



SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP

A 'HOW TO NOTE' FOR DONORS

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1. Summary

Even in stable democracies broad-based, inclusive policy ownership is rare. It is even more unlikely in country contexts that are more institutionally and socially complex and experiencing rapid economic and social change. With an aid effectiveness agenda that promotes ownership and accountability in partner countries this means looking critically at how "ownership" is constructed in the policy process and the role of donors in support. Policy is never just technical. It involves politics and power. Donors have to understand how policy works in practice (as distinct from theory) in any particular country context. It requires undertaking power analyses with themselves factored in - as organisations and individuals - who can make a positive or negative contribution. They need to be self-aware to avoid disempowering others in the policy process. At the same time, they should engage with a wide and diverse group of policy actors in state, civil society and the private sector and whenever possible support debate and locally driven independent research. While taking a back seat in providing policy advice, they should seek out and support pro-poor reform policy networks, particularly those straddling state-society divisions. Supporting the realisation of human rights for all and facilitating poor people's empowerment in all the programmes they support are two key measures that donors can employ for long term strengthening of inclusive and democratic country ownership.

Following a brief discussion of context and challenges, this 'how to note' is drafted in the form of some 'frequently (donor) asked questions':

- How can donors support pro-poor policy change?
- Why do donors have to do power analyses?
- How can donors avoid interfering politically?
- With whom should donors engage?
- How should donors work with civil society for inclusive and democratic ownership?
- Is supporting the realisation of human rights a violation of inclusive country ownership?
- How can donors facilitate poor people's empowerment for more inclusive and democratic ownership?

¹ This Note was commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation and a previous draft was presented in October 2010 at a meeting of Cluster A of the OECD/DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, chaired by Philippe Besson to whom I am very grateful for his guidance and encouragement. Thanks also to my colleague Jeremy Holland for his feedback.

2. Background: emerging trends in donor thinking

Globalisation means that no country 'is an island unto itself'. Full autonomy is neither feasible nor desirable. However, countries heavily dependent on aid have less autonomy than others. Their policy choices and capacities for action are constrained by the views and wishes of international development institutions. Ideological dependency too often accompanies financial aid. That donor driven policies do not work was the origin of the Paris Declaration's concept of 'ownership'. However, five years later, aid recipient countries are still subject to donor driven policies and donors are still wondering what to do about it. The problems that first led to the ownership agenda have not gone away (Booth 2008a). Even when aid modalities may have changed, these have not necessarily solved the problem; for example, there is evidence from Mozambique that General Budget Support has made donors more interfering (De Renzio and Hanlon 2007).

Furthermore, since Paris there has been a strong and recent donor trend to undermine the ownership agenda. The economic and financial crisis is placing donor governments under increasing pressure to demonstrate to their domestic constituencies that every Euro in the aid budget is spent efficiently and effectively. Rather than releasing control, the logic of this argument leads to donors seeking ever greater influence. As one donor representative in Mali put it, 'What donors want is a structure that can start working quickly, someone to talk to, someone who will answer the phone, answer their questions and follow up their programs - not an administration that would be efficient for and accountable to the population' (Bergameschi 2007:13). Thus, although the intention of country ownership was to reverse the process by which recipient governments were more formally accountable to their donors than to their own citizens (Horner and Power 2009), this is being undermined by an equally strong (or stronger) imperative to demonstrate to their own citizens that they are in control of how the money is spent: "The privilege of a ring-fenced budget demands more not less scrutiny so that we can look the hard-pressed taxpayer in the eye, so that we can reassure them they are getting 100p of value for every pound spent on development"²

Nevertheless, there are promising signs that development aid is in practice making progress with the ownership agenda.

Firstly, what was initially conceived in the Paris Declaration as ownership by the executive branch of government has shifted to a recognition of the role of formal representative institutions – parliament and regional and local government assemblies – as well as to an appreciation that 'civil society' participation in policy processes goes beyond the involvement of donor-friendly NGOs.

