programmes to supply more resources to the poor may not be accessible to their intended beneficiaries. An example is an EC project to rehabilitate the tea sector in Uganda through supporting liberalization and expanding the distribution of extension services, credit, and agricultural inputs. A 1992 study to investigate a lack of response to these incentives amongst a portion of tea growers traced part of this problem to various forms of market exclusion of women tea producers (Safilios-Rothschild 1993). Effective institutional change in this case would require women tea producers to be registered with the tea cooperative system in their own names, not their husbands', to be educated in the rights which come with cooperative membership, and to be contacted directly by extension workers.

The response to this tricky issue of reorienting institutions in the interests of the poor is in the

Governance agenda's concern with seeing an expansion of the capabilities of civil society to act as a counterbalance to state power, and in the Poverty agenda's promotion of participatory development. This is the 'demand' side of the institutional change equation. The Governance and Poverty agendas are linked through their respective connection to operative words such as 'access', 'participatory development', 'creating an enabling environment' and 'empowerment'. For example, governments which do not have 'pluralistic institutional structures' (World Bank 1989: 61), restrict public access to government decision-making, which circumscribes the potential for the public to hold governments accountable for their actions. In the Poverty context, the lack of access to public services or poor provision of services undermines the objective of improving human capabilities which are enhanced by publicly provided facilities like health care clinics and schools.

Creating this 'enabling environment' and empowering people 'from the village to the upper echelons of government', (which 'also means empowering women and the poor') stems from Barber Conable's observation of the Bank's 'growing conviction that ... development must be more bottom-up and less top-down and that a learning approach to program design is to be preferred to the imposition of blueprints' (World Bank 1989: 5,4,6,xii). The question asked here regards how far the poor are included in the Bank's and member states' definition of civil society, and what the new role envisaged for civil society will involve for the poor.

Civil society is defined as the sum of interdependent parts, or 'intermediaries':

Intermediaries have an important role to play; they can create links both upward and downward in society and voice local concerns more effectively than grassroots institutions. In doing this, they can bring a broader spectrum of ideas and values to bear on policy making. They can also exert pressure on public officials for better performance and greater accountability.

(World Bank 1989: 61)

Both agendas recognize the need to amplify the collective voice of the poor in opposition to the more organized and articulate voices of urban and business groups which contribute to their exclusion from the state and the market. But aside from designating NGOs as the vehicle for ensuring that

the poor's perspectives are expressed at policy-making levels, there are no clear institutional mechanisms for enhancing the involvement and effectiveness of the poor in civil society.

The problems the poor face in seeking effective associational forms tend to be subsumed to discussions which frame the social and political activism of the poor in terms of greater involvement in community management, often discussed in the context of decentralization. This is implicit where both agendas discuss participation in terms of enhancing the capacity of local communities to perform functions which the state has not managed effectively, such as the delivery of social services. This has implications for the Bank's understanding of a range of important questions at the heart of institutional change: power issues at the local institutional level, the place of the poor in civil society or 'associational life' (Landell-Mills 1992), and operationally, for the approach to social policy for the poor.

For a start, is it reasonable to assume that if the poor cannot challenge the government that they will be any more successful in challenging local power structures? On the issue of power at the local level, the World Bank contends that:

A common mistake is to ignore local leadership, often on the grounds that it is exploitative, but there is little evidence to support that view. On the contrary, studies show that working with existing leaders produces more effective development programs. (World Bank 1989: 61)

This contention is debatable. While there is evidence to show that working within existing institutions at the local level can promote sustainable project performance (World Bank 1994b: 24), it has also often been noted that 'power at the local level is more concentrated, more elitist, and applied more ruthlessly against the poor than at the centre' (Griffin 1981: 225).

Latterly, there has been an acknowledgement in the Governance discourse that '(p)articipation is not without risk' (World Bank 1994a: 46). These risks include the danger that stakeholders may not benefit directly from their efforts, and that intermediary organizations may not represent the views of the ultimate beneficiaries (*ibid.*). Further analysis of these issues is to be found outside Governance policy documents. For example, the recent **The World**

Bank and Participation (1994b: 29) notes:

It seems timely to reconsider the Bank's role and capacity to (...) strengthen the organizational and managerial capacities of stakeholder organizations to more effectively represent the needs of their members, including the poor and disadvantaged. The Bank's capacity to help governments address both these issues will require close working relations with intermediary organizations at the grassroots level....

Problems of risk and of effective representation are precisely the issues which we have identified as begging analysis and policy response; that they are coming onto the Bank's agenda is to be welcomed. They appear, however, to be treated primarily at the micro-level. This leads to the broader question of the meaning of the poor's participation in civil society.

As Jeffries points out, the failures or retraction of state social service provision have resulted in various forms of local self-management in poor communities. This has been seized upon as evidence of the organizational and political potential of marginalized groups (1993: 33). But he warns against romanticising this process and mistaking it for real progress in popular participation and influence, and suggests that this form of 'self-encapsulation' is 'scarcely what is meant by 'the growth of civil society' in the literature on the emergence of political democracy in western Europe.' (*ibid.*)

This problem becomes clearer in Bank discussions of institutional capacity building at the community level. Bank discussions of institutional change in Africa have increasingly stressed the importance of understanding traditional community values (Williams and Young 1994; Dia 1993), and making positive use of existing community organizational capacity:

Future development strategies need to recognize that, far from impeding development, many indigenous African values and institutions can support it. For instance, the persistence of group loyalties, although often deplored by outsiders, has been a significant force for development. Communal culture, the participation of women in the economy, respect for nature – all these can be used in constructive ways.

