

Abstract

Whose Public Action? Analysing Inter-sectoral Collaboration for Service Delivery

Principal Investigator

Richard Batley, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham

Co-investigators:

Natasha Palmer, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Pauline Rose, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex
Kevin Sansom, Water and Engineering Development Centre, University of Loughborough.

Aims and objectives of research

To understand:

- the factors that condition the definitions of public action by government and non-governmental actors in service delivery;
- how their different goals are managed and controlled through alternative forms of contractual and non-contractual organizational arrangements;
- how the characteristics of the service sectors under examination influence the perspectives of actors and the different possible forms of collaborations between organizations.

Key research questions/hypotheses and methods

We anticipate that non-profit organizations will show (i) greater resistance than for-profit enterprises against subordinating their perception of the public interest and (ii) greater difficulty in managing agreements with government because of their looser organizational form. The relationship may be managed through a number of organizational arrangements which may be more or less suited to managing these tensions: contract, joint venture agreements, co-production and loose collaboration.

Questions

- How do alternative perspectives on and approaches to 'public action' arise in government and non-government bodies?
- Whose perception prevails in a given engagement?
- Can bodies with different perceptions and interests work together? How can this be organized?
- Is non-governmental public action distorted by partnership with government?
- What forms of 'partnership' facilitate joint working and are appropriate to different balances of power, purpose, task and sector?
- Under what conditions do each of the different types of government/non-government collaborative arrangements work or not work?

The selected countries for the field research are Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. These countries offer a wide range of different types of government-non-governmental collaboration within some broadly similar social and political traditions. The research will involve a mixed-method approach, including quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected through surveys and in-depth case studies:

- collation and synthesis of literature across service sectors and contexts;
- scoping of government/non-government relationships in service delivery;
- survey on size and scope of non-government service delivery, funding sources, forms and nature of relationship with government, motivations and perceptions;
- analysis of case studies of different forms of collaboration;
- further in-depth analysis of case studies and their development over time.

Relation to the programme

This project explores the boundaries between government and non-government bodies in defining and executing action in service delivery. It also refers to the characteristics of actors in terms of their established practices, ideologies, interest base, accountability and organizational form.

Relevance of this research to user groups

Governments have widely failed to provide adequate public services. This is particularly important for poor people who need the basic services - primary health, primary education, water and sanitation - that will allow them to satisfy their own needs and to be productive citizens. In many countries, they have turned to non-governmental providers to fill the gaps left by the failure of government services.

Our practical objective is to identify partnership arrangements that best accommodate differences of policy objective and structural conditions between government and non-government providers of services, and to indicate the factors that need to be taken into account when partners enter into contractual relationships or understandings.

Contact details

Professor Richard Batley
International Development Department
School of Public Policy
University of Birmingham
Birmingham B15 2TT, UK

email: R.A.Batley@Bham.ac.uk
tel: 44 (0) 121 414 4985
fax: 44 (0) 121 414 7995

Dr. Natasha Palmer
email: natasha.palmer@lshtm.ac.uk

Dr. Pauline Rose
email: p.m.rose@sussex.ac.uk

Mr Kevin Sansom
email: k.r.sansom@lboro.ac.uk

September 2005