



**Non-Governmental
Public Action
Programme**

Preliminary Research Findings Brief

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

Project aims, objectives, methods

The research examines how and why relationships between governments and non-state service providers (NSPs) have been formed and evolved, and what balance of influence emerges between these actors. Among NSPs, its particular focus is on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including voluntary and community organizations.

The specific objectives are to understand:

1. The factors that condition government and non-governmental actors' definitions of public action (policies and practices) about service provision;
2. The effect of the organizational form of the relationship on the influence that government and NSPs are able to assert;
3. The strategies actors employ to manage the relationship and their influence in it.
4. The effect of service characteristics on the perspectives of actors and the forms of collaboration between organizations.

The core research hypothesis is that government and NSPs involved in a service delivery relationship have different perceptions and priorities which are likely to lead to contention about the purposes and processes of public action. The way that their relationship is formally and informally organized (in a range from vertical contracts to mutual agreements), by setting the rules of the game, affects the capacity of the 'partners' to assert influence.

The research focuses on Pakistan, Bangladesh and India and on three service sectors: primary education, primary health care, and community-based sanitation. These countries offer a wide range of different types of state/non-state collaboration within some broadly similar social, political and administrative traditions, though with clear divergences in their state formation and regime type.

In each country, the research examined relationships between state and non-state actors first in their *historical evolution*, then at the level of national *programmes of activity*, within which particular *case studies* of relations between government bodies, NGOs and voluntary organizations were undertaken. The results of the case studies were then tested for their wider relevance at programme level. The research was undertaken through a combination of qualitative methods: literature reviews and documentary analysis; key informant interviews with government, donors, NGOs, associations of NGOs, and academics; and detailed semi-structured interviews with the government and non-government actors involved in the case relationships.

Key research findings (bullet points)

1. The policy environment in principle favours 'partnership' between government and non-state service providers but in practice actors' goals are ambivalent

- Government policy, generally and in all three service sectors, uses the discourse of partnership. This is partly in response to recognized failure of public services but also to donor advocacy and broad international policy currents.
- Current commitments to the principle of partnership are underlain by histories of contention as well as of collaboration between governments and non-state providers about their respective roles and access to external funding. Suspicion and mistrust remain deep and have probably grown as more funding has been channelled to NGOs.
- Further analysis will be undertaken of the ways in which NGOs' formation and interaction with government are influenced by the histories and institutional characteristics of the state in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. However, the patterns seem to differ markedly. In Bangladesh, parallel systems of government and NGO services exist; donor action plays an ambiguous role in supporting each separately while also now encouraging contractual relations between government and NGOs. In India, external funding is not an important influence except at local level, and state dominance in provision is the starting point for NGOs' attempt to influence service delivery through advocacy and pilot schemes. In Pakistan, under the influence of regime needs and donor policies, the concept of public private partnership has been strongly adopted but generally means the recruitment of philanthropic and NGO support for government provision.
- The main level of operational collaboration in service delivery is at local level, but in Bangladesh and Pakistan the support or approval of higher levels of government has been essential. Particularly where agreements or contracts are negotiated above the operational level of government, there is often a gulf between, on the one hand, the policy commitment to collaboration and, on the other, the professional and bureaucratic antipathy which has to be overcome by NGOs' strategies.
- Non-state service providers (including the 'for-profit' sector) are prolific in all three service areas. In the case of health, they are the major provider. NGOs and voluntary organizations historically have been most active in education and least in sanitation (where communities and households predominate). However, numbers have grown in response to governments' and donors' policy emphases and anticipated funding; for example, numbers involved in community sanitation have grown fast in response to the national strategy developed in Bangladesh. With the growth in numbers and shared need to enter into dialogue with government and donors, NGOs have collaborated in umbrella associations - though these may later have been weakened by the need to compete for contracts.

