CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

STUDY PACK

2014

This study pack was prepared as a part of Learning Journey 1: Promoting Civic Engagement
The material draws on and assimilates the concepts that came out of an online discussion on ‘civic engagement in local governance – beyond usual suspects?’ in the Democratic Local Governance Network and the reading references provided at a Learning Retreat Civic Engagement and Socially Inclusive Local Governance organised by IDS in collaboration with SDC DLGN in September 2014. This work was supported by financial resources made available to LOGIN by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. More information can be obtained from LOGIN Secretariat at secretariat@loginasia.net.
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INTRODUCTION TO STUDY PACK

Background
In the first LOGIN General Assembly, members agreed to exchange and learn by embarking on three learning journeys, one of which was Promoting Civic Engagement in Local Governance. The central question in this case was to build an understanding on ‘How to promote civic engagement for better local governance’.

Civic engagement in governance has been a much debated topic. The meaning, practice and implications vary from context to context. This is more so in the case of civic engagement in local governance as it has the potential of playing out differently in different member country contexts, depending especially on the extent of decentralization, democratization, existing role of civil society in local governance processes, priority reform areas and existing and required levels of transparency and accountability.

The Learning Journey on civic engagement had translated into a structured learning visit to Mongolia earlier this year, on civic engagement in local governance for better service delivery. In the later part of the year an online discussion was initiated on the topic ‘civic engagement in local governance – beyond usual suspects?’ in the Democratic Local Governance Network in which LOGIN members participated. This was followed by a Learning Retreat on Civic Engagement and Socially Inclusive Local Governance organised by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in collaboration with SDC DLGN in September 2014. This Study Pack has been prepared based on the online discussion and the reading references provided at the Learning Retreat, taking forward the sub-themes from Learning Journey 1.

This study pack is intended for members of LOGIN Asia and is designed to cater to the middle level practitioners of local governance and decentralisation.

Sub-themes
The study pack presents thematic notes on four sub-themes related to civic engagement in local governance:

Civic engagement – concepts
Learners will be introduced to the concepts and theories of civic engagement. These are presented in the contexts of local governance and the region.

Entry points for civic engagement
Civic engagement is not a stand-alone thematic area. It cuts across many aspects of governance and identifying appropriate entry points is very important. The learning journey has been placed in the context of local governance and that itself is an entry point. However, the knowledge products will try to identify specific entry points for civic engagement within local governance like service delivery improvement, legislative processes, electoral reforms and gender concerns. This sub-theme will also discuss the different modes of entering civic engagement.

Power dynamics in civic engagement
It is evident that new spaces and opportunities have been emerging for citizen engagement in governance at all levels, especially that of local governance. These are being developed and promoted through policy instruments, legal frameworks and support programmes. However, it is also clear that such elements alone will not lead to civic engagement or help in strengthening local governance. In fact, power relations at various levels play a major role, even in democratic spaces.
Civic engagement in post-conflict scenario
The region also has countries and areas which are in conflict or post-conflict situations, often in dynamic and volatile conditions. It is a fact that in such situations the State legitimacy itself might be questioned by some. In certain cases, the state is often a violent actor itself. Situations of hybrid states or negotiated statehood also exist: other governance actors exist aside from the state, who engage in service delivery and security, but are not necessarily representative and accountable. In such situations it is useful to look at how ‘spaces for engagement’ look like and who shapes them. Lack of ‘safe spaces’ is a crucial issue to be addressed. Thus it is important for understanding citizen engagement in (post)conflict settings where power dynamics among citizens and between citizens and authorities have to be considered against the historical background of the conflict.

Government responsiveness
As is clear from the various sub themes mentioned above, civic engagement in local governance is not a neutral and stand-alone activity. Government responsiveness is a key factor in shaping the way the engagement could be designed and taken forward. The region provides many experiences and examples of such government responsiveness to civic engagement in local governance. Sharing these would help in similar engagements in other parts of the region.

Study pack structure
The study pack is part of a self-learning journey. The thematic notes on the sub-themes mentioned above have been based on the reading references and online DLGN discussion. This is followed by an annotated bibliography for further reading.

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1 This thematic note is not included in the Study Pack at present. It is intended to prepare this with inputs from LOGIN members.
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE
CONCEPTS

1 Background
Civic engagement in local governance is seen to be one of the tools of articulating citizens’ voices in development, holding local governments accountable and promoting partnership in local development. The following segments assimilate the concepts of citizenship, participation and accountability including their meanings and nature in the context of civic engagement, as outlined in literature on the subject.

2 Citizenship
Meanings
Citizenship is a debated concept in international development and has myriad meanings. If it is taken to imply membership of a country, then it tends to exclude the marginalized persons such as migrants or refugees. Citizenship can be understood as belonging (to a certain place, group or community), as status (as compared with a non-citizen) as national identity and as relating to rights and duties.3 The conventional notion is of citizens having rights and responsibilities in relation to their national governments. In a globalized world, citizenship is about entitlement to human rights and to a relationship with duty bearers, whether national, international, regional or local.

