

## The politics of what works in service delivery: an evidence-based review

Batley, Richard; Mcloughlin, Claire

### *Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### *Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Batley, R & Mcloughlin, C 2012 'The politics of what works in service delivery: an evidence-based review' ESID Working Papers, no. 6, Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre, Manchester.  
<[http://www.effective-states.org/\\_assets/documents/esid\\_wp\\_06\\_mcloughlin-batley.pdf](http://www.effective-states.org/_assets/documents/esid_wp_06_mcloughlin-batley.pdf)>

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## Research at Birmingham

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## ESID Working Paper 06

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### ***The politics of what works in service delivery: An evidence-based review***

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February 2012

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ISBN: 978-1-908749-01-7

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the evidence on the forms of politics likely to promote inclusive social provisioning and enable, as opposed to constrain, improvements in service outcomes. It focuses on eight relatively successful cases of delivery in a range of country contexts and sectors (roads, agriculture, health, education) where independent evaluations demonstrate improved outcomes. The paper traces the main characteristics of the political environment for these cases, from the national political context, to the politics of sector policymaking, to the micro politics of implementation. The findings indicate that it is possible to identify connections between good performance and better outcomes at the point of delivery and the main forms of politics operating at local, sector and national levels.

A number of common factors underpinning successful delivery emerge strongly but need to be tested through further research. In particular, the paper highlights the relationship between inclusive delivery and:

- periods of crisis and transition;
- the nature of the political settlement;
- the types of calculations of political returns being made by political actors at all levels, and;
- the extent to which the state derives or seeks to enhance its legitimacy through the provision of a particular service.

## **Keywords**

Service delivery, inclusive development, political context, modes of provision, maternal and child health, basic education, roads, agricultural marketing, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Peru, Rwanda

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors are grateful to Morag Baird (DFID), Willy McCourt (World Bank), and Pauline Rose (UNESCO) for help in identifying the case studies, and to Kunal Sen (University of Manchester), Lant Pritchett (Harvard University) and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts.

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## **Executive Summary**

Important conceptual advances in understanding the politics of basic service delivery have centered on the role of actors, incentives and institutions in enabling or constraining reform. However, empirical research exploring how different forms of politics impact on service outcomes remains limited and fragmented, leaving little scope for systematic analysis or policy uptake. Comparative studies of the political factors that account for variation in service outcomes, either across sectors within a country or across regions within a sector, are relatively rare. Sector-level political economy analysis has tended to provide highly localised insights into specific blockages to reform.

This paper examines the evidence on the forms of politics likely to generate positive incentives for inclusive social provisioning and enable, as opposed to constrain, improvements in service outcomes. It focuses on the forms of politics that have underpinned eight relatively successful cases of delivery in a range of country contexts and sectors (roads, agriculture, health, education) where independent evaluations demonstrate evidence of improved outcomes. The paper traces the main characteristics of the political environment in which these cases evolved, from the national political context, to the politics of sector policymaking, to the micro politics of implementation. Piecing together these layers is constrained by the fragmented nature of the literature. However, the findings indicate that it is possible to identify connections between good performance and better outcomes at the point of delivery and the main forms of politics operating at local, sector and national levels.

A number of common factors underpinning successful cases of delivery emerge strongly but need to be tested through further research. In particular, the studies of what works support the prominence given to the role of the nature of the political regime, the political conjuncture, and the origins of elite incentives as key determinants of inclusive social provisioning. They illustrate the state may have strong incentives for inclusive provision where a particular service or good has historically been a key source of state legitimacy and an expression of the social contract. Calculations of political returns on the part of political actors, linked in some cases to the pursuit of political entrepreneurship, have also been critical in some cases where remarkable improvements in service provision have been achieved. The characteristics of a particular service – or the extent to which it is targetable, ‘visible’, measurable and easily credited - affect its political salience and in turn the likelihood of state responsiveness.

Resources alone do not determine outcomes on the ground: politics intervene (in either an enabling or constraining role) between policy intention and implementation. Modes of provision should be analysed as ‘spheres of politics’ that shape the opportunities for collective action and types of accountability relationships that emerge at the point of delivery. Some of the cases indicate that strong, top-down accountability reinforced by a legitimate state with some degree of moral authority can work, particularly if top-down control can ‘insulate’ delivery systems from the normal functioning of prevailing political institutions. At the local level, there are particular questions raised by the cases about the positive effects of social accountability systems that are genuinely locally-grounded and draw on moral and

cultural norms. At the point of implementation, reciprocal terms of collaboration between state and non-state actors may be instrumental.

The paper concludes that future research might usefully examine service provision as a two-way process in which services are formed by, and formative of, state-society relations and processes of state building. As such, research should begin with the point of contact with citizens/users, and seek to add meaning to the concept of the social contract. It should adopt a 'bottom-up' approach that focuses on the relatively neglected arena of the politics of implementation, where policies are (re-)interpreted and blockages to performance often occur. A broad conceptual framework for researching the politics of service provision is proposed that emphasises the fundamental question of control - that is, how and by whom is control exercised over what services are delivered to whom. Further research into the politics of what works would enhance policymakers' understanding of the reasons for variation in service outcomes, informing efforts to address widespread under-provision.

## 1. The debate about politics and service delivery

The pervasive failure of governments in developing countries to adequately provide services that meet the basic needs of poor people has been largely, though not exclusively, attributed to problems of weak capacity. At the same time, there is now consensus that politics matters, that institutions 'rule', and that donors need to understand, even if they are not fully able to engage with, the political aspects of reform (Leftwich and Wheeler, 2011; Unsworth, 2010). It is not that politics has been entirely absent from the diagnoses of the under-provision of services, just that it has rarely been systematically examined as the principal cause.

It is well understood, at the conceptual level at least, that politics underlies or exacerbates capacity constraints<sup>1</sup>. The idea of service provision as an inherently political undertaking, intimately bound up with the nature of the state and the formation of the social contract, has both a long tradition in political science and has enjoyed a recent revival in donor thinking around state-building (OECD, 2008). The central tenets of the seminal World Development Report (2004) – that accountability relationships are key to effective and inclusive services, and under-provision is a measure of the failure of representative democracy and the 'long-route' of accountability – remain deeply influential. Recent efforts to address so-called 'political market imperfections' by enhancing user participation in assessments of service quality, or publicising information about expenditure, are all implicitly based on improving political incentives<sup>2</sup>, and a response to the perceived deficiencies in political accountability (Keefer, 2007; Gauthier and Reinikka, 2007). There is now consensus that political institutions determine incentives for the allocation of public goods (Harding and Wantchekon, 2010). Empirical studies continue to support this view by demonstrating that political actors, under certain circumstances, may prefer to target narrow groups rather than pursue inclusive, broad-based provision, based on calculations of political returns (or attracting votes) (Collier, 2007).<sup>3</sup>

At the point of implementation, where policies often encounter vested interests and falter, whether and how services are delivered may depend in particular on the structure of incentives facing providers and recipients (Pritchett and Woolcock, 2004; Collier, 2007). As Booth (2011a) observes, there is now widespread acknowledgement that what appear on the surface as capacity limitations have their origins in incentive structures.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, service delivery is likely to face problems to do with the motivations of frontline staff, the heterogeneity of customer needs and demands, and the difficulty of measuring and monitoring performance (Collier, 2007). The principal-agent problem has been a central framework for understanding why behaviour in service delivery organisations so often 'fails to correspond to the expected pattern' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006, cited in Booth, 2011b:14)<sup>5</sup>. As Pritchett and Woolcock (2004:196) explain, because the provision of services is key, discretionary, and transaction intensive, with multiple principals and agents, delivering services through the public sector may well be 'the mother of all institutional and organizational design

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<sup>1</sup> For basic definitions of the conceptual terms used in relation to service provision in this paper, see Annex 1.

<sup>2</sup> Incentives are 'the rewards and punishments that are perceived by individuals to be related to their actions and those of others' and can be material or non-material (Ostrom et al, 2002: 36, cited in Harris, Jones and Kooy, 2011:26).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Andre and Mesple-Soms (2009) found that during the period of rule under the NDC in Ghana, districts that voted for the opposition party received more public goods than others in an attempt by the ruling party to consolidate their position by appeasing potential opposing forces. Similarly, a recent study of the politics of road allocation in Kenya by Burgess et al (2010) concluded that because of the context of high ethnic fractionalization, successive presidents have pursued ethnic alliances by investing in roads in districts where their own ethnicity is dominant, and in districts dominated by the second most powerful ethnic group.

<sup>4</sup> The role of incentives as bottlenecks in the under-provision of vital public goods is a central concern of the Africa Power and Politics Programme. See: <http://www.institutions-africa.org/>

<sup>5</sup> The 'principal-agent' model draws attention to the difficulties that citizens (as 'principals') face in ensuring the actions of self-interested politicians (the 'agents') are aligned with their purpose, and the problem that governments (as 'principals') face in constraining the behaviour of their bureaucracies (as 'agents') (Batley, 2004).



problems'. In developing countries, as Batley (2004) has argued, the bureaucratic arena is itself highly politicised, inter-connected with societal interests, and often forms the basis of patronage.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of a growing understanding about the various ways that service provision can be exposed to political influence, technical studies and evaluation reports examining the determinants of service outcomes often provide explanations that are entirely disconnected from political economy questions about political incentives, actors and institutions. Where politics is considered in the diagnosis of performance, it is typically seen as a constraining rather than enabling factor, and is often reduced to superficial, unconvincing categories like 'lack of political will', or 'patrimonial politics', or 'weak incentives' (Hickey, 2007). As Crook (2010) concluded in his review of the literature examining civil service reforms in Africa, 'lack of political commitment' is the favourite catch-all term for failure, but politics remains the 'poor cousin' among a group of better-understood, capacity-based explanations. In sum, the widespread consensus that politics matters has not been matched by rigorous research into how different forms of politics are likely to determine whether and how services are delivered.

This paper examines the available evidence on the political determinants of service provision, departing from the main thrust of recent literature in two ways: first, in its focus on how politics accounts for variation in outcomes; and second, in considering how politics has enabled as opposed to constrained reform and underpinned cases of relatively successful delivery. The paper aims to situate a strand of research on the 'politics of what works' - by the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) research programme - in an evidence-based review of what is already known about the forms of politics that may generate incentives for inclusive provision and ultimately better outcomes for poor people<sup>7</sup>.

The paper examines eight cases of relatively successful delivery and traces the main characteristics of the political environment in which these cases evolved, from the national political context, to the politics of sector policymaking, to the politics of implementation. The case studies represent a variety of country contexts (Bangladesh, Rwanda, Ghana, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Malawi and Peru), and are taken from four sectors—maternal and child health, basic education, agricultural marketing, and rural roads. These were selected both because of their intrinsic value to the livelihoods and wellbeing of poor people, and because they present an opportunity to consider the influence of politics in both 'social' (health and education) and 'productive' (roads and agricultural marketing) sectors. Leftwich's (2010:10) broad definition of politics is deployed – one that extends beyond formal political institutions to include 'all the activities of conflict, cooperation and negotiation over decisions about institutions and rules which shape how resources are used, produced and distributed'.

Successful cases of service provision, or programmes that 'work', were selected on the basis that: a) they have improved the lives of poor people, as demonstrated through impact evaluation; and b) these results have been sustained over the long-term (minimum 5 years). These cases, as Bebbington and McCourt (2007) observed in their own search for 'success', often emerge against the odds, and are never wholesale triumphs. As Grindle (2005) puts it, success, like development in general, is a moving target. Even policies that produce good results over time may 'go bad' at any point, either by ceasing to be effective or producing unintended consequences (*ibid*). In reflecting on the findings of the programme of research by the Citizenship research centre, Benequista and Gaventa (2011:39) similarly concluded that even the cases that were considered successful were often fraught with setbacks, missteps and reversals.

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<sup>6</sup> This finding is based on studies of new public management reforms introduced in the 1990s in four countries – Ghana, Zimbabwe, India and Sri Lanka

<sup>7</sup> For details of the sources and search terms used in this review, see Annex 2.

