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EVALUATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR GOVERNANCE REFORMS 2001-2011

Literature Review

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Executive summary

This literature review has been completed as part of an OECD multi-donor evaluation of PSGRs in developing countries between 2001 and 2011. The review was started during the inception stage of the project, specifically so that the findings could be further explored by five country case studies to be conducted in Bosnia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mozambique and Uganda in July 2011.

Public Sector Governance Reform (PSGR) is an ad hoc categorisation of various reforms and as such does not have a well defined literature. It is acknowledged in many studies that PSGRs carried out in developing countries over the past decade have been considered 'unsuccessful', both when measuring success in terms of implementation or impact.

In previous decades there has been an emphasis on technical approaches to PSGRs whereas the real difficulty lies not in abstract technical design but in understanding and addressing other underlying problems related to the political economy of governance reforms, such as the interplay between formal and informal governance systems in developing countries and perverse incentives on both the partner government and the donor agency sides. PSGRs relate to complex and ill-defined problems which exist within parts of the public service, which is itself an interdependent system embedded within wider systems of society and culture.

The literature identifies a number of obstacles to reform which can be divided into design challenges and implementation challenges. Problems with the design of PSGRs include a failure to take political dynamics into account and a lack of genuine ownership of reform because reforms are ultimately not demand-led. It will be important for the five country case studies and the subsequent synthesis report to investigate how donors can successfully move beyond a simplistic assertion that 'politics matters'.

PSG has weak diagnostic tools and no globally recognised conceptual framework which means that reforms are often based on poor diagnostic work and are missing a robust 'theory of change'. The literature asserts that donors tend to support imported models of reform and take short term approaches – our country case studies will be able to verify this.

Even if the design stage of reforms works well, PSGRs are often not fully implemented for a variety of reasons. The most common complaints are that reforms founder because of a lack of 'political commitment' or limited ownership. Organisational culture within the public sector is also often blamed along with weak state capacity. On the donor side there are problems with staff attrition, predictability of funding and sequencing. Wider contextual barriers such as political volatility and weak information management present further problems.

The following lessons learned are repeatedly mentioned in the literature and will be further investigated in the country case studies to see whether the empirical evidence validates or contradicts these views. Policy implications will be drawn in the evaluation synthesis report:

- Pay attention to politics in both the design and the implementation of reforms.
- Reforms require strong domestic leadership to be successful – exogenous attempts at PSGRs are unlikely to be successful or sustainable.
- Incremental approaches taken within reforms may be more sustainable and politically feasible.
- Timing and sequencing of reforms should be major considerations when designing and planning the implementation of PSGRs.
- Donors should consider how they can support citizens in creating public pressure for reform.

- Poor public sector performance must be addressed although there is no consensus on how to do this, with alternative suggestions being to increase staffing levels, focus on pay reform, introduce more performance management and support organisational change.
- Change donor behaviour and systems so that support is more long-term, predictable and not entangled with perverse incentives.

There is a striking lack of research on the impacts of PSGRs on gender and diversity, as well as on specific PSGRs with a gender or diversity focus. There is also little research on how PSGRs are affected by different aid modalities. In general, there has also been more focus in the literature on 'presenting failure' rather than 'explaining success' (Bebbington and McCourt, and Grindle are exceptions to this rule).

Table of contents

Abbreviations

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
COG	Centre of Government
CSA	Civil Service Administration
CSR	Civil Service Reform
DFID	Department for International Development
GA	Government Administration
GSDRC	Governance and Social Development Resource Centre
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group (World Bank)
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPM	New Public Management
OECD - DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
PFM	Public Financial Management
PSG	Public Sector Governance
PSGR	Public Sector Governance Reform
PSR	Public Sector Reform
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
VfM	Value for Money
WDR	World Development Report

1   Introduction

1.1   What is Public Sector Governance?

Public Sector Governance is not a tightly defined term in development literature. For the purposes of this literature review, the broad area of interest is those central government institutions and organisations which create the governance conditions for the public service and the wider state sector. The organisations of interest are the central agencies which support the collective political decision-making of the Executive, and which regulate their execution by the public sector. This is done through the institutions for: strategy planning, policy development and coordination, economic management, service delivery, public sector organisation, public sector leadership, accountability and control. These central bodies are also responsible for ensuring that Executive action is in compliance with the Law and accountable to the Legislature and the general public.

On this definition, public sector governance does not include 'national' governance which relates to constitutional issues such as democracy, human rights and the separation of powers. It is also limited to 'whole of government' governance institutions. It does not refer to public governance arrangements within particular policy areas and sectors – or for sub-national governments.

PSG is further limited in this report because the sponsors of the evaluation do not require it to cover central government public finance or anti-corruption arrangements. While these are unquestionably dimensions of public sector governance, they are excluded here because they are being covered by separate OECD/DAC sponsored evaluations.

This report nevertheless draws on some literature relating to the dynamics of the full set of central regulatory and control institutions where they comprise a single whole-of-government 'system' which cannot be adequately understood by the examination of discrete organisational components. Otherwise, the literary resources identified in the report focus mainly on the following four thematic areas of PSGR given emphasis in the evaluation terms of reference:

- Reforms of the role of the state
- Centre of government reforms
- Civil service system reform
- Reforms to accountability and oversight mechanisms

A key focus of this literature review is governance 'reform', meaning adjustments to the central institutional arrangements of government which, by changing incentives operating on relevant organisations and staff, are intended to produce a major beneficial and sustainable improvement in their performance. From the literature we can conclude that the public purposes of most interest to governments in pursuing PSGRs are:

- Improving service delivery
- Reducing public expenditure
- Improving efficiency and value for money
- Increasing private sector involvement in public policy and service delivery
- Devolution to local government
- More effective machinery of government
- Enhancing government transparency and accountability
- Engaging citizens in public service development and oversight
- Enhancing public sector leadership and professionalism
- Strengthening strategic management of government

- Management decentralisation and enhanced accountability for Ministries, departments and agencies.

Whilst there is a vast amount of academic and donor literature that relates to PSGR, there is little in the way of overarching policy guidance that has been published since 2000. Similarly, there is not a large body of work on international guidelines or globally recognised best practice for PSGR. There are, however, some global guidelines and best practice for certain sub-sections of PSGR, for example the 'World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People' and OECD's report 'The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working Towards Good Practice'.

1.2 Methodology

It is recognised in the terms of reference for this evaluation, and in prior major evaluations of PSGR activity, that despite ample attention and resources, the overall results of PSGR efforts in developing countries have been unsatisfactory. While there is consensus that the status quo is not working well, there is confusion and frustration on how to remedy the situation.

Accordingly, this literature review extends beyond an examination of the actual performance and results of different PSGR programmes over the decade to also cover the possibility that effectiveness in this area has been impeded: by confusion in how PSG problems are defined; by unrecognised problems affecting intervention logic; and by perverse operational incentives. To test these hypotheses, this literature review draws on some seminal literature on governance, management and organisation.

