Summary research project

Multi-stakeholder processes, service delivery and state institutions

Participating partners:

Maastricht School of Management (coordinator)

Wageningen University

Utrecht University

Oxfam Novib

Clingendael Institute

February 2010

Introduction

This document provides a summary of an applied research project on Multi-Stakeholder Processes (MSPs), service delivery and state institutions. It is part of the 'Knowledge Network for Peace, Security and Development'. This network aims to make a tangible contribution to policy development, through knowledge mobilization. In this respect it supports and encourages the sharing of expertise and cooperation between a variety of Northern and Southern actors involved in development activities (e.g. public and private actors, researchers, policy makers, society-level actors, and beneficiaries). For more information on the network, please consult www.millenniumakkoorden.nl.

Project Objectives

The objective of the project is first to generate insight in the cooperation between multiple state and non-state actors for the improvement and the delivery of basic services and utilities, and second to study how such cooperation contributes to the legitimacy of state institutions. The findings will be translated into recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and (international) donors on the question of how multi-stakeholder processes can strengthen the legitimacy of state-institutions.

Background of the research

The provision of services and utilities like water, electricity, transportation and communication is a crucial aspect of development because it affects people's lives in terms of health, education and their income-earning capacities. Against this background, it is assumed that people's appreciation of their government largely depends on the extent to which the state can provide reliable services. Hence, there is widely-held assumption that states can enhance their legitimacy through better service provision.

However, the perception of the role of the welfare state has changed, partly due to the introduction of approaches where non-state actors are also responsible for service delivery. In societies where the state lacks the willingness or capacity to deliver services, non-state actors may set up own initiatives, with or without government cooperation, to compensate for the lacking services. These non-state actors include, among others, community based organisations, non-governmental organisations, or international aid system providers. While such systems can assure service delivery, they can often be patchy, lack quality, or even be politicized. Nonetheless, the multiplicity of institutions and the changing perceptions of the role of the state have opened up space for cultivating new forms of service delivery such as multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs).

The term 'multi-stakeholder' is often attached to networks, platforms, processes, and partnerships. In this research our interest goes to the quality of the *process* in terms of values around decision-making, accountability, inclusiveness and citizen participation. MSPs can be formed in the context of a planned project, or evolve from institutionalizing processes or spontaneous, informal arrangements. MSPs may maximize service provision by involving multiple state and non-state actors.

However, donors and governments express their concern that service delivery by non-state service providers (NGOs in particular) may result in improved services on the short term, but will on the long term undermine government's legitimacy. Hence, we like to examine in-depth what multi-stakeholder processes in service provision do in practice for service delivery and how they can influence the legitimacy of the relevant state institutions involved in the delivery of services.

The main question that guides this project is: **How do multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) for the improvement of service delivery affect the performance and governance of those services, and how does this affect the legitimacy of state institutions?**

Specific questions the project addresses are:
1. Which actors and trends can be identified in service delivery in the studied context?
2. What are the characteristics of the multi-stakeholder process organised for service delivery?
3. How is this process governed?
4. What are the outputs in terms of service delivery?
5. How does the process and generated outputs affect the legitimacy and effectiveness of relevant state-institutions?
6. What are key factors in the (socio-political & institutional) context influencing MSPs, service delivery, and their relation with the legitimacy of state institutions?

Methodological approach

The project will analyse a wide range of MSPs on local or meso level in different sectors in four countries: Palestinian Territories, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal and Burundi[1]. Fieldwork in these countries will take place between November 2009 and December 2010, and will be performed by researchers from Wageningen University, Utrecht University, Maastricht School of Management, in close collaboration with local partners of these institutions or NGOs (partners of Oxfam Novib). Through case studies empirical data will be gathered, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, such as literature review, interviews, surveys and focus groups. In each country at least two and maximum four MSPs will be studied. The service/utility studied per country may differ.

Project Outputs

The project (2008-2011) will develop an analytical model to study the influence of MSPs on services and the legitimacy of state-institutions. In addition to intermediate papers, each country case will be presented in a separate report. In-country workshops will be held to validate findings, stimulate learning from the findings among participants and formulate country-specific recommendations. An academic publication will compare the cases from four studied countries. Practical implications drawn from the study will be presented in a guide comprising best practices and lessons learned for local and (inter)national policy makers and other actors involved in MSPs and service delivery. The project will be concluded with an international conference.

For more information on the project, please contact Ms. Nora Stel (Maastricht School of Management) at stel@msm.nl.

---

[1] Initially, Ethiopia was also included in this list. However, during the first pilot case study in Ethiopia, it was decided to study Ethiopia as a separate case, through an adapted framework, because the post-conflict and politically unstable status given to Ethiopia proved to be challenged, particularly in the country itself.