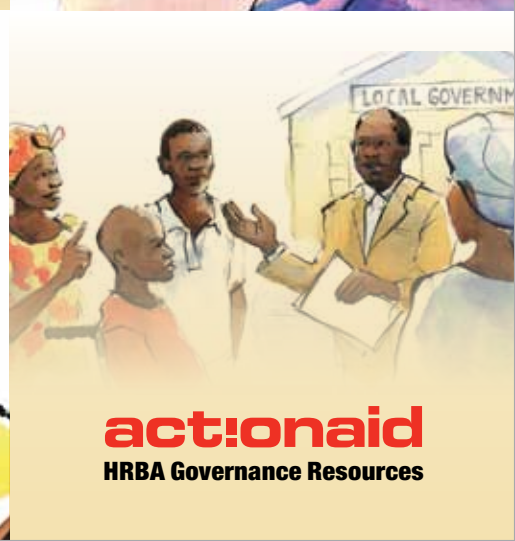
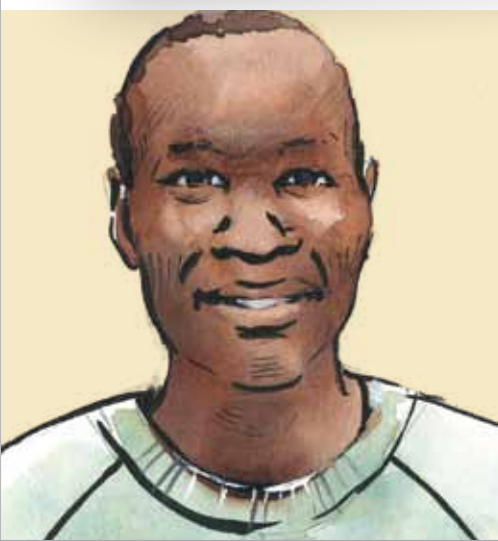




**Just and Democratic Local Governance**

# Power

Elite Capture and Hidden Influence



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HRBA Governance Resources

**Just and Democratic Local Governance**

# Power

Elite Capture and Hidden Influence

**Power**

– Elite Capture and Hidden Influence

Published by ActionAid  
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This book has been produced by ActionAid’s International Governance Team (IGT) and supplements ActionAid’s Human Rights Based Approach – People’s Action in Practice. This book is part of a series under the common title of Just and Democratic Governance and focuses on governance issues, approaches and tools that are relevant in all ActionAid’s work in Local Rights Programmes.

**Acknowledgement of sources:**  
 The content of this resource book has been inspired and informed by many other publications, papers and reports and numerous inputs, comments and suggestions from ActionAid staff and partners. A list of major sources appears at the end of the book.

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# Human Rights form the basis for ActionAid's work

Human Rights form the basis for ActionAid's work. ActionAid believes that poverty violates human rights and that this happens because of unequal power relations which start in the family and extend up to the global level. Violations of Human rights are often a result of failures in governance. Governance is about the relationship between citizens and the state and the way the state uses its power and authority to manage its political, economic and administrative affairs. ActionAid believes in democratic people-centred governance where governance processes and the exercise of power are guided by human rights principles and values. Together these constitute the idea of rights-based, people-centred governance based on the rule of law and principled on democratic values of participation, equity, justice and fairness.

ActionAid's approach to human rights is explained in the publication: ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach – People's Action in Practice. This publication informs the Just and Democratic Governance series which this title is a part of.

The Just and Democratic Local Governance series is intended for civil society practitioners and activists working at the local level. The five books can be read independently, but they complement each other and contribute to a more overall picture of key governance issues of importance to ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach. The series focuses on the local level and will support practitioners in their efforts to achieve ActionAid's strategic promises of improving service delivery for poor people and achieving a fairer distribution of resources to finance public policies aimed at reducing poverty.

It is now generally acknowledged that strengthening accountability mechanisms and holding the state to account plays a crucial role in securing improvements in service delivery. Citizens can most easily influence the state at the local level. Decentralisation reforms in many countries have enabled citizens to form responsive local governments and hold these and other state institutions at the local level to account. Civil society action has demonstrated that considerable improvements can be achieved even without extra external resources by simply focusing on improving local accountability relationships and decentralised governance systems. This approach can achieve significant improvements in a short space of time for the most marginalised, many of whom only have limited access to any type of service.

Clearly many problems cannot be solved at the local level. National and international policies, global patterns of wealth generation and distribution are factors that impact on the local level and determine how much room there is to manoeuvre. The struggle for democracy and human rights at the local level must therefore necessarily be linked to national and international campaigns.

The five books in the series cover issues from a general perspective and do not take specific national contexts into account. However, support will be given to developing national versions of these resource books and translating them into national languages. The current series of five titles is focused at the local level and we hope that it will assist practitioners in improving services for the poor. Forthcoming titles will focus on how the local level can effectively link up with national struggles.

# Power and social change

You cannot change society without having power and influence yourself. For your voice to be heard and your demands for change to be taken seriously, you need political power. Much of our work is a struggle to build up the necessary political power by peaceful and democratic means in order to be able to influence power holders towards supporting a more just, democratic and equitable vision of the future.

We all have experience of what power is. For many of us what most easily comes to mind is the giving and receiving of orders. Sometimes we are in a position to tell someone to do something, and other times people tell us what to do and we have to do it. But there is more to power than this. It is more subtle and complex than most of us immediately recognise. Many attempts to bring about social change have failed because we did not think enough about power relations.

This book focuses on power relations in social change processes at the local level. In local communities

most people are aware that large landowners, factory bosses, local politicians, traditional leaders and the media have considerable power. Often people have only a sketchy idea of the hidden connections that weave these groups together with one another, with political leaders and parties, with the media, with schools and hospitals and the military in a web of systematic connections that create a local regime which is itself part of a much larger and more powerful national regime. Because you can barely see the shadows of this ruling system, it is hard for people to see their own potential to create alternative people centred democratic forums for decision making.

This resource book explores the theme of power. It discusses key issues about what power is, how it is used and what role power plays in change processes. It presents tools for analysing power and practical strategies for civil society practitioners to manoeuvre and negotiate through the webs of hidden power towards more inclusive people centred development.

## The Problem of Power – manifestations



*– When we tell our MP that the school roof has fallen through, he just tells us to file a request for repair at the District Education Office. When we file the request, nothing happens.*



*– When we tell the MP that nothing has happened, he says we have to be patient and follow the rules, yet the same man is busy breaking almost every rule there is.*

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How come that the rich landowner always gets the most irrigated water. Well, he's good friends with the local water engineer, in fact they went to school together and his wife's sister is married to the under-secretary in the Ministry of Power and Water, and then just to make really sure that they understand each other, they meet occasionally for a coffee and a chat where a little brown envelope is passed beneath the table. That's how.

Of course this shouldn't happen. Society is supposed to run by rules and laws, we all know that. We have heard our president say so and heard him quote long sentences from the constitution, about how we are all citizens equal under the law and how human rights will be respected, protected and fulfilled. It sounds good, even feels good when you hear it, but we all know that it doesn't work like that. And we all know that things won't get better for people living in poverty until we can make our society work by rules and laws. If the rules and laws function, then you can build a society where men and women are equal, where there is justice, respect and dignity.

The idea's simple really, but how do you make it happen? This is what this book is about. It's about how good leadership with the power to make things happen can build a better world for all people. It's about how to overcome corrupt power that operates secretly from behind the scenes

for the benefit of only a few people. If we are going to build a better world we have to know how to manage power, authority and leadership for the benefit of the majority of people.

We have all heard our leaders telling us that they are trying to build a better world. But all too often these noble ideals become eroded and corrupted. Our leaders become preoccupied with staying in power and getting rich. They discover that they can bend the rules and get away with it and that's where the problem starts. It's all about the problem of power – how to manage it and make it work for the betterment of all people, especially for women and the most marginalised.

Someone once said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." They are right. If there are no checks and balances on leaders and the power they wield, then they have a free hand.

Leadership and power are necessary and crucial for social change. But change must be inspired by a vision that includes everybody and must be based on the values embedded in democracy and human rights. Leaders must be accountable which means having a binding duty to answer questions and explain yourself when things go wrong and then facing up to the consequences of one's actions.



*–The rich landowners were able to influence the decision about where the irrigation channels should be placed so that they could get most of the water. Poor farmers were not even consulted.*

As we all know, some people have more power than others. These people tend to be those who are wealthier, better educated or who have some special standing in the community such as a teacher, a priest, businessmen, landowners and even criminals. If the rule of law is weak and the laws unjust, leaders and powerful people can bend the rules, break the law and even change the law, to promote their own ends without getting caught. They effectively become above the law. This

allows them to give orders and gifts, buy favours, and pay bribes, or make threats and use violence, more or less without any risk of being caught. This kind of power is not used for the common good; it is illegal, it breaks the law, and contravenes human rights and democratic principles and values.





*– Listen to this, I just read in the paper about the national chief of police who was found guilty of corruption and money-laundering police welfare funds worth more than US\$144 million. That's an awful lot of money. How is it possible to rob police pensions on this scale?*



*– Corruption in our society is not just about some people dipping into petty cash for some pocket money. The whole system is corrupt. It's a whole parallel economy. It affects everything, systematic fraud in procurement, in revenue and taxation.*

This type of power can be very influential. It works against the policies and practices that government publicly says that it is trying to achieve. It is done secretly and if it is exposed it is denied. It can occur in the family, the community, in local and national governments, in NGOs and donors as well as in international business corporations and international bodies.

When things go this far, there is a real problem for poor people. The dice are loaded against them. Of course you can't have a society without leaders with power and authority. People with power and authority are necessary in order to get things done. We know that and we know that there are good leaders who follow the rules and set an example. Power is not bad in itself; it is bad people who give power a bad name.

We all have some power ourselves; for most of us it's in our family or community – the question is how we use it. Most of us know what it is like to be powerless, where we have no chance of influencing

what's happening to us. Taxes are suddenly put up. A road is driven through our backyard.

But real powerlessness is experienced by millions of poor people all over the world every day where just getting something to eat is a problem. For them power is about being oppressed, being held down with no hope of change.

But there is another power, the power to stand up and say no, I will not submit to these injustices. Civil society organisations are forming all over the world to say 'no' to unjust oppressive power and 'yes' to power based on the rule of law, human rights and justice.

We can do this by setting an example ourselves and using the law of the land and International Human Rights to draw attention to cases where the law is broken and rights denied. Doing this is easier said than done. We have to start by understanding the power we are up against. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## People and Power – essential concepts

You cannot change society without having power and influence – change for the better for poor people rarely happens by itself. For your voice to be heard and your demands for change to be taken seriously, you need power. Much of our work is a struggle to build up the necessary power by peaceful and democratic means in order to be able to influence power wielders towards supporting a more just, democratic and equitable vision of the future.

We all have experience of what power is. For many of us what most easily comes to mind is the giving and receiving of orders. Sometimes we are in a position to tell someone to do something, and other times people tell us what to do and we have to do it. But there is more to power

**This book is about people who have power** of the type described here which they can use to control and influence decisions, events and outcomes in society. We refer to them as powerful people, powerful groups, power holders and leaders. They can come from all sections of society; from the state in the form of bureaucrats or what are sometimes called duty bearers; from the business or market sector, from the military, from the police, from religious institutions, from political parties, from civil society and from criminal gangs and syndicates.

than this. It is more subtle and complex than most of us immediately recognise. Many attempts to bring about social change have failed because we did not think enough about power relations. In this chapter we are going to try and unpack power in a little more detail.

### How do we see power?

When you think about it, power plays a role in all human relationships; it is there in every problem and every solution. But what is power and where does it come from?

There are a number of sources of power, in other words things that give us power either as an individual or a group. First of all, there is **authority and position**. This is the power that an individual or a group has because of their role in society. People like policemen, heads of businesses and politicians have this kind of power. This kind of power is backed by rules, norms and resources. People with this type of power can often reward and punish people who they have authority over.

Another source of power is **access to and control over resources**. These are things like raw materials, technology, finance, factories, land, transport, media and communications systems. If you own or control these you have power and influence. Some individuals and corporate companies are very powerful because they control enormous amounts of money.



*– There's no way I can stop the landlord cheating me. I feel absolutely powerless.*



*– In my experience, people in authority just see power as a way of dominating and controlling others.*



– You have to see that power is also enabling and creative; it's what can change the world and make it a better place.

Also important are **networks** – that is all the people you know, especially those who have authority. The saying 'It's not what you know, but who you know' has a great deal of truth to it. Social connections and personal contacts are an important source of power and means of influence.

**Skills, education and expertise** are also important. Knowing how to use and maintain equipment and manage key processes to get things done is a source of considerable power. The same goes for information. If you know what is going on and other people do not, you have more power than they do.

**Personal qualities** are also important. Things like intelligence, confidence, determination, charisma and ability to communicate all increase a person's credibility and ability to lead and influence and take up powerful positions in society.

### Is power necessary?

Without power, society cannot function. Parents, teachers and leaders have to tell their children, their pupils and their people what to do and what not to do, what is right and what is wrong. Actions and behaviours need to be rewarded or punished. Power has a lot to do with how humans act and behave and most people would agree that stealing, fighting and killing should be stopped and punished and

to do that requires the exercise of power.

Power is also competitive. Powerful people and groups compete with each other to become the most powerful. Powerful people believe that their vision of the future is crucial for their success, their group's success or their country's success. They want to change society and that's why they struggle so hard to become more powerful. Sometimes this struggle for power becomes violent and destructive. To prevent this, many societies try to find ways to control violence and let power changes happen in peaceful ways which do not disrupt or destroy society. This is one of the key ideas embedded in the concept of democracy and the idea of holding elections as a way of transferring power from one leader to another in a peaceful manner.

We often have a tendency to think of power as being negative, the power of one person over another, the power of force and control over people, resources and decisions. Indeed the main focus of this book is on understanding and combating negative power, where power is corrupted and abused for personal gain and where rules, regulations and human rights are ignored or brushed out the way.

However, power and leadership are the means by which we can change society for the better and in this context power is also



– I don't understand what gives someone the legitimate right to hold power when they break all the rules.

a positive force which fosters collaboration and people's capacity to act creatively and work together for a better world.

Each of us has the **power to act**. We have the capacity to create a more equal, just and fair society. Finding direction for our actions requires us to discover the **power within ourselves**. This has to do with our sense of self-worth, our identity and the values we aspire and adhere to and our understanding of being citizens with rights and responsibilities. Discovering this power within involves a process of empowerment and much of our work as activists for social justice focuses on helping communities and individuals to embark on this journey.

