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Helpdesk Research Report

# Political dynamics and the effectiveness of aid programmes

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## Question

*What evidence is there that local political dynamics are explanatory factors for the success or failure of aid programmes? Provide examples, drawing on aggregated analyses of aid projects, where available.*

## Contents



## 1. Overview

There is an increasing recognition amongst development scholars and practitioners that the obstacles to effective change in developing countries are not only related to technical or financial issues, but are also bound up with domestic politics and power relationships (DfID 2010a; DfID 2010b; Di John and Putzel, 2009; Leftwich: 2011; Parks and Cole, 2010; DFID 2016). As a result of the growing appreciation of the political barriers to development, donors and research organisations have developed a range of analytical frameworks and diagnostic tools to help navigate the political and economic conditions which can restrict the effectiveness of aid programmes.[1]

This report reviews evidence that local political dynamics are explanatory factors for the success or failure of aid projects or international assistance programmes. It begins by setting out the findings from aggregated analyses and overarching evaluation studies. The authors who undertake aggregated analysis of a large number of projects tend to use databases from international financial institutions (IFIs), most

[1] This includes Drivers of Change, Political Economy Analysis, Problem-driven Iterative Adaption, Flexible and Adaptive Programming, and Political Settlements Analysis. Practitioners and theorists interested in taking forward these frameworks often align themselves to the Thinking and Working Politically and/or Doing Development Differently communities of practice.

commonly from the World Bank. There is a consensus across these studies that domestic political economy factors are key determining factors in accounting for the effectiveness of aid programmes. However, given the overarching nature of aggregated analyses, they tend to look at macro-level trends, rather than exploring in detail any particular political factor or providing examples.

Section 3 of this review looks at a range of academic, donor and policy literature to explore the specific political dynamics that affect the implementation of aid programmes, highlighting lessons through individual case studies where available. These examples have been selected from a wide range of countries in order to draw attention to broad findings. The literature reviewed for this section of the report focuses primarily on the incentives and constraints of local elite actors and interest groups. Case studies also exist concerning the importance of factors related to the wider political context, such as windows of opportunity, and structural features of the political administration and bureaucracy, although these appear to receive less attention. Considerations related to gender were not integrated in either the macro-level, aggregated literature or the country-level literature considered in this review.

Key lessons:

- There are a number of aggregated studies which identify political economy variables as key to explaining the effectiveness of aid programmes. These factors include the degree of **political stability and cohesion** in recipient countries, the presence of **sound fiscal policies and institutions**, and the **strength of interest groups within parliament**.
- There is also a growing appreciation in academic and grey literature of the importance of political factors in accounting for the effectiveness of aid programmes in individual cases. There has been a tendency in this literature to **focus on agential factors** and in particular the role of **elites engaging in corruption, clientelism and rent-seeking**.
- Aid projects can also be undermined by a **lack of ownership** on the part of recipient governments or the wider public, and through a failure on the part of donors to establish **effective partnerships with local reformers**.
- Donors need to be alert to **windows of opportunity** to push through reforms. Notwithstanding the importance for donors of moving quickly enough to **keep abreast of country-level political developments** in recipient countries, **micro-level features of the public administration** can also frustrate the implementation of development projects.

## 2. Aggregated analyses and overarching evaluation studies

There are a number of aggregated or overarching evaluation studies of programmes supported by international financial institutions (IFIs) which identify a positive relationship between programme effectiveness and domestic political economy conditions.

- A report by the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department (World Bank, 1999) looked at a large number of Bank-supported projects, comparing the level of government commitment in each case to the project outcome. Using econometric analysis, this study suggests that there is a positive relationship between implementation rates and government commitment (a possible proxy for 'ownership', which is discussed in detail below).

- In a frequently-cited study, Dollar and Svensson (2000) analyse the causes of the success or failure of World Bank-supported structural adjustment programmes using a database of 220 reform projects. They conclude that programme success can be predicted by a small number of political economy variables. The authors also found there was little evidence for a relationship between the success of programmes and additional monetary commitment or staff time from the World Bank. The most important contributor to the success of reform programmes is the presence of suitable domestic political conditions, including:

- Democratically elected governments
- Political stability
- The absence of long-term incumbents in power
- An absence of ethnic fragmentation

▪ Burnside and Dollar (2000) investigate the interactions between foreign aid, economic policies and growth using a database containing information on official loans received by developing countries from multilateral and bilateral sources. Their analysis indicates that foreign aid has a positive impact on growth in countries with sound fiscal, monetary and trade policies, but little positive impact on countries with poor policies. On this basis, the authors argue that making aid conditional on the quality of policies in recipient countries would likely increase its positive impact on growth.

