

# Community-based approaches and service delivery: Issues and options in difficult environments and partnerships

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by

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## Summary

1. This background paper was prepared for DFID Sudan Desk starting in Dec 2004. The paper focuses on the relationship between community-based approaches and service delivery. It draws together general lessons from international experience of relevance to ongoing discussions in Sudan. Specifically it analyses the different objectives underlying community-based approaches and service delivery in different settings and the challenges associated with linking these objectives in the context of highly aid dependent post-conflict environments. The paper focuses primarily on provision of basic services i.e. primary healthcare, primary education and water supply and sanitation but with examples drawn particularly from the health and water and sanitation.

2. The focus of the paper is on the general operational challenges of programming development assistance and implementing activities in fragile states or difficult environments.

- Section 1 sets out issues around terminology and objectives associated with fragile states, community-based approaches and service delivery.
- Section 2 goes on to explore the challenges and options for the use of community based approaches and the factors that determine the potential and limits of CBA.
- Section 3 focuses on the nature of the aid relationship. The hypothesis underlying this is that because aid is often so significant in such situations, how these resources are supplied has an impact on the likely success in service delivery or usefulness of CBA.

3. Section 1 identifies a range of different objectives associated with applying CBA. These include *inter alia* empowerment of people and communities, improving efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of interventions, building organisational capacity at local level and strengthening local governance. The central conclusion of section 1 is that a great deal of care is required in distinguishing between different objectives associated with community-based approaches (CBA) and understanding how they relate to wider service-delivery objectives. In particular this requires:

- Differentiating between adopting a community-based approach and simply implementing projects at community level;
- Avoiding the assumption that because community-based approaches *can* be used to achieve a range of different objectives, using them *will* achieve those objectives.
- Identifying a clear hierarchy of objectives and acknowledging trade-offs between them.

4. Community-based approaches can contribute to broader service-delivery objectives. However for the impact of such approaches to be optimised, there needs to be greater clarity about the precise objectives CBA is being harnessed to achieve and more realism about what is achievable in a particular context with a project or programme.

5. Section 2 highlights a number of issues and challenges associated with implementing community-based approaches, both generally and specifically in difficult environments. Particular issues relating to defining the user community, degree of local authority involvement, targeting and financing were identified and discussed. The review concludes that community-based

approaches are relevant across many sectors and can equally be applied to individual community-level projects or as a component of wider national programmes.

6. An important question in post-conflict settings is how to ‘scale up’ activities from project-based assistance (relief) in the absence of effective government, towards programme- and policy-based assistance (development). It is particularly important that community-level activities are clearly located in relation to other interventions, in terms of focus, type and scale.

7. The potential and limits to CBA discussed in section 2 are summarised as follows:

- **Problem identification.** There is broad agreement that community-based approaches have the potential to be more responsive to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries (allocative efficiency). However communities are generally less well equipped for identifying solutions.
- **Identifying solutions** to problems experienced at community level generally requires additional external technical support to facilitate informed decision-making. Important issues surround designing an appropriate ‘menu’ of service options which balances the needs and demands of beneficiaries with the constraints of the operating environment.
- **Public goods and optimum level of provision.** Community level priorities may not always be consistent with broader societal goals e.g. equity, efficiency and sustainability. While community-based approaches may improve allocative and productive efficiency, public goods, for example sanitation, are often undersupplied. Important questions surround subsidiarity i.e. the levels at which decisions are made and different components of services are provided.
- **Maintaining minimum standards.** It is important that community-level interventions are complemented and guided by a larger system of norms and standards to ensure quality and equity in services provided. Community-based approaches have the potential to improve targeting in general, but major challenges surround targeting vulnerable groups *within* communities.
- **Enabling environment.** A key determinant of the potential and limits of CBA is fundamentally the existence of an ‘enabling environment’ which can provide information to support identification of appropriate solutions, decide on the optimum level of provision, ensure maintenance of minimum standards, and respond flexibly to changing demand for services over time.

8. A common challenge in post-conflict settings is striking an appropriate balance between the need to rebuild institutions quickly and the desire to reform them to ensure longer-term sustainability in service provision. Experience shows that the success of community-based approaches ultimately depends on establishing a responsive framework of support institutions. This takes time. If the objective of strengthening local governance is to be realised there is a need for gradual/conditional disbursement which allows time for beneficiaries to learn how to defend their rights and hold leaders and service providers to account. Unfortunately this requirement often runs counter to short-term funding cycles and the desire to see ‘quick impacts’, especially in post-conflict settings.

9. Section 3 explores the way in which aid is delivered and the impact this has on the ‘enabling environment’ required for CBA, especially in aid-dependant environments. The way the aid actors

behave and external flows are delivered is not always conducive to the development of the systems and structures that support community-based approaches. There are discussions on how to relate externally-financed activities more effectively to national systems and policies which are relevant to difficult environments and service delivery. The main concern is to 'do no harm' while also not legitimising authorities in situations where there is serious concern or ongoing conflict. However, the emerging recommendations in this area go against entrenched current practice and will require substantial efforts and commitment by all actors to make them a success.

## **Introduction**

10. This background paper was originally prepared to feed into discussions at two DFID-funded workshops on future options for Service Delivery in Sudan, held consecutively in Khartoum and Nairobi in December 2004. The paper focuses on the relationship between community-based approaches (CBA) and service delivery (SD) drawing general lessons from international experience of relevance to ongoing discussions in Sudan. Specifically it analyses the different objectives underlying CBA and SD in different settings and the challenges associated with linking these objectives in the context of highly aid dependent post-conflict environments. The paper focuses primarily on provision of basic services i.e. primary healthcare, primary education and water supply and sanitation (WSS) but with examples drawn particularly from the health and WSS.

11. The focus of the paper (sections 1 and 2) is on the general operational challenges of programming and implementing activities in fragile states or difficult environments. This specifically involves looking at operations, decisions and options of what can and should be undertaken in difficult environments (such as protracted conflict, lack of infrastructure, weak human and administrative capacity). A second set of issues are set out in section 3 around the nature of the aid relationship (for example humanitarianism and aiding fragile states). The hypothesis underlying this is that because aid is often so significant in such situations, how these resources are supplied has an impact on the likely success in service delivery or usefulness of CBA. The final section draws together conclusions around the limits, potential and enabling environment for using community-based approaches for service delivery.

### **1. Terminology and objectives**

12. This first section of the paper briefly sets some definitions and outlines the debates around some of the key concepts used. This includes the rationale for engaging in fragile states or difficult environments, the underlying logic to the delivery of basic services and community based approaches. The analysis highlights a range of different objectives imputed to CBA and SD and some of the conflation problems that occur as a consequence.

#### **1.1. *The varied characteristics of difficult environments***

13. The discussion which follows centres on the challenges associated with delivering services in so-called 'fragile states' or 'difficult environments' (see Berry et al, 2004). These terms are used broadly to refer to a range of situations where the state is either weak or collapsed, including post-conflict settings. The agenda around how to aid these environments has shifted and gained considerable momentum over the last few years.

14. The emphasis on these countries has arisen from a range of sources. After the trend towards rewarding 'good performance' and aiding good policy environments came a recognition that the logical consequence of disengagement from 'poor policy environments' was however not an option, particularly given the significance of such countries to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The events following September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 resulted in linkages being made between global insecurity, poverty, social exclusions and weak institutions in particular countries

and regions. This included a focus on the erosion of state institutions and their inability to deliver services as a potential factor contributing to global security risk.

15. Within this a range of specific international initiatives that have been central to developing this agenda (see Macrae & Harmer 2003 for a discussion of recent trends). They include the Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) work at the World Bank (WB), the OECD DAC Joint Learning and Advisory Process on Difficult Partnerships (LAP) and units set up in US and UK governments to focus on post conflict reconstruction or stabilisation. DAC characterizes difficult partnerships as “countries where there is a lack of political commitment and weak capacity to develop and implement pro-poor policies” (*Development Cooperation in Difficult Partnerships*, DAC 2002). The World Bank has adopted a categorization “Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS). DFID has categorized a similar set of countries as “fragile states”. There is an underlying tension between categorisations that are operationally useful (e.g. LICUS ones which focus specifically on World Bank operations) and those which attempt to capture a wider ‘reality’. The current terminology seems to be settling on ‘fragile states’ as an easily recognisable term across a range of cases, but while recognising the shortcomings in terms of comprehensiveness and subjective elements of the agenda that it does not capture.

16. Within the current discussion there is an emerging consensus around a distinction between the *willingness* of a state or government to undertake reform or implement policy and their *capacity* to do so. Within this categorisation a further distinction is sometimes made in terms of whose willingness, which is about the depth of commitment and level of political traction; and central vs implementation capacity. Central capacity is about the ability to make policy, while implementation focuses on administrative capacity to execute programmes and policies at a decentralised level (Christiansen et al., 2004). Another common differentiation is the level of legitimacy or a gap in participation which is linked to the ‘resilience’ of a regime or state (USAID, 2005; Picciotto et al., 2004).

17. One subgroup of ‘fragile states’ which warrants further discussion is countries in armed conflict. In practice pervasive ongoing armed conflict is a key feature of many difficult environments and it is often in these environments that the worst long term human development outcomes are generated (Macrae et al., 2004). Contemporary armed conflicts are said to be increasingly complex (see **Box 1**) and the distinction between conflict and post-conflict is often very unclear. Common usage of the term ‘post-conflict’ does not necessarily imply absolute peace. An understanding of the political economy of conflict and the nature and dynamics of vulnerability is an important prerequisite for conflict-sensitive programming if a return to conflict is to be averted (Le Billion, 2000; Collinson et al., 2003). The legacy of protracted conflict also presents significant constraints to efforts to rehabilitate basic services (Holzmann, 1999).

#### **Box 1: Complex Emergencies**

There has been a worldwide proliferation in recent years of so-called complex emergencies. ‘These tend to have multiple causes, but are essentially political in nature and entail violent conflict. They typically include a breakdown of legitimate institutions and governance, widespread suffering and massive population displacements, and they often involve and require a range of responses from the international community, including intense diplomacy and conflict resolution efforts, UN policing actions, and the provision of multilateral and bilateral humanitarian assistance by official and private agencies. A complex emergency tends to be very dynamic, characterized by rapid changes that are

difficult to predict. Thus complex issues are raised regarding the timing, nature and scale of response. The Rwanda complex emergency shares all these characteristics and more' (Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996).

Kaldor (1999) introduced the concept of 'new wars' and a shift away from state-sponsored conflict towards decentralised self-financing conflicts (see also de Waal, 1997; Duffield, 1998). Others have documented the increased involvement of armies or militias in illicit commercial activities (e.g. Keen, 1998 on Sierra Leone) and highlight the extra-legal or violent means by which powerful groups actively and deliberately undermine the entitlements of marginalised groups. It is further argued that internal wars help to sustain 'alternative' political and economic systems and 'forced', 'parallel' markets with restricted entry controlled by elite groups. An emerging concept is that of 'conflict entrepreneurs' – individuals or groups who seek to manipulate conflict situations to serve specific political (and economic) objectives, often manipulating historical constructions of identity in order to mobilise others (Eide, 1997). Despite ceasefire agreements or negotiated peace deals, such conflicts tend to persist over several years or even decades; pockets of apparent stability (either geographical or temporal) may revert to insecurity, and it is often difficult to know whether or when the conflict is truly over. Such situations exist or have existed in inter alia Afghanistan, Angola, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Southern Sudan and Sri Lanka.