Along the way we will discover that there is **power with others** – the power of solidarity. We will find that there are others who share our experience and our vision

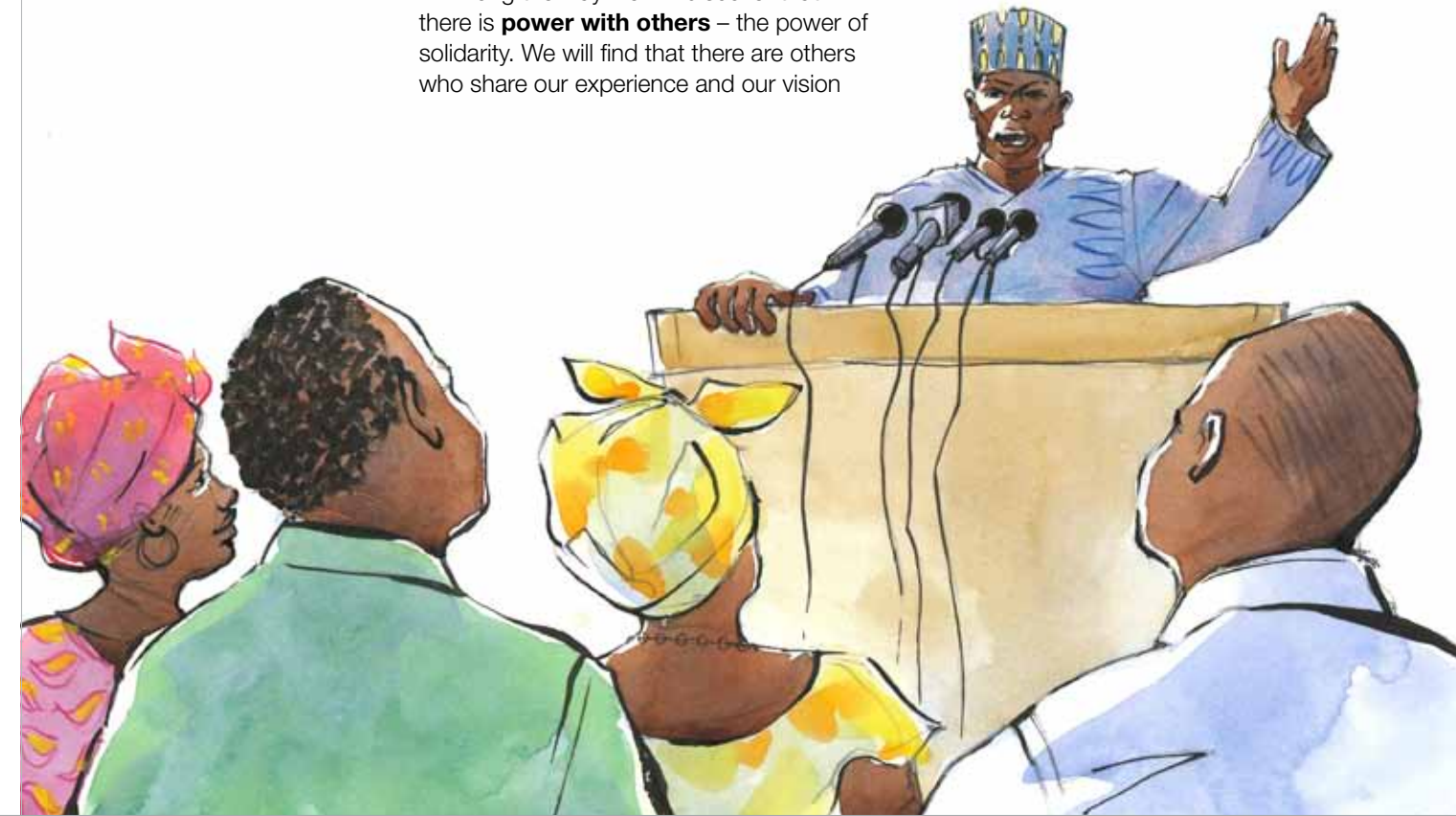
of a more just society. Together we can find common ground among our different interests and collectively develop the strength to challenge injustice. Indeed the **power of collective action** by poor and marginalised people is at the heart of how we believe civil society can help create a more just and fair society.

As we have seen power is necessary for organising social life and developing society. The issue is therefore not power itself; but rather understanding how power works, how people get it and how they use it and what they use it for. We will look at this in the next sections.

### Think about this...



"If one meets a powerful person .... one can ask five questions: what power do you have; where did you get it; in whose interests do you exercise it; to whom are you accountable; and, how can we get rid of you? Anyone who cannot answer the last of those questions does not live in a democratic system." TONY BENN, 16 NOV 1998.





– Our aim is to expose illegitimate hidden power by peaceful and legal means...



– ... and to promote the exercise of power by legitimate visible means based on transparent laws and rules.

### Is power legitimate?

As we have seen, power is necessary and much power is exercised by people in positions of authority. They have power over other people and resources. This raises the question of legitimacy. By what right do people hold power? Legitimacy is about whether something is done in accordance with rules, principles or standards. Our ultimate standard is International Human Rights. If a country's laws and rules fulfil Human Rights standards, then we would consider these as legitimate. If power is then exercised in accordance with these laws then we would see the exercise of power as being legitimate.

If laws and rules do not fulfil Human Rights standards, we would consider the exercise of power based on these laws as illegitimate, in other words not in accordance with established Human Rights standards. The same would apply when laws and rules which do fulfil human rights standards are broken or ignored by power holders when they exercise power.

As activists working for social justice we are working for reforms which will lead to power being exercised in accordance with laws that fulfil human rights standards.

### Understanding power

A useful way of thinking about how power works is to think of it as being: **visible**, **hidden** and **invisible**. All societies, both in the north and south, display these three types of power. Let's look at these in a little more detail.

**Visible power** is exercised through formal rules, laws, structures and procedures such as parliaments, local governments, and councils of elders or village chiefs. It is called visible because it is based on rules and laws which you can get information about so that you know why a decision was taken. Usually a person is empowered by an authority mandate to exercise power based on the law or rules. For example in meetings, the chairperson usually has the power to set the agenda for the meeting and make the members follow the formal rules for the way the meeting is conducted. In planning processes there may be a set of rules and procedures for how the planning process should be managed. Likewise, with complaints, there are often formal rules for how a complaint is registered and who deals with it.

Where power is exercised fairly and justly on the basis of laws that fulfil human rights, it is usually accepted by the majority of people. However, if the rules and laws do not fulfil international human rights standards or if the laws and rules do, but are broken or ignored by those exercising power, then visible power is being exercised illegitimately. This form of power is generally not accepted by the majority of people.

As activists working for social justice our aim is to see power exercised legitimately in accordance with laws and rules that fulfil human rights standards. In other words, legitimate visible power. To achieve this requires reforming laws and rules which do not fulfil human rights standards and building effective institutions which can catch power holders who break the law



– At our local school the principal had formal visible power by virtue of her position as the principle, but she also used hidden power with all her gifts and hand-outs to members of the school management committee.

and ignore rules. This means strengthening and reforming institutions such as the police, the courts, regulative bodies and the media as well as enabling civil society to carry out a 'watchdog' or oversight role. For this 'watchdog' role to be effective, it is necessary to ensure the freedom of speech, the freedom to form associations and free access to information.

**Hidden Power** is exercised from behind the scenes by powerful people who are able to influence decisions and outcomes to their own advantage at local, national and international levels. For example, a committee chairman can influence what gets placed on the agenda of a meeting, or who gets invited to the decision-making table. It occurs in all countries in both the north and the south and often involves ignoring rules or breaking laws and established procedures. For this reason we usually regard the exercise of hidden power as illegitimate.

However, there are occasions when this would not be the case. For example, if a leader instructs his officer not to provide emergency aid to a group of people because they do not support him, and the officer does provide the aid anyway by using his hidden influence, then we would not regard this as illegitimate. It was rather the order that was illegitimate.

In some countries the opportunities for using hidden power are much greater than others. Groups of powerful people can get together and make sure that their interests get first priority. The factory owner can talk to the local government planning officer who gives him planning permission to build

a new factory on land owned by the council which was supposed to be a park. In return the planning officer gets a kickback and his brother gets a management job at the factory. Often this kind of thing happens because people can get away with it. The rules and laws in the country are weak and not enforced. Indeed very powerful people often make sure that the rules are not enforced! Needless to say poor people's interests tend to get pushed to the back when this type of power becomes predominant.

As activists working for social justice our aim is to expose illegitimate hidden power by peaceful and legal means and to promote the exercise of power by legitimate visible means based on transparent laws and rules.

**Invisible power** shapes the way we see the world. Our history, our culture and traditions are full of beliefs, habits and unwritten rules which influence how we see the world. Processes of socialization can perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and what we feel comfortable with. The most widespread form of global inequality is founded in invisible power, namely unequal power relations between men and women which are justified in terms of traditions, beliefs and habits. For example, an older male politician may feel very comfortable speaking to a crowd of powerful decision makers, while other citizens may not. Women may find it hard to stand up in front of men and criticise the health care services, because there are traditions and beliefs that women should not do this.



*In my area women have been brought up to uphold male power. If women are going to influence anything they have to do it through men. But we have little experience of working side by side with men, or even other women, on social projects or things like that.*

#### Think about this...



A rich landlord occasionally beats his tenant farmer when he is late paying the rent. The farmer goes home to his family where he beats his wife and terrorises the female members of the family.

Schools, the media, and religious and political leaders shape values and norms that prevent change. In many countries values and prejudices regarding women and racial minorities are present in stories and images that appear in school books, advertisements and in the press.

This kind of power influences whose voices are heard most often and whose voice is taken most seriously and makes it difficult for the voice of the most poor and marginalised to be heard, especially for women and girls. Many powerful people and traditional leaders use this form of invisible power to justify their domination and control of society. They appeal to traditions about the rule of elders and select groups. In some cases this can extend into the domain of the occult where beliefs about the supernatural, ghosts and witchcraft still hold sway. Religious texts are also used to justify that women are inferior to men and traditions which exclude groups of the population from development are perpetuated. Invisible power often underpins hidden power.

However, we must not forget that invisible power can also be positive. It supports and instils many positive values about how we should treat each other, about how we perceive what is just, fair and decent. Invisible power is never static, although sometimes values and traditions may remain fixed over very long periods of time. Today there are many factors influencing invisible power, for example, education, mass media, mobile phones and global TV and communication. These trends provide opportunities to challenge invisible power where it contravenes human

rights. As activists working for social justice we must assist people to appreciate their rights and obligations and understand how and why their rights are denied. Empowerment that challenges unjust invisible power is therefore a very important part of our approach to reducing poverty.

#### How does power work?

All three types of power exist in all societies. They exist alongside each other and understanding how they interact is important for understanding how to fight poverty. In all societies, power will sometimes be exercised legitimately and sometimes illegitimately. Our struggle as activists working for social justice is to see that power is predominantly exercised visibly and legitimately – that is to say power based on transparent laws and rules which fulfil human rights standards. Our greatest challenge in terms of fighting poverty is in societies where hidden illegitimate power is the predominant type of power. This type of power can keep poor people trapped in cycles of poverty for generations. This is what we will now look at.

In societies where hidden illegitimate power is predominant, the trappings of visible legitimate power are usually present. For example, most countries have a constitution, laws, a parliament, a justice ministry and hold elections. But in many countries these institutions do not hold real power. Instead, power is often concentrated in and limited to a number of small coalitions made up of powerful individuals with considerable influence. These coalitions exist at both national and local levels.



*– In our society political power is all about grabbing wealth and influence for yourself, your community or the political party and then giving gifts to people to make them support your interests*

Individuals in the powerful national coalitions come, for example, from major ethnic groups or from important national institutions or organisations like the military, the police, the business community or major political parties. The diagram on the next page illustrates this. The institutions are arranged in a circle on the outside. There may be other types of institutions in your country. The diagram just shows some typical examples.

Heads of the important institutions and other senior staff are often part of the dominant coalition which is headed by the country's leader. They may also be

involved in other influential groups, some of which may even challenge the dominant coalition. These are not formal coalitions with members, but informal arrangements where leading individuals meet, consult and decide what is in their best interest.

These coalitions also exist at the local level. Local level coalitions will reflect local interests but are also mindful of national concerns. People in the same coalition generally share major interests, but they may have different views on other interests. They are concerned about promoting their own interests and are on the lookout for allies to their cause. For example

#### Think about this...

All decision making processes can be manipulated in a number of easy ways by powerful people to make sure that things go the way they want them to. Sometimes it is done in visible ways and other times it is hidden. Here are a few examples:

**Controlling ideology** – the way we see the world is shaped by ideological messages. When ideology strays away from basic democratic and human rights values it can become a powerful tool for suppression and domination.

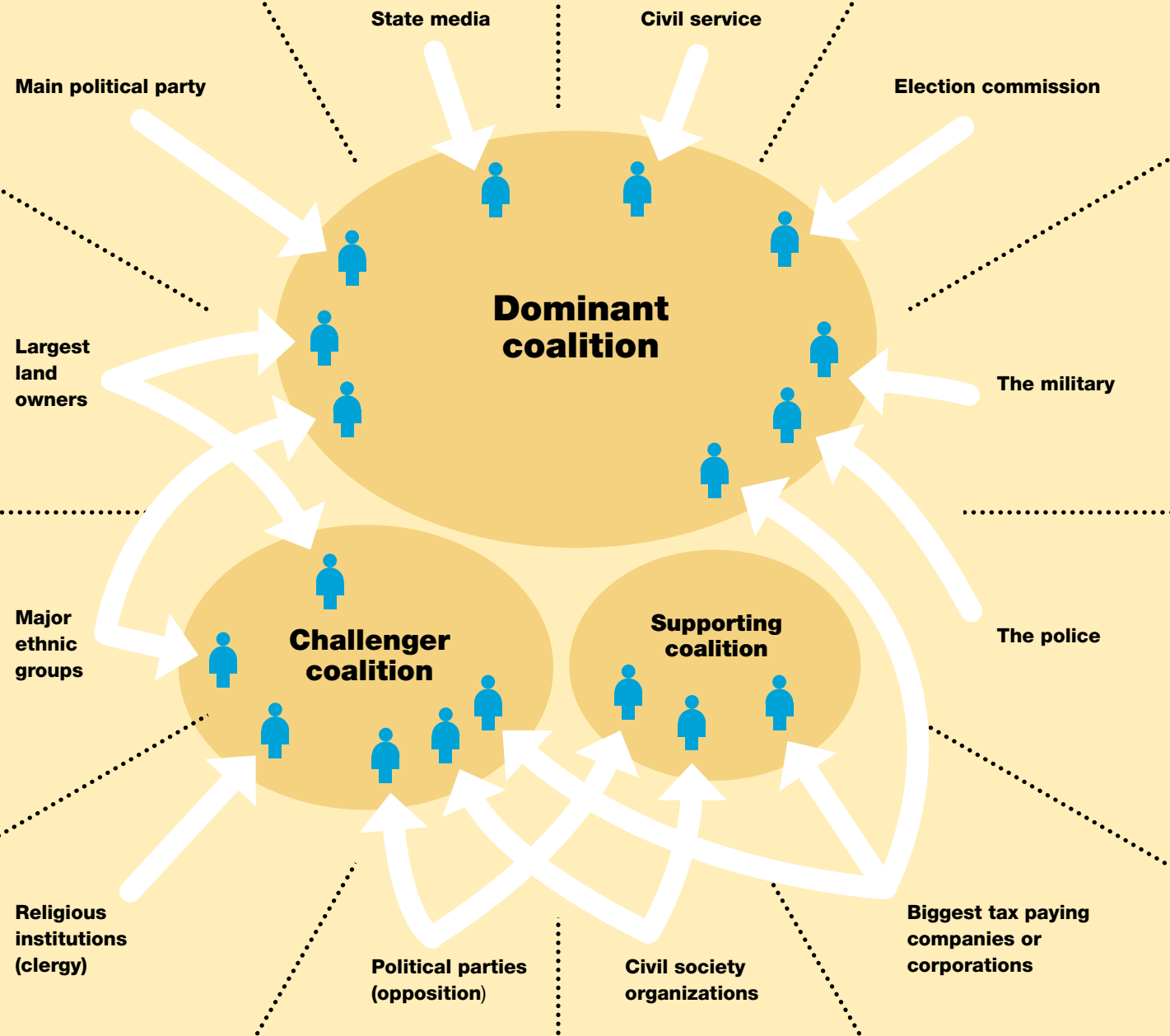
**Shaping the political agenda.** Powerful people can define which rights or issues are priorities for public debate and policy decision-making, and which are not. They can also control the production of and access to information to give credibility to some issues and not others.