While there are good reasons to be cautious about labelling cases as ‘successful’, there is nevertheless a general openness to the idea that stories of success or progress at least, can be useful learning tools (ODI, 2011<sup>8</sup>). It is notable that recent research into the politics of service provision has turned its attention to explaining variation and exception in the face of overwhelming poor performance (Booth, 2011*b*), identifying institutional arrangements that are comparably better at dealing with some of the problems that arise in public service provision (Besley and Ghatak, 2007), and explaining why some cases run against the general patterns of institutional failure or corruption (Leftwich, 2010). Like these studies, the purpose here is not to provide a blueprint for success elsewhere, but rather, to begin to advance a research agenda that aims to understand better what accounts for variations in outcomes in the face of widespread under-provision.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section identifies some of the main themes that have emerged from recent empirical research into the politics of service delivery. In section 3, we turn our attention to the main body of evidence on which this paper draws, and examine more closely the politics of what works using eight case studies of successful delivery taken from our focus sectors. In section 4, we summarise the main findings from the case studies and wider empirical literature, before concluding in section 5 by identifying what a systematic approach for understanding the forms of politics likely to underpin successful service delivery might look like in future research.

## **2. The political determinants of service delivery**

Over the past decade or so, researchers have begun to examine the role of politics in determining whether, how and to whom services are provided, explicitly acknowledging that even where resource levels are sufficient, provision cannot be adequate if incentives are not properly aligned towards better outcomes (Collier, 2007). At the core of this thinking is an underlying intuition that variation in performance can be explained by variation in the way political institutions operate.

While there have been important advances in thinking about how politics may influence service performance, evidence of the links between politics and actual outcomes on the ground remains limited. Empirical research is fragmented across multiple sectors and disciplines, largely taking the form of in-depth case studies that in the absence of any unifying conceptual approach or framework offer a limited basis for systematic, comparative analysis. Studies have tended to converge on a relatively narrow few aspects of politics from among the larger range of possible political factors influencing outcomes. A good portion of the literature has been framed around a set of assumptions about the conditioning role of the national political and institutional environment - largely the nature of the political regime and electoral cycles. The ‘micro politics’ of incentives and relationships between actors at the point of delivery has been relatively neglected.

The brief review below outlines the main strands of current debates on the political determinants of service delivery, and presents some recent empirical evidence of how these affect service performance.

### **2.1 Periods of crisis and adjustment**

Political institutions are shaped by wider socio-economic conditions that determine the options and choices of political actors (Hickey, 2007). As Grindle (2005) notes, policy change initiatives occur in particular economic, political, and social contexts that represent different configurations of interests, institutions, and actors, and the legacies of prior political interactions. Based on a review of qualitative

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<sup>8</sup> A prominent recent illustration is the collection of ‘progress stories’ compiled by ODI. See: <http://www.developmentprogress.org/global-report>

studies of health and education reform across sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, Nelson (2007:87) concluded radical institutional reforms are sometimes launched in the wake of economic and political crises that 'weaken or destroy established interest groups, empower new ones, and convince the public of the need for major change'. Economic crisis is a catalyst in bringing about reform, because it throws the normal rules of the game into flux (Batley, 2004:39). Case studies of successful implementation of social protection policies across Africa and Asia have shown that in several instances, reform coincided with 'political junctures' (e.g. elections, moments of crisis, post-colonial settlements) that persuaded regimes to renegotiate the political settlement and social contract between state and citizens (Hickey, 2006).

## **2.2 Variation across and within regime type**

The nature of the political regime has long been regarded a key determinant of the policy choices states make with regard to services. A good deal of research in this area has either subtly or overtly addressed the question of whether democratic political systems, more than other types of regime, generate better service coverage and quality. The case in favour is that interactions between voters and politicians produce greater incentives for responsive public goods provision (Birner and Resnick, 2010). The realist view, as Harding and Wantchekon (2010) put it, is that 'whether one pitches it as leaders buying support or as citizens demanding recognition, the outcome is the same: by virtue of elections, democracy increases the provision of public goods'. But while empirical studies have documented spikes in social expenditure with the advent of democracy (Sasavage, 2005; Carbone, 2009), increased public spending does not, by itself, automatically translate into better outcomes (Besley and Ghatak, 2007).

The impact of democracy on service provision has been shown to be contingent on the wider institutional context (Nelson, 2007). This is graphically illustrated by Carbone's (2009) comparative analysis examining why democratisation was instrumental to the development of pro-poor health policies in Ghana, but failed to have similar positive effects in Cameroon. The study concludes that the key difference in Ghana was democratisation was accompanied by vibrant debate in the media and mobilised interest groups which gave opposition parties a platform to pressure the governing parties to respond to demands for better health. Stasavage's (2005) widely cited study of the impact of democracy on education spending in Uganda and Malawi similarly found that increased spending in Uganda was due to the particular salience of education in the country, coupled with public access to information about government policy.

Studies indicate that it is not elections *per se* that determine incentives for the delivery of public goods, but the highly localised dynamics of political competition and political culture. Keefer and Khemani's (2003) seminal study of so-called 'political market imperfections', which examined how information asymmetries, deep social polarisation, and the non-credibility of political promises disrupt the translation of citizen preferences into service outcomes, remains influential<sup>9</sup>. The study found Kerala performed relatively better in public goods provision because its voters are better informed and less ethnically polarized, and its political parties are able to generate credible political platforms on the basis of delivering broad social services. The local dynamics of political party competition are also implicated in Crost and Kambhampati's (2010) comparative study of village-level education

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<sup>9</sup> *Information asymmetry* means citizens, and particularly the poor, cannot easily assign either credit or blame for the quality of services delivered to individual politicians, and as a result politicians' incentives are to under-provide them. *Deep social polarisation* and ethnic fragmentation means citizens favour candidates from their own ethnic groups, distracting from the performance of public services. The *non-credibility of political promises*, based partly on the inability of citizens to verify them, undermines any political competition on this basis, leaving incumbents free to continue to underperform.

infrastructure in North India. This found higher rates of party turnover were directly correlated to the number of primary schools in a village, and the quality of its infrastructure.

Regime 'types' do not convey the same types of incentives through government bureaucracy: hence there may be no direct relationship between regime type and incentives for service provision (Booth, 2012). Research by APPP suggests top-down pressures for performance in public services are particularly strong where the political leadership has the capability to centralise the management of economic rents in the service of a long-term vision (Booth, 2012; Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2009; Cammack and Kelsall, 2011; Kelsall, 2011). Well functioning state bureaucracies can occur along the spectrum of political systems, including where neo-patrimonial logics prevail. This may depend on the extent to which political leaders are willing to invest political capital in 'insulating' certain reforms from the normal functioning of informal political institutions. Booth and Golooba-Mutebi (2009) argue this convincingly based on a political economy analysis of the Uganda roads sector. Watson and Khan (2010) draw a similar conclusion in relation to education reform in Pakistan, arguing special 'units' can protect reforms from an otherwise dysfunctional climate of opaque and discretionary bureaucratic rules and processes.

### **2.3 The source of elite incentives**

Understanding what drives effective service provision requires attention to the underlying incentives of elite decision makers (Besley and Ghatak, 2007). This need to 'unpack' the institutional incentives of political and economic elites was a key conclusion of the 10-year research programme of the Centre for the Future State (Unsworth, 2010)<sup>10</sup>. That is not to say that elites are by virtue of their position alone negative forces for development. Research has emphasised their incentives derive from a number of sources, including power base (i.e. resources and political influence in a locality or among a group), how they interpret poverty (i.e. ideology and knowledge), and how they translate the interests of their constituency into practice (i.e. capacity to implement) (Amsden, DiCaprio and Robinson, 2011). Elites make a difference, but we need to focus on the structures and institutions shaping their interests if we are to understand how the actions of individuals can be routinised (Unsworth, 2010; Olivier de Sardan, 2010).

Pro-poor service delivery may result where political elites court the support of the poor in the service of their political careers. This is illustrated by Kosack's (2009) analysis of the origins of investments in Education for All across different regimes in Ghana, Taiwan and Brazil. The study concluded that political will derived not from the leaders' personal commitment, or from international pressure, but from a political imperative to respond to citizens' demands. This imperative was strongest where the government needed the support of the poor to stay in power, where the poor were mobilised by a 'political entrepreneur' able to push forward their demands, and where the interests of private capital were to reduce the price of skilled labour. A recent study by Rosser, Wilson and Sulistiyanto (2011) found a similar dynamic with regard to health policies in Indonesia. It showed that where district heads actively pursued 'political entrepreneurship' over the long-term – i.e. developing and then relying on a popular support base among the poor in order to stay in power - they were more likely to promote free public services. Hence, as Hickey (2006:vii) observed in relation to social protection, pro-poor policies may emerge at particular moments when the interests of private and political actors converge with the interests of poor groups.

The long-held view that individual actors act as 'champions' able to somehow single-handedly galvanise pro-poor change is increasingly being tempered by a recognition that the capacity of individual actors derives from the alliances and coalitions in which they are embedded. These

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<sup>10</sup> Where elites are defined as: 'a distinct group within a society which enjoys privileged status and exercises decisive control over the organization of society' (Amsden, DiCaprio and Robinson, 2011)

alliances in turn determine individual actors' room for manoeuvre, and the resources they can mobilise. As Unsworth (2010:38) puts it, 'it is the way networks of relationships between public and private actors are configured that shapes their ability to influence reforms, not the characteristics of individual actors'. Accordingly, research by the Developmental Leadership Programme is examining leadership not in the personalised sense, but as a political process involving the skills of mobilising people and resources in pursuit of a set of shared and negotiated goals (Leftwich, 2010).<sup>11</sup> Others have noted that leaders grow out of the coalitions that they personify; they do not float freely above them (Bebbington and McCourt, 2006). Grindle (2005) asserts that whether or not leaders are able to undermine the existing 'political equilibrium' (of interests) around a policy depends both on the reform context and the strategies actors deploy - in other words, on both structural factors and actors' agency. Structure and agency need not be seen as being in opposition. As Mcloughlin and Batley (2011) argue based on studies of collaboration between government and non-government service providers in South Asia, the strategies most likely to succeed are those that are based on an understanding of existing structures and how they may present not only constraints but also opportunities for influence.

## **2.4 Alliances, networks and collective action**

Services are often understood, at the conceptual level, as the product of processes of state-society bargaining (Unsworth, 2010) or of an elusive underlying 'political equilibrium' (or social contract) between elites and different interest groups in society (Walton, 2010). A major strand of research has been concerned with the conditions under which citizens can collectively organise to press for broad-based provision, and therefore challenge service exclusion. But whether or not citizen engagement can influence policy choices is seen as dependent on a range of factors, including the political context, the relative capacities of actors, and the history and style of engagement between them, as well as the nature of the service being addressed.<sup>12</sup>

There are of course prominent cases where citizen pressure has been successful in influencing the state's policy choices. In-depth examinations of the well-documented case of citizen engagement in the health sector in Brazil continue to demonstrate that strong mobilisation around participatory institutions has promoted a more equitable distribution of healthcare. Coelho's (2011) comparative study of Local Health Councils in São Paulo found local institutions were more effective where powerful social actors could connect them into to a wider network of social organizations and political, governmental, and health institutions, in order to press for and negotiate the demands made by the forums through these connections. Another factor in more successful cases is the alignment of public managers, civil society representatives and political parties around an ideological commitment to popular participation (Benequista and Gaventa, 2011).

Drawing on case studies in India, Brazil and Mexico, the Centre for the Future State has documented successful cases of reform that have relied in part on broad-based alliances that transcend the public-private divide (if such a divide exists) and bring together key actors with common interests.<sup>13</sup> Unsworth (2010:45) describes this process as 'a form of embedded autonomy'. A recent study in Greater Durban illustrated how inclusive elite coalitions between political leaders, traditional leaders, elected councillors, businessmen, social activists and the church were able to break down social antagonisms and push for inclusive social provisioning (Beall and Ngonyama, 2009).

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<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.dlprog.org/>

<sup>12</sup> The Citizenship DRC lists the 'six factors' that influence the outcomes of citizen participation as: prior citizen capabilities; institutional and political context; the strength of internal champions; the location of power and decision-making; the history and style of engagement, and the nature of the issue (Benequista and Gaventa, 2011: 40)

<sup>13</sup> Benequista and Gaventa (2011:39) stress that in practice the boundaries between state and society are often blurred.



