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## **The Role of External Actors in Supporting Social and Political Action towards Empowerment and Accountability with a Focus on Fragile, Conflict- and Violence-Affected Settings**

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### **Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme**

In a world shaped by rapid change, the Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research programme focuses on fragile, conflict and violence affected settings to ask how social and political action for empowerment and accountability emerges in these contexts, what pathways it takes, and what impacts it has.

A4EA is implemented by a consortium consisting of: the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Accountability Research Center (ARC), the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR), the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), Itad, Oxfam GB, and the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR). Research focuses on five countries: Egypt, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Pakistan. A4EA is funded by UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policies of our funder.

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# **The Role of External Actors in Supporting Social and Political Action towards Empowerment and Accountability with a Focus on Fragile, Conflict- and Violence-Affected Settings**

Angela Christie and Richard Burge

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the role and experience of external actors, particularly donors, in supporting social and political action in fragile, conflict and violence affected settings. Evidence is distilled from a wide range of synthesised sources to generate relevant findings and questions in relation to what we know and what we don't. Included among the source material is a 2016 macro-evaluation of DFID's empowerment and accountability (E&A) programmes which examined over 50 DFID funded projects.

Themes which emerge relate to: how external actors need to think about the context and work politically; who are the most appropriate social and political actors to support in E&A; whether a direct or indirect approach to support for E&A achieves more tangible outcomes; whether external actors should move beyond short-term tools and tactics focused on one-sided engagement; and whether programmes should be designed around more strategic, multi-faceted interventions. The paper concludes with identifying a number of gaps in the evidence which are translated into a range of questions which could potentially inform the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research programme.

**Keywords:** conflict, fragility, empowerment, accountability.

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# Contents

	Summary, keywords and author notes	3
	Acknowledgements and acronyms	5
<b>1</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
	1.1 Key findings to have emerged	6
	1.2 What are the gaps in the evidence?	7
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction: Scope and limitations of the paper</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Literature review: emerging themes and questions in relation to external actor programming</b>	<b>11</b>
	3.1 Context	11
	3.2 Mechanisms and strategies	13
	3.3 Outcomes	20
<b>4</b>	<b>Looking forward: what are the gaps and how might a new research programme fill them?</b>	<b>22</b>
	4.1 What does this mean for the theory of change and conceptual framework for the Empowerment & Accountability Research programme?	22
	4.2 What do we still need to know?	23
	4.2.1 Context	23
	4.2.2 Mechanisms and strategies	24
	4.2.3 Outcomes	25
	<b>Annexe 1 DFID macro-evaluation: conceptual framework and hypotheses</b>	<b>27</b>
	A1.1 Findings: hypotheses testing	30
	A1.2 Conclusions	33
	<b>Annexe 2 Case studies: examples and exceptions</b>	<b>34</b>
	A2.1 Context	34
	A2.2 Mechanisms and strategies	36
	A2.3 Outcomes	42
	<b>References</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Box</b>		
Box A2.1	The COMARU study	40
<b>Figures</b>		
Figure 2.1	Theory of change and theory of action	9
Figure 2.2	A theory of empowerment and accountability from A4EA programme business case	9
Figure 3.1	Fox's sandwich strategy	20
Figure 3.2	External approaches to SPA	22
Figure A1.1	Hypotheses explored within the Itad macro-evaluation	28
Figure A1.2	DFID theory of change for E&A (macro-evaluation interpretation)	30
<b>Tables</b>		
Table 2.1	Linking contexts, social and political action and outcomes for E&A in FCVAS – key factors	10
Table 3.1	The role of stakeholders in supporting social and political action	15
Table A2.1	Outcomes of citizen engagement	38

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## Acronyms

A4EA	Action for Empowerment and Accountability
AcT	Accountability in Tanzania
CBD	Central Business District
CMDP	Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Peace
CMO	Context, Mechanisms and Strategies, Outcome (A4EA framework)
COMARU	Consejo Machiguenga del Río Urubamba
COPE	Creating Opportunities for the Poor and Excluded Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAP	Drivers of Accountability Programme
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Development Research Centre
E&A	Empowerment and Accountability
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EQUALS	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Services
FCO	Foreign & Commonwealth Office
FCSP	Foundation for Civil Society Programme
FCVAS	Fragile, Conflict and Violence Affected Settings
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
GSDRC	Governance and Social Development Resource Centre
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NK	Nijera Kori
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PATHS	Partnership for Transforming Health Systems
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PPIMA	Public Policy Information, Monitoring and Advocacy
RGCF	Rights and Governance Challenge Fund
RMND	Reducing Maternal and Neonatal Deaths in Rural South Africa through Revitalisation of Primary Health Care programme
RWSP	Rural Water Supply Programme
SAcc	Social Accountability
SPA	Social and Political Action
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
V4C	Voices for Change
VAWC	Violence Against Women and Girls

# 1 Executive summary

This paper explores the role and experience of external actors, particularly donors, in supporting social and political action (SPA) in fragile, conflict and violence affected settings (FCVAS). The paper has been produced to inform the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research programme, which attempts to address the overall research question: what are the best ways for external actors to support internally-led social and political actions or to create enabling conditions that contribute to empowerment and accountability? As such, the analysis in the paper is shaped by the conceptual frame used by A4EA which looks at context, mechanisms and strategies, and outcomes.

Evidence is distilled from a wide range of sources including a macro-evaluation of over 50 of DFID's social accountability interventions (see Annexe 1) and a desk-based review of case studies on SPA and empowerment and accountability (E&A) in FCVAS (see Annexe 2). This evidence has generated relevant findings and questions in relation to what we know and what we don't know about what works in supporting SPA to achieve outcomes in E&A.

## 1.1 Key findings to have emerged

- FCVAS present unique challenges for external actors in supporting SPA. Understanding the context is critical to making social and political action work. **In the past external actors have pursued separate approaches in FCVAS but are now bringing together support for the reform of state institutions with support to civil society in building state-society relations.** The evidence is limited, however the emphasis on avoiding imposing Western or generic models is well made in recent literature.
- Approaches are evolving with external actors 'thinking and working politically'. **There is increasing attention amongst external actors for a more politically informed approach to E&A programming during both design and implementation.** Growing evidence and practical guidance on how to operationally go about thinking and working politically is emerging. Evidence also points to the need to address existing power imbalances and to understand the significance of norms and perceptions of legitimacy.
- **Civil society organisations are key actors to support for E&A although the evidence shows that external actor support to civil society is more focused on empowerment than accountability.** Studies point to core principles to guide good practice in civil society engagement. The evidence of external support to civil society is extensive with varying degrees of success.
- There is **a case for external actors to consider supporting 'unruly', spontaneous and cultural forms of action such as social movements and associations.** Evidence suggests that more organic, membership-based movements are needed to secure changes in state-society relations and state institutions. This poses a challenge for external actors due to the unpredictability, politicisation and legality of such movements. But it is through social movements and associations that SPA can have the potential for inclusivity, in particular for women, girls and disadvantaged communities. While the evidence points to the value and importance of social movements and associations; it also questions whether such movements can truly lead to lasting change.
- **New social media also represents an opportunity for external actors to support spontaneous forms of SPA.** There is recent and growing evidence of new social media being used as a tool for actors who are engaged in SPA. It presents innovative opportunities for external actors to support an enabling environment by creating linkages and bringing together major stakeholders.

- Evidence is inconclusive as to whether a direct or indirect approach to support for E&A achieves more tangible outcomes. **External actors need to consider whether a more indirect approach is more appropriate – by supporting or building an enabling environment for SPA.** There is emerging evidence that suggests that what works best are interventions which influence the contextual constraints for SPA. State-citizen relationships in conflict-affected states are disproportionately shaped by indirect events and less by official channels, so external actors should identify and support citizens' informal channels of communication with the state and analyse and adjust donor funding mechanisms, scale and trends in relation to their impact on state-society relations.
- **Applying a strategic, multi-faceted approach.** There is a strong argument for external actors to move beyond short-term tools and tactics focused on one-sided engagement, towards more strategic, multi-pronged interventions that simultaneously tackle blockages within both state and society. The emerging evidence from case studies supports this viewpoint as does the macro-evaluation of over 50 DFID-funded E&A interventions (see Annexe 1). This latter evaluation confirms that 'social accountability traps' exist (i.e. improved local service delivery is almost always achieved by local social accountability processes but is more challenging to scale up or sustain) and the need to move beyond tactical approaches to achieve success at scale. E&A approaches should link the local to the national level to achieve outcomes at scale.
- **Target marginalised groups directly to leave no-one behind.** The macro-evaluation of DFID E&A interventions found that social accountability programmes should get better at identifying and designing interventions for marginalised groups, whether for localised social accountability or for more ambitious, higher-level processes.
- **The evidence points to mixed results and outcomes in terms of 'what works' in E&A programming.** While some of the earlier-dated evidence from macro-level studies and evaluations points to limited achievements (changes in practices and behaviours, gains made by more politically well-connected communities, public service improvements more at the local level, participation in local associations rather than state institutions), there are more positive conclusions from some of the more recent studies in the desk review (where initiatives are part of a wider government strategy, there is a focus on inclusion and rights-based approaches, or there is an emphasis on bringing together a wide range of actors).

## 1.2 What are the gaps in the evidence?

This paper concludes by looking at the gaps in the evidence and what this might mean for future research on E&A in FCVAS. Having briefly re-visited the A4EA theory of change, the paper identifies a number of research questions which need to be answered to address these gaps. These are structured around the A4EA frame:

### Context

- How do frontline workers understand and use political economy analysis or political analysis in practice?
- How are shifts in power dynamics or power balance understood, observed and measured by those implementing and participating in E&A programmes; and how can programmes avoid elite capture?
- How are marginalised groups targeted in E&A programming?

## **Mechanisms and strategies**

- How are internal champions for citizen engagement within government identified, engaged and supported?
- How can external actors engage constructively with social and political movements?
- How are external actors able to support new social media in a way which is integrated with other support to SPA towards E&A?
- How are multi-faceted approaches designed and employed in practice by frontline workers supporting SPA towards E&A.

## **Outcomes**

- What examples do we have of scaling up of successful local initiatives; what can we learn from these examples?
- How do social contracts between citizens and the state and similar concepts intersect with programming; in what circumstances does E&A programming strengthen or undermine those relationships?
- How do external actors factor in social norms and perceptions of legitimacy in their programming?
- Does adaptive programming for E&A in FCVAS work?
- How can donor conditions and organisational arrangements be amended to better support adaptive programming?

These research gaps and questions will be the subject of the wider A4EA research programme and in particular will be addressed by the specific research (led by Itad and Oxfam) on 'Adaptive Programming for Empowerment and Accountability in Fragile, Conflict and Violence Affected Settings: What Works and Under What Conditions?'

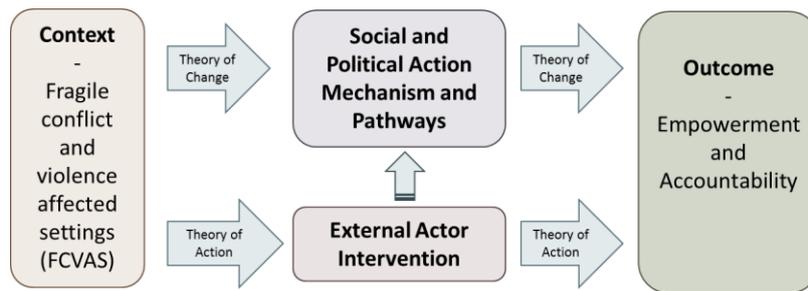
# 2 Introduction: Scope and limitations of the paper

Despite the considerable investment by external aid actors in empowerment and accountability (E&A) initiatives in the past decade, understanding is limited in terms of which approaches work, in which contexts and why. This paper explores how these actors (including multilateral, bilateral and international non-government organisations (NGOs)) have supported social and political action (SPA) in fragile, conflict and violence affected settings (FCVAS), to determine what we know about what works for E&A and under what conditions. The paper has been written as part of the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research programme, which explores how progressive SPA emerges in FCVAS settings, the pathways it takes and what impacts it has on E&A. This exploration of the theory of change towards E&A is designed to also provide practical and operational insights and lessons for how external actors can contribute to improving outcomes (theory of action<sup>1</sup>), as presented in Figure 2.1.