Local government actors are also like citizens and need empowerment to get government response on citizens’ concerns. Some of these actors could be intermediaries (as in India) who ensure that resources from government programmes reach their villages by acting as the bridge between higher levels and the village. However, in cases where elected councils are strong and effective, these actors get themselves elected, doing away with the necessity to ‘commute’ between villages and higher levels4.

Interaction of citizens with other actors
On the one hand citizenship could be viewed in terms of vertical relationships of citizens with institutions of authority, on the other hand it also encompasses their relationships with non-state actors. Benequista and Gaventa5 have summarized different approaches to development according to which citizens are seen as consumers, users and choosers of state services, electors, holders of legal rights and/or beneficiaries. They, however suggest that citizenship is attained not only through the exercise of political and civic rights but also social rights citizens exercising ever-deepening power over decisions that affect their lives. This nature of citizenship extends from the public to the private arena and is naturally more inclusive of the marginalized sections of society such as women.

“Vertical citizenship has more to do with the individual or groups’ relationship to the state-acting as a citizen in the sense of participating in local government decision-making and/or advocating for government attention to a particular issue, or holding government

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2 This note draws on and assimilates the concepts that came out of an online discussion on ‘civic engagement in local governance – beyond usual suspects?’ in the Democratic Local Governance Network and the reading references provided at a Learning Retreat Civic Engagement and Socially Inclusive Local Governance organised by IDS in collaboration with SDC DLGN in September 2014.

3 Eyben, R. and Ladbury, S., 2006

4 James Manor, School of Advanced Studies, University of London

5 Benequista, N and Gaventa John, 2011
accountable. Horizontal citizenship is found in the associational life where relationships of mutual solidarity and networking occurs; in some country contexts this would also be described as ways in which people act out of a sense of civic duty, contributing to community life.”

Citizenship may not always develop through engagement with governments. It could also develop through the engagement of poor people with informal agencies such as with informal courts, informal savings groups or NGO mobilized groups. This eventually develops into some agency form with which individuals are able to participate in decision-making, whether through state sponsored or social/other means.

3 Participation and Accountability

Factors affecting participation and accountability
Citizen action or participation is related to the concept of accountability. The assumed linkages for development outcomes of improved service delivery and citizen voice in decision making are citizen action and government responsiveness, and hence enhanced accountability. However, the extent of accountability and participation are highly context specific. They depend on the nature of the political set up, character of formal/informal state-society relationships, nature of socio-economic inequality, capacity of civil society to network or influence and on global factors such as international political and economic drivers.

State supported and other means of participation
The concept of participation has received considerable emphasis in the development discourse, in the context of including peoples’ voices in decision-making processes. Recent times have seen many states creating greater opportunities for citizens to dialogue and debate in policy making. However, the capacity of the states to respond to greater citizens’ participation is debatable. The voices of the poor or the marginalized are also often not those that are heard in the state supported means of participation.

Participation of the marginalized could take on other forms, such as choosing to join a social movement rather than becoming part of a consultative process. In fact in South Africa there has been a culture of public protests resulting from the inability of citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

While civic engagement with the state can happen through various means such as state forums, legislations, NGOs, social movements or creation of parallel governance structures, non-formal forms of citizen action are significant as they symbolize “the transition from representative democracy to participatory democracy”. (Abdour Wahab Dieng, SDC, Mali). But the challenge in non-formal means is that they may accentuate inequalities and differentiation in terms of participation of local communities in local development.

Approaches to accountability
State responsiveness to voices of citizens is important for participation to be effective. Public and social accountability is a critical concept associated with participation. Accountability implies a relationship between a principal who delegates to an agent the responsibility to act on his behalf.

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6 Alison Mathie, Coady International Institute
7 Eyben, R. and Ladbury, S., 2006
8 Ephrem Tadesse Gebre, SDC Regional Programme, Southern Africa
The approach to accountability is two-pronged:
1. the supply side of the state being responsive and transparent towards citizens
2. the citizens' oversight function
Accountability is not simply citizen-state relations, but includes that of corporate and NGO sectors as significant political actors shaping the relationship between state and citizens. Power relations have an important role in accountability being ensured.

Conditions for effective accountability
The effectiveness of accountability depends on a number of institutional arrangements. It is critical to consider the concepts of vertical and horizontal accountability to understand this. “Vertical accountability mechanisms refer to the relationship between citizens conceived as principals (voters, organized society and the media) and state agent who have an effective expectation to answer for their actions (legislatures, elected representatives, executive branch and local government). Horizontal accountability refers to relationships in which diverse government offices hold each other accountable to ensure that no one encroaches on the rights and privileges of the other, and that no agency stands above the rule of law”. (O’Donnell 1998)

Accountability can be facilitated by elections to legislative bodies and formal oversight and control mechanisms. Street protests, petitions and media monitoring of public action to hold governments accountable are alternate arenas of ensuring accountability. Effective accountability is achieved through the combination of social accountability and political accountability. Identification of which conditions can improve accountability can be done by analyzing the dimensions of standards, answerability, responsiveness and enforceability in civil society-state relations in a country context. These dimensions can also be used to measure the effectiveness of accountability in a country context. 9

4 Practical challenges in civic engagement
The theoretical aspects of citizenship, accountability and participation also cover the conditions required for their effectiveness. However, the agent of change- local civil society- is a mix of diverse individuals with different motivations, values, incentives and ways of working. This impacts the nature and effectiveness of civic engagement. The local organizations formed for civic action or engagement are often not equipped with the necessary skills and capacities to influence decision making. CSOs can act as intermediaries between people and governments, but this is not without the risk of their taking on this representation.