## 2.5 Top-down 'versus' bottom-up accountability

The debate about the relative merits of top-down 'versus' bottom-up accountability in underpinning service performance is pervasive in the literature on service performance. Research by the APPP indicates the success or failure of service delivery systems is related to the extent of top-down discipline and motivation, whether the framework for provision reflects a coherent vision, and the types of corporate performance disciplines in place (Booth, 2010:4-5).<sup>14</sup> Enquires into what drives 'pockets of productivity' and 'islands of effectiveness' draws similar conclusions (Leonard, 2008; Crook, 2010). Leonard (2008), for example, argues productivity is more likely where administrative leadership is depoliticised but responsive to political leadership. Other recent studies have found considerable merit in accountability from below. In their rigorous study of the Ugandan health sector, Björkman and Svensson (2007) showed that 'bottom up' community monitoring can play an important role in improving service delivery when traditional top-down supervision is ineffective. Nevertheless, as Gaventa and Barrett (2010) point out, such effects are highly context-dependent, and similar studies have found no such impact.

Some are beginning to conclude that citizen engagement in accountability –or social accountability – may be more effective when *combined with* top-down accountability (Joshi, 2012). Crook (2010: 79) argues that 'pressure from the public for better performance is only likely to work if the need to respond is incorporated into organisational incentive structures'. In other words, real change may be more likely where there are enabling conditions on 'both sides of the equation' – that is, where citizen pressure and political will combine to produce incentives for delivery (Benequista and Gaventa, 2011:39).

Even in the absence of formal democratic accountability (i.e. the long-route), citizens can bring to bear informal, reputation-based controls over public officials. Tsai's (2007) widely-cited study of 316 villages across rural China found that even though formal accountability mechanisms were weak, local officials had a strong incentive to provide public goods where citizens were able to award them moral standing for doing so. The study found higher levels of public goods provision in villages where solidarity groups that were 'encompassing' (open to everyone) and 'embedded' (incorporate local officials) were able to make local officials hold to their public obligations through informal sanction. Hossain (2010) reaches similar conclusions from a study in Bangladesh. She highlights that 'rude' forms of accountability – or forms of accountability that depend on the power of social norms and rules to influence and sanction official performance - were particularly salient because of the prestige and financial incentives associated with holding public office in the country. She concludes that effective accountability relationships can be 'embedded in social relations and political pressures that are unofficial, informal and personalized' (*ibid*:924).

Social accountability may be more effective where it is genuinely locally-anchored, and builds on a culture of citizen participation. Singh and Kaushal's (2009) study of co-productive relationships between the state and traditional authorities in the provision of public goods and services in Nagaland found arrangements worked because they combined strong state-level backing and an enabling legal framework with local customs of consensus-building around collective problems. APPP has provided illustrative examples of the role of 'locally anchored problem solving' in service delivery; that is, small-scale, locally-generated initiatives that make use of local resources and derive their legitimacy from 'local cultural repertoires' (or 'views on what is important and how to get things done') (Booth, 2011a:19). As Booth (2011a:17) explains, these arrangements often locate modern professional standards within the local moral economy. In some contexts, institutional innovations work when they build constructively on what already exists and are based on practical norms (*ibid*). Market-place co-

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<sup>14</sup> Based on fieldwork undertaken in 2009 in Malawi, Niger, Rwanda and Uganda.

production in Sierra Leone worked because relationships were based on reciprocal exchange, parties recognised their mutual dependence, and there was immediate sanction for failures of reciprocity (Workman's, 2011). Hence, moral reciprocity is a form of accountability, even when these relationships appear on the surface to be patrimonial (Hickey, 2006:vii).

## **2.6 Sector and reform characteristics**

Different sectors have particular characteristics that determine their political salience, the incentives for politicians to deliver them, the main actors and interests surrounding them, and the ways that citizens can mobilise around them. They present different opportunities for political returns: As Keefer and Khemani (2003) have argued, there is now 'ample evidence' politicians have greater incentives to provide narrowly targetable goods, such as infrastructure provision, rather than improvements in broad public services<sup>15</sup>. Mani and Mukand (2007) add another dimension, finding incentives also vary according to the 'visibility' of certain goods (where visibility increases the likelihood elites will be credited). Calculations of returns may not only determine *whether* the state provides a service but *how* the state engages in its production. As Pritchett (2002) argues, regimes have incentives to directly produce education because it is the best means of directly controlling and monitoring the inculcation of beliefs.

Sector characteristics may also influence power relations between service users and providers, or principals (citizens and their political representatives) and agents (politicians, officials and professional groups, provider organizations). Studies across Africa and Asia analysed the relative power of principals and agents according to whether a service is producer or consumer oriented, the degree to which users are defined territorially, the level of information and choice citizens have in using the service, and the measurability of performance (Batley, 2004:45). They found that compared with users of agricultural marketing services and urban water supply, users of curative health services had relatively little choice, little information about how to exercise it, and little capacity to organize (*ibid*). Likewise, Keefer and Khemani (2003:2) argue political market imperfections are greatest in the education and health sectors, where information asymmetry is chronic, and citizens cannot easily evaluate the quality and efficiency of services.

Different types of reform are also likely to attract different types of politics. Kaufman and Nelson (2004) distinguish 'piecemeal' reforms that entail relatively small steps and may fall under the political radar but nevertheless have important cumulative effects, from larger initiatives that aim to extensively alter the structure and organization of delivery systems. Their studies of education and health reform across Latin America show that whilst ambitious plans carry higher risks of provoking political opposition, a more incremental approach may fail to sustain its own momentum (*ibid*:5). In the health sector, programmes that created new stakeholders or addressed obvious equity goals without disrupting established interests were more sustainable than reforms that made new demands or altered existing procedures: on the whole, equity-oriented reforms were generally easier to implement than efficiency-oriented reforms (*ibid*:50, 62). This view is supported by Grindle (2005) who in reference to the education sector in Latin America observes that while reforms to increase access were relatively easy because they increased the size and power of unions, quality reforms that emphasised performance evaluation and reorganisation upset the political equilibrium of actors, interests and agents and met with fierce opposition. Overall, the literature is clear that anticipation of resistance from interest groups may in some cases explain why some reforms are pursued and others are not, and why politicians often revert to 'popular' policies.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A recent study by Khemani (2010) suggests swing voters in local jurisdictions provide greater vote returns when allocated private transfers such as jobs, cash, subsidies, and in-kind transfers, instead of broad public goods such as quality health and education.

<sup>16</sup> Grindle also makes the point that strategic decision-makers anticipate the sources of resistance and calculate to out-manoeuvre them.

## 2.7 Modes of provision

The particular 'mode of provision' - in other words, who the principal actors are, and their respective roles and accountabilities - also influences incentives at the point of delivery, and may determine the opportunities for collective action. Modes of provision – or forms of direct delivery by government, contracting (whether to contract in external support or to contract out whole functions), collaboration and co-production - have been analysed according to how roles of ownership, stewardship, financing, delivery, and accountability are distributed between state actors, non-state providers and citizens or users (Batley and Larbi 2004, Balabanova 2008). Recent research on social accountability in India, Brazil and Mexico, for example, has shown that the arrangements for implementation 'substantially influence the opportunities for collective actors to organise, influence policy, and hold service providers accountable' (Unsworth, 2010: 38)<sup>17</sup>.

But there are limitations to simple classifications of 'modes' of provision, and recent research is increasingly exposing what has probably always been the reality - that in practice, services and public goods are often generated through formal and informal collaborations across increasingly blurred public/private boundaries, that these can occur spontaneously, and that they are often highly elusive and informal (Olivier de Sardan, 2010). Services are not monopolistic (Olivier de Sardan, 2010), they are often hybrids that do not fit with the ideal types (Joshi and Moore, 2004), and might more typically take the form of 'complex co-production' (Booth, 2011a). Whether or not public services are delivered effectively depends on the precise terms on which collaboration occurs, the co-ordination between actors, and the personal relationships between them. One study in Niger describes how different modes may involve different types of *particular* accountabilities between individuals and institutions, and different opportunities for *general* accountability to the citizens/users (Olivier de Sardan, 2010). As intimated earlier, some consider that it is not modes *per se* that drive better or worse public goods provision, but the specific mechanisms that exist to overcome problems of collective action (Kelsall, 2009).

A relatively small body of literature has examined the dynamics of relationships between state and non-state actors collaborating in producing public goods and services. This research has illustrated how the balance of power and relative autonomy of the actors at the point of delivery is a product of the broader political and institutional environment, the history of state-NGO relations, and the nature of the political regime (Batley and Mcloughlin, 2010:135). These factors influence the way the relationship is organised – both formally and informally – and the actors' respective room for manoeuvre (Mcloughlin, 2011). For example, Batley (2011) and Rose (2011) have found that effective and enduring - less brittle - forms of collaboration between government and non-government service providers seem to arise where the relationship has evolved rather than been created, rests on mutual agreement, and preserve the financial autonomy of partners.

## 3. Case studies of the politics of what works

While there is consensus that politics may enable or constrain service provision, the empirical evidence remains limited, and it is difficult to get a sense of how the various aspects of politics identified in the wider literature might interact and determine outcomes in any one given case. This section examines eight cases of 'successful' implementation – as measured by independent evaluation of impact – and traces the aspects of politics that have been considered important determinants of progress. In so far as the literature allows, the cases highlight the influence of political

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<sup>17</sup> Collective action was often weakened by lack of focus point, physical or otherwise, around which to mobilise. For instance, cash transfer programmes in Mexico were deliberately designed to bypass civil society intermediaries that were seen as corrupt, cutting off the focus point for collective actors to mobilise (Unsworth, 2010, 39).



institutions, actors and incentives at the local, sector and national level. The aim is to consider politics more holistically.

In addition to the main criteria of evidence of measurable results (i.e independent evaluation), sustained over the medium term (five years), the case study selection aims to represent a range of modes of provision - from direct state delivery, to contracting, to co-production and state-NGO collaborations. In practice, no case fits neatly into a single category, partly because the complexity of organisational arrangements is not often captured in the literature, and partly because a particular service may be provided through bundles of modes operating at different levels or points in the production and delivery process. Though the cases are taken from a diverse range of countries, as table 1 shows, they were not selected for the purpose of illustrating contrasting country contexts.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 1. Selected case studies of the politics of what works**

| <b>Sector</b>                    | <b>Country</b> | <b>Mode of delivery<sup>19</sup></b>           |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--|
| <b>Maternal and child health</b> | Rwanda         | <i>Performance-based financing</i>             |
|                                  | Bangladesh     | <i>Decentralised state provision</i>           |
| <b>Basic education</b>           | Ghana          | <i>Complementary (State-NGO collaboration)</i> |
|                                  | Ethiopia       | <i>Decentralised state provision</i>           |
| <b>Rural roads</b>               | Indonesia      | <i>Decentralised state provision</i>           |
|                                  | Peru           | <i>Contracting out</i>                         |
| <b>Agricultural marketing</b>    | Malawi         | <i>State-run</i>                               |
|                                  | Ghana          | <i>State-run</i>                               |

### 3.1 Performance-based financing in maternal and child health in Rwanda

A number of sources have recently drawn attention to the remarkable progress made in the Rwandan health sector since 1994 (Pose and Samuels, 2011a; Basinga et al, 2011; Brinkerhoff, 2009). Although the genocide virtually destroyed the country's health infrastructure, available data indicates most health indicators have been restored to pre-genocide levels, and Rwanda is on track to meet the child and maternal health MDGs. Maternal mortality decreased dramatically between 2000-2005 (30%), as did under five and infant mortality between 2005-2007 (32% and 28%, respectively). Progress is expected to continue as the number of women giving birth in health facilities is increasing (Pose and Samuels, 2011a:11,15-16).

The scale and timing of Rwanda's progress on health is seen as intimately connected to the exceptional context of the post-genocide period and the nature of the ensuing post-war political settlement. Progress on health sector reform in Rwanda can be traced along the same timeline as wider processes of stabilisation and social reconciliation in the country (Pose and Samuels, 2011a). Planning was initially hampered by a period of stagnation in the late 1990s, during which time the interim Government of National Unity was reliant on emergency humanitarian aid and the country

<sup>18</sup> It is notable that none of the cases are from among the group of fragile and conflict affected states, and that, as one reviewer commented, other studies from South America could have been included.