18. It is important to note that even within a country what makes the environment 'difficult' often varies. Specially rather different types of service delivery problems are often faced in different parts of the same country and coverage levels, while similarly low, might be so for quite different reasons (see **Box 2**). This implies the need for a differentiated strategy capable of addressing both short-term acute problems relating to ongoing conflict, food insecurity and vulnerability, and the longer-term challenge of (re)building human and institutional capacity. The key therefore is prioritising limited resources (type and location of intervention) while maintaining the capacity to respond flexibly to changing contexts on the ground.

## **Box 2: Sudan**

The situation in Sudan illustrates many of the challenges associated with 'difficult' environments.

### *Regional disparities in economic and social development*

Overall growth during the 1990s has been strong but skewed. Combination of conflict and persistent underdevelopment of marginalised areas. Wide variations both within and between North and South. In the North economic reforms involved drastic reduction in public expenditure negatively affecting social services and infrastructure investment (World Bank, 2003). Decentralisation of service delivery functions to states and local authorities which currently have neither the revenues nor the administrative capacity for these tasks. Widespread collapse of basic infrastructure and administrative capacity in the South as a result of civil war.

### *Protracted conflict and insecurity*

Decentralised, uneven nature of conflict ranging from open warfare to localised inter-clan conflicts. Periodic acute humanitarian emergencies. Widespread insecurity, breakdown in rule of law and proliferation of small arms and UXO. Major challenges surrounding demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups. Stark contrast between conflict affected areas and parts of the North which are relatively stable and rarely directly affected by conflict in other regions.

### *Low levels of coverage in basic services and serious obstacles to access*

Major gaps in statistical coverage, especially in conflict affected areas, but available data suggest low and uneven coverage (UNICEF) and worsening HDI trends in many areas (Kozel & Mullen, 2003). Geographic factor: vast territory (2.5million km<sup>2</sup>), low population density, frequent floods and droughts. Discrimination in service provision, both political (e.g. ethnicity/religion) and social (e.g. women and children). Specific challenges associated with delivering services to mobile and transitory populations including an estimated 4 million IDPs. Aggregate data masks major disparities in service levels. Services in Khartoum state are relatively good by regional standards whereas elsewhere they are virtually non-existent.

### *Fragile state, difficult partner?*

The level of fragility whether defined in terms of capacity, willingness or resilience varies significantly between different regions and different levels of state systems or authorities. Central policy capacity in Khartoum would seem relatively high, at least compared to the SPLM which is encountering policy making largely for the first time. Implementation capacity is extremely variable both between and within the north and south, but particularly lacking within the southern states. Levels of willingness as perceived by the international community are also variable, historical isolation of the Khartoum government largely reflects the perceived lack of willingness to undertake political and economic reforms. Levels and the nature of resilience, legitimacy and participation are also very different across regions as well as between different international actors.

## **1.2. Service delivery**

19. Service delivery can be usefully conceptualised as the relationship between policy makers, service providers, and consumers of those services and encompasses both services and their supporting systems. This section sets out some of the definitions around service delivery (SD) and the rationale for providing services. The focus in difficult environments is generally a slightly narrower definition of 'basic services'. Basic needs tend to be more acute and access more difficult, especially among conflict affected populations, and the infrastructure and administrative capacity to deliver higher level services is often lacking. Definitions of 'basic' services vary but

generally included are primary health and education, basic water and sanitation, roads and bridges, and minimum rule of law and justice that promote personal security. Another common concept is that of ‘pro-poor service delivery’. This refers to interventions that maximise the access and participation of the poor by strengthening the relationships between policy makers, providers, and service users (DFID, 2003).

20. There are a range of different rationales or justifications for why the state should deliver services to their population. These can be categorised as economic, rights-based and state legitimacy justifications.

**21. The economic argument** for state intervention to deliver goods or service is premised on the idea of market failure. Leaving things to the market will result in an under-supply or under consumption because there are public benefits that go beyond the personal ones. While individuals benefit from being immunised against polio, the benefits for society as a whole are much greater if there are high levels of immunisation – there are positive externalities. Public health and welfare programmes, education, roads, research and development, national and domestic security, and a clean environment are some of the commonly listed ‘public goods’.

**22. Rights-based arguments** are founded on the idea of a set of universal and indivisible rights that all individuals hold and that are or should be backed by legal entitlements. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966) details states’ obligations in the social sectors and includes an obligation to progressively realise these rights. While this takes into account resources constraints, it is combined with ‘minimum standards’ that are not subject to progressive realisation. Rights-based arguments are underpinned by assumptions about obligations to respect the principles of non-discrimination and accountability, as well as the right to participation. A basic needs approach on the other hand is not necessarily associated with an obligation on the part of the government to cater to needs and cannot be enforced.

**23. State legitimacy justifications** start from the observation that historically the development of the state was based on the extraction of resources and personnel largely for military purposes. In return, the state would provide external and internal security. As societies modernised and became more complex, the role of the state and the range of services provided expanded, while expectations of citizens vis-à-vis the state increased. The problem facing many developing states is that while they make promises to both external actors and their own populations, their ability to deliver on these promises is often limited. The disparity between expectations and delivery undermines their legitimacy both internally and externally.

24. There is a growing international consensus around the importance of human development outcomes, as the MDGs demonstrate<sup>1</sup>. It is generally agreed that the responsibility for financing and regulation of basic services lies with the state, which is the entity with the legal responsibility for realising their population’s human rights. However, the state is sometimes unable or unwilling to assume these functions or responsibilities, rendering external support problematic. In extreme cases, there may be a humanitarian imperative to bypass the state completely and intervene where life, health, subsistence or physical security are threatened.

<sup>1</sup> See Blanchflower et al., 2004 on importance of difficult environments in relation to achievement of MDGs.

25. Clear understanding of the objectives of service delivery in difficult environments helps us define entry points for external support, aid modalities and donor behaviour. It is important also to note that there are limits to what can be achieved through service delivery alone. There are dangers of conflating objectives (discussed further in section 1.5 below). The desired outcomes we associate with service delivery are dependent on parallel successes in improving security, reducing vulnerability and stimulating broad-based economic growth etc. In a post-conflict setting, short-term objectives typically include restoring peace and stability, achieving ‘quick impacts’ and winning ‘hearts and minds’ by tackling high-visibility problems rapidly. These need to be carefully balanced with longer-term objectives of (re)building institutions for service delivery and (re)establishing the legitimacy of the state. Achievement of both types of objectives depends on capacities and contexts and typically requires a mix of state and non-state mechanisms. There is no blueprint for service delivery in difficult environments. Capacities of state and non-state providers may vary enormously, so the appropriate mix of approaches and instruments is also likely to vary.

### **1.3. Community-based approaches**

26. This section provides an overview of key issues relating to ‘Community-based approaches’ (CBA) in general and specifically in conflict and post-conflict settings. CBA is an umbrella term for approaches to programming which involve beneficiaries in their identification, design or management. It refers to a set of approaches, applied within community-level projects or as part of national programmes. Degrees of ‘participation’ vary substantially and range along a spectrum from consultation with communities to devolution of resources, decision making and implementation to the community level. There is an extensive literature on the potential and limitations of community-based approaches which draws mainly on theories of collective action.

27. Participatory approaches have been around for many years now but the degree of beneficiary control in development projects varies significantly. The perceived failure of previous top-down supply-driven programmes to extend service coverage on a sustainable basis has led to renewed interest in community-based approaches at the World Bank. ‘Community Driven Development’ (CDD) as defined in recent World Bank documents goes far beyond mere consultation to treat beneficiaries and their institutions as ‘assets and partners in the development process’.

#### **Box 3: CDD**

‘Community-driven development (CDD) gives control of decisions and resources to community groups. These groups often work in partnership with demand-responsive support organizations and service providers including elected local governments, the private sector, NGOs, and central government agencies. CDD is a way to provide social and infrastructure services, to organize economic activity and resource management, to empower poor people, improve governance, and enhance security of the poorest.’

Source: PRSP sourcebook

28. The overall amount spent by the World Bank for CDD has increased dramatically from approximately \$325million in 1996 to \$2bn in 2003 (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). This shift represents a significant change in spending patterns and some critics have argued that the available evidence on the effectiveness of CBA does not support the speed and scale of the change (Harriss, 2001; Platteau, 2004).

29. Community-based approaches are increasingly being applied in a range of different contexts, both as part of an idealised model of decentralised government and also in the absence of effective government. It has been suggested that community-based approaches can be pursued in areas where traditional forms of aid are not yet possible. As such, community-based approaches have been presented as a possible means to bridging the ‘gap’ between relief and development (Cliffe et al., 2003). This is partly a matter of building foundations for systematic delivery of essential services and partly about (re)establishing the ‘social contract’ between emerging institutions of governance and their constituencies. Proponents of community-based approaches argue that their inherent flexibility makes it possible to intervene in areas where the state is weak, but critics argue that in practice they often fail to build, or even undermine, state capacity.

#### **1.4. Objectives of community-based approaches**

30. This paper focuses on the potential of community-based approaches in relation to service delivery objectives (not the contribution of SD to community-based approaches for example). As with service delivery, discussed briefly above, a range of different objectives are imputed to CBA. These objectives, and what they can or should be able to achieve, are often not clearly articulated. They rest on implicit assumptions that are often conflated. The following section tries to disentwine some of the common objectives around CBA and explore briefly how they relate to each other. Four broad overlapping categories of objectives are identified: empowerment, building organisational capacity, improving efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability and strengthening local government. It is important to note that a community-based approach may be applied as *means* of improving service delivery (e.g. efficiency) or as an *end* in itself (e.g. empowerment).

31. **Empowerment of people and communities.** It has been argued that (well-designed) community-based projects have the potential to be more inclusive, to empower communities, including poor and marginalised groups, and strengthen linkages between civil society and government (Narayan, 1998; Alkire et al, 2004). Others have questioned the extent to which such complex issues as empowerment can really be addressed through participation in community development projects (Mosse, 2001). There is an extensive literature around the costs and benefits of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). In some cases it is regarded as a means to better problem definition whereas in others it is regarded as something which has inherent value and is thus an end in itself.

32. **Improve efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.** There is broad agreement that community-based interventions have the potential to be more responsive to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries (allocative efficiency). There is also some evidence that community-based projects are comparatively cost effective (productive efficiency) because of lower levels of bureaucracy and better knowledge of local costs (McLeod, 2003; Rawlings et al., 2004) While those projects which draw primarily on locally available skills, materials and financing are clearly likely to be more sustainable, some commentators have argued that this simply amounts to shifting the financial burden of service delivery to potential beneficiaries (Ribot, 1995; Joshi, 2002). This may be inconsistent with a rights-based approach to broadening access (see **Box 4**).

33. **Build organisational capacity at local level.** In theory, mobilisation of communities to identify problems and plan and manage projects helps strengthen local capacity for collective

action. There is arguably inherent value in this and additional benefits are often observed beyond the scope of the original project, e.g. formation of self-help groups and micro enterprise development (McLeod & Tovo, 2001). However, important questions surround the definition of 'community' and the ways in which the demands of sub-groups and individuals are represented, e.g. ethnic minorities, women and children. Community-based approaches typically aim to build 'social capital' but while this is a useful concept it is often applied uncritically with inadequate understanding of cultural and political context and vested interests in the status quo (Harris, 2001; Fine, 2001; Krishna, 2001).

