

Voice, Empowerment and Accountability

Topic Guide

About this Topic Guide

This guide summarises some of the most rigorous available evidence on the key debates and challenges of voice, empowerment and accountability. To view it as web pages and see five **supplements** providing more detail, visit www.gsdrc.org/go/vea.

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Supplements to this topic guide

The following supplementary pages are available at www.gsdrc.org/go/vea.

- Conceptualising empowerment and accountability
- Political empowerment
- Social and economic empowerment
- Accountability and responsiveness of the state and society
- Challenges and risks
- Measuring empowerment and accountability

Executive summary

Voice, empowerment and accountability (VEA) interventions aim to support poor and marginalised people to build the resources, assets, and capabilities they need to exercise greater choice and control over their own development, and to hold decision-makers to account. This guide provides an overview of the best available evidence on the impact of VEA interventions. It identifies what we know about the barriers to VEA in different contexts, and emerging lessons on how to address them.

Two main rationales for supporting VEA recur across the literature. One is that voice, empowerment and accountability have intrinsic value, as objectives in and of themselves. A second rationale is that VEA is instrumental to the achievement of a broader range of development goals, including inclusive institutions, improved access to and quality of public services, and human development outcomes. VEA also aims to support inclusive political settlements in which states respond to the needs of all groups.

Evidence of the impact of VEA interventions is limited and inconsistent – identifying both positive and negative effects. Only a small body of literature has analysed the (potential) role of VEA in supporting development goals, and the evidence is clustered around more measurable effects on service delivery, particularly health and education. Overall, the evidence consistently demonstrates that the impact of VEA depends on context: specifically, on pre-existing power relations, social norms, levels of equity or exclusion, leadership, and the capacity and will of both state and civil society actors.

Albeit limited, the evidence presented in this guide indicates that: i) *voice and participation* have had positive effects on education and health outcomes in a small number of isolated cases, but evidence of links between participation and inclusive institutions is mixed; ii) *empowerment* is positively associated with improvements in health-promoting behaviour and women's protection against violence, although there remains a gap in understanding the long-term effects of empowerment on social and political inclusion; and iii) *transparency and accountability* initiatives have had mixed results, although transparency has been linked to reduced capture, and some positive impacts on access to services have been documented.

Recent research, whilst sometimes critical of aid, has identified promising entry points for supporting VEA. Some call for aid to move beyond short-term tools and tactics towards more strategic, multipronged interventions that simultaneously tackle blockages to VEA within both state and society. Other studies emphasise the need to think and work politically, adapt theories of change to local incentives and power dynamics, and be realistic about what can be achieved. Aid actors are increasingly being called upon to adopt an enabling and brokering role. This implies working across public and private spheres to build consensus and address the pervasive collective action problems that often constitute a major barrier to citizen accountability. Evidence suggests supporting women's political inclusion requires understanding women's networks and their own capacity to empower themselves.

Challenges for aid effectiveness are particularly acute in fragile and conflict-affected states characterised by low trust and weak capacity. In some fragile and conflict-affected contexts, positive results have been achieved by adopting a non-confrontational 'social contract approach', which emphasises the collective responsibility of all parties to support better development outcomes.

Rigorously measuring the impact of VEA is challenging: whilst inputs, outputs and results may be monitorable, longer-term outcomes that involve complex causal chains often go uncaptured by conventional M&E frameworks. A more holistic approach to indicators is widely called for in the literature.

Evidence guide: impact of VEA interventions

What do we know about the impact of VEA interventions? The table below organises the research and evidence included in this guide into three types of intervention – voice and participation, empowerment, and accountability – and four types of impact: on access to public services, education outcomes, health-related behaviour and outcomes, and inclusive institutions.

Limitations of the evidence base

Overall, the size and quality of the evidence on the impact of VEA is limited and inconclusive. Much of the available literature is policy-oriented, opinion-based, or secondary. Empirical research in this field has primarily applied observational, qualitative research design. There are comparatively few quasi-experimental designs (except in the health sector) and only a small sample of systematic reviews are available. Geographically, literature from Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America dominates, while the Pacific, Middle East and North Africa are less studied.

The limited evidence indicates VEA interventions have had positive, negative and neutral impacts. There are also gaps: There is a paucity of research on the long-term effects of VEA, and on hard-to-measure outcomes like power relations, political inclusion and changes in attitudes and norms. The political processes that underlie VEA, such as coalition-building and collective action, are comparatively neglected. The influence of variables such as gender, age, ethnicity and class on the functioning and impact of VEA interventions is also not well researched.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACTS (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE)					
		Access to public services	Education outcomes	Health behaviour and outcomes	Inclusive institutions
TYPE OF INTERVENTION	Voice and Participation	(1) (4) (5)	(2)	(4)	(3) (5)
	Empowerment		(9)	(7) (8) (9) (10)	(11)
	Accountability	(13) (14) (16)		(15)	(12) (13)

Evidence guide references

- 1 **[S; OR]** Speer, J. (2012). Participatory Governance Reform: A Good Strategy for Increasing Government Responsiveness and Improving Public Services? *World Development*, 40(12): 2379-2398.
- 2 **[P&E; EXP]** Pradhan, M., et al. (2013). *Improving educational quality through enhancing community participation: Results from a randomised field experiment in Indonesia*. Washington, DC: World Bank
- 3 **[S; OR]** Gaventa, J., & Barrett, G. (2012). Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement. *World Development*, 40(12): 2399-2410.
- 4 **[S; OR]** Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2013) Does Participation Improve Development Outcomes? in *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* Washington DC: World Bank: 161-246.
- 5 **[P&E; OBS]** Citizenship DRC. (2011). *Blurring the Boundaries. Citizen Action across States and Boundaries. A Summary of Findings from a Decade of Collaborative Research on Citizen Engagement*. Brighton: Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability.
- 6 **[P&E]** Balamoune-Lutz, M. (2013). *The effectiveness of foreign aid to women's equality organizations in the MENA: Does aid promote women's political participation?* Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.
- 7 **[S; SR]** Wiggins, N. (2012). Popular Education for Health Promotion and Community Empowerment: A Review of the Literature. *Health Promotion International*, 27(3): 356-371
- 8 **[S; SR]** Kerrigan, D., Fonner, V., Stromdahl, S. & Kennedy, C., (2013). Community Empowerment Among Female Sex Workers Is an Effective HIV Prevention Intervention: A Systematic Review of the Peer-Reviewed Evidence from Low- and Middle-Income Countries. *AIDS and Behavior*, 17(6): 1926-1940.
- 9 **[S; SR]** Dickson K., and Bangpan, M. (2012) *Providing access to economic assets for girls and young women in low-and-lower middle income countries: a systematic review of the evidence*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, University of London.
- 10 **[S; SR]** Vyas, S., & Watts, C. (2009). How Does Economic Empowerment Affect Women's Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Low and Middle Income Countries? A Systematic Review of Published Evidence. *Journal of International Development*, 21(5): 577-602.
- 11 **[S; OR]** Duflo, E. (2012). Women, Empowerment and Economic Development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(4): 1051-1079.
- 12 **[S; OR]** Kosack, S., & Fung, A. (2014). Does Transparency Improve Governance? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17(1): 65-87.
- 13 **[S; OR]** Gaventa, J., & McGee, R. (2013). The Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives. *Development Policy Review*, 31(S1): s3-s28.
- 14 **[S; OR]** Joshi, A. (2013). Do They Work? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives in Service Delivery. *Development Policy Review*, 31(S1): s29-s48.
- 15 **[P&E; EXP]** Svensson, J. & Bjorkman, M., (2007). *Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment of a Community-Based Monitoring Project In Uganda*. Washington, DC: World Bank
- 16 **[S; SR]** Lynch, U., et al. (2013). *What is the evidence that the establishment or use of community accountability mechanisms and processes improves inclusive service delivery by governments, donors and NGOs to communities?* London: EPPI Centre

Key: type of research

[P&E] Primary and Empirical	[S] Secondary
[EXP] Experimental	[SR] Systematic Review
[OBS] Observational	[OR] Other Review

1 Concepts and key debates

1.1 Defining voice, empowerment and accountability

Voice, empowerment and accountability (VEA) is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of ideas about how citizens can express preferences, secure their rights, make demands on the state and ultimately achieve better development outcomes. VEA draws attention to the role of individual agency, power relations, and processes that can enable or constrain citizen's capacity to articulate and achieve their individual and collective goals.