² UK Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell quoted in the Daily Telegraph 4 July 2010

Secondly, just as the Accra Agenda for Action (OECD/DAC 2008) extended the notion of country ownership beyond the executive branch of government, so also did discussions on the road to Accra highlight the notion of ‘development effectiveness’ – that aid is only effective if it achieves good development results in terms of the sustainable reduction of poverty, gender equality and the realisation of human rights (Better Aid 2010). Re- connecting ‘aid effectiveness’ with the purposes of aid links the ownership agenda to donor approaches that are grounded in the principles of participation, accountability and transparency (Horner and Power 2009). Increasing emphasis on strengthening and deepening democratic institutions reflects donor awareness that the most they can aspire to support is not broad-based ownership of specific policies such as PRSPs but rather to help states become both more effective and more accountable to all their citizens through strengthening those institutional arrangements for policy-making and implementation that have broad-based legitimacy.

Thirdly, a growing body of research evidence on power and policy processes is beginning to inform our understanding of aid relations, bringing the concept of broad-based ownership back into the real world of messy politics. When donors sought recipient country ownership of Poverty Reduction Strategies, they forgot that such ownership would be unlikely in their own countries, let alone in countries with high levels of economic inequality and political exclusion (Faust 2010). It is a very rare occurrence when all the citizens of a country are in agreement with their government’s policies. If donors want to promote democratic country ownership, they must recognise that political contest (including riots and demonstrations) and ideological disagreement are the benchmark of a working democracy.

These are three encouraging signs that the ownership agenda is connecting at one and the same time with both the ambition of the Millennium Development Goals and with the real world of aid. This note is preliminary *guide to what donors need to do more of* to sustain and strengthen their support to inclusive and democratic ownership in countries to which they are providing aid. It is couched in terms of answers to the questions likely to be prompted in response to the emerging trends in the ownership agenda that have just been discussed.

3. Frequently Asked Questions

3.1 How can donors support pro-poor policy change? ³

Think and act politically about policy

‘Country ownership’ was a response to concerns that donors were diagnosing problems and proposing policy solutions in aid recipient countries, potentially undermining

³ This section draws on Booth et al 2008, Unsworth 2010, Eyben 2008, UNRISD 2010, Menocal et al. 2007

democratic governance in the countries concerned and making governments in aid recipient countries more accountable to donors than to their own citizens. However, the manner in which donor agencies have until now tended to conceptualise policy has influenced how they have engaged with ‘ownership. Policy is understood as a response to an objectively real problem the existence and nature of which is judged as independent from the political position of those making the observation. Policy is understood as technical – a kind of testable hypothesis in relation to a publicly recognised problem – if X, then Y.

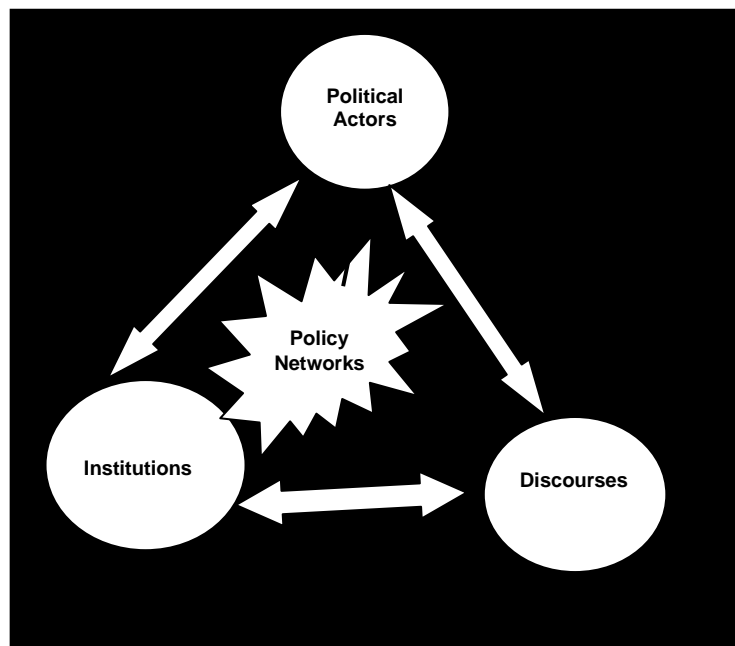
Key Quote

“UNRISD research suggests that countries that are dependent on multilateral financial institutions show high levels of policy capture by these institutions. Those with a longer history of democracy in which policy making reflects compromises between politicians and citizens have pursued more heterodox policies.”

UNRISD 2010 p.287

Research into how policy actually works in practice in countries with democratic regimes indicates that while policy can benefit from evidence and technical know-how, politics tend to over-ride technical advice, leading to policy responses of informed improvisation rather than strategic planning. The national development strategies that donors advocate for aid recipient countries have long since been recognised as of little value back home in their own countries.