34. **Strengthen local governance.** Community-driven development is increasingly being promoted as a means of strengthening state-community synergies (Das Gupta et al., 2004; Binswanger & Aiyar, 2003). Emerging demand-driven approaches theoretically 'empower' communities to command services and provide a mechanism for (re)building trust and accountability and re-establishing the 'social contract' between communities and government. However major challenges surround integrating emerging community-based approaches with traditional sectoral and local government approaches (World Bank, 2004). The objectives of strengthening local governance and delivering better services are often confused. Pressure to meet short term sectoral output targets often distracts attention from institutional reforms necessary to make service delivery systems sustainable in the longer term.

#### **Box 4: Efficiency vs rights?**

There has been a global shift in water policy since the mid-1990s away from top down supply-led approaches towards demand-based approaches based on the principle of managing water as an economic good. A central feature of new approaches has been devolution of management and financing responsibility to local levels. A key concern associated with reforms focused on improving efficiency and sustainability of water supply systems is how to protect basic needs. The introduction of user financing has proved controversial in many areas with poor water users unable or unwilling to pay. South African is trying to achieve an appropriate balance between equity and efficiency through promoting a vision of water as both a social and an economic good. The Free Basic Water policy entitles every household to a 'lifeline' supply of 6000l per month (25lpcpd based upon an average household of 8) free of charge. The costs of providing Free Basic Water are recovered by increasing charges for higher level users which enables cross subsidisation. Early experience suggests significant challenges associated with its implementation, especially in low-revenue areas. In poorer regions of South Africa the provision of FBW depends heavily on intergovernmental transfers. This raises questions as to what level we expect services to be sustainable e.g. village, district, province.

### **1.5. Prioritising among multiple objectives**

35. As noted, the objectives attributed to CBA include empowerment, building organisational capacity, improving efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of an intervention or service, and strengthening local government. These are variously treated both as means to an end and as ends in themselves. Using CBA to build organisational capacity can for example be viewed as an end or a purpose in itself or a mechanism for improving local governance, or a way of empowering a community. While a community-based approach to service delivery may contribute to empowerment, improving efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, building local capacity and strengthening local governance, it is unlikely to meet all of these objectives at once with the same level of success. It is often assumed that, because CBA *can* be used to achieve a range of objectives, applying CBA *will* achieve all of those objectives. Unfortunately, there is nothing

automatic about this. The practical impact is a tendency to conflate objectives and/or a failure to clearly prioritise among them, as witnessed in the proliferation of highly unrealistic log-frames based on dubious assertions about causality. This overloading of the agenda for intervention may in fact undermine the potential added value of more focused application of CBA. Thus, clarity about objectives and/or a clear hierarchy of objectives in relation to the operating context is essential.

36. To give an example, community-based approaches to rural water supply and sanitation are widely promoted as being more efficient and sustainable (WSP, 2001). However, community-based does not imply self-sufficiency at community level, and experience shows that the success of such approaches depends on establishing a framework of responsive external support agencies (Ariyabandu, 2004). While establishing management capacity at community level often has positive benefits beyond the project itself (IRC, 2000), a committee established to manage a borehole will not necessarily be well-equipped to manage a school/clinic, or indeed engage in conflict resolution and reconciliation activities. Well-designed RWSS projects may well help to empower individuals or communities but this is generally contingent on other factors such as changes in gender relations, and therefore only holds true in specific conditions (Joshi, 2002). Similarly water supply projects may provide an entry point for strengthening local governance by directly linking communities with local government, but this in itself is not sufficient to improve accountability. Thus, if the primary objective is empowerment of target groups or strengthening local governance, limited sector-specific CBA activities may not be most effective way of achieve them.

37. Conflation of objectives is a common problem. While CBA may result in better services, this is not always the case. Nor is it necessarily true that better services will result in empowerment or contribute to strengthening local governance. It is important therefore to separate out these various objectives and prioritise among them, especially in conflict settings. Furthermore it is important to explicitly recognise the limits of CBA in the context of wider state-building objectives, and the importance of addressing wider policy and institutional frameworks within which they are being applied.

### **1.5.1. How do objectives differ in conflict and post-conflict settings?**

38. Community-based approaches are increasingly applied in protracted conflicts where there has been a continued absence of effective government over long periods. However the promotion of developmental principles of participation and working with and through communities, as a means of improving efficiency and relevance of relief interventions, creates dilemmas for humanitarians concerned with impartiality and neutrality. The concept of sustainability<sup>2</sup> is equally controversial. This is a key programming objective of development interventions but is by definition largely incompatible with 'relief' (Macrae, 2001). Generally accepted development programming concepts clearly need to be adapted to fit the actual conditions of crisis and recovery in specific locations (Christopolos et al., 2004).

39. So-called 'developmental relief' generally draws on short-term funding cycles and is provided on an ad hoc basis with limited scope for substantive capacity building or constructive or active

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<sup>2</sup> The term refers to both the capacity of a project or programme to function effectively over time with minimum external input, and for the outcomes of the project to be self-sustaining in the long term

engagement of local authorities. Nevertheless community-based approaches are associated with a range of objectives around empowerment, promoting social cohesion, (re)building trust and addressing the root causes of conflict, although the linkages are often extremely poorly defined (see Strand et al, 2003; Darcy & Hoffmann, 2004).

40. Community-based approaches are also being promoted in post-conflict settings as a mechanism for early rehabilitation and provision of basic goods and services (Cliffe et al., 2003; Guggenheim). The type and level of need in post-conflict settings varies and demand-driven community-based approaches are considered more pragmatic, flexible and adaptable, allowing communities to identify their own priorities. They also seek to mobilise communities to contribute to rapid rehabilitation of basic services resulting in ‘quick wins’ and high visibility ‘peace dividends’ designed to reduce the likelihood of return to conflict. Important questions however surround the status of civil society, the nature of ‘social capital’ and the potential for collective action in post conflict settings (Harvey, 1998; Strand et al., 2003), and the effectiveness and sustainability of ‘quick win’ approaches (Christiansen et al, 2004).

#### **Box 5: Community-Driven Reconstruction**

The World Bank Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) approach is based on the transfer of block grants for local development activities from the centre direct to Community Development Committees (CDCs). These grants are administered by CDCs comprising representatives of local authorities, traditional authorities, elected community representatives (including women, youth, returnees, ex-combatants and disabled) who prioritize community needs and investment aspirations, and contract implementing partners. In the short-term, intensive capacity-building efforts are required to empower the community committees to assume these responsibilities. Experience from other post-conflict situations suggests that committees can become active within one year. In the short-term, these efforts tend to be financed by direct transfers from donors to a central fund or in a decentralized manner to community committees but from the outset, close linkages should be established with processes of decentralised planning, including the establishment of systems for the transfer of budgetary resources to local levels.

Source: Cliffe et al, 2003

## 2. Implementing Community-based approaches

41. This section turns to the issues and challenges associated with CBA both generally and specifically in fragile state or difficult environment context. There exists a vast literature on community-based approaches which pre-dates more recent World Bank documents (see Agarwal, Ostrom, Wade, Scott, Ribot, Bebbington). The focus of this earlier literature has tended to be on community-based natural resource management but is directly relevant and holds many important lessons upon which this section draws.

### 2.1.1. Defining the user 'community'

42. **Size and scope**. The dangers of artificially creating 'communities' of beneficiaries in response to aid projects is well documented (Platteau, 2004). Romantic notions of homogenous communities with shared interests have been rejected in favour of detailed analysis of different incentives for and against collective action (Ostrom, 1990; Gillinson ODI, 2003). While social and economic heterogeneity need not constrain collective action (Wade, 1988), it needs to be recognised and carefully managed. The size of the user group depends largely on the type and level of activity to be undertaken. For example a water point, a school and a health clinic may each have quite different catchment areas requiring management at different levels. This presents particular challenges for integrated management of basic services at a local level.

#### **Box 6: What is a CBO?**

Community-based approaches often involve devolution of some decision-making responsibility to intermediaries or Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). Ideally CBOs are representative of their community i.e. membership-based but consequently tend to vary dramatically in size and focus. CBOs are rarely self-sufficient in terms of service provision but typically work in partnership with external support organisations and service providers including local government, private sector, NGOs and central government agencies. CBOs may have a sectoral focus, e.g. Village Water Supply & Sanitation Committees (VWSSCs), or may have a multi-sector mandate, e.g. Community Development Councils (CDCs). Successful CBOs may subsequently diversify their activities but their legal status and authority in relation to local government is often ambiguous.

43. **Management**. A key dilemma in such contexts is whether to work with and strengthen existing CBOs, (e.g. Sri Lanka which has a long history of community-based approaches), or create new ones. Establishing new structures is costly and time consuming but may be preferred to funding or reforming structures which are already inequitable or exclusive. 'Elite capture' is a recurring theme in the literature on community-based approaches, especially in clan or lineage based societies (Platteau, 2004), but it is arguably inevitable that decision-making processes around management of public goods will be dominated by elites, even in the most egalitarian societies. Ostrom (1990) and others emphasise the importance of establishing 'clear rules of the game', noting that ensuring everyone knows who is responsible for making decisions is often more important than involving everyone in decision making. Domination of decision-making processes needs therefore to be distinguished from capture of public good benefits through outright theft and corruption (Mansuri & Rao, 2003).

44. **Conflict issues**. Particular problems are faced when working in divided, conflict-affected communities where existing ethnic, social or economic divisions may have become politicised with pervasive fear and mistrust between and within ‘communities’ (see **Box 7**). Such problems are further compounded by reintegration of ex-combatants and return of large numbers of refugees or internally-displaced people. Problems of elite capture are exacerbated by ready acceptance of highly asymmetric patterns of resource distribution typical of conflict-affected populations accustomed to the war economy (Richards et al, 2004). A key consideration here is distinguishing endogenous and exogenous sources of conflict (Deng, 2002; Keen, 1998). While capacity for collective action may be strengthened in the face of an external threat, the mobilisation of local populations against one another, e.g. Dinka and Nuer militias in South Sudan, can result in long term problems ‘post-conflict’.

**Box 7: Working in divided communities**

Experience from Sierra Leone highlights the difficulties of implementing community based projects in war torn societies. A detailed social assessment was recently undertaken as part of the National Social Action Project (NSAP) to analyse and evaluate how collective action functions in rural communities recovering from war in Sierra Leone. NSAP is a modality for funding direct community action administered by the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) as part of the Transitional Support Strategy for post-war recovery and poverty alleviation. The review identifies an agrarian crisis as a major cause of rural poverty and war in Sierra Leone. The crisis has become institutionalised with the rights of land-owners over-protected and the rights of rural labourers under-protected. The division between rural lineages and dependent lineages, and migrant ‘strangers’ is perpetuated through the control lineage that elders exercise over marriage systems, and over the labour of young men. This acts as a strong push factor encouraging many to leave rural areas. This represents a problem for community-driven development (CDD) since projects depend on community contributions generally put forward in the form of labour, especially of young men.

The assessment explores the nature of ‘community’ in Sierra Leone and notes a lack true cohesion in rural communities to support CDD. Ad hoc committees appointed by relief agencies, generally known as Village Development Committees (VDCs) have tended to be dominated by leading lineages and are argued to have added to the divisions between rural elites and the bulk of the poor. CDD is thus threatened by undemocratic procedures, villagers’ lack of knowledge of their rights, and lack of local capacity to handle project inputs. The report argues that the failure of chiefdom governance was a primary cause of the war and argues that reforming these local level institutions is likely to be a key determinant of the success of ongoing administrative decentralisation.

Source: Richards et al, 2004

45. In addition to the question of subsidiarity, i.e. what is the lowest appropriate level for management of services in terms of efficiency/effectiveness, it is important to understanding how devolution of responsibility for decision making and resource allocation is likely to help mitigate or in fact exacerbate existing tensions.