▪ Using data from over 6000 World Bank projects implemented in 130 developing countries since the 1980s, Denizer et al (2013) investigate the relative importance of country-level 'macro' factors and project-level 'micro' factors to the outcome of aid-financed development projects. Using the ratings generated through World Bank project management and evaluation procedures, the authors find that rates of project success are significantly higher in countries with good policies and institutions, as measured by World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) data. However, their study also finds that the quality of World Bank staff assigned to manage projects has a significant impact on project outcomes, which is of comparable importance to country characteristics.

▪ Ivanova et al (2001) studied a sample of approximately 160 programmes supported by the IMF between 1992-98 and found results that were broadly consistent with those in Dollar and Svensson (2000). Their analysis underscores the importance of three additional political economy factors:

- The strength of special interest groups within parliament in recipient countries lowers the likelihood of programme success. To capture the strength of special interests in parliament, the authors constructed a variable indicating the maximum share of seats held by parties that represent nationalistic, religious, rural and regional interest groups.
- A high degree of political cohesion increases the likelihood of successful programme implementation. Political cohesion is said to be present in presidential systems if the same party controls the executive and the legislature; in parliamentary systems, cohesion is associated with one-party majority governments.
- In countries with frequent changes of government, a poor quality bureaucracy has a negative effect on the likely success of programme implementation.

▪ World Bank (2011) identifies trends in the design and implementation of Bank-funded financial management information systems (FMIS) since 1984. Commenting on the study, Allen (2015) notes that the average completion time for 55 FMIS projects was twice the original forecast, at nearly eight years. Moreover, many projects were not completed or were reconstituted into new projects with a similar mandate. Allen (2015) suggests that these kinds of public financial management (PFM) projects often hit the following 'institutional walls' in developing countries which stall their progress, or render them unviable:

- Key stakeholders in developing countries are often more concerned with preserving rent-seeking opportunities than with bringing about genuine reforms.
- Financial authorities tend to give priority to undertaking high profile projects at the expense of basic accounting and budget control.
- Civil servants are often reluctant to engage in new reform projects that interfere with their routine work.

# 3. Political factors relevant to programme effectiveness

## Factors related to elite incentives

As part of the turn to a more politically informed and engaged form of development theory and practice, there is an increasing awareness in the literature that the obstacles to developmental progress often reflect the dominance of local actors with an interest in maintaining the status quo, typically because they benefit from existing forms of clientelism, corruption and/or rent-seeking.

### *Clientelism*

A critical factor in the success or failure of many aid projects and in development progress more generally is the way incentives and constraints shape the willingness and ability of national and local elites to act in pursuit of development goals. Many of these incentives and constraints are ultimately linked to the pursuit of political support and/or financial gain. A common theme across many case studies therefore concerns the role of clientelism, defined as a process of awarding material goods or other benefits in exchange for political support. Clientelism can undermine development programmes when elites divert the resources made available through aid to service the networks of patrons that keep them in power, rather than working to ensure those resources are used to achieve development objectives. Clientelist networks are themselves often based on ethnic or kinship-based relationships, as illustrated by the examples of infrastructure projects in Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea respectively (Fritz and Levy, 2014: 8).

- **Sierra Leone**

In a summary of key findings from a set of political economy studies carried out for the World Bank between 2008 and 2001, Larizza et al (2014) argue that the drivers of electoral politics have undermined efforts by international actors in the infrastructure sector in Sierra Leone. The geographic distribution of ethnic groups has provided strong incentives for politicians to foster patronage networks to secure votes rather than engage in country-wide infrastructure improvement. Reporting on the findings of qualitative research, Larizza et al (2014: 197) find that government contracts for major projects are typically awarded to politically-connected firms as a means of securing patronage support, rather than on the basis of technical competency. In recent years a series of major road projects, including those funded by development partners, have been hamstrung by delays, cancellations, irregularities in contracting and reported cases of corruption. In the face of concerns over contractors' supervision and management, the German development bank KfW cancelled funding for 24 projects scheduled for 2010. Similarly, a EU project in 2003 to rehabilitate a major highway was temporarily terminated due to serious delays.