The activities which form the focus of this review relate to PSGRs carried out between 2001 and 2010, with a bias towards more recent literature as it can provide more of a cumulative perspective on reforms of the period under review. Various types of literature have been included in the review, for example meta-evaluations, country evaluations, academic papers, consultancy reports and donor documents. We deliberately sought to collate material from a wide range of sources including multilateral donor evaluation units, bilateral donors, evaluation repositories, think tanks, NGOs, online resource centres, academic journals, websites and consultancy firms. In particular we sought to include Southern sources of information wherever possible, either through specific searches, or by using online resource centres such as the GSDRC or ELDIS who themselves conduct in-depth searches for Southern materials.

1.2.1 Issues and limitations of the review

The global literature related to PSGR is vast, including resources on topics as varied as pay reform in Tanzania, internal audit in Bangladesh, social accountability mechanisms in Brazil, rearrangement of central government in Kazakhstan and decentralisation in Indonesia. This literature review is therefore not intended to be exhaustive, but instead intends to give a flavour of the key findings that emerge across the four thematic areas of PSGR from a global perspective. A number of practical and conceptual constraints were experienced during the literature review process. These are outlined below:

- Assessments of PSGRs tend not to disaggregate between pre-2001 and post 2001 reforms, instead discussing reforms as a whole. It is difficult to artificially separate these time periods, given that the reforms of the 1990s laid the way – and to an extent determined the nature – of reforms in the following decade.

- It has not been possible to analyse decentralisation purely from a central government perspective or, in some cases, to strip out findings related to decentralised PSGRs from overall evaluations of PSGRs.

- Many authors emphasise that reforms cannot be fully evaluated in terms of impact until some time after they are fully implemented. It may therefore be too early to comment fully on PSGRs implemented in the latter part of the decade under review.

2   Broad conclusions from the literature

Measuring 'success' in PSGRs is not a straightforward process for the following reasons:

- There is a lack of baseline information against which to monitor and evaluate progress and make judgements as to 'success' (Peters et al 2007).

- Some authors measure success on the basis of how well reforms were undertaken (process) whereas others assess success on the basis of impact and results. Whilst the latter is the more useful for the purposes of this evaluation, there are questions around the feasibility of measuring outcomes and impact. Robinson notes that 'successful outcomes cannot easily be captured by robust macro-level indicators of effectiveness, accountability and probity, and it is difficult to gather clear and unambiguous evidence of impact' (2007e: 453). Outcomes are rarely disaggregated, for example to demonstrate different outcomes for women or marginalised groups.

- There is a lack of standard definitions and indicators. When using subjective concepts such as capacity, participation, performance and accountability which are subject to considerable debate (Lessann and Markwadt 2009, Morgan and Baser 2007) and applying them to highly differentiated contexts it is hard to define 'success' objectively.

Despite these conceptual issues, there is a consensus across the literature and in the findings of most major evaluations and reviews of PSGR activity that PSGRs have tended to be unsuccessful. For example, a major IEG evaluation 'Public Sector Reform: What Works and Why?' found that 'CSA performance has improved in fewer than half of the borrowing countries' (2009:xv). The IEG background paper on civil service reforms argues that 'based on the evidence reviewed, generally CSA reform efforts have not been successful' (Evans 2008:iii).

Similarly, DFID's Governance Portfolio Review notes that performance scores for civil service reform are the lowest of all the governance sub-sectors at 60% (DFID 2011:6). A 2009 Stocktake for PSGRs finds that 'PSGR initiatives do not perform well in comparison with the rest of the portfolio… PSGR projects show an overall VFM rating of 59.4%, which is well below DFID's overall VFM of around 69%.... Some types of PSGR perform more poorly than others. Whilst centre of government, civil service cadres and managing for results all show very similar performance of 62-63% others are less successful; state organisation at 48%, accountability reforms at 31% and training and capacity building is the weakest at 29%' (Waldock 2009:15).

The 2011 World Development Report (WDR) acknowledges the difficulty of institutional transformation, arguing that it is 'always tough' (World Bank 2011:8) and even in the fastest transformations 'it takes a generation' (ibid:10). Institutional change is even harder in contexts of conflict and fragility, where there are low expectations, widespread mistrust and entrenched groups who are incentivised to resist change.

World Bank sponsored research, conducted and published by the Governance Team at the Institute of Development Studies, argues that evidence of success of governance reforms has been 'very mixed' (Robinson 2007: 401) and experiences are 'still so varied and context-contingent that it remains extremely difficult to model reform paths' (Goetz 2007:412). Other academic research supports these findings, for example Unsworth who argues that PSGRs in developing countries have had 'little impact' (2010:21). 'Most analysts seem to agree that the two key objectives of public service reform – which are to improve management of government budgets and programmes and to improve the capacity to offer better services – have not been achieved' (Crook 2010: 485).

Despite this broadly negative picture, there are some success stories presented in the literature, for example PSGR activity in Ethiopia (Mengesha and Common 2007), Tanzania (Morgan and Baser 2007, Rugumyamheto 2004) and Uganda (IEG 2009, Robinson 2007).

The overall sense of PSGR failure is striking, because design and organisation of the central institutions and processes of government is not highly complex at the technical level. Because of this, various studies and commentators have raised the possibility that PSGR is complicated by concealed complexities which have been ignored or inadequately recognised in the design and implementation of many PSGR interventions. These complexities are:

- The central agencies and institutions of government are at the interface between politics and administration. They are designed to institutionalise certain constitutional principles such as collectivity, equity and rule of law, and they are therefore particularly exposed to competing pressures from the nation's deeper political economy and cannot be successfully reformed without addressing those wider influences (World Bank 2008). These problems are more acute in relatively fragile countries where PSGRs must be considered in the context of the larger agenda of nation building.

- The elements of PSGR being covered in this evaluation are those where informal pressures are likely to be more powerful than formal pressures in a developing country context. Fukuyama (2003) characterises areas such as administrative reform as involving 'low specificity and high transactions'[1] which means they cannot be reformed just by changing formal institutional arrangements. He also observes that in such areas, the main vectors of reform must be endogenous – such reforms cannot be successfully led by donors. In earlier work Schick emphasises the prominence of informal over formal processes and pressures (1998). More recently Casson et al. (2010) and Hyden (2008) have reinforced this view – Hyden argues that within African states there is 'a peculiar mixture of 'informal' values and behaviours with formal institutions, in which the informal are dominant in power relations but not recognised or understood' (2008:5).

- Because of the two elements above, PSGRs cannot be looked at as discrete technical interventions (Levy 2007). The central processes of government are in a complex relationship with the deeper institutions in society, and interventions in these processes must therefore be considered with that complexity in mind. Chabal and Daloz (1999) emphasise the deep entanglement of state and society, a theme which is also explored by Reno (2000). More recent literature has sought to link public service reform with complexity theory, in particular Land, Hauck and Baser's application of Complex Adaptive Systems Thinking to capacity development (2009). Complexity theory likens organisations and networks to living organisms rather than machines and suggests that they continually adapt and change in unplanned and uncontrollable ways.