### **2.1.2. Degree of local authority involvement**

46. Community-based projects typically work in parallel with local governments. This is often perceived as necessary where the capacity of local authorities is particularly weak and/or their legitimacy highly contested. The extent to which this state-avoiding approach is useful is discussed further in section 3, including a discussion on alternative approaches. A common

problem in post-conflict settings is continued military dominance of, and interference with, local civil administration, e.g. South Sudan (Blunt, 2003). There may also be a legacy of mistrust between government and communities. The issue of capacity building in such contexts is thus contentious but there are a number of ways in which imperfect local institutions operating in turbulent environments can be supported (Anderson, 1996). Experience suggests that securing 'buy-in' or at least approval from emerging institutions of government is important in order to impart greater legitimacy to community-based initiatives, even when they do not have the money or 'official' authority to finance recurrent expenditures or make policy decisions (Alkire et al, 2004).

47. CBOs play a key role in community-based approaches as intermediaries between community and local government. A key challenge is deciding at what level to establish CBOs. For example, in ongoing discussions around the future shape of local government in Sudan, the County has been identified as the level that most effectively links citizens, communities and traditional leadership, on the one hand, with the structures and resources of government on the other. Important questions surround how CBOs relate to emerging government structures and in particular traditional authorities. The National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan, for example, actively sought to bypass traditional councils or 'shuras' which were considered 'part of the problem'. Experience in Somalia, suggests that while traditional authorities have a critical role to play in conflict resolution, peace building and reconciliation they may not be best placed to manage provision of basic services in an efficient and equitable manner (War Torn Societies Project, 2001).

### **Box 8: Election of CDCs in CEP and KDP**

The World Bank Community Empowerment Project (CEP) in E. Timor provides an interesting example of a 'blank slate' approach involving election of Community Development Councils (CDCs) to oversee planning and management of reconstruction and development projects. While this was initially well integrated with local government administration systems, it has subsequently failed to adapt with the changes of government and abolition of different tiers of administration due to inherent inflexibilities (World Bank, 2004; Christiansen et al, 2004).

Kecamatan Development Project in Indonesia had a similar approach designed to bypass dysfunctional local government authorities and address problems related to abuse of office and unaccountable top down planning endemic in Indonesia. It aims to promote good governance through increased participation in local level decision-making and improved accountability and transparency. The project was made possible through World Bank support and crucially the Indonesian government's recognition of;

- (a) very high levels of corruption causing a loss of credibility in all levels of government;
- (b) the inability of traditional mechanisms of delivering development finance to local communities and a need to bypass these mechanisms to disburse funds directly and more efficiently to communities;
- (c) willingness of the government to channel funds directly from a central project account into joint village accounts at local sub-district banks, at no stage passing through a government ministry.

The KDP mechanism provides block-grants directly to sub-district (kecamatan) councils (UDKP) to fund development plans prepared through a 4-6 month long participatory planning process. The KDP doesn't strictly bypass government institutions as the kecamatan, although previously ineffective, functioned as regional government. Funds are administered at the local level and in phase III of the KDP, the focus is on the institutionalization of these processes to empower villages. It specifically works to protect village autonomy, improve villagers' capacity to represent themselves in higher level institutions, and to create representative inter-village bodies.

It remains too early to judge the effects of the KDP mechanism on local accountability, but a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system is now in place. In terms of outcomes, small-scale infrastructure built through KDP costs on average one-third less than other methods currently used for similar construction. Benefits from the process and products of KDP reach the poor (earning short-term employment of which 70% of the workforce were from the poorest segments of their communities). Surveys show a high level of satisfaction with the KDP program among end users. However, sustaining the KDP will only be possible with substantial levels of external support over the medium to long-term.

Sources: Cliffe et al, 2003; Edstrom, 2002 & Guggenheim (2004)

48. The process of strengthening local governance takes a long time. At the same time, the legitimacy of post-conflict regimes is in part determined by the willingness and ability of states to provide and maintain basic services. Wilson (1998), for example, relates how school teachers in post-conflict Peru played a difficult but central role in reconstituting relations between the state and its citizens in isolated rural communities. If the objective of promoting greater accountability at local level is to be realised, there is a need for gradual/conditional disbursement which allows time for the beneficiaries to learn how to defend their rights and hold leaders and service providers to account (Christoplos et al, 2004). This requirement often runs counter to short-term funding cycles and the desire to see 'quick impacts', especially in post-conflict settings. Ignoring or bypassing those local and national institutions which can eventually be expected to assume

responsibility for service provision can erode both capacity and legitimacy (Juma & Suhrke, 2002).

49. The prospects for ‘rebuilding government from the bottom up’ through community-based approaches are limited unless there is also something to build it towards/build down to it. There are thus limits to what can be achieved through community-level projects.

### 2.1.3. Targeting issues

50. It is generally agreed that community-based targeting is a useful tool in responding to user needs (Conning & Kevane, 2002) and is likely to be most effective in combination with geographic, temporal, social or administrative criteria. As consumers of services, community members are often the most legitimate, informed and reliable source of information about their own problems and priorities (Alkire et al, 2004). However, under certain conditions local inequality can worsen when targeting is devolved to this level. It therefore requires careful facilitation to ensure decision making processes are not ‘captured’. The capacity of intermediaries has been identified as a key determinant of success in targeting social funds<sup>3</sup> (Rawlings et al., 2004) but access to and training of skilled community-level facilitators is a particular problem in post-conflict settings.

51. A key determinant is the extent to which project benefits are shared between intermediaries and beneficiaries. While there may be a shared interest in delivery of local public goods such as a health clinic, school or water point, a different set of incentives surround trying to target private benefits such as social safety nets. There is a large body of literature, for example, on problems associated with targeting food aid (see Sharp 1998 for a review). This suggests that community-based approaches only work if the community concerned buys into the idea of targeting. Otherwise they will subvert the targeting mechanism and redistribute in their own way. Conning & Kevane, (2002) point out that communities vary substantially both in their ability to mobilise information and implement monitoring systems, and in their willingness to target the poor. While local democratic participation is to be encouraged, leaving the decision over how to target and redistribute funds entirely to communities is unlikely to guarantee targeting of vulnerable groups.

52. Experience suggests that while providing communities with choices may be desirable, it needs to be informed choice (see **Box 9**). Demand-responsive approaches theoretically allow for flexibility and innovation but also need to be informed by technical information and standards. Ultimately there are limits to what can be achieved using locally available skills and materials. Information asymmetries, weak market integration and limited supply chains due to lack of infrastructure and credit facilities present significant obstacles even in ‘normal’ developmental settings. Early experience of implementing demand-based approaches to Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) in the 1990s found sanitation often given low priority by communities and the public good thus undersupplied (WSP, 2000). This illustrates the tension between allowing communities to make their own decisions and ensuring they make the ‘right’ decisions. Demand-based approaches may prove inconsistent with achieving universal coverage targets such as the MDG for sanitation.

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<sup>3</sup> Social funds are a mechanism developed by the World Bank for financing small projects ranging from infrastructure to social services. Projects are identified by communities and presented to the social fund for financing, typically under the supervision of NGOs or local government.

**Box 9: Demand-based approaches**

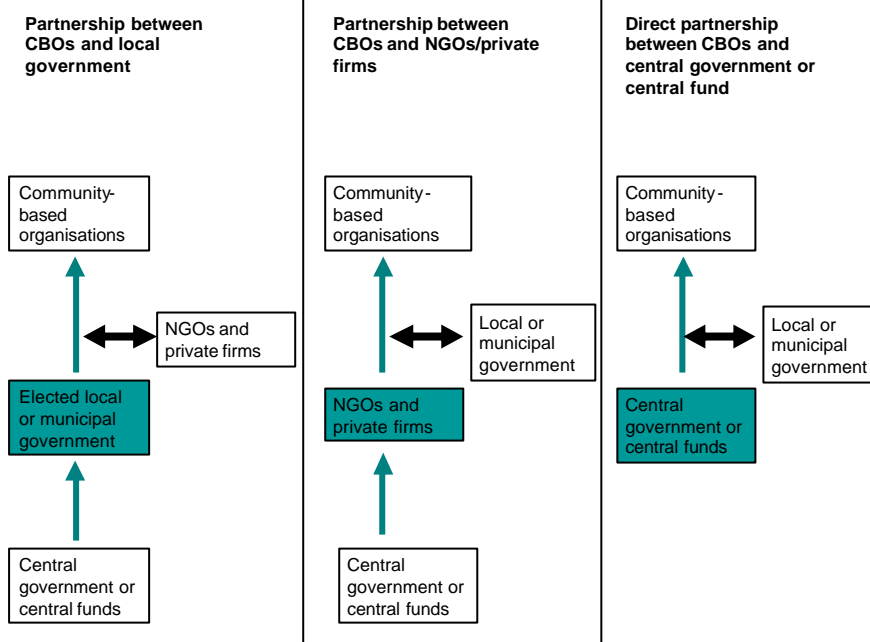
With a demand-driven project, proposals may be solicited either by inviting CBOs, NGOs, local governments or other service providers to submit proposals to deliver pre-selected services for selected groups, or by advertising in a more 'open' way, notifying communities and interested bidders that funding is available for social services to be chosen by community groups themselves. One key question is how to structure the project financing menu. It has been noted that having a completely open menu of allowable subprojects rather than restricting choices to only a few types of services can provide 'greater stimulus to innovation and creative problem solving' allowing the true investment priorities of a community to be financed. However, this assumes that funding applicants have the technical capacity to design effective interventions, and/or that funding agencies have the capacity to assist them in designing effective services. Entirely open-menu, demand-driven approaches tend to cater to the interests of the vocal majority, not to the minorities or silent majorities, who might be most vulnerable and in most need of social services. McLeod (2002)

53. Evidence suggests that community participation can lead to improved project performance and better targeting. It is useful here to distinguish between 'preference targeting' which asks if the preferences of the poor have been adequately considered and 'use targeting' which asks if targeted groups gain proportionally more from the provision of services (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). Particular challenges surround targeting vulnerable groups *within* communities, although a number of studies now suggest that categorical targeting of transfers to female parents leads to larger positive impacts on child welfare and household investments (e.g. in health, nutrition and education) (Coady et al, 2004; Marcus et al, 2004). Targeting is likely to be particularly difficult and expensive to monitor in conflict or recent post-conflict settings where capacity is often weak (Darcy & Hoffmann). This suggests the need to keep it as simple as possible and focus on a small number of key indicators around equity and accessibility.

**2.1.4. Financing issues – recurrent costs and user financing**

54. **Exacerbating tensions.** Atmar and Goodhand (2002) warn of the dangers of a major injection of aid resources into a conflictual and resource-scarce environment. This may exacerbate tensions and renew the cycle of violence. Afghanistan experience highlights the dangers of creating a rentier state in which a small group of 'shareholders' benefit from the peace dividend. Transferring funds directly to communities has certain advantages including minimising the number layers of opportunities for corruption associated with large flow of funds from the centre. However, at the same time it needs to be ensured that community-based approaches help legitimise rather than undermine fragile emerging government structures (see Section 3). There are important issues around how to manage and disburse funds in post-conflict settings i.e. a central or local government fund managed either by UN or NGO, a one-off grant or an annual cycle (see Cliffe et al, 2003). **Box 10** illustrates possible financing options for CDD. Practical challenges may also surround money transfer in the absence of formal banking systems and credit facilities, for example in Afghanistan and Somalia agencies have resorted to using traditional systems of money transfer.