Civic engagement may be effective with councils, committees and groups that can enable advocacy. The presence of supportive champions in public institutions is also important to get positive results.

The entry points for civic engagement and the measures and means explore these challenges in greater details in the second note of this series.

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9 Joshi, Anuradha and Graeme Ramshaw. 2013
Reading References

   Available at: http://www.drc-citizenship.org/system/assets/1052734530/original/1052734530-eyben_etal.2006-building.pdf?1289908923

   Available at: http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp347.pdf

   Available at: http://www.idea.int/resources/analysis/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageID=55694

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE
ENTRY POINTS

1 Background
Civic engagement is instrumental in promoting effective democratic local governance. There are many modes and entry points of civic engagement in local governance. Civil society may play the role of watchdog or of oversight for local government institutions, advocate for change in the interest of citizens, monitor service delivery and partner with government in local development. The following segments outline some of the entry points.

2 Civic engagement through formal/informal institutions of local governance
Decentralization holds the premise of bringing government closer to the people. Institutionalization of the democratic political process is one of the positive results of decentralization. While regular elections set up formal local government institutions, there are mechanisms below them to provide entry points for engaging citizens in decision-making processes. Examples of such informal administrative units include the Gram Sabha in India or the Barangay in Philippines. Other bodies for citizen participation that may be set up in decentralized systems include sector based institutions such as Parent Teacher Associations, Health Committees and other such bodies, which essentially serve as oversight mechanisms and means of involving citizens in decision making.

3 Civic engagement in service delivery and ensuring accountability

Entry points
Civic engagement in service delivery is related to invoking accountability and demanding improved access to and quality of services. This is done collectively and may involve the following entry points:

- Demanding information about the level and quality of services and entitlements to citizens
- Monitoring the quality of services and performance of public service providers and frontline service delivery officials
- Using grievance procedures
- Engaging in protests and demonstrations for publicizing dissatisfaction with service delivery

Concepts and theories
Many theories have been set out on the forms of accountability in service delivery. These include the standard model where a citizen delegates to elected political representatives the power to make policy. In this model periodic elections provide citizens with the power of sanction, wherein they may choose not to re-elect non-performing representatives. The second strand in this model is that elected representatives exercise oversight on public bureaucracy for policy implementation. However, in the real world of an ever expanding range of public services and public bureaucracy, these accountability relationships become complex.

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10 This note draws on and assimilates the concepts that came out of an online discussion on ‘civic engagement in local governance – beyond usual suspects?’ in the Democratic Local Governance Network and the reading references provided at a Learning Retreat Civic Engagement and Socially Inclusive Local Governance organised by IDS in collaboration with SDC DLGN in September 2014.
11 Cheema,S. 2011
12 Source: Joshi, Anuradha and Peter P. Houtzager. 2012. “Widgets or Watchdogs: Conceptual Explorations in Social Accountability”.

Accountability debates that focus on the supply side, advocate for reform of public systems for better service delivery. In this approach the citizen is seen as a consumer and reforms focused on making services easily accessible to citizens. Another example of a supply side approach is to create institutions such as ombudsman and introducing transparency legislations to build in accountability within the public delivery system.

On the demand side, participatory democracy provides opportunities to citizens to directly engage in policy processes. One example of this is the **advocacy for rights based approaches to basic services**. Advocacy on rights based approaches have led to legislations such as the right to education or right to public services legislations. Many of these legislations have sanctions attached on public bureaucracies for non-delivery of public services. **Collaborative approaches** to improve public service delivery include the community scorecard, social audits, community report cards among other tools.

**Challenges to civic engagement in service delivery**

There is evidence to suggest that civic engagement leads to improved accountability and transparency in service delivery. For instance studies have shown that in India social audits have contributed to exposure of corruption and effectiveness in programme implementation. Community monitoring of services in Uganda have shown to improve teacher attendance.

However, there are many challenges to civic engagement in service delivery. Most of the demand side collective accountability mechanisms of civic engagement do not have powers of **imposing sanctions** built into them. These mechanisms also suffer limitations of not addressing **how government responsiveness is to be strengthened**. In an environment of decentralization, there are alternative modes of service delivery and partnerships. There are often **non-state actors** involved. Holding them to account through civic engagement is often difficult. Success of accountability mechanisms and reform of public institutions for better service delivery are dependent to a large extent on the supply side. Supportive action in the form of reform-minded bureaucrats or the environment in which the public system operates is required in many cases.

