

## Africa after the Africa Commission:

What priorities for  
the German G8?

**Civic engagement and  
accountability**

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## 1. Ownership and accountability around aid

- The G8 Action Plan recognises the need to involve civil society in all aspects of NEPAD process.
- But the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness largely silent on 'demand-side' pressure for governance reform through civic engagement.
- Accountability to citizens arguably essential to national ownership and mutual accountability around aid relationships.
- To what extent can donors be expected to support civic engagement with the state?



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## 2. Civil society as agents of accountability

- Rights-based approaches have encouraged civil society to play a much more active role in policy advocacy
  - Malawi Economic Justice Network,
  - Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP).
- The Domestic Election Observation Group in Nigeria
  - 50,000 trained election observers across the country
  - Critical oversight where multi-donor support to the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) allegedly failed to secure a credible outcome.



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### 3. Strengthening support to civic engagement

- Criticism that donor – government dialogue around PRBS is closing down space for civic engagement (compared to broad participation in PRSPs)
- Africa Commission and the Progress Report on the G8 Action – calls to broaden participation and strengthen accountability institutions (parliaments, the media etc)
- DFID's White Paper on international development, '*Making Governance Work for the Poor*', (2006) highlights the role of citizens and civil society in helping to keep the state honest.



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## 4. The lack of a common donor vision for support to civil society

- Donors are not as well coordinated in supporting civil society as they are in supporting developing country governments.
- Donor support to voice and accountability in large part skills up civil society for the advocacy, or the capacity of the state to respond.
- Less work to broker and facilitate the interface between citizens and the state; uncertainty over the degree to which donors should engage in endogenous political processes



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## 5. Support to civic engagement as 'politics'

- The 2006 White Paper is clear about the importance of politics, as the often informal processes by which states, leaders and citizens relate to each other to make change happen (politics as citizen action).
- A focus on the “interaction of interest groups” - a potentially radical departure from traditional governance reform (dealing with the “rotten apples in the barrel”).
- Growing interest in “good enough governance” and on working with the grain of “neo-patrimonial” political systems.



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## 6. Political unknowns

- **DFID's White Paper stops short of examining the implications of a focus on politics.**
- **Can we make the same assumptions about citizen voice and accountability in “neo-patrimonial” and fragile-state contexts?**
  - **Rules defining citizenship may be poorly defined/ enforced**
  - **Absence of formal channels**
  - **Engaging with the “missing middle”**
  - **The most marginal (or indeed influential) actors may operate outside the constitution**
  - **Is “constituency” a more valid entry point than “citizenship”?**



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## 7. Donors are not well equipped to work politically

- A difficult balancing act between the need to safeguard relations with government on the one hand and not to undermine CSO advocacy on the other.
- Political risk encourages donors to work at “arms’ length” from civil society, e.g. through intermediary NGOs and local foundations; may lack the capacity to mediate in political conflicts.



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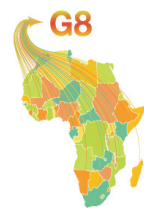
## 8. Politics and harmonisation – uncomfortable bedfellows?

- Increasing harmonisation of donor support to civil society – pooled funding, joint programmatic frameworks.
- Not all donors are willing to work with social movements or other potentially politicised actors.
- Not all donors are sufficiently flexible in their funding arrangements to minimise transaction costs for civil society partners
  - potentially excludes more marginal citizens groups, and those with minimal administrative capacity.



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## 9. Where to?

- (i) Enhancing rules of the game for civic engagement (e.g. support to civic education, conflict resolution and political party development). But expectations should be lowered (accountability emerges gradually)...
  
- (ii) Backing specific interest groups to achieve particular policy outcomes. This raises questions over the role of donors as legitimate players in endogenous political processes...



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## 10. If donors are to work politically with civil society...

- Understand better what 'voice' constitutes in fragile-state, neo-patrimonial settings, how it is exercised and how to work with it.
- Relax administrative rules to allow a more diverse set of influential actors to access funding and facilitation, especially under multi-donor mechanisms.
- Where the current trend is to work through an intermediary, be prepared to invest diplomatic weight in directly facilitating civic engagement with the state.



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## Discussion points...

- Are our assumptions about citizenship and accountability adequate?
- Who in African civil society should donors be working more with?
- Politics as civic action v politics as political partying
- Support to “rules of the game” v backing of interest groups; what is the legitimate role of donors?
- What changes in the aid architecture are needed to support civic engagement?