Understanding how policy works in practice in any particular country is a first step to moving away from a technocratic approach. Various versions of an analytical framework are available (e.g. Keeley & Scoones 2003, McGee 2004; Booth 2008). One of these (Eyben 2008) explains the policy process as a power struggle in which people (actors) working within institutional rules of the game, draw on current ways in which we interpret our world (discourses) shape policy decisions. Policy change - or successful resistance to change- occurs through networks of people that are



operating within the constraints and opportunities offered by the institutional and discourse environment. This framework allows donors to explore where and how policy networks are operating and, identify which ones they wish to support.

A study of donor efforts to support health sector reform In Uganda and Tanzania concluded that donors could have done more to establish creative alliances among pro-poor reformers in the ministry of health and civil society groups There was a reluctance among donor staff to undertake this kind of approach because of how they interpreted the principle of country 'leaving donors to alternate between meekly accepting 'government' inadequacies and pulling out/cutting back funding, as opposed to working with like-minded groups within (and outside) government departments to change the direction of government travel' (Booth et al. 2008:16). On the contrary, in Peru DFID identified the importance of such policy networks for reforming the health sector, not only by providing them with seed-funding but also helping them broaden their appeal through adopting the discourse of a rights-based approach to health (Wilson 2005).

The policy process is always contested and the outcome often unpredictable. Hence a possible donor approach would be to develop long-term and consistent relations with recipient organisations and networks (including those within governments) which are pursuing a change agenda more or less compatible with the donor's own values and mission. Rather than aiming to achieve a pre-determined specific real-world change in which the recipient organisation is treated as an instrument for that change, the focus of donor effort would be to support reformers' own efforts in what may be a rapidly changing policy environment. DFID in Bolivia undertook such an approach in supporting for four to five years an apex organisation – the Comité Enlacé – in its efforts to represent the views and perspectives of its member associations of self-employed workers during a turbulent political period with a frequently shifting agenda.

3.2 Why do donors have to do power analyses?⁴

If donors ignore power they risk helping sustain rather than transform the institutional arrangements that keep people poor

Today a number of donors are incorporating power analyses both into their diagnostic work and their governance assessments for informing programming and policy dialogue. However, because such analyses take donors out of their 'technical' comfort zone, there may be an institutional resistance to integrate such diagnoses into agencies' day-to-day business. However, when the political contradictions and challenges in the aid relationship are 'sanitised out' in official documentation and reports, there is a high risk of donors forgetting the actual reality in which they are seeking to achieve good development results.

⁴ This section draws on OECD/DAC 2008, Bayart 2000, Tadros 2010, www.powercube/net

Key Quote

“Common approaches to citizen engagement such as the PRSP process and the plethora of “citizen summits” and “listening sessions” emphasize bringing everyone to the table as ‘stakeholders,’ but fail to recognize that underlying power dynamics between conflicting interests have a huge impact on people’s capacity to participate and influence outcomes. All stakeholders are not equal, yet they are often treated as such, while agendas and parameters of discussion are defined in ways that leave out crucial issues”.

Just Associates 2006

There are many ways of analysing how power works and shapes who is involved in or excluded from policy making.⁵ Here *is one possible framework particularly useful in support of inclusive and democratic ownership*:

- Visible power is manifest through the formal institutional arrangements for policy making and implementation, such as the civil service, the legislature, local government etc; certain policy actors, such as Ministers and parliamentarians are visibly powerful;
- Informal power is less visible – it is hidden to many observers but nevertheless shapes the policy agenda ‘behind the façade’; certain institutions and policy actors, such as the army or business elites may be very influential although not part of the formal procedural arrangements; donors are often influential in this way;
- Invisible power is at work through people’s internalisation of norms and beliefs about how the world should be and it can invisibly shape policy choices; invisible power is challenged through processes of empowerment when individuals and groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise successfully that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in conditions of poverty or marginalisation.