**4 Civic engagement in public finance management**

The centrality of budgets in reflecting government policy direction and priority has led to public finance management being one of the key fields of civic engagement. Public finance management may therefore be considered another entry point of civic engagement. **Citizen led budget initiatives** began with the popularization of Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre and have proliferated into citizen participation in planning, execution and audit of budgets. The main mechanisms for civic engagement in public finance management are **participatory budgeting, public expenditure monitoring** through tracking surveys and audits and advocacy for budget transparency. Advocacy for gender budgets and children’s budgets by citizens is a mode of civic engagement to make budgets more inclusive.

There is evidence to show that civic engagement in public finance management has yielded positive results. For instance, studies have shown that in Uganda public expenditure tracking surveys when made public and linked to public information campaigns have led to reduced budget leakages.

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13 Gaventa, J and McGee, R. 2013
14 Reinikka and Svensson. 2005
5 Civic engagement for government responsiveness and empowerment of local voices

At the local level, civil society serves to engage in local development by influencing the articulation of local needs and priorities. Protecting the interests of the weaker sections in government programmes by the action of CSOs is another mode of empowerment through civic engagement. 8 case studies of the Citizen Development Research Centre have shown that significant pro-poor reforms have come about as a result of alliances between CSOs, media, intellectuals and state reformers. In Brazil the Right to City campaign led to housing for the urban poor and enhanced capacity of the state for urban planning. Civic engagement therefore not only enhances state responsiveness but also state capacity.

Evidence from Brazil has shown that civil society is increasingly seeking representation in institutions that make public decisions, making political representation—another entry point for civic engagement 15. These include neighbourhood associations, NGOs, advocacy organizations and urban movements, community associations and social movements. Civil society actors assume the political representation of a constituency as intermediaries between citizens and state. Civil society groups choosing the role of people’s representatives (and thereby posing as a threat to elected representatives) establish their political legitimacy amongst people in the absence of historically established mechanisms such as elections. The new actors interpret their activity of representation in one of six ways: electoral, membership, proximity, identity, mediation and service.

Another entry point for civic engagement for government responsiveness is civic engagement in legislative processes bringing the voice of citizens in the formulation of laws and policies.

6 Conditions for effective civic engagement

The entry points identified in previous segments are not exhaustive. However, contextual factors have an important role to play in the impact of civic engagement. These include the following16:

- Levels of democratization including freedoms of association, voice or media
- A political environment favorable to a balanced supply and demand side approach
- Prevailing legal frameworks and incentive structures for political representatives and government functionaries
- Citizen capabilities to engage effectively

Reading References


15 Source: Houtzager, PP and A Gurza Lavalle. 2010
16 Gaventa, J and McGee, R. 2013
Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14719037.2012.657837#.VD43CFfqKdA

Available at: http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/mediated-citizenship-bettina-von-lieres/?K=9781137405302

Available at: http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/CivilSociety%27sClaims_Houtzager-GurzaLavalle.pdf
1 Power Dynamics in Local Governance

It is evident that new spaces and opportunities have been emerging for citizen engagement in governance at all levels, especially that of local governance. These are being developed and promoted through policy instruments, legal frameworks and support programmes. For example, many countries have enacted legislations, developed guidelines and have rolled out programmes and projects to strengthen local governance. However, it is also clear that such elements alone will not lead to civic engagement or help in strengthening local governance. In fact, power relations at various levels play a major role, even in democratic spaces.

Power relations play a major role in civic engagement as it is about individuals and their interactions among and between each other. This might be dependent on the status or position an individual has in this system and is identified by various indicators which is related to the individual identity and with regard to the authority the person enjoys at the level in which s/he is. Thus governance at the local level too is influenced by these power relations.

As an institution, local government is also influenced by this web of power relations. In this case, it is not only about power relations among individuals but also among institutions, whether it be higher tiers of government or other institutions.

How does an institution or individual derive power? A local government may derive this power from the constitutional framework of the country, various legislations or decrees. However, local governments in many places might have historically derived power which would not be specified in legislations or policy instruments. In the same manner, an elected representative derives her/his power by virtue of being elected by people. An officer at a particular level derives his/her power from position. As citizens, people too derive their power from legislations and similar policy instruments as well as through certain historical reasons through which the power has been bestowed upon them.

Not only are institutions and people homogenous entities, but power relations are marked and present between them. Any civic engagement at the local governance level is influenced by and dependent on these power relations at various levels. A proper understanding of these would make civic engagement more effective and efficient.

2 Concepts and Theories

*How does one perceive power?*

- Power in comparison – A few have power and they are the powerful. Others are powerless or comparatively powerless.
- Power as relationship – Power does not lie with anyone specific, but it is ‘embodied in a web of relationships and discourses which affect everyone, but which no single actor holds’.