Though closely connected, the terms voice, empowerment and accountability are conceptually distinct, and also widely contested:

- **Voice** is often understood as the ability of citizens to express their preferences and to be heard by the state, either through formal or informal channels, in written or oral form (Rocha Menocal & Sharma, 2008). Citizens' voices are not homogenous, and sometimes more powerful voices and opinions can crowd out those of excluded or marginal groups (DFID, 2011).
- **Empowerment** is a process through which individuals or organised groups increase their power and autonomy to achieve certain outcomes they need and desire (Eyben, 2011). Empowerment focuses on supporting disadvantaged people to gain power and exert greater influence over those who control access to key resources (DFID, 2011).
- **Accountability** is a process for holding individual actors or organisations to account for their actions. Accountability requires transparency, answerability, and enforceability between decision makers and citizens (Menocal & Sharma, 2008).

For further resources, see the supplement on [conceptualising empowerment and accountability](#).

Why does VEA matter?

Voice, empowerment and accountability interventions (separately or in combination with each other) aim to support poor and marginalised people to build the resources, assets, and capabilities they need to exercise greater choice and control over their own development, and to hold decision-makers to account. Two main rationales for supporting VEA are present across the literature. One is that voice, empowerment and accountability have *intrinsic* value, as objectives in and of themselves. Empowerment, for example, can improve people's autonomy and dignity, whilst enabling them to make valued contributions to family and society (Eyben, 2011).

A second rationale is that VEA is *instrumental* to the achievement of a broader range of development goals. For instance, citizen voice is viewed as a precondition for equitable access to and quality of public goods and services, thereby supporting improved health and education outcomes (Rocha Menocal & Sharma, 2008). VEA is also considered vital for the development of inclusive institutions – or institutions that generate equality of opportunity and access to resources. Increased voice and accountability of marginalised groups is crucial if development is to fulfil its promise to 'leave no one behind', and tackle the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion (Rocha Menocal & Sharma, 2008). VEA is also associated with the development of more inclusive political settlements, in which states are responsive to the needs of all groups of citizens, regardless of ethnicity or social status (DFID, 2011).

Rocha Menocal, A. & Sharma, B. (2008). *Joint Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability: Synthesis Report*. London: DFID

<http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/3425.pdf>

Citizens' voice and accountability are important dimensions of governance. Citizens need effective 'voice' in order to convey their views; and governments or states that can be held accountable for their actions are more likely to respond to the needs and demands articulated by their population. Overall, interventions have had some positive effects, such as raising awareness, empowering some marginalised groups and encouraging state officials. However, impact has remained limited in scale and sustainability. The key variable for impact has been context – specifically, the interaction between formal and informal institutions, and the underlying power relations. Donors should sharpen their 'political intelligence', and work with existing institutions, address both supply and demand sides, and diversify their engagement outside their comfort zone. They should also be realistic about short- vs. long-term goals.

DFID. (2011). *A Preliminary Mapping of the Evidence Base for Empowerment and Accountability*.

London: DFID http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Publications/FINAL_E_and-A_Annex3_Evidence_Mapping.pdf

What do we know about the impact of aid on voice, empowerment and accountability? This review finds that the evidence is fragmentary, and more impact evaluations are needed. Little is known about the long-term impacts of interventions on political dynamics. In a number of instances, VEA has led to short-term changes in policy, regulation and reform, improved transparency, reduced corruption, increased community participation and improved government responsiveness to citizen demands. However, these changes are context-specific and have been difficult to scale up. Their drivers remain little understood. One clear finding is that citizen empowerment is not bestowed by donor or government interventions, or by official spaces for citizen engagement. Rather, it is often achieved by citizen-led movements that act without the support or sanction of governments or donors.

For further resources, see the GSDRC topic guide on [inclusive institutions](#).

1.2 Key debates: challenges to aid effectiveness?

VEA emerged as a priority in the international development agenda in the 1990s. Over the past five years in particular, cross-country mixed-methods research has called for aid actors to think politically, understand the role of informal institutions, and act strategically to support more inclusive VEA. Aid interventions have been criticised for previously overlooking deep-rooted inequalities and structural constraints to empowerment (Pathways of Women's Empowerment, 2011). Others contend aid is rooted in a clear-cut distinction between state and society (or public and private spheres), with limited appreciation that accountability and empowerment emerge from informal processes that straddle these spheres (Unsworth, 2010).

Prominent experts are now calling for aid to move beyond the use of short-term tools and tactics towards more strategic, multipronged interventions that simultaneously tackle blockages to VEA within both state and society (Fox, 2014). A 'supply-demand' dichotomy is increasingly viewed as unhelpful (Fox, 2014). Bridging supply and demand is particularly pertinent in fragile and conflict-affected states, where positive citizen-state relations are widely considered key to rebuilding the social contract. Nevertheless, in such contexts VEA is often constrained by low levels of trust between state and society and within societies, by exclusive political settlements and informal patronage systems that disempower ordinary citizens, and by the lack of a functioning public sphere through which citizens can articulate their demands (von Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008).

Pathways of Women's Empowerment (2011). *Empowerment: A Journey not a Destination*. Brighton: IDS, Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC.

<https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/SynthesisReport12DecR.pdf>

Why are conventional interventions that seek to promote women's empowerment insufficient? This report synthesises 12 key messages that emerge from the work of the cross-country research programme on women's empowerment. It stresses that women in different countries and of different backgrounds define and experience empowerment in diverse ways. What is empowering to one woman is not necessarily empowering to another. Understanding empowerment therefore needs to begin from women's own experiences, rather than from a focus on a predictable set of outcomes. Policy-makers and aid practitioners should not make assumptions about what empowerment means to women or how it can be achieved. Efforts to promote women's empowerment need to do more than give individual women economic or political opportunities. They need to tackle deeper-rooted structural constraints that perpetuate inequalities.

Unsworth, S. (2010). *An Upside Down View of Governance*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

<http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/AnUpside-downViewofGovernance.pdf>

How can effective, accountable public authority be increased? This paper synthesises research findings from the Centre for the Future State. It explores how public authority is created through processes of bargaining between state and society actors, and the interaction of formal and informal institutions. Findings highlight the need for a fundamental reassessment of existing assumptions about governance and development. Informal institutions and personalised relationships are pervasive and powerful, but they can contribute to progressive as well as to regressive outcomes. Rather than focusing on rules-based reform, policymakers should consider using indirect strategies to influence local actors.