If donors focus only changing arrangements in relation to the first kind of power, they may find that hoped for outcomes in terms of more inclusive ownership fail to realize. For example, the increase in numbers of women in parliament in many countries has not automatically led to gender equality concerns becoming a more central policy issue

⁵ ‘Political economy analyses’ are a version of power analyses that ‘look at the distribution of power and wealth between groups and individuals’ (OECD GOVNET website) An increasing number of donors have been undertaking such studies but in 2005 it was noted that there were significant differences in focus. For example Sida was interested in human rights, democracy and poverty reduction; the World Bank on formal public institutions and informal practices within these and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on state stability (Dahl-Østergaard et al 2005). For different kinds of power analysis see www.powercube.net

(Tadros 2010). Nor does the visible presence of women’s rights organisations necessarily result in any major policy shift unless informal and invisible power are recognised and addressed. In Uganda, for instance, donors supported women’s NGOs struggling to change the policy on land reform to make it more gender equitable. Wishing to conciliate the donors, the government appeared receptive to the NGO demands but processes of informal co-optation and the invisible power that led to many women leaders fearing to challenge the patriarchal status quo resulted in a dilution of the NGOs’ demands and a failure to shift the inequitable status quo (Nabacwa 2010).

3.3 How can donors avoid interfering politically?⁶

They can’t..... Donors are political actors

Good donor practice requires informed decisions based on careful contextual analysis that importantly includes the effect of donors’ own activities and presence on this context. However, for many aid agency staff the principle of country ownership implies they should not interfere with local politics. This is why donors are often invisible in donor-funded power analyses. But even if donors decide to limit their role to the provision of objective technical advice, to whom should that advice be provided and for what end? Which policy networks are likely to make the most use of such advice and why? To act ‘technically’ in a politically complex context is likely to make donors pawns of the more powerful vested interests and therefore by default makes them, albeit, naïve, and political actors. In Bolivia, for example, donors sought to establish a civil society fund as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy without appreciating they were being manipulated in a conflict between secular and clerical factions within the ruling elite (Eyben 2003).

Key Quote

The lessons learnt from my experience, as a member of the donor community in promoting accountability in Bolivia ... suggest the need for an explicit recognition that we are political actors and that donor staff need support and training to help them perform more effectively as such. This means they need to be as effective in managing relationships as they are in managing money.

Eyben 2003: 25

Donor staff exercise power every day through how they relate to others. They may impose their own point of view, ignoring or dismissing as irrelevant other ways of understanding and of tackling problems. Those proposing alternatives feel disempowered and will drop out of the conversation, including at donor-sponsored workshop spaces where power inequalities can be all too evident - but also can be

⁶ This section draws on Booth et al 2008, Eyben 2003

successfully challenged. Supporting inclusive ownership requires donor staff developing self-awareness of how power operates in their relationship with people in the country where they are working. The organisational and individual critical self-reflection that this demands delivers benefits for donors as well as for those they work with. Donors too will learn to think differently, imagine new possibilities and debate alternative choices.

3.4 With whom should donors engage?⁷

With diverse groups of policy actors in state, political parties, the private sector and civil society

The term ‘development diplomacy’ encourages donor staff to engage with as wide as possible range of policy actors, not only to learn about the many different perspectives and diagnoses of a country’s problems and policy opportunities but also to play a helpful role in facilitating the airing of debates, including financing independent think tanks that can provide research-based evidence to add substance to these debates.

General or sector budget support can play a potentially important role in encouraging broad-based ownership of policy reform both in their own policy dialogue with governments and through facilitating civil society access to policy –making. In many cases, governments’ commitment to good development results means that such dialogue is primarily about the choice of means rather than the principle itself. These are debates that should involve not only government officials, parliamentarians and civil society policy networks but also seek to capture the views and experiences of those living in poverty. Thus, donors can play a useful role in helping make such debates an empowering rather than disempowering and exclusionary process for poor and marginalised people. However, donors should avoid playing too big a part themselves in such debates. To this end, donors need to avoid imposing a single harmonized analysis of the country’s major problems of poverty, the environment or growth. These are complex problems subject to multiple diagnoses and solutions and broad-based country ownership of the process of solving such problems is diminished if donors insist on a single diagnosis.

Key Quote

Donors would see their role not as experts bringing solutions, nor as politically neutral ‘partners’, but as convenors, facilitators and politically aware contributors to serious debate.

Unsworth 2009, p.891

Like venture capitalists, donors can simultaneously finance two different approaches to solving a problem. DFID and Sida in Bolivia supported two separate initiatives in support

⁷ This section draws on Unsworth 2009, Eyben 2008 UNRISD 2010

to people's right to identity. One was through financing a civil society consortium via the intermediary of an international NGO; the other was to finance the National Election Commission via UNDP. These initiatives each worked relatively well on their own terms. The donors were facilitating variously-positioned actors to tackle the problem according to their *different diagnoses* and consequent purposes, and thus supporting a variety of different kinds of actions and projects.