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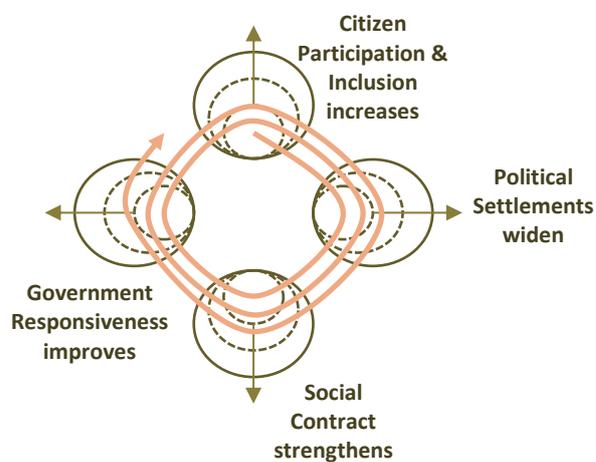
<sup>1</sup> Here the theory of action means how a planned programme intervention is understood to contribute to political and social change.

**Figure 2.1: Theory of change and theory of action**



A number of definitions, theories and conceptual frames have been used to shape the A4EA research programme.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2.2: A theory of empowerment and accountability from A4EA programme business case**



The theory of change underpinning the A4EA research programme is that ‘empowered citizens who participate in social and political action will widen political settlements, strengthen the social contract between state and society, improve government responsiveness and provide space for previously excluded groups to participate in politics and hold government to account’ (DFID 2016a: 5). Figure 2.2 presents this theory as a virtuous circle.

The definitions set out in the A4EA Inception Report<sup>3</sup> include the following. ‘Social action’ refers to action taken in the social sphere to shift social norms, values, incentives and power that underpin social behaviour. ‘Political action’ means collective action undertaken by groups (or networks) for change in public policies or governance arrangements. ‘Empowerment’ refers to a state of both subjective and objective being, where people have greater voice over decision making that affects their lives, an expanded range of choices and the possibilities of making them in the social, political and economic spheres, and increased control over their own lives (Green 2016; Eyben 2011). ‘Accountability’ refers to the process of holding actors responsible for their actions (Schedler 1999; Fox 2007). ‘External actors’ refer to multilateral and bilateral government partners, NGOs and private sector individuals

<sup>2</sup> These are summarised in Annex 1.

<sup>3</sup> IDS (2017) ‘Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme, Inception Report (April-November 2016)’.

and donors; although recognising that most literature relates to ‘external actors’ as donors and means multilateral and bilateral governments.

To explore if and how change happens, the A4EA research programme has developed a context – mechanisms and strategies – outcome (CMO) conceptual framework to shape how the programme will look at the interaction of various factors of context (in relation to FCVAS), mechanisms and strategies of SPA, and outcomes. The relationship between these factors is understood from the outset to be interactive rather than linear. The key factors are listed in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Linking contexts, social and political action and outcomes for E&A in FCVAS – key factors**

FCVAS context	SPA mechanisms & strategies	Outcome
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fragmentation of authority</li> <li>2. Informal processes of power</li> <li>3. Closing civil society space and internalised fear</li> <li>4. Ethnic and intersecting identities</li> <li>5. Norms and perceptions of legitimacy</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unruly, spontaneous and cultural forms</li> <li>2. Diverse and shifting entry points</li> <li>3. Cross-scale and multi-partied coalitions</li> <li>4. New discourses and repertoires</li> <li>5. Norms and practices of inclusiveness</li> </ol>	<p>Empowerment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Awareness of power and entitlements</li> <li>2. Capacity and resources for action</li> <li>3. Freedom to exercise agency</li> </ol> <p>Accountability:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delivery of public goods</li> <li>2. Norms of legitimacy and trust</li> <li>3. Capacity and commitment for responsiveness</li> <li>4. Inclusivity of outcomes</li> </ol>

This synthesis paper provides a general review of themes and questions relating to ‘what works’ raised within recent literature and studies, including a recent macro-evaluation of DFID’s E&A projects.<sup>4</sup> All findings included within the paper are well-evidenced,<sup>5</sup> however assessing the relative merits of the methodologies adopted to weight evidence included within these studies is beyond the scope of this paper. Each document or case study used within the synthesis report was assessed for relevance by researchers in terms of: the type of evidence provided (primary/observations, programme document, secondary/other); content (FCVAS, SPA, role of external actors) and quality of content (whether findings were based on field work; clarity of methodology; triangulation of evidence; number of interviews).

In terms of other limitations, the paper is largely concerned with how external actors can support SPA in FCVAS rather than non-FCVAS. While this has helped narrow down the literature this is not an exhaustive review of all evidence and case study material. The study highlights examples of interventions funded by DFID, partly because of the focus of the macro-evaluation study and partly because a considerable amount of programming and evaluative work has been undertaken by DFID in the field of E&A. The study is also constrained by the fact that much of the literature on external actors focuses on donors, despite the wide range of other external actors potentially involved in supporting SPA, such as international NGOs, philanthropists and private sector organisations. The lack of information to support findings in relation to an expanded list of external actors represents a gap in the evidence and a possible focus for further research.

<sup>4</sup> Itad (2016a) ‘Macro Evaluation of DFID’s Policy Frame for Empowerment and Accountability: Technical Report: What Works for Social Accountability’, December, see summary Annex 1.

<sup>5</sup> Individual case studies which exemplify the themes or provide interesting exceptions have been included separately as Annex 2.

Although it has not been possible to collate evidence against each factor, information within this paper is organised using the CMO conceptual frame adopted by the A4EA programme and keeps in mind the research programme's core questions relating to each dimension of analysis:

- *Context*: Under what conditions does citizen-based SPA lead to an inclusive empowerment of social groups (with special attention to women and girls)?
- *Mechanisms and Strategies*: What kinds of citizen-based SPA contribute to building inclusive, open and accountable states and institutions (and which kind do not)?
- *Outcomes*: How can we understand, measure and assess the impacts of such interventions to improve outcomes for development goals?

### 3 Literature review: emerging themes and questions in relation to external actor programming

This review of literature is supported by more detailed evidence from a synthesis of a macro-evaluation of DFID E&A interventions (Annexe 1) and a review of a wide range of case studies presented in Annexe 2.

#### 3.1 Context

##### ***Fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings present a unique set of challenges for external actors in supporting social and political action***

There is widespread agreement that FCVAS present a unique set of challenges for external actors. These include: the lack of, or fragmentation of, state authority and institutions; weaknesses in the rule of law and protection of human rights; the dominance of informal systems and processes of power; restricted and violated spaces for civil society to operate; the importance of ethnic identity combined with weak notions of citizenship; and the significance of norms and perceptions of (state and non-state) legitimacy. Understanding these challenges and addressing them in programming to support SPA is critical.

Fragility denotes a lack of trust between state and citizen and so although accountability initiatives are particularly needed, they are also particularly likely to flounder (McGee and Kroeschell 2013). In its 2011 World Development Report the World Bank emphasised two main approaches to be supported by external actors in moving from fragility and violence to stability and security: these are transforming institutions and restoring confidence. However, FCVAS can be volatile and subject to significant change with little warning; they are often characterised by weak formal institutions and strong informal institutions (e.g. traditional leaders or unelected village councils), which are challenging to hold to account. There may be only a narrow or narrowing political space within which citizens can exercise voice and agency (OECD 2015). The implications for locally-led social and political action are complex. On the one hand, FCVAS may create a climate of fear and despondency but on the other they may drive people to contest the status quo. The implications for external actors are complex too: in terms of identifying and working with SPA champions, external support in FCVAS carries the real risk of looking for safe engagement options and not tackling the 'spoilers', and/or groups who are marginalised from the power base. This can translate into elite capture and can exacerbate existing power asymmetries, so aggravating perceptions of injustice among some groups (Grandvoinet et al. 2015). But there are clear limitations on supporting and promoting inclusive political settlements. As one recent study indicates,

'External actors will find it difficult....to directly influence internal political dynamics. It may thus be more effective to target international behaviour and initiatives that affect incentives such as management of extractive industries, international tax evasion and corruption' (Haider with Mcloughlin 2016: 4).

State-society relations are defined by DFID as:

Interactions between state institutions and societal groups to negotiate how public authority is exercised and how it can be influenced by people. They are focused on issues such as defining the mutual rights and obligations of state and society, negotiating how public resources should be allocated and establishing different modes of representation and accountability.  
(DFID 2015: 15)

Understanding the context is critical to making SPA work. In the past external actors have promoted state building by focusing on top-down approaches centred on formal institutions, but also encouraged peace-building by advocating for a bottom-up civil society approach. These two approaches have started to come together in building state-society relations, state legitimacy and the political and social fabric of society (Haider with Mcloughlin 2016), alongside a call for more comprehensive but flexible approaches to development assistance.

In 2014 DFID commissioned Itad to conduct a macro-evaluation of its investments in E&A to inform policy and practice in DFID and other development organisations. Focusing on social accountability interventions, the macro-evaluation confirmed that context matters, specifically in relation to state-society relations. In terms of donor action, the study concluded that when state-society relations indicate a weak social contract, greater local level responsiveness is best achieved via informal citizen action (e.g. use of social media) and media oversight. Furthermore, in the context of a weak social contract, improving citizens' knowledge of their entitlements is necessary to achieve increased formal citizen engagement with service providers. There was some evidence to suggest that working long term through existing organisations and networks, and through strong on the ground presence, created positive contributory conditions. In contexts of a weak social contract, supporting institutions that connect state and citizen was found to play an important role too.

***However, approaches are evolving – external actors are 'thinking and working politically'***

Current literature is heavy with endorsements for a more politically informed approach to programming. This suggestion is not entirely new – although the ideas it embraces are evolving. Ten years ago, in a review of the literature and donor approaches, O'Neill et al. (2007) suggested that donors can contribute positively to intermediate outcomes if they understand the politics better. They pressed for strategy and programming (including design, monitoring and evaluation) grounded in a thorough political economy analysis (PEA). Others have conveyed similar messages. Sharma (2009) made the case that political economy analysis particularly focusing on the impact of informal institutions, processes and actors (e.g. religious councils, social norms and traditional leaders respectively) should inform the design of E&A programmes. Wild & Harris (2011) recommend a thorough mapping of the key entry points for reform using political economy tools.

Broadening the debate beyond the political, O'Meally (2013: 7-22), in a resource paper for the World Bank, points to six important macro elements or characteristics of context which can indicate the potential for success:

- Civil society: which has sufficient technical, organisational and networking capacity; authority, legitimacy and willingness to challenge authority
- Political society: which exhibits a tendency towards democratisation, willingness to engage, rule of law
- Inter-elite relations: since the nature and inclusiveness of political settlements to date sets a precedent for what might be possible in the future
- State-society relations: since the nature of social contracts to date also sets a precedent
- Intra-society relations: levels of inequality, social exclusion and fragmentation which are suggestive of what might be achieved
- Global dimensions: donor-state relations; international political and economic drivers which offer important prompts for change.

However, while such a list may help define the problem, it is not a solution.

Given the challenging nature of FCVAS, the need for external actors to be politically savvy remains at the forefront of the development debate. The Itad macro-evaluation concluded that careful context/political economy analysis is crucial when designing and implementing a social accountability initiative. Practical guidance on how to work politically is emerging. Most recent attempts by external actors to ‘think and work more politically’ in response to a ‘live update’ on the political economy are discussed below in relation to new mechanisms and strategies. These approaches emphasise that aid should be more explicitly and assertively political, employing political goals and employing political means more extensively. Thus, it appears that connections are being strengthened not between specific contexts and successful outcomes but between specific approaches, mechanisms, strategies and successful outcomes.

### 3.2 Mechanisms and strategies

#### ***Organised civil society is a starting point – the key actors to support for empowerment and accountability***

Overall, external actors have sought to support SPA rather more towards empowerment than accountability and through funding related civil society organisations (CSOs) rather than movements. Rosanvallon (2008) identified three generic mechanisms through which civil society can hold the state accountable beyond, and independent of, electoral mechanisms. These have been adapted slightly to the context of FCVAS.

- *Oversight* – the various means by which citizen organisations are able to monitor and publicise the behaviour of elected (or unelected) and appointed (or self-appointed) rulers
- *Prevention* (or protection) – their capacity to mobilise resistance to, or support for, specific laws and policies (e.g. a constitutional amendment), agreements (e.g. return of stolen assets) or processes (e.g. holding an election), either before or after they have been implemented, and provide protection to uphold rights
- *Judgement* – the trend toward “juridification” of politics when individuals or social groups use the courts and jury trials or traditional justice systems to bring delinquent politicians or militia leaders to judgement.

Much has been written to guide good practice in civil society engagement. While the literature may be largely generic rather than specifically focused on FCVAS, it remains relevant to an understanding of the role of civil society in FCVAS contexts. For example, based on a synthesis of citizens’ voice and accountability initiatives, Menocal and Sharma (2008) offered core principles (several linked to context) for improved external actor

engagement in supporting social and political action towards empowerment and accountability:

- Gather intelligence: build or sharpen political intelligence when developing policies or undertaking interventions
- Work with what you have: work with the institutions you have and not the ones you wish you had, which will be more limited in FCVAS (new institutions can remain disconnected with members at the ground level and unrecognised by those with power at higher levels of authority; in FCVAS they could emerge in a way which entrenches a polarised position)
- Build political skills: focus capacity building not only on technical skills but on political skills (although recognising the higher risks involved in FCVAS)
- Address both supply and demand: place greater emphasis on mechanisms that address both sides of the (supply-demand) equation (while being realistic about what can be offered by the supply side in FCVAS)
- Diversify engagement: diversify channels and mechanisms of engagement and work more purposefully with actors outside your comfort zone (which is potentially a higher risk in FCVAS).