Fox, J. (2014). *Social Accountability. What Does the Evidence really Say?* Global Partnership for Social Accountability. <http://issuu.com/thegpsa/docs/social-accountability-04-13>

This presentation revisits widely cited literature on the effectiveness of social accountability. It identifies a first group of approaches that are 'tactical': bounded interventions or tools limited to society-side efforts. Evidence about their success is decidedly mixed. These demand-side interventions may be based on unrealistic assumptions, such as hoping that information provision alone will inspire collective action. A second group of approaches is 'strategic'. Evidence on these is substantial and positive. Strategic approaches deploy multiple tactics or mutually reinforcing tools. They encourage enabling environments for collective action. They also coordinate initiatives for citizen voice with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness. The author concludes that reforms that associate voice with responsive capacity ('teeth') trigger a virtuous circle and are more promising.

von Kaltenborn-Stachau, H. (2008). *The Missing Link: Fostering Positive Citizen-State Relations in Post-Conflict Environments*. Washington, D.C: CommGAP, World Bank.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/CommGAPMissingLinkWeb.pdf>

This paper draws on examples from Timor-Leste, Liberia and Burundi to illustrate that aid in post-conflict environments often overlook the significance of opportunities for civil society, the media and the state to connect and engage constructively in the public sphere. Conflict often results in high public expectations, lack of public trust, societal fragmentation and exclusion. Post-conflict public spheres are typically characterised by the prevalence of fear, rumours and uncertainty, caused by disempowerment and loss of livelihoods. Nevertheless, participatory processes, accountable and transparent institutions and constructive citizen-state relations require a national dialogue platform that only a functioning public sphere provides.

2 Effectiveness and impact of VEA: the evidence

Evidence of the impact of VEA interventions, including on development outcomes, is limited and inconsistent. Much of the empirical research in this area focuses on the effectiveness of VEA initiatives in achieving intermediate outputs (e.g. capacity development, numbers/who participated, service satisfaction), but there remain few rigorous evaluations of broader impacts (e.g. changing norms/attitudes, increased equity, collective action). Only a small body of literature has analysed the (potential) role of VEA in supporting development goals – largely focused on more measurable effects in the area of service delivery, particularly in the health and education sectors.

Albeit limited, the evidence presented below indicates that: i) *voice and participation* have had positive effects on education outcomes in a small number of isolated cases, but evidence of links between participation and inclusive institutions is mixed; ii) *empowerment* is positively associated with improvements in health-promoting behaviour and women’s protection against violence, although there remains a gap in evidence of the long-term effects of empowerment on social and political inclusion; and iii) *transparency and accountability* initiatives have had mixed effects, but transparency has been linked to reduced capture, and some positive impacts on access to services have been documented.

Several studies note that connections between VEA and human development outcomes are not automatic; while there is evidence of positive correlations, causality is more elusive. Overall, the effects of VEA on development processes depend on context: specifically formal and informal political systems, social norms, power relations, leadership capacities and pre-existing levels of equity or exclusion.

2.1 Voice and participation

Citizen voice and participation are often expected to improve equity and make institutions – whether formal or informal – more inclusive. However, in practice the evidence for this is limited and contradictory. Positive associations between participation and greater state responsiveness and accountability have been found in several cases (Speer, 2012). For example, one recent rigorous study in Indonesia showed that citizen participation in school committees improved education outcomes, particularly when committees were elected and held joint planning meetings with elected village councils (Pradhan et al., 2013). In other cases, citizen engagement with public service providers has led to a backlash by the state, or capture by dominant groups (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Participatory development activities can ameliorate or exacerbate horizontal inequalities, depending on who participates (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). They can also generate apathy or disengagement among citizens if viewed as tokenistic.

Speer, J. (2012). Participatory Governance Reform: A Good Strategy for Increasing Government Responsiveness and Improving Public Services? *World Development*, 40(12), 2379–2398.

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.034>

What are the public policy benefits of participatory governance, and what are the conditions for effective implementation? This literature review finds that there is limited and mixed evidence on the impacts of participatory governance, with either moderately positive impacts or no impacts discernible on access to

public services, well-being and poverty. Evidence on the conditions for effective participatory governance is much more comprehensive, and there is broad agreement that capable and motivated civil society and government actors are key elements. More comparative cross-case research based on medium and large samples is needed for judging whether participatory governance arrangements can increase government responsiveness and service quality.

Pradhan, M., et al. (2013). *Improving educational quality through enhancing community participation: Results from a randomised field experiment in Indonesia*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

http://real.wharton.upenn.edu/~maisy/documents/WorldBank_SchoolCommittee.pdf

This paper investigates the role of school committees in improving education quality. It presents the results of a large, randomized evaluation of 520 schools in Central Java. Some schools were randomly assigned to elect school committee members. Another treatment facilitated joint planning meetings between the school committee and the village council. Two other treatments provided resources to existing school committees. The study found that the institutional reforms, in particular those that involved elected committees linked with local councils, were most cost effective at improving learning. The success of the linkage intervention results from the fact that a more powerful community institution, the village council, was involved in planning. This provided the legitimacy needed to ensure that actions to improve learning were actually implemented.

Gaventa, J. & Barrett, G. (2012). *Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement*. *World Development*, 40(12), 2399-2410 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.014>

Does citizen engagement contribute to development and democracy? This meta-analysis (100 case studies on 20 countries) finds strong evidence that citizen engagement has often contributed to constructing citizenship, strengthening participation, enhancing responsiveness and accountability from states, and developing inclusive and cohesive societies. However, in a quarter of the cases citizen engagement has led to negative outcomes such as backlash from state or society, or capture by dominant groups. Citizen engagement can make a positive difference even in the least democratic settings, though not in a linear way. Participation in local associations has been strongly associated with positive outcomes, but engagement in formal participatory governance much less so.

Mansuri, G. & Rao, V. (2013) *Does Participation Improve Development Outcomes? in Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* Washington, DC: World Bank, 161-246

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/469232-1321568702932/8273725-1352313091329/PRR_Localizing_Development_full.pdf

This chapter rigorously reviews almost 500 studies of participatory community development and decentralisation. It finds that on balance, greater community involvement modestly improves resource sustainability and infrastructure quality. However, the people who benefit are often the most literate, the least geographically isolated, and the most connected to wealthy and powerful people. Demand-driven, competitive application processes can exclude the weakest communities and exacerbate horizontal inequities. Some studies of community participation in health and education find modestly positive results overall, although the causal link between participation and service delivery outcomes is vague. The formation of community health groups appears to have virtually no effect on any health-related outcomes when done in isolation, but is effective when combined with training or upgrading of health facilities. Information given to households and communities about the quality of services in their community as well as government standards of service tends to improve outcomes.

Citizenship DRC. (2011). *Blurring the Boundaries. Citizen Action across States and Boundaries. A Summary of Findings from a Decade of Collaborative Research on Citizen Engagement*. Brighton: Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability.

<http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/CentreOnCitizenship/cdrc.2011-blurring.pdf>

This report draws on ten years of research on citizenship and more than 150 case studies, including cases from post-conflict and insecure settings. It finds that citizen engagement has enabled reforms and helped enhance citizenship, public services, state accountability and capability, and rights and democracy. Impact is determined by legacies of citizen capacities and engagement, by institutional and political context, and context specifics such as the strength of internal champions and the framing of the issue. The report argues donors should work both horizontally and vertically across and within state and society. When it works, citizen engagement contributes to more effective citizen practices, which in turn help to create more responsive and accountable states and more cohesive societies. When it fails, however, engagement can lead to disempowerment, more clientelistic practices, a less responsive state and an increasingly divided society.

2.2 Empowerment

Empowerment aims to ensure that development benefits disadvantaged groups, including women, minorities and the poor. Fully capturing the individual and social effects of empowerment interventions is challenging, and to date the evidence base is limited. One isolated study using cross-country panel data recently found that aid has had an intrinsic positive effect on women's political empowerment in the MENA region (Balioune-Lutz, 2013). Qualitative research has also identified links between trends in economic empowerment and pro-poor growth (OECD, 2012). Likewise, from the reverse perspective, political exclusion has been found to negatively impact on long-term, inclusive growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013).

A small body of rigorous evidence indicates empowerment and accountability interventions can support improved health knowledge and behaviour (Wiggins, 2012). A recent systematic review has also identified positive effects of women's empowerment on their sexual health and risk of domestic violence (Kerrigan et al., 2013).