### Box 10: Financing options for CDD



Source: World Bank, 2003

55. **Cost recovery** is controversial. Basic social services consist to a large extent of recurrent costs such as salaries, drugs and books, spare parts for hand pumps etc. Responsibility for recurrent cost financing usually rests with local government (through taxation) or with non-state providers (through user fees). However, collection of both taxes and user fees may prove extremely difficult, especially among very poor populations. There is also a significant body of evidence to suggest that cost recovery in basic education and healthcare negatively affects uptake. For example, in post-conflict situations where public expenditure on health care systems is inadequate, the burden of financing tends to shift increasingly to households, the poorest of which may then have to defer care. How the very poor can be protected, particularly if cost recovery schemes and private sector expansion are contemplated, is an essential question. This problem is increasingly recognised by donors, some of whom now explicitly state that their policies do not support cost recovery (e.g. USAID; World Bank)<sup>4</sup>.

56. **Volunteerism** Community-based approaches often seek to mobilise other resources, including volunteer contributions, particularly in kind, such as labour and materials. But important questions surround the appropriateness of volunteerism among extremely poor households whose asset base has been steadily depleted by years of protracted conflict (Bradbury, 1998). Experience from WSS schemes suggests that flexibility is key, e.g. allowing contributions in cash or kind with variable payments options (Ariyabandu, 2004). Such sophisticated schemes may however be difficult to operate where capacity is weak. It is also important to recognise that the unit costs of providing a basic level of service may vary substantially between different locations and also

<sup>4</sup> See Humanitarian Practice Network for a summary of recent debates between LSHTM and ECHO over cost-recovery in the health sector in DRC <http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2677>

between different implementing agencies. Additional concerns surround the capacity of communities to contract service providers (**Box 11**). Recent evaluations of social funds point to the need for sector-wide standards and policy guidelines to ensure minimum service standards among non-state providers (Rawlings et al, 2004).

**Box 11: Community contracting**

The Swajal project (or the World Bank's Integrated Water Supply and Sanitation Project) in Uttar Pradesh introduced community contracting in a systematic way. Community men and women purchased pipes, taps, valves and hand pumps after checking and comparing market prices, calling for tenders (in some cases), evaluating bids, and choosing the best value for their money. They hired masons, plumbers and contractors to build their system for them. Community contracting was duly recognised in the Swajaldhara (national guidelines) but important questions surround replicability of the Swajal model. The Project Support Unit (PSU) had a cadre of trained and committed staff who provided regular support services to the communities engaged in contracting and procurement of materials for their water supply systems. Among the support services provided by the PSU are lists of market prices of items, guidance on ISI certification, cost comparisons and cost-cutting suggestions. Scaling up this level of support under the national water supply programme presents an enormous challenge.

Source: Field Note on Community Contracting in Swajal, WSP 2001

57. **Demand-side issues.** A key challenge faced in delivering services in difficult environments is how to reduce access costs for poor users. This includes both direct costs such as fees and indirect ones such as opportunity costs involved in using a service. Regulating levels of cost recovery among non-state providers is extremely difficult in the absence of an effective government and targeted social protection measures, such as fee waivers, and require an element of means testing which is equally difficult to implement where capacity is weak. Alternative options surround stimulating demand for services via direct transfers to service users. There is an ongoing debate as to the relative merits of cash or vouchers e.g. for seeds and tools or healthcare, and between conditional and unconditional cash transfers (Marcus et al, 2004). This debate also has particular relevance in conflict settings (Harvey, 2005). The arguments in favour of cash-based approaches are that they can be more cost-effective and timely, allow recipients greater choice and dignity, and have beneficial knock-on effects on local economies (Peppiatt et al, 2001). Another option is cash or food for work. There is an ongoing debate about food vs cash which suggests that food is only appropriate in very specific circumstances because of distorting effect on food markets (Clay et al., 1998a and b). Cash for work and food for work has been used in a number of places as a means of rapidly rehabilitating infrastructure post-conflict, e.g. Afghanistan. However, equitable distribution of costs and benefits associated with rehabilitation of local public goods depends on the existence of clear rules over their ownership, access and use after construction or rehabilitation.

58. A key question to consider when assessing options for financing service delivery is the weak revenue base encountered in many post-conflict settings. It is often assumed that conflict is the primary cause of poverty but experience shows that chronic poverty and vulnerability often persist for many 'post-conflict' years (e.g. Uganda). It is important, therefore, to beware of optimistic projections of revenue growth and recognise that populations affected by chronic conflict are likely to remain dependent on targeted external support for many years. For example, it is now recognised that the recurrent cost of social-service structures established in E. Timor cannot be

sustained through national revenues and are likely to remain dependent on external aid for the foreseeable future.

## ***2.2. Potential and limits of community-based approaches***

59. Community-based approaches are relevant across many sectors and can be equally applied to individual community-level projects or as a component of wider national programmes. An important question in post-conflict settings is how to scale up activities from project-based assistance (relief) in the absence of effective government, towards programme- and policy-based assistance (development).

60. There is evidence to suggest that community-based approaches may be useful to mobilise labour for infrastructure rehabilitation, e.g. schools, clinics and water points, and for delivery of basic goods and services. These activities are distinguished by being small in scale and non-complex and by requiring local cooperation (see **Boxes 11, 12 and 13**). But their scope remains limited.

### **Box 12: Community Organised Primary Education (COPE) Schools in Afghanistan**

A recent evaluation of COPE shows that it is possible to provide very basic primary education through NGO managed community based approaches but notes that the challenge of scaling up such approaches remains unresolved. The programme, run by CARE, aims to provide greater access to quality basic education for school-age girls and boys (children between the ages of 6-14 years with a quota of at least one-third (38%) girls) in rural areas of Southeast and Central Afghanistan. COPE has established 336 community-managed schools in selected districts of Ghazni, Maidan/Wardak, Paktika, Khost, Paktia, Logar and Kabul provinces. COPE also provides training for teachers to help upgrade their skills.

The project started in the late 90's and despite restrictions placed on girls' education by the Taliban Authorities, the COPE project approach allowed communities to take control of who teaches their girls and boys, and where they are taught. Communities successfully resisted Taliban efforts to close schools and the Taliban tolerated them, partly because the project approach builds on the traditional education system where instruction takes place in Mosques or private houses, and teachers are hired from local communities. The Village Education Committees (VECs) and parents provide the school facility and hire teachers. Classes usually meet in a 'Hujra' (living room), in a parent's house, Mosque, tent, or in the open air under a tree. Parents, VEC members and schoolteachers negotiate the school fee per child to pay teachers' salary. Village Education Committees together with teachers, select students from poorer families to be exempted from payment to promote equity of access for students from poorer families.

A key component for the development of institutional capacity to maintain and support the schools is the extensive training VEC members receive in community-based participatory methodologies (PRA), resource mobilization, school administration, and supervision of school personnel, decision-making, and conflict resolution. COPE Community mobilisers provide ongoing support to ensure skills are built in a consistent and comprehensive manner. The project cycle involves an introductory phase of 1-2mths followed by a School Support stage of 1-2 years and eventual NGO phase out and hand over to local authorities in the last 6mths of year 2. The new Afghan government supports the programme and has expressed strong support for the rehabilitation of the government education system. CARE sees an opportunity to integrate some of the COPE schools into the public school system and in the longer-term and will focus on capacity building for the Ministry of Education and regional education departments to enable them to manage the schools effectively. In order to facilitate the long-term transfer of responsibility from COPE to the local educational bodies the Village Education Committees are employed which will be ultimately responsible for the management and financing of the schools in the communities.

Source: CARE (2003)

61. Rehabilitation is not just a question of rebuilding what was there before but rather requires careful planning. Important questions surround the appropriate level at which different components of different services should be planned and managed. General experience from elsewhere highlights the danger of mobilising communities in the absence of effective support frameworks, i.e. schools without books, health centres without drugs, pumps without a supply chain of spare parts etc (**Boxes 12 and 13**).

### **Box 13: Community-based WSS in South Sudan**

Recent evaluations of Save UK support to water supply and sanitation development in South Sudan illustrate the potential and constraints of community-based approaches. SC (UK) WSS project interventions to-date have had a significant impact on access to water supplies in project areas in Bahr el Ghazal. Since 1998 the project has systematically trained SRRA-WES water teams in the technique of hand drilling using Zimbabwe manufactured Vonder rigs. Each team has ten members selected by the local authorities, usually from communities within the payam. Of these usually seven are drillers and three are responsible for hand-pump maintenance, including a team supervisor. The activities of water teams in each payam are further co-ordinated by county level SRRA WSS co-ordinators who also work closely with SC (UK) project staff. In addition to training each team the SC (UK) project equips team members with necessary tools, overalls, boots etc. The teams are then given responsibility for drilling and construction and maintenance of water points using drilling rigs, construction materials and pump sets provided by the SC (UK) project. The teams are also responsible for maintenance of all water points within their payam, including those established previously by other agencies.

The hand drilling approach has a number of important advantages in the context of south Sudan. Firstly the Vonder rig is low-tech, relatively simple to operate and maintain and therefore easy to train teams to use. Secondly it is low-cost, the unit and its component parts are relatively cheap to purchase initially and are well constructed giving a longer life span. There are no additional fuel or lubricant costs and it does not require mounting on a vehicle, instead hand-drilling relies on locally available manual labour. The rig itself can be dismantled and transported between sites by the communities themselves. It can therefore be transported across even the most difficult often swampy terrain at low cost and importantly drilling can therefore continue during the wet season. Thirdly, related to its low cost and portability the Vonder rig is low-risk which is important in insecure areas. The rig is of relatively low value and can be easily hidden to avoid damage or looting. By working together with communities the project has successfully extended tube wells across large areas of northern Bahr el Ghazal.

The India Mark II (IM2) hand pump is the current standard in south Sudan due largely to the fact that UNICEF previously supplied these pump sets and spare parts in bulk to all OLS WES sector agencies. UNICEF subsequently changed its policy and ceased supplying pump sets to OLS agencies in early 2000. Since then the SC UK WSS project has purchased IM2 pump sets and spare parts independently in order to continue to supply its project areas. UNICEF retains its co-ordination role within the OLS WES sector and remains committed to supplying parts for maintenance of existing IM2s to SRRA offices throughout the region. However in practice there is much confusion over roles and responsibilities and SRRA offices visited in northern Bahr el Ghazal had not received any supplies of spare parts for long periods. Large parts of South Sudan remain inaccessible due to weak infrastructure and poor communication and unresolved supply chain problems threaten to undermine the sustainability of community-managed sources. A key concern for all agencies currently involved in installing tube wells and hand pumps is the prohibitive cost of air freight. The need to develop cheaper options is reflected in numerous WES sector reports. Local manufacturing potential is weak to non-existent and although road transport links, particularly with Uganda, have improved in recent years, the potential of the local private sector to supply the market for parts remains extremely limited in many areas. It would seem therefore that procurement, management and distribution networks will require substantial external support for some time yet.

Source: Slaymaker (2002 & 2004)

62. The analysis above suggests that community-based approaches are useful in ensuring interventions respond to actual needs and priorities of beneficiary communities (i.e. problem identification) but communities are generally less well equipped to identify solutions and are likely to require technical support to facilitate informed decision making. Furthermore

community-level priorities may not always be consistent with broader societal goals, e.g. equity, efficiency or sustainability. For example, extending sewerage and improving latrine coverage are often not identified as high priorities by beneficiary communities but may have major public benefits associated with them. Public goods that span many communities or that require large and complex systems are often better provided by local or central government (**Box 14**). Finally it is important that community-based projects fit within the overall policy framework, so that demand-driven sub-components are complemented and guided by a larger system of norms and standards that can help ensure quality, facilitate monitoring, and promote consistency across the country (Tovo & McLeod, 2001).