<sup>19</sup> These are the dominant aspects that distinguish these cases, although other modes are going on within them.

characterised by sporadic conflict. Once political reconstruction began in the early 2000s, reforms began to be designed and piloted, and national-level implementation got underway after the first multiparty elections of 2003 (Ibid, 2011:7).

Booth and Golooba-Mutebi (2011:15) argue that the shock and challenge to national survival presented by the genocide helped install a leadership determined to pursue nation-building, noting that President Kagame is widely regarded as 'both visionary and determined to the point of ruthlessness'. They characterise the regime since 2000 as a form of 'developmental patrimonialism', whereby the ruling elite has successfully centralised rents and deployed them in the pursuit of a long term vision. Free from the need to create rents to generate political support, policy has been driven almost exclusively by a genuine commitment to economic and social development as an antidote to a legacy of ethnic division (ibid). The near-complete destruction of infrastructure and human capital may even have enabled policy innovation free from the constraints of a historically entrenched system (Morgan, 2010).

At the technical level, Rwanda's achievements in health are seen as partly attributed to the Performance Based Financing (PBF) initiative – a form of 'contracting in' piloted in 2002 and rolled out nationally in 2006<sup>20</sup>. This initiative provides financial incentives to publicly and NGO-managed district hospitals to improve their performance against quality and use indicators (Pose and Samuels, 2011a). Central government acts in a stewardship role, but the initiative receives financial and technical contributions from the World Bank, WHO, and number of bilateral aid agencies.<sup>21</sup> A recent multi-donor impact evaluation across 166 districts found improvements in both the use and quality of maternal and child health services as a result of the initiative (Basinga et al, 2011).

Echoing wider observations about the role of determined leadership in Rwanda's broader developmental success, several authors note that strong political leadership, from the President down to village-level, has been a critical impetus for health reform in the post-genocide period (Pose and Samuels, 2011a; Brinkerhoff, 2009). High-level backing from the Rwandan government was cemented in 2006 only after rigorous evaluations demonstrated the initiative could have positive impacts on outcomes (Soeters et al. 2006). The government's will and firm commitment enabled it to push the initiative forward in spite of an initial cool response from donors (Morgan, 2010). The capacity to assertively engage donors is indicative of Rwanda's reputation as able to pursue its own agenda, acting as a 'true partner' and encouraging the co-ordination of aid at central and local levels (Pose and Samuels, 2011). Strong top-down incentives also feature prominently in accounts of the success of performance based financing in Rwanda. Booth and Golooba-Mutebi (2011:16) argue the Rwandan civil service scores highly on vertical coordination and technocratic integrity. Furthermore, the legitimacy and integrity of the Rwandan regime, evidenced in the complete absence of high-level political corruption, affords it considerable moral authority (ibid).

Rwanda has been described as an example of how formal standard setting, evaluation and feedback mechanisms can be successfully deployed alongside more traditional, culturally embedded means of enforcing contracts, accountability and obligations (Pose and Samuels, 2011a). Part of the government's moral authority derives from strategic revival of the deeply embedded cultural values of *imihigo* and *guhiga*, which require mayors, village chiefs, local leaders and civil servants to sign annual performance contracts on which they have to swear an oath (ibid). Some have observed synergy between this wider emphasis on performance, which Brinkerhoff (2009) describes as 'front and centre' in the Rwandan public sector, and the success of PBF. At the technical level, Meesen et al (2006) note that deploying values and social norms of integrity and honesty lowers the transaction

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<sup>20</sup> The approach is sometimes referred to as 'paying for performance' (P4P).

<sup>21</sup> Funding is coordinated through an *Inter-Agency Working Groups on Results Based Financing*, affiliated to the International Health Partnership (Kalk et al, 2010).

costs of command and control mechanisms like PBF.

### **3.2 Decentralised maternal and child health in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh has achieved what the World Bank (2005) has described as a 'spectacular rate of progress' on health indicators since its independence in 1971, most notably in reducing fertility, but also in increasing the use of antenatal and postnatal care. Pose and Samuels (2011*b*) similarly cite 'extraordinary improvements' in infant and maternal mortality in the country, including a 44% decline in the maternal mortality rate between 1990-2001 (Mridha et al, 2009:1). This progress has occurred alongside substantial growth in health infrastructure: from a very low base of virtually no health facilities at independence, to now substantial numbers of district hospitals and local community clinics (Mridha et al, 2009). Successive five year plans have shifted services from a narrow urban-based delivery system to a more broad-based rural programme capable of reaching vulnerable groups (Pose and Samuels, 2011), though differences in access between regions and between ethnic and socioeconomic groups remain (Mridha et al, 2009; World Bank 2005; Hossain and Osman, 2007).

Several observers note success in Bangladesh is surprising given the country's poor record on governance and the prevalence of corruption (Mridha et al, 2009; Pose and Samuels, 2011*b*). Electoral competition and the political capital to be gained from service provision have played an important role in driving social sector reform. A stable post-independence political settlement, coupled with predictable and consistent patterns of elite competition and cooperation enabled commitment to prioritising maternal and child health in spite of a swathe of changes in government (Hossain and Osman, 2007; Pose and Samuels, 2011*b*; Parks and Cole, 2010). As Hossain and Osman (2007:39) note, strong party competition between 1991 and 2006 made successive ruling parties scale-up their commitments to health in order to outbid their predecessor. This is mirrored in increased party control over the distribution of resources at local level (*ibid*). Since the 1980s, politicians have perceived support for social spending as a political win-win that provides political credit alongside business opportunities (Mahmud et al, 2008).

Electoral politics may also have determined the *nature of the reforms* undertaken in Bangladesh, based on the type of popular support they have been able to attract. Hossain and Osman (2007) argue achievements made during the 1990s were mainly limited to improvements in access – a type of reform seen as broadly aligned with the governance status quo, not likely to be technically demanding or disrupt political interests, and popular with citizens, service-providers (specifically doctors), elites and the donor community. Mahmud et al (2008) concur that successive governments have pursued the path of least confrontation, adopting reforms that were relatively easy wins accomplished by 'a stroke of the pen'. It is noted, however, that since the 2000s, much-needed quality reforms have yet to make it onto the policy table, reflecting the difficulties of engaging the well-organised professional public servants whose political clout has been strengthened through expansion in the sector (Hossain and Osman, 2007).

Public health in Bangladesh is delivered through a tiered structure of facilities at tertiary (division) secondary (district) and upazila (sub-district) levels. While there are no available country-wide evaluations of the decentralised mode of provision, Faguet and Ali's (2009) micro-level study of health outcomes across two upazilas - one successful, one unsuccessful – provides an insight into the local structural, political and institutional factors that may account for the variation in indicators across localities. This study showed that in order to understand success and failure in public service delivery, we need to dig down beneath the 'rules of the game': that is, to look beyond the organizations, institutions and informal rules and conventions that govern incentives, to examine the underlying beliefs, understandings and dispositions that drive behaviour. While the health 'hardware' (infrastructure, administration, staff) of the two upazilas was similar, the successful upazila was in closer proximity to the capital, had a history of sustained NGO involvement, and a relatively open,

tolerant religious tradition. Even more important than these structural factors, Faguet and Ali (2009) argue, was the ability of 'local leaders' to promote changes in health behaviours. This was made possible because they were embedded in a dense 'web of relationships' between citizens, legal authorities and service providers that conferred on them local authority and legitimacy, making the local population more susceptible to their messages. This network of relationships also underpinned a higher degree of accountability by public servants. Hence the conclusion that if services are to respond to a population's particular - and changing - needs, and be credible in the eyes of the population, the elected representatives of that population should be involved in their production (Faguet and Ali, 2009:216).

### **3.3 Complementary basic education in Ghana**

Ghana has made substantial progress in increasing access to basic education since the post-colonial period: the net enrolment ratio in primary school increased from 60% to 77% between 1999-2008 (UNESCO, 2011:117). In spite of this achievement, the 2011 Education Monitoring Report warns that the country is unlikely to meet its MDG targets without a substantial increase in aid (UNESCO, 2011). Enrolments remain well below the Education for All (EFA) goals, and completion rates are problematic, with only 63% of children making it to their fifth year of primary school (Little, 2010:44). Progress has levelled off since the early 2000s, partly because of the difficulties of reaching the last 20% of primary age children, particularly in the north of the country, where the great majority of children do not complete the compulsory nine years of primary education (Little, 2010; Casey-Hayford and Hartwell, 2010:529).

Studies have analysed the relationship between Ghana's uneven progress on education over the past three decades, and the level of 'political will' exhibited by successive regimes (Little, 2010; Pedley and Taylor, 2009; Kosak, 2009). These provide similar accounts of why the country invested relatively more in primary education in the periods before 1966 and after 1986, whereas the intervening period was characterised by structural decline. Governments that prioritised access to education – namely, under the Convention People's Party (CPP) (1951-1965) and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) (1982-92) – were driven by a need to actively court the support of the masses (Little, 2010; Pedley and Taylor, 2009). Kosack (2009) develops this further, arguing fluctuating levels of political will correlate with whether or not two 'vital constituencies' in education reform - poor families and employers - were mobilised by a 'political entrepreneur'.

Against this background of inconsistent progress, resource constraints and the continuing challenge of reaching underserved populations, the importance of complementary education in Ghana is increasingly being recognised (Casely-Hayford and Hartwell, 2010). The School for Life (SfL) programme, piloted and rolled out across the north of the country since 1995, is considered one of the few successful examples of complementary education (Rose, 2009). The programme provides accelerated learning to underserved populations through a form of co-production whereby formal organisations and communities or service recipients both make resource contributions. Teachers are recruited from within the community, trained by the Ghana Education Service (GES), and paid by the community in food, small amounts of cash or household labour<sup>22</sup>. A recent impact assessment found SfL reached 85,000 children and over 4000 rural communities across 12 districts, with close to 90% of these children completing the programme and become functionally literate, and almost 70% transitioning to the formal education system at upper primary levels. The integration of SfL students into the formal system has had a positive impact on the overall gross enrolment rate for public primary

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<sup>22</sup> This definition of co-production is based on Joshi and Moore (2004)

schools in the north<sup>23</sup>. The programme also improved gender equality (at least 40% of those enrolled in SfL were female) (Casely-Hayford and Hartwell, 2010).

A supportive government-NGO relationship may be an important enabling factor in the overall success and sustainability of SfL. The programme is managed through collaborative arrangements between donors, non-state actors and government agencies. While it is exclusively donor-funded, government has been encouraging in its stewardship role, increasingly recognising the contribution of complementary education at the policy level since 2003 (Casely-Hayford and Hartwell, 2010). The legitimacy of SfL has been acknowledged at the lowest tiers of government, and in turn SfL has influenced the state sector's notions of quality provision. Rose (2009:230) notes that experience in Ghana is indicative of a wider pattern whereby governments are happy to include NGO provision in education plans provided the provision is supported by external resources rather than competing with formal government schooling. Batley and Mcloughlin (2010:144-145) argue that this type of informal mutual agreement, based on independent contributions by the partners and non-hierarchical relationships between them, allows for joint learning, relies on the accumulation of human capital, and may extend through processes of imitation, example and institutional replication .

### **3.4 Decentralised basic education in Ethiopia**

Despite being one of the most educationally disadvantaged countries in the world, Ethiopia has achieved a 'rapid and equitable' expansion of access to primary education since the end of the civil war in 1991 (Engel, 2011). The 2011 Global Monitoring Report observes the country now has a real prospect of achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015, having reduced the number of children out of school from 6.5 million to 2.7 million from 1999 to 2008 (UNESCO, 2011). Notwithstanding continuing concerns over quality, there is evidence that this rapid expansion has been accompanied by reductions in geographic and socioeconomic inequalities in access (in particular, a narrowing of the gender gap), alongside growing rates of primary school completion (Teshome, 2008; Engel, 2011).

The literature examining the progress made in education in Ethiopia draws attention to the strong ideological commitment to pro-poor reform and equality of access reform exhibited by the ruling political party, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This ideology is linked to the party's military history, its experience of mass mobilisation in resistance to the Dergue, and the fact that the poor are its key political constituency (Brown and Teshome, 2007). The political legitimacy of the EPRDF rests on its identity as a 'vanguard movement of the poor', and education has been regarded by as a central pillar of a post-war nation-building project, and a means of addressing past sources of instability (Engel, 2011:14). Successive education policies have been 'loaded' with references to democratic values, human rights and citizenship, and aimed 'to produce good citizens who understand, respect and defend the constitution' (Teshome's, 2008:58).