OECD (2012). *Poverty Reduction and Pro-Poor Growth: The Role of Empowerment*. OECD.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264168350-en>

This policy guidance presents evidence from research and practice on the causal relationships between empowerment, pro-poor growth and poverty reduction. It argues that inequity and power imbalances lead to market failures and to political, social and legal exclusion. These prevent poor people from raising their productivity and production, and therefore their incomes. They also prevent them from increasing their voice within their society and community. Conversely, poor people's empowerment secures their rights and drives pro-poor growth. The report advocates strengthening poor people's organisations, their control over assets and their influence in economic governance to improve the terms of their engagement in markets. A combination of economic, political and social empowerment will make growth much more effective at reducing poverty.

Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. A. (2013). *Why Nations Fail. The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. London: Profile Books Limited.

This multidisciplinary book analyses the historical and institutional dynamics of numerous societies. It finds that prosperity is sustained by the transformation of political and economic institutions from

extractive to inclusive ones. In rich countries, citizens overthrew elites who controlled power and created pluralist societies instead. The key features of these societies were the broad distribution of political rights, government accountability and responsiveness to citizens, and the opening up of economic opportunities. Broad-based political empowerment bridging social divides has driven economic transformation, but there is no clear recipe for achieving such empowerment.

Baliamoune-Lutz, M. (2013). *The effectiveness of foreign aid to women's equality organizations in the MENA: Does aid promote women's political participation?* Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/2013/en_GB/wp2013-074/

This paper asks whether official development assistance promotes gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa region. It examines the effects of aid to women's equality organisations on women's political empowerment, as measured by the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. Based on panel data from 13 Middle East and North African countries between 2002 and 2010, it finds that such aid has been effective. It also concludes that autocracy exerts a negative influence on women's political empowerment, and that higher adolescent fertility rates are associated with a smaller proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

For further resources, see the supplementary sections on [political empowerment](#) and [social and economic empowerment](#).

Wiggins, N. (2012). *Popular Education for Health Promotion and Community Empowerment: A Review of the Literature. Health Promotion International, 27(3), 356-371.*

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1093/heapro/dar046>

This systematic review of 29 empirical studies on high-, middle- and low-income countries finds that popular education is associated with increases in individual and collective empowerment (e.g. self-confidence, critical awareness, sense of community) and action (e.g. participation, actions of solidarity). It is also linked with improved health knowledge, behaviour, physical health and food security. The author recommends donors should provide more long-term support that better accounts for the pre-existing sense of community and any structural barriers to empowerment.

Kerrigan, D., Fonner, V., Stromdahl, S. & Kennedy, C., (2013). *Community Empowerment Among Female Sex Workers Is an Effective HIV Prevention Intervention: A Systematic Review of the Peer-Reviewed Evidence from Low- and Middle-Income Countries. AIDS and Behavior, 17(6), 1926-1940.*

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1007/s10461-013-0458-4>

Does community empowerment of female sex workers in low- and middle-income countries help with HIV prevention? This systematic meta-analysis on literature published between 1990 and 2010 found only ten relevant studies (from India, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic). All were of low rigour. All of the interventions combined community empowerment (including an emphasis on sex workers' rights, dignity, collective agency and leadership) and three typical HIV prevention activities (peer education, STI screening and management, condom distribution). Overall, the interventions were associated with significant reductions in HIV infection and other STIs, and increases in consistent condom use.

Women's economic empowerment

A recent systematic review highlighted the need for more long-term, high quality research that enables better monitoring, evaluation and assessment of the impact of economic asset-building interventions (Dickson & Bangpan, 2012). It found that there is only a modest amount of evidence that women's empowerment improves their financial assets or participation in social life. Another systematic review similarly found mixed and inconclusive evidence of the relationship between economic empowerment and domestic violence (Vyas & Watts, 2009). Some maintain that evidence of the purported two-way relationship between economic growth and women's empowerment remains weak (Duflo, 2012).

Dickson K. & Bangpan, M. (2012) *Providing access to economic assets for girls and young women in low-and-lower middle income countries: a systematic review of the evidence*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/systematicreviews/Economic_assets_2012Dickson.pdf

This systematic review analyses the evidence for the impact of three types of economic asset intervention: educational incentives, livelihood programmes, and reproductive health programmes. It finds that a modest but growing evidence base suggests that providing girls and women with access to economic assets and developing their skills can improve their ability to generate an income, increase the amount they save, support school participation and increase overall sexual health knowledge. However, it concludes that claims that this will increase their economic standing in society overall, lead to better further educational or career choices, or improve long-term sexual health outcomes, cannot be made.

Vyas, S. & Watts, C. (2009). *How Does Economic Empowerment Affect Women's Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Low and Middle Income Countries? A Systematic Review of Published Evidence*. *Journal of International Development*, 21(5), 577-602. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1002/jid.1500>

Are women who are more empowered economically less likely to suffer domestic violence? This review of thirty quantitative studies finds mixed evidence and no clear geographic patterns. Household asset wealth and women's secondary education are generally associated with reduced incidence of domestic violence. However, women being more educated than a male partner, and women's access to independent income through employment, are generally associated with increased risk of domestic violence.

Duflo, E. (2012). *Women, Empowerment and Economic Development*. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(4), 1051-1079. <http://economics.mit.edu/files/7417>

This secondary review of empirical literature finds that the relationship between women's empowerment and growth is weak. Women's empowerment may lead to a narrow set of improvements in children's health and nutrition, but economic development alone is insufficient to achieve significant progress in important issues such as women's decision-making power in the household, community and polity. The article concludes that actions that favour women over men will continue to be necessary to achieve gender equality.

2.3 Transparency and accountability

To date, there is no consensus on whether or how transparency or accountability improves development outcomes. Nevertheless, there is some emerging evidence that certain factors are associated with relative success – for example, it is becoming clear that certain types and channels of information provision are more likely to enable citizens to directly hold service providers to account (Kosack & Fung,

2014). A widely cited example of this is the successful case of community monitoring in the health sector in Uganda (Svensson & Bjorkman, 2007). Nevertheless, recent meta-reviews have concluded that overall, the evidence supporting the assumed links between greater transparency and accountability and better services remains limited (Gaventa & McGee, 2013; Joshi, 2013; Lynch et al., 2013).

Kosack, S. & Fung, A. (2014). Does Transparency Improve Governance? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17(1), 65–87. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-032210-144356>

Why do some transparency and accountability initiatives fail while others succeed? This paper reviews 16 evaluations of the impact of information provision. It finds that three key variables account for variation in outcomes: possibilities for collective action, political willingness, and implementation chains. More successful interventions provided information on inputs and outputs, provided information on the rights of citizens along with information about the performance of the provider, and presented information about performance in comparison with other villages or national standards.

Gaventa, J. & McGee, R. (2013). The Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives. *Development Policy Review*, 31(S1), s3-s28. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1111/dpr.12017>

This comprehensive literature review finds that the evidence base on transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) is not large enough to begin to assess overall trends and impacts. Some isolated studies have shown that TAIs have created opportunities for citizens and states to interact constructively. These have contributed to better budget utilisation, improved service delivery, greater state responsiveness to citizens' needs, spaces for citizen engagement and the empowerment of local voices. Relationships within and between state and civil society have proven critical.

Joshi, A. (2013). Do They Work? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives in Service Delivery. *Development Policy Review*, 31(S1), s29-s48. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1111/dpr.12018>

Transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) have emerged as a key strategy for improving public services, but the links between transparency and accountability and their impact on service delivery are often assumed. This article finds evidence suggesting that a range of accountability initiatives have been effective in their immediate goals, and in a few cases have had a strong impact on public services, but that overall evidence of impact on the quality and accessibility of services is mixed. Political economy factors, including the nature and strength of civil society movements, the relative political strength of service providers (for example, teacher unions), the ability of cross-cutting coalitions to push reforms, the legal context, and active media all appear to have contributed in varying degrees to the successful cases.