2. Agreements between government and NSPs are becoming more formal and hierarchic but agreements are more likely to be sustained where they are mutual and/or relational

- The initiative to enter agreements, and to formalize them, may come from NGOs, government or donors. NGOs may seek clarity of roles, obligations and the access to funding that an official agreement provides. Governments, particularly where they act as channels of external funding to NGOs, may need to demonstrate that they have systems to ensure NGOs' compliance. However, in some of the research cases, NGOs' greater familiarity with international discourse and their strong connections in government have allowed them to take the lead in shaping agreements.
- The research found a tendency towards increased formalization of agreements, as written MOUs or contracts. These took the form either of 'vertical contracts' where one party (the NGO) was to be funded by and act as agent of government, or of mutual agreements where the parties were separately funded but agreed to contribute to common or complementary ends. The basis of trust between the partners may range from tight legal provisions, at one end of the spectrum, to relationships based on repeated cooperation and unwritten understandings, at the other end. Contracts may be relational to a greater or lesser degree, both in vertical or mutual agreements, but the former are more likely to be legalistic and the latter relational.
- In practice, agreements are often uncertain, unclear and incomplete. Not only is contracting

capacity often weak in government but also NGOs are often reluctant contractors, without the systems or the willingness to serve as government's agent. Moreover, the characteristics of education and health care (and qualitative aspects of community sanitation) make them difficult candidates for certainty. As a result, formal agreements or contracts often raise new areas of tension about the interpretation of respective roles and duties, whether these are too unclear vaguely defined or too mechanistically applied. Vertical or 'principal-agent' contracts are most likely to generate tensions and the subordination of non-governmental to governmental perceptions of public action, unless contracts are qualified by a strong relational element. Mutual agreements, which avoid the subordination of one party to the other, allow both sides to maintain their public action commitments – but these usually depend on both sides having independent lines of funding.

3. NGOs are not powerless in their relations with governments and donors; they may pursue strategies that balance independence, financial survival and commitment to their own goals.

- The case studies showed that NGOs and governments were less locked into contrary perceptions and priorities by institutional conditioning factors than our core hypothesis suggested. The research found that service delivery NGOs had grown up in relation to government (and donors) and responded to changing policies and sources of funding. Nevertheless, they were to various degrees conditioned by their own founding values, the personal commitments of leaders, links with communities, their niche technical specialisms, and their desire to preserve the organization itself.
- An important influence on the strategy of NGOs is the nature of their leadership which is often highly personalized and sometimes autocratic; even where approaches are more team-based, this is often on the basis of personal inspiration. Much therefore depends on leaders' entrepreneurial capacity to influence or adapt to the policy and funding environment. Some of the research cases illustrate leaderships that influence public action on the basis of a communitarian and moralistic mission; others appeal to professional or universal values. In practice, organizations tend to make broad claims of both types, but there are polar distinctions between those that retain an original community and ideological base and those that seek wider opportunities for influence and funding. In either case, leaders' personal networks in government and donors are fundamental.
- Networks are a resource of social capital that NGOs may bring to the relationship with government to advance and defend their interests. The type of network that is important may vary by context: elite personal connections seem to be particularly important in Pakistan; inter-NGO umbrella associations may be particularly important in Bangladesh. Some NGOs' proximity to donors may open doors to governments seeking donor funding. The claim to having strong community links, justified or not, is almost always a strong legitimizer of NGOs' status in the eyes of government and donors. Apart from the role of pre-existing networks as a resource, fundamentally important to the development and retention of a service delivery relationship is active networking with officials (and sometimes politicians) particularly at the local, operational levels of government.
- Non-state service providers act in different contexts with different scope for autonomous action. They do not always seek autonomy from government but to influence it by collaboration – their concern may be less to do with the making of public policy than with implementing it more effectively. Even where autonomy is prized, NGOs have to balance it against considerations of financial and organizational survival. Among the case study NGOs, we can identify three broad strategies with regard to the relation between resource dependence and autonomy:
 - NGOs that avoid financial dependence on government or donors, rely on untied independent funding, and seek mutual relationships with government.
 - Those that seek to reduce financial dependence on any one donor or government contract by maintaining a mix of sources of (tied) funding, perhaps with a mix of mutual and vertical relationships with government.
 - Those that (have to) accept dependence on one or a few sources of funding in a vertical relationship – but usually preferring direct donor funding.
- NGOs may favour different policy ends and implementation means than government. However, in the case studies, where there were differences it was more often about means than ends, and NGOs were tactically astute enough to represent differences as complementarities. In a

vertical contractual relationship, it is important that the agent indicate its willingness to cooperate with the principal's means and ends, or to allow itself to be co-opted. In any case, the general strategy observed in the case studies was the avoidance of conflict or confrontation with government - not only because the NGO would lose business but also because it would sacrifice influence.