**Determining whose voice is heard in decision making arenas.** Deciding who is able to participate, influence, shape and implement public policies by privileging certain groups and excluding others.

**Framing formal decision-making and implementation processes.** Powerful people can organise governance structures and mechanisms that regulate policy implementation so that they benefit some members of society and not others.

ADAPTED FROM J. CHAPMAN AND A. MANCINI (EDS.) (2005) CRITICAL WEBS OF POWER AND CHANGE. ACTIONAID.





'The Political Settlement': Institutions, competing coalitions and powerful people

Leaders and key people

business leaders will want to maintain their control over markets and resources and keep taxes low, large landowners want to maintain ownership and control of their lands, the military and police want to maintain their privileges and their monopoly on the use of violence. Key politicians want to ensure that their supporters are satisfied so that they can stay in power.

The system of coalitions is never static. Individual power and influence waxes and wanes according to unfolding events. A key person may die leaving a power vacuum; a businessman go bankrupt, a new political party may win more seats, valuable land may be sold or a trading concession revoked. Events and incidents like this can change the balance of power.

This mishmash of powerful individuals with differing interests results in rolling agreements among powerful actors in the dominant coalition which are constantly being challenged and renegotiated for the purpose of controlling the potential for violence and maintaining their economic interests and power over the rest of society.

This is where real political power lies. It is a trade-off between support for the leader in exchange for support for one's own interests. It is also known as the 'political settlement' – the circle of powerful and influential individuals and coalitions which has a collective interest in sustaining the governance conditions that allow them to keep control, ensure that their own interests flourish and keep other less powerful groups from becoming more powerful.

**How does hidden illegitimate power keep control?**

Where hidden power is predominant, powerful people in charge often regard the institution they head as being adaptable to their needs. Laws and rules can thus be applied to some people, but not others and procedures and regulations can be changed to suit changing circumstances. Individuals at the top of these institutions play a decisive role in navigating the institution between its public face as an institution based on visible rule governed behaviour, and its hidden role of supporting the interests of the dominant coalition of the political settlement. For example funding for education may be greater in areas where powerful people have their base and less in areas where the opposition is stronger. It is often very difficult to prove these distortions as facts and figures can easily be kept well hidden.

In the face of this, people living in poverty remain marginalised precisely because they do not have the power to influence these powerful people and the normal channels of influence through local councils, elections and complaints procedures are outplayed and out manoeuvred by a parallel system of governance focused on the interests of the few. Hidden power thus represents a highly effective system of maintaining the power of powerful people to the detriment of poor people.



*– Corruption becomes really critical in our district when the politicians, the business community, the civil servants and the police start cooperating in stealing public money.*



*– It's good that administrators are transferred from time to time. Then the system breaks down for a while, before sufficient trust can be built among the powerful to get reorganised to continue as before.*



*– The problem starts at election time. Our politicians use large sums of money to run their campaigns and to buy supporters and voters. When they get into power they have to recover these funds so that they are ready for the next election!*

### How does hidden illegitimate power change?

In societies where hidden illegitimate power is predominant, elections may be held, but they may not have much influence on who actually gets to hold power and what gets decided. Internal negotiations among power holder coalitions are often more important and these changes may not lead to changes for ordinary people as the key focus of the coalition is its own interests. In dictatorships, elections may not be held at all, or be purely symbolic. Here change is more likely to be as a result of a military coup, civil war or mass protests as we have seen in a number of countries recently.

On occasion, challenger coalitions with a different agenda to the dominant coalition may gain greater influence. They may see advantage in allying with the poor, if only for their own ends. These situations represent opportunities for change that can benefit the poor. It is important for social activists to understand the interests that powerful people are pursuing and maintain a dialogue with them. There may be opportunities to press for pro-poor change. In many countries there are now more progressive individuals emerging who hold power and influence, for example the growing middle classes, who realise the importance of more inclusive policies. We will return to this issue later.



*– The new Chief Administrator in our district is an honest man. He told me that the real problem with financial accountability in our district starts when the block grant from Ministry of Finance comes. He is then supposed to send back 10% of that in cash in a cardboard box to a contact person in the President's Office.*

### Think about this...

#### Here are some ways that powerful people use to keep control:

- By controlling key institutions such as the army or the police and using violence or threats of force.
- By using social structures that extend down through society, for example the party, religious institutions, ethnic based networks or the caste system.
- By co-optation – including people who could be a threat in their own network by rewarding them in one way or another.
- By elite capture - this involves powerful people 'taking over' or 'neutralising' an organisation that is a potential threat or useful asset.
- Through mutually rewarding relationships with key people or groups in society (patron-client relationships). The patron provides favours to his staff or community members, in return for their loyalty.
- By making sure that some aspects of the way they exercise power are legitimate in the eyes of the people.

Are any of these happening in your community or your district?



*– Power is rarely concentrated in one person; it's usually a group or a network of people who support each other.*



*– Power is competitive, powerful people are always struggling to keep their power or get more of it!*

### Think about this...

#### Transparency International (TI)

is a global civil society organisation fighting corruption. TI defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, like when people in authority put public money in their own pockets. Each year since 1995, TI has done an annual survey of more than 150 countries and measured the level of corruption. Corruption is also a measure of how much a country functions according to visible or hidden power. The more corrupt a country is, the more likely that hidden power is the dominant power. To find out where on the corruption scale your country is, visit TI's Corruption Perceptions website at: <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>



### In conclusion

In reality, all three types of power are happening at the same time: visible, hidden and invisible powers are all in motion. The three types of power are 'models' or ways of thinking about how power is exercised. These models can help us understand what type of power is predominant in our societies.

Civil society has a major role to play both at the national and local levels in change processes. All change processes involve the exercise of power and for this reason it is important that we understand how to work on power and influence powerful people.

We have discussed the way in which invisible power can keep people trapped in cycles of poverty by reinforcing myths about powerful leaders and unjust and biased beliefs. Civil society has an important role to play in helping to empower individuals and communities to understand their rights and be aware of how invisible and hidden types of power, trap them in poverty.

We have argued that reducing poverty for all people and sharing resources equitably will best be served when a society adopts decision making processes based predominantly on visible legitimate power – power based on impartial and transparent laws that fulfil human rights standards. Civil society has therefore an important role to play in promoting governance based on this type of power. In the next chapter we begin to consider how we can do this. We will look at examples of different types of power holders and the interests they may have, the roles they might play and how they might use power.

### Think about this...

1. What is the predominant type of power in your community?
2. Do people believe that power can shift from one major group to another (if not, why not)?
3. What sources of power operate most transparently in your community/society?
4. What sources of power are available for your movement or organisation?
5. What is the nature of authority in your local area?



# Power Actors

## – key players, key institutions



– Our demonstration was peaceful and legal. We had informed the police about it ...



– ... Our cause was also just and backed by carefully collected evidence, but when we assembled the police stopped us from marching.

In societies where hidden illegitimate power is predominant, the heads of key institutions in society usually have to compete keenly for resources for their institutions. When resources are scarce powerful people at the top of local or national institutions may see advantages in allying their institution, or simply their own interests, with other influential people. In this chapter we are going to look at a number of key institutions, common to most countries, which powerful people will be interested in influencing and controlling. There may be other institutions in your country which you could add to this list.

**The police** play an important role in all societies by maintaining law and order. They have a mandate to use force in accordance with laws, rules and guidelines for their work. They are therefore a legitimate source of power. However, if they do not follow the laws and rules and guidelines for how they should carry out their work, their use of force becomes illegitimate or illegal. Where the rule of law is weak, the police can be used by leaders at all levels as a source of power to support their rule and the police are often used to stop or hinder citizens in exercising their legal right to demonstrate or protest and draw attention to poor performance or malpractice.

**The military's** role is to protect a country from external threats and they have a legitimate mandate to use military force. Two crucial questions are who decides the budget for the military and who decides when military power should be used? Is it the military themselves, the leader of the country or the government? Also important is how the decision to use the military is made. Is it based on objective criteria or is it a personal decision? The military therefore share some of the same characteristics as the police, and provide similar sources of power. The relationship between the military and the national leader and the dominant coalition is crucial as the military is the ultimate guarantee of power to the political leadership. The crucial question is whether the military are loyal to the country's constitution, the political leader or themselves.

**The bureaucracy** is often a huge administrative entity. Policy and budgeting decisions are often made in the sector ministries in the capital without consultation with related departments or lower levels. Civil servants lower down in the system, especially at the district level may have considerable influence in how resources are ultimately used. Upward and downward accountability systems to officials above and citizens below tend to be weak, resulting in corruption, mismanagement

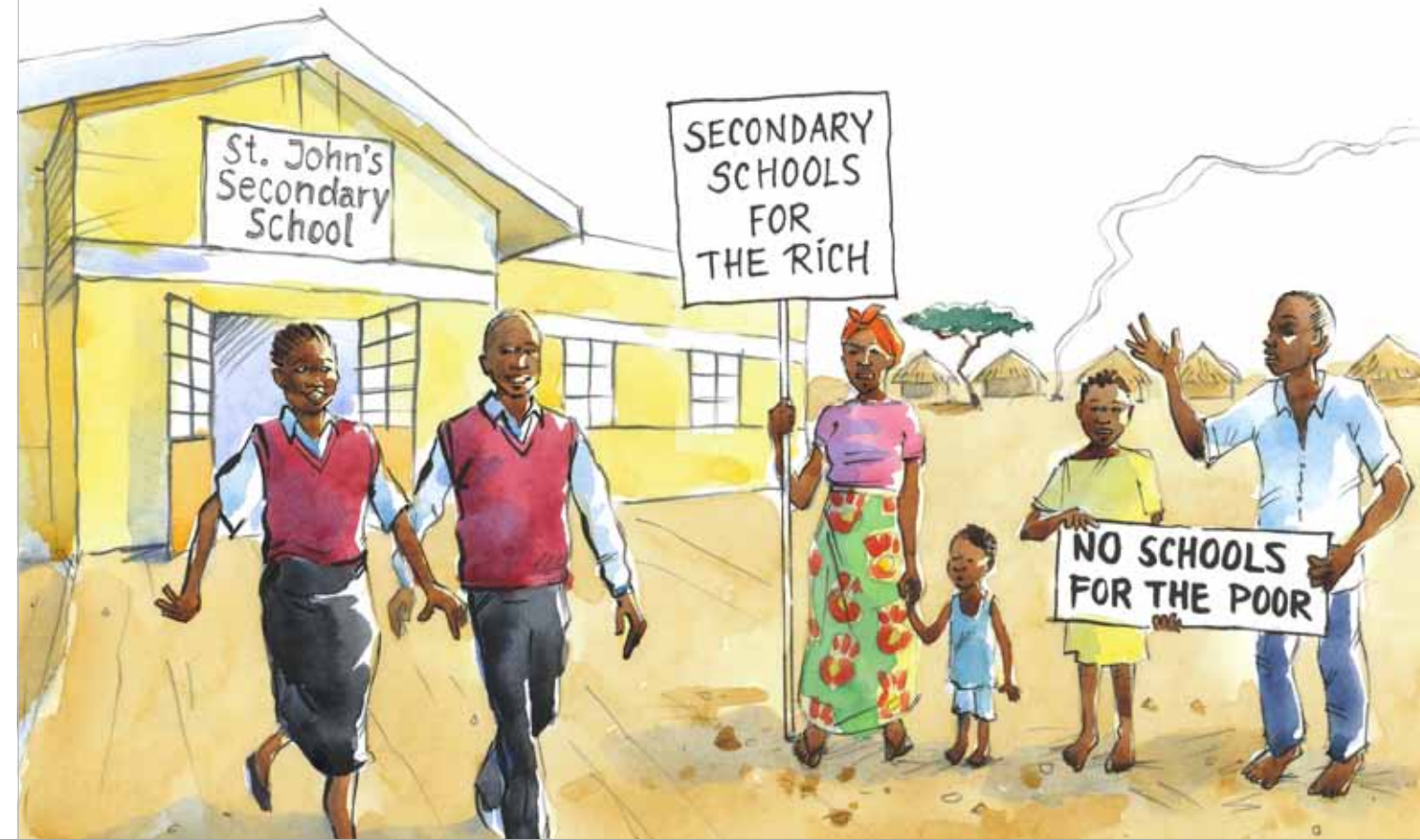


– Who is it who decides to spend most of the education budget on secondary schools for middle class children, while primary education for the poor is neglected.

and political interfering. These have major consequences for poor people who rely entirely on public services and in many places resources intended for the poor never reach their final destination. This issue is therefore a major area of focus for Civil Society Organisations (CSO).

**Local Government** represents an important interface for dialogue between citizens and government. Local government is by its nature concerned with issues that affect people at the local level. Typically these are essential public services, like health, education, water supply and social

security and citizen registration papers. Local governments are themselves often part of local-national power struggles as central power holders may feel threatened if local government becomes more powerful. This often results in central authorities being reluctant to fully implement decentralised local government. This often means that local governments have insufficient funds, not enough qualified staff and unclear mandates about what they are supposed to do and what they have authority over. In spite of these problems, dialogue with local government is a major opportunity area for CSOs to influence local policy and practice.