Svensson, J. & Bjorkman, M. (2007). *Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment of a Community-Based Monitoring Project in Uganda*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/book/10.1596/1813-9450-4268>

This paper analyses the importance of strengthening accountability between health service providers and citizens for improving access to and quality of health care. It presents a randomized field experiment on increasing community-based monitoring. As communities began to more extensively monitor the provider, both the quality and quantity of health service provision improved. One year into the programme, there are large increases in utilization, significant weight-for-age z-score gains of infants, and markedly lower deaths among children. The findings on staff behaviour suggest that the improvements in quality and quantity of health service delivery resulted from an increased effort by the staff to serve the community. Overall, the results suggest that community monitoring can play an important role in improving service delivery when traditional top-down supervision is ineffective.

Lynch, U., et al. (2013). *What is the evidence that the establishment or use of community accountability mechanisms and processes improves inclusive service delivery by governments, donors and NGOs to communities?* London: EPPI Centre.

<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=8khQy7mGMxw%3D&tabid=3425&mid=6800>

This systematic review analysed whether community monitoring and accountability mechanisms improve equitable access to service delivery and reduce corruption. Four intervention types were reviewed: greater freedom of information, greater transparency in service delivery mechanisms, an increase in budget control by citizens and increases in the consumer's assessment of service accessibility and quality. Together, the findings draw attention to the importance of capacity development, empowerment, level of corruption and health. Overall, more rigorous research is needed. The review found that interventions are most effective when they are grounded in grassroots communities and adopt cross-cutting approaches, for example, combining cash transfer interventions with education and training opportunities or combining community infrastructure programmes with quotas for participation of women in governance roles.

For further resources on transparency, see the section on [access to information, and its constraints in the GSDRC's communication and governance topic guide](#).

For further resources on accountability, see the supplement on [accountability and responsiveness of the state and society](#).

3 Supporting VEA: approaches, tools and frameworks

3.1 Strengthening voice and participation

Evidence suggests the success of participatory and community-driven development projects depends on the degree to which communities are willing and able to mobilise, and the state's commitment to responding to citizens' concerns (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Citizen engagement may also depend on the opportunity costs of participation, which can be especially high for poor people. Development actors are increasingly aware of potential unintended consequences of engineering participatory processes: evidence shows participants tend to be wealthier, more educated, of higher social status by caste or ethnicity, male, and more politically connected than non-participants. In this situation, a large injection of resources for a participatory project can reinforce inequalities (Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

A recent evaluation of DFID's support to civil society advocacy highlighted a need for more flexible and long-term partnerships that can identify and support innovative VEA activities (ICAI, 2013). Other recent case studies reinforce the importance of developing leadership, innovation and autonomy within civil society itself (Tremblay & Gutberlet, 2012). Combining evidence with citizen mobilisation – termed 'evidence-based mobilisation' – has been effective in driving pro-poor policy reform in some cases (Hooton, 2010).

Mansuri, G. & Rao, V. (2013). Can Participation be Induced? Some Evidence from Developing Countries. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 16(2), 284-304.

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/13698230.2012.757918>

Can external actors successfully induce participation, or does it have to emerge organically? This article summarises the findings of a review of hundreds of World Bank participatory projects. It finds the success of these programmes is hindered by both endogenous factors and flawed programme design and implementation. Two especially important domestic obstacles are (1) entrenched interests of political agents, bureaucrats, and NGOs with either incentives to resist or capabilities to appropriate programme resources; and (2) poverty and illiteracy, as the poor and illiterate participate less and benefit less from participatory projects than do the wealthier, more educated, and more connected citizens. The principal lessons emerging from the study are that inequality, history, geography and political systems are important; communities do not necessarily have a ready stock of 'social capital' to mobilise; induced participation works best when supported by a responsive state; and donor agencies should exercise greater patience, adopt more flexible, long-term engagement, and learn from failure.

Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2013). *DFID's Empowerment and Accountability Programming in Ghana and Malawi. Independent Commission for Aid Impact (Report No. 28)*. London: ICAI. <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Empowerment-and-Accountability-081013-FINAL.pdf>

This independent evaluation examined two DFID programmes that aimed to strengthen citizen engagement with government in Ghana and Malawi through grants for civil society organisations (CSOs) and community monitoring of local services. The evaluation found that the programmes empowered communities to engage constructively with government to resolve problems with the delivery of public services and development programmes. However, DFID had often defaulted to CSO grant-making, which was not always strategic. Programmes were not always flexible enough to support innovation, rapid

learning and scaling up. Monitoring was used primarily to demonstrate efficiency rather than to support learning. The programmes had not yet developed strategies to ensure the sustainability of their results. Recommendations include greater targeting of support for national advocacy and influencing by CSOs, using smaller portfolios, longer partnerships and more tailored capacity-building.

Tremblay, C. & Gutberlet, J. (2012). Empowerment through Participation: Assessing the Voices of Leaders from Recycling Cooperatives in São Paulo, Brazil. *Community Development Journal*, 47(2), 282-302. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1093/cdj/bsq040>

This qualitative assessment of a waste management project in metropolitan São Paulo used interviews and oral histories to explore the impact of capacity building programmes. It found that developing leadership and solidarity within recycling cooperatives helped foster their autonomy. Building networks with government was also important to secure recyclers' participation in policy and implementation. Community outreach was effective at increasing awareness of the benefits of recycling, including improved working conditions.

Tacchi, J., Watkins, J., & Keerthirathne, K. (2009). Participatory Content Creation: Voice, Communication, and Development. *Development in Practice*, 19(4-5), 573-584.

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/09614520902866389>

This mixed-method qualitative study examined a Sri Lankan community media project that enabled remote areas to access various ICTs and contribute to community radio programmes. It found that the programme enabled marginalised individuals and communities to have a voice in local public spheres and demonstrated that local content can generate locally meaningful debate around local issues. The study noted the importance of paying attention to context when considering what might be locally appropriate, relevant and beneficial in participatory content creation.

Hooton, N. A. (2010). Linking Evidence with User Voice for Pro-Poor Policy: Lessons from East Africa. *Development in Practice*, 20(8), 985-1000. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/09614524.2010.513726>

This qualitative research compares two cases of successful pro-poor policy changes that followed evidence-based mobilisations: new city ordinances on urban agriculture in Kampala (Uganda) and changes in dairy-marketing policy and practice in Kenya. It finds that the voices of farmers, traders and consumers, supported by good evidence, can provide powerful pressure for change, whether these voices are conveyed directly or indirectly (through representatives or even video). The key success factors were links with civil society organisations (CSOs) and user groups, and strong links with 'formal' actors of policy processes.

For further resources, see section on Communication for social change and transformation in the GSDRCs communication and governance topic guide.

3.2 Thinking and working politically

Politics and power relations are frequently cited as determinants of the effectiveness of VEA interventions, yet rigorous evidence on how politics enables or constrains outcomes remains limited. Although aid actors have in recent years acknowledged the need to work politically, this has often not translated into practice. Political economy analysis can in principle help agencies understand the structural constraints that informal institutions place on VEA, and identify actors, coalitions or social movements willing to support change (Unsworth, 2010).

Working politically requires adapting theories of change to local incentives and power dynamics, and being realistic about what can be achieved (Wild & Harris, 2011). For example, information provision is

unlikely to create incentives for responsiveness to citizens in the context of a highly centralised system of patronage (Wild & Harris, 2011). Nevertheless, some evidence of positive results from applying thinking and working politically is starting to emerge – for example from DFID’s SAVI programme in Nigeria (DFID, 2013). More precise targeting of projects to particular cities or social groups correlates with reduced capture and corruption (Winters, 2013).