Also in the search for solutions, another macro-level report on countries recovering from episodes of violence pointed to basic principles and a toolkit of options which can be adapted to different contexts (World Bank 2011). From the evidence presented five approaches have been identified which have been used in different country circumstances to link rapid confidence-building measures to longer-term institutional transformation. These are:

- Support for bottom-up state-society relations in insecure areas, such as combined community-based programmes for policing, employment and service delivery, and access to local justice and dispute resolution systems
- Security and justice reform programmes that start with the basics and recognise the links between policing and civilian justice
- Basic job creation schemes, including large-scale public works, addressing infrastructure bottlenecks, and expanding access to skills, finance, work experience and assets
- Involving women in the design and implementation of security, justice and economic empowerment programmes
- Focused anti-corruption actions to demonstrate that new initiatives and revenues can be well-governed, drawing on external and community monitoring capacity.

In a similar vein, the Development Research Centre (DRC) on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability suggested six factors contributing to successful results (Citizenship DRC 2011). First, the nature of the issue: where citizen demands are perceived to be within existing policy frameworks, they have greater chance of being heard through participatory modes of engagement. Where they challenge those frameworks, more contentious forms of protest may be needed. How issues are framed also appears important. In FCVAS it may be best to frame issues in relation to national and local rather than international norms, although in some contexts – such as anti-corruption – international norms can be more critical in incentivising elite groups to change practices and behaviours. Second, the institutional and political context: in FCVAS, citizen action may be largely restricted to grassroots associations, but if protected and integrated into national level processes these associations may make a crucial contribution to social cohesion and power dynamics. Third, the strength of internal champions: rather than try to measure the political will of government, an alternative is to determine whether there are champions for citizen engagement within the government. As the DRC states: 'Working at the interface of state and society can mean

efforts to empower champions to build the necessary will to support those seeking change from the outside' (Citizenship DRC 2011: 41). Fourth, prior citizen capabilities: in situations where citizen capabilities are weak – for example, to hold meetings, raise media attention, organise petitions – strengthening them through practice (rather than training) can make an important contribution to ultimate success. It is however important to recognise here the fear of reprisal, and that inaction might be a rational response. Fifth, the location of power and decision making: authority is held at many levels requiring a coordinated, multi-faceted and multi-level way of approaching citizen engagement. In FCVAS informal authority can be just as important as the formal levels which are likely to be more restricted. Finally, the history and style of engagement is important. Understanding what forms of engagement have worked in the past – for example by looking at the history of community-based organisations – is crucial to designing context-appropriate programmes. In FCVAS assessing why and how engagement has broken down – as well as where it has persisted – is critical to understanding in what could work.

These studies set out different principles or options for improved actor engagement and adapting to context. Relevance towards FCVAS has been considered. Beyond recognising that context matters, the studies do not go beyond this to suggest explicitly what elements of external engagement and context seem to matter most. In FCVAS it is critical to consider the key principle of 'do no harm' which requires external actors to consider carefully who is being supported and who is not being supported, and the potential risks and consequences. In terms of determining and realising the potential for action however the Citizenship DRC authors suggest practical guidelines for both internal and external actors, as set out in Table 3.1 below. This recognises that in making use of the matrix below the roles of stakeholders will differ according to the specific setting, for example in some fragile contexts the risks facing civil society in engaging in specific areas of accountability (most notably budget monitoring, oversight of legislation, anti-corruption) may be greater than in others.

**Table 3.1: The role of stakeholders in supporting social and political action**

<b>Government officers and elected representatives</b>	<b>NGOs and civil society actors</b>	<b>Researchers</b>	<b>Donors</b>
Recognise that citizen engagement – even if it is challenging and contentious – can build effective governance and better political leadership	Assess the benefits and risks of various strategies of engagement	Understand the importance of 'seeing like a citizen' in the research process	Think 'vertically' as well as 'horizontally'
Go beyond an 'invitation' to citizens to participate	Develop clearer strategies and policies for mediating and linking across actors	Recognise that the ways of working on citizenship can be as important as the findings themselves	Help to protect the space for citizen engagement, including for social movements
Reach out to champions in other levels and areas of government	For sustainable results, develop approaches that build the constituencies for change	Build collaborative multi-stakeholder and transnational partnerships to address complex global issues	Give citizen engagement more time

Source: Adapted from Citizenship DRC (2011) 'Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action Across States and Societies. A Summary of Findings from a Decade of Collaborative Research on Citizen Engagement'

### ***Is there a case for external support to unruly, spontaneous and cultural forms of action – a more disruptive version of citizen activity?***

Some authors offer evidence that suggests that broad national membership-based movements are required to secure changes in state processes and institutions (Kabeer et al. 2010; Htun and Laurel Weldon 2012). This poses a challenge to external actors, since historically, (Western) aid agencies have not paid much attention to what we term social movements and grassroots associations. This is largely because of their unpredictable nature, their overt politicisation and their tendency to engage in informal political activity (e.g. public demonstrations, use of social media). There is an observed paradox here in that social movements may prosecute the state for not ensuring that the rights of the people are upheld, by using radical and formally illegal types of protest to highlight the state's own "illegality" (Earle 2008; 2011). This perspective is backed by a body of literature that argues, from a FCVAS perspective, why donors should not engage directly with social movements. This literature primarily rests on the premise that promoting or funding social movements leads to a dilution of purpose and a defection of membership (Haider 2009; Earle 2011). Work by Fernando (2012) supports this position arguing that donor funding 'projectises', depoliticises and co-opts a movement's agenda. Should external actors choose to directly engage with social and political movements, authors emphasise the importance of minimising requirements and donor influence to not derail social and political movements from their original course (Castillejo 2009; Earle 2011; Haider 2009).

But it is through social movements and associations that SPA can have the potential for inclusivity as they tend to draw together members from more marginalised or disadvantaged communities. Earle (2008) has made the case that the most appropriate ways of providing assistance are probably the least exciting but of greater benefit in the long run. This could involve supporting running costs for communication amongst members and other allies, and improving communications strategies, including through the internet, to appeal to new, younger members. Movements could also benefit from greater levels of internal organisation and recordkeeping, so that they can easily draw on their organisational history for future planning and strategising. Funding for support NGOs, that provide legal advice and media training could also help movement leaders take greater positive advantage from the newspaper and television coverage that their activities inevitably incur. Finally, movements would benefit from easy access to relatively small amounts of money, to fund ad hoc protests and emergency meetings.

A more recent study by Maria Stephan (2016) has looked at how collective citizen action in a number of fragile and conflict affected states (e.g. Colombia, Liberia, Guatemala, Nigeria, Afghanistan) has played a key role in 'challenging exclusionary, predatory governance and in advancing peace processes' (2016: 1). Such action is often manifested in social movements which comprise of members (individuals and groups) which share a common identity and use tactics including marches, vigils, boycotts, sit-ins, strikes, monitoring, and other non-violent methods. Stephan has demonstrated how such movements can confront and encourage power-holders to open up new democratic spaces. As with other studies the research shows that such social movements tend to have historical legitimacy and draw upon a critical mass of supporters.

Inclusivity requires supporting participation of all groups. From research covering 100 cases studies Gaventa and Barrett point to – albeit limited – evidence of 'a greater sense of inclusion of previously marginalised groups; and a greater sense of social cohesion across groups. This is particularly important in fragile contexts or settings with historically high levels of horizontal inequalities, whether perceived or real' (2010: 44). This is supported by research which shows that in FCVAS, local associations can play a critical role in strengthening cultures of citizenship (Citizenship DRC 2011). Case study evidence shows participation in these associations can expand the sphere of relationships in the lives of poor

people. This effect is particularly significant for women who are often confined to the limits of family. According to research exploring whether participation works, a World Bank report (2013b) makes the case that effective civic engagement does not develop within a predictable trajectory. Flexibility and patience are key.

Building social cohesion is one of those intangible goals that some external actors have sought in their support to SPA towards E&A. There is emerging evidence for the building of trust between communities and between citizens and the state. Drawing on evidence from five fragile and conflict affected states, a World Bank study demonstrated how external actors have more chance at success in building social cohesion if they have understood social norms and legitimacy, how different groups have perceived fairness and justice, and design programmes that target inequality, promote tolerance and support community-driven projects and restore livelihoods (Marc et al. 2013).

The question of whether donors have done too much or too little to support social movements has not gone away. Gaventa and Barrett (2010) concluded that although citizens may engage with the state in a variety of ways, associations and social movements are far more important vehicles than had been previously understood. Their view was that donors can play an important role in protecting and strengthening spaces for citizens to exercise their voice and can support the enabling conditions for citizen engagement. Donors can promote the value of broad social movements for development, support champions of engagement within the state and monitor state reprisals against increased citizen voice. For donors working in FCVAS, the research pointed to the need to recognise at an early stage in the engagement the role which local associations and other citizen-led activities can play in the strengthening of cultures of citizenship which foster responsive states. Of interest, was that more than two-thirds of the research studies within the Gaventa and Barrett review found that the weakest democratic settings were linked to associations. This finding, the authors suggested, had important implications for donors and activists who often assume that civil society presence in fragile settings is very weak or has little potential to be effective.

### ***New social media – how can or should external actors support spontaneous forms of social and political action?***

There is recent interest and mounting evidence of the success of temporary ‘flares’ of SPA which do not translate into organisational bureaucracies or mainstream processes. Such actions are supported in part by new developments in information and communication technologies changing how people share information and mobilise (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Social media platforms are emerging as important tools for social movements in the global south; the Arab Spring being the much-quoted example of this.

There are many other examples. During the national strike over fuel subsidies in Nigeria in 2012, elements of social media were widely credited with broadening the debate to include a discussion on corruption and in influencing the government to reach a compromise with the Nigerian Labour Congress (NSRP 2012). The Occupy Wall Street in the United States movement illustrates the potential of social media to spur activist engagement in the Northern hemisphere by providing an alternative source of information to traditional media and facilitating coordination (Clark 2012). During the Egyptian uprising in 2011, social media afforded opposition leaders the means to shape repertoires of contention, frame issues, propagate unifying symbols, and transform online activism into offline protests. While social media was not the singular cause of the uprising, it helped create a fertile context (Lim 2012). In Taiwan, social media was credited with playing an instrumental role in both the organisation and mobilisation of the “Sunflower Movement” that was eventually successful in shaping the legislative’s agenda to prioritise an oversight mechanism (Chen et al. 2014).

A literature review by Buettner and Buettner (2016) analysed the role of Twitter during a range of social movements across the world and concluded that Twitter effectively connects people despite a 'complex and non-linear social fabric' (2016: 1). Although social media represents quick and inexpensive ways to generate grassroots support, mobilise protests and share information, media use is of course limited to those with access to technology. While mobile technology is increasingly accessible, there is a case to be made that it remains a tool beyond the reach of the most marginalised.

The source material points to key findings and recommendations which external actors could consider in their programming to support social and political action. Social media applications can facilitate real-time data collection and utilisation (e.g. tactical mapping and reporting in emergencies and community planning). The state and civil society can use crowdsourced data to inform and monitor service delivery. A recent study on the role of crowdsourcing for better governance presents external actors with an opportunity to promote local ownership and participation in E&A initiatives. It is not however without its limitations as the study also notes that 'The willingness and personal engagement of volunteers is based on a vision and specific objective that an official donor or government institution may not have. An initiative that is perceived to be externally driven will only work in an emergency, crisis, or similar short-term context' (Bott et al. 2014). What external actors can do best is to find ways to cooperate with online communities and support the enabling environment by creating linkages and bringing together all major stakeholders.

***But would an indirect approach to external support be better – supporting or building an enabling environment for SPA?***

There is some evidence that providing grants to CSOs can lead to scattered portfolios of civil society activities which are difficult to scale up or link in a strategic way (ICAI 2013). This is because there are inevitable limits to the degree to which donors can identify complex dynamics in a foreign environment (Friedman and Reitzes 2001). The UNDP position however presented in 'The Political Economy of Transitions Analysis for Change' (2012b) suggests that donor funding has worked best where it has supported coordination among existing CSOs and acted as an intermediary between them and the government. Despite this, civil society-based policy support is seen to suffer from limited sustainability, association with international rather than local ideas and may lack a representation of diverse viewpoints.