– *The staff at our local government try their best and you can't really blame them. Their budget is so small and they have never received proper training. The mayor doesn't even know what his responsibilities are!*

**Political parties** often have a well organised structure from the national to the local level and are important actors. The most influential parties 'in power' will be closely associated with the dominant coalition and local party organisations represent the final 'outreach' to the grass-roots level. They will attempt to make sure that the status quo remains intact or is strengthened. At the local level much depends on how parties in power and those in opposition interact with each other and who their supporters are and where they are located. This local power play will include issues of direct importance for poor people, especially issues related to service delivery. There are therefore considerable opportunities for civil society to influence these processes in ways that can have positive outcomes for poor people.

**Organised religion** often plays an important role in relation to invisible power as it is closely associated with beliefs and values. Organised religion is often conservative and supportive of the existing power structure in society. As a result faith based organisations often have greater freedom to influence and act compared to other CSOs. Many religious organisations are involved in mainstream development work as well as more religious charity focused initiatives. However, there are many examples of local religious

organizations that have offered a helping hand to peaceful movements struggling for change. Organized religion often has access to considerable resources, not only in terms of buildings and funds, but also people, not only the clergy and clerics, but also believers who may be ready to act and support clerical decisions. Religious groups have considerable power and influence and many are able to mobilise large numbers of supporters. If religious groups are disobeyed, they can invoke sanctions, for example excommunication, castigation, or fatwa which can have a great hold over people because they have been socialized to meet religious obligations and obey religious rules.

**Traditional leaders** are kings, queens, chiefs or village head men. In many countries they still play a significant role in terms of invisible power. They are respected, part of the local or national identity and have emotional ties with their people. In many countries their role has largely become ceremonial, but traditional leaders do still play a political role in many places. This role can be complex and can both be a voice for moderation and inclusion, but they can also be conservative and resistant to change. They often form complex alliances with powerful people and support the status quo for a variety of reasons that range from self or clan interest

to more progressive inclusive reform initiatives.

**The media** is an extremely important source of power. Access to information and freedom of information are cornerstones of democratic governance. However, the control of information, its manipulation, or simple withholding can be a decisive tool for controlling society. This is why authoritarian leaders in many countries attempt to limit or deny media access to their opponents. They also frequently invest substantial resources in state-run media. As a consequence, people's movements sometimes have to create innovative and independent media outlets and communication systems for themselves. They also sometimes choose to launch campaigns that focus on demanding greater media freedom and fighting censorship. It is essential for civil society organisations to find ways to communicate their messages objectively to a wider audience. When this happens the media can become a powerful force for change.

**Landlords and landowners** are another powerful group. In many countries a few people may own very large amounts of land upon which many people depend for their livelihoods, either as tenant farmers or labourers. Landowners often have a near monopoly on labour which enables them

to hold wages low and keep rents high. They tend to have influential positions in local level political settlements that enable them to keep land taxes low as well as ensuring that land reform initiatives are effectively kept off the agenda or are not implemented.

**Traders and wholesalers.** Many products sold at the local level, including agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, are often controlled by powerful companies which have a near monopoly on the supply of goods and services. They can use this position to charge higher prices and control markets and the type of products available. People living in poverty have most to lose here as they are least able to afford goods. Cheaper or better-suited products that could make a big difference for the poor may simply not be available.

**The business community.** The economies of many countries may be dominated by a few large companies and state investments in infrastructure may be dependent upon them. International corporations may also have great influence, especially if it involves the extraction of raw materials like oil and gems. Additionally, taxation from just a few companies may make up the bulk of a government's revenue which gives these companies considerable power and leverage.



– *Although our religious leaders tend to be conservative and against change, they have come out and supported us on issues of social justice. This was a great help for our movement.*



– *Community radio played a key role in the success of our campaign. After each session we had with the authorities, we went on the air and informed people about what happened. This meant that everybody in the district knew what was going on and it really made the councillors stick to the rules.*

For more information about accountability and public service provision see the accompanying resource book in this series: **Accountability** – Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision



– We lobbied the business community at district headquarters and found that they were sympathetic to greater social justice for the poor. They said that they would fund one of our campaigns. Afterwards we realised that if poor people had more money they would be able to buy goods supplied by the businessmen.



For more information about representation and accountability in CSOs and NGOs see the accompanying resource book in this series: **Voice** – Representation and Peoples' Democracy.

Independent organisations such as Global Financial Integrity have assessed that for every USD 1 given in aid to countries in the south, USD 10 flows out via crime, corruption and tax evasion. This represents a huge amount of lost revenue, much of which is associated with state-corporate investments in infrastructure and extractive industries. Big business may therefore have great influence over the investment decisions taken by the dominant coalition.

### Civil society organisations and associations

are a huge mixed group. The range covers sports clubs, charities, interest groups of all kinds, burial societies, study groups as well as trade unions and professional associations, social movements and NGOs and CSOs, all which may or may not be membership based. NGOs, CSOs and social movements are generally seen as being involved in work that will benefit the poor and some NGOs may be religious organisations. Civil society is the arena in which people can organise themselves and directly engage with authorities and businesses in a quest for a more just and equal society.

However, there are many NGOs that are really private business and many others function more as a political party and others still that have more in common with criminal organisations. Some NGOs are funded

entirely by local contributions. Others receive large grants from both national and international organisations including northern donors involved in supporting development. There are issues about representation – whose interests are NGOs really working for as well as accountability – in other words, who are they answerable to.

Some NGOs are heavily involved in service delivery, others in empowering people to campaign for their rights. The latter group can be seen as a threat by leaders and most countries require NGOs and CSOs to be registered and their activities monitored by the state and in some cases NGOs have been closed down.

**Donors** provide large sums of money to a wide range of governments, either as grants or loans for development. They also provide funding to many NGOs and CSOs. They often impose conditions on this assistance which can force governments to focus on poverty reduction, but they can also have unintended negative effects, especially for poorer people. For example Structural Adjustment Programmes funded by the IMF and the World Bank with an emphasis on privatisation and the free market are criticised for having had a negative effect on state service delivery. Governments are often eager to take

### Think about this...

1. What are the most important institutions in your community or area?
2. Who are the major power holders in your area and what institutions or organisations are they connected with?
3. What are their main interests - are any of them likely to be for or against poverty reduction?
4. What is the basis for people's loyalty working in these crucial institutions and organisations?
5. Can you approach any of these people or discuss issues about poverty with them?
6. Are any of these power holders important for the survival of your organization?



– I sometimes wonder whether all the money we get from donors really helps our leaders more than it does us. It makes it easy for them to ignore us. They don't really need us and we have little power to hold them to account.

loans from donors, but the interest rates on these loans may be high. Likewise donors through their support can provide international legitimacy to a regime and generous development assistance may unwittingly enable governments to spend more on things like the military than they otherwise would have been able to. Donors are usually prepared to listen to civil society so it is essential to engage them in critical dialogue. They may also be able to intervene where other actors cannot.

**Organised crime** is another major actor able to provide corrupt political leaders with large amounts of financing, usually incomes generated from drugs, human trafficking, weapons and diamond smuggling and the like. When this happens we talk about the politicisation of crime. Political leaders get caught up in a spiral of intrigue where they become manipulated into satisfying the criminal goals of powerful gangs and syndicates which now have a world-wide reach and do not shy at using violence to achieve their ends. Organised crime syndicates will tolerate the activities of

some civil society organisations, but it is on their terms and often gangs benefit themselves from the CSO presence.

### In conclusion

The people at the top of some of the organisations and institutions like the ones we have looked at in this chapter may play an important role in the leading coalitions, at both national and local levels, which we discussed in the previous chapter. We have only been able to consider them from a very general perspective in this chapter. In each country there will be a specific context and range of issues that will influence each organisation. For activists working for social justice, it is important to identify the key institutions and individuals who lead them and their interests and how these link up in influential coalitions. In Chapter 5, a number of tools for analysing power are discussed which can help you with this. In the next chapter we will look at a number of case studies which shed light on how some actors use their power, how this impacts on poor people and what civil society organisations can do about it.

# Expressions of Power

## – use and abuse



– When we campaign, we need to learn from other people's experience. Take note of what works and doesn't work and analyse why.



– We should also not be shy of experimenting with new ideas and ways of drawing attention to problems.

In this chapter we will look at a number of cases which illustrate how hidden power can be used, how rules, regulations and policies become side-lined and how, consequently, poor people suffer as a result. We will also look at how CSOs can respond and discuss some of the key issues relating to the cases. Some of the cases refer to real events and others are constructed around real situations although they may not have unfolded exactly in the way described here. The purpose of the cases is not the cases themselves, but rather to provide examples of various ways in which hidden power is used and to discuss how civil society can respond and what risks might be involved. We hope that you, the reader, will reflect on and discuss these cases with your colleagues. Every situation is different, but some situations share things in common and discussing them helps you prepare for the real situations you will face.

### Case 1: No participation

New laws enabling citizens to participate in local government planning had been approved by the national government, but the Mayor had long turned a deaf ear to citizen's demands for greater participation. He seemed to personally resent any inroad to his authority in the small isolated rural local authority where he was elected year after year as no one dared stand against

him. The community tried all sorts of approaches to get the Mayor to change his mind, but to no avail. Eventually, the community came up with a novel form of protest. They would ensure that there would be non-stop singing outside the mayor's house for as long as it took to get him to change his mind. Initially the Mayor ignored the protest and joked about it, but after several sleepless nights, it was no longer so funny. The police refused to become involved as there was no law against singing. The continual stream of singers continued. They also started to make up songs about the Mayor and his family and the Mayor quickly began to be seen as a bit of a joke himself. He finally gave in and conceded with good grace to the demands for greater citizen participation, before he completely lost face.

**Reflection points:** This novel form of peaceful protest owed some of its success to the fact that the Mayor, who was generally seen as being autocratic, was rather isolated from the rest of the council. Greater participation was a legal right and most other councillors were not so opposed to it, although the Mayor's steadfast opposition blocked any opportunity for dialogue. However, an important aspect of this story is the fact that loss of face or embarrassment



– There are many ways to confront unjust power, the trick is to find new peaceful ways that capture people's imagination and gets them talking.

### Think about this...

#### Case 1:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. What factors contributed to the outcome?
4. Could you use a strategy like this in your work?

in front of the community can be enough to get officials to change their minds. An important factor that may have contributed to the successful outcome was the fact that the community was quite small and isolated. The Mayor and especially his family had a lot to lose.

### Case 2: Denial of Rights

In a remote Hindu society marginalised Dalit/casteless people were not allowed to enter a famous temple at district headquarters to worship. Local Dalits had organised themselves with the help of NGOs and campaigned over a long

### Think about this...

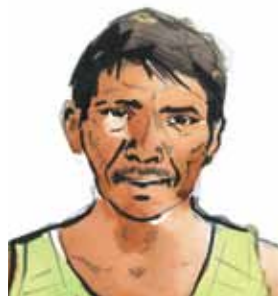
#### Case 2:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. Even though the dalits had got permission from the authorities, they were still attacked. What do you think went wrong and what else could they have done?
4. This was supposed to be the culmination of a peaceful campaign. Is it reasonable to expose people to risks like this?



period of time to be given permission to enter and worship at the temple. After many consultations and negotiations the authorities granted permission. On the appointed day they proceeded in a happy procession towards the temple. As they approached, they were attacked by a fierce mob intent on denying them access. The mob was furious that the old values and traditions of the caste system were being eroded. In the fighting that followed many people were hurt and civil society activists had to flee for their lives. It was some days before order was re-established. The incident caused a furore, but finally after further negotiation the Dalits were able to enter the temple but this time escorted by police.

**Reflection points:** Dalits and their organisations had made all preparations possible for this campaign. They had conducted a long term public discussion about the fact that they were denied access to the temple. There seemed to be general public support and the temple authorities, although not enthusiastic, seemed to be resigned to the idea that dalits would now enter the temple for worship. The authorities had been consulted and the police involved. It looked as if the final phase of the campaign would be successful – the actual entering of the temple. One issue that may have been overlooked is that although people in official positions had been consulted, this case also involved invisible power – power that involves strong feelings and emotions among many local people who may have felt excluded from the negotiations.



*– It's difficult to disagree with people who want to help you when they are paying for everything.*

### Case 3: Who decides: Donors...?

Many donors decided to support a nationwide programme to strengthen local government. All District Local Governments would be covered. But only one third of the Village Local Governments, the next level of government, would be covered, and those included would be those closest to the District Headquarters or at least near to a motorable road, in other words the better off. District level officials lobbied to get the programme changed. They felt that it was important to include all village level governments in the district. Everybody should feel included and besides the village governments furthest away were the ones most in need of strengthening and feeling included in a new era of governance. The donors agreed but said that they did not have funding for all village governments. The Districts again lobbied for the programme to be reduced in size. Why not only cover half the country and then go more slowly and learn from the process before going nationwide? However, the arguments fell on deaf ears and the programme was implemented as originally planned.

#### Think about this...

##### Case 3:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. How do you think the issues in points 1 & 2 above will influence outcomes?



**Reflection points:** Donors and International NGOs often have more power than they realise and crucial decisions about programme design and implementation may be made in offices far removed from the places where they will be implemented. Donors may feel that issues like the size of a programme and the number of local governments covered are more technical and funding related and fail to realise how political they actually are and that for poor people excluded from the programme, it is yet again a power demonstration by a powerful actor.

### Case 4: Who decides: Traditional authority...?

Traditional leaders of a largely pastoral community hit upon an idea for making quick money for themselves. They became involved in the cross border smuggling of a large number of camels. The idea was that the camels would be fattened up and sold at a later date. The camels arrived and began to systematically eat everything in the area so that the community's own cattle had no grazing and began to starve. The community was dismayed that their own leaders could do something like this to them. The leaders in return told the community to mind its own business – it was the elder's right to take decisions on behalf of the community.

As the crisis developed in the community, young people felt they had to react. They began by invoking a traditional form of protest against the elders which was itself quite unusual and not without considerable significance in terms of a younger generation confronting traditional



*– It's time for us young people to stand up and confront old ways that are clearly socially unjust and biased.*



*– It was a disaster for our community when a local NGO was exposed for corruption. It affected everybody's work. Suddenly the authorities didn't want to work with us.*

leaders through traditional means. At the same time they sought assistance from a local NGO. The NGO facilitated contact with local government and local government officers acted by involving the customs department and veterinary authorities. The local government had been trying for a long time to establish its authority over the community and this was an opportunity for more direct intervention on their part. The outcome of this was that the camels were driven back across the border and the traditional leaders lost face which started a leadership struggle in the community which led to a new basis for relations between the community and local government where younger people in the community had more influence and power.