- The central agencies cannot successfully coordinate and regulate the public sector through independent silos. The behavioural incentives created for line departments and agencies are the product of the interaction of these central processes and informal influences. Thus major PSG reforms tend to be inter-dependent. PFM reform cannot be successful without Public Administration reform – and vice versa – and the effectiveness of both may be dependent on the quality of the processes for policy coordination, and accountability and oversight. This finding aligns with organisational systems literature and 'systems thinking' which emphasises how different elements influence each other within a whole, and how

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[1] As opposed to changes in such areas as budget process or taxation which have the characteristics of 'high specificity and low transactions' and where outside actors can be more effective.

problems must be viewed as a part of an overall system to avoid unintended consequences (Morgan 2005, Weinberg 2001 revised). Rugumyamheto (2004) links the failure of early PSG reforms in Tanzania to a lack of a systems approach and Evans emphasises the interconnectivity between PSGRs: 'CSA reform cannot be viewed in isolation… for example, improving public financial management systems to the point where it has real impact on public service performance and accountability has not happened without also improving the civil service' (2008:iii).

- The sustainability of PSG reform depends not on the creation of laws and rules, nor on the capacity of individuals. It depends on organisations involved having internalised the intent of the reform through their leadership, processes, incentives, routines and culture. For example, Schein argues that an understanding of organisational culture explains why changing formal systems in an organisation, or enhancing the skills of individuals, does not always change the organisation's performance (1985). Some commentators consider that PSG reform efforts are ineffective because they stop at the point that the requirements are legally mandated, and/or because they have not won the active support of the management of the organisation involved (Brinkerhoff and Morgan 2010, Morgan and Baser 2007, Antwi et al 2008, Crook 2010).

- PSG reforms necessarily involve major and often upsetting changes for current players. For developing country governments the potential for inertia, resistance, or diversion of reform resources into less upsetting areas tends to be well recognised. Morgan and Baser, for example, note that 'most efforts at public service reform bump up against some form of entropy. The costs are identifiable and up-front. Benefits are ambiguous and delayed. The wider the scope of the programme becomes over time, the higher the proportion of sceptical and uncommitted participants becomes… (2007: 21). Less well recognised are perverse incentives operating within donor agencies and their agents in relation to PSGRs. Such perverse incentives might be reluctance to engage partner governments on ensuring reform preconditions are in place; a preference for readily 'manageable' interventions (for example a preference for training over organisational development), a preference for activities that show tangible results within a convenient time period; and a reluctance to engage in long-term development assistance programmes (WDR 2011).

- The end result of the presence of such complexities is, as hypothesised in OPM's bid for this evaluation, that PSGRs sometimes have the characteristics of 'ill-structured' or even 'wicked' problems (Herbert 1973, Rittel and Webber 1973, Conklin 2008). An ill structured problem is one where the goals are complex and sometimes ill-defined and the nature of the problem is successively transformed in the course of exploration. A wicked problem is one where because the true nature of the problem is unknown, a satisfactory solution to it is unknowable.

3 Overview of literature in the four thematic areas

PSGR, as defined for this evaluation, does not have its own distinct literature and comprises a selection of very different types of reform, including reforms focused on the role of the state, policy leadership and coordination, civil service and machinery of government, and accountability and oversight mechanisms. Each of these thematic reform areas has its own burgeoning literature. This section seeks to outline the intent and outcome of reforms for each of the separate thematic areas of PSGR. Subsequent sections collate and synthesise the findings across the thematic areas, presenting overall findings for PSGR activity.

3.1 The Role of the State

Researchers have tended to divide PSGR reforms into three phases, or 'waves'. The first and second waves of reforms date from the 1980s and 1990s and focused on Structural Adjustment Programmes and 'downsizing' of the state. These have now largely been discredited, and since the late 1990s / early 2000s, reforms have tended to focus on:

- Improved service delivery process and outcome (World Bank: 2004)

- Enhancing an informed, engaged citizenry with a role to play in PSGRs – citizens as 'movers' (Owusu 2005, Levy: 2007).

- Creating an open, responsive, and accountable government which supports the recast relationship between state and society (UNDP 2009a, Unsworth 2010).

These reforms are based on the recognition that service delivery to citizens is the crux of a functioning state. In practice, this has meant that the relationship between civil servants and citizens has been recast: citizens once seen as passive users of public services are being recast in the light of concerns regarding accountability and performance delivery (Crook 2010). Some work has been done that disaggregates 'citizen' by gender (for example MacPherson), but this tends to be the exception.

While the state has clearly come back into fashion (Brinkerhoff 2008), it is also explicitly recast as a *partner* in reform rather than the sole agent (or recipient of external support). The state connects to citizens, civil society, and the private sector in different ways. There have been two major changes. Firstly, there is a greater appreciation for the role of citizens not only in participating in designing reforms, but monitoring and sustaining their implementation as well. This is most obvious at sub-national level, where the "buy in" of local citizens is essential for reform (Goetz: 2007). Secondly, the state is not expected to simply offload services or functions to the private sector via privatisation, but should work in partnership with them. There is a large role for the private sector, but the relationship between them and the state requires greater capacity on the government's side to manage this relationship, for example via contracting (Loevinsohn & Harding, 2004).

3.1.1 Decentralisation

Decentralisation has been a major emphasis during the decade under review. In 2006 alone more than 19% or US$4.5 billion dollars of the World Bank budget was spent on decentralisation projects (Lessman and Markwadt 2009:2). There are many motivations for decentralisation in developing countries, for example for constitutional reasons or to facilitate democratic evolution. Even when it is not explicit, improving service delivery is often an implicit motivation, or hope, behind many decentralisation efforts (Devarajan et al, 2005:1). Other claims made in favour of decentralisation include increasing participation, reducing poverty and improving accountability.

Unfortunately, the evidence base for these assumptions is largely missing – in a cross country study Jutting et al argue that the number of countries where case studies show that decentralisation has had no impact or a negative impact on poverty outnumber instances where a positive impact has been found. 'In environments with high inequalities at the outset, there is a definite risk that decentralisation will increase poverty, rather than reduce it. The ambiguous evidence suggests that the link between decentralisation and poverty reduction is not straightforward and that the outcome is largely influenced by country specificities, as well as by the process design' (Jutting et al 2005:2). Other academic research supports the assertion that decentralisation reforms have not had a consistent, positive impact on service delivery, participation, poverty reduction or social cohesion (Robinson 2007a, Robinson 2007b, Vedeld 2003, Crook 2003, Conyers 2007, Jackson and Scott 2007, Lister and Wilder 2005). However, there is some evidence of local governance mechanisms opening up political space for women's participation (Manor 2007, Evans et al 2010). The degree of responsiveness to the poor and the extent to which decentralisation impacts on poverty are largely dependent on the relationship between central and local governments and the commitment of the central government to poverty reduction (Asanta & Ayer 2004). Decentralisation therefore cannot be viewed as a 'silver bullet' solution for the many problems of development.

3.1.2   Private sector involvement and engagement

It is well established in the developed world that as national economies become more sophisticated and market regulation becomes more transparent and robust, the scope for improving efficiency by contracting private firms and organisations to perform some public functions and provide services increases. However, there is widespread concern in current international development practice that 'contracting out' is sometimes detrimental.

Concerns regarding the state working in partnership with the non-state sector to manage service delivery and development fall into two categories. Firstly, some authors raise concerns over the performance, employment conditions, financial transparency and accountability of the private sector and NGOs (Parnini 2009). Secondly, concerns are raised in the literature as to the government's capacity to manage partnerships and complex contracting relationships with non-state actors, particularly in fragile contexts (Batley and McLoughlin 2010, Clark 2005, Loevinsohn and Harding 2004). While the involvement of non-state actors in service delivery offers great potential (UNDP 2009b), considerable weaknesses on the government side can lead to inefficiencies and problems with scaling up initiatives. However, Loevinsohn and Harding argue that existing evidence suggests contracting out services improves service delivery and may help to achieve the MDGs (2007). The approach should be expanded carefully in developing countries using large scale pilots initially, with the government retaining overall responsibility for policy, regulation, technical standards, monitoring and evaluating performance, emergency response and coordination.