Synthesised work by Haider (2009) and Fernando (2012), both recommended that development partners should act more indirectly and systemically to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society and civil society movements. This they note could be achieved for example by: supporting mobilisation processes within civil society, protecting the right to form independent associations and the right to protest, and supporting social movements to communicate in public debates and to be visible within the media. This is in line with the findings of a literature review by Earle (2011) which also led to the conclusion that donors should concentrate on creating a supporting environment for social movements. This could include working with governments to avoid the criminalisation of all protest; helping to support a more accepting public sphere where different views can be expressed; engaging with government to protect freedom of speech and the right to protest; promoting avenues for state-society engagement early on during peacebuilding; and supporting the media to protect the right to protest and to draw public attention.

Overall, the suggestion is that what works best is not external actor direct engagement with SPA actors but interventions which influence the contextual constraints such actors face. Specifically, external actors can focus on indirect approaches in fragile states. State-citizen relationships in FCVAS are disproportionately shaped by indirect events and less by official channels, so external actors should identify and support citizens' informal channels of

communication with the state (e.g. community forums, use of social media) and analyse and adjust donor funding mechanisms, scale and trends in relation to their impact on state-society relations.

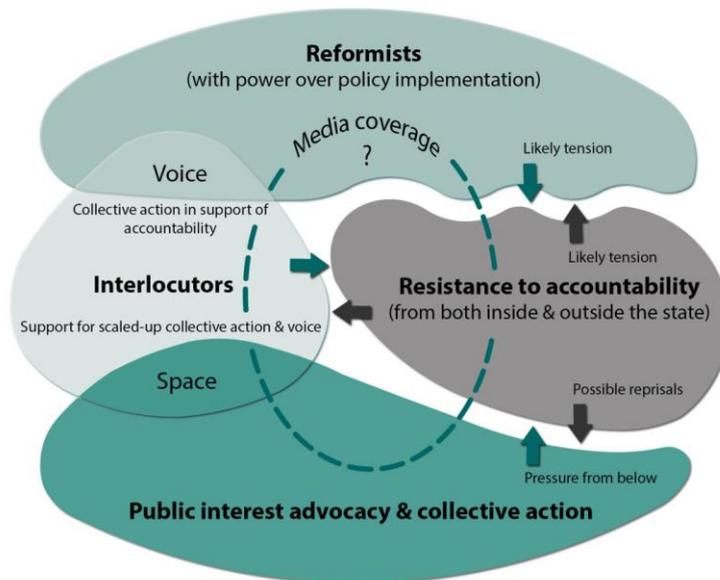
### ***What about a multi-faceted approach?***

Fooks (2013) argues that E&A – particularly in FCVAS contexts – requires triangulation between civil society groups, other powerful non-state actors and the state. This triangulated approach, Fooks believes, nurtures the social contract. This approach can be seen to encourage cross-scale and multi-partied accountability coalitions, and promote a discourse and action based on bringing together a wide range of actors at the outset. Other authors agree that in these contexts, more traditional demand-led approaches are perceived as a challenge by nervous governments and so supporting SPA here carries more risk. More particularly, observers critical of social accountability interventions have highlighted the dangers of an absence of strategic higher-level support. Jonathan Fox notably describes an ‘accountability trap’ in which contribution to improved services remains localised and short-lived in the absence of strategic intervention (Fox 2014). The Itad macro-evaluation (2016a) confirmed such social accountability traps. There was clear evidence that improved local level service delivery is almost always achieved by local social accountability processes, but translating local social accountability processes into improved service delivery at scale was shown to be difficult to achieve beyond the geographical and administrative reach of the project.

Based on the results of a systematic comparison of cases, Fox (2015) urges external actors to move beyond short-term tools and tactics focused on one-sided engagement and towards more strategic, multi-pronged interventions that simultaneously tackle blockages within both state and society. In what he calls ‘the sandwich strategy’ Fox invites external actors to deploy multiple tactics, encourage enabling environments for collective action for accountability, and coordinate citizen voice initiatives with reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness (Figure 3.1). Evidence from the Itad-led macro-evaluation suggested that supporting formal (invited) citizen engagement is necessary to achieve improved higher-level service delivery and needs to be part of a highly institutionalised and integrated approach. On the supply side, social accountability needs to be embedded in policy and programme frameworks, including channels for information to flow upwards. On the demand side, civil society needs to be coordinated and vertically integrated. Perhaps surprisingly, evidence from the macro-evaluation led to the rejection of the hypotheses that mechanisms supporting a mix of formal and informal citizen engagement are more likely to contribute to higher level service delivery.

Citizen engagement functions in a world of multi-tiered governance in which international, national and local efforts can connect. Overall, this suggests the possibility of a combined strategy of working in invited spaces and enabling organic movements; working directly and indirectly; and working vertically and horizontally.

**Figure 3.1: Fox’s sandwich strategy**



Source: Fox, J. (2015) 'Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?', *World Development*, 72: 355 (revised and abridged version of GPSA Working Paper), [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

### 3.3 Outcomes

#### *What does it all add up to?*

This section examines the findings of a number of macro-evaluations and meta-synthesis studies which have each contributed to the body of knowledge currently informing donor programming. The evolution of thinking is reflected sequentially in relation to publication date. While this section attempts to present headline findings in relation to 'what works', more specific examples are provided in Annexe 2.

An ODI macro-evaluation of voice and accountability initiatives found that positive effects were mostly limited to changes in behaviour and practice, but that there was little evidence for a direct contribution to development or democracy (Menocal et al. 2008). A critical factor limiting the nature of results was understood to relate to donor expectations being too high and based on misguided assumptions around the nature of voice and accountability and the linkages between the two. However, Gaventa and Barrett's mapping of outcomes of civil society engagement (2010) showed that 75 per cent of the 100 cases mapped in their study had made positive gains linked to the construction of citizenship, the strengthening of practices of participation, the strengthening of responsive and accountable states, and the development of inclusive and cohesive societies.

Social accountability in service delivery has been shown to work with women and for women. UNIFEM's landmark 'Progress of the World's Women Report' (Goetz 2009) is a rich source of good practice in strengthening accountability for gender-responsive service delivery. The UNIFEM report, while describing access to services as a single rallying point for women's collective action, cautions on the importance of understanding context, including those contexts where women's relative powerlessness and lack of mobility results in women's relationship to the public sphere being mediated by men so they effectively seek accountability 'at one remove from states and markets' (2009: 6). The 2016 Itad macro-evaluation found that supporting socially inclusive platforms results in improved services for marginalised groups, with awareness playing a supporting role. Further, a conducive policy environment and targeted supply-side measures can contribute significantly.

A study looking at over 500 examples of interventions (government and donor-supported) that have sought to induce participation, including the World Bank's effort to support participatory development, found generally positive results relating to participatory approaches – but emphasised that the main beneficiaries tend to be the most literate, least geographically isolated, and most politically well-connected communities. They found little evidence however that induced participation builds long-lasting cohesion. Even at the community level, group formation tends to be both parochial and unequal (Mansuri and Rao 2012).

In a review of the experience of participatory governance mechanisms as a strategy for increasing government responsiveness and improving public services, Speer (2012) assessed the evidence on the impact of such mechanisms as positive but limited. Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that the public policy benefits of participatory governance on government accountability and responsiveness remains to be proven and that implementing participatory governance effectively is likely to be a challenging enterprise in many places. Joshi (2013) found that donor support has been effective in empowering people but also found that the evidence on impact is more mixed.

The aforementioned meta-analysis of 100 case studies of citizen engagement (Gaventa and Barrett 2010) identified citizen engagement in local associations as having the highest proportion of positive outcomes with both local associations and social movements scoring more highly than participation through formal governance structures. On the other hand another review of approaches to social accountability concluded that the evidence base was thin and uneven, often being based on speculative and even anecdotal information and sometimes reflecting institutional biases; that theories of change (ToC) were weak and incomplete, with gaps and missing links; that many evaluations assessed effectiveness (largely focused on output measures) rather than impact; and some claimed attribution where it was not plausible in a complex environment with multiple interventions (McGee and Kelbert 2013).

Most recently several authors have reached more positive conclusions on what works. First, a 2013 World Bank review of more than 400 papers and books concludes that on balance, induced participation through community development or decentralisation initiatives is associated with improved government responsiveness, although the link between participation and service delivery outcomes is often vague (World Bank 2013a). Second, Houtzager and Joshi (2008) make the case that social accountability efforts which work are characterised by working across supply and demand, giving inclusion an explicit focus and adopting a rights-based approach. Finally, in line with this multi-faceted approach to engagement, some positive results have been achieved in FCVAS by adopting a social contract approach which emphasises the collective responsibility of all parties to support better development outcomes (Combaz and McLoughlin 2014).

From the literature, we have seen that very broadly, SPA can be divided into two paradigms: 'induced' efforts where the focus of external actors is on supporting a reform process and 'organic' forms of SPA where external actors are responding to citizen-led actions. Figure 3.2 below captures the key approaches advocated in the reviewed literature. These are approaches which external actors could consider in supporting SPA. The approaches should not be 'treated' in isolation. The literature points to the risks or failures of single approach initiatives, for example increasing access to information alone doesn't lead to change (see for example Fox 2014) and working with the grain could simply entrench power imbalances if other strategies are not employed. Greater success is more likely when approaches are combined in a more strategic way.

Figure 3.2: External approaches to SPA



## 4 Looking forward: what are the gaps and how might a new research programme fill them?

From a review of the evidence – contained in Section 3 and Annexes 1 and 2 – we can identify a number of themes where questions and gaps remain. This section is concerned with how these questions and gaps could be addressed by the A4EA research programme. First however we look briefly at how the A4EA theory of change is tested against the evidence presented.

### 4.1 What does this mean for the theory of change and conceptual framework for the Empowerment & Accountability Research programme?

Overall our findings both corroborate and challenge elements of the theory of change for the A4EA research programme. It is worth repeating the theory underpinning the A4EA research programme:

Empowered citizens who participate in social and political action will widen political settlements... strengthen the social contract between state and society... improve government responsiveness and... provide space for previously excluded groups to participate in politics and hold government to account.  
(DFID 2016a: 5)

#### ***Empowered citizens who participate in social and political action will widen political settlements...***

Our findings challenge this element of the theory of change. There is significant evidence from our examination of organised civil society, social movements and new social media (in Section 3 and Annexe 2) that citizens are empowered through participating in SPA. These case studies suggest, however, that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate empowerment alone leads to a deepening or a widening of the political settlement.

The macro-evaluation of E&A interventions (detailed in Annexe 1) confirms an ‘accountability gap’ at the local level which indicates a need to move beyond tactical approaches to achieve success at scale – and contribute to a widening of the political settlement.

***[Empowered citizens will] strengthen the social contract between state and society...***

There is a degree of confidence from the evidence on the context and involvement of civil society and social movements (in Section 3 and Annexe 2) that citizen-state relations can be improved through E&A interventions in the short term. It is however not sufficiently clear how this translates – or is understood – in strengthening the social contract between state and society in the long run. There is evidence from Section 3 and Annexe 2 that E&A can contribute to building awareness of rights between duty holders and duty bearers, and building social cohesion and trust. One recent study demonstrates that providing improved services, transparency and accountability which addresses people’s complaints can lead to more positive public perceptions of governance legitimacy (SLRC 2016).

***[Empowered citizens will] improve government responsiveness...***

The review of evidence – for example in relation to building an enabling environment which opens up democratic space in FCVAS, supporting multi-faceted approaches and local-level outcomes (in Section 3 and Annexes 1 and 2) – points to improvements in government responsiveness to E&A initiatives. The evidence indicates there are improvements in local service delivery. This can however be limited and short-term (as evidenced in Annexe 1 – Accountability Gap). Improved governance responsiveness is however more likely to be achieved where external actors provide specific (indirect) support to civil society and other non-state actors to engage with government and state institutions. There is also some evidence that elite groups do respond (and are incentivised to) to international norms and conventions in particular thematic areas (e.g. anti-corruption). Although in particular FCVAS contexts it is recognised that unrepresentative governments may not always be responsive – one recent study points out there is no consistent relationship between people’s access to basic services and their perceptions of local or central governance legitimacy (SLRC 2016).

***[Empowered citizens will] provide space for previously excluded groups to participate in politics and hold government to account.***

Our findings demonstrate that supporting the enabling environment – as evidenced in Section 3 and Annexes 1 and 2 – is a critical area in which external actors can make a difference. While it does require an understanding as to why excluded groups have been excluded – including how and why powerful and empowered groups may not favour opening up the space for excluded groups – the evidence suggests that external actors can make a difference by targeting specifically marginalised or excluded groups at the local level and in strategic level programming.