**Reflection points:** What started as a simple money making scam developed into a three-cornered power struggle between the community, youth and local government which in effect changed the status quo quite dramatically. This is an example of how power can change suddenly and unexpectedly.

#### Think about this...

##### Case 4:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. Who were the winners or losers in this case?
4. How do traditional leaders and local government co-exist in your area



### Case 5: When civil society is 'uncivil'

A local person from a marginalised community emerged as strong leader with a flair for championing the interests of his community – an ethnic minority in the area. An NGO was soon formed and it was successful in attracting funds, including funds from northern donors. All went well to begin with.

The NGO played a key role in bringing many improvements to the community. However, after some years the leader joined a political party and became influential in local politics. Key positions in the NGO were also given to leading local party cadre.

The NGO continued to receive funding, but its focus slowly shifted to more wealthy groups and the original leader now led a flamboyant lifestyle. Rumours abounded that funds were disappearing from the NGO and being used for 'fat cat' projects that favoured the local power holders and promoted divisive policies in the community.

It was no good bringing the issue to the attention of the authorities as they were dominated by the political party. Instead, the old members turned to a respected religious leader who was well liked in the community. He was also concerned about the breakdown of morals and sense of decay in politics and public affairs so he agreed to take the issue up in his sermons. His fiery preaching soon had an effect, but it also led to threats against the religious leader.

The NGO and political party adopted a lower profile, but attempts to get the NGO investigated by the authorities have not

**Think about this...****Case 5:**

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. What reputation does civil society have in your area?
4. What role do religious leaders and institutions play in your area?

been successful so far. The religious leader has also been accused of supporting the opposition party and mixing religion and politics.

**Reflection points:** When civil society organisations become corrupt and partisan they can undermine the standing and credibility of other CSOs in the area. Internal accountability is a major issue as charges of malpractice can easily be used to close down or restrict the operations of CSOs. Civil society in local areas can develop their own codes of conduct and try and introduce common standards of accountability and transparency.

**Case 6:****Who decides: Criminal Gangs...?**

An urban area in one of the world's largest cities is under the control of a violent and heavily armed gang. The gang makes a lot of money from buying and selling drugs not only locally but also internationally. The gang has an interest in ensuring that there is a high level of drug addiction in the community as they are the sole suppliers – hence the community is dependent on them. The gang enforces strict discipline in the community and 'offenders' are punished, often violently, sometimes with death. The gangs have effectively ensured that all public services have stopped in the community. Residents have to go outside



*– When politicians and criminals get together you know you are in for a hard time.*

to get health care and schooling. This involves travelling a considerable distance to inadequate service centres.

This situation is repeated in many other locations in the country and often there are violent territorial conflicts among the gangs. There is effectively a 'stand-off' between the gangs and the authorities where the authorities appear powerless to do anything about the situation. This is partly caused by the fact that the gangs are ruthless and heavily armed, but also by the fact that large bribes are paid to officials to look the other way. Ordinary citizens are caught up in a criminalised abuse of state power which results in citizens being denied basic public services and security.

CSOs have been able to negotiate 'space' from a neutral humanitarian platform and gangs have allowed them to provide services like schools and clinics and set up offices, but nevertheless their presence in the community is on terms dictated by the gangs. The popularity of the service does give the CSOs some leverage as the services have become an established part of people's lives and there would be considerable protest if these were removed.

**Think about this...****Case 6:**

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. By providing services like this, are CSOs letting both the government and the gangs off the hook?
4. What role should CSOs play in this kind of situation?



**Reflection points:** CSOs hope that this strategy will gradually enable them to facilitate more normal conditions in the community, although other parts of a 'normal situation' such as providing security, policing and justice remain less well addressed.

**Case 7:****Constituency Development Funds**

Many countries give considerable funds to elected Members of Parliament for development work in their constituency which they have wide discretion over. They are often called Constituency Development Funds (CDFs). In one country, civil society networks carried out an audit of CDF projects in their area. They requested to see the project documents so that they could organize their audit. This request was refused, but they then pointed out that they had the right to receive the documents under the new Right to Information Act. After quite some time and many more requests, the documents were delivered and they could start their audit. They discovered many irregularities in the projects and a pronounced bias in the location of many of the projects which were located in areas where the MP's supporters lived. One project in particular stood out. It simply had not been started even though funds had been released a year previously. They discovered that the area chief had colluded with some of the CDF Committee Members to swindle the project. With support from NGOs, the team managed to recoup the swindled funds. The CDF fund managers and the government line ministries are now much more careful







– *The right to information law has really helped our work. Before, it was nearly impossible to get hold of documents. It's still not easy, but if you're patient, you can get them in the end.*



– *When corruption becomes a way of life you have a problem.*

and play by the rules when it comes to allocating and implementing budgets.

**Reflection points:** There are often local power plays connected to who is responsible for funding, planning and managing local development initiatives. In many places the state bureaucracy was traditionally responsible for providing services and development which meant that resources for this were under their control. Subsequently many countries introduced more autonomous locally elected governments with responsibility for service delivery which led to less control by the state and its line agencies and more control by local governments. On top of this some governments have given CDF budgets to MPs which has given individual politicians greater control and discretion with development funding. In all these processes there is a concern that development funds and service delivery can get captured by the powerful in the promotion of their own agendas.

#### Think about this...

##### Case 7:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. Do you think that MPs should be in charge of funds intended for development in their constituency?
4. How do you think funds for local development can best be managed?



#### Case 8: Corruption: When embezzlement becomes systematic

In a country, senior district officials were systematically helping themselves to a proportion of funds from the district treasury. They were able to get away with this embezzlement of state funds as corruption had more or less become institutionalised in the country. Senior officials at the national level were also involved. Indeed each level in the chain of corruption from the local to the national level had to give a fixed proportion of the money that had been stolen to the ruling party. This money was then used to consolidate the party's power and position – in other words the money was used to secure the loyalty of other powerful groups who were challenging the ruling power holders. Staying in power by buying power!

However, civil society organisations at the district level managed to collect evidence that proved what was happening. They decided to go public and file a case with the police and publicise it in the

#### Think about this...

##### Case 8:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. Why were these officials not 'saved' by their friends – they were just a few among many involved in this type of power abuse?
4. Do you think that this case changed anything in the longer run?



media. The publicity caused a furore and the authorities were obliged to go ahead with a prosecution. The officials involved were suspended pending the outcome of the case, however, in the meantime they found out who the leader of the CSO was who had instigated the investigation and anonymously threatened to burn down the CSO leader's house, unless they dropped the case. Appeals to the district police to provide security fell on deaf ears. Ultimately though, the case was successfully prosecuted.

**Reflection points:** This particular CSO was part of a wider national alliance and they quickly contacted the national organisation requesting their help. They arranged for national press coverage of the incident and contacted the national police and demanded that the district police provide security. They also sent busloads of supporters to the district who camped around the CSO leader's house and demonstrated in front of the DC's office demanding that the police investigate the threats. Luckily this story had a happy ending. The strategy adopted by the CSOs was effective in stopping the violent reprisals. The police finally provided protection and the officials involved were convicted and dismissed from office.

#### Case 9: When service becomes serve yourself

The medicine supply system had become a target for systematic corruption. Large quantities of medicines 'disappeared' to reappear again on the private market. Health care personnel were the immediate



– *Forming a national campaign was a tremendous challenge, but it really paid off. We were able to get people involved in a way that we never had before. It also resulted in some real changes to structures and laws that have had a lasting effect on reducing corruption.*

beneficiaries, but the scam was part of a wider nation-wide process of corruption which was designed to fund the party in power as there was a 'trickle-up effect' where a percentage of the take ended in the party coffers. The effects of this were most keenly felt by the poor and marginalised as medicine that should have been provided free of charge was often not available. CSOs were concerned about how widespread this practice had become and initiated a national one year campaign led by leading national NGOs. It involved many much smaller local NGOs who all played an important part. The campaign was a success. Many people involved in the scam were exposed and prosecuted, including well known doctors and civil servants. More vigorous controls were introduced.

**Reflection points:** A national campaign like the one described above requires a good and just cause, great organisation, good logistics and above all coordination of many CSOs. It demonstrated that civil society alliances involving many CSOs working together had great power and influence.

#### Think about this...

##### Case 9:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. After the campaign had finished and things had died down, do you think that the problem was solved?
4. This case was about public medicine meant for poor people being stolen by government staff. What do you think it takes to stop people from doing something like this?





– *Getting international attention is easier now. The internet and YouTube have really made a difference in reaching wider audiences.*

### Case 10: Land appropriation

An international company with its headquarters in the north wanted to invest near the capital city in a country in the south and build a factory. A government department ‘gave’ the company a large piece of land for a very small price. The true ownership of the land was disputed. Local people asserted that it was traditional land owned by the clan, but the government department maintained that it was state land. In the meantime the land was used by a large number of squatters who worked in the city performing essential menial jobs for very little pay. The company began construction and the squatters were driven off the site. The squatters approached an NGO for help and a case was filed at the high court contesting the state’s ownership claim and demanding compensation for the squatters.

The court case was dismissed and the NGO felt powerless to do more until they thought of trying to go international with the case. They approached an international NGO and they were able to establish links to NGOs in the company’s home country in the north. They managed to get media interest in the north and this resulted in a delegation of squatters travelling to the country where they were interviewed on TV demonstrating outside the company’s headquarters. Eventually the company made a settlement with the squatters, but

the land dispute itself remains stuck in the courts.

**Reflections points:** There are greater opportunities than ever before for bringing an issue to the attention of a much wider audience, including, as in this example, an international audience. The new media of the internet, YouTube, mobile phones and SMS’s all offer opportunities for getting in contact with wider audiences. It can be an effective way of putting greater pressure on authorities to take cases raised by CSOs more seriously.

### Think about this...

#### Case 8:

1. What are the key issues involved here?
2. What power issues are at play?
3. Are the courts in your country also ineffective in cases like this?
4. Do you know of other innovative ways of promoting a local issue to a wider audience?

For more information about how CSOs can raise issues and make their case heard see the accompanying resource book in this series: **Voice** – Representation and Peoples’ Democracy.

### Think about this...

**Global Financial Integrity (GFI)** is an international research and advocacy organisation which was launched in 2006. It promotes policies, safeguards, and agreements aimed at stopping the cross-border flow of illegal money. GFI has estimated that for every \$1 poor nations receive in foreign aid, an estimated \$10 in dirty money flows illicitly abroad. GFI estimates that for the decade 1999 – 2009 the developing world lost US\$8.44 trillion as a result of money flowing out of countries via crime, corruption and tax evasion. “This is a breathtakingly large sum at a time when developing and developed countries alike are struggling to make ends meet,” said GFI Director Raymond Baker. “This report should be a wake-up call to world leaders that more must be done to address these harmful outflows.”

For more on this see: <http://www.gfintegrity.org/>



– *Corrupt power can result in a country being systematically drained of money by power holders and it is the poor who suffer the most from this.*

### In conclusion

The cases we have reviewed in this chapter reveal that power abuse problems are extensive and involve many different types of actors who in one way or another have opportunities to wield power illegitimately for their own purposes and interests. They range from criminal gangs and syndicates to traditional leaders, NGOs, politicians, bureaucrats and donors to name but a few. Many of these abuses are rooted in social values and norms that we have called invisible power. Some traditional values tend to support the idea of a strong leader who is a power unto himself.

The most damaging types of abuse occur when corruption and misappropriation are organised on a grand scale as a means to securing and

maintaining the position of the powerful. A country can in this way be systematically drained of considerable resources and usually it is the poorest who suffer the most as a consequence. National policy can be distorted when the dominant coalitions can bend or modify the way policies are implemented so that they favour their own interests.

In the quest for a more just and equitable society, we have to face up to the issue of hidden power. The solution is greater accountability which requires society to be managed transparently in accordance with the rule of law. Civil society can play an important role in this quest by demanding change, exposing power abuse and keeping a constant watch on the goings on in powerful places. The next chapter introduces a number of tools that can be useful for analysing power and identifying where power abuses are most likely to occur.

For more information about accountability and public service provision see the accompanying resource books in this series: **Accountability** – Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision, and also: **Budgets** – Revenues and Financing in Public Service Provision

# Power Tools

## – insight and analysis



– Before you start to analyse power relations, you must be clear about what you are going to work on and try and achieve.

In this chapter we will look at a number of tools that can help us analyse and think about power, power holders and power decisions in the areas where we work. It is very important to understand as best we can how power works. As we observed earlier many attempts to bring about social change have failed because we did not think enough about power relations.

### Naming the issue

Before you start thinking or analysing it is important to know what kind of work you will focus on. You may work for an organisation representing a particular community. Perhaps you are a social activist living and working directly in a community. Maybe you work for an NGO that works with a variety of concerns. No matter what, before you analyse power relations it is important to know what your work will focus on and make sure that there is broad backing among the community for this.

**A focus statement** is a simple short sentence that tells what your work is about. It should be decided and endorsed by your community. It tells everybody what you are doing and reminds you to stay focused on the issue. For example: “Our priority for the next year is to get the community connected to an uninterrupted supply of clean drinking water which will be managed by the community.”

For example, will you focus on improving health services in your area or is it better to demand that district budgets be made public, or perhaps to get clean drinking water provided to a marginalised community? Knowing clearly what you are going to focus on is essential for identifying the key power holders connected to what you are focusing on. It is a good idea to formulate a focus statement saying what your work will be about and getting your community to endorse it. This helps keep your work on track. Remember that no matter what you are working on, you will also be working for a system of governance that is just, transparent and based on legitimate laws, rules and regulations. Only this form of governance can guard against future abuses of power. We must ensure that battles won are not lost again.

### Tool 1: Naming the powerful – power analysis

This tool concentrates on naming major decision-makers that have power to influence your work. It can be used to map their interests in a particular context and help you decide who you want to target or avoid in your work.

The first step is to identify a list of key power actors in your area or district. Power holders are individuals and social groups who have the ability to influence political, social and economic outcomes



– Our local politicians told us that we would be safe at this site, but powerful business interests have obviously managed to get our local plans changed and now they just send the bulldozers in to get rid of us!

in your area. Examples include powerful political leaders and families, political party leaders, private interest groups (e.g., businesses, traders and landowners), NGOs and Civil Society Organisations, religious leaders and religious institutions, traditional leaders or people with inherited positions. Also, informal coalitions or groups, ethnic or minority group leaders, and leaders from powerful state institutions such as the military, police and judiciary. You should also include any insurgent groups, and organized criminal networks. In some cases, particular individuals may be influential in several powerful groups, and some groups may have considerable overlap with others. Powerful groups are not generally based on membership, but rather on the interests they represent.

The next step is to identify the interests of key actors. Interests are the things that are most important to powerful people. It can be physical things like land, factories, forests and water and the control of them. It can be goals that they want to achieve, like acquiring more land or controlling a market for certain products and maximising their ability to earn money. It can also be to maintain or expand their overall power to influence and benefit from major decisions affecting the district, which might mean they are concerned with ensuring that others remain without influence.