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*Source: Gaventa, 2006*

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17 This note draws on and assimilates the concepts that came out of an online discussion on ‘civic engagement in local governance – beyond usual suspects?’ in the Democratic Local Governance Network and the reading references provided at a Learning Retreat Civic Engagement and Socially Inclusive Local Governance organised by IDS in collaboration with SDC DLGN in September 2014.

18 Source: Gaventa, 2006
• Power as ‘zero-sum’ concept – If someone gains power, someone else loses it.

**How is power described?**
• Power ‘over’ - a powerful person’s actions impact over the powerless
• Power ‘to’ – the ability or the capacity to do something, have something and to control
• Power ‘within’ – confidence, identity and awareness which is necessary for power over or power to.
• Power ‘with’ – power which is generated through partnerships and collaboration with others. It is here that the concept of civic engagement is embedded.

**Power and civic engagement**
• When does power become important in civic engagement - if it is required to deal with issues where the voice of the powerless has to be made heard.
• When multiple actors are involved and it requires to address the power of individuals and institutions in the web of relations.
• When it is the issue of rights and access where a shift in power is required. It is here that conflicts arise and power struggles begin as no one would like to give up power.

Power need not always be seen as a negative trait and always disabling. In many situations, power is also about capacity and ability for action and thoughts for positive engagement and results, thus being enabling as well.

3 Power in practice
As mentioned, civic engagement in local governance has to deal with power relations at each level and step. How does one identify various forms of power? There may be two principal ways of doing this:

3.1 **Formal and Informal**

*Formal:* Within a system, there are individuals and institutions which yield power due to the position they hold. The relations between and among them are also influenced by a plethora of power relations which are bestowed upon them through legislations, policy instruments and others and the extent of power is dependent on these. For example, the elected representative holds power as s/he is legitimately elected and the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined by law or similar instruments. A local government at a particular level has the power as defined by law. Or the officer has the power as per the directives of the appropriate level of government. Civic engagement has to understand these to effectively utilize the powers and power relations to the advantage of the objectives of the engagement (if it is enabling) or have to confront to gain power which leads to these objectives (if it is disabling).

*Informal:* Power relations are complex. Many a time, the roles are not clearly defined or overlapping. This leaves a lot of room for the emergence of informal power relations. These could be defined by virtue of many factors – historical, social, cultural, political and many others. For example, in the local context, family status, age, wealth, religion, education etc may play a major role in encompassing informal power in decision-making. Political party affiliation and the position within the party also might play a role. Gender relations are also key to these informal powers, mostly to the disadvantage of the women. Even among the people or institutions that hold formal powers, there are instances where they also wield informal powers. For example, even when an officer does not have certain powers, by virtue of his/her
other characteristics and relation within the system, s/he holds power to influence decision making, though not legally entitled to do so. Same is the case with elected representatives, political party leaders, various tiers of government and sectoral departments. Local governance and local governments are embedded within a complex web of formal and informal power relations. Thus it is important to understand and address these formal and informal power relations for civic engagement.

3.2 Spaces, places and forms of power

Another way of understanding power is defined by John Gaventa and colleagues where they consider spaces, places and forms of power, depicted in the form of a power cube. These have been considered in the context of participation and engagement.

Spaces:
The first question is about the spaces for such participation - how they are created, with whose interests and what terms of engagement. There is a continuum of spaces:

- Closed spaces: There are many spaces in local governance which are closed for participation and engagement. Decisions are made by a set of actors where there is no scope for inclusion. There is no consultation, involvement or discussion. Someone else, who is powerful, decides for you. Nowadays, many actions on civic engagement are directed towards opening these closed spaces for better transparency or accountability.
- Invited spaces: This is one step forward where spaces are created and invited for participation (Cornwall, 2002). This is especially becoming significant in local governance than at higher levels, with new participatory spaces like village assemblies, committees etc being introduced.
- Claimed/created spaces: These are spaces which are claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders and mainly the result of active civic engagement.

Interrelationships of the spaces also create challenges for strategies for civic engagement. To challenge ‘closed’ spaces, civil society organizations may serve the role of advocates, arguing for greater transparency, more democratic structures, or greater forms of public accountability. As new ‘invited’ spaces emerge, civil society organizations may need other strategies on how to negotiate, collaborate and participate. It is also important that the civic engagement be strengthened to keep these invited spaces open and open wider.

Places and levels:
Where does one find these spaces? They are at different levels and places - local, national or global levels. Considering the spaces the local governance provides for better participation and civic engagement, it is important to strengthen these levels. However, these places and levels are interconnected and a lot depends on national and global levels so that focusing on local alone might not always be useful. Of course, this may lead to confusion on where to engage – local, national or global.

Forms of Power (Adapted from VeneKlasen, 2002):

- Visible power: This is the most transparent form of power which is defined clearly. It could be by way of formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making.
- Hidden power: In many instances, powerful people and institutions influence decision making by working through the individuals and institutions who have the visible power. Political parties, community and religious leaders etc play this role.
• Invisible power: This seems to be the most disabling and challenging form of power in which the main problems and issues are diverted or kept away from the minds and thinking of people. Biased or controlled media could be such an example. It is here that civic engagement has to start from building awareness to capacity building.