## **4.2 What do we still need to know?**

### **4.2.1 Context**

1. A **deep understanding of the political, economic and social context** is critical in the design and implementation of E&A programmes to recognise: specific interests and incentives; the role that formal institutions and the more ‘informal’ social, political and cultural norms can play; values and ideas; and drivers and actors. In programming for E&A it is important to understand how politics can change rapidly in FCVAS – and **demonstrate an ability to react and adapt**. There is a growing emphasis in the literature on calling for external actors to think and work politically and be able to adapt rapidly to changes in the political environment (see evidence presented in Annexe 2 – Context). At the same time, they need to be realistic about what can be achieved and what can change in the lifetime of a specific intervention – particularly given the drive for

short-term funding and immediate results. While there is strong evidence that external actors are employing and using political economy analysis tools and methods in the design of programme interventions there is less evidence in how this understanding of the political economy is understood and used in practice on a regular basis by those who are at the frontline implementing programmes. External actors need to be **thinking and working politically** as they are starting to understand how this influences the effectiveness of their interventions. This requires external actors to be engaged with key stakeholders (state and non-state) on a continuous basis, be prepared to resource ongoing political analysis, and ensure real-time learning and feedback from the interventions. As a result, aid should be more explicitly and assertively political.

*Research Gap:* how are frontline workers understanding and using political economy analysis or political analysis in practice?

2. Case study evidence (see Annexe 1 – Accountability Trap) on how power is analysed and how external actors employ specific mechanisms to address power imbalances suggests that **E&A interventions do not demonstrate significant shifts in power dynamics between elite groups and marginalised groups**. Some of the case studies even postulate there can be a ‘capture’ of the E&A process by elite groups (see evidence in Annexe 2). This could be due to over-ambitious goals and objectives of the external actors in what could be expected from a programme with a duration of three to five years. Changes in the balance of power within a society are generational. What is critical therefore is a realistic understanding of the context of power relations in a society and in a community and what change is realistic in the short term. The evidence however on how the power balances have or have not changed, how they are addressed by frontline workers (e.g. civil society actors and others who are those supporting and implementing SPA interventions) and whether elite groups have captured the processes of E&A, is not sufficiently rigorous. It comes across as more circumstantial evidence.

*Research Gap:* how do frontline workers understand power dynamics; how are shifts in power dynamics or the power balance understood, observed and measured by those implementing and participating in E&A programmes; and how can programmes avoid elite capture?

3. Following on from this is the need to understand how **marginalised and disadvantaged people** experience accountability and empowerment initiatives. It is important to understand their experiences and views on E&A activities which are ‘introduced’ and those which develop more organically from the community or group itself. For marginalised groups to benefit from E&A interventions however there is evidence which points to the need for programmes to be focused exclusively on targeting specific marginalised groups (see for example evidence in Annexe 1 – Socially inclusive service delivery).

*Research Gap:* how are marginalised groups targeted in E&A programming?

#### **4.2.2 Mechanisms and strategies**

4. **Organised civil society is a key actor in E&A**. Evidence suggests it represents a starting point for external actors to support (see Annexe 2 – Mechanisms and Strategies). Civil society provides multiple roles in E&A: oversight, prevention (and protection), and judgment. At the same time, civil society may not always be closest to the most marginalised and may have vested interests. Moreover, civil society on its own cannot make E&A interventions a success. This requires civil society engagement with

other actors, state and non-state, and identifying who are champions for citizen engagement. These latter stakeholders are less well known and understood.

*Research Gap:* how are internal champions for citizen engagement within government identified, engaged and supported?

5. There is emerging evidence however that external actors need to consider supporting unruly, spontaneous and cultural forms of action (see Annexe 2 – Mechanisms and Strategies). These are epitomised by **social movements and associations** which are different from organised civil society. By their very nature they are more challenging for external actors to support. They may not welcome external support especially from donors, less so from international NGOs. From the case study evidence, we need a better understanding of how external actors can engage more effectively with social and political movements and other member-based groups.

*Research Gap:* how can external actors engage constructively with social and political movements?

6. The role of the **mainstream media** is seen increasingly by external actors as having an important 'oversight' or 'watchdog' role in accountability interventions. With regards to **new social media** it is seen as a more spontaneous form of SPA – considered by most case studies as a 'tool' to be used by actors many of whom do not belong to political parties or organised civil society. Evidence points to the value of both types of media – but not to be supported in isolation (see Annexe 2 – Mechanisms and Strategies).

*Research Gap:* how are external actors able to support new social media in a way which is integrated with other support to social and political action towards empowerment and accountability?

7. There is evidence that external actors can play a critical role in creating or strengthening an **enabling environment** for SPA to take place. This indicates that indirect support is potentially a more viable option for external actors rather than directly supporting actions. There is also growing evidence that a **multi-faceted approach** is a way forward for external actors in their programming for E&A. This approach however needs to be tested more rigorously at the field level as external actors employ a range of approaches which bring together a broad set of actors, support collective action and combine formal and informal approaches. (See evidence presented in Annexe 1 – Social accountability and the social contract and in Annexe 2 – providing indirect support under Mechanisms and Strategies).

*Research Gap:* how are multi-faceted approaches designed and employed in practice by frontline workers supporting SPA towards E&A?

#### **4.2.3 Outcomes**

8. Much of the evidence points to successes of E&A interventions at the **local level**. Evidence from the macro-evaluation however points out that these local achievements are difficult to sustain, and that they are unlikely to be scaled up to the national level (see Annexe 1). One influential study talks of an 'accountability gap' which is confirmed by the macro-evaluation which recommends external actors apply a strategic approach to social accountability (Fox 2014).

*Research Gap:* what examples do we have of scaling up of successful local initiatives; what can we learn from these examples?

9. There are a range of approaches which set about building **state-citizen relations** in FCVAS. The evidence points to mixed successes. There is evidence of building social cohesion and trust (see Annexe 2 – Mechanisms and Strategies). Deeper analysis of how relationships change and alter between the state and its citizens in FCVAS is required. It is not clear how E&A programmes understand, relate and adapt to the social contract between citizens and the state.

*Research Gap:* how do social contracts between citizens and the state and similar concepts intersect with programming; in what circumstances does E&A programming strengthen or undermine those relationships?

10. External actor support to E&A can contribute to a change in social norms and perceptions of legitimacy. Evidence of how they contribute however is limited to a small number of case studies which focus on these areas (see Annexe 2 – Mechanisms and Strategies).

*Research Gap:* how do external actors factor in social norms and perceptions of legitimacy in their programming?

11. We have seen that there is much hype given to **new models of development programming that are iterative, adaptive and politically grounded** and attention as to whether they show greater promise than more traditional development approaches. Among the myriad of possible models, the current E&A programming paradigm suggests that external actors should think and work in a politically smart way, work with the grain, make small bets, adopt problem driven locally led approaches and as a result do development differently. These approaches or principles offer new or repackaged signposts to programming success, including developing a stronger understanding of how political, economic and social contexts play out in situations of complexity and fragility and a commitment to learning by doing. Evidence of adaptive programming is however thin on the ground – in relation to how such approaches have been put into practice, what has worked and not worked, the underlying factors that enable their effective implementation, how they contribute to success and the added value they provide. The current literature is relatively sparse and appears overly removed from the reality that practitioners face and is couched in a ‘donor-centric’ language that frontline workers, who ultimately must translate concepts into delivery, struggle to understand.

*Research Gap:* does adaptive programming for E&A in FCVAS work?

12. Donors face internal **organisational limitations** to the interventions they may choose to make. Donors are bound by the need to disburse large grants, regulatory arrangements in relation to delivery, results reporting and value for money performance (which are subject to public scrutiny and challenge) and high staff turnover. According to Derbyshire and Donovan (2016: 3), ‘Many of the operational systems in place in donor organisations and suppliers (as well as supplier incentives) have been established to ensure accountability, compliance and value for money. These systems rely on pinning down details of work plans, budgets and personnel inputs up front and delivering against these and this approach effectively closes down the space and flexibility’. These do not translate easily into the contractual implications of adaptive programming.

*Research Gap:* how can donor conditions and organisational arrangements be amended to better support adaptive programming?

The gaps in research and evidence which have been presented above support the need for deeper and more targeted research. These questions are being reflected upon and are informing the A4EA research programme including a specific research project to be undertaken by Itad and Oxfam in 2017-18: ‘Adaptive Programming for Empowerment and Accountability in Fragile, Conflict and Violence Affected Settings: What Works and Under What Conditions?’.

# Annexe 1 DFID macro-evaluation: conceptual framework and hypotheses

In 2014, DFID commissioned a macro-evaluation of its investments in E&A. The main purpose was to generate learning about what works, for whom, in what contexts and why, in order to inform policy and practice in DFID and other development organisations. The analysis focused on social accountability (SAcc) approaches to E&A and was carried out by Itad.

The macro-evaluation understood social accountability to comprise the range of mechanisms that informed citizens (and their organisations) use to engage in a constructive process of holding a government to account to its actions and helping it to become more effective (Malena et al. 2004). Proponents believe that when citizens engage in SAcc processes, their views are more likely to be heard and to influence government policy and service delivery, leading to better quality services (World Bank 2003). However, observers more critical of SAcc interventions have highlighted the dangers of an absence of strategic higher-level support. Jonathan Fox notably describes an ‘accountability trap’ in which SAcc’s contribution to improved services remains localised and short-lived in the absence of strategic intervention (Fox 2014).

The macro-evaluation utilised a CMO (Context, Mechanisms, Outcomes) conceptual framework to shape hypotheses based on a combination of project screening and literature review. These hypotheses were then tested against DFID financed projects to produce a ‘narrative analysis’ based on the strength of evidence that supported the hypothesis that particular causal mechanisms predictably lead to E&A outcomes in specific contexts. Figure A1.1 provides a simplified version of these hypotheses.

There is some (although limited) overlap between the Itad macro-evaluation and the CMO factors of interest to the A4EA research programme, specifically in relation to inclusivity, diverse entry points, informal citizen action (e.g. through social movements and social media), responsiveness and delivery of services/public goods.

As a first step in the macro-evaluation process, Itad conducted a literature review which identified a number of consensus issues from the academic and practitioner literature relevant to SAcc interventions. Significant amongst these were that service delivery failures stemming from weak public-sector accountability, are at root a political economy challenge as much as a technical one. Further, activating ‘political voice’ is more likely to emerge when citizens organise collectively around issues that immediately affect their lives and often the barrier to citizen action is the lack of capacity for collective action itself (Joshi 2013). Support for accountability processes can have an empowering effect on women’s political voice and capacity for collective action, but this effect is mediated by gendered social norms and the gendered division of labour. Transparency and access to information are necessary and have an inherent value, but are insufficient on their own to stimulate action (voice), and thereby accountability. Working on both voice and accountability more consistently and systematically is more effective than working on one alone and assuming that it will lead to the other.

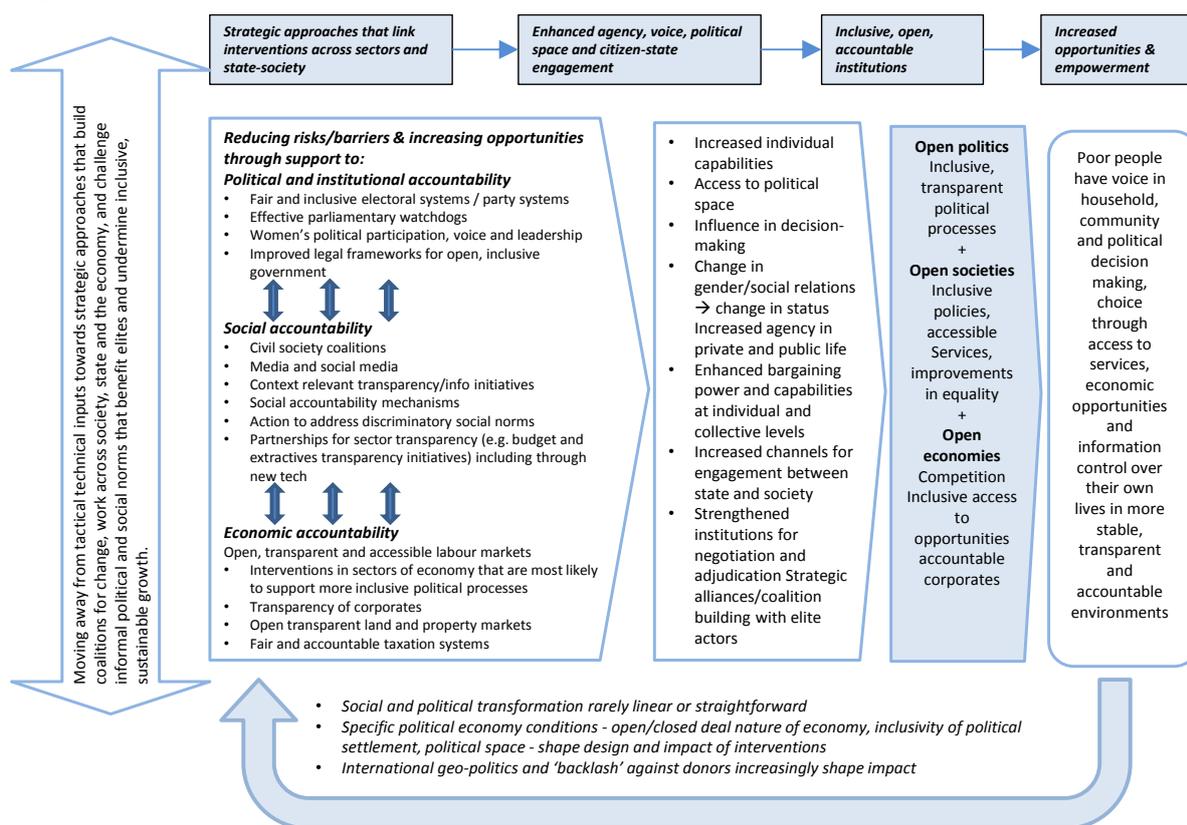


The meta-evaluation team created a 'meta' theory of change reflecting DFID's position that mapped entry points, processes and outputs through which poor people are enabled to have choice, to challenge and to change through action in state, society and market (see Figure A1.2). DFID's conceptualisation of E&A continues to evolve around the three overlapping lenses of social accountability, political accountability and economic accountability.