3.1.3   Participation and citizen engagement

A key aspect of PSGRs has been to recast the relationship between state and society, by building downward accountability mechanisms and increasing participation in national policy processes and service delivery. UNDP (2009b) raises questions as to whether enough has really been done in this area to establish sufficient and sustained trust between citizens and the state and Goetz (2007) concludes that PSGRs have so far failed to transform the relation between state and society.

Findings from DFID's ten year Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability argue that donor programmes generally fail to recognise the full potential of citizen engagement which results in poor understanding of how the state-citizen relationship shapes governance (Benequista and Gaventa 2011). Citizens engage politically with the state through

local associations and NGOs, state sponsored participatory forums and self-organised social movements and campaigns. The research argues that citizen capabilities are a crucial but often ignored issue and that citizen action can improve service delivery through collective action throughout the service delivery process. Of the 150 case studies, it was found that participation had led to positive gains in 75% of cases with examples of service delivery improvements in health, education, water, housing and infrastructure. However, there were detrimental outcomes in 25% of cases, demonstrating that citizen-led approaches can also go wrong. The research identifies six factors which are critical for ensuring a positive citizen engagement:

- The institutional and political environment

- Prior citizen capabilities

- The strength of internal champions

- The history and style of engagement

- The nature of the issue and how it is framed

- The location of power and decision-making

The research also emphasises that citizen engagement helps to transition societies from clientelism to citizenship, thereby deepening democracy. Donors are encouraged to better integrate their work with governments and their work with civil society, act to protect spaces for participation and give citizen engagement more time (Benequista and Gaventa 2011).

However, there are alternative views in the literature, for example the Africa Power and Politics Programme at the Overseas Development Institute presents evidence that 'bottom up pressure from voters and service users are a weak factor at best in improving performance' (2011a:3).

3.2   Reforms of the Central Functions of Government

Whilst there is a range of resources that suggest suitable roles, activities, structures and features of an effective centre of government (CoG), less has been written in general on this area of reform in the development literature. CoG reforms aim to support policy management and the internal regulation of the public sector. Review of project documentation in donor project databases (e.g. GTZ and CIDA) suggests that the main focus of CoG reforms over the past decade has been to enhance the policy making capacity of the Executive.

Many of the lessons learned in the literature are the same as those relating to other areas of PSGR, for example advice to take a long-term perspective and pay attention to country specificity and political context. However, more specific advice includes the following:

- The impetus and continuous support for CoG reform must come from the highest levels, ideally the Prime Minister (Ben-Gera 2004).

- CoG reforms should start with a thorough review of the existing structure, rather than starting from an abstract model (Ben-Gera 2004).

- Reforms should focus on building competencies and links with other central agencies rather than specifying size and structure as there is no best practice on specific size or structure of cabinet offices / chancelleries (Manning and Evans 2003).

- External experts can be useful at the initial assessment stage, but after that their potential contribution is limited unless they have extremely close working relationships with the relevant management and staff (Ben-Gera 2004).

- Develop the capacity of cabinet offices / chancelleries to monitor the implementation of council of ministers' decisions by line ministries as this is a key role (Manning and Evans 2003).

3.3   Civil Service System Reform

As mentioned in the section on the role of the state, PSGRs have gone through three distinct 'waves' since the 1980s. The intent and outcome of civil service reforms (CSRs) at each of these stages has been different. During the 1980s CSRs were focused on the need to contain the costs of public sector employment through retrenchment and restructuring. CSRs were initially pursued to overcome fiscal concerns arising from overstaffing and unsustainable wage bills. The second phase began in the 1990s and aimed to build the capacity of the civil service, for example through New Public Management (NPM) reforms, for example performance assessment, monitoring, transparency, benchmarking and decentralisation.

The implementation of both of these waves of reforms have largely been regarded as failures (Polidano 2001, Evans 2008, Crook 2010, Unsworth 2010). Olowu (2009) and Crook (2010) argue that the legacy of reforms aimed at reducing the size of the public sector has been a chronically understaffed and under-resourced public sector across many African countries. There is also evidence that downsizing has had a disproportionately negative impact on women (Rama 2002). The NPM reforms of the 1990s have also been strongly criticised for introducing inappropriate Western style reforms into contexts for which they were unsuited rather than favouring indigenous attempts at reform (Schick 1998, McCourt 2002).

The current phase of CSRs focuses more on improving the quality and motivation of the civil service, improving recruitment and promotion systems and ultimately improving service delivery. Therefore the focus of recent CSRs has broadened towards the longer-term goal of creating a government workforce of the right size and skills-mix, and with the right motivation, professional ethos, client focus, and accountability (UNDP 2009a). There is a growing selection of resources on increasing the number of women at middle and senior management level in the civil service. Additionally, there is an increased results focus as most post-2000 CSRs have been linked to quality service delivery to support long term growth and poverty reduction. Donors are now more appreciate of the political context in which CSRs take place and understand that administrative structures and public employment arrangements cannot simply be approached as technical issues.

Whilst there has been a significant amount of reform work carried out on leadership within the public sector, this has not been reflected in the literature. Lyne de Ver argues that 'the development studies literature… has barely engaged with issues concerning leaders, elites and coalitions and that leadership as concept and practice has neither been properly researched nor understood analytically as a key element in the politics of economic growth and social development (2008:3). The few resources that do consider public sector leadership emphasise the importance of strong leadership, for example Andrews et al. 2010 emphasise the ability of leaders to create 'change space'. In a review of leadership development programmes in developing countries Lyne

de Ver and Kennedy (2011) find that such programmes lack an understanding of the politics of leadership, do not have a robust theory of change or a set of clear definitions and tend to be based on Western concepts of leadership. Interestingly, they argue that leadership development programmes focused on women tend to have more of an understanding of politics and view leadership as more of a collaborative exercise.

Unfortunately, the general consensus in the literature is that the outcomes and achievements of CSRs have been "extremely limited, even negative in some instances" (Crook, 2010) for reasons which are explored further in the sections below.

3.4   Accountability and Oversight Mechanisms

Accountability and oversight reforms are necessary if government are to generate accurate data, reduce corruption, change the organisational culture of the public service and ultimately transform power relations (Therkildsen 2001). Donors' motivation for supporting the reform of oversight and accountability mechanisms also stems from an over-riding concern for aid to demonstrate results and not be lost to corruption (through measurable performance, output, outcome and impact indicators). The desire to ensure oversight systems are in place is linked to concerns about accountability to taxpayers in donor countries in relation to aid funds (de Renzio 2006). In terms of overall outcomes, donors have been increasing their attention on oversight and accountability mechanisms as a way of ensuring aid effectiveness; improving good governance; aiding economic growth (Pretorious & Pretorious 2008); reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs (Stern 2005); and enhancing service delivery, particularly in post-conflict countries where these kinds of reforms are emphasised early on (Pretorious & Pretorious 2008).