- **Papua New Guinea**

The negative impact of clientelism on development progress has played out in a similar way in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Using wide-ranging household survey analysis, Hasnain et al (2014) illustrate how elected members of the national parliament have maintained high levels of influence over how resources are allocated across districts despite initial donor-supported efforts to delegate these decision-making powers to local communities. Their analysis of the data shows that the presence of new infrastructure projects in communities can be traced to exact features of the electoral and institutional landscape and depends largely on clientelist links between clan and kinship-based communities and MPs. This indicates that whilst MPs in PNG operate under formal institutional arrangements that obligate them to attend to community demands impartially, they continue to exercise significant personal discretion over the allocation of funding through informal channels.

### *Corruption and rent-seeking*

Corruption and rent-seeking are two further elite-centred political dynamics that can undermine the effectiveness of aid programmes. Whilst related, they are conceptually distinct. A standard definition of corruption is the misuse of public power for private gain (World Bank/IMF, 2006). This definition is sufficiently broad to encompass various kinds of interaction between public sector officials and other agents. 'Private gain' could refer to financial benefits, for example where money is exchanged as bribery or kickbacks for procurement contracts. However, private gain could be non-monetary, for example in cases of clientelism or nepotism (Kolstad et al, 2008: 3). Rent-seeking is the effort to gain access to or control over opportunities to earn rents, which are earnings in excess of relevant costs (Coolidge, 1999: 2). Some instances of rent-seeking may involve corruption, but rent-seeking does not necessarily involve the abuse of power. It may simply entail the pursuit of a more equitable distribution of available rents (Kolstad et al, 2008: 3).

However, in developing countries, the owners of state-owned enterprises have been known to use their businesses as 'rent-generating machines', diverting resources from producers and consumers for the benefit of a select group of elites (Ivanova et al., 2001: 7). The disappointing performance of aid projects is often partly explained by the fact that corrupt officials, politicians and other individuals in positions of political power have used the aid architecture to exploit opportunities for rent-seeking rather than ensuring that resources are targeted at those in need of assistance. A frequently encountered argument in the literature is that higher levels of foreign aid can exacerbate rent-seeking and corruption whilst eroding other governance indicators such as bureaucratic quality and the rule of law (Knack 2000; Svensson 2000; Djankov et al 2006). The recent experience of foreign aid and development projects in Somalia and Tanzania illustrate the negative impact of corruption and rent-seeking on international assistance efforts.

- **Somalia**

During the 1980s foreign assistance accounted for over 50 per cent of Somalia's GNP but actual growth was minimal. It has subsequently become clear that most of this aid was subject to state capture and used to shore up the strength of the regime of President Barre. Aid-financed contracts were associated with bribes and kickbacks whilst internationally-financed project budgets were distorted by rent-seeking.

Officials at the Mogadishu Port Authority (MPA), for example, would routinely require shipping lines bringing food aid to deposit large sums of money into foreign bank accounts before allowing them to unload. A World Bank Public Expenditure Management Review carried out in 1989 found that the donor-funded Public Investment Program (PIP) was so poorly accounted for that there was a "lack of any systematic and integrated knowledge in the Government of expenditures under the PIP" (Coolidge, 1999: 30).

- **Tanzania**

In 2009, the Tanzanian Government faced accusations of corruption in relation to a bilateral donor-funded programme. Following external evaluation and a financial review of the Management of Natural Resources Programme, the Norwegian government reclaimed a large amount of a USD 60 million grant on the grounds that much of the funds could not be properly accounted for. Suspecting systematic capture of programme funds on the part of government officials, the review estimated that half of the total grant had been lost through corruption and mismanagement. Among the institutional failings which helped facilitate and hide the capture, accountants discovered poor financial management and reporting, lack of adequate technical capacity and human resources, lack of budgetary control mechanisms, ineffective internal monitoring or evaluation, improper records and accounting systems, and improper allocation of expenses (Cooksey, 2012).

## Factors related to interest-group politics

A key tenet of politically-informed approaches to development programming concerns the importance of supporting locally-led solutions to locally-defined problems. According to this school of thought, reforms, policies and programmes have a greater likelihood of success if they are seen as legitimate by local actors and communities (Booth & Unsworth, 2014; Wild et al, 2015). This entails a focus on locally-salient issues and a process of harnessing domestic capacity to discover feasible solutions, with the aim of either securing 'ownership' on the part of recipient governments, implementing organisations and the wider public, or forging effective alliances with local reformers.