In terms of *what* works, the literature review found a lack of convincing evidence that social accountability initiatives have led to any significant shifts in deeper accountability and power relationships or benefitted the poorest and most marginalised (Westhorp et al. 2014). Tactical and apolitical social accountability approaches appear not to have lived up to expectations, underestimating the durability and effects of power structures that both constrain citizens from taking action and impede those who work for the state or service providers from responding. Secondly, evidence suggested that assumptions underpinning theories of change have expected too much of the complex mechanisms that influence how information and messages from different sources are accessed and engaged with. In response to this, there is implicit support for thinking politically both in the ICAI (2013) evaluation of DFID's E&A programme as well as DFID's internal E&A reviews. However, there is a suggestion that DFID's own political economy, especially the spending pressure and demand for results, is preventing the broad application of its E&A programme in practice.

The macro-evaluation highlighted a few significant evidence gaps specifically in relation to: how different groups of poor and vulnerable people experience social accountability issues and initiatives; the role of oversight institutions, particularly the media in enhancing accountability; whether political thinking approaches to donor support for E&A programmes make a difference; whether expanded or invited national or provincial level forums/inclusive deliberative spaces are effective; whether and how broad based coalitions effect progressive policy processes and enable more effective horizontal linkages with accountability actors such as parliaments, legislatures and supreme audit authorities; how DFID can better understand and respond to the dilemmas and challenges caused by spending pressure, demand for evidence of results etc.

**Figure A1.2: DFID theory of change for E&A (macro-evaluation interpretation)**



Source: Kate Bishop (from Macro-Evaluation of DFID's Policy Frame for Empowerment and Accountability; Empowerment and Accountability Annual Technical Report, 2016: What Works for Social Accountability?, Annexe Vol 1, Itad, December 2016b: 9). Reproduced with kind permission.

To help fill some of these gaps, the macro-evaluation selected 50 projects, broadly representative of DFID's social accountability portfolio, and used these to test 17 hypotheses structured around an examination of causal configurations of factors (or conditions) in relation to context (C), intervention mechanism (M) and outcome (O). Within this approach, contextual analysis focused on status-society relations while analysis of mechanisms and outcomes focused on if and how particular types of E&A intervention translated into enhanced access to and delivery of services and more specifically improved outcomes for marginalised groups. Hypotheses were clustered under three headings: the Accountability Trap; Socially Inclusive Service Delivery and Social Accountability and the Social Contract. The methodology and findings were quality assured through an EQUALS (Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Services) review.

## A1.1 Findings: hypotheses testing

### ***The accountability trap***

Based on evidence from the examination of the selected projects, the macro-evaluation confirmed that improved local level service delivery is almost always achieved by local SAcc processes. This is relevant to DFID projects that focus support to demand-side citizen action. However, the macro-evaluation rejected the hypotheses that mechanisms supporting a mix of formal and informal citizen engagement are more likely to contribute to improved higher level service delivery.

An example of a case study on which this finding was based is the Foundation for Civil Society Programme in Tanzania (2008-15), which awarded multiple grants to NGOs and CSOs working on SAcc initiatives. Despite many instances of local success, programme

evaluations did not find evidence that these collectively contributed to an improvement of service at scale. There was insufficient evidence to distinguish between the efficacy of working with formal (invited) and informal (uninvited) space, although there was some evidence that formal space is essential, while informal space and support to skilled facilitators with close community links can play a reinforcing role.

Analysis of the broader case studies suggested that formal institutionalised networking can promote at-scale service delivery improvements and that institutionalised coordination could also explain the difference in outcome achievement. However, overall, translating local SAcc processes into improved service delivery at scale was shown to be difficult to achieve beyond the geographical and administrative reach of the project. This finding is particularly relevant to DFID SAcc interventions which attempt to bridge the gap between micro-level intervention and macro-level policy changes. Micro-level intervention involves supporting discussions between service users and service providers at facility level about the quality of service delivery. Macro-level intervention involves supporting the enabling environment of policies and governance arrangements that enable citizens to claim their rights to services. Analysis concluded that feeding evidence and learning into processes of higher level legislative and policy change is neither necessary nor sufficient. An upward flow of information involves introducing evidence on service delivery outcomes and impact into higher level discussions.

Evidence did suggest that the outcome of services at scale can be achieved if SAcc processes are embedded in policy or programme frameworks. Programmes cited to support this suggestion were the Rights and Governance Challenge Fund/Creating Opportunities for the Poor and Excluded Programme (RGCF/COPE) in Bangladesh (2014-16) and the Rural Water Supply Programme (RWSP) in Tanzania (2012-15). RGCF/COPE promoted citizen engagement through collective rights awareness and support to mobilisation. A recent evaluation showed that the programme achieved higher level service delivery outcomes with for example 129,000 households benefiting from social safety nets and 46,500 additional children completing primary school. RWSP was designed to improve and sustain government policy implementation of its Water Sector Development Programme (WSDP). RWSP achieved higher level service delivery outcomes including a contribution of 960,000 to an additional 6.6 million people being provided with access to improved water services. Despite these examples, the macro-evaluation concluded that the evidence is not strong enough to develop a refined theory for testing. The main risks to service delivery outcomes were found to be supply-side resources and capacity.

Findings were translated into a number of operationally relevant conclusions in relation to achieving improvements at scale:

- SAcc is much more effective in achieving improved local level (project area) service delivery than improved higher level (at scale) service delivery
- Supporting formal (invited) citizen engagement is necessary to achieve improved higher level (at scale) service delivery
- Supporting formal (invited) citizen engagement needs to be part of a highly institutionalised and integrated approach to achieve higher level (at scale) service delivery
- On the supply side, SAcc needs to be institutionalised and embedded in programme frameworks, including channels for information to flow upwards
- On the demand side, civil society needs to be coordinated and vertically integrated.

### ***Socially inclusive service delivery***

The macro-evaluation explored strategies to reach marginalised groups and make sure that service delivery improvements include them. The study found that supporting socially

inclusive platforms results in improved services for marginalised groups, with awareness raising playing a supporting role. Further, a conducive policy environment and targeted supply-side measures can contribute significantly.

One programme examined was the Partnership for Transforming Health Systems (PATHS) 2, Nigeria (2008-14). PATHS2 achieved improved services for marginalised groups, in particular women and girls. There were significant increases in the proportion of births attended by skilled birth attendants for example. A modelling study showed that PATHS2 contributed to saving over 100,000 lives from 2008 to 2014. Another programme, the Reducing Maternal and Neonatal Deaths in Rural South Africa through Revitalisation of Primary Health Care programme (RMND), 2011-16, supported the national strategy for maternal, newborn, child and women's health and nutrition at national and district levels. However, there were inconsistencies in the findings for where programmes did not focus wholly on marginalised groups. For example, the Drivers of Accountability Programme (DAP) in Kenya (2010-16) did not achieve service delivery improvements for marginalised groups. This programme aimed at improving accountability of Kenya's government to its citizens by providing technical assistance to county assemblies and by empowering citizens. DAP established and strengthened several socially inclusive platforms. While service delivery improvements were reported, however, none directly impacted on marginalised groups.

### ***Social accountability and the social contract***

Hypotheses in this area of study focused on the social contract<sup>6</sup> between state and citizen and explored the role that media engagement plays in improving formal and informal citizen engagement in SAcc relationships in contrasting contexts of weak and strong social contracts. The macro evaluation found that when state-society relations indicate a weak social contract, greater local-level responsiveness is best achieved via informal citizen action and media oversight. Further, in the context of a weak social contract, improving citizens' knowledge of their entitlements is necessary to achieve increased formal citizen engagement with service providers. The study found that a strong social contract alone was sufficient for the service delivery outcome to be achieved. There was some evidence to suggest that working long term through existing organisations and networks and through a strong on the ground presence created positive contributory conditions. In contexts of a weak social contract, supporting institutions that connect state and citizens was found to play an important role too.

Programme examples contributing to these findings included the Foundation for Civil Society Programme (FCSP), Tanzania (2008-15) and the Public Policy Information, Monitoring and Advocacy (PPIMA) programme, Rwanda (2009-18). The Tanzania programme operated in a relatively weak social contract context. The political liberalisation of the early 1990s in Tanzania had failed to translate into meaningful citizen participation during FCSP's lifetime. The programme awarded multiple small grant sub-projects on a competitive basis to NGOs/CSOs working on demand-side citizen awareness raising and CSO capacity building. FCSP achieved improvements in local level responsiveness; for example, the Mvomero District Development Committee was successfully lobbied to establish the District Education Fund for improving levels of education, specifically targeting female students. As a result, the formed committee is in the process of establishing hostels for girls in each secondary school across the district. The Rwanda PPIMA programme also operated in a weak social contract context; political space had remained relatively controlled and closed to citizen engagement, despite a progressive policy environment of decentralisation. The programme supported CSOs at national and local level to hold government to account and influence the formulation and implementation of policies and plans. Of interest is that the macro-evaluation rejected the hypothesis that in a state society context with a weak social contract, improving citizens'

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<sup>6</sup> Understood to be the voluntary agreement reached between state and society for mutual benefit.

knowledge of their entitlement and/or improving their capacity to monitor services will increase formal citizen engagement with service providers. In weak social contract contexts, programme support to SAcc processes were undermined by failure to support institutions which connect state and citizens.

Overall, looking across the projects, formal citizen engagement was found to be the main driver of greater local level responsiveness when sufficient entitlements were associated with service delivery and when limits to freedom of expression constrained informal action as the main driver of SAcc processes.

## A1.2 Conclusions

The macro-evaluation reached a number of conclusions on the basis of its findings: Firstly, that SAcc is much more effective in achieving improved local level (project area) service delivery than improved higher level (at scale) service delivery. Further, supporting formal (invited) citizen engagement is necessary to achieve improved higher level (at scale) service delivery. To achieve improved higher level (at scale) service delivery, there is illustrative evidence that supporting formal (invited) citizen engagement needs to be part of a highly institutionalised and integrated approach. On the supply-side, SAcc needs to be institutionalised and embedded in policy or programme frameworks, including channels for evidence to flow upwards. On the demand-side, civil society needs to be well coordinated and vertically integrated. SAcc can achieve improved services for marginalised groups if socially inclusive platforms are supported. Awareness raising can play a supporting role. Illustrative evidence suggests that in some cases SAcc is not sufficient and needs to be complemented by supply-side measures specifically targeting marginalised groups. When there is a weak social contract, greater local level responsiveness is best achieved by informal citizen action, with media oversight playing a supporting role. Formal citizen engagement is best increased through improving citizens' knowledge of their entitlements. The analysis also indicates that formal citizen engagement can be increased through working long term through existing organisations and networks and through a strong on-the-ground presence. Perhaps inevitably, a strong social contract was found, by itself, to be a strong driver of formal citizen engagement.

The macro-evaluation generated three signposts to effective SAcc programming for DFID based on these findings:

1. **Apply a strategic approach to social accountability;** analysis confirms the social accountability traps identified by Fox (2014) and the need to move beyond tactical approaches to achieve success at scale. SAcc approaches should link the local to the national level to achieve outcomes at scale.
2. **Target marginalised groups directly to leave no-one behind;** in support of this targeted approach SAcc programmes should get better at identifying and designing interventions for marginalised groups, whether for localised SAcc or for more ambitious, higher-level processes.
3. **Consider the context and think and work politically;** project context influences the effectiveness of SAcc initiatives; this means that careful context/political economy analysis is crucial when designing a SAcc initiative and that implementation also requires thinking and working politically to adapt to contexts which change.