Oversight and accountability is a cross-cutting issue, equally relevant to service delivery, public financial management, public participation in policymaking, and decentralisation (Peterson 2010). International standards, for example for auditing, can act as an important impetus for reform. Performance management, which involves management by agreement or contract rather than by command, requires strong accountability mechanisms if it is to be effective (Dzimbiri 2008).

The literature is in general agreement that although much work has been undertaken in terms of process in this area (including increased participation, greater citizen demand, and more timely and transparent reporting for external and internal audit) the impact of such efforts is either limited or too difficult to ascertain (Allen 2009, Peterson 2010). It is also argued that while gains have been made in some areas relating to democratisation (i.e. nominally increased participation) and commitments to governance reform, many developing countries perform badly in attempts to control corruption, enhance the efficacy of services, decentralise government, and increase accountability within the civil service (Stern 2005). Stern argues that attempts by IFIs to improve transparency and accountability have not been very successful in the past two decades, and that traditional accountability mechanisms may have more traction in improving the functioning, performance and transparency of governments either as alternative or supplementary mechanisms (2005).

However, there have been some successes. Earlier in the decade Therliksden (2001) concluded that public accountability measures (such as Citizens Charters, public complaint mechanisms, and service delivery surveys) were in their infancy and being implemented selectively. However Citizen's Charters have since been deemed successful in some of the places where they have been implemented, such as South Africa and Tanzania, alongside performance-based contracts in countries such as Ghana (UNECA 2003). Particular progress has also been demonstrated in the area of external audit reform according to HIPC update surveys, while internal audit/control reform

has shown the least improvement (Pretorious & Pretorious 2008: 25-6). Interestingly there is little explanation of why this is the case.

The key role of parliaments is thought to have been overlooked and be requiring attention, as they bridge both horizontal and vertical accountability (Hudson and Wren, 2007). There are some successful examples of parliamentary oversight reforms, for example in Ghana, and the role of Parliamentary oversight in the security sector is being emphasised after successes in Liberia (Bonn 2010). There is a significant body of research on measures to increase the numbers of women in parliament, although much concern has been voiced at the level of influence women actually have once they enter parliament (Galligan 2006).

Although PFM reforms are outside the definition of PSGR being used for this evaluation, it is difficult to comment on accountability and oversight without considering PFM. In any case, successful outcomes of PFM accountability reforms depend on strengthened managerial accountability within ministries, departments and agencies. Dorotinsky and Floyd (2004) conclude that on the basis of data collected on HIPC countries which have undergone PFM reforms since the mid-1990s that budget formulation has improved in a number of countries, however budget execution and accountability are still very weak in the majority. Fewer than a third of the 20 countries surveyed had budget outturns which were close to the budget as adopted, and 90% of the African countries surveyed failed to produce final audited accounts within 12 months of the end of the fiscal year, rendering meaningful parliamentary oversight impossible. This is echoed by a World Bank evaluation of capacity building in Africa, which concludes that while there have been successes, the Bank's support for capacity building in the public sector has encountered considerable difficulty in the area of public financial management' (Pretorious & Pretorious 2008).

Civil society participation in budget monitoring and the establishment of Citizen's Charters have accrued positive evidence and are generally seen as good practices (O'Neill et al: 2007). The International Budget Partnership's (IBP) experience with the use of civil society monitoring of the budget process is a well-cited body of evidence demonstrating the impact of such activities on both budget accountability and budget efficiency (performance). There has also been evidence of gender sensitive budgeting, for example in Tanzania (Morgan and Baser 2007).

4 Synthesis of challenges

Many of the same challenges or reasons for failure are repeatedly identified in the literature across the different thematic reform areas. The list below is not exhaustive but includes the most commonly identified problems in order of frequency with which they are mentioned in the literature. These challenges can broadly be separated into two categories:

- Design challenges

- Implementation challenges

4.1 Design challenges

Political dynamics not taken into account - One of the most repeated criticisms of PSGR initiatives is that the political dynamics on the ground are not taken into account in the design stage (Crook 2010, Levy 2007, Goetz 2007, Robinson 2007d, Antwi et al. 2008, Pretorious and Pretorious 2008). PSGRs are berated for being overly technocratic in design while lacking understanding of either the political realities, historical roots, cultural specificity or administrative traditions of the country in question. Unsworth argues that 'instead of prioritising reform of formal institutions, they [development practitioners] should look at the structures, relationships, interests and incentives that underpin them' (2010:1). Gender and diversity issues are an inherent part of this required analysis.

Weak diagnostic tools and no overarching framework – The IEG PSR Evaluation (2009) identifies the lack of an overarching framework for the design of civil service reforms as a major impediment to progress in this area. This gap is particularly obvious if PSGRs are compared with PFM reforms which, in comparison, have clearer diagnostic tools and set standards (e.g. Public Expenditure Reviews, Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability [PEFA] indicators) making project design, monitoring and evaluation much easier. The IEG evaluation states 'the frequent failures of CSR reform, despite continued acknowledgement of its importance, seem to reflect the lack of a coherent strategy (with isolated exceptions) and of clear diagnostic tools to address CSA issues' (2009:xvi). The report also notes that in the World Bank 'analytical and advisory assistance' on civil service reform programmes was less than one-forth as common as for financial management, and it did not precede lending in most case study countries. Other authors also emphasise a general weakness in early diagnostic work for PSGR. Olowu argues that 'CSRs wrongly diagnosed Africa's civil service problems and came up with a flawed prognosis or with solutions that were wrong-headed… hence in most countries CSRs made African civil services to further degenerate rather than improve them' (2010:1).

Incorrect or missing 'theory of change' - Unsworth comments on this issue of wrong diagnosis from a different angle, arguing that 'programmes to improve the investment climate, strengthen the rule of law, or fight corruption do not fail just for lack of 'ownership' or attention to politics. They fail because they make the wrong starting assumption: that progressive change consists in, and can be achieved through, strengthening formal, rules-based institutions that reflect a clear division between public and private spheres of life' (2010:1).

Imported models – Several experts argue that donors 'import' a standard, foreign model of reform, even if they do not have prior experience of successful work in the region (World Bank 2005, Peterson 2010). For example, in Yemen 'off the shelf' reforms were unsuccessfully applied without consideration of the specific challenges posed by unification, Gulf returnees and a civil war (World Bank 2006). This criticism has been most forcefully applied to the New Public Management (NPM) style reforms which have been regarded by some as unsuccessful attempts to 'transplant'

Western reforms into completely different contexts (Crook 2010, Ramio 2008). In a very detailed study, Batley and Larbi argue that NPM reforms in developing countries have not always been a failure, but conditions for success are exacting and are only occasionally met (Batley and Larbi, 2004).

Reforms are not demand-led, leading to a lack of ownership – This is linked to the point above where models of reform transplanted from Western countries 'have largely been the brain-children of aid donors, leading to the usual complaint of weak political commitment' (Killick 2005: 4). There is a common criticism that there is a mismatch between what donors are willing to fund and government priorities and local needs (Parnini 2009, Hudson and Wren 2007, Peterson 2010). Polidano argues that donors dominate the selection and definition of reform projects, and ultimately governments adopt initiatives that are likely to bring in the most aid money rather than those that are the most necessary (2001).