4 Challenges
As discussed in previous sections, power and power relations play a major role in local governance. In fact, civic engagement is all about engaging with these powers and power relations to achieve the objects of the engagement. A few challenges (or opportunities) are emerging in the context of power and civic engagement in local governance.

• Heterogeneity: Each of the power relations are different from each other. Actors in civic engagement too require to understand and address these on a case-to-case basis. For example, power relations within a local government vary among respective individuals within it like the elected representatives, officials and so on.

• Enabling: many a time, power relations at the local level, whether formal or informal, are enabling. They should be taken advantage of in civic engagement. For example, if engaging with political parties or religious leaders for a particular objective are contributing to the achievement of the objectives of civic engagement, civil society could strategize to use this to advantage.

• Disabling: This is more so when we consider power as zero sum and someone has to lose power to get benefit for the powerless. This is a difficult situation leading to power struggle and conflict. In certain cases, there is no option other than confrontation, but in many cases, appropriate strategizing can lead to a win-win situation.

Reading References

Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/6107/deor_13_1_70.pdf?sequence=13.


Based on discussions with Ben Blumenthal of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation during the mission for Context analysis of Power Relations - Local Governance in Bangladesh, for SDC supported Sharique project. Also the discussion points from the facilitated e-dialogue by SDC’s DLG Network in May-June 2014 on Civic engagement in local governance: beyond usual suspects?
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN POST-CONFLICT SCENARIOS

1 Background
In regions or countries which are in conflict or post-conflict situations, civic engagement happens in the context of a changing configuration of powerful actors. In such situations the State legitimacy itself might be open to question. In certain cases, the state is often a violent actor itself. There is also the situation where there are hybrid states or negotiated statehood: other governance actors exist aside from the state, who engage in service delivery and security, but are not necessarily representative and accountable. In such situations it is useful to look at how ‘spaces for engagement’ look like and who shapes them. Lack of ‘safe spaces’ itself is a crucial issue to be addressed. Moving on from the previous section on power dynamics in citizen engagement in local governance, it is also necessary to consider the power dynamics (among citizens and between citizens and authorities) in post conflict situations. This has to be seen in the historical background of the conflict.

2 Civic Engagement – Understanding the Post-conflict Scenario
Unlike in other situations, post-conflict scenario is complex with the history and diverse characteristics of actors and their relations, legitimacy and motives. Civil society itself could be a non-entity and citizenship itself could be in infancy. It is in this context that we may consider civic engagement.

Platforms: In a conflict or post conflict situation, civic engagement becomes important to overcome the impact of conflict. On the other hand, unlike in other situations, the existence of institutionalised platforms for such an engagement might be absent. Moreover, over the years of conflict where there was no civic engagement, the experience of such actions might have also been absent or previous learnings have been lost or forgotten. Even if there are such platforms, the civil society in general would be unaware of these platforms for participation and collective action. Who sets the rules of engagement in these is also a question to be considered. Finally, how safe are these platforms and spaces is a concern for many.

The State: The role played by the state is important, as it has to respond to civic engagement and action. However, in many post-conflict situations, the state itself is not ready to be engaged with civil society. It might be unwilling to have an interface with civil society or citizens. On the other hand, legitimacy of the state itself may be debatable during a post-conflict situation and thus whom to engage with becomes a question.

Hybrid State: In a post conflict scenario, there would be other governance actors existing aside from the state, especially at the local level. They might be engaging in service delivery, peace keeping, security and many other activities. However, they might not be representative and accountable. This again leads to the question of whom to engage with and who would respond to civic engagement.

Exclusion and Elite Capture: Though exclusion has been a phenomenon applicable in various situations, a post-conflict scenario could make it worse, especially with the exclusion of certain identities. These could be on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, language, religion or class. However, it is also to be noted that these are the most vulnerable groups in a post-conflict situation who require active engagement with the state actors. In fact, in many such situations elite capture in governance, especially in local governance is a possibility.
Post-conflict situations would have changed the power relations, with the emergence of new powers and actors which could be another area of conflict in civic engagement itself. The state too would be an active player in manipulating civic engagement by using the potentials of local power relations and elite capture.

3 In Practice- forms of engagement

Civic engagement in post-conflict situations is characterized by many forms of engagement. Civil society itself is yet to take a formal structure and form. Many a time a formal way of representation or participation within the civil society itself is not possible. Within the civil society itself there would be different divisions. They would have different positions and opinions on the manner the engagement should take place with the state actors. These would be influenced by their allegiance to the state actors or political affiliation.

Nowadays, citizen participation has been considered as an effective tool in civic engagement in post conflict scenarios. It is to be noted that ‘when spaces open up’, citizens do not just fill those spaces. A conscious process of ‘citizenship building’ is required’.