Unsworth, S. (2010). *An Upside Down View of Governance*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
<http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/AnUpside-downViewofGovernance.pdf>

This study recommends that donors adopt incremental, indirect strategies to influence the local structures, relationships, interests and incentives that underlie governance. Donors should be open to unexpected actors or processes (e.g. coalitions), and should design actions based on deeper, context-specific understanding of informal institutions and their implications. For example, different public sector reforms have different effects on actors’ capacities to shape policies and service delivery. Other key elements include relations between political and economic elites, the roles of informal (“traditional”) local institutions, and the local institutions and politics governing revenues from natural resources. Donors should also let civil society actors explore participatory representation outside formal elections and membership organisations.

Wild, L. & Harris, D. (2011). *The political economy of community scorecards in Malawi*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

<http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7543.pdf>

This research used political economy methods to understand how community scorecards have worked in Malawi. It found that scorecards helped facilitate collective problem solving by actors across the supply and demand sides, and reignited communities’ capacities for self-help. However, the theory of change did not reflect some of the political realities. Service delivery remained significantly shaped by centralised patronage relationships, so the incentives of service providers were more focused on responding to demands from the centre than from citizens, even where information on service gaps was provided. The provision of information is only a small part of scorecards’ value. More important is the process for identifying who the key stakeholders are, bringing them together to devise joint action plans to tackle service delivery problems, and following up on these plans.

DFID. (2013). *Thinking and Acting Politically: Supporting citizen engagement in governance: The experience of the State Accountability and Voice Initiative in Nigeria*. London: DFID.

http://savi-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Thinking-and-Acting-Politically_FINAL.pdf

This report documents lessons from the experience of DFID Nigeria’s State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI). It argues this programme is succeeding in supporting more responsive state governance, and a sustained pattern of constructive engagement between citizens and state governments is beginning to emerge. SAVI is achieving these results through supporting partners to think and act politically to a far greater extent than previous programmes. SAVI has applied a participatory political economy approach in which staff and partners are supported to conduct political economy analyses and update political intelligence themselves. SAVI aims to develop demand-side players who will eventually be able to engage with state government on behalf of citizens without donor support.

Winters, M. S. (2013). *Targeting, Accountability and Capture in Development Projects*, *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(2), 393–404. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1111/isqu.12075>

Can improved targeting lead to improved aid accountability? This article uses data from 600 World Bank projects to explore capture, as manifested by corruption or other funding diversion. It finds that more

precise targeting is associated with reduced capture. Projects targeting single cities or particular social groups suffer less capture than projects with nationwide or more diffuse targeting. Donors could therefore improve aid accountability by using more targeted projects in more corrupt countries. Domestic governments could improve accountability to their citizens through better targeting.

For further resources, see the GSDRC's topic guide on [Political Economy Analysis](#).

3.3 Facilitating collective action

Aid actors have generally positioned themselves as 'doers' of VEA, but this has achieved limited impact and at times even weakened local capacities for action (Booth, 2012). A small body of emerging research is beginning to illustrate that shifting to an enabling role, with a focus on collective action and local problem-solving, might be more effective (Booth, 2012).

Collective action and problem-solving challenges are pervasive among both elites and citizens, and constitute a major barrier to citizen accountability (Booth, 2012). Nevertheless, there is little in the way of practical guidance for donors seeking to support collective action (Unsworth, 2010). Adopting an enabling role also entails potential unintended consequences, such as the 'NGO-isation' of women's groups, or backlash against empowering certain groups that may be disadvantaged, including women (Pathways of Women's Empowerment, 2011).

Booth, D. (2012). *Development as a Collective Action Problem. Addressing the Real Challenges of African Governance. Synthesis Report of the Africa Power and Politics Programme*. London: ODI, for Africa Power and Politics Programme. <http://www.institutions-africa.org/filestream/20121024-app-synthesis-report-development-as-a-collective-action-problem>

This report summarises the findings of a five-year comparative research programme. It argues that donor funds and templates for accountability often undermine self-help and inhibit local problem-solving. It emphasises that most debates in accountability and governance are locked in a straitjacket of principal-agent thinking, promoting either the citizen-led 'demand-side' or the state-led 'supply-side'. Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa is not fundamentally about one set of people getting another one to behave better, but about both sets of people finding ways to act collectively in their own best interests. Three factors prevent this: policy-driven institutional incoherence; weak top-down performance disciplines; and an inhospitable environment for local problem-solving.

Eyben, R. (2011). *Supporting Pathways of Women's Empowerment: A Brief Guide for International Development Organisations*. Brighton: IDS, Pathways of Women's Empowerment.

<http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Output/188696/>

This briefing, based on multi-country mixed-method research, recommends that donors work from local processes to facilitate internal changes to the political economy. Recommendations for donors include: give long-term support to women's organising and collective action; maximise multiplier effects on women's empowerment and plan for doing no harm; and respond creatively to women's aspirations to control their sexuality and relationships. All these approaches can be designed to reap long-term, sustainable value for money.

For further resources, see the GSDRC helpdesk report on [Interventions for collective action and accountability](#), and the topic guide supplement on [challenges and risks in supporting VEA](#).

3.4 Supporting gender equality

Gender equality is a core goal of all VEA interventions. A recent comparative analysis of 14 countries found that a combination of factors support gender equity in politics and policy-making, including elite support and allies inside the state (Nazneen & Mahmud, 2012). Some evidence indicates that supporting women's political inclusion requires going beyond technical tools such as women's quotas, to a deeper understanding of how to support women's networks of influence and their capacity to empower themselves (Tadros, 2011).

Nazneen, S. & Mahmud, S. (2012). *Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development (Working Paper No. 13)*. Manchester: Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre.

http://www.effective-states.org/wp-content/uploads/working_papers/final-pdfs/esid_wp_13_nazneen-mahmud.pdf

What are the implications of political settlements for gender equality? This qualitative research compares the cases of 14 countries in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and North Africa. It finds that the politics and policy-making that make political settlements are gendered. Factors that promote gender inclusive development policies and outcomes include: elite support for gender equity; coalitions with oppositional groups within the women's movement; transnational discourse and actors creating space for gender equity; presence of male allies and 'femocrats' within the state apparatus; and policy coalitions exerting pressure on the state. The paper calls for greater attention to the role played by gendered ideas and ideology in inclusive political settlements.

Tadros, M. (2011). *Women Engaging Politically: Beyond Magic Bullets and Motorways (Pathways Policy Paper)*. Brighton: Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC.

http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/WomenEmp/Policy_Oct_11_Women_engaging.pdf

Multi-country ethnographic evidence shows that parliamentary quotas are not a magic bullet for women's political empowerment. Effectiveness depends on quotas and electoral systems, but also on the configuration of political actors' power. Reaching a critical mass of women parliamentarians does not guarantee progress. Rather, key actors and alliances for gender equality can strengthen these parliamentarians' advocacy for gender and social justice, enhance quota systems and demand accountability for women's political empowerment from all political forces. Women's collective action for equality and their networks with other political forces are critical. Donors could support this strategically.

For further resources, see the section on gender and citizenship in the GSDRC's gender topic guide.

3.5 VEA in fragile and conflict-affected states

Fragile and conflict-affected contexts are characterised by social fragmentation, low levels of trust, and weak state capacity and/or legitimacy. Civil society may lack leadership and have limited access to information or means of communication (Schouten, 2011). Under these circumstances, mobilising citizens or engaging them in formal accountability mechanisms may be premature, and can be viewed as a challenge to the state (Schouten, 2011). Where insecurity is prevalent, aid agencies need to develop an understanding of citizens' coping strategies and relationships with the state, before engaging them in participatory development (McLean-Hilker, et al., 2010).