Aid agencies should not force people into partnerships but they can provide neutral spaces people can meet without any commitment other than to communicate with each other for the purpose of learning. This should be understood as a sufficient and entirely satisfactory output without any requirement for a consensual document or agreed plan of the way forward.

3.5 How should donors work with civil society for inclusive and democratic ownership⁸

By recognising that states and societies help build each other, work with policy actors in state and civil society prepared for mutual engagement.

Formal categories of nation-state and civil society may obscure rather than illuminate contextually specific and historically generated social and political practices and relationships and permeable institutional boundaries across which policy networks bargain for or resist policy change.

Donors can support such bargaining by, for example encouraging a broad-based and inclusive tax regime that engages taxpayer-citizens in politics. This concerns a process of 'constructive contestation' (Pritchett 2010) in which citizens become aware that they are taxpayers and organise themselves to make demands on government, while both sides must be in a position to reach an inclusive tax. At the same time, donors need to recognize that not all groups can be incorporated into such a bargaining regime. Inclusive ownership can occur through social movements that are contesting established values and structural power relations and have the clout to exert pressure for change from a more radical position (UNRISD 2010). Direct donor support of a social movement may put at risk its legitimacy and ways of working (OECD/DAC 2011 forthcoming) but donors can support institutions - such as human rights commissions - that keep open the space for such movements.

Strengthening civil society is not always a route to inclusive ownership, as it depends on the context and on who is involved. Furthermore, donor enthusiasm for civil society can undermine state capacity, for example when donor-financed NGOs hire the most capable state officials. Donors' encouragement of civil society without considering the capacity of the state to negotiate and respond can lead to demand overload.

⁸ This section draws on Giffen & Judge Benequista et al 2010 and Unsworth & Moore 2010.

Donors have a responsibility to ensure they relate with a broad range of civil society organisations from different perspectives and geographical bases. A common failure of donors has been to engage only with ‘user-friendly civil society’, while representatives of the more excluded sections of the population, who are less used – and possibly less willing - to meeting with educated foreigners are ignored. Donor interest in harmonisation can result in them all supporting the same relatively small group of civil society actors and reduce inclusiveness.

Key Quote

Our research strongly suggests that strategies are needed which focus on the interaction between institutions and citizens – that is, on the relationships *between* states and societies – in constructing and implementing development policy. In certain circumstances, citizen engagement with the state can help to confer legitimacy, demand accountability, influence policies, counter elite capture of resources and implement effective services. Putting citizens at the centre, as members of states and societies, is critical for moving beyond the traditional state–civil society divide that has characterised much donor funding and policy.

Benequista et al 2010 p. 3

At the same donors must avoid perceiving state and civil society as binaries in opposition to each other and missing opportunities to support networks and organisations that are straddling the divide. Donors can help by supporting those working across the state /society borders and brokering connections. This can be more effective than programmes that focus narrowly on either governance reform or civil-society strengthening. A study from Mexico looked at how reformers in the federal government (with World Bank and others’ support) facilitated policy change through creating regional economic development councils with elected representatives of indigenous producer organisations. This success depended heavily on the presence of a faction within the state institution prepared to go into partnership with autonomous social organisations. The study concludes that pro-poor change occurs when there are coalitions between state and society actors who share a common reform agenda and apply simultaneous top-down and bottom-up pressure to neutralise resistance from established elites (Fox 2004).

3.6 Is supporting the realisation of human rights a violation of inclusive country ownership?⁹

No, support to human rights for all helps strengthen such ownership.

While donors have to avoid seeking to impose the policies that they prefer – thus undermining domestic policy processes of bargaining and consensus – this should not lead them to supporting a government that seriously disrespects human rights. Donors

⁹ This section draws on Foresti et al 2006 and Benequista et al 2010

therefore have to work for a careful balance between supporting these domestic processes on the one hand and human rights conventions on the other.

Key Quote

Aid is only effective if it achieves good development results and good development results are not possible if gender inequalities persist, environmental damage is accepted or human rights are abused .