## Annexe 2 Case studies: examples and exceptions

Within this annexe, we now consider the evidence we have of what works in relation to these emerging themes within the frame of context, mechanisms and strategies, and outcomes and based on specific case studies. One major caveat is that this is not an exhaustive review of evidence but draws on over 40 case studies both multi-country and single country (see bibliography).

### A2.1 Context

#### ***External actors are adapting to the challenging context of FCVAS in their support to SPA***

Evidence of what works in terms of external actors focusing on building state-society relations is relatively limited. One study on the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State building in Timor-Leste demonstrates what is required – focus on how things are done (*the process*) as much as what is done (*the results*). In this case, civil society emphasised the importance of inclusive and participatory processes to address conflict and build the state (Interpeace 2010). Contrast this to another case study from Timor-Leste – on the Asia Foundation’s local governance reform programme – which highlighted tensions within the theory of change between programme approaches and improving state-society relations. Raising village activism was seen to have led to conflict not consensus, demonstrating that ‘Reforming state-society relations cannot be achieved via a solely technical approach to local, governance, but requires both deeper and wider political engagement across society and state as a whole’ (Rowland and Smith 2014 cited in Haider with Mcloughlin 2016: 1). Understanding the context is critical.

Evidence on what works in terms of confidence building from the 2011 World Bank macro-evaluation report described how community-level programme design can be adapted to country context in seven FCVAS countries: Afghanistan, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Indonesia, Nepal, Rwanda. The more successful initiatives aimed to re-establish credible participatory forms of representation, ensure building trust and a transparent control and use of funds, and alignment between community decision-making structures and the formal government administration. As with other macro-level studies the above report points to the importance of involving women in the design and implementation of programmes in rebuilding the state and in post-conflict settings. This is mirrored in a study on how gender is integrated in state building initiatives (Castillejo 2011). The study looked at how women in five FCVAS countries (Burundi, Guatemala, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Sudan) have largely been excluded by existing elites from post-conflict negotiations. The study indicates that where there have been opportunities women have been relatively successful in influencing political reform. External actors however have tended to neglect addressing the power dynamics that have excluded women.

There is some evidence of success in relation to supporting efforts to *change social norms* (e.g. DFID, Voices for Change 2016b). This approach can be seen in the design of recent political accountability and anti-corruption programmes in Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda, for example, which pay attention to the incentives of elite groups to change behaviour and alter social norms around what is acceptable and not acceptable. There could be more traction in supporting political action to improving accountability through external actor support to countries (governments and civil society) to engage in international initiatives such as the Internal Reporting Mechanism of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

What doesn’t work, unsurprisingly, are efforts to impose Western or generic models. The work of Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews points clearly to how the basic

functions of government can fail to improve in a number of case studies around the world, coining the phrase 'isomorphic mimicry'. A series of case studies show where state institutions have failed as they have followed Western models. While these examples relate largely to public sector reform they can apply equally to external actor support to empowerment and accountability initiatives. This is supported by evidence in relation to social and political action, for example in Sierra Leone there is criticism that programming on state-citizen relations is guided by generic templates (institutional channels such as setting up an ombudsman, human rights commissions and public consultation mechanisms) (International Alert 2015). In the Middle East and North Africa region an evaluation of the UK's Arab Partnership (DFID and FCO) found that imposing blueprint models for anti-corruption commissions and parliamentary engagement with citizens failed to get sufficient traction and ownership at the national level unless they were specifically tailored to and emerged from a deep understanding of the context (IOD Parc – Triple Line 2015).

### ***Evidence of new approaches – external actors are 'thinking and working politically'***

Addressing existing power imbalances: One of the challenges identified in Section 4 of the main paper is the risk of elite capture of external actor efforts to support SPA. There is some evidence where this has occurred. In Ethiopia, one study indicated that donor support helped complete state capture and repression and contribute to the consolidation of an authoritarian regime. The government was not interested in accountability and donors were unwilling to impose real governance conditions. In not addressing the power dynamics between state and civil society in Ethiopia donors may have inadvertently entrenched elite capture of the state (Abegaz 2013). In Tanzania, although donor support has helped strengthen institutions that advance accountability, it simultaneously supports a status quo that undermines accountability and democratisation. Donor support had unintended consequences in undermining accountability through the provision of general budget support and through support of policies that undercut vertical accountability in decentralisation and in public goods provision (Tripp 2012).

Significance of norms and perceptions of legitimacy: There is evidence that external actor support to changing social norms at the national level can work if done right. In Nigeria, the DFID-funded Voices for Change (V4C) project provides strong evidence where social norm changes are beginning to take place in specific groups and institutions. As a result of the project women are taking part increasingly in politics and elections, especially in colleges and universities; there is potential for 'collective action for change' through what are called the Purple Clubs, men's networks and women's platforms; the government is beginning to provide direct funding so that it benefits women; and progress has been made on changing the legal framework so that it upholds women's rights (Itad 2016a).

Thinking and working politically: It seems that what is critical to this thinking is an understanding of the political settlement in different contexts. In many FCVAS, there is a lack of accountability, a dominance of informal over formal relationships and institutions (e.g. traditional councils or local militia groups having more influence and power than local state authorities), and an absence of state-society relations for many people. External actors can, however, support SPA which leads to a more inclusive political settlement. Two macro-level case studies provide indications of what could work. The first study takes evidence mainly from three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ghana, South Africa and Uganda). A positive impact seems to occur where donors strengthen existing democratising trends, however attempts to create them seem destined to fail. In supporting civil society, external actors (in this case, donors) should review the range of CSOs targeted through democracy assistance programmes to ensure that groups in rural or urban low-income areas and those with a mass membership also receive adequate support. It would be better for donors to replace periodic grant support with long-term programme grants and technical assistance designed to build organisational capacity by strengthening fundraising mechanisms, financial management

systems and internal governance. They could provide specialised assistance aimed at strengthening capacity for policy analysis and advocacy, especially for organisations lacking these skills. Third, problems of financial dependence, reduced legitimacy and erosion of autonomy which arise from a heavy reliance on foreign aid could be mitigated by adopting strategies to identify and institutionalise local sources of funding from membership dues, indigenous philanthropy and internally generated sources of income. Fourth, aid donors should seek to promote a more supportive policy environment for CSOs by encouraging governments to remove restrictive controls and to simplify registration procedures (Robinson and Friedman 2005).

## **A2.2 Mechanisms and strategies**

### ***Organised civil society remains a strong starting point for external actors***

Evidence from recent case studies have demonstrated external actor support to civil society in FCVAS can have a significant impact on E&A outcomes. This evidence is drawn from recent evaluations of E&A programmes with civil society as the key stakeholders including the Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) programme (Itad 2015) and the multi-donor Democratic Governance Facility in Uganda (Triple Line 2016). For the latter programme, which was supported by eight donors, E&A interventions were part of a larger governance programme. Both evaluations considered the programme design to be relevant to the context and based on a political economy analysis. At the same time both evaluations found that results and impact were most notable at the local level and more challenging to scale up at the national level. For the AcT evaluation, the direct influence is most apparent in the area of civil society strengthening. Strong results are being achieved in the area of media reach and citizen action, but here AcT's contribution is less strong.

One case study demonstrates how external support to local community participation can contribute to the success of an accountability initiative – but also shows its limitations. In the case of a trail bridge project in Nepal the research focused on the relationship between the state and its citizens and on the accountability mechanisms operating on the supply-side and demand-side of that relationship (Cima 2013). The research demonstrated that villagers' active engagement in public spaces (user committees) can represent an opportunity for 'empowerment', mostly in the form of building a network of useful contacts within and outside the community. The research paper argues that the user committee space represents an accountability tool, while the public audit practice is a more symbolic space in which trust and legitimacy for the actors involved can be built. In a context of polarised power structures and discriminatory social and cultural traditions, however, the meaningful participation of traditionally disadvantaged groups is limited.

A study summarising ten years of research from the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Benequista 2010) and based on over 150 case studies worldwide, argued that external actor (donor) programmes failed to recognise the opportunities presented by citizen engagement, and understanding the complex relationship between citizens and the state. It called on external actors to understand that citizens need greater political knowledge and awareness of their rights and of agency as an initial step in claiming these rights. It suggested that associations are an effective way in strengthening citizen engagement.

### ***Supporting unruly, spontaneous and cultural forms of action – social movements and associations***

As discussed in Section 4 of the main paper this is not an area which has readily and easily attracted external actors. It is seen by the donor community as having a high risk in being associated with actions which could be considered 'too political', 'illegal' or 'undermining state legitimacy'. Other actors, however, particularly international NGOs, may be more

attracted to the potential advocacy and for the more spontaneous, grassroots nature of these actions. These conflicting stresses have been played out in discussions between donors and civil society on who to support for political and social action. The tensions are more pronounced in fragile, conflict and violence affected settings.

The latent potential of SPA is well evidenced in terms of how organic movements have impacted on empowerment and accountability without external intervention. For example:

- In India, the Workers and Farmers Power Organisation is widely credited for exposing fraud in several local governments, deterring further malfeasance in others, influencing legal debates and generating a wider campaign for legislative and regulatory change at the state and national level (Jenkins and Goetz 1999).
- In Nepal, the Nepal Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Peace (CMDP) emerged as an effective non-violent, apolitical movement (Earle 2011).
- In Nigeria, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), produced a bill of rights setting out demands for political autonomy (Earle 2011).
- In Tunisia and Morocco, advocacy by women's rights groups led to their respective governments passing progressive Personal Status Laws (World Bank 2012).
- International Alert in their 2015 report 'Strike Action' provide specific examples of street protests, demonstrations and blockades that have achieved varying degrees of success and failure. For example, protests against a ban on motorcycle taxis in the central business district (CBD) of Freetown, Sierra Leone in 2013 led to a reduction in the scope of the ban. The report suggests that protests are generally viewed by citizens as an effective tool for communicating, engaging with and influencing the policies and practices of both big business and government.

There is however more limited evidence of the effectiveness of external actor support to social and political movements (Menocal and Sharma 2008). As noted above, external actors have historically avoided engagement with such endogenous movements; and where they have engaged E&A achievements have been mixed:

- In Peru, international conservation organisations have worked with an indigenous movement, Consejo Machiguenga del Río Urubamba (COMARU), to oppose threats to their livelihoods by multinational corporations (McKie 2007).
- In Sierra Leone, Western aid agencies have supported women's movements to increase women's political participation and influence (Castillejo 2009), which has in some cases led women's organisations to develop projects in response to donor rather than community priorities.
- Donor support to the pastoralist land rights movement in Tanzania (McKie 2007), which has resulted in the professionalisation of the social movement organisation, disillusionment of members, and the demobilisation of the movement. Tostan, an NGO in Senegal led a campaign against female genital cutting (FGC) from the 1990s, using kinship and social networks (Malhotra et al. 2009).
- The Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Peace has been instrumental in the development of civil society in Nepal, eventually contributing to a more empowered public and a more accountable government (Heaton-Shrestha and Adhikari 2013). Interestingly, the movement refused direct donor funding, but did receive indirect funding through NGOs for printouts, meeting rooms and travel.
- As already identified, the Voices for Change programme in Nigeria is an example of a programme designed to catalyse social action and is based on the belief that it is necessary to 'intervene from both the top down (mass media campaigns at the regional and national level) and the bottom up (on the ground work with key influencers)'. V4C uses a full range of communications, campaigning and media channels to stimulate a social movement of young people aged 15-35. There is

emerging evidence of success. The programme reports the potential actions for change through the Purple Clubs and the benefits of the purple brand and the support of ministries (DFID, Voices for Change, 2013: 18).

Social movements may be of value to women since they do not require membership of a formal organisation. For example, in Tanzania, Uganda, Namibia, Morocco and Tunisia, women's movements were instrumental in the passing of legislation or the amendment of discriminatory laws. An analysis of 70 countries from 1975-2005 found that women's movements play a key role in pushing for policy change on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) (Htun and Laurel Weldon 2012).

External actors are now starting to think and act beyond the 'usual civil society suspects' and understand and support more organic types of SPA. In the aforementioned macro-study of 100 different cases (Gaventa and Barrett 2010), there is sufficient evidence to see the value for external actors in supporting associations and social movements. Of the case studies cited they include a number of fragile and conflict-affected states including Bangladesh (ten case studies), Nigeria (four), Kenya (three), Angola (two) and Gambia (two). The study looked at the positive and negative outcomes of the citizen engagement projects across four dimensions of citizen engagement (see Table A2.1 below).