Some experts argue that strengthening citizen-state engagement in FCAS requires a triangulated approach that simultaneously builds voice and also listening capacity within the media, government and

civil society (von Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008). Recent experience suggests that a ‘social contract’ approach – which rather than being confrontational emphasises the role of all parties and their collective responsibility for problem-solving – can be constructive in improving accountability (Fooks, 2013). This approach indicates that working with civil society can be an effective entry point, even in authoritarian settings.

von Kaltenborn-Stachau, H. (2008). *The Missing Link: Fostering Positive Citizen-State Relations in Post-Conflict Environments*. Washington, DC: CommGAP, World Bank.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/CommGAPMissingLinkWeb.pdf>

This paper, based on a qualitative review of case studies, argues that a full understanding of the dynamics shaping citizen-state relations requires a comprehensive focus on media, state and civil society – rather than on each in isolation. Media development and communication capacity within government go hand-in-hand. The report encourages donors to: i) think systematically, and ensure cross-sector planning and donor coordination; ii) work with civil society and media to arrive at a common understanding of their roles; iii) promote ‘listening’ capacity in central and local structures; iv) support inclusive civil society networks, and downward accountability within them; and v) support civic education programmes that promote public understanding about the right to information.

McLean-Hilker, L., Benequista, N., & Barrett, G. (2010). *Broadening Spaces for Citizens in Violent Contexts* (Citizenship Development Research Centre Policy Briefing). Brighton: Institute of

Development Studies. http://www.drc-citizenship.org/system/assets/1052734708/original/1052734708-hilker_etal.2010-broadening.pdf

This brief examines the evidence of the impact of everyday violence and insecurity on space for citizen engagement and voice. It argues external actors should work at both state and community levels with the involvement of local residents. External actors must gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of local power dynamics and actors, particularly the complex relationships between violent and non-violent actors, and between everyday violence and political violence. Citizens adopt coping responses (e.g. partial citizenship or self-censorship, peaceful coexistence with violent actors, parallel governance or security structures), but these are not necessarily benign. Interventions should build on existing sources of resilience, ‘safe spaces’ and structures for change.

For further resources, see the section on strengthening citizen engagement in state-building processes in the GSDRC’s fragile states topic guide.

Schouten, C. (2011). *Social accountability in situations of conflict and fragility*. Bergen: U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, CMI.

<http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Output/189345/>

This briefing note presents lessons from examples of social accountability mechanisms in fragile and conflict-affected states. It calls for donors to pay greater attention to analysing state and civil society capacity for engagement. Based on experience, donors should: i) identify and support local accountability mechanisms, based on a mapping of existing capacity and identification of potential change agents; ii) strengthen partnerships across sectors, demographic and geographic divides, including through peer-support and network-building; and iii) strengthen the social contract, by understanding power dynamics, and supporting alliances that cut across the public-private divide.

Fooks, L. (2013). *Within and Without the State: Governance and Fragility: What we know about effective governance programming in fragile contexts*. Oxford: Oxfam.

<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/governance-and-fragility-what-we-know-about-effective-governance-programming-in-306683>

This paper presents lessons from experience of implementing the DFID-funded ‘Within and Without the State’ programme in South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel. It finds that working with civil society actors can be effective even in situations where they have limited capacity and power to engage with the state (e.g. in authoritarian settings). To achieve change, it is necessary to broker relations between civil society groups, other powerful non-state actors, and the state (e.g. through policy days, public forums and targeted meetings). This triangulated approach helps support the development of the social contract. Aid agencies should also develop a better understanding of gender inequality as a driver of conflict, and informal power arrangements that support or constrain change. Overall, the *process* of citizen-state engagement is as important as the outcome.

For further resources, see the GSDRC helpdesk report on interventions to increase levels of trust in society.

See also DFID guidance on working effectively in fragile states in the GSDRC’s fragile states topic guide.

3.6 Supporting social accountability

Much of the recent literature on social accountability calls for donors to combine action to address accountability failures within government and between elites. A recent meta-review concluded that information provision alone is likely to be ineffective without corresponding government enforcement activities (O’Meally, 2013). Effective social accountability arguably requires four enabling conditions: organised and capable citizen groups, government champions, a political environment conducive to community involvement, and access to information. These conditions were present in the recent successful case of the *Check my School* project in the Philippines, which illustrated success can be achieved when social accountability adopts a consensus-building rather than a confrontational approach (Shkabatur, 2014).

O’Meally, S. C. (2013). *Mapping Context for Social Accountability. A Resource Paper*. Washington, DC: World Bank http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1193949504055/Context_and_SAcc_RESOURCE_PAPER.pdf

How does context affect interventions for social accountability? This literature review examines six major contextual variables: civil society, political society, inter-elite relations, state-society relations, intra-society relations, and global dimensions. It finds that interventions must ‘think politically’, since accountability failures (and solutions) are often rooted in formal and informal power dynamics. Citizen demand alone is insufficient to drive sustained change: state action is equally important. Social accountability interventions thus need to build links between actors on both ‘sides’ – state and society – and couple ‘soft’ information-sharing with ‘hard’ enforcement interventions.

Ringold, D., Holla, A., Koziol, M., & Srinivasan, S. (2012). *Citizens and Service Delivery. Assessing the Use of Social Accountability Approaches in the Human Development Sectors*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2377>

Can citizens hold providers accountable, and do providers respond to citizens’ influence? This report reviews 38 World Bank social accountability projects in health, education and social protection. Obstacles to effective citizen action included information asymmetries and requiring individuals rather than groups to act. Isolated accountability mechanisms may be ineffective. For example, citizens need both information and channels to use it. Inequalities and closed political systems are impediments too, whereas strong civil society and media can play a positive role. At the frontline, providers’ incentives shape their responsiveness. The authors recommend that donors specify the fit, interactions and

sustainability of mechanisms. Donors should adapt to the services, resources and political economy, and advance transformation through accessibility, inclusiveness, and data availability and quality.

Shkabatur, J. (2014). *Check my school: A Case Study on Citizens' Monitoring of the Education Sector in the Philippines*. Washington, DC: World Bank Institute.

<http://wbi.worldbank.org/wbi/Data/wbi/wbicms/files/drupal-acquia/wbi/CaseStudy-CheckMySchool.pdf>

This research paper outlines lessons from the 'Check My School' project, which promoted transparency and accountability by engaging citizens in tracking the quality of schools. It combined on-the-ground community monitoring with ICTs. The success of the project is attributed to a number of favourable conditions. A dedicated CSO leader helped tailor the intervention to local socio-political conditions. Rather than adopting an adversarial approach or attempting to expose government faults, the project used a more constructive form of engagement with public officials. Versatility and flexibility in integrating the ICT tools was also important, especially in an environment of low internet penetration. Overall, the project applied a collaborative, problem-solving approach, and was aided by a political context (of decentralisation) that was conducive to citizen monitoring.

3.7 Aid and accountability

Development agencies increasingly emphasise country ownership and alignment. However, critics charge that aid accountability has remained largely within the aid system itself, rather than between donors and recipients (Eyben, 2008).

Improving aid accountability to disadvantaged populations might require engaging in more critical self-reflection, relinquishing some power, shifting relations from competition to cooperation, and adjusting actions and strategies based on feedback (Crack, 2013). Experts call for donors to consider the effects (positive or negative) of all their actions on constructive bargaining between state and society (Unsworth, 2010).