**Focusing your analysis**

These questions can help uncover people, issues and concerns in your power analysis. It is best done in a group. It is a good idea to write your answers down for later use.

- Who are the major powerful players (in the economic, political, civil society and cultural/ideological sectors) that we think are with us, against us and uncommitted on the issue? Include those at different levels from the local to the national where relevant.
- Of these players, who are the key groups, organisations, institutions and personalities leading and organising the actions for and against us – both publicly and behind the scenes?
- What are the real and expressed interests of the major players?
- What are the most critical relationships and tensions between these players?
- What are the strategies used by different sides and how effective do you think they are?
- Who do you consider your allies and opponents?
- What are the key local and national trends or events that are affecting your issue?
- How are they affecting it? In the current context, who's winning and who's losing?
- What does this analysis tell you about possible opportunities and risks for action on your issue?

ADAPTED FROM DEB BARNDT 1989 AND VENEKLASEN & MILLER 2002



**Matrix for your findings**

	What are the main institutions, organisations, or agencies making decisions on your issue/right?	Who are the most influential and powerful leaders or officials in these bodies?	What are the main interests they are promoting? What do they want to stop from happening?	How do they promote their interests and block those of others on this issue?
1				
2				
3				
etc.				

The real interests of powerful people may be hidden and finding out what they are requires a good knowledge of the local economy and political scene. In some cases, it is important to go beyond the stated interests, and instead look for clues about the deeper interests of powerful actors – many of these may not be talked about openly in public. You should also include potentially powerful people who are excluded from power. These are important groups or individuals who do not have power but who wish to have it. For example, they could be the leaders of marginalised groups or groups who are very influential in their own small territory.

When identifying interests you should also consider key fears. These are things that powerful people might try to prevent happening because it will undermine their power and control of vital interests. You should also think about the interests or fears of powerful people specifically in relation to the goal you are working on. For example if you are working to get clean drinking water to your community, find out who has power over this. Also, who has 'gate keeper' functions in relation to your goal. Gate keeper functions are people who control access, or who have easy access to influential people. Working with them may enable you to get easier access to the real power holders.

You can use the matrix on the opposite page to organise and display your findings. A matrix like this can help you compare different powerful people or groups and identify similarities and differences.

**Positions:**

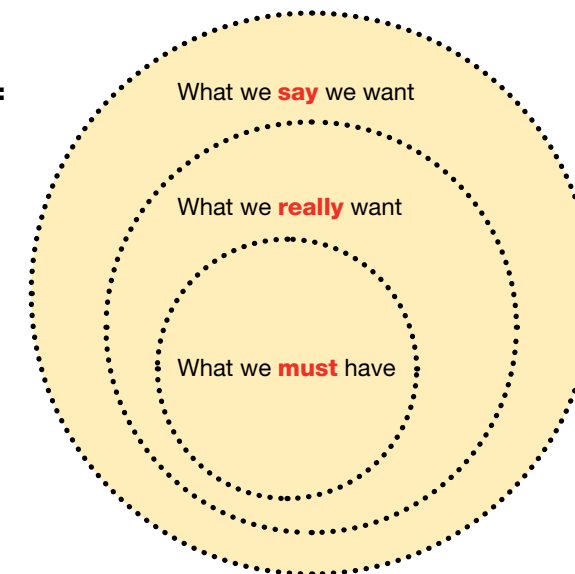
What we **say** we want

**Interests:**

What we **really** want

**Needs:**

What we **must** have



**Tool 2: The Onion**

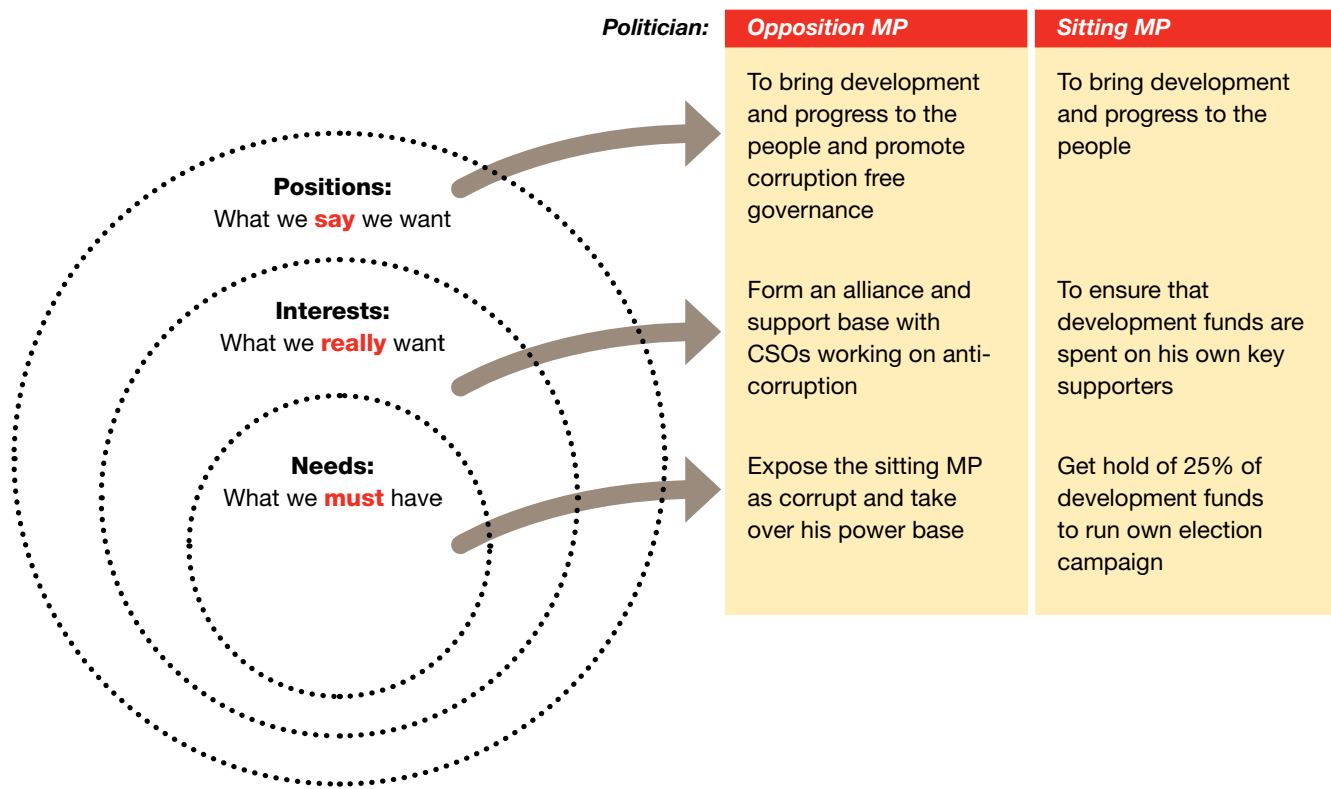
**– Positions, interests and needs**

The onion tool is based on the idea of an onion and all its layers. You can see the outer layer of an onion, but you can't see those underneath. This is similar to many situations where power relationships are in play. You can hear what people say, but this may not be the same as what they are trying to achieve and this may not be what they really need.

This tool can be used for deeper analysis of some of the actors that you put in the matrix you made in Tool 1. The Onion can help you to uncover what powerful people or groups may really be concerned about. The outer layer contains the positions that we take publicly, for all to see and hear. Underlying these are our interests – what we want to achieve from a particular situation. Finally, at the core are the most important needs which we must fulfil.



*– We learnt that there is often a great difference between people's public image and then what they do and say behind the scenes.*



Powerful groups are in competition with each other about power and the control of resources. When the exercise of power is illegitimate, this struggle often involves actions that are morally questionable and sometimes illegal. There is therefore often a considerable difference between their public position on issues and their real interests and needs which they are keen to keep hidden. The diagram shows you how you can use the tool to uncover deeper-lying interests and needs. You can also compare actors with each other which may

reveal whether they are allies or enemies. The point of the Onion Tool is to show graphically what the hidden interests and needs are among competing power holders and where interests are common and where they are different. This insight can help you in your action planning and help improve your ability to communicate and enter into dialogue with different parties. In addition, these insights may help you challenge power holders as to whether their actions and strategies are a good way of furthering their own interests and needs.

**Tool 3: Power Mapping: Institutions, coalitions and people**

This tool is about how you can make a map of power relations among the key stakeholders in your local area. This tool is similar to Tool 1, but it is visual rather than based on a matrix and written words. The steps below explain the process. The tool is shown as a diagram on the next page.

**1. Decide what you want to map.** This could be a location, for example a sub district, or a sector, like health. Your map will be a ‘snap shot’ picture of power relations at a particular moment in the location or sector you have chosen. If you try to map all regional or sector power holders in detail, the result may be very time-consuming and become over complicated. Focus on power holders in an area or sector that is not too big. It’s better to make a number of smaller maps than one very big one.

**2. Start by identifying all the institutions and organisations in your area.** Institutions are usually state bodies like the health department, a school or a clinic and the local government. Organisations are things like CSOs/NGOs, private companies, political parties and religious organisations. Write the names of these organisations and institutions in a circle towards the outside of your map, like in the example diagram on the next page.

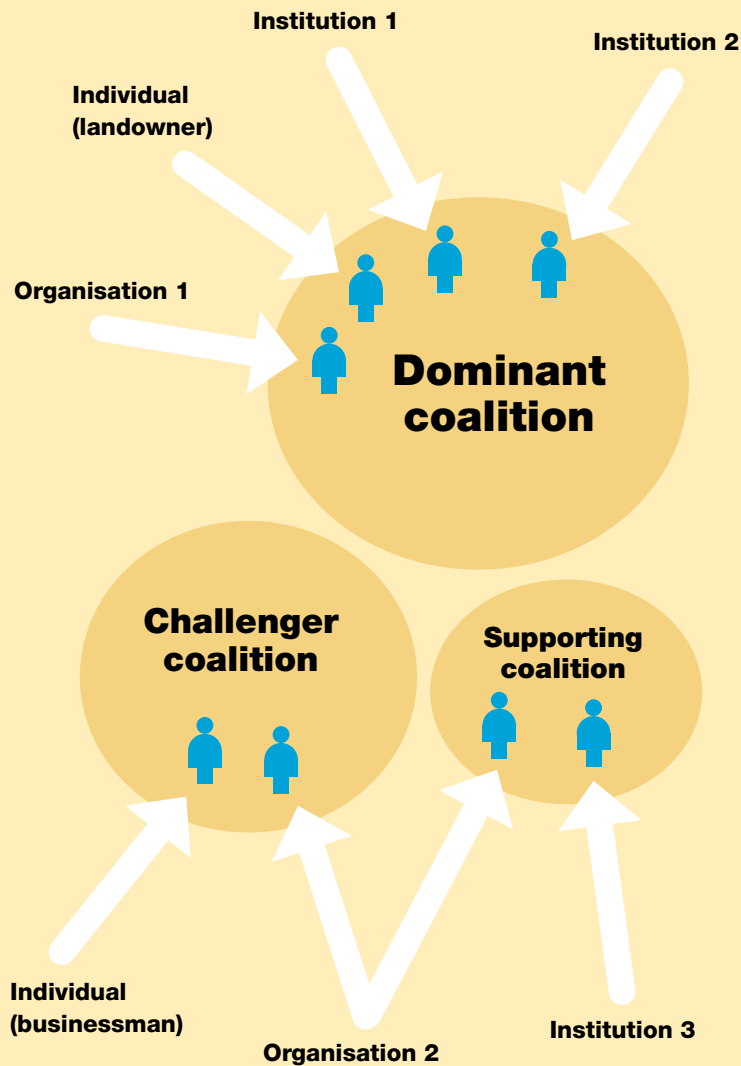
**3. The next step is to identify the key people.** These will be the leaders of the institutions and organisations and perhaps some of the key senior staff. There may be other important and influential individuals who are not part of an institution or an organisation, for example a community leader, a tradesman, a businessman or landowner. Write all the names of these people down on a separate piece of paper.

**4. Determine how influential these people are.** Are they influential just in their organisation, or are they influential in other important coalitions? For example, find out what their real interests are. Who is close to them? Who do they consult or confide in if they have a major problem or decision to make? This will give you an idea about which coalition they are in. You will have to decide whether there is really only one coalition, the dominant one, in your area, or whether there are secondary coalitions and challenger coalitions as well. When you have decided how many coalitions there are, draw the appropriate number of coalition circles in the middle of the diagram.


**5. It is now time to place the people on your list in the diagram.** Draw a stick figure of each person on your list and put them in the coalition circle that you believe the person belongs to. If the person comes from an organisation or institution, draw an arrow from that organisation to the stick figure and the coalition they are in, like in the diagram. If they are an individual, follow the example in the diagram.

**6. Don’t forget to place your organization on the map.** Putting your organisation on the map is a good reminder that you are part of the situation, not above it, even when you analyse it. You, and your organization, are perceived in certain ways by others. You may have contacts and relationships that offer opportunities and openings for work with the parties involved.

**7. Mapping is dynamic – it reflects a particular moment in a changing situation, and points toward action.** This kind of analysis can point to new opportunities. What can be done? Who can best do it? When is the best moment? What ground work needs to be laid beforehand, what structures built afterwards? These are some questions you should ask when you are doing the mapping exercise.



**Power mapping:  
Institutions, competing coalitions and people**

 Leaders and key people

**8. Develop your map further if you want.** You can also draw lines and use symbols to indicate the type of relationships between power holders. Do they work closely with each other? Why do they do this? Is there a conflict between some of them? Why does the conflict exist? You can represent these things on the map by using symbols if you want, but be careful that it doesn't become too complicated. You can also try and see the world from the point of view of the different parties. What are their views of the other groups involved in the situation? How do they see you and your organisation?

When you make your map at your own local level you will have to consider how it links up with the district and national level. Often power relations are replicated from one level to the next. For each power group also try and consider their support base in the population and why people support them. Are there specific, definable segments of the population that support particular power groups, and do they benefit from their success and patronage?

**In conclusion**

These tools can help you to analyse power relations. If you understand how power relations function, you will be better placed to decide how to act on power. This is the subject of the next chapter.

# Power Strategies – for collective action



– *Collective action involves empowering people, building solidarity and running campaigns for change.*

Creating change and progress for poor and marginalised people involves influencing, persuading and sometimes forcing powerful people to change their minds, their policies and their practices. For activists and civil society organisations working for social change, this process starts with empowerment. We have an important role to play in assisting poor and marginalised people to understand the forces that keep them entrapped in poverty. We have looked at what we have called invisible power and seen how traditions, beliefs and customs can perpetuate exclusion and poverty.