#### **Box 14: Community-based primary healthcare?**

Community-based activities may be undertaken by local communities with the support of local government, nongovernmental organizations or international agencies. Public health services supported through community participation may include, but not be limited to: resource mobilization for health financing (for example, establishing community funds for purchase of drugs, or capital and labor contributions to upgrading of health clinics); organizing social assistance for vulnerable members of the community; and organization of community groups to support public health activities such as health education and promotion.

Community based health care does not exclude government involvement, rather it is a flexible partnership between communities and health care professionals which is characterised by bottom-up local control, with top-down support from government officials and outside-in support from health experts, including NGOs and donors where necessary. The community identifies, manages, and monitors their health project, making decisions and controlling resources during all stages of the project cycle. The community may also identify their needs in terms of technical assistance and who should provide it; NGOs, government staff or the private sector). However, the full range of health care services in a community cannot be met by community members alone; health care providers are needed for curative care, EPI, skilled obstetric and surgical interventions, diagnosis, and ensuring that services that may have low consumer demand (for example, public nutrition and health education) are included in any package of care. Even a very simple package of health services will require some continuous external support.

63. Experience shows that the role of intermediaries is key in enabling communities to articulate their needs and priorities to external agencies, such as NGOs, local government or the private sector, and helping them hold service providers to account. The potential of community-based approaches ultimately depends on being part of a broader framework of responsive institutions. In the absence of external support structures, opportunities for intervention remain limited to those goods and services which are manageable at community level with minimal external assistance.

64. A key question, therefore, is what proportion of the good or service can be provided locally and what additional systems need to be put in place? CBA is arguably necessary but not sufficient for basic service delivery. That is, success is highly dependent on factors external to the scope of community-level interventions. For example, a sectoral programme focused on policy and strategy may also be needed. It is important therefore to develop a clear breakdown of institutional competence at different levels. **Box 15** provides an example of the type of analysis which needs to be undertaken in relation to the delivery of different water services.

### **Box 15: Defining institutional competences**

Warren et al (2002) adopt a colour coding approach to defining institutional competence e.g. Green for factors that correspond to a strength of community-based development, Red for factors beyond the scope of CBD and yellow for factors that may be positively affected by a community-based approach but may require other interventions as well. Such an analysis might be applied, for example to institutional aspects of WSS:

1. Red factors i.e. those beyond the scope of CBD would include: sector planning, facilitating the emergence of community based organisations and private sector and regulatory oversight.
2. Yellow factors which might be positively affected by adoption of community based approaches might include: local planning processes, procedures for contracting private sector, implementation of sub-projects and monitoring the quality of services provided.
3. Green factors i.e. those which correspond to a strength of CBD would include responsibility for operation and maintenance including management of funds and investment decisions.

Similar analysis might be applied to technical factors, for example:

1. Green factors might include demand assessment and choice of service level
2. Yellow factors might include matching demand with technology options which minimise recurrent costs and complexity of maintenance and identifying service providers capable to executing the work.
3. Red factors would include establishing minimum standards for the quality of goods and services provided and maintaining viable supply chains to ensure sustainable provision in the long term.

Source: Warren et al (2002)

65. The analysis above suggests that community-based approaches are ultimately constrained by the presence or absence of responsive state institutions and policy frameworks. The question, therefore, is how to ensure the fundamental components of systems and policies are in place. Given that they are so important, how do we make sure that community-level interventions compliment and do not themselves undermine the systems and policies upon which their success is dependent? This is the specific focus of the Section 3.

### **2.3. Locating community-level interventions**

66. This section sets out some of the key dimensions or axes along which interventions differ at a generic level. These include the **focus** and **type** of intervention by government or external actors, as well as the **scale** or coverage of an intervention. For example an intervention might be sectoral (e.g. health) or across a range of sectors, either at national level (PRSP), sub-national level (integrated area-based rural development), ad hoc (the majority of NGO or CBO projects) or systematically implemented across a whole country (national programmes).

67. The **focus of intervention** is clearly a continuum ranging from national or central level such as a ministry or national agency, through lower levels such as provinces, districts etc down to the community level.

68. **Types of the intervention** fall into four categories

- **Core systems** such as planning, financing, policy making (see also **Box 18**.) This might include national or decentralised public financial management reform efforts or building local government monitoring and evaluation capacity.

- **Sectoral interventions** such as in education, health, infrastructure or security. In practice drawing the lines between different sectors is relatively arbitrary, especially at the margins. This would include SWAPs at national or even provincial level, or a water and sanitation project at community level.
- **Cross-sectoral interventions** are those attempting to address issues such as gender relations, HIV or the environment.
- **Inter-sectoral** approaches can be characterised as those attempting to work across a range of sectors, or draw together and link them with cross-sectoral programmes. This might take the form of a PRSP, an integrated rural development programme or block grant approaches, whether to local government or to communities could be classified in this way.

69. The third dimension is the **scale of intervention** or coverage. The two extremes on this spectrum are full national coverage and individual or small scale ad hoc projects.

- **Horizontal/national programming** can be implemented using a community-based approach. The key characteristic is that community-level interventions take place within the context of a national policy and plan for implementation. Funds can be disbursed to community level across the whole country for either a specific sectoral or inter-sectoral purpose, such as the Afghan National Solidarity Programme, or as earmarked funds for the community to spend according to a set of process criteria such as the Rwandan Ubudehe programme<sup>5</sup>.
- **Ad hoc interventions.** While the logic of each individual project may be sound, ad hoc projects have a tendency to result in patterns of intervention that are unsystematic, and poorly coordinated with sub-optimal outcomes. Historical criteria used to select what, where or how to work may no longer be relevant. A range of NGO, donor and government projects fall into this category.

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.minecofin.gov.rw/poverty\\_reduction/ubudehe.htm](http://www.minecofin.gov.rw/poverty_reduction/ubudehe.htm) for details

### 3. Aid, systems, policies and the constraints for CBA

70. This section focuses on how aid practices impact on the key determinants of how, and to what extent, CBA can be used deliver services. We conclude above that the extent and nature of systems and policies constrain and define what CBA can achieve or be used to do. In aid-dependent environments, how aid is delivered has significant, often corrosive effects, on the development of policies and systems. This first part of Section 3 focuses on the links between the existence of policy frameworks and systems and CBA. The second part then turns to the impact of aid on policy and systems development.

#### 3.1. Policies, priorities, systems and CBA

71. From the analysis presented on lessons and experience of CBA approaches, the fundamental determinants of how and to what extent the approach is effective can be seen as :

- a) The extent to which there is single, or at least dominant, central policy-making and prioritisation framework, whether at national or sectoral level.
- b) The ability to provide both financial systems, such as accounting, disbursement, payroll, taxation, procurement and audit, and other resources such as specialist technical inputs to support community decisions and systems for monitoring and evaluation.

72. In more practical terms, the nature and strength of systems and policy frameworks will impact on how CBA can be used. It will affect particularly:

- The **options on the menu** or choices by communities. If there is no way of resourcing those community selections, particularly those with **recurrent cost** implications, then what it is realistic and sensible for communities to spend their efforts on is constrained. If there is no training of nurses, system for allocating staff to health centres, or means of covering the recurrent cost of drugs, then building health centres by communities is unlikely to be a successful use of CBA.
- The selection of the **level of subsidiarity** for a particular activity or decision making. This includes what level of administration should decide where service provision should be located. Designing curricula and printing textbooks at a community level is not likely to be efficient, or feasible. Building two health centres or water points right next to each other is also unlikely to be the most effective use of resources. The level of decision making for different issues includes decisions about staffing such as recruiting and allocating teachers, health workers and other external support that communities might need.
- Whether there are national or sectoral level **standards and norms for service delivery** that exist and are regulated (**Box 16**). This is partly an equity issue of whether provision is of a similar quality across an area or sector, but also has practical operational implications. An immunisation or public health information programme in an area next to one with no such programme will be negatively affected, particularly if there is significant population movement between the two areas. If cost recovery is operating for some provision but is free for others, both programmes will be undermined, as people will over concentrate on those where provision is free.
- Whether there is capacity for **monitoring and evaluation**. If there is, then the ability to focus on issues around equity and quality of services provided to or by communities is greater. If

not, then the focus needs to be on self-regulating systems i.e. using beneficiaries to hold service providers to account. The level of M&E capacity is also a key determinant of the nature of **contracting arrangements** that can be designed. What types of contracts are most effective is dependent on the ability to monitor and enforce the terms. With the greater the limitation in capacity, the less complicated and more 'self regulating' the contracting and 'downward' enforcement of terms needs to be.

**Box 16: Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS)**

The development of a basic, guaranteed, or essential package of health services, which concentrates on women and children, and which is usually provided at no cost, is often one of the first steps taken in the process of restoring health services in a post-conflict situation. In Afghanistan, after the fall of the Taliban and the influx of international assistance, the MoH developed and approved a detailed Basic Package of Health Services with significant technical assistance from donors (especially the World Bank, EC, USAID and JICA) agencies (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA) and NGOs involved in the health sector. This was a highly collaborative process, that took months to complete, but that had almost universal broad-based support. The BPHS was carefully costed on a per capita basis, after which it was decided as a result of financial constraints to initially suspend inclusion of the mental health and disability components, pending incorporation at a later date when funding permitted. The BPHS focuses on maternal and child health, and includes EPI, safe motherhood, child health (especially appropriate treatment of ARI and diarrhoea) public nutrition, and communicable disease control. It is designed as a standardised package of services to be available in all primary health care facilities, and includes treatment and protocols that are cost effective and equally accessible to rural and urban communities.

In order to allow for a more rapid rollout of essential health services to a larger segment of the population, especially those in rural and remote areas, the government agreed to contract these services to NGOs. The MoH relinquished, at least temporarily, the service delivery role but reserved for itself the important roles of policy making, monitoring and quality control. Three major donors supported the provision of the BPHS at a national level: USAID, the EC and the World Bank. Healthcare is provided by donor funded NGOs who agree to provide the full package of services in their target areas, who have been selected competitively and whose funding is contingent upon satisfactory performance and the achievement of selected targets. The NGOs operate under Performance Based Partnership Agreements (PPAs) or PPA-like contracts, which are contractual agreements between the government and service providers linking donor funding to basic performance criteria. In Afghanistan, where the delivery of health services had been highly fragmented and inequitable for decades as a consequence of conflict, developing the BPHS and contracting out its delivery to NGOs allowed for a more rapid restoration of health services to all parts of the country (especially remote and underserved areas) than otherwise would have been possible.

73. **Time and flexibility.** An important factor that needs to be added to this discussion is time. In practice the nature and strength of systems and policy frameworks is not static; they can be built and developed as well as deteriorate. In post-conflict and crisis situations, the parameters of what determines the role of that CBA can play in service delivery are likely to be changing particularly rapidly. Consequently programmes need to be flexible and responsive, or they can become inappropriate and potentially obstacles to development. For example, the Community Empowerment Project (CEP), designed by the World Bank in East Timor, while initially well integrated with local government administration systems, failed to adapt with subsequent changes of government and abolition of different tiers of administration (Christiansen et al, 2004).