### *Ownership*

As defined in an IMF policy development and review paper, (IMF, 2001: 5) 'ownership' in the context of Fund-supported programmes "is a willing assumption of responsibility for an agreed program of policies, by officials in a borrowing country who have the responsibility to formulate and carry out those policies, based on an understanding that the program is achievable and is in the country's own interest". This understanding can be supplemented by the following observations:

- Interest groups and NGOs can help create or undermine public support for reform, particularly in countries without an effective political opposition.

- Participation in the design and implementation of reforms, which may also involve coalition-building across political divides, can help to promote ownership.

- Reforms may be blocked by parliamentary, regional or other sources of political opposition outside the government (IMF, 2015).

In the following case studies of IMF-supported programmes, the degree of domestic ownership is regarded as a key political factor which strengthened or impaired successful implementation (Ivanova et al 2001; IMF 2001).

- **Positive ownership in Uganda**

In Uganda in the late 1980s, the government gradually adopted more stable and market-oriented policies. The IMF was able to support the process by expanding its financial assistance package. With support from the Fund and other donors, the country implemented a series of macroeconomic and structural reforms in the 1990s and saw improved economic growth and poverty reduction. Ownership of these reforms was assisted through a process of internal debate and consensus-building and was nurtured through public presidential commitment. Moreover, although it was supported by external partners, the impetus for economic reform in this period came primarily from within the Ugandan authorities, with most of the key decisions being taken by the government under its own initiative (IMF, 2001: 33-35).

- **Lack of ownership in Zimbabwe and Kyrgyzstan**

In Zimbabwe, policy advice and financial assistance from the IMF and other IFIs was helpful for a period in the early 1990s when the government was interested in reforming its economic policies. However, from the outset the programme of economic reform faced opposition from forces within government and the political leadership. The commitment of the authorities to the reforms was weakened in 1993 in the face of civil unrest and opposition within government. The loss of ownership in this case was compounded by a general failure to build support for the programme within government, the ruling party and the wider society. In the face of mounting economic and public health crises, a new agreement was reached in 1999 on a programme of reforms supported by Fund resources. This arrangement was also undermined by a lack of ownership and was derailed by unsustainable fiscal policies and a deterioration in the rule of law. Subsequent government mismanagement of the economy led to arrears to creditors, including the IMF, which subsequently declared the country ineligible to use Fund resources (Ibid:. 30-31).

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the government also had difficulties in gaining the political support necessary for undertaking IMF-supported reform programmes during the 1990s. Two out of the three programmes approved between 1993-1998 were subject to irreversible interruptions. The major causes of the interruptions were disagreements within government over the desirability of the reforms, resistance of certain entrenched interests groups within parliament, a lack of coalition-building on the part of the government, and weak co-ordination of economic decision-making. Parliamentary interest groups, in particular, played an important role in frustrating early reform efforts. The majority of parliamentarians at this time were managers of state enterprises or local officials, and the reforms under the first programme threatened to weaken their power. Members of Parliament applied considerable pressure on the government to abandon the programme, which culminated with the removal of the prime minister in mid-December 1993. A lack of clear budgetary and structural polices precluded the restoration of the reforms under subsequent administrations (Ibid: 31-33).

### *Effective partnerships with local reformers*

Where the structure of elite incentives is firmly entrenched, siding with local reformers may offer donors a more effective way of affecting change than trying to foster ownership. Hughes and Hutchison (2012) provide two cases studies which illustrate how the failure of donors to forge alliances with certain local reformers resulted in lost opportunities to achieve concrete outcomes from development projects.

- **Cambodia**

The World Bank's Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) programme in Cambodia, launched in 2008, attempted to tackle corruption by promoting social accountability partnerships between state institutions and NGOs. The ruling Cambodian People's Party has maintained its dominance over Cambodian politics partly through using the profits of predatory land and natural resource management to pay for improved public services and rural development projects. In this context, the government has a relatively uncritical relationship with NGOs which are focused on improving service delivery, because these organisations help the Party achieve positive development outcomes in rural areas by addressing gaps in provision. However, the Party has a much more antagonistic relationship to NGOs working on citizen advocacy issues, as these organisations contend for control of the Party's resource base and are more strident in protesting over contentious political issues such as land conflict.