At the same time we have an equally important role to play in assisting poor people and their organisations to build stronger alliances and solidarity movements. The power of numbers is often crucial. A few small organisations are unlikely to be heard, whereas alliances of many organisations and movements involving large numbers of people can make a decisive impact for change.

Finally, we have to consider how we will campaign for the fulfilment of people's rights. What will we focus on – this is our aim, our objective, and then how we will go about achieving it. This is our strategy. For example, our objective may be to improve health care services for the most marginalised. Our strategy might be to collect evidence about the health status of the most marginalised and the

standard of care currently available and use this evidence to demand improvements. However this strategy assumes that powerful people will listen to us and consider our evidence seriously.

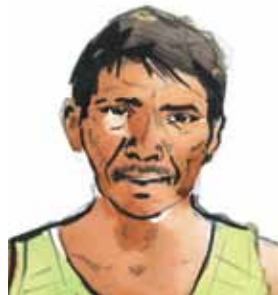
What this tells us is that when we decide our objectives and strategies, we also have to seriously consider the issue of power. What and who do we have to influence in order for the change we want to actually happen? Who might try to stop us and how would they do this? Who might support us and what would we have to do to win their support? Although our focus is at the local level, we may also need to consider how issues are linked to higher levels, perhaps especially the district level, but also the national level and sometimes even the international level.

The communities we work with and our own organisations that support them will decide what objectives to pursue. What we have to then do is to consider what strategy is best suited to the context we are working in. There are many ways of achieving our objectives and the choice of strategy will have much to do with how we have analysed power relations within our local context. We need to consider how powerful people will react to the strategies we choose and whether the strategies we have chosen are likely to have successful outcomes. In the following sections we will look at some commonly used strategies.

  
For more about Empowerment see ActionAid's REFLECT approach at: [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org) and People's Action in Practice: ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach (2012).



*– But don't forget power relations are involved in everything we do – be prepared!*



*– As long as you can keep talking to people, you have a chance to influence. But if communication breaks down completely, it can be hard to start it up again.*

### Strategy area 1: Dialoguing with progressive power holders

This strategy is based on influencing and persuading power holders to change policy and practice. It centres on dialogue, negotiation, lobbying and advocacy. It requires that power holders are prepared to listen to us. This can be because we have a position of strength, for example, the backing of a national alliance of CSOs which represent large numbers of people or carefully documented evidence about corruption. But being able to dialogue does not just depend on a position of strength; it can also be because we have common interests.

Common interests are easily found among like-minded people and organisations, but often power holders, who on the surface appear to be our opponents, may be willing and able to support some issues that are important to us. Careful power mapping like we have described in Chapter 5 may reveal that there are power holders who are prepared to listen to us and even support us. We may find that our overall views may differ widely, but on a specific issue we may be able to agree, although not necessarily for the same reasons. It is therefore important to maintain a dialogue with power holders in order to know what is going on as well as knowing how they think about issues that are important to us. The following approaches outlined below can be useful.

#### Ripe moments and triggering events:

This refers to situations where a combination of apparently unconnected events may suddenly make something

possible that was not possible before. It may be a series of local events like the outbreak of a serious illness that receives national press coverage and the involvement of officials from the capital. The combination of these events may make it possible to discuss issues and proposals that would have been unthinkable previously and which are not necessarily connected with the matter at hand. (For example, Case 4 in Chapter 4).

**Change agents:** This refers to individuals who have an interest in and capacity to carry out change that would benefit the poor. Sometimes this happens with the appointment of new officials to important local positions. Likewise, newly elected local councillors may be more progressive on certain issues. As activists working for social change, we should be aware of what position local officials take on issues that are important to us. Similarly, we should encourage and support minor local power holders who privately show concern about social issues to be more forthcoming and speak out in their communities – become change agents.

**Appeals to higher authority:** This approach is about taking an issue to a higher level of authority, for example jumping over local level authorities and going to the district level. The most common situation where this strategy is possible is when evidence of poor performance or misconduct collected by civil society is rejected or ignored by local authorities. They may hope that this will make us give up. However, it may be

possible to take the issue to the district level and initiate a dialogue. District officials may take a different view from those at the local level for a variety of reasons.

A variation of this strategy is for CSOs to approach district authorities with reasonable proposals for improvements or reforms at the local level and seek support and commitment from district level officials. With this kind of backing it can be difficult for local authorities to go against the proposals when they are presented to them. It is simply easier for them to follow the line of least resistance and agree.

### Strategy area 2: Evidence based approaches

This strategy is based on collecting objective evidence about a situation and using it to demand improvements. A common focus for this type of strategy is when service provision and government staff performance is poor when measured against standards, laws or human rights. A focus on service provision generally looks at the quality of services and people's satisfaction with them and whether standards are fulfilled. Another variant is to follow money trails and examine budget allocations to see if money disappears at some stage in the budget process. These methods can be quite technical and are sometimes done together with staff providing the service and bureaucrats responsible for administering them as they depend on having access to information and service locations. These strategies can be effective and result in improvements in the delivery of existing services and in improvements in relationships between

citizens and authorities as they encourage participatory problem solving approaches. These can be important objectives in themselves; however, they are less likely to challenge power relations or the structural problems that may be the cause of the problems we have been investigating. For example poor service and staff performance are often directly linked to weak accountability systems and under funding and under staffing of services.

A focus on staff performance often involves investigating complaints about corruption, mismanagement or abuse



*– We all know that corruption takes place, but you have to be able to collect reliable evidence to prove it.*





*– I was nervous when we met the District Commissioner, but the fact that we could present our evidence in an organised way and knew our facts by heart gave me great confidence...*



*– ... and it also impressed the commissioner!*

of laws or human rights standards. It involves gathering solid evidence which is often then made public through the media or through public meetings. Usually it involves naming individuals and publishing the extent of their misdeeds, often referred to as whistle blowing. This can cause considerable embarrassment for the people involved, which is one of the strengths of the method. The approach is more confrontational than the service provision focus and in serious cases judicial authorities should be involved. It is important for civil society activists using evidence based approaches to carry out a detailed power analysis in order to assess how power holders are likely to react when the evidence is presented, what outcomes are likely to be achieved and what the most appropriate course of action is likely to be. Evidence based strategies make the assumption that your evidence will be taken seriously. It also assumes that it is possible to access the information upon which you base your evidence. These assumptions need to be tested.

### **Strategy area 3: Communicating with a wider audience**

There are many strategies which are based on communicating with wider audiences about problematic issues in order to build support for a case and put pressure on power holders. Communication approaches are thus often a means to an end. For example being able to communicate with a wide range of people and tell them that health services in our area are substandard will help us towards our primary goal of getting health services

improved. The assumption is that greater public awareness will force power holders to react in the way we want them to. Again these assumptions need to be tested. In the following we have highlighted a few strategies of this type that are often used.

**Media:** The use of the media, that is mediums like TV, radio and newspapers, is a crucial strategy for all civil society work. Media reporting in all its forms allows our cases to be broadcast to a much wider audience and activists should consider how they can use the media in everything they do. It is especially important to see if it is possible to get your case into the media at a higher level. For example the district or national level, even the international level. (Case 10 in Chapter 4 is an example of this). There are now many innovative ways of getting your message across using social media, for example the internet, twitter, blogs, Facebook, SMS, YouTube and mobile phones. All these can be used in a great many innovative ways.

**Drama and music:** These approaches can be effective in breaking the taboo or myth about power. It can take many forms: street theatre, flash mobs, street processions, mock hearings or puppet plays to name a few. It does not have to name people, but it can outline cases or situations that people are familiar with. It can ridicule the double standards of the powerful. Just saying this openly in public can be a very big step forward which in itself helps to question their power base. Even the smallest victory over the powerful can have huge effects – suddenly they seem less powerful.



*– At each stage of the negotiations we went to the local newspaper and told them how things were going. Then they printed our story and posted it on their website. In this way a much wider audience could follow our work.*



*– It was only when we organised a peaceful demonstration that was attended by about a 1,000 people that the authorities realised how frustrated people were about the health situation in the district.*

Other approaches can involve formal statements or situation bulletins released by alliances of civil society organisations, as well as processions, marches, public assemblies and symbolic acts or vigils. Also committees or representations lead by respected citizens can be effective.

In all approaches which have to do with communicating to a wider audience it is important to consider the likely reaction of power holders. How will the strategy of communicating with a wider audience contribute to our primary goal? We need to consider this regularly and adjust the way we communicate in relation to how power holders react. If power holders who administer local services have indicated a willingness to negotiate and consider our proposals, it might make sense to hold back on a forthcoming media campaign that criticises the poor administration of services. It is important to make sure our communication strategies are in tune with our objectives and the actions of power holders as events unfold.

### **Strategy area 4: Peaceful Action and Protests**

This strategy is based on peaceful actions, protests and acts of civil disobedience where citizens peacefully draw attention to problems by using public spaces for demonstrations, sit-ins, events and happenings. These are all powerful methods of drawing attention to issues and demanding their redress. There are many forms of protest and civil disobedience ranging from litigation in the courts, to hunger strikes, boycotts of all types and refusals to comply and non-cooperation.

The assumption is that drawing attention to issues in this manner will make power holders react positively. However, the objective of some protests may initially be to get the issue recognised as a problem by the wider public. This can be important when access to the media is restricted or banned. These strategies directly confront power holders and again it is important to analyse how power holders are likely to react to protests. We need to be clear about how a protest strategy will contribute to the overall objectives we are aiming at. For example at the local level a short well organised and peaceful protest might be helpful in restarting negotiations with local government which had become ineffective because officials themselves thought that if they ignored us we would give up.

If we adopt protest strategies, we should carry out a careful power analysis as there are authorities in many countries that do not tolerate protests and they will often stop them violently. There may well be a risk of injury, imprisonment and torture for activists involved. In some countries peaceful demonstrations or protests are possible while in others just the act of protesting is enough to get people arrested. We need to carefully assess the risks in relation to the objectives and strategies we are pursuing and consider whether the risks can be justified.

*For more about new social media see the accompanying resource books in this series: **Voice** –Representation and People's Democracy.*



**Strategy area 5: Humanitarian and Documentation approaches**

In conflict situations where violence is rife, it may be very difficult for CSOs to operate at all. Case 6 in Chapter 4 about urban gangs is a good example of this. In situations like this, CSOs may be limited to just focusing on humanitarian service delivery, for example health care and education. This will initially be on the terms of the power holders, but over time as the services become established and people have come to depend on them, it may give CSOs greater leverage. However, it is a long term process which can easily be reversed and it is an open question whether these approaches do not somehow support the status quo.

In some cases it may be impossible for civil society to act at all. Civil society organisations may simply be banned. Violence and oppression may be widespread. In these situations, activists can still play an important role in documenting abuses in any way they can, through filming with mobile phones, through interviews or comprehensive note taking. Electronic media make it possible to get information sent abroad which can be a powerful tool for mobilising international support and condemnation of human rights abuses. Carefully documented data about human rights abuses can be used as evidence later in truth and reconciliation processes.



– During the emergency, it was a very hard time for us. All we could do was to document human rights violations as best we could. When times change, this information will help us bring the culprits to justice.

**In conclusion**

The main focus of this chapter has been to consider change strategies in relation to power analysis. Power is always present in change processes. It is important to consider how powerful people will react to or be affected by the change strategies we adopt and how this will contribute or detract from the achievement of our overall goals.

All the strategy areas we have discussed have been successfully used by CSOs and are in regular use, but remember there are many other factors that contribute to success and failure. Sometimes change comes quickly and unexpectedly, at other times what seemed a simple issue drags on for years without much change. It is unlikely that one single strategy will be successful on its own, so we may have to consider using a number of strategies at the same time and be prepared to change our strategies as events unfold. In addition, it is very helpful to work together with other NGOs or CSOs in alliances – there is power in numbers.

As we have noted, there are always power holders somewhere who are prepared to use violence and other oppressive means to stop you. It is therefore important to assess risks and threats to our work. This is the subject of the final chapter.

# Power struggles

## – assessing risks for collective action

Challenging power is always risky, with the potential for backlash and conflict. To some extent this is unavoidable. Many issues cannot be resolved without conflict, indeed conflict is a necessary part of change processes. As we have seen in Chapter 6, there are many strategies available for collective action. Which ones we select will depend on a number of things – among them the degree of risk. Carrying out a structured risk assessment can help in selecting strategies, or thinking through how to minimise risk. In this chapter we look at two simple tools for assessing risk factors.

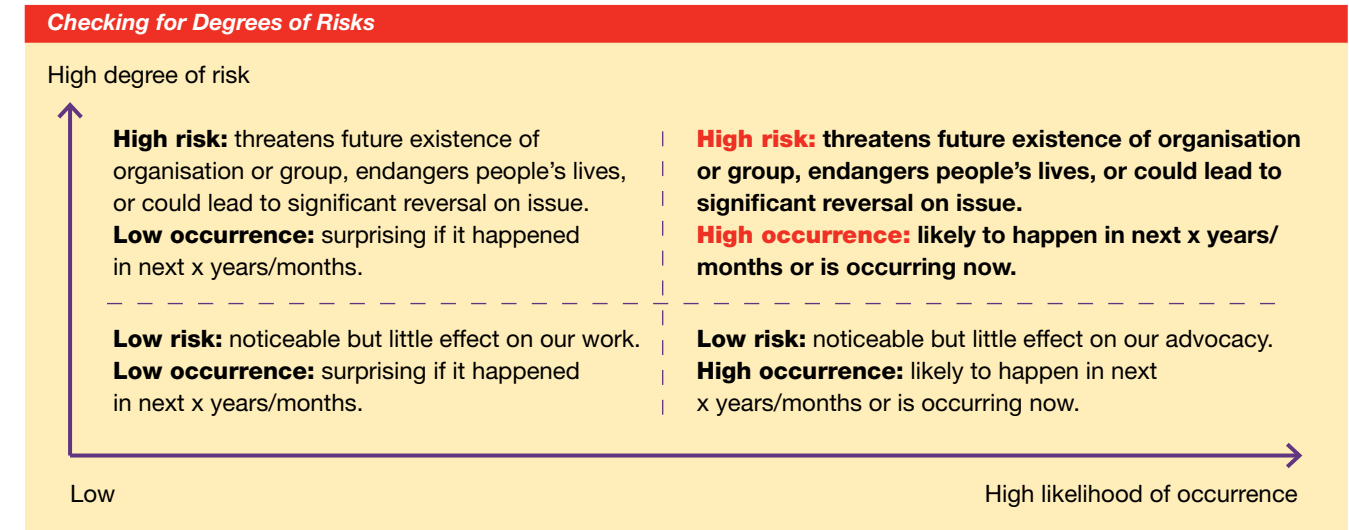
**Tool 1: Risk analysis grids**

These are grids that you can draw up on a piece of paper or a board and use as a framework for discussing risks in your organisation. Questions that you might ask yourselves in a risk analysis include:

- 1 What are the risks? What are the major things that might go wrong with this strategy or action that might endanger people’s lives, provoke a backlash or place people’s health and the work your organisation is doing in jeopardy?