A manual on 3 steps for working in fragile and conflict affected situations developed by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation together with the Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) at Swisspeace (Martheler, 2013) has suggested the following which could be used for such initiatives in post-conflict scenarios:

**Step 1: Understanding the conflict context**

An organisation working in fragile and conflict-affected situations is part of the context. Its representatives should understand the actors related to conflict and fragility, tensions and the conflict-related events and have a basic understanding of the related governance and fragility issues.

The conflict context analysis focuses on factors, which can reduce or increase tensions. It looks at key actors, Sources of Tensions (SOT), Connecting Elements (CE) as well as key questions on (local) governance. The scope and depth of the conflict-context analysis depend on its aim, use and the context in which it is conducted.

**Step 2: Understanding the interaction between the organisation and the conflict context**

What is the interaction between the identified elements of conflict and fragility and the project/programme, i.e. between the programme, the organisation and their relations with partners and stakeholders? A list of sample questions regarding these elements helps to identify relevant factors in the programme, which create tensions or have a positive impact on the conflict context. They are often related to information sharing / communication, the transfer of resources and whatever implicit messages we send with different types of everyday behaviour.

**Step 3: Strategic decisions for programme and project management**

Based on the factors which are creating tensions or are having a positive impact on the conflict context that have been identified, strategic management choices have to be developed. The three fields of observation - programme, organisation and relations – need to be considered. Adjustments of the projects to the conflict context have to become part of the programme management cycle.

Simon Robins in his paper on “An Empirical Approach to Post-Conflict Legitimacy: Victims’ Needs and the Everyday” (Robins, 2013) points to the issue of ‘victims’ of conflict. He
mentions that (a) civic engagement in a (post) conflict situation needs to integrate the victims’ perspective. Standardised modes of civic engagement, such as rolling out a truth and reconciliation committee or implementing a human rights approach, are not sufficient, (b) victimhood should not be construed simply as those who bear the brunt of conflict but as a socially and subjectively constructed category.

4 Concerns and Issues

Legitimacy of Agencies: Considering that in post-conflict situations, there is need for citizenship building for civic engagement, legitimacy of agencies facilitating this process is important. These could be donor agencies, NGOs or similar institutions. Acceptance and engagement will depend on its motive, objectives and position in the country. In many cases, its position during the times of conflict itself would be considered by the state and civil society.

Legitimacy of State: Citizens might not be in a position to accept the legitimacy of the state or its actors in a post conflict situation. They may even consider many non-state actors to be the real actors and would try to engage with them. This might be useful as a link to the state actors. But in many cases this would also weaken the engagement process as the non-state actors might be considered as threat to the state.

Legitimacy of Process: The process has to be accepted by the civil society and is to be in tune with existing social norms and cultural practices as well as governance practices accepted by the state.

Legitimacy of Outcomes: The outcomes expected through civic engagement paves the foundation for any citizen action. Unachievable outcomes projected to strengthen citizen engagement could turn out to be counterproductive and even lead to further conflicts.

Inclusion and Exclusion: In practice, this is a critical issue. The sensitivities created by the conflict would impact the inclusion or exclusion of any group from engagement; this is to be carefully thought of while planning civic engagement initiatives. Otherwise, it can lead to difficult situations and further conflict. It is not only about citizen groups, but also about social groups/identities, non-state (armed) authorities, and customary institutions.

Whom to Engage With: In a post conflict scenario, the governance actors would yet to be clearly defined. Even public officials need not be definitely representing the new state actors and system. It might take more time for the state actors to finalize this considering their political affiliation and other factors. These officials themselves would not be clear about their own role in the new state and how to engage with citizens. In such a situation, identifying the appropriate actors for engagement is a difficult and a delicate issue to be tackled.

Actors and their skills in engagement: Most of the new state actors would be inexperienced in engaging with citizens through a participatory approach. However, it is also possible to identify champions among the state actors for further engagement or at least to provide spaces or enabling an environment for citizen engagement.
Reading References


6. Marthaler, Esther & Gabriel, Sidonia 2013, A Manual on 3 steps for working in fragile and conflict affected situations, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
Annotated Bibliography
(The annotations are overviews written afresh and not abstracts from the publication)

1. Civic engagement – concepts

http://www.bicc.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Publications/bulletins/bulletin42.pdf
Deliberating the *fundamental question of transfer of powers to civil society institutions*, the paper elaborates three dimensions of this transfer – representation, citizenship and public domain. Donors and international agencies are increasingly delegating work to CSOs rather than traditional, elected governments in an effort to bypass corrupt institutions. These CSOs thus emerge as the new representatives of the people. They also form their constituencies (of people) by using the logic of citizenship. The paper, however, points out that over-delegation of tasks to non-state actors can lead to the shrinking of the public domain – that space where citizens claim rights directly from the state. The paper would be a good starting point to introduce civic engagement as well as its impact (positive and negative) on the space available under the tag ‘public domain’.

Although this paper contains a case study (Johannesburg), it better serves as a conceptual paper to introduce the ideas of political capital and double dealing. Equally important is the paper’s exposition of community leaders emerging as brokers (to use the author’s term) between local residents and government institutions.