74. Another common challenge in post-conflict settings is striking an appropriate balance between the need to rebuild institutions quickly and the desire to reform them. External agencies often view

post-conflict societies as a 'blank slate' upon which to project policy and institutional reforms but experience from elsewhere, e.g. Afghanistan, shows that institutions are often far more resilient than expected. Wherever possible, building on existing systems makes sense. There is often more there than people realise. In most cases, incremental change over the long term is preferable to radical change in the short term. Certainly, starting from scratch is hugely time-consuming and where capacity is weak may create new bottlenecks as staff have to learn new systems.

### **3.2. *The impact of aid the enabling environment for CBA***

75. In highly aid-dependant countries, the nature of the interaction with the aid system has a very particular impact on the development of both policy and systems. The nature, strengths and weakness of the policies and systems provide the context which defines the potential contribution of community-based approaches to broader service delivery objectives. This section looks at the impacts, particularly the negative effects, that aid delivery approaches can have on development of the policy frameworks and systems required to support CBA.

#### **3.2.1. The impacts of aid practice**

76. This sub-section focuses on the evidence emerging on the unintended impacts of aid across a range of countries. These are not specific to difficult environments. But where the state is particularly weak, of low capacity or fragile, the ability to manage and absorb the unintended 'costs' of external financial flows and implementing agencies' behaviour as currently practised, is likely to be particularly challenging.

77. In many countries where there are significant aid flows, government institutions are weak to a greater or lesser degree. External aid actors, including both financing and implementing agencies, do not have confidence in weak or dysfunctional official systems or find existing government policies to be incoherent or inadequately prioritised. As a result, donors and International NGOs have typically chosen to work around these, providing their own strategies, policies and programmes and building their own parallel projects or project implementation units or other 'state-avoiding' systems. This process is replicated across a large range of donor agencies and implementing agents. The move toward project modalities was particularly prominent during the 1970s but continued throughout the 1980s until critiques began to emerge in the 1990s (for summary of evidence and critiques of project modalities, see Christiansen, 2003: 11).

78. The common unintended consequence of this 'state avoidance' is a further undermining or inhibiting the state's capacity to function. A secondary effect is that the legitimacy of the state may be eroded or constrained, as it is not delivering, managing or resourcing service provision for its population. Central government planning and policy processes (particularly the national budget) often become increasingly irrelevant as prioritisation, resource raising and allocation mechanisms become fragmented. Line ministries also turn directly to different donors for resources, often in competition with the NGO service provider, rather than to the ministry of finance. This tends to evolve into a vicious circle of policy fragmentation and incoherence, with declining use and effectiveness of national systems, which results in donors and NGOs avoiding these government priorities and systems even more.

79. The ultimate consequence of this cycle appears to be aid-dependent governments becoming accountable to a range of donors for their activities, rather than to their population. NGO service providers are primarily accountable to their funders, and donors primarily accountable to their domestic electorates rather than recipients of their aid. Donor concerns understandably tend to focus on their own fiduciary risk, rather than on the total impact of public policy and finance. Even if resources are being channelled through national processes and systems, there consequently remain real and understandable tensions between a government's upwards accountability to donors, the competing demands for accountability to different donors, and the government's downwards accountability to their citizens. These competing demands are not easily resolved. In many aid dependent countries there is presently a striking imbalance in favour of an often confusing and fragmented array of upwards accountabilities. This competition and imbalance leads to a further loss of accountability of the government to its people.

80. In post-conflict and difficult environments a number of common features have been identified that impact on the aid relationship and the development of national policy frameworks and systems (see Christiansen et al., 2004). The diversionary impact of multiple and parallel projects and systems, given initially weak capacity, is particularly pronounced and potentially damaging. In some of these environments, there are serious concerns about the impact of donors and INGO activities legitimating policies, regimes or government actors which are abusive to their populations.

81. The range of actors on both the external and the national sides results in more complicated interfaces. On the donor side, this includes humanitarian and development donor and implementing agencies, in addition to a range military, security, immigration and drugs related actors. National authorities are also often fragmented, with unclear relationships between different elements of the government or indeed competing authorities such as 'warlords'.

82. A feature that has particular impact across a range of difficult environments is the presence of humanitarian actors and emergency aid modalities extended beyond their original short-term use. Humanitarian modalities have historically developed a 'state-avoiding' approach for a variety of reasons, which means they are likely to be committed to providing services in lieu of the government. A large scale and sustained influx of humanitarian and 'multi-mandate' actors creates a significant 'organisational footprint' that can draw financial and human resources away from other activities. An example of this was the persistence beyond the toppling of the Taliban regime of the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan which drew together external interventions into a single explicitly state-avoiding framework. This UN structure became a direct competitor with the new authorities for aid resources.

83. In conflict or post-conflict environments the relationship between humanitarian objectives and activities and more developmental forms of relief becomes critical. Non-state providers, often in the form of NGOs and faith-based organisations as well as private-sector provision, tend to dominate on the ground in post-conflict settings in short and medium term. This leads to questions about how to ensure that the activities of non-state service providers are aligned to or complementary with longer-term objectives in rebuilding the state. There seem to be three particular sets of issues that emerge around this:

84. **Competition and co-operation.** The competition for access to funds, whether by international NGOs, UN agencies or national authorities and institutions, creates perverse incentives and barriers to collaboration between actors. Voluntary coordination mechanisms are proving to be generally rather ineffective and where they have worked, it is largely due to an explicit framework being established. The Somali Aid Coordination Body (SACB) has achieved a notable degree of success largely because of the dominance of one donor (European Commission). Some successful attempts have been made to force agencies to cooperate, e.g. BPHS (**Box 16**), or to require them to operate under consortia.

85. **Capacity building.** There is a significant difference between working with local authorities to coordinate distributions of food or drugs and building the capacity of local institutions to eventually deliver services themselves. These activities require fundamentally different sets of skills. Those agencies with a purely humanitarian mandate are not, and perhaps should not be, focused on these longer-term capacity issues. Capacity building is often a stated objective of multi-mandate organisations but is generally project-specific and uncoordinated. International NGOs face a number of dilemmas in engaging with local authorities and indigenous NGOs in post-conflict settings.

86. **Lesson learning and policy development.** The work of agencies in situations of protracted crisis or ongoing conflict is often characterised by weak documentation of practice and lesson learning. Where M&E exists it is often input rather than outcome oriented. ‘What works’ is often quite specific to a particular set of circumstances, and usually the people who know most about this have few mechanisms for passing this information on. The challenge here is to create ‘space’ for individuals and organisations to document both bad and successful practice as a basis for future policy development. This would provide much better, context specific evidence as the basis for policy development. The funding frameworks need to play a role in creating the incentives for agencies to engage honestly in constructive dialogue on sector policies and guidelines.

### **3.2.2. Harmonisation & alignment: reducing unintended consequences of aid practices**

87. Critiques and evidence on the effectiveness of aid have resulted in a new focus on country ownership and the evolution of the harmonisation and alignment agenda. More recently, work on fragile states has suggested that this agenda is equally and perhaps even more important in these kind of states (for discussion of harmonisation and alignment agenda see Christiansen et al 2004).

88. Although closely related, alignment and harmonisation describe different facets of the aid relationship that can usefully be distinguished. Alignment concerns the relationship between donors (and implementing agents) and recipient governments or authorities. Within this, two dimensions of alignment relate to systems and priorities. This is a useful distinction which makes apparent the potential for donors and implementing agencies to align with national authorities’ priorities but not use their systems, or visa versa, align their practice with national systems but to hold different priorities. Harmonisation, on the other hand, refers to the relationships among donors and includes a spectrum of practices from information sharing to rationalisation of procedures and common arrangements such as silent partnership or pooled funding (see **Box 17**). A linked concept is that of policy coherence, which is particularly relevant in the context of difficult environments where there are often a wider range of actors. Coherence is concerned with

consistency of policy and practice within donor governments. The issue is the relationship between the development-humanitarian-trade-security-drugs-immigration objectives held by donor governments.

**Box 17: SWAPs and SWiMs in the health sector**

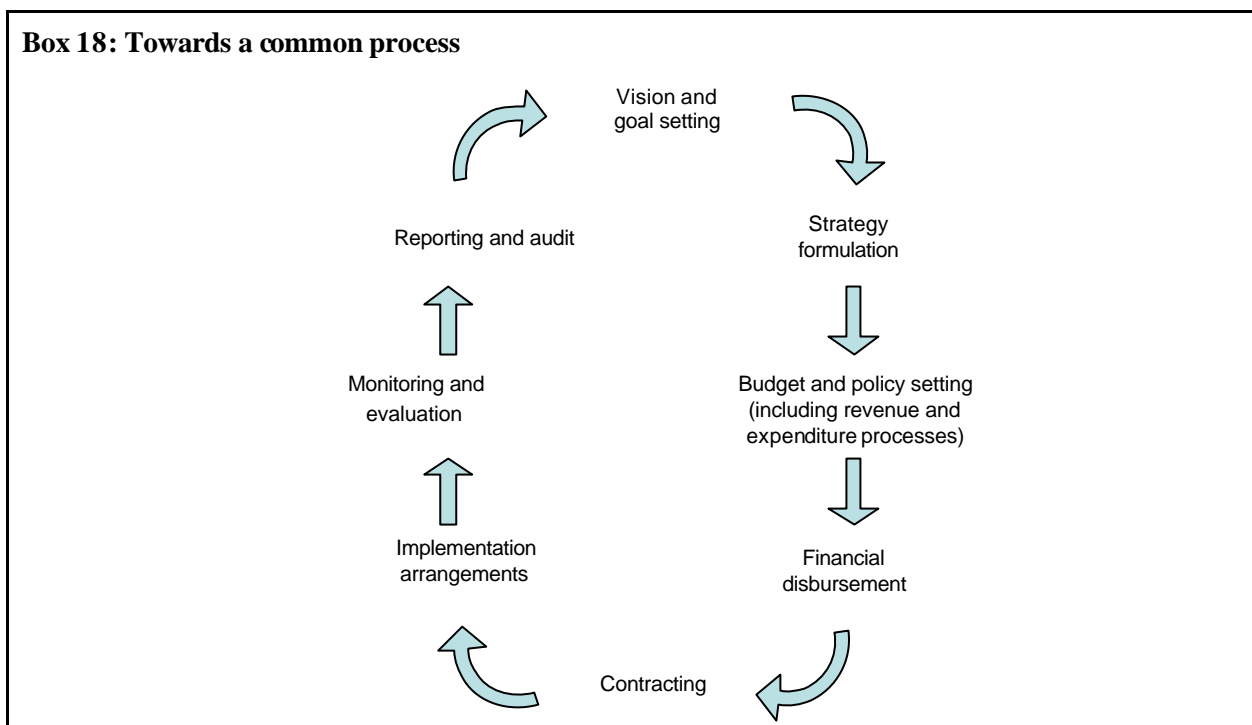
SWAPs (sector wide approach) in the health sector have been used to assist with donor coordination in a number of recent instances. In a classic SWAP pooling of donor funds occurs and the government centrally coordinates sector activities and controls resources. In principle this avoids problems of duplication, 'projectisation', and competition. In practice it may only be successful in situations where there are a small number of donors (donors often resist efforts of the MoH to centrally control resources, and some donors will not work with a SWAP) and a strong central authority. In East Timor, during the UNTAET period, a modified SWAP was successful during the first two years. The major donors to the health sector were the World Bank, the EC and AusAid. Although funds were not actually pooled, they were very carefully coordinated and committed, and the resources to which they would be applied agreed by all. Donors agreed to fund only those NGOs who complied with the policies and guidelines developed by the Interim Health Authority (IHA), including health facility staffing and salary protocols that were broadly consistent with state levels. Donors also agreed not to fund any construction or renovation in the health sector without IHA approval. The SWAP strategy facilitated unified sectoral planning, and included a strong focus on building national capacity from the outset; all international staff in the IHA were partnered with national staff in counterpart relationships.