– Change involves challenging power and this often involves conflict and with conflict there are always risks. We should never underestimate risks. It’s important to consider what could go wrong and make contingency plans for what we will do if something happens.





– A risk analysis grid is a tool for analysing how serious a risk really is.

- 2 What is the potential impact of this risk? (How serious would it be to us, the people we are supporting, or the issue, if it happened?) Decide whether the answer is high or low (or in between).
- 3 How likely is it that this negative situation will happen (the likelihood)? Again, decide whether it is high or low (or in between).

You might just discuss the questions or you can use cards to calculate risk more systematically. For example, you can brainstorm risks and write each one on a different card. This can be followed by a discussion of the rest of the questions as they apply to each card. You can then place the cards on a risk grid like the one shown here.

You should discuss the risk cards that have high risk and high likelihood of occurrence – those that you put in the top right hand box in the diagram (see previous page). Discuss what you could do to reduce the risk or danger and how you could protect the group, the organisation or yourself if your actions don't work out as planned. If you feel that there is really no way to avoid unacceptable risks, you should perhaps consider revising your strategy to something that is less risky.

Being able to visualise risks in this way and discuss them in a structured manner can be a valuable exercise which can help you to make the right decisions in relation to the strategies you are planning to use or are using.

**Tool 2: Force field analysis is another type of risk analysis tool.**

This tool can be used to identify the different forces that may influence your work. Forces can be people or organisations or events that can affect your work. Whenever you are working for change, there will be some forces that are supporting you and other forces that are blocking what you are trying to achieve. This tool offers a way of identifying these positive and negative forces. It helps you assess their strengths and weaknesses. It can also help you to see more clearly what is maintaining the status quo. It is a visual tool like the one in the diagram shown on the next page that you can draw on a piece of paper, a board or on a wall.

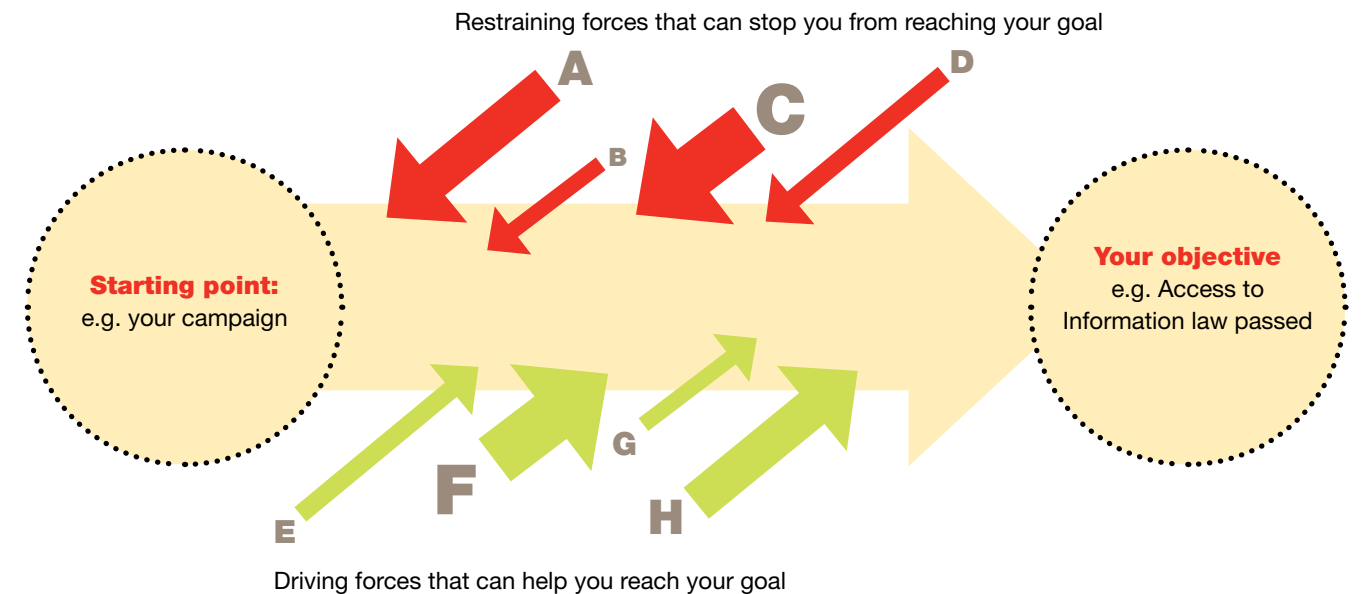
These are the steps for using the tool:

- 1 Draw a horizontal time line with your starting point at one end and your objective or goal at the other end as in the diagram on the next page.
- 2 On the top of the line list all the forces (people, organisations or events) that may stop you from achieving your objective. Make an arrow that is pushing you backwards from each force. The thicker you make the arrow, the bigger the threat from that force. If you make the force closer to the line, it means that it is a force near you, a local force. If it is further away, it is at the district, regional or even national level.



– Force field analysis is a tool for identifying both positive and negative forces that can influence your work.

- 3 Underneath the line list all the forces that will help you achieve your objective. Make an arrow that is pushing you forwards from each force. The thicker you make the arrow, the bigger the help you can expect to get from that force. If you make the force closer to the line, it means that it is a force near you, a local force. If it is further away, it is at the district, regional or even national level.
- 4 When you have done this, consider which forces you can influence, either strengthening the positive forces or weakening the negative ones.
- 5 In the light of your analysis, you may want to review your plan of action and modify your strategy.



**Force Field Analysis**

IDEAS BASED ON LEWIN, K. (1951) FIELD THEORY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, NEW YORK: HARPER AND ROW

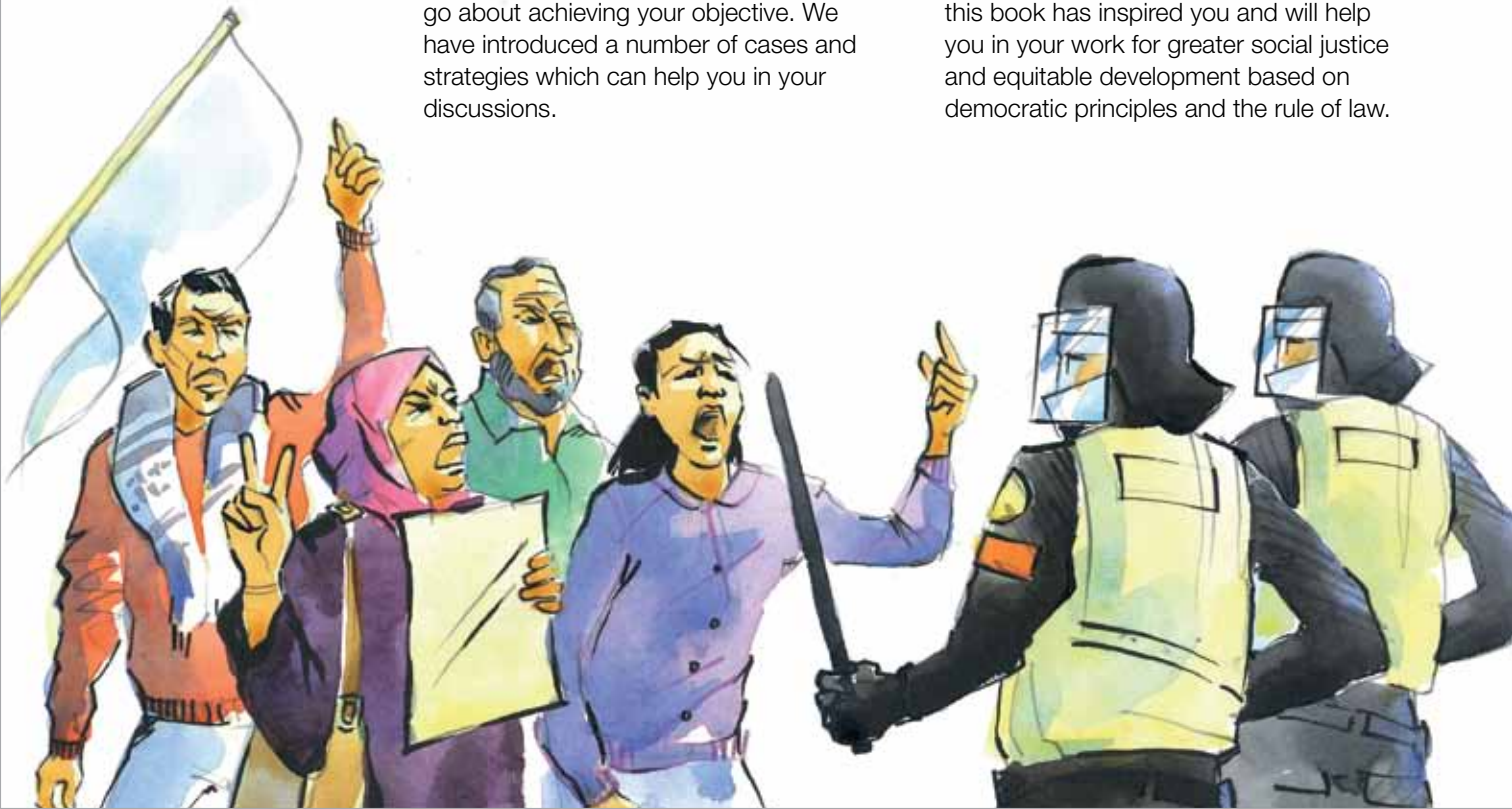


– *Change involves challenging power and this often involves conflict and with conflict people can get hurt.*

### In conclusion

In order to decide on the best strategy to confront unjust power holders, you must first of all be clear about your objective. What is it that you and your community, or your organisation, want to achieve? When you have a clear picture of this, you can analyse the situation. There are many things you should think about and in Chapter 6 we focused on analysing power relations. Power, and how it is wielded, can have a decisive effect on your work. Many civil society efforts to bring greater justice and equality to their communities fail because power relations were not considered fully. When you have a good picture of how power works in your area and who are the power holders, you can then discuss and review the many ways that you could go about achieving your objective. We have introduced a number of cases and strategies which can help you in your discussions.

But you should also find out what other people have done in your area and what approaches have been successful and what ones have not been – and why. It is important to consider multiple strategies as well as building alliances with other organisations. There is great strength in numbers. Many of the strategies we have discussed take time. You must be realistic about what it is possible to achieve. Many of the strategies just nibble at the feet of powerful people, but occasionally a mouse can bite a vital nerve and make even an elephant jump. Change can come unexpectedly and quickly on occasion. If you keep biting for long enough, small changes develop into bigger changes which add to significant improvements for people living in poverty. We hope that this book has inspired you and will help you in your work for greater social justice and equitable development based on democratic principles and the rule of law.



## Acknowledgement of Sources

The following publications have particularly inspired this resource book:

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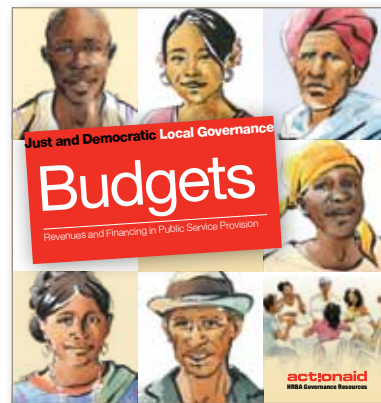
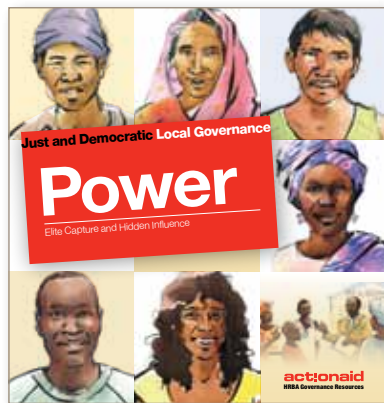
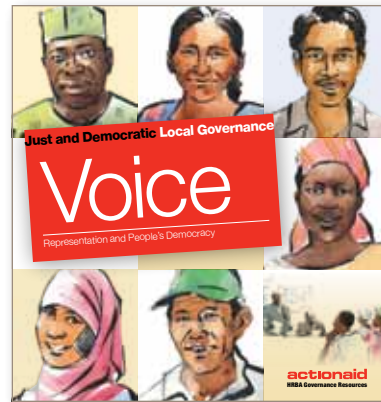
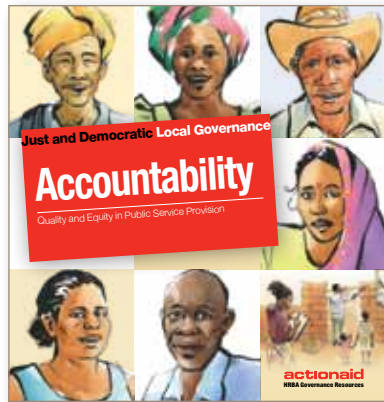
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**The Just and Democratic Governance Series**

consists of a series of resource books which aim to support the work of civil society activists in their struggle to reduce poverty and fulfil people's rights. The series supplements ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and focuses on key challenge areas identified in ActionAid's governance work. Under the common title: Just and Democratic Local Governance, the series at present consists of the following titles.



## **Just and Democratic Governance**

Throughout the world, people's demands for democracy are growing louder as many have suffered under oppressive regimes and unaccountable leaders. Without meaningful democracy, elites capture decision-making processes and resources. For many of the poorest and most excluded groups, there is a strong connection between a lack of political space or influence and the perpetuation of poverty and injustice. Seeking alternatives, women, men and youth around the world are taking to the streets; using the internet; and or joining local meetings to demand proper political representation and accountability from the State for delivering on basic rights.

ActionAid works through a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and is committed to holding governments and corporates to account and improving the quality, equity and gender responsiveness of public services for five million people living in poverty as well as supporting people

and their movements to gain significant victories in achieving a fairer redistribution of resources for financing poverty reducing public policies by 2017.

This book is part of a series of books which supplement ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach – People's Action in Practice. Under the common title of Just and Democratic Governance, the series focuses on governance issues, approaches and tools that are relevant in all ActionAid's work in Local Rights Programmes. The series supports the work of civil society activists in their struggle for just and democratic local governance systems which respect, protect and fulfil people's human rights.

The series focus on key governance challenges identified in ActionAid's work in Local Rights Programmes. At present the series consists of the following titles.

**Democracy – Justice and Accountability at the Local Level**

**Accountability – Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision**

**Voice – Representation and Peoples' Democracy**

**Power – Elite Capture and Hidden Influence**

**Budgets – Revenues and Financing in Public Service Provision**