Eyben, R. (2008). *Power, Mutual Accountability and Responsibility in the Practice of International Aid: A Relational Approach (Working paper No. 305)*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

<https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/Wp305.pdf>

Accountability in aid has largely been about performance against pre-established objectives. Aid has been framed as a contract, where accountability involves regulating behaviour between separate entities. But global political economy sustains inequities in aid that impede such accountability. Eyben advocates understanding aid as relational: aid actors do not share a pre-established consensus, but they are interdependent and their relations are dynamic, messy and contradictory. Accountability becomes more about mutual responsibility, with attention to relations, process and complexity. In this approach, aid actors would emphasise more decentralised decision-making, multiple diagnoses and solutions, and 'messy partnerships'.

Crack, A. M. (2013). *Language, Listening and Learning: Critically Reflective Accountability for INGOs*. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(4), 809-828.

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1177/0020852313500599>

What does meaningful accountability look like in INGOs? Reforms in the 1990s emphasised legal and financial compliance, demanded by powerful actors such as donors. More recently, accountability to 'beneficiaries', staff and peer organisations has been emphasised, but has usually been trumped by economic imperatives. The author argues that meaningful accountability requires that INGOs embed critical reflexivity in their practices. Language needs to emphasise people's right to expect INGOs to be

answerable (e.g. the term ‘beneficiary’ should be abandoned). Listening to much less powerful stakeholders is central. INGOs need to use feedback to become learning organisations, and collaborate with peers to create a culture of reflective learning in aid.

McGee, R. (2013). *Aid Transparency and Accountability: ‘Build It and They’ll Come’? Development Policy Review, 31, s107-s124* <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1111/dpr.12022>

Have promises of aid transparency as a means to aid accountability been fulfilled? This qualitative, secondary review finds that most aid TAIs have not articulated their theory of change. Transparency is considered to be a necessary but insufficient condition for aid accountability. Yet aid TAIs have barely addressed the disconnect between transparency ‘givers’ and accountability ‘seekers’. In particular, accountability ‘seekers’ are very dissimilar and disconnected (e.g. Northern taxpayers, donors that support transparency, Southern aid recipients). Greater attention is needed to the purported beneficiaries of aid TAIs. To ensure the involvement of aid recipients, aid actors should support better citizen-state relations, use framings that are meaningful to aid recipients, and supply information to recipients to help them demand accountability.

3.8 Assessing impact

Rigorously measuring the impact of VEA is challenging: while inputs, outputs and results may be monitorable, longer-term outcomes that involve complex causal chains often go uncaptured by conventional M&E frameworks (DFID, 2011). Recent secondary reviews have shown that VEA programmes often have poorly articulated or unrealistic theories of change, which can hamper the quality of evaluation (Tembo, 2012; McGee & Gaventa, 2011).

Measuring outcomes against preconceived indicators may miss harder to measure changes in power and relationships (Brook & Holland, 2009). Some argue predefined targets may in some circumstances create pressure to report positive outcomes that ultimately bias the evidence base (Cavill & Sohail, 2007). A recent systematic review called for a holistic approach to capturing the outcomes of empowerment, focusing on multi-dimensional indicators of power in different dimensions of people’s lives (Taylor & Pereznieto, 2014). Some success has been achieved when beneficiaries themselves decide how their empowerment should be measured (Jupp et al., 2010).

Tembo, F. (2012). *Citizen Voice and State Accountability: Towards Theories of Change that Embrace Contextual Dynamics (Project Briefing No. 73)*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/7602.pdf>

This briefing argues that current approaches to Theories of Change (ToCs) are inadequate for citizen voice and accountability interventions: linear ToCs do not capture the complex and dynamic realities of state-citizen relations and of the influences of the wider context on these interactions. It suggests a model for developing ToCs that are better grounded in dynamic socioeconomic and political contexts. The model, which blends outcome mapping and political economy analysis, can facilitate an ongoing process of analysis, intervention and learning. ToCs need to be subjected to a continuous process of construction and deconstruction to improve knowledge of what works and what does not, and in what circumstances.

McGee, R. & Gaventa, J. (2011). *Shifting Power? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability (Working Paper No. 383)*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/PDF/Outputs/Mis_SPC/60827_Wp383McGeeGaventa.pdf

What does impact mean in relation to accountability programmes and projects? This meta-review argues

that current approaches to impact assessment in this field are inadequate: methodological wars are overshadowing key issues of power relations and politics. A learning approach to impact assessment is needed that gives power and politics a central place in monitoring and evaluation systems. Instead of looking at the extent to which the desired impact was achieved, it is important to look at what happened as a result of the initiative, how it happened and why. It is also important to test and revise assumptions about theories of change continually and to ensure the engagement of marginalised people in assessment processes.

Brook, S. & Holland, G. (2009). *A Mixed-method Approach to Measuring Empowerment in the Context of Social Policy Monitoring in Jamaica*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/Jamaica_Measuring_Empowerment.pdf
This mixed-method research was designed to understand young people's sense of empowerment in their relations with the police. It used a Community Score Card completed by focus groups, which produced numeric ratings as well as a narrative explanation of the ratings, and rapid assessment peer interviews of individual young people in the communities (ethnographic research). It found that while indicators were useful for measuring the accountability gap, they can be misleading – and even dangerous – if they reduce power relations to a depoliticised relationship between service provider and user. The difficult relations between youth and police in the three study communities were symptomatic of much broader societal problems. This research was timely and cost-effective; not only did it inform policy, but it had an empowering effect on the young people involved in the pilot.

Cavill, S. & Sohail, M. (2007). *Increasing Strategic Accountability: A Framework for International NGOs. Development in Practice*, 17(2), 231-248. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/09614520701196004>

This review argues that international NGOs have focused their accountability mechanisms on inputs, activities and outputs, through formal reporting such as evaluations, stakeholder surveys and complaints mechanisms. M&E typically looks at predetermined quantitative indicators, which risks pressuring INGOs to highlight positives and downplay problems. There has also been a lack of effective feedback from the field to headquarters and to local communities and partners. This situation leaves strategic gaps in M&E. For example, the larger purpose of development may be seen as aspirational, and advocacy may be poorly evaluated. As a result of all this, mistakes are often repeated, and learning is not prioritised.

Taylor, G. & Perezniето, P. (2014). *Review of evaluation approaches and methods used by interventions on women and girls' economic empowerment*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

<http://www.odi.org/publications/8275-review-evaluation-approaches-methods-used-by-interventions-women-girls-economic-empowerment#downloads>

This systematic review assesses the quality and effectiveness of 254 evaluations of women's and girls' economic empowerment. It argues that because these programmes can bring about transformational change in women's and girls' lives, evaluations need to apply a holistic approach. This involves not just looking at whether women and girls have increased their access to income and assets, but also their power, agency and control over other areas of their lives. Effective evaluations used multidimensional indicators. The most innovative studies used variables to capture aspects of economic empowerment that one might not normally consider, such as whether a young girl was less likely to have unwanted sex. Mixed method evaluations were effective in various ways: they captured change in more diverse ways, and explored not only what changes occurred, but why and how.

Jupp, D., Ibn Ali, S., & Barahona, C. (2010). *Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them - Quantifying Qualitative Outcomes from People's Own Analysis* (Sida Evaluation Series). Stockholm: Sida.

http://www.sida.se/English/publications/Publication_database/publications-by-year1/2010/june/measuring-empowerment-ask-them---quantifying-qualitative-outcomes-from-peoples-own-analysis/

This paper presents the experience of a social movement in Bangladesh, which found a way to measure empowerment by letting the members themselves explain what benefits they acquired from involvement and by developing a means to measure change over time. These measures have also been subjected to numerical analysis to provide convincing quantitative data which satisfies the demands of results-based management. The study shows how participatory assessments can empower and transform relationships, while at the same time generating reliable and valid statistics for what were thought to be only qualitative dimensions.

For further resources, see the supplement on measuring empowerment and accountability.