Cambodia initially operated with a SWAP, but ultimately shifted to a SWiM (sector wide management). This does not require full coordination or pooling of all donor funds, there is no common basket. Rather, sectoral policies, funding and implementation strategies are developed between the MoH and its partners. The MoH is clearly the manager, and sets the strategic focus. Afghanistan does not operate with a SWAP or SWiM donor coordination mechanism. The situation there is considerably more complex than East Timor or Cambodia. During more than two decades of conflict the delivery of health care had become extremely fragmented, and was provided almost entirely by NGOs and non-state providers. In 2002 donor assistance increased substantially, and there was a much more diversified donor base than was the case in East Timor or Cambodia. However, the three major donors, in concert with the specialised UN agencies, developed the BPHS with the MoH, and the main donors undertook to ensure that there would be national coverage with the BPHS. The donors, with the MoH, agreed to divide the country up between themselves, with each donor providing sufficient funding to cover between 8-13 provinces. Without this close coordination and agreement it would not have been possible to deliver health services to such a large segment of the population.

**3.2.3. Harmonisation & alignment: emerging practice?**

89. This agenda is still in its infancy. A number of ideas are emerging about how this agenda can be taken forward in practical, operational terms with the aim of strengthening the overall systems and policy prioritisation processes in particular situations. The focus of attention, particularly relevant in difficult partnerships, is on supporting or developing a common process amongst all actors, both within and between government, donors, and non-governmental actors. This approach may also provide some entry points to addressing the relief-to-development disjuncture around the cooperative behaviour, lesson learning and capacity building issues outlined above. Ideally the basis of this approach is the existing national policy making, planning and budgeting process, perhaps reformed or un-fragmented as necessary. However in order to make this operationally meaningful, particularly in the context of CBA, it is important to unpack the components of this 'common process'.

90. There is a range of ways of describing the elements of such processes, but generally they include the elements set out in the diagram below (Box 18).



91. While this is a highly idealised representation of rather more messy and iterative processes, most of these steps or stages are being undertaken to some degree by actors on the donor, non-state agencies and government sides alike. The important thing is agreeing as common as possible a set of rules and timings associated with the different stages of the cycle. This implies drawing together the different rules and cycles of different actors. The following table tries to relate some of the stages of the cycle to the alignment agenda (Box 19).

**Box 19: Policy and systems alignment**

<i>External actors/NSSP</i>	<i>Governmental process</i>
Policy alignment	Vision and goal setting
	Strategy formulation
	Budget and policy setting
Systems alignment	Financial disbursement
	Contracting
	Implementation arrangements
	Monitoring and evaluation
	Reporting and audit

92. The consequence of serious movement towards a single or dominant process of policy, planning and implementation, should be that some of the key collective-action problems associated with the aid relationship are overcome and that, with time, the quality of the policies

and systems improve. This is easily asserted, however, and the practical changes in behaviour, thinking and approaches required of actors on all sides are significant. If taken to an extreme, such an approach could possibly become too restrictive or inhibit innovation. However there is nothing intrinsic to alignment that should stop innovative piloting. Such pilots would just need to be planned with a view to the relationship with the national system.

**93. But what if there is nothing there to align to?** In practice is it unlikely that there is nothing there in terms of systems. They may be weak, in need of substantial reform, or no longer used, but there is a common tendency for external actors to assume that there is nothing there. Evidence from Afghanistan, for example, suggests that there were quite effective public finance systems in place that had been running to the local level throughout the Taliban era. Despite political collapse, the government's administrative systems had proved relatively resilient and enduring (see Evans et al, 2004). In practice it is more likely to be a matter of choosing between parallel or overlapping systems. The key issue here seems to be that donors and INGOs make this choice in a harmonised way, and select the same systems to build on, reform or relate to. There are a number of examples where donors have supported the development of different national planning systems or sectoral policies, ultimately undermining each of the separate policies or systems. Drawing together the cycles and content of Cambodia's directly competing World Bank-supported Poverty Reduction Strategy process and Asian Development Bank-supported Socio-Economic Development Planning processes has taken a number of years and a great deal of effort.

**94. But what if there are really serious concerns about legitimating and supporting authorities?** Policy alignment, or support of donor programmes and non-state actors activities for national priorities is likely to be difficult and undesirable in these contexts. There has been a tendency to see the willingness or ability of particular donors to engage in the policy dialogue with government as a prerequisite for systems alignment to take place. More recent thinking has started to question this, suggesting that system alignment may be possible and desirable even in the absence of policy alignment. Specifically, the approach, called 'shadow' systems alignment is outlined in the box below. What this might allow is for the negative consequences of non-alignment to be mitigated. While not supporting regimes that donors and NGOs do not wish to legitimise, it would allow for rapid 'legitimation' to take place should the context of the policy dialogue emerge. The importance of a harmonised and coherent political engagement within the international community is also clear in these circumstances. The proliferation of priorities and contradictions within and between different international agencies is often not resulting in a clear or consistent set of messages to national governments.

**Box 20: Shadow systems alignment**

Such an approach might be useful in situations where there is a:

- Lack of competing or multiple systems
- Concerns about legitimising a particular government or authority
- Serious concerns about the intentions of the authorities towards their own population
- A significant and prolonged humanitarian presence

If there is nothing to 'align to', interventions need to be 'shadow' aligned. This approach needs to start with assessing the available formal and informal policies and systems (there is invariably more available than is first assumed). These can then be built on, adapted and reformed, which is more effective than designing and introducing entirely new policies and systems, particularly in low capacity environments.

**Shadow systems alignment is a state-avoiding approach but one that is ‘future-proof’.** It does not give an authority or government control over resources, but does use structures, institutions or systems which are parallel but compatible with existing or potential organisation of the state. It aims to avoid creating a diversionary institutional legacy that can undermine or impede the development of a more accountable and legitimate future relationship between the people and their governments.

The key to shadow ‘systems’ alignment is to ensure system compatibility. The design of external interventions is made based on the parallel but consistent or compatible organisational structures and operational procedures. A central element of this is about providing information in a compatible format (e.g. budget years and classifications).

Additional operational practice may include using the same or at least compatible:

- Administrative layers or boundaries
- Planning and budgeting cycles
- Budget classifications
- Accounting, procurement and audit systems
- Monitoring and evaluation systems
- Staffing structures, wage rates and hierarchies

In practice alignment is a question of degree. ‘Shadow’ systems alignment is a way of overcoming the negative effects of ‘non-alignment’ but is not dependent of policy alignment or handing control over resources to the authorities.

Source: Christiansen et al, 2004

95. The concept of shadow systems alignment is particularly relevant in a situation where there is large number of fragmented non-state service providers, such as NGOs in Southern Sudan. Practically, what it should mean is a significant up-front investment in the donors, implementing agents and government authorities agreeing on the key systems listed above and then all moving towards using the same system. For example, once a common procurement procedure is agreed that meets general international standards, all service provision would operate with the same set of rules. For donors in such a situation, the emphasis is likely to be on the contracting process with implementing agencies. Contracting would have to shift to include the use of nationally-selected systems, rather than the reporting systems being those of the donor. In practice, given that there are on-going activities in an area, this would involve a lead time for phasing in such arrangements.

## 4. Conclusions

96. A central conclusion of this review is that a great deal of care is required in distinguishing between different objectives associated with community-based approaches (CBA) and understanding how they relate to wider service-delivery objectives. In particular this requires:

- Differentiating between adopting a community-based approach and simply implementing projects at community level;
- Avoiding the assumption that because community-based approaches *can* be used to achieve a range of different objectives, using them *will* achieve those objectives.
- Identifying a clear hierarchy of objectives and acknowledging trade-offs between them.

97. Community-based approaches can contribute to broader service-delivery objectives. However for the impact of such approaches to be optimised, there needs to be greater clarity about the precise objectives CBA is being harnessed to achieve and more realism about what is achievable in a particular situation, project or programme.

98. The review identified a range of different objectives associated with applying CBA. These include *inter alia* empowerment of people and communities, improving efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of interventions, building organisational capacity at local level and strengthening local governance. It was noted that these objectives can be variously treated either as means to an end, or as ends in themselves. The practical impact of this is a tendency to conflate objectives and/or a failure to clearly prioritise among them, especially in post-conflict settings. This overloading of the agenda for intervention may in fact undermine the potential added value of more focused application of CBA. Thus clarity about objectives and/or a clear hierarchy of objectives in relation to the operating context is essential.

99. Section 2 highlighted a number of issues and challenges associated with implementing community-based approaches, both generally and specifically in difficult environments. Particular issues relating to defining the user community, degree of local authority involvement, targeting and financing were identified and discussed. The review concludes that community-based approaches are relevant across many sectors and can equally be applied to individual community-level projects or as a component of wider national programmes.

100. An important question in post-conflict settings is how to scale up activities from project-based assistance (relief) in the absence of effective government, towards programme- and policy-based assistance (development). It is particularly important that community-level activities are clearly located in relation to other interventions, in terms of focus, type and scale.

101. The potential and limits to CBA can be summarised as follows:

- **Problem identification** There is broad agreement that community-based approaches have the potential to be more responsive to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries (allocative efficiency). However communities are generally less well equipped for identifying solutions.
- **Identifying solutions** to problems experienced at community level generally requires additional external technical support to facilitate informed decision-making. Important

issues surround designing an appropriate ‘menu’ of service options which balances the needs and demands of beneficiaries with the constraints of the operating environment.

- **Public goods and optimum level of provision.** Community level priorities may not always be consistent with broader societal goals e.g. equity, efficiency and sustainability. While community-based approaches may improve allocative and productive efficiency, public goods, for example sanitation, are often undersupplied. Important questions surround subsidiarity i.e. the levels at which decisions are made and different components of services are provided.
- **Maintaining minimum standards.** It is important that community-level interventions are complemented and guided by a larger system of norms and standards to ensure quality and equity in services provided. Community-based approaches have the potential to improve targeting in general, but major challenges surround targeting vulnerable groups *within* communities.
- **Enabling environment.** A key determinant of the potential and limits of CBA is fundamentally the existence of an ‘enabling environment’ which can provide information to support identification of appropriate solutions, decide on the optimum level of provision, ensure maintenance of minimum standards, and respond flexibly to changing demand for services over time.

102. A common challenge in post-conflict settings is striking an appropriate balance between the need to rebuild institutions quickly and the desire to reform them to ensure longer-term sustainability in service provision. Experience shows that the success of community-based approaches ultimately depends on establishing a responsive framework of support institutions. This takes time. If the objective of strengthening local governance is to be realised there is a need for gradual/conditional disbursement which allows time for beneficiaries to learn how to defend their rights and hold leaders and service providers to account. Unfortunately this requirement often runs counter to short-term funding cycles and the desire to see ‘quick impacts’, especially in post-conflict settings.

103. The way in which aid is delivered and the impact this has on the ‘enabling environment’ required for CBA, especially in aid-dependant environments. The way the aid actors behave and external flows are delivered is not always conducive to the development of the systems and structures that support community-based approaches. There are discussions on how to relate externally-financed activities more effectively to national systems and policies which are relevant to difficult environments and service delivery. The main concern is to ‘do no harm’ while also not legitimising authorities in situations where there is serious concern or ongoing conflict. However, the emerging recommendations in this area go against entrenched current practice and will require substantial efforts and commitment by all actors to make them a success.

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