Short term approaches – donors are often criticised for being short-termist in their approaches and favouring 'quick wins' in project selection and design rather than supporting long-term, systemic reform (Parnini 2009). This is often because donor agencies are under pressure from their domestic constituencies to demonstrate results within relatively short budget cycles.

4.2   Implementation Challenges

A key observation made by many experts is that PSGRs are often ultimately unsuccessful because, even if the project is well designed, it is not properly implemented or it comes to a premature end (Polidano 2001). There are a number of reasons why this may occur:

'Lack of political commitment' – this is the most popular explanation of why PSGRs fail in developing countries (Robinson 2007c, Robinson 2007d, Crook 2010, McCourt 2003, Lawson 2007). Robinson comments that 'governance reforms typically founder on account of political factors, rooted in a combination of inadequate political commitment and considerable political resistance' (Robinson 2007c: 401). Because PSGRs almost inevitably challenge existing power relations, resistance from politicians and low-mid level bureaucrats is likely. Goetz argues that most governance reforms fail largely because they seek to challenge existing power relations without an adequate understanding of what these are (2007).

Crook describes 'lack of political commitment' as 'the favourite catch-all explanation' but argues that experts do not adequately address *why* political commitment is so frequently lacking. Possible explanations include reform fatigue, entrenched patronage networks, and the lack of likely financial incentives from PSGRs.

Limited state capacity – Many authors note the weakness of the public sector for carrying out comprehensive reforms. Crook (2010) and Olowu (2010) have both recently argued that the public sector in Africa has been weakened by years of reforms focused on 'downsizing'. "The core problem of the civil service and public service provision in Africa is UNDERstaffing and lack of resources at levels where it matters most – front line services, and key middle management operations at both central and local levels (Crook 2010: 491). The 'brain drain' and low levels of education further reduce the wider recruitment pool for the public sector. State capacity is also impinged on by non-meritocratic recruitment in many countries, as well as incoherent pay scales and a general need for pay reform.

In particular, questions are being asked in regard to developing countries' state capacity to rise to the challenge of managing service delivery, relations with non-state providers and decentralisation (Loevinsohn and Harding 2004). Further, capacity is not uniform across government and there are different needs at different tiers of government (Gupta et al 2003). While technical support is often

provided in the form of international consultants as a way of building capacity, there is often little transfer of skills and consultants are often criticised for replacing rather than building capacity. In addition, lack of cross-cultural management skills can exacerbate working between foreign consultants and nationals (Pretorious and Pretorious 2008, IMF 2006).

Problems with donors – The literature identifies a number of problems with donor behaviour in relation to PSGR. In particular, discontinuity of international staff (who tend to have a life span in-country of 2-5 years) and a tendency to adopt a short-termist and overly results-oriented approach (Parnini 2009). Gibbons notes that in Afghanistan staff attrition was as high as 30% leading to a lack of direction, uncertainty and shifting priorities as staff change (2009). Other frequent criticisms include lack of knowledge of local languages (Gibbons 2009), sudden changes to donor priorities with volatile funding as a result (Evans et al. 2010), and lack of coordination and duplication amongst donor agencies and programmes (Poudyal and Ghimires 2011, Wyatt et al 2008).

Organisational culture – many authors identify the civil service culture as an impediment in PSGR. It is variously criticised for lacking a culture of accountability, collaboration, performance, analytical thinking and / or transparency (Antwi et al 2008, Crook 2010, Jacobs 2009). Organisational culture is extremely difficult to change, certainly via exogenous reform interventions. Antwi et al comment that in relation to Ghana's Civil Service Improvement Programme (CSPIP), 'while the results on the mechanical routine aspects of the CSPIP were impressive, the actual level of 'transformation' or 'change' that endures and should be reflected in management and staff's attitude and behaviour, and in the organisational culture, is to say the least unacceptable' (2008:261).

Inadequate timing and sequencing of reforms – Some authors identify poor reform planning and sequencing as a key challenge to implementation. For example Antwi et al (2009) argue that in Ghana there were too many reform activities taking place concurrently as part of the Civil Service Performance Improvement Programme. As a result the same people were overburdened and potential synergies between reforms were left underexploited. WDR 2011 argues that if there are too many reforms too quickly it can result in overtaxing local reformers, cutting corners by transplanting best practice, defining success in *de jure* terms (e.g. the creation of laws and policies) rather than in *de facto* terms (improving services), by-passing national institutions and cocooned parallel streams of reforms.

Problems with M & E and weak information management – The first step in a reform programme is to establish who is employed by the public sector, to perform which tasks and how much they are being paid. However, such a census is often surprisingly difficult to do, and can take an extended period of time (UNDP 2009c). A severe lack of baseline data and weak information management systems in many developing countries can make monitoring performance very difficult (Wyatt et al 2008, Morgan and Baser 2007). This means that early identification of problems is impossible and that evidence of impact is difficult to identify.

Limited acceptability and ownership of reforms – we have discussed how the design of a PSGR can reduce ownership, but ownership can also dwindle at the implementation stage. Crook argues that it can happen after many years of reform when managers have failed to fully explain the reform to their staff or build a culture of support (2010). Goetz (2007) emphasises the importance of creating continuous incentives to ensure ongoing buy-in to reforms and Batley (2004) argues that reforms must be given time to accumulate 'constituencies of support' amongst those who gain from the reform.

Political volatility – Sometimes implementation is hampered by difficult political situations in country. For example in Nepal various implementation arrangements (including the Reform Coordination and Monitoring Committee, the Administrative Reform Committee, GRCU, the

Efficiency Unit and Change Management Units) were compromised by rapid changes in personnel and by the volatile political situation which eventually bought the reforms to an end (ADB 2010). A similar trend was noted in Yemen (World Bank 2006).

5   Lessons Learned and Policy Implications

A number of 'lessons learned' can be gleaned from the literature across the four thematic areas of PSGR - these will be incorporated in the evaluation questions for the five country case studies to see whether supporting or contradictory evidence is discovered. The most frequently cited are listed below in order of prominence in the literature.

It is worth noting that there is some inconsistency around the proposed 'lessons' and that some may be mutually exclusive. For example some authors emphasise the need for donors to take a 'long term approach' because bringing lasting change takes decades (Levy 2007, WDR 2011) whereas others suggest focusing on 'quick wins' to avoid reform fatigue (Owusu 2005, Laking and Norman 2007).

Pay attention to political and institutional factors – This is the most repeated lesson learned throughout the PSGR literature, across all thematic areas (for example, Levy 2007, Robinson 2007c, Robinson 2007d, Samarantunge 2008, Goetz 2007, Peterson 2010, Pretorious and Pretorious 2008). Donors have often failed to recognise and understand the political context within which they are operating and there is an increasing understanding that PSGRs are not purely technical issues, but rather relate to a system of multiple role-players, complex relationships and dynamic and inter-related processes (Unsworth 2010). Culture and administrative tradition can affect the feasibility of reform (Flynn 2002) and it is critical to understand that all reforms create 'losers'. The resistance of powerful groups and interests can derail a reform process, for example resistance from civil servants or public sector unions. Wider PSGR processes therefore require an understanding of the links of patronage, familial ties, gender bias, diversity issues and the cleavages of ethnicity, religion and clan within all branches of government. Despite the widespread acceptance that political factors are critical in project design and early diagnostic work, there is a frustrating tendency in the literature to just state that in-depth political economy analysis is needed (Crook 2010). There is a clear need for research to get beyond a superficial 'politics matters' statement, or prescription for political economy analysis, and the country case studies linked to this review should specifically investigate this point. Some recommendations are that donors should create incentives for reform based on an understanding of the differing actors involved in any reform process (Goetz 2007) and that the political profile of PSGRs can be strengthened by linking them to a Prime Minister's Office or a subcommittee of Cabinet (UNDP 2009). Batley comments that reforms should be given time to accumulate 'constituencies of support' amongst those who gain from reform (2004).