**Table A2.1: Outcomes of citizen engagement**

Area	Positive	Negative
<b>Construction of citizenship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased civic and political knowledge</li> <li>Greater sense of empowerment and agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased knowledge dependencies</li> <li>Disempowerment and reduced sense of agency</li> </ul>
<b>Practices of citizen participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased capacities for collective action</li> <li>New forms of participation</li> <li>Deepening of networks and solidarities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New capacities used for 'negative' purposes</li> <li>Tokenistic or 'captured' forms of participation</li> <li>Lack of accountability and representation in networks</li> </ul>
<b>Responsive and accountable states</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater access to state services and resources</li> <li>Greater realisation of rights</li> <li>Enhanced state responsiveness and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Denial of state services and resources</li> <li>Social, economic and political reprisals</li> <li>Violent or coercive state response</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusive and cohesive societies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusion of new actors and issues in public spaces</li> <li>Greater social cohesion across groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforcement of social hierarchies and exclusion</li> <li>Increased horizontal conflict and violence</li> </ul>

Source: Gaventa and Barrett 2010: 25

Notable insights gained from the case studies related to fragile and conflict-affected settings include:

- in relation to *citizen engagement and the construction of citizenship* - there is evidence of a continuous growth of knowledge and rights awareness from a study of members of a CSO, Nijera Kori (NK) in Bangladesh, which takes a rights-based approach in its work. In a comparative study of NK members and non-members affiliated with microfinance NGOs, the research authors (Kabeer with Kabir and Huq 2009) found that NK members were far more knowledgeable about their constitutional rights than non-members. The study also suggested that 'women who participated in the NGO NK

were more likely to participate in decision-making within their households, less likely to vote according to their husband's wishes and more likely to participate in other forms of political mobilisation than those women who were not engaged through the association (2009: 27)'.

- in relation to *citizen engagement and the practice of participation* - some evidence points to a change in the dynamics of power which is considered to have emerged not only because of the greater awareness developed by citizens, but also greater skills to use that knowledge effectively. For instance, Mahmud (2010) writes about how worker engagement in the garment factories in Bangladesh has led to greater negotiating skills, arising from their realisation of the need to mobilise and organise, as well as their knowledge of international agreements, such as the International Labour Organisation conventions.
- in relation to *building networks and alliances* - one study found that struggles for land reform in the Philippines caused a deepening of relationships and networks across state and society, illustrated when a network of peasant organisations and NGOs was able to initiate a dialogue with the government agency responsible for land reform, and to form a working committee to implement new reforms (Borras and Franco 2010).
- In relation to *citizen engagement and building responsive states*, mobilisation by Naripokkho in Bangladesh on issues of health related to violence against women has led to new initiatives from the Government and UNICEF to provide support and treatment for survivors of acid attacks (Huq 2005). While in Angola, community associations involved in dealing with issues of displacement from the many years of civil war increasingly engaged in production-related activities to gain access to technical expertise, credit and agricultural inputs from government and other providers (Ferreira and Roque 2010).

For external actors working in FCVAS, the research points to the need to recognise at an early stage in engagement the role which local associations and other citizen activities can play in strengthening cultures of citizenship which foster responsive states. Of particular interest was that more than two-thirds of the research studies in the weakest democratic settings were linked to associations. The authors suggest this finding has important implications for donors and activists who often assume that civil society presence in fragile settings is very weak or has little potential to be effective. There is evidence from a number of case studies indicating that external support to social movements and membership-based associations can be effective. But there are risks on both sides – for the external actors in becoming politicised and for the social movements in being co-opted. In one case in Tanzania donor funding with its conditionalities resulted in the professionalisation of a social movement organisation, disillusionment of members, and the demobilisation of the Barabaig movement and movements in other African countries (McKie 2007).

When risks are managed, however, there is considerable potential for supporting social movements to lead to E&A outcomes. Earle and Pratt's (2009) research found that social movements can act strategically to avoid or minimise such negative outcomes. In one case study from the Peruvian Amazon region the community organisation, COMARU, negotiated with different donors and acted strategically and cautiously in deciding whether to enter alliances with conservation organisations (see Box A2.1). In Sierra Leone, there is evidence that strike action (street protests, demonstrations and blockades) is generally viewed by citizens as an effective tool for communicating, engaging with and influencing the policies and practices of big business and government. Citizens have resorted to striking in the context of an inability to seek redress through official channels (petitions, meetings and consultations) (International Alert 2015).

### **Box A2.1: The COMARU study**

COMARU is an indigenous organisation which attempted to represent the needs of its member communities in the face of threats to livelihoods from multinational energy companies. The Earle and Pratt study asked particular questions about whether the aims of the COMARU movement had been co-opted by more powerful and better connected global actors. Findings from the study are suggestive in terms of risk management for external actors:

- COMARU was cognisant of the risk of collaboration with INGOs, negotiated with different funding sources and acted cautiously before entering into alliances.
- The study found that both the leadership and membership were acutely aware of the way in which external actors can try to privilege their own agendas and co-opt the leadership.
- Members sanctioned any leader who was thought to be overly influenced by outsiders or who had put their own interests before that of the movement.
- The leadership crafted a delicate balancing act between fundraising from external sources as a matter of organisational survival and trying to protect the autonomy of the organisation.
- Movement leaders achieved this through a number of mechanisms, including the employment of different 'frames' establishing both distance from and association with the same agenda according to their audience.
- They also used regular references to agreements in international law that supported the group's claims to autonomy and specific rights.
- However, these mechanisms were read by some external actors as radical and politicising and may have prevented the establishment of profitable relationships between the movement and external supporters.
- Attempts by the movement to assert autonomy did not prevent co-option from a distance, as external actors asserted a close relationship with the organisation to lend support to their own particular international agenda.

Source: Earle and Pratt (2009)

However, questions remain as to whether social movements can lead to lasting change:

Policy success is not always accompanied by the more fundamental and less obvious outcomes that underpin lasting change, such as popular awareness, increased capacity of organisations and stronger leadership. These outcomes are needed to maintain the gains that have been made and become essential resources in future campaigns.

(Citizenship DRC 2011: 27)

### ***New social media – a game-changer or just a new tool for SPA?***

There is a growing body of evidence which points to new kinds of opportunities for external actors to support more spontaneous and organic forms of SPA. An innovative example of 'what could work' comes from a recent case study on 'The Role of Crowdsourcing for Better Governance in Fragile Contexts' (Bott, Gigler and Young 2014). Evidence from initiatives in Haiti, Libya, Sudan and Guinea gives us a sense of what is possible in attracting and engaging citizens (at a national and global level) to participate in SPA and ultimately hold governments to account. The most relevant case studies for our synthesis report are crowdsourcing for transparency and civil rights in Guinea and Participatory Post-conflict and Recovery Mapping in Sudan: Building Peace and Stability. While potentially attractive there is a risk of over-selling the value of crowdsourcing on its own, but it could be an effective tool or method if combined with a more strategic approach. There is, however, a counter-risk in that it could undermine the voluntary, spontaneous, non-state led nature of crowdsourcing.

### ***Providing indirect support - creating an enabling environment for civil society and other actors to engage***

Evidence is emerging that external actors can be instrumental in creating or supporting an enabling environment for SPA towards strengthening empowerment and accountability outcomes. In Sierra Leone for example the main recommendation for external actors is that they should facilitate the 'enabling environment' for social movements, rather than provide direct support. There are, however, risks in that external support could 'projectise' movement activities, create donor accountability rather than member accountability, and even co-opt the movement's agenda (Fernando 2012). Further evidence from a case study in Sierra Leone points to a focus on indirect approaches to improving state-citizen relations in fragile states. State-citizen relations in conflict-affected states are disproportionately shaped by indirect events (crisis, disruptive projects, etc.), and less by official channels and institutional reforms. International Alert recommended that external actors should ensure that programming on state-citizen relations is guided by a political-economy analysis to identify issues and sectors fundamental to citizens' livelihoods (International Alert 2015).

In a case study from Cambodia donor engagement appeared very successful in terms of creating political spaces in which grievances can be expressed by the poor themselves. While government concessions in response to such protests are rare, and violent repression has occasionally taken place, the fact that ordinary people keep coming back suggests that the poor themselves place a high value on the ability to voice complaints (ODI 2003). Attempts by donors to work at the grass roots level, however, have encountered a number of problems. First, there is the danger of overwhelming local capacities. In relation to both the local state and the NGO sector, the steep differential between international and local actors in confidence, power, and resources tends to result in actions which reflect international priorities. This undermines rather than enhances local confidence and perpetuates relations of dependency.

In another case study from Mozambique (Faehndrich and Nhantumbo 2012) the external actors were international NGOs which supported national NGOs to play a supporting role at all levels of the political system, creating an enabling environment for accountability from the bottom to the top. Based on evidence, the study recommended the international NGOs should: embody accountability throughout the planning, implementation and monitoring process by sharing information, knowledge and opinions with stakeholders, beneficiaries and the general public; strengthen local organisations and their capacity to hold local authorities more accountable; sensitise local authorities, emphasising the incentives they have for being more accountable; provide an informational bridge between the district level on the one side and the provincial and national level on the other; and promote institutional change at the central level towards more political, administrative and financial decentralisation.

A useful comparison can also be gleaned from a post-totalitarian state – Bulgaria (UNDP 2012a). In what was then considered to be a changing and sometimes hostile politico-institutional environment, UNDP's main contribution to civic engagement was considered to have been to create a safe space for participation by playing the role of mediator between citizens and authorities. This resulted in: unleashing the potential of an existing and latent resource for community empowerment - the institution of the 'chitalishte'; identifying local "agents of change" and investing in their capacities - mayors, chitalishte secretaries; using windows of opportunities as they opened – for example, the initiation of comprehensive governance reform, adoption of new legislation; demonstrating in practice the validity of a certain approach before scaling-up; and mobilising broader support and creating partnership platforms – following the so-called "never alone" policy.

### ***Increasing interest in external support for multi-faceted approaches***

In a much-cited paper, Jonathan Fox (2014) looks at evidence from a number of case studies to see what works in social accountability initiatives. From studies in Uganda (education spending information campaign and community-based health clinic monitoring), Brazil (participatory municipal budgeting), India (right to information and social audits), Indonesia (community-driven development and village public works) he concludes: 'More promising results emerge from studies of multi-pronged strategies that encourage enabling environments for collective action and bolster state capacity to actually respond to citizen voice' (Fox 2014: 5). He also refers to a number of case studies which document cases where there has been a lack of clear impact – postulating that providing information on its own is not enough, bottom-up monitoring often lacks bite, and community-driven development programmes are often captured by elites.

Evidence from a number of the case studies cited in the previous sections points to multi-faceted approaches in bringing together a wide range of actors including both state and non-state, for example in building social cohesion and strengthening accountability institutions, as well as avoiding stand-alone approaches and methods, such as providing access to information but not capacity building in how to make the best use of it. Case study evidence from Oxfam's work in South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Palestine/Israel demonstrates how external support to a multi-faceted approach can work in practice. The emphasis in achieving success in some of the programmes has been on supporting constructive engagement between the state and its citizens, for example in organising public forums and dialogue, delivering training in good governance and enabling citizen feedback on proposed legislation in South Sudan. While Oxfam emphasises the importance of working with civil society in fragile states it argues 'Working with civil society is an appropriate entry point – but it is not sufficient to promote good governance. Civil society should be supported to *engage constructively* with duty-bearers, and programme strategy may include linking civil society to other influential non-state actors and institutions' (Oxfam 2013: 3).

### **A2.3 Outcomes**

#### ***Achievements are more noticeable at the local rather than national level***

Evidence of results and outcomes is stronger at the community and local level rather than at the national level.

In Cambodia case study evidence demonstrates that social accountability practices have led to improvements in the performance of government administration and public service delivery – but only at the local level and not demonstrably sustainable beyond the intervention period (Babovic and Vukovic 2014). As we have seen this is supported by experience from the case study on the Accountability in Tanzania programme: more results have been achieved at local level than at national level. Success factors were seen to be (i) working across demand and supply and, (ii) taking contextual factors into account (Itad 2016a).

Although not a FCVAS, a useful comparison can be gleaned from a case study of the civil society organisation MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan) in India. Although nearly 20 years old, the experience of MKSS is illustrative of the value and limitations of working with a broad set of actors. What MKSS seems to indicate is that anti-corruption campaigns require both broad-based participation in protest action and grassroots initiatives to involve ordinary people in auditing public expenditure at the local level. However – forms of civil society fostered by the state or development agencies are less effective. The Indian case demonstrates the potential for state-fostering to produce precisely the kinds of 'compromised' CSOs which inhibit the emergence of effective anti-corruption movements based on local-level popular auditing (Jenkins and Goetz 1999).

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