Decentralisation in Ethiopia has been seen as central to the ruling party's because it has helped resolve struggles for power and resources between ethnic political elites, and accommodate the various ethnic groups' specific geographical features, economic activity and social and cultural values (Chanie, 2007 and Engel, 2011). In the education sector, central government finances services and retains control over the curriculum but devolves planning, standard setting and accreditation, evaluation, monitoring and allocating local discretionary budgets to woreda education offices (Garcia and Rajkumar, 2008)<sup>24</sup>. In spite of sub-optimal arrangements for funding, planning and role allocation, decentralisation has improved service delivery, and disproportionately favoured poorer, more remote, food insecure, and pastoral areas, narrowing the gap in attainment between disadvantaged and

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<sup>23</sup> Specifically, the evaluation found that SfL increased access to primary education by 14% in the North; from a gross enrolment rate of 69%, to 83% (Casely-Hayford and Hartwell, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Levels of government in Ethiopia are: zones, woredas (districts) and kebeles (community councils) (Garcia and Rajkumar, 2008).



better-off woreda (Garcia and Rajkumar, 2008:ix). While acknowledging the problems in attributing sector outcomes to decentralisation, it has coincided with steeper upward trends in a number of education indicators (Dom and Lister, 2010:51).

There are mixed signals about the relative roles of top-down versus bottom-up accountability and participation in the decentralised system of education in Ethiopia. On the one hand, Brown and Teshome (2007:45) argue that the ruling party's Marxist roots which underlie its commitment to pro-poor policymaking have engendered a top-down, command approach to implementation. Decentralisation has been tempered by strong top-down constraints on local government autonomy (Dom and Lister, 2010). Intergovernmental transfers in practice centre on informal, patron-client relations characterised by an imbalance of power between strong central and weaker regional political parties. These dynamics sustain upward accountability, central domination and regional fiscal dependence (Chanie, 2007: 361).

Other studies indicate that decentralisation in Ethiopia has generated positive social capital and collective action around services. It has allowed woredas to raise local awareness of national strategies and more effectively mobilize community participation and resources (Engel, 2010; Dom and Lister, 2010). Community contributions frequently make up between 10 and 20% of the woreda budget (Garcia and Rajkumar, 2008, cited in Engel, 2011:20). The government's decision to allow teaching to be delivered in local languages, using locally relevant curricula, may have contributed to more active participation in the teaching-learning process (Engel: 2010:18). But while there may be gains in terms of increased local pride, self-identity and social capital, the impact of education policy on long-term national unity remains unknown (Smith, 2008).

### **3.5 Decentralised rural roads in Indonesia**

Indonesia has recently been lauded as a democratic success story, having in a relatively short time made the transition from a centralised authoritarian regime to a democratic state that has pursued what Harris and Foresti (2011) describe as an aggressive programme of 'big bang decentralisation'. While problems of corruption and neo-patrimonialism remain pervasive, decentralisation is considered to have enabled progress towards increased accountability, as well as allowing citizens to express their preferences in the delivery of public goods at the local level (ibid).

As part of ongoing decentralisation reforms, the Indonesian government has adopted what is considered an innovative approach to the provision of small scale infrastructure and rural roads development under the national Kecamatan Development Program (KDP) (World Bank, 2010)<sup>25</sup>. In this community-driven development approach, central government devolves an annual block grant to sub-districts to fund infrastructure projects chosen by villages, of which roads are the most popular (Olken, 2010). Projects are facilitated and managed by local NGOs, which are responsible for managing funds, sourcing materials from the private sector, and building roads with local labour (Guggenheim et al, 2004). Available data indicate that by October 2009, the programme had built or rehabilitated over 62,000 kilometres of roads, with wider positive impacts in reducing household vulnerability and decreasing unemployment (World Bank, 2010). Evaluations have found the technical quality of the vast majority of the infrastructure to be 'good' to 'very good', the method of building more cost effective than equivalent government contracts, and the roads to be well maintained by communities (Olken, 2010; Guggenheim, 2004).

There is some consensus that the incentives for the post-1998 democratic state to adopt a community-driven approach to development derived in part from the underlying socio-economic conditions in the country (World Bank, 2010; Guggenheim et al, 2004; Chowdhury et al, 2009). In

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<sup>25</sup> The programme now comes under the remit of the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM).

analysing the origins of the KDP in particular, experts emphasise that the context of rural poverty, political upheaval and financial crisis – namely, the East Asia crisis and the sudden downfall of President Suharto – weakened the appeal of a centralised state and provided an impetus for government to deliver programmes that could ‘bypass the graft-prone top layers of government’ in an effort to ‘increase the people’s trust’ (Guggenheim et al, 2004). The KDP was not an entirely new mode of delivery, but was able to build on pre-existing institutions for local participation (ibid). The political appeal of this form of direct transfer is that they have an immediate and visible impact on recipients, and can be ‘pitched’ as confirmation of the government’s commitment to poverty reduction (Chowdhury et al, 2009).

The success and sustainability of the KDP model may be at least partly attributable to its demand-led, participatory nature (World Bank, 2010; Guggenheim et al, 2004; Chowdhury et al, 2009). According to the World Bank, the participation of women and poor people in the programme has been high (average 45% and 60% respectively) (World Bank, 2010). Gibson and Woolcock (2008) found that in the KDP’s deliberative forums, rights-based claim making was the preferred ‘currency of exchange’, and allowed marginalised groups to challenge elite dominance over decision-making. Olken’s (2010) study of the effects of participation in the programme across 49 villages concluded participation increased the programme’s legitimacy (i.e. the type of project selected). Specifically, people saw decisions as more legitimate, regardless of whether the outcome matched their preference, if they were reached by direct democracy as opposed to a deliberative meeting (ibid).

Bottom up and top-down controls over corruption have arguably operated well together in the case of the KDP, to different effect. One study concluded that whereas citizen engagement was able to act as an effective check on the potential for shirking by community labourers, it was not an effective check on missing materials - only increased government audits were able to reduce ‘missing’ expenditures (Olken’s (2010). Grassroots monitoring was only effective where there are limited free rider problems and limited elite capture (ibid). Guggenheim et al (2004) argue that strong top-down control and joint government-World Bank monitoring at local level helped curb the potential for elite capture, noting the collaborative local effort between the Ministry of Home Affairs and local community NGOs in exposing corrupt officials. These observations chime with the findings of studies of accountability systems across other sectors which indicate that success requires a combination of bottom up and top-down pressure (Unsworth, 2010).

### **3.6 Contracting out rural roads in Peru**

Peru has recently made significant progress in improving access to roads in rural and mountainous areas, where some of the country’s most vulnerable populations live. Since 1995, the Peru Rural Roads Program (PCR) - a national programme run by government and jointly funded by the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank - has rehabilitated and maintained some 15,000km of rural roads and 7,000km of paths (used primarily by women and children) (McSweeney and Remy, 2008). A number of evaluations have demonstrated improvements in local economic productivity and increased investments in health and education as a result of the program (Valdivia, 2010). A 2005 study found an 8% increase in school enrolment, a 55% increase in number of visits to health centres, a 16% increase in use of agricultural land, and a 20% increase in rural household income (Simatovic, 2008:7). The programme has also particularly increased women’s access to markets and school enrollment (Bravo, 2002).

Much of the literature attributes the success of the PCR to a number of ‘innovative’ institutional design characteristics that set the right incentives for the agents (Valdivia, 2010). Under the programme, local governments and communities identify priority projects according to local demand. Women and

men are consulted separately to enable women to make their voices heard. The local government then issues performance-based contracts to Routine Road Maintenance Microenterprises (MEMVRs), formed by local people, to carry out the required work<sup>26</sup>. The state requires that at least 30% of the employees of the MEMVRs be women, reflecting a broader commitment to gender equality, as seen at national level in the gender quota for political candidates (Simatovic, 2008). Several authors have argued that the PCR's inclusive mode of provision has enabled genuine local ownership, helped insulate it from local capture, and ultimately underlies its sustainability (Simatovic, 2008; Valdivia, 2010). Valdivia (2010) argues the programme has avoided corruption because outputs are highly observable, and because monitoring is carried out jointly by local government and community associations. McSweeney and Remy (2008) point out that the MEMVRs have incentives to be accountable and to perform well because they are formed from, and embedded in, local communities that live close to the road, and therefore have a direct stake in maintaining them. In this way, the case supports the point made elsewhere that accountability may work best when it is genuinely locally-anchored.

The decentralised mode of road provision in Peru, and in particular the mainstreaming of citizen participation and the engagement of local users in their maintenance, has been described as increasing political participation, strengthening democracy and civil society, improving local management skills, aiding political inclusion, and increasing citizen's trust in the state (Simatovic, 2008:3). Other accounts reveal more contested relationships between the state and the local community. Wilson (2004) argues road building has at times been characteristic of the state's 'territorialising project', that is, making claims to political/social space, and exerting control over people and resources at a distance, which often involve strategies of persuasion, force and seduction, and transplanting local offices and administrative districts. She notes roads may have different connotations to rural communities; in some instances, they may be seen as a path into the wider economy, polity and society; in others, they might be considered a threat to autonomy, and communities might evade 'incorporation'. While the Peruvian state has oscillated between prioritising and neglecting road building, the most successful cases have generally occurred where there was 'consensus reached between state and population that roads-building was the way forward to modernity and progress' (ibid).

### **3.7 State-run cocoa marketing in Ghana**

For 25 years Ghana has consistently achieved annual growth rates of above 5%, making it one of the fastest growing agricultural economies in the world (Wiggins and Leturque, 2011). The country's agriculture sector, and in particular its cocoa marketing system, has been particularly successful in connecting smallholder farmers with domestic and export markets (ibid). Through this system, the government acts in a stewardship role through the state-run marketing board, Cocobod, which oversees the production of the crop and maintains a monopoly over exports. Farmers sell cocoa beans to Licensed Buying Companies (LBCs), and the cocoa is moved to ports and exported by the government-owned Cocoa Marketing Company. Studies have shown Cocobod has performed impressively over the past decade: produce is of premium quality, farmers receive a relatively large share of exports, and the system is surprisingly corruption free (Williams, 2009; Hubbard, 2003). This success makes Cocobod somewhat exceptional when viewed in the context of its own history of corruption in the period prior to the 1980s (Williams, 2009). Moreover, it goes against a wider pattern of poor performance in comparable systems across developing countries, many of which have been difficult to reform due to vested interests and rent extraction (Hubbard, 2003; Williams, 2009).

Several analysts have noted that strong leadership has been an important factor in ensuring that the Ghana cocoa marketing system has been effectively insulated from political interference (Williams,

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<sup>26</sup> As of 2008, 650 MEMVRs had been created, generating 4,800 permanent jobs and some 35,000 temporary jobs (Simatovic, 2008:25).



2009; Shepherd and Onumah, 1997). As Williams (2009) argues, the charismatic and motivated political leadership of J.J. Rawlings was instrumental in pushing through a series of 'well-directed' reforms to the system during the 1980s and 1990s. Wiggins and Leturque (2011) note that agricultural growth took off after Rawlings came to power in 1981, and has since been sustained in part by the regime's consistent commitment to agricultural development during a period of relative political and economic stability. Williams (2009) argues that the authoritarian nature of the regime made it well positioned to be able to push through genuine economic reforms.

Others have observed that, although reforms to the cocoa marketing system were financed by donors under structural adjustment, the government has been able to retain a sense of local ownership over the system, and to resist donor pressure for full liberalisation (Hubbard, 2003; Wiggins and Leturque, 2011). As Hubbard (2003) concludes, the nature of the reforms adopted by government balanced efficiency with national ownership, thereby satisfying the donors as well as Ghanaian nationalists. Some argue that the effects of this strong leadership, and in particular the government's commitment to quality, have trickled down to the organisational level. Williams (2009) argues that the system's relative insulation from corruption is partly explainable by the Cocoa Marketing Company's almost Weberian standards of organisational performance; with high levels of professionalism, merit-based appointments, and reliable salaries.