Reforms require strong domestic leadership and ownership – high level political and bureaucratic leadership of reforms contributes to successful PSGR (WDR 2011, Robinson 2007d, Antwi et al 2008, Laking 2008). Reforms are more likely to be prioritised and adhered to if local elites and politicians consider them to be a domestic priority. Wide consultation can garner support for reform, identify means of off-setting losses and provide reassurance for those affected. Many experts also suggest creating networks of like-minded reformers and identifying and working with 'champions for reform' at a high level in government who can help overcome resistance to change, provide authority to managers to bypass the conventional or bureaucratically acceptable way of doing things where necessary, and to force cooperation between different parts of the administration (UNDP 2009a). Ultimately, many experts argue that donors must move away from 'imposed' solutions and instead support reforms which arise out of domestic demand (Parnini 2009:554). Booth states that 'changes in the thinking of political leaders and their supporters are not usually the sort of thing that can be 'engineered' by actors who are external to the country in question, except perhaps in situations of extreme economic or political breakdown' (2005:1).

Support incremental approaches within reforms – many authors argue that incremental approaches that are carefully selected to minimise opposition and produce cumulative benefits have a greater chance of success and sustainability than wholesale reforms that are implemented relatively quickly (Robinson 2007d). Peterson (2010) advocates using a country's existing system and changing 'only when necessary' in order to ensure sustainability, buy-in, ownership and ultimately efficiency (2010:3). It is argued, usually from a theoretical perspective as opposed to using empirical evidence, that incremental approaches to reform that involve small, cumulative changes are less likely to provoke significant opposition from traditional elites, and such reforms will build public support over time which will in turn fortify reform-minded political leaders. In particular, Leonard (2008) identifies the existence of 'pockets' of effectiveness within countries with poor governance and weak public sectors. Crook similarly argues against large scale PSR reform programmes, instead advocating that the 'best way forward is to identify and work with the competent managers to be found in 'islands of effectiveness', encouraging and spreading more effective kinds of incentives and developing more positive organisational cultures' (2010:479). Morgan and Baser offer a different view, using their analysis of reform in Tanzania and a systems approach to demonstrate that from the perspective of the current trend for comprehensive reforms 'countries need transformative systems change, especially in the public sector. The assumption is that the synergies gained from simultaneous reforms in service delivery, auditing, financial management, law reform, policy analysis, democratisation, and so on, can boost overall performance' (2007:19). The country case studies for this evaluation will provide empirical evidence on incremental and broad approaches which should bring greater clarity to this debate.

Consider timing and sequencing – It is clear that there has been little coordination of PSGRs in many developing countries, leading to duplication and over-stretching of particular individuals and units (WDR 2011, Antwi et al 2008, Evans and Wilder 2006). Possible synergies between reforms have gone under-exploited. The country case studies will specifically investigate issues of sequencing and planning of inter-dependent reforms. Evans and Wilder suggest strategically linking reforms in a way that makes the priority reforms more viable for example, combining rightsizing / attrition strategies with pay reform (2006). Olowu advocates recipient coordination of reforms as part of the Strategic Performance Management (SPM) initiative, which is being used in Botswana, South Africa and other nations to coordinate multi-faceted governance reforms. WDR 2011 also emphasises the long-time horizons needed for sustainable institutional transformation whilst recognising that a balance is needed so that there are some early wins and 'reform fatigue' does not take hold.

Support the role of citizens - This is particularly relevant in relation to PSGRs affecting accountability and oversight mechanisms although it is acknowledged by several experts that PSGRs are more likely to be effective in the context of widespread public pressure for reform (e.g. Antwi et al. 2008, Levy 2007). Various strategies are suggested in the literature to strengthen a concerned citizenry including the use of strategic public communications and linking PSGRs to wider reforms and initiatives in order to boost public awareness, as was done in Botswana and Nigeria (Laking 2008, Bruni 2008, Andrews 2008). Additionally, ensuring freedom of access to information is important as many developing country governments operate in a culture of secrecy. Strategies such as giving citizens legal standing within institutions of public sector oversight and the right to issue dissenting perspectives directly to legislative bodies have also been suggested (Goetz and Jenkins 2001). However, Crook argues that pressure from the public is only likely to lead to improved performance if it is incorporated into organisational incentive structures (2010: 479). Others have emphasised the need for an educated citizenry (Wyatt et al 2008) and the need for human development investments in order to build trust for and buy-in to PSGRs (Andrews 2008). Booth also offers a dissenting voice, arguing that although the idea that wider public discussion about policy and poverty reduction will lead to greater accountability and commitment from society is an attractive one, it should not be applied without heavy qualifications in typically aid-dependent poor countries (2005, 2011a).

Tackle poor public sector performance – many experts emphasise the need to improve public sector performance, although there is less consensus on how to do this. Crook and Olowu emphasise how under-funded and under-staffed civil services are across Africa as a result of down-sizing reforms and argue strongly for both the expansion of the civil service in these countries and for serious pay reform. In particular there is a need for more trained staff in decentralised district offices (Olowu 2003). Others advocate performance based management techniques and efforts to change the culture of the public sector (Therkildsen 2006, IEG 2009). Crook comments that 'getting public agencies to perform better, from the very low level they now find themselves in, requires not just resources but an organisational commitment on the part of staff to do their jobs; this requires a changed organisational culture within which not just wages but the whole package – of personal rewards and incentives and management style – encourages and DEMANDS better performance by public agencies' (2010: 492).

Change donor behaviour and systems – In general there is consensus that donors should reform their own systems and procedures to enable them to take a longer term approach in-country in relation to PSGR, both in terms of funding, project design and staff contracts. There is also concern in relation to accountability that donors take the place that should be occupied by citizens in accountability relationships. In typically requiring recipient governments to be accountable to donors for the use of aid funds, already fragile institutional accountability mechanisms are further weakened (Therkildsen 2001:8) and the governments' general accountability to the public is undermined (Stern 2005). WDR 2011 argues that donor agencies are inherently biased towards minimising domestic and fiduciary risk, rather than supporting best fit institutional transformation appropriate to the political realities on the ground. The report recommends that donors enter long-term funding commitments, provide predictable aid, avoid short term technical assistance, utilise south-south resources and coordinate their support to reforms better.

6 Gaps in the literature

A number of gaps can be identified in the PSGR literature:

6.1 Gender and marginalised groups

In considering the gender dimension of PSGRs it is important to consider a) reforms that have been undertaken with a specific gender and diversity or rights dimension, and b) the impact (negative, positive or unmeasured) of any particular reform or set of reforms on women and marginalised groups.