Mary Robinson
OECD/DAC Conference in Dublin 2008

Human rights can contribute to the implementation of the ownership principle because it leads to citizenship based ownership. Citizens and their representative organisations are placed at the centre of policy making. Their knowledge, voices, and mobilisation make democratic and inclusive ownership a reality. Citizenship strengthening leads to better informed people who can understand their rights and are able to engage constructively and effectively in claim-making, collective action, governance and political processes.

Human rights conventions also provide guidance on how donors can help put the ownership principle into practice through support to state and civil society capacity. Donors can provide support to strengthen citizenship rights and enable marginalised and excluded citizens to have a greater voice in governance (OECD/DAC 2006).

3.7 How can donors facilitate poor people's empowerment for more inclusive and democratic ownership?¹⁰

In addition to specific support to political empowerment, all programmes and services can be designed for empowerment multiplier effects

Political empowerment is about people's capacity to influence policy, make demands and call to account the state institutions that impact upon their lives. When people in poverty are unable to exert influence, states are unlikely to create enabling environments for good development results. Political empowerment occurs in the complex, ever-shifting and blurred boundaries of state-society relations. Poor people's empowerment through grass roots organisations and popular participation is often insufficient for changing the historical relations of inequality and exclusion that limit the state's capacity to create an enabling environment for pro-poor growth. Subordinated

¹⁰ This section draws on the author's draft of a forthcoming DAC Policy Guidance Note on empowerment and pro-poor growth

groups need to be brought into political processes through a combination of representative and deliberative institutions.

Examples of the latter include health councils in Brazil and participatory planning in Uganda, where it is mandatory for districts to channel funds further down to counties, giving greater voice to ordinary citizens than if they were engaging at the district level. Involving citizens in making decisions about the management of public resources and institutions - what has been termed 'co-governance' - is an effective way of strengthening accountability. Even so, power relations may prevent many people from speaking their minds, even if they attend the meetings organised specifically for that purpose. In these circumstances people may first need to strengthen and learn to amplify their voices within more informal and familiar community settings.

In all the programmes and projects that donors finance they can check whether these can be designed to have a broader empowering effect as well as achieving the programme's specific goals. For example, micro-finance can be empowering if attention is paid to the formation and functioning of micro-credit groups as spaces for members to articulate their needs and interests, for participatory learning and for collective action to challenge the status quo (Mayoux 2000).

Key Quote

"The landless in this locality elected me. When I was elected I tried best to serve their interests. I was very shy before I joined this organisation. I couldn't talk, was always afraid....I had never met any policeman. And now when the police arrest somebody, I myself go to the police station... I ask them why a working man has been arrested. I get them freed.... I know who is a criminal and who is a day labourer here. The rich have affinity with the rich.... We couldn't protest if they beat our children. We always worked in their house. They take us as their servant.... We want a society where there is equality. There should be no discrimination between rich and poor. My organisation is mobilising for that society".

From Mossamat Jomila Khatun's story as told to Naila Kabeer (Eyben et al 2008)

Attention to the 'how' of empowerment in addition to the 'what' of the technical objectives brings a number of advantages:

- It can lead to a higher uptake of the services on offer – children's school attendance increases and women make more use of birthing centres;

- When the project is designed to give people a voice in how a service is managed, it is more likely to be delivered efficiently and effectively;
- It may introduce shifts in power relations without being labelled an 'empowerment' project, which may seem threatening to those in authority.

4. Conclusion

This note has emphasized the importance that donors understand how policy works in practice and their need to be aware that they will be interfering politically. They should facilitate in-country debate and encourage pro poor reform networks of policy actors. Supporting the realisation of human rights for all and facilitating poor people's empowerment in all the programmes they support are two key measures that donors can employ for long term strengthening of inclusive ownership. In so doing, donors need to play a more nuanced and genuinely supportive role. This indicates the importance of recruiting, training and retaining staff able to work comfortably and sensitively with ambiguity, paradox and unanticipated outcomes, with a high degree of political acumen, sensitivity to context and strong relationship skills.

There are very rarely quick wins for donors and past gains can rapidly unravel. Donor agencies cannot 'deliver' policy effectiveness in the countries they are seeking to help. This highlights the need for donors to consider issues of attribution and contribution when measuring their effectiveness in supporting pro-poor policy outcomes in aid recipient countries. A one-sided emphasis on 'delivering and reporting results' for taxpayers in donor countries can put at risk their support to strengthening domestic accountability in partner countries.

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