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Overseas Development  
Institute

# **Participation and Citizenship: Exploring Power for Change**

## **Comments and reflections**

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## General Comments

- **‘Power’** is a crucial dimension. Not just as concept but as dynamic relationships between people.
- **Levels:** local vs global and micro-macro linkages well known dilemmas. We still fail to understand local experiences and how/why they work. And ‘coherence’ at the global level.
- **Spaces:** often underestimated. Not just about who creates them/who is invited or included. Context, layout, culture and physical space matter too.
- **Forms:** what/who determines if power is visible, hidden or invisible? Informality, patronage, interest groups, economic needs, culture and social norms all relevant.

## Implications

- Need to rethink traditional **categories of actors**, e.g. civil society, citizens, government, donors etc.
- Need to rethink traditional **approaches** (e.g. the meaning of rights, participation)
- Emphasis on theory, but even more on **the practice of power relations.**
- Cross fertilisation and **multidisciplinary approaches:** geography, political science, history, anthropology
- Culture?

## ODI recent experience (i)

1. Emerging interest in different/new areas: governance, informal politics, rights, rural development, urbanisation
2. A new language? Voice, accountability, civic engagement, responsiveness and...democracy.
3. Donors are interested. Both a limitation and an opportunity.

### **Some trends**

- ❖ awareness of limited role and political role for donors,
- ❖ interest in multi donor experiences (but limited practice)
- ❖ acknowledgement of risks of new aid modalities
- ❖ 'beyond' traditional civil society
- ❖ interest for informal politics and 'power relations'
- ❖ evaluative thinking/questioning

## ODI recent experience (ii)

### Limitations and challenges

- ❖ coping and working with complexity
- ❖ power difficult to pin down
- ❖ Donor - funded interventions not ideal entry point,
- ❖ political parties vs political engagement
- ❖ Governments remain donors' main preoccupation

### The way ahead

- The 'rights plus' debate
- Focus on informal politics and neo-patrimonialism
- New partnerships/networks, north and south
- Is this something that ODI, IIED and IDS should join forces on?