(World Bank 1989: 60)

The Bank plans to leverage its assistance to build on these 'constructive' elements through promoting participatory local level approaches to project implementation. But on the other hand, it makes clear that there are other institutional arenas in which 'there can be little compromise' with social values: '(t)he family and ethnic ties that strengthen communal action have no place in central government agencies' (World Bank 1989: 60). Williams and Young suggest it is highly unlikely that the Bank intends to promote 'group loyalties' or 'communal culture', in its quest to strengthen domestic institutions because these values are antithetical to the Bank's market liberal agenda (1993: 92-99). Despite Bank rhetoric to the contrary, the Governance agenda has normative overtones; namely, its desire to refashion the African political system in the image of the western liberal market system. But this does not rest easily with elements of Africa's 'communal culture'.

In effect, the Bank has selectively highlighted elements of civil society that it feels are compatible with certain tasks, constructing a dichotomous approach to institutional change. The poor are asked to care for themselves on the basis of community values while sectors of civil society that are successful in the market are assisted in lobbying the government to get out of the market. Jeffries and other observers have suggested the sub-text of the Bank's support for a greater role for civil society in governance is the promotion of business associations and their influence on economic policy. The point is that different sets of rules, and different attendant rights and obligations, are being applied to different parts of society. This has implications for the place of the poor in influencing public policy.

The general approach to social development for the poor underlines this problem. There has been a tendency to transfer implementation of social safety-net programmes to NGOs and local communities. As Vivian points out, this is a strategy to create a new social infrastructure to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of social service delivery (Vivian 1994: 1). It is based on a now familiar approach to restructuring welfare economies in the West, of 'managed' competition to increase accountability and efficiency (*ibid.*: 20), and of devolving efforts to broker the satisfaction of needs claims further and further down the administrative line.

Decentralization of social service provision has been a mechanism for central governments to share the burden of costs, but it is unlikely that this represents an efficient or equitable solution to problems of social service provisioning. In the first place, the bulk of the voluntary labour supporting these services is most often provided by women (cf, Doyal and Gough 1991), exacerbating the social problems attendant on women's already over-extended labour obligations. Nor is there evidence that local self-management improves the participation of the poor - indeed, sometimes the opposite is true. In Uganda, for example, local management of the education system by parent-teacher associations evolved in response to years of civil turmoil. What is apparent now is that poorer parents are often priced out of sending their children to school where richer parents can increase the obligatory level of local contributions to school fees. Reliance on local communities can also exacerbate problems of social and regional polarization, where differences in the quality of local services develop by virtue of the wealth of particular communities in relation to others (Goetz, Maxwell and Manyire 1994: 18).

The demand-based schemes which are expected to empower recipients link neo-liberal market models of social provisioning with 'alternative' visions of local participation. This strategy for human resource development visualizes responsive decentralized networks of social providers, but makes some risky assumptions about processes of institutional change. As some analyses of this approach point out, problems of elite capture are hardly avoided, while the requirements of participation and sometimes voluntary labour contributions can leave power relations unchanged as the onus is on the poor to demonstrate their 'deserving' character, rather than on their rights to certain resources (Vivian 1994: 21). To date this approach has generated not so much a coordinated network of social service providers as random atomized efforts. In addition, the unreflective faith in the capacity of NGOs to represent the poor is challenged by some recent studies, which demonstrate their particularistic interests and their vulnerability to the same kinds of incentives as the public institutions they are expected to replace (Vivian 1994: 22; Vivian and Maseko 1994).

As Beckman points out, this reduces concepts like empowerment and accountability to a form of

managerial populism, where consensus and compliance is expected from local communities (Beckman 1992). Concepts like participation and mobilization are ambiguous. They can be political-democratic or they can be managerialist, with an accent on 'tapping' or 'releasing' the energies of the poor (*ibid.*). The result is a remarkably apolitical perspective on the meaning of participation, where issues of the fundamental conflicts between the interests of the poor and elites do not figure. Nor is the word 'justice' used in discussions of participation or empowerment; it is framed rather as a matter of enabling access, not redressing inequalities. As Doyal and Gough argue: 'in a society of pervasive inequality and unmet needs, greater participation can at best act as a fig leaf to cover the powerlessness of the poor. At worst, it aggravates their deprivation and limits their participation still further.' (1991: 308; cited in Vivian 1994: 22).

5 CONCLUSION

It must be acknowledged that the World Bank is simply not well placed to address power issues in relation to poverty. Political issues - such as those raised in discussions of distributional equity - are deemed outside of its mandate, and in addition, as it works primarily through national governments, it is constrained by regime interests. In response to these constraints, the Governance agenda has focused on the managerial problems of the state with a view towards improving the environment for the free market. The Poverty agenda retains an emphasis on adjustment policies in agriculture and better targeting of social sector spending, with little attention to the politics of reorienting public institutions to respond to the interests of the poor. In other words, the normative question: 'what is good government for?' has not been iterated directly to the poverty reduction project.

The approach to national institutional change which puts the onus on groups in civil society to provide direction to the state means that responsibility for poverty is sloughed off to NGOs and communities - the institutions least capable of engineering sustainable society-wide changes, or of inducing a reorientation in public administration. Localized service provision replaces efforts to challenge entrenched distributional inequities.

A constructive approach to carrying the two agendas forward would involve developing perspectives

on institutional change and on civil society more attentive to issues of power and poverty. This would involve close attention to stakeholder interests in institutions, and an approach to promoting associational life which includes the interests of the poor. Some of the Bank's current analytical

and methodological work on participation has the potential to do this. The challenge is to ensure that this is neither restricted to the micro-level, nor oriented primarily to a project implementation agenda, but that it becomes the basis of a new social contract institutionalising the interests of the poor.

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