There is some indication that the incentives behind the government's long-term commitment to cocoa marketing are at least partly derived from a political impetus to court the support of cocoa farmers, and that this political imperative has transcended authoritarian and democratic regimes. Wiggins and Leturque (2011) describe how Rawlings built this constituency of support among cocoa farmers through a combination of personal charisma, authoritarianism and the fragmented nature of the opposition. Remnants of the influence of cocoa farmers as a source of state legitimacy are still perceptible, and reforms to increase farmers' share of exports gained added momentum after democratisation in 1992, in response to widespread dissatisfaction at the low price of cocoa. Since democratisation, the government of Ghana has faced political pressure to respond to the demands of cocoa producers, partly because of the scale of the cocoa industry and the noticeable weight of cocoa interests in democratic politics, and partly because producer prices are a frequent topic of discussion in the media (Williams, 2009).

### **3.8 Agricultural input subsidies in Malawi**

Malawi has recently come to be regarded as a relatively successful case of economic progress, poverty reduction and human development in Sub-Saharan Africa. In acknowledging this, Vandemoortele and Bird (2011) note that, although questions remain regarding the sustainability of recent growth in the country, overall progress is undeniable. Between 2004-2009, the country achieved an above-average annual GDP growth of 7%, much of which was driven by the agricultural sector, estimated to contribute around 39% to the economy (ibid:11).

The introduction in 2005 of the Fertiliser Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) - a government-funded programme that increases poor smallholder farmers' access to agricultural inputs - has been seen as key driving factor behind Malawi's recent economic progress (Chinsinga, 2008; Dorward and Chirwa, 2011; Vandemoortele and Bird, 2011). Through this programme, the government provides vouchers (or coupons) for maize fertilizer to farmers who are considered to be 'productive but otherwise resource constrained' (Chinsinga, 2008). Targeting and distribution is devolved to district and local levels, undertaken in consultation with traditional authorities, local government, and Village Development Committees (VDCs) (Vandemoortele and Bird, 2011). Notwithstanding ongoing concerns and emerging evidence that the programme has been prone to local elite capture (Eggen, 2011), several studies have recorded positive impacts. A recent evaluation concluded that it had

'substantially increased national maize production and productivity, contributing to increased food availability, higher real wages, wider economic growth and poverty reduction' (Dorward and Chirwa, 2011:232). Similarly, Chibwana, Fisher and Shively (2011) argue that dramatic increases in maize outputs have had wider positive effects on national and household food security.

In examining the political incentives behind the government's adoption of the FISP, much of the literature has emphasised that, for a number of reasons, food security is now a highly salient political issue in Malawi. Furthermore, agricultural inputs have over time accrued a large basis of popular support. Several authors attribute this at least partly to the sheer dominance of agriculture in Malawi's economy, and to the fact that an estimated 85% of the workforce is employed by it (Chirwa et al. 2006). Others note the country's history of chronic food insecurity (Chinsinga, 2007; Vandemoortele and Bird, 2011). Devereux (2009) argues fertiliser subsidies were politicised under the patronage-based rule of President Muluzi (1994-2004), whose political power base was concentrated in the densely populated and food insecure south of the country. Either way, Chinsinga (2007:10,15) concludes that food security has become intimately bound up with the very legitimacy and survival of regimes in Malawi. Underlying this, she argues, is an implicit social contract that government will provide citizens with agricultural inputs as a social safety net in times of need.

While there is some debate about whether the origins of the underlying political salience of agricultural input subsidies in Malawi derive from popular pressure or patronage politics, or both, there is consensus that elections played a catalytic role in the introduction of the FISP in 2005. As Chinsinga (2008) explains, these elections were preceded by two periods of severe hunger in the early 2000s that prompted both political parties to pledge to introduce universal subsidies if elected in 2005. Following the elections, opposition parties in parliament were able to put pressure on the ruling party to stick to its pledge to adopt a universal subsidy, in spite of the President's reservations about financing. Birner and Resnick (2010) note that the characteristics of fertiliser distribution – specifically, that it is visible, short-term, and targeted – make it particularly appealing to politicians, since it allows for greater political returns relative to other, longer-term agricultural investments (e.g. training, new crop research). In what appears to be a confirmation of this, Dorward and Chirwa (2011) have noted that the FISP was a high profile aspect of the President's successful re-election in 2009.

#### **4. Synthesis of findings on forms of politics underpinning success**

It is important not to over-simplify the cases presented above, and it is not the aim here to compare them, but rather to indicate how aspects of politics may have combined in each individual context to underpin the progress made. As intimated earlier, the robustness of the evidence linking aspects of politics to outcomes should not be overstated. While all the cases above are validated by rigorous impact evaluation that attribute outcomes to interventions, the relationship between these outcomes and the prevailing forms of politics at national, sector and local level is more often implied than proven. Furthermore, because the review was limited to desk-based analysis of the available literature, the cases represent only a sample of possible political configurations that may underpin success, and are almost certainly incomplete accounts of the political factors that were important in each case. The cases were not drawn from ready-made accounts but compiled from disconnected sources. They are therefore indicative rather than comprehensive accounts of the politics of what works.

Notwithstanding these caveats, the cases do indicate that it is possible to trace the connections between good performance and outcomes at the point of delivery, and forms of politics at local, sector and national levels. They suggest where future research seeking to examine the politics of what works more systematically might usefully focus. In this section, we synthesise the main findings about

the forms of politics considered to have underpinned the cases, reflecting back on the findings from the wider literature on the political determinants of service delivery where there are notable recurring themes.

A number of themes about the forms of politics that underpin success recur across the case studies and the wider literature on the politics of service delivery, and these are synthesised in Table 2. In the absence of an existing conceptual framework for examining the politics of service provision, the table organises the key political variables influencing service provision into ‘levels of politics’ that are inevitably overlapping but nevertheless allow us to systematise the findings.

As the table indicates, certain political variables emerged strongly in the case studies of the politics of what works. In particular, the relationship between pro-poor provision and crisis, transition, political settlements and calculations of political returns, top-down control and embedded accountability, and sector characteristics and modes of provision as ‘spheres of politics’, all feature prominently. These themes are synthesised below, and Table 3 presents more detailed findings.

**Table 2. Political determinants of service delivery**

| <b>Levels of politics</b>       | <b>Variables</b>   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Institutional conditions</b> | History of state formation, regime type, political settlement*, authority structures (central and local), relationship between delivery and state legitimacy*, global forces, political party ideology*, social contract*, power of popular ideas  |
| <b>Political conjuncture</b>    | Moments of crisis and transition*, electoral cycles*, dynamics of political competition at national and level, political entrepreneurship  |
| <b>Sector-level influences</b>  | Service characteristics*, elite incentives for delivery (national and local)*, perceptions about level of political returns to provision*, strategies of external funders  |
| <b>Sector-level settlements</b> | Alliances and coalitions, balance of power between actors, level of political commitment (leadership and control) from above*, relations between formal and informal sources of authority, relations between different levels of government, level of capture and clientelism, citizen expectations and social contract (and extent to which these are articulated)* |

\*factors that emerge strongly in the case studies of the politics of what works

#### **4.1 Crisis and transition, political settlements, and calculations of political returns**

Overall, the case studies support the consensus that major sectoral reforms are often instigated and designed in the wake of periods of major **economic crisis or political upheaval**. This is demonstrated clearly in the case study on Indonesia, where the community driven development mode

of provision gained momentum after the economic crisis and the fall of Suharto, which weakened the appeal of a centralised state. In the aftermath of crisis, determined leaders may seize the opportunity to frame services as nation-building projects, as indicated in the case of Rwanda, where improvements in health were seen as an important pillar of reconstruction following the genocide. Similarly, in Ethiopia, commitment to education was envisaged and actively promoted as a means of generating good citizenship as part of a wider programme of nation-building.

The Peru case study also supports the view that basic services can be understood as tools for **state- and nation-building**; echoing Van de Walle and Scotts (2009) analysis that the state may use service provision to establish its control and authority over territory ('penetration'), to create a common culture ('standardisation') and to resolve disputes, create political loyalty and bind critical populations to the state ('accommodation'). Services in this instance are the point where the state becomes 'visible' to citizens and, reflecting Migdal (2001), one among other means through which the state establishes its own 'rules of the game' as dominant over other social norms. As a real and symbolic aspect of people's daily survival strategies, services can act as an effective means for the state to achieve social control and compliance (ibid).

While not often explicitly framed as such, there are hints in the case studies of how the nature of the **political settlement** influences the policy choices states make with regard to service provision. In Bangladesh, for example, a stable political settlement has been seen as a key factor in consolidating the state's credible and consistent commitment to health delivery in spite of periods of regime change. In a similar vein, Rwanda's long-term vision and remarkable achievements in health have been at least partly attributed to its particular form of 'developmental patrimonialism'. The cases also support the view that while elections may catalyse state responsiveness, the influence of formal political systems cannot be understood independently of the role of other institutions. The extent to which **social contracts** are articulated by an active civil society and through debate in the media may be key in this regard. In Malawi, for instance, while the political imperative to provide subsidies and the choices the state made were almost certainly catalysed by elections, but the formative social contract that pitches food security as a key source of state legitimacy may have been a more important driver of the states responsiveness to its citizens. Likewise in Ethiopia, the ruling party's ideology and its particular identity as a movement of the poor has been seen as a more important *underlying* driver of commitment to pro-poor spending in education than elections *per se*.

The cases demonstrate that political actors sometimes make policy choices that benefit poor people on the basis of **calculations of high political returns**. The (perception of) returns may be greatest not only where provision is a potential or existing source of state legitimacy, but also where the service is particularly politically salient, and/or is targeted towards the main constituency of support of the ruling party. Echoing the wider literature, the cases illustrate that the imperative for broad-based provision may derive from political actors pursuing '**political entrepreneurship**', that is, courting a mass constituency of the poor in the service of their political careers. Levels of 'political will' for primary education in Ghana, for example, have been shown to fluctuate over time according to the extent to which the ruling party has been dependent on the support of the poor, and the extent to which the interests of the poor were articulated by a political entrepreneur. Similarly, agricultural policies gained particular political salience in Ghana and Malawi under regimes that courted the support of farmers, and continued to be a central source of state legitimacy where they subsequently attracted a large basis of citizen support. Overall, the cases advance the hypothesis that pro-poor provision is more likely where the state derives or seeks to enhance its **legitimacy** through the provision of a particular service.

## **4.2 Top-down control and embedded accountability**

There is some evidence in the case studies in support of recent thinking that organisations can be effective - even in clientelistic settings - where they are **insulated from political interference** by strong, top-down authority and leadership carried through to the level of implementation. This is explicitly demonstrated in the corruption-free bureaucracy of Cocobod, and also in the bureaucratic arena in Rwanda, which is characterised by **strong, top-down performance incentives**. The Rwanda case indicates that top-down incentives and bureaucratic control may be reinforced where the state is perceived as legitimate and has moral authority, and where top-down control draws on culturally embedded norms of accountability. But while the role of top-down accountability comes out strongly in Rwanda and Ghana, in other cases there is evidence that a combination of top-down and bottom-up accountability can drive progress, as in Indonesia, where they worked in tandem but to different effect. The case studies therefore support the move in wider literature towards examining top down and bottom up accountability as complementary as opposed to being an 'either or' proposition.

The cases also illustrate findings made elsewhere that pro-poor service provision might occur where forms of **social accountability draw on moral reciprocity**, are locally-grounded, and build on a culture of participation. For example, the accountability of local leaders in the health sector in Bangladesh depended on the extent to which those leaders were 'embedded' in local networks of relationships between local authorities, citizen groups and service providers. In Peru, the fact that agencies contracted to build and maintain roads were formed from local communities increased local ownership and therefore generated incentives for good performance.

### **4.3 Sector characteristics and modes of provision as 'spheres of politics'**

The cases demonstrate that the **characteristics of a particular service** affect its political salience and in turn the calculations of political returns made by political actors. Specifically, the findings reinforce the point made elsewhere that extent to which a service is targetable, 'visible', measurable and easily credited may determine the likelihood of state responsiveness. For example, direct transfers for roads in Indonesia were appealing because roads are highly visible and direct transfers are easily creditable. In Bangladesh, progress in health reform is at least partly attributable to the **nature of the reforms** – namely improving access rather than quality - which ultimately pursued the path of least resistance. This supports the theme raised earlier that anticipation of resistance from interest groups may explain why some reforms are pursued and others are not, and different types of reform attract different types of politics.