- All the NGOs we studied put great emphasis on working with government, cultivating relations with officials and politicians, and giving credit for any achievement to governments rather than claiming it for themselves. While they may look for opportunities to exit from or to diversify the relationship with government, so long as they are in it they feel the need to exercise voice *with* loyalty. Thus many seek to influence how public services are provided, not by advocacy from the outside but by lobbying from the inside – shaping and influencing government policy and then acting as a support to government in implementing it. To obtain and retain this insider relationship with government, NGOs need to find ways of winning official trust and confidence by, for example
 - Maintaining official and political networks of influence and support
 - Responding to government and donor policies and priorities
 - Demonstrating professionalism in the work they undertake
 - Providing scarce technical skills (such as geographical information systems in the sanitation sector)
 - Offering the comparative advantage of their proximity to communities.

Policy and practice implications (bullet points)

- In South Asia, as in Sub-Saharan Africa, non-state service provision is usually large; it is greater than that of government in health and sanitation provision. Knowing its scale and how it operates is a fundamental requirement for policymakers who seek improved service provision for poor people. NGOs are just one part of non-state provision.
- The case for 'partnership' between government and non-state service providers is generally acknowledged by government, NGOs and donors. It has entered the lexicon of all service strategies, and in that sense the field is wide open for experimentation. However, the term is used indiscriminately to describe a wide variety of forms of relationship that may or may not be doing what policy makers intended. Different forms of relationship may extend public service provision on governments' terms or extend choice by setting up alternative systems. They may extend the effectiveness of provision by harnessing all available resources or weaken it through fragmentation. Governments, donors and NGOs need to be clearer about what they are aiming to achieve and what the appropriate instruments are.
- Governments' capacity to make and apply agreements and contracts, and NGOs' capacity to deliver them are often weak. Experience of positive cases needs to be disseminated.
- Where external funding by donors is significant it has had a major effect in increasing the number of NGOs that operate in the field of service delivery, particularly in Bangladesh, but this has led to widespread suspicion about 'briefcase NGOs'. One way of dealing with this has been for donors to channel their funding to NGOs through governments and to require competitive bidding for contracts. But this has had its own perverse effects in undermining the flexibility and autonomy of non-governmental public action.
- Mutual agreements, which avoid the subordination of one party to the other, allow both sides to maintain their independent views about the means and ends of public action – but these usually depend on both sides having independent lines of funding.
- There are positive cases where NGOs have had a major part in implementing national programmes. However, most NGOs do not have the motivation or organizational capacity to take on long-term mass delivery roles. They have been most effective on a mass-scale in the case of campaigns such as the community-led sanitation (CLTS) programme in Bangladesh, or where the 'NGO' is effectively part of government such as the provincial Rural Support Programmes in Pakistan. Most NGOs are best equipped to pilot or demonstrate new approaches.
- Service delivery NGOs should not be treated as a single category: their origins, aims and desire for autonomy from government differ. However, what unite those that do enter into a relationship with government are their strategies to maximize their influence by avoiding conflict and building the trust and confidence of government officials.
- Most service delivery NGOs are highly dependent on the inspiration, leadership and personal networks of their founders. Few have negotiated a successful transition to more institutionalized management.
- Advocacy and service delivery are often seen as alternative orientations of NGOs, but this research showed how they may interact. NGOs may engage in a cycle where they influence government's service strategies, shape service delivery mechanisms and then enter into arrangements to deliver the service. Successful approaches seem to be based on a form of soft lobbying from the inside rather than strident advocacy.

Key publications and outputs, with links to versions on the web.