The Bank avoided siding with either element of the NGO movement in Cambodia, but was therefore unable to take advantage of opportunities to strengthen the DFGG programme. For example, the Bank could have forged an alliance with land and forestry activists within the advocacy NGO wing as way of assisting the poor in their struggles over land and natural resource governance. Alternatively, the Bank could have engaged with service-delivery NGOs to work on issues that were less likely to antagonise the government, such as promoting social accountability mechanisms within the on-going project of decentralisation. In the event, the World Bank aimed to maintain political neutrality by neglecting the opportunity to link its objectives under DFGG to the interests of either group of local reformers. As a consequence, however, the individual projects funded by the Bank lacked political coherence and failed to achieve much progress on the quality of governance (Hughes and Hutchison, 2012: 27-28).

- **Philippines**

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Metro Manila Urban Services for the Poor (MMUSP) slum-eradication programme aimed to deliver affordable housing and improved services and infrastructure to approximately a quarter of the city's informal settler and urban poor community, and to strengthen the capacity of existing shelter agencies. However, whilst local officials were receptive to the technical and financial assistance being offered by ADB, they were disinclined to use those resources to improve housing and services for the poor. Local housing programmes were instead designed primarily on behalf of low-wage government employees. Slum eradication, according to the dominant viewpoint amongst Metro Manila government officials, involved demolishing existing structures and relocating their inhabitants to the outskirts of the urban areas. The ADB attempted to avoid taking sides in the politically contentious debate over informal settlements. But in trying to maintain neutrality, it missed an opportunity to build alliances with local activist NGOs with an established track record of campaigning for reform on these issues. In other cases, such as the Pasig River Rehabilitation Project, ADB has successfully partnered with reform-minded NGOs in the Philippines to support resettlement policies for the poor. Its decision not to do so in the case of MMUSP meant that it lost a potentially effective channel through which to promote pro-poor policies to government officials (Hughes and Hutchison, 2012: 26-27).

## Factors related to the wider political context and institutional structure

Although they receive less attention in the literature than elite incentives or interest-group politics, it is evident from case studies that important social, economic or political events can provide windows of opportunity for potentially far-reaching reforms. Notwithstanding the importance of wider, country-level political trends, aid projects can also be negatively affected at the micro-level by characteristics of the public bureaucracy. Finally, whilst much of the literature on the political factors which can impede or facilitate effective aid programming centres on the role of human agency, it is important to bear in mind that political actors operate within the context of formal political institutions which have the potential to frustrate developmental change.

### *Windows of opportunity*

Major political events, crises and shocks can open up opportunities for progress on development obstacles which international actors can look to capitalise upon, as illustrated by the example of the financial crisis in Bulgaria in the 1990s. However, as a corollary to this, there is a risk that donors can be out-paced by political developments in recipient countries. The effectiveness of assistance projects can be impacted as they loose their relevance to the wider political context, as illustrated by recent justice and security sector programmes in Guatemala and Timor-Leste.

- **Bulgaria**

In Bulgaria, a reform-minded government was elected in 1997 following a severe banking and foreign exchange crisis. The resulting economic turbulence helped consolidate a broad political consensus in favor of structural reforms. The government took active steps to foster political ownership of the reforms through organising initiatives such as a workshop where government officials, international organisations and creditors met to discuss and agree on the policy objectives behind the reforms and the broad strategy to achieve them. The resulting policies were widely publicised and debated in parliament. In combination with IMF support and widespread public backing, the willingness of the authorities to embrace structural economic reforms helped stabilise the economy and paved the way for the creation of a currency board, anti-corruption measures, and eventual EU membership (IMF, 2001: 35-36).

- **Guatemala**

The EU's Support Programme for Justice Reform (PARJ) was designed to consolidate the 1996 peace accords in Guatemala. However, the effectiveness of the project was hampered by a seven-year design period, with the result that the accords had lost a great deal of their political significance by the time the programme started. The successor programme, designed to support the 2009 national agreement on security and justice, was similarly slow to get underway, finally being implemented in 2013. The delay was caused by: a) the slow speed of EU procedures; b) elections and a subsequent change of government in Guatemala in 2012; and c) low institutional capacity. Ultimately, the project lost political momentum and was unable to take advantage of shifting political priorities during the electoral turnover (OECD, 2016: 32).