The cases also indicate that particular **mode of provision** may influence the extent to which citizens can engage in collective action. In both of the roads cases - Peru and Indonesia - the participatory approach was considered to have enabled services to be more adapted to local preferences, and particularly to women's preferences. In Peru, participatory institutions had effects (both positive and negative) on notions of citizenship and interactions between the state, society and elites at a local level. Similarly, decentralisation in Ethiopia - a mode of provision essential for accommodating diversity in the context of high ethnic fragmentation - has in turn generated positive social capital and enabled collective action. However, it is not possible to conclude on the relative success of modes from the evidence available. It seems likely that the performance of modes is very context specific. Moreover, the cases make it clear that modes are not simple categories (e.g. direct state versus contracted out provision); most real life cases are composites of more than one mode and include both formal and informal elements.

At the micro-level of the politics of implementation, the cases highlight that the terms of collaboration between the actors engaged in delivery may enable or constrain service outcomes. The Ghana School for Life study indicates that whether or not public services are delivered effectively depends on the extent to which there is mutual agreement and positive, reciprocal relationships between state and non-state actors. This supports the findings from the relatively small body of research suggesting

mutually supportive state-NGO relationships that have evolved from a basis of trust are an important but relatively neglected sphere of politics.

**Table 3. Detailed findings from case studies**

| Country/Sector                                | Mode of provision                          | Indicators of progress  | Political factors underlying progress  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <i>Rwanda</i> , Maternal and Child Health     | Contracting-in/Performance-based financing | Sharp decline in maternal mortality (30%), under five mortality (32%) and infant mortality (28%) between 2000-2005      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-genocide political settlement characterised by 'developmental patrimonialism'</li> <li>• Strong leadership behind nation-building project</li> <li>• Government ownership</li> <li>• Strong top-down performance incentives and bureaucratic control, supported by the moral authority of the state</li> <li>• Mode of provision fits with traditional, culturally-embedded norms of accountability</li> </ul> |
| <i>Bangladesh</i> , Maternal and Child Health | Decentralised state provision              | Sharp decline (44%) in maternal mortality since independence  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent commitment in spite of changes in regime</li> <li>• Stable political settlement</li> <li>• Perception of high political returns from health delivery, and political party competition on this basis</li> <li>• Nature of reforms doesn't challenge vested interests</li> <li>• More successful in upazilas where local leaders are embedded in networks of accountability relationships</li> </ul>       |
| <i>Ghana</i> , Basic Education                | Non-state provision/co-production          | Net enrolment in primary school increased 60%-77% 1999-2008<br><br>School for Life reached 85,000 children in the North | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periods of 'political will' depended on constituencies of the poor being mobilised by political entrepreneurs</li> <li>• Complementary education highly adapted to local preferences</li> <li>• Supportive government-NGO relationship and non-competitive funding arrangements</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Ethiopia</i> , Basic Education             | Decentralised state provision              | Number of out of school children more than halved between 1999-2008, from 6.5 million to 2.7 million                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong ideological commitment to pro-poor development on the part of the ruling party</li> <li>• Pro-poor ideology is a source of state legitimacy</li> <li>• Decentralised mode of provision accommodates ethnic diversity</li> </ul>  |



|  |                                  |   |  |
|--|----------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Indonesia</i> , Rural Roads         | Decentralised state provision    | Built or rehabilitated over 62,000 km of roads between 1998-2009, with wider positive impacts on rural poverty                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic and political crisis increased appeal of community-driven approaches</li> <li>• Mode of delivery built on pre-existing norms of participation</li> <li>• Perception of political returns from 'visible' direct transfers</li> <li>• Mode of delivery highly adapted to local preferences and encourages women's participation</li> <li>• Combination of top-down and bottom-up accountability</li> </ul> |
| <i>Peru</i> , Rural Roads              | Contracting out                  | Rehabilitated 15,000km of roads between 1995-2005, with wider positive impacts on local economic productivity and rural poverty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mode of delivery adapted to local preferences and encourages women's participation</li> <li>• Local contractors are formed from, and embedded in, local communities</li> <li>• Participatory mode builds trust between state and society, and enhances political inclusion and citizenship</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Ghana</i> , Agricultural Marketing  | State regulation and stewardship | Sustained annual growth of above 5% for 25 years, supported by agricultural growth and cocoa exports                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong leadership insulating state marketing board from political interference</li> <li>• Government ownership</li> <li>• Strong top-down performance incentives and bureaucratic control</li> <li>• Farmers are a key constituency and a source of legitimacy for the ruling regime</li> <li>• Popular pressure and interest groups supporting farmers and good political returns</li> </ul>                     |
| <i>Malawi</i> , Agricultural Marketing | Input subsidies through vouchers | Annual growth of 7% between 2004-2009, supported by agricultural growth   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue has political salience due to context of food insecurity</li> <li>• Delivery of service is a source of state legitimacy</li> <li>• Mass constituency of popular support and high visibility of mode = good political returns</li> <li>• Catalytic role of electoral competition</li> <li>• Government ownership</li> </ul>  |

## 5. Conclusion: Understanding the politics of what works in service delivery

The case studies and wider literature indicate both a growing and a more integrated treatment of the politics of service provision. Many of the findings about the forms of politics underpinning the case studies of what works are anchored in the literature examined in section 2. Some specific hypotheses about why states make particular choices, about what generate incentives for elite commitment, and about how this is translated into improved service outcomes could be tested through further empirical research.

In particular, the studies of what works support the prominence given to the role of the nature of the political regime, the political conjuncture, and the origins of elite incentives as key determinants of inclusive social provisioning. They illustrate the state may have strong incentives for inclusive

provision where a particular service or good has historically been a key source of state legitimacy and an expression of the social contract. Calculations of political returns on the part of political actors, linked in some cases to the pursuit of political entrepreneurship, have also been critical to some cases where remarkable improvements in service provision have been achieved. The characteristics of a particular service – or the extent to which it is targetable, ‘visible’, measurable and easily credited – affect its political salience and in turn the likelihood of state responsiveness.

Resources alone do not determine outcomes on the ground: politics intervene (in either an enabling or constraining role) between policy intention and implementation. Some of the cases indicate that strong, top-down accountability reinforced by a legitimate state with some degree of moral authority can work, particularly if top-down control can ‘insulate’ delivery systems from the normal functioning of prevailing political institutions. At the local level, there are particular questions raised by the cases about the positive effects of social accountability systems that are genuinely locally-grounded and draw on moral and cultural norms. At the point of implementation, reciprocal terms of collaboration between state and non-state actors have been instrumental in some cases.

While research has made important advances in identifying political factors that determine the design and implementation of services, significant gaps in our understanding remain. The identification of the politics of what ‘works’ was constrained by a paucity of studies of service delivery that combine both an objective assessment of outcomes (i.e. an impact evaluation) with systematic analysis of the political determinants of outcomes. Our review revealed not only the rarity of cases subjected both to political analysis and technical impact evaluation but also, more critically, the problem that there is a wide gulf between them. Sector-level political economy analysis has more often been problem-driven than directed at understanding ‘successful’ cases, and rigorous impact evaluations are by nature technical accounts that almost never analyse politics.<sup>27</sup> Comparative case studies of sub-national states, regions and districts where resource levels are similar, but where outcomes are different, are rare in the literature. Such studies could provide valuable insight into what accounts for relatively well and poorly performing states and offer a rigorous methodology for understanding the politics of what works.

## **5.1 The basis of an approach to understanding what works**

There is a need for research that examines the influence of politics ‘in the round’: that is, based on a framework that brings together aspects of politics and explores them systematically through case studies of provision.

Future research needs to give special importance to the point of implementation, where formal policies most often fail and where ‘real’ policies emerge from the interplay of interests and incentives. and adopt an essentially ‘bottom-up’ approach to the field research, working upwards in order to identify the key political factors that underpin performance. This would put the focus on those institutions, incentives and actors that are effective at the point of delivery - rather than on those that in the formal scheme of things are supposed to set the institutional and policy framework governing implementation. This approach would be particularly appropriate and timely given the growing recognition that, in practice, delivery is often facilitated through informal, ad hoc arrangements that rely on relationships of reciprocity and alliances across blurred public-private boundaries. The focus on real implementation rather than stated policy needs also to understand the pressures from ‘above’ that condition behaviour in practice: the institutions and actors that set the general political framework,

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<sup>27</sup> This problem was particularly acute in the productive sectors, and studies of other sectors could offer different findings. The chosen sectors follow the terms of reference for this paper. More political analysis may have been available if our focus had been on other sectors. For example, urban water has been one of the most politicized of all areas of service reform. As one reviewer commented, cases from the sanitation sector could have provided another set of themes and propositions.



and the organizational arrangements that establish who's who and the rules of the game at the sectoral and local level.

Such research could focus on the point of contact between citizen/user and the state, seeking to clarify and operationalize the concept of the social contract, which is frequently described as central to the delivery of basic services, but often left without explanation or practical meaning. The idea of the social contract might be more comprehensible, and useful to researchers and policymakers, if it were anchored at the sector or service level. In practical terms, the idea of 'sector-level settlements' or 'sector social contracts' could enable better understanding of the influence of aspects of politics from policy inception to implementation – such as the bargains made between political and civil society actors, the political salience of the service, the level of citizen pressure for its provision and how this is voiced, and the perceived political returns in delivering it.

Two aspects of services - the characteristics of sectors and their mode of delivery - have more often been treated as managerial rather than political spheres. The characteristics of sectors have often been regarded as technical considerations affecting problems of market failure and the appropriate role of the state. Although some attempts have been made to analyse how the characteristics of sectors influence the relative power of principals and agents, providers and consumers of services, these have not been applied widely or systematically. Modes of provision (state, market, and forms of partnership and co-production) have also often been treated mainly as matters involving technical considerations of efficiency. However, they are also a product of politics and a theatre of politics. They are the formal and informal organizational structures and rules for the direction of service provision. Modes are where politics is 'realized' in decision making structures and where politics and the state are experienced by citizens: (i) who and what interests are part of the decision process, (ii) what are the rules of inclusion and exclusion to benefits? Future research should therefore analyse sector characteristics and modes of delivery as spheres of politics.

## **5.2 Seeing the relationship between services and politics as two-way**

The findings indicate that it isn't only that politics determines service delivery, but that in turn, service delivery determines forms of politics. Future research needs to be multi-directional, tracing both the influence of politics on services and, in turn, the influence of services on politics. While this has been a major focus of policy and research on fragile states, in the case of effective states there has been little analysis of whether and how local and sectoral practices feed back into higher level political practices. This could trace the implications of successful delivery on the formation of the social contract, on the capacity and legitimacy of the state, and on processes of citizenship formation. Closer attention to these feedback effects may enhance our understanding of what motivates states to pursue inclusive forms of provision in the first instance, and in particular the level of political returns they perceive in doing so.

In this vein, services should be analysed not only as a value (output performance) in themselves but also as contributing to processes of state-building. Research could test the hypothesis that the provision of services is supported by, and in turn supports, the legitimacy and durability of political settlements and a more resilient and inclusive social contract (Whaites, 2008; OECD, 2008). These principles have so far mainly been applied to fragile and conflict affected settings, but they apply equally in more effective states. State-building is not only a process that occurs in the aftermath of conflict and collapse but is also a continuous process in all states as they accommodate to changing environments and interactions with other states.