The PSGR literature says very little about either gender or diversity in general and few resources mention specific reforms that have explicitly been carried out with a focus on gender or diversity. This is possibly because few such reforms have been undertaken and from the literature it seems that few reforms have had specific aims relating to gender or diversity specific outcomes. DFID's Governance Portfolio Review supports this assumption as it notes that 'governance spending on projects for women's organisations is low and relatively few governance projects focus explicitly on gender issues. While the gender and distributional impacts of governance projects are hard to measure there are some notable successes' (2011:7).

In terms of assessing the gender or diversity impact of PSGRs in general, documents typically include a sentence stating the importance of gender equality, sensitivity and mainstreaming but fail to include any further substantive discussion on the issue. The impacts of specific PSGRs on gender, benchmarks or indicators of achievement are rarely mentioned.

The service delivery focus of the 'third wave' of PSGRs over the last decade has the potential to have a positive impact upon women and marginalised groups (UNDP 2009b). MacPherson notes that women are usually the primary users of services on behalf of households and therefore PSGRs aiming at improved service delivery should affect women the most (2008). However this has been described as largely inadvertent: PSGRs are not thought to have had an explicit focus on women or marginalised groups (Morgan et al: 2009). Reforms have been criticised for taking a "more restrictive view of governance" where governance concerns the effectiveness of the state rather than the equity of the economic system or the legitimacy of the power structure (UNIFEM 2008: 181). UNIFEM also state that there has so far been little interest in gender equity as a component of public sector reform from within the state sector itself – particularly in the context of downsizing reforms where women lose their jobs, and face changes in incentives and accountability measures. Female citizens also experience negative impacts due to the privatising or outsourcing of state services and amenities – particularly where the cost is recovered through the introduction or increase of user fees (UNIFEM 2008).

In the few resources that discuss gender and PSGRs in significant depth, they tend to focus on:

- Women's engagement in local governance decision-making and leadership as a result of decentralisation, and initiatives to develop women's capacity to perform these new roles more effectively. An example is India's scheme for the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), which is thought to have had a major psychological and social (rather than economic) impact upon women (Manor 2007). Similarly in Cambodia women have increased their participation in Commune Councils (Evans et al 2010).

- Efforts to increase the numbers of women in politics and decision making roles, including the employment of women in senior and middle ranking government service roles. Many

authors also consider the extent and quality of their participation in governance, especially Parliament, and in senior public positions (both elected and appointed).

- Strategies to encourage governments to adopt gender budgeting or gender responsive budgeting processes that are designed to ensure more equitable allocation of public resources; to increase public institutional accountability; and give citizens a voice that is heard in how resources should be allocated. For example, Morgan and Baser identify a greater acceptance and internalisation of gender mainstreaming within the budgetary process in Tanzania (2007).

6.2 Aid modalities and aid effectiveness

The section on 'Lessons Learned' has identified several major lessons for donors to improve their PSGR work, in particular around country ownership. However, the literature tells us very little about which aid modalities best support PSGR. Comments related to this issue are scattered across a small percentage of the PSGR literature and we found no evaluations that consider this question in depth.

DFID's 2009 Stocktake shows that 42% of DFID PSGR spend is channelled through multilateral aid agencies or is jointly funded and 25% of funding is channelled through budget support (Waldock 2010:15). No resources were found that investigated the effectiveness of these different approaches to funding PSGRs. The 2009 Stocktake also noted an issue with aid allocation in relation to spending on 'government administration' (GA) – 'how much spending on GA relates to development need or geopolitical concerns is a clear issue arising from the stock-take. Global donor priorities do not appear to clearly correlate to development priorities' (Thornton and Hemon 2009: 2).

6.3 Traditional institutions and authority

There is a significant body of research on traditional authority and governance which discusses how formal political systems are often underpinned by complex informal networks. Cammack , for example, argues that informal networks link together MPs, government officials, chiefs, religious leaders, 'big men' and villagers, and formal governance in many African countries cannot be understood outside these ties of patrimonialism (Cammack 2007). Literature on 'customary' or 'traditional' political structures also emphasises that they can contribute to social exclusion by perpetuating discrimination based on gender, caste or race. Some resources within the slim literature on public administration in fragile states explore issues of traditional authority, for example in countries where local chiefs or warlords have been absorbed into local governance structures (Lister 2007). In fact, Lister argues that statebuilding processes are largely about formal bureaucratic rules taking precedence over informal rules based on clientelism and patrimonialism. However, in general the PSGR literature tends to focus on formal governance systems rather than exploring interplay with traditional political structures. For example, we did not find case studies demonstrating a role (positive or negative) being played by chiefs, religious leaders or traditional leaders in PSGRs. This may be because it is an under-researched area, or it may be that this is more clearly seen at the local level, whereas the focus of this evaluation is reform of central government.

6.4 Value for Money

Despite the current donor emphasis on value for money (VFM), we found no specific mention of it in the resources reviewed. Many resources and evaluations sought to express an opinion on the overall effectiveness of PSGRs, but these discussions were not couched in VFM terminology. We

anticipate that this may well change in future as VFM assessment becomes a more expected part of donor evaluations.

7   Conclusion

Despite the lack of 'cross-fertilisation' between the development literature and other disciplines, the management literature on 'wicked' or 'ill-structured' problems is of relevance to PSGR (Herbert 1973, Rittel and Webber 1973, Conklin 2008). Conklin describes 'wicked' problems as scenarios where:

- There is no definitive statement of 'the problem'

- There is no definitive 'solution' - the problem solving ends when you run out of resources

- There is no right or wrong answer, the situation just gets better, worse, good enough or not good enough

- No two wicked problems are the same so solutions have to be custom designed

- Alternative solutions cannot be tried out as each is expensive and has lasting unintended consequences

- Problems run across more than one governmental / professional / territorial domain.

The above description seems to fit remarkably well with the area of PSGR. Conklin notes that when people encounter a wicked problem they start by trying to understand the problem but then immediately jump to formulating potential solutions (2005:5). The PSGR literature suggests a similar story – it is full of exhortations to pay attention to the context of reform, but there are few examples of where this has actually been done. As the IEG 2009 evaluation notes, issues such as civil service reform are not guided by an overarching conceptual framework with clear policy guidance like those in other more technical areas of reform such as public financial management. Instead, for most of the subsectors of PSGR there is little clear best practice, no global policy guidance and no robust indicators of progress.

The development literature on PSGR is full of discussion over what has happened (a lot) and what the outcome has been (generally negative), but there is very little on 'why' certain reforms took place, what the 'problem' was that they were aiming to change and what the underlying 'theory of change' was that led to the particular design of the solution. As Booth writes, 'the truth is, however, that no one really knows how to build the type of governance that Africa needs. The forms of governance that might work better for development under the specific conditions yielded by African history and geography are not known. We know what is wrong, we know why things are not working, but we don't know for sure what would work better, even in broad and imprecise terms' (Booth 2009).

The effective functioning and governance of the public sector in developing countries is absolutely critical for the MDGs – this is well documented (Earle and Scott 2010). It is for this reason that, given the lack of progress over the last three decades of PSGR, we are now at the point where 'a complete rethink is required' (Crook 2010: 499).

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