- **Timor-Leste**

The UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) was initiated in 2006 with a mandate to undertake a comprehensive review of the country's security sector. From an early stage in the process there was little support for the review amongst officials, and government sign-off was only achieved in 2012. There appear to be three key factors accounting for the lack of effective progress in this case: a) the security sector reform team was not given adequate guidance or support in relation to managing relationships with the Timorese authorities; b) the mission's recruitment procedures were too slow to allow the project to capitalise on political windows of opportunity; and c) the mission did not adapt successfully to the new composition of the Timorese government or its changed political priorities in the aftermath of the 2007 elections (OECD, 2016: 33).

### *Bureaucratic instability and resistance*

The enactment of aid programmes can be negatively effected by micro-level features of the public administration in recipient countries.[2] For example, Cornell (2014) argues that instability in human resources in aid-recipient state institutions can obstruct the implementation of democratic governance (DG) programmes. An important cause of high turnover rates is labour market conditions, and that salaries tend to be higher outside the public sector. The best civil servants therefore tend to leave to pursue more lucrative employment in the private sector, or in development agencies themselves.

High turnover rates can effect implementation negatively by creating an unstable bureaucratic environment. New staff tend to lack experience and training, particularly in contexts where there is an absence of institutional learning. Frequent staff turnover can also contribute to short sightedness; bureaucrats may be less inclined to invest in long-term efforts that may produce results only once they have left their post (Cornell, 2014: 191-196). Donors sometimes create parallel organisational structures outside the bureaucracy of the recipient country in an effort to bypass some of the more intractable implementation issues. However, this is not a viable strategy for programmes such as DG that are designed to improve state structures. As a consequence, these programmes are particularly vulnerable to instability and inefficiency caused by changes of staff at the relevant state agency. Cornell substantiates these observations through interviews with donors and recipients in a broad range of DG projects in Peru and Bolivia, finding that high staff turnover has been a major challenge to the success of aid programmes in both countries.

- **Instability and resistance due to political appointments**

Notwithstanding the negative consequences of inexperienced staff and short-termism, turnover rates as a result of a competitive labour market may also bring positive consequences in terms of the recruitment of individuals best suited for the job (Ibid: 196). However, another key factor in accounting for the frequent change of public administration staff in aid-recipient countries is the high degree of politicised or personalised appointments. Civil servants tend to be replaced after elections or other changes in the political landscape. This turnover entails the same impediments to the effective implementation of aid programmes discussed above but without the potential benefits of meritocratic recruitment. Moreover, donors typically have to invest time and resources in rebuilding relationships with the new political leadership and its staff, and in trying to ensure that previous arrangements and agreements will be honoured. This can present a further set of challenges, as long-standing aid projects may be resisted due to reluctance on the part of newly appointed senior civil servants to engage in programmes and policies of the previous administration (Ibid: 196-198).

- **Resistance due to divided political loyalties**

Donor programmes can also be negatively affected by the presence of divided political loyalties amongst the members of local implementing partners or organisations, particularly in the run-up to an election. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the Commission Nationale de la Demobilization et Reinsertion (CONADER) was established to manage the national disarmament, demobilisation and re-

[2] Easterly (2002) suggests that the effectiveness of foreign aid programmes can also be undermined by bureaucratic inefficiency and complexity within the aid sector itself.

integration (DDR) process between 2002- 2009. An independent evaluation carried out by Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI) in 2007 found the performance of the programme to be inadequate, highlighting a lack of proactive analysis of programme gaps, weak supervision and monitoring, and an absence of co-operative working. The underlying barrier to effectiveness was that different groups within CONADER were loyal to different political movements and were primarily concerned with their position in the imminent elections. This positioning meant they were not necessarily aligned with the commission's objectives. In fact, several groups were actually opposed to the DDR project, as the contending political parties wished to maintain their military capabilities until after the elections (Kolln, 2011: 13).

### *The structure of formal political institutions*

A wide range of studies acknowledge the importance of domestic champions or political allies for the successful implementation of aid programmes. However, it is also important to note that these individuals operate within structural constraints and that their political will can be restricted by systemic and formal institutional factors. In other words, the presence of committed political actors is important but not always sufficient to facilitate change. In Ghana, for example, members of Parliament and civil society organisations have campaigned actively in recent years for greater transparency in the allocation of revenues from natural resources. However, structural features of the political system have constrained the possibility of effective action to bring about change in this area. Chief among these is the fact that whilst alleged acts of corruption are taken to the Attorney General, this office lacks the financial and political independence from the executive to carry out the necessary reforms (Mejía Acosta, 2009).

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