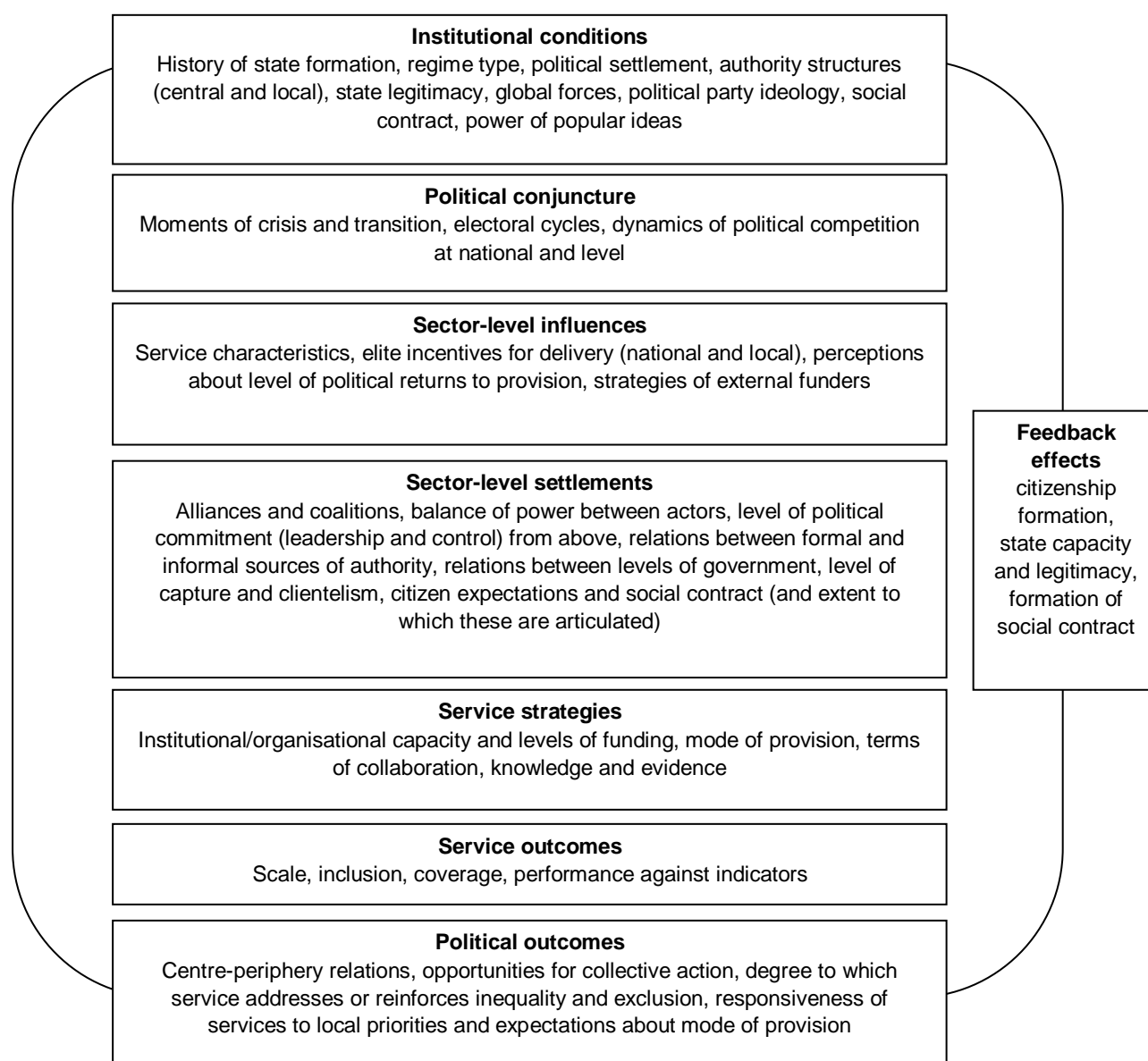
## **5.3 Conceptual framework and research questions**

Based on the findings of this review - both the case studies and the wider literature on the political determinants of service delivery - Figure 1 suggests a basic framework for integrating the various aspects of politics operating at different levels into a coherent whole. This framework is necessarily broad, and future research will need to strategically narrow the focus to enable feasible comparative studies. It suggests a hypothetical causal chain of influences that go from the macro-institutional factors through sector level influences and strategies to the delivery of services and political effects. At each level, a leading research question is proposed.

- **Institutional conditions:** Institutional and contextual factors condition the environment in which services are prioritized, planned, organized and delivered. These can be grouped first as the organization of political power (state regime type and authority structures) arising from the political settlement. Second, there are conjunctural factors that, at particular times, alter the incentives of actors - for example the cycles of political competition determine the incentives of actors to be responsive to demand. Third, there are factors that directly impinge on sector policy choices: the characteristics of particular services, sources of funding and the accountabilities they imply, and how these interact with elite incentives to provide them.
  - What is the influence of conditioning factors in framing the incentives of policy actors at sector level and, directly or indirectly, on service performance?
- **Political conjuncture:** Within this institutional environment, sector-specific actors may enter into understandings about the governance of particular service sectors, the leading stakeholders and long term policy goals. We describe these as 'secondary' or 'sector' level settlements. They may be formal agreements or informal understandings and be made at national or local level.
  - What is the influence of interactions between actors in forming sector level settlements about the governance of service sectors?
- **Sector-level influences and settlements:** In turn, institutional conditions and political conjuncture set the framework of dominant actors and permissible understandings which can influence service strategies (prioritization, sequencing and funding) and decisions about modes of provision and the roles of actors. Strategies may be formal statements or emerge from working practice.
  - What is the influence of dominant actors and understandings in forming strategies and deciding modes of service provision?
- **Service strategies and service outcomes:** Service strategies and modes of provision produce effects in the form of (i) service outputs/outcomes, and (ii) political effects in setting relations of accountability and control between citizens/users, service delivery agencies and government.
  - What are the political effects of modes of provision and service outputs on public perceptions of performance, opportunities/citizen capacity for collective action, inclusion/exclusion of groups, elite incentives, and the reach of government?
- **Political outcomes:** There are potential feedback loops where the political effects of service delivery may positively or negatively influence broader changes in relations between users/citizens, state and elites at the level of the political settlement and the social contract.
  - What, in turn, are the effects of service provision on building the capacity and resilience of the state, legitimising public authority and forming stable political settlements?

An implicit underlying issue throughout the framework is how and by whom control is exercised over what services are delivered and to whom. This could be a core running theme of future research on the politics of what works in service delivery. 'Control' would include the exercise of *political authority*, *means of coordination* between state and non-state agencies, and *arrangements to hold to account* political leaders, state and non-state agencies for commitments to service delivery. Different forms of authority, coordination and accountability would be expected to operate at different points in the framework, and to operate differently depending on the service and the context.

**Figure 1. The two-way relationship between politics and service delivery**



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## Annex 1. Glossary of terms

This annex provides basic definitions of the service-delivery related concepts used in this paper. It does not aim to represent the diversity of perspectives or ongoing debates surrounding the meaning of these terms, but to offer a starting point for understanding.

| Concept                      | Basic definition and further resources   |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Accountability</b>        | <p>The 'long route' of accountability is the means through which clients/citizens influence policymakers, and of policymakers to influence service providers. The 'short route' is the means through which consumers/citizens exercise power directly over providers (World Bank, 2003). Social accountability is any form of accountability that relies on civic engagement.</p> <p>See:</p> <p>World Bank, 2003, 'Making Services Work for Poor People, World Development Report 2004', World Bank, Washington D.C</p> <p>Joshi, A., 2008, 'Producing Social Accountability? The Impact of Service Delivery Reforms', IDS Bulletin, Volume 38, Number 6, pp. 10-17(8)</p>  |
| <b>Co-production</b>         | <p>Co-production is the joint and direct involvement of both public agents and private citizens in the provision of services (Ostrom, 1996). Institutionalised co-production is the provision of public services through a regular, long-term relationship between state agencies and organised groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions (Joshi and Moore, 2004).</p> <p>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ostrom, E., 1996, 'Crossing the Great Divide; Co-production, Synergy, and Development', World Development, Vol.24, No.6, pp.1073–88.</li> <li>• Joshi, A. and Moore, M., 2004, 'Institutionalised Co-production: Unorthodox Public Service Delivery in Challenging Environments', Journal of Development Studies, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 31-49</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Citizenship formation</b> | <p>Gaining citizenship is not only a legal process of being defined as a bearer of rights, but involves the development of citizens as individuals with agency, capable of claiming their rights and acting for themselves (Benequista and Gaventa, 2011). Inequalities in access to resources (e.g. basic services) feed on and reproduce asymmetries in social relationships (Kabeer, 2002).</p> <p>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benequista, N. and Gaventa, J, 2011, Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action across States and Societies—A Summary of Findings from a Decade of Collaborative Research on Citizen Engagement, Brighton: Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability</li> <li>• Kabeer, N., 2002, 'Citizenship and the Boundaries of the Acknowledged Community: Identity, Affiliation and Exclusion', IDS Working Paper no 171</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Incentives</b>            | <p>Incentives are 'the rewards and punishments that are perceived by individuals to be related to their actions and those of others' (Ostrom 2002, cited in Harris, Jones and Kooy, 2011:26). In service provision, a leading question is how the incentives of decision-makers (for provision) can be aligned with the interests of society. Questions about incentives are closely linked to questions about motivation and forms of accountability (Collier, 2007). Incentives may be shaped by resources, information, decision-making, delivery mechanism, and accountability (Pritchett and Woolcock, 2004).</p> <p>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collier, P., 2007. Accountability in the Provision of Social Services: A Framework for African Research, Oxford: Centre for the Study of African Economies</li> <li>• Pritchett, L., and Woolcock, M., 2004, Solutions When <i>the</i> Solution is the Problem: Arraying the Disarray in Development, World Development, Volume 32, Issue 2, February 2004, Pages 191-212</li> </ul> |
| <b>Information asymmetry</b> | <p>Information asymmetry is the imbalance of information between parties engaged in a transaction. Without access to information, it is difficult for citizens to attribute blame or credit to politicians or service providers for the quality of services (Keefer and Khemani, 2003). Community monitoring (collecting information about the activities of politicians and service performance) is often</p>   |

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|                                | <p>conceived as a means of overcoming information asymmetry and increasing the principal's (citizens) bargaining power and control (Gauthier and Reinikka, 2007).<br/>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keefer, P., and Khemani, S., 2003, <i>Democracy, Public Expenditures and the Poor</i>, Development Research Group, Washington D.C: World Bank</li><li>• Gauthier, B., and Reinikka, R., 2007, <i>Methodological Approaches to the Study of Institutions and Service Delivery: A Review of PETS, QSDS and CRCS</i>, Washington: World Bank</li></ul>   |
| <b>Institutions</b>            | <p>Institutions are 'humanly-devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction', or simply "the rules of the game" (North, 1991). Formal and informal political institutions play an important role in shaping interests and in determining incentives for service provision. Informal institutions and personalised relationships are pervasive influences on policymaking (Unsworth et al. 2010).<br/>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unsworth, S. (ed.), 2010, 'An Upside Down View of Governance', Centre for the Future State, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton : Institute of Development Studies</li></ul>   |
| <b>Principal-agent</b>         | <p>The 'principal-agent' model draws attention to the difficulties that citizens (as 'principals') face in ensuring that the actions of politicians (the 'agents') are aligned with their purpose, and the problem that governments (as 'principals') face in constraining the behaviour of their bureaucracies (as 'agents') (Batley, 2004). Accountability is a principal-agent relationship (Gauthier and Reinikka, 2007).<br/>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Batley, R., 2004, The politics of service delivery reform, <i>Development and Change</i> 35(1): 31-56</li><li>• Gauthier, B., and Reinikka, R., 2007, <i>Methodological Approaches to the Study of Institutions and Service Delivery: A Review of PETS, QSDS and CRCS</i>, Washington: World Bank</li></ul> |
| <b>Social contract</b>         | <p>A social contract is an implicit understanding between citizens and governments that the former will receive the benefits of political order in return for ceding some freedoms to the latter. Services are sometimes seen to comprise a core element of the social contract between states and citizens. Public access to good services indicates that a society is well-governed and enables the political leadership to draw continued support for its programme (OECD, 2008).<br/>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• OECD, 2008, 'Service Delivery in Fragile Situations', Paris: OECD</li></ul>  |
| <b>State-society relations</b> | <p>State-society relations are 'interactions between state institutions and societal groups to negotiate how public authority is exercised and how it can be influenced by people' (DFID, 2010:15).<br/>See:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DFID, 2010, <i>Building Peaceful States and Societies: A DFID Practice Paper</i>, Department for International Development, London</li></ul>  |

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### **The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre**

The Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (ESID) aims to improve the use of governance research evidence in decision-making. Our key focus is on the role of state effectiveness in achieving inclusive development and social justice.

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