1. Working papers

The 'Whose Public Action?' ESRC/NGPA papers are published at <http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/nonstateprovidersESRC.htm>

S.M. Nurul Alam:

- Bangladesh Country Review: History of State-NSP relations, February 2007
- Identification of Programmes for Study in Bangladesh, February 2007
- Case studies on Unnayan Shahjoggy Team (sanitation), Friends in Village Development (education), Population Services and Training Centre (health), and comparative report

Masooda Bano:

- Pakistan Country Review: History of State-NSP relations, February 2007
- Identification of Programmes for Study in Pakistan: Initial Notes and Methodology, February 2007
- Case studies on the Orangi Pilot Project (sanitation), Idara-Taleem-o-Aagahi (education), Punjab Rural Support Programme (health), and comparative report

Padmaja Nair:

- Scoping Study of Relationships between the State and the Non-Governmental Sector in India, July 2006
- Historical Analysis of Relationships between the State and the Non-Governmental Sector in India, February 2007
- Identification of Programmes for Study in India, February 2007
- Case studies on Shelter Associates (sanitation), Door Step School (education)

Kelly Teamey

- Literature Review on Relationships between Government and Non-state Providers of Services, June 2007

2. Publications

Special Issue of *Public Administration and Development*: Vol. 26, No.3 2006

- Batley, R, 'Guest editor's preface, pp 193-196
- Moran D, 'Comparing services: a survey of leading issues in the sectoral literatures', pp 197-206
- Sansom K, 'Government engagement with non-state service providers of water and sanitation services', pp 207-217
- Rose P, 'Collaboration in education for all? Experiences of government support for non-state provision of basic education in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, pp 219-229
- Palmer N, 'An awkward threesome – donors, governments and non-state providers of health in low income countries, pp 231-240
- Batley R, 'Engaged or divorced? Cross-service findings on government relations with non-state service providers, pp 241-251

3. User-oriented briefing papers

Briefing Papers commissioned by DFID on non-state providers at <http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/nonstateprovidersDFID.htm>

- Sansom, sanitation services, May 2006
- Palmer, health services, June 2006,
- Rose, basic education, September 2006.

Batley, 'Governments and service providers' for Capacity.org (www.capacity.org) published quarterly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) and SNV the Netherlands Development Organisation.

Rose, Government and non-state sector collaboration to reach education for all, <http://www.id21.org/education/e1pr1g1.html> Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 17 March 2007.

Batley, 'Addressing mistrust between governments and non-state service providers', id21 urban development main page, <http://www.id21.org/urban/u1rb1g1.html> Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 14 August 2007.

- Also in Local Government Analysis and Research Bulletin of The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/13956>

4. Conferences

Rose - Convenor of Panel on non-state providers, and paper presentation on Non-state provision of education in sub-Saharan Africa. African Studies Association, SOAS. September 2006

Siegmann - Seminar in Islamabad, Pakistan on 'Public-private partnerships in healthcare' and Public-private partnerships in water and sanitation, organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute and papers by Karin Siegmann (ex-research collaborator, Pakistan), 18 September and 27 November, 2006

Batley and Nair - Organized Workshop in Sydney, Australia on *Effective partnerships for the provision of essential services*, within biennial conference of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Development, papers by Richard Batley and Padmaja Nair, 21 October 2006

- Batley: 'Creating an enabling environment for non-state service delivery' and 'Facilitating and regulating non-state actors'
- Nair: 'Contracting and collaboration'

Rose - Presentation at the Stakeholders Forum of the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Cape Town, 10-14 December 2006

Palmer and Rose – Presentations on non-state provision in health and education at DFID Human Development Retreat, 6 February 2007

Rose - UK Forum for International Education and Development – Convenor of Section on Non-state providers and new education systems:

<http://www.cfbt.com/UKFIET/sections/themedsection/non-stateproviders.aspx>

Paper presented on 'Growth in education systems through collaboration? Exploring relationships between non-state providers and the State in South Asia', September 2007.

Batley - Presentation to DSA NGO Study Group on 'Government's relations with NSP. Can they work together?', University of Sussex, 19 September 2007

Rose - Invited presentation on 'NGO provision of education in urban slums:

Opportunities and obstacles for migrant children and youth, *Migration, Education and Socio-Economic Mobility Workshop*. University of East Anglia [paper to be prepared for a Special Issue from the workshop] November 2007.

For further information

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<http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/index.htm>