DRC. 2006. Taking a Citizen’s Perspective. Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability
Section 2 of this paper, especially, the sub-section ‘the nature of citizenship – how it emerges, grows and develops’ can be good introduction to notions of citizenship.

or
http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp347.pdf
This paper would be a fitting sequel to the papers on citizenship as this piece looks at what outcomes civic engagement produces. Analysis of over 100 case studies lead to four discernible outcomes of civic engagement: construction of citizenship, strengthening practices of participation, strengthening state responsiveness, and inclusive societies. The paper is special for its inductive methodology that derives theory out of evidence rather than prescribing normative exhortations.

Introductory paper on democratic accountability. The paper outlines four aspects to measure the effectiveness of accountability: standards, answerability, responsiveness and enforceability. Includes 16 case studies where civic engagement has held government accountable.

A good follow up to the concept of democratic accountability discussed in the previous paper. It explains the previous conceptual approaches to social accountability, such as the principal-agent approach, the supply driven/demand driven approach, the horizontal/vertical accountability approach etc., and proposes a new framework that looks at evidences and checks whether theoretical concepts actually work. A large number of social accountability case studies are mentioned in the paper.

The paper argues for a much broader view on representation than what is usually accorded to it by literature – going beyond the traditional notions and encompassing new actors. The paper also deals with how claims of representation are made.

2. Entry points for civic engagement

DRC. 2011. Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action across States and Societies. Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability
The paper brings out key concepts in civic engagement by churning over 150 case studies. At the outset, the paper describes the ‘seeing like citizen approach’ and the ‘actor-oriented approach’ to civic engagement. The examples of Bangladesh (service delivery – poverty reduction), Brazil (service delivery – health) and Angola (conflict zone) provide three case studies of civic engagement.

http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/Mis_SPC/60827_DPRGaventaMcGee_Preprint.pdf
The examples provided in this paper make it a useful resource on transparency and accountability initiatives by civil society as an entry point for civic engagement.

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14719037.2012.657837#.VD43CFqKdA
The paper is a conceptual analysis of social accountability. The novelty of the paper, however, lies in its conceptualisation of social accountability as a set of disaggregated actions, each of which is a part of long-term engagement with the state. Thus, social accountability is pictured as a possible entry point for civic engagement.

Piper, Laurence and Bettina von Lieres. 2014. Introduction: The Crucial Role of Mediators in Relations between States and Citizens. In Bettina von Lieres and Laurence Piper (eds.)
**Mediated Citizenship: The Informal Politics of Speaking for Citizens in the Global South.**
London: Palgrave Macmillan
The title is self-explanatory – mediators: the unusual suspects

http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/CivilSociety%27sClaims_Houtzager-GurzaLavalle.pdf
The article stands out because of an unusual story that it brings out – civil society groups choosing the role of people’s representatives (and thereby posing as a threat to elected representatives) as an entry point of civic engagement in Brazil. The paper discusses how these actors establish their political legitimacy amongst people in the absence of historically established mechanisms such as elections. The new actors interpret their activity of representation in one of six ways: electoral, membership, proximity, identity, mediation and service. The authors provide an interesting viewpoint that representation by these actors need not be seen as opposed to participation. A sample of 229 ‘civil organisations’ from Sao Paulo were interviewed. **Note:** the mediators in this study are not individuals, but registered organisations.

http://www.icld.se/eng/pdf/icld_wp7_printerfriendly.pdf
A number of practical examples from Asia mapping how different civil society organisations have found their entry points.

3. Power dynamics in civic engagement

The paper is a quintessential conceptual material as it captures the classic concepts of open, closed and invited spaces of participation, and hidden, visible and invisible powers.
Gaventa, John. “Participation Makes a Difference: But not Always How and Where We might Expect.” *Development Outreach* 13(1): 70-76
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/6107/deor_13_1_70.pdf?sequence=1
Although placed within the pro-participation school, this paper by Gaventa addresses one of the critiques that was raised against the idea of citizen participation – that it does not work sometimes. Gaventa admits that there indeed can be ‘civil society failure’ and traces how and why it can happen.

4. Civic engagement in post-conflict scenarios

The package deals with the post-conflict situations in Nepal and Timor-Leste. Yet, more than as a case study, this paper would better fit as a conceptual material to shed light on the topic of legitimacy – what lends legitimacy to civic engagement in a post-conflict setting. The paper brings out two novel conceptual points: (a) civic engagement in a (post) conflict situation needs to integrate the victims’ perspective. Standardised modes of civic engagement, such as rolling out a truth and reconciliation committee or implementing a human rights approach, are not sufficient, (b) victimhood should not be construed simply as those who bear the brunt of conflict but as a socially and subjectively constructed category.

Title self-explanatory

The manual tells organisations intending to engage in a conflict affected zone how to prepare for its work: (a) understand the conflict context (b) Understand the interaction between the organisation and the conflict context (c) Strategic decisions for programme and project management. Serves as a preparatory toolkit.