Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Understanding Change as Politics not Political Will

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[1] This document is intended for use as a technical guide, any views expressed are those of the author and do not represent FCDO or UK Government policy. The author is grateful to Alan Whaites, Heather Marquette and Aislin Baker for comments on drafts.

Contents

SUMMARY 3
1. Introduction 4
2. Toolkit For Analysing the Political Trade-offs of Change 5
3. Motivation and Agency 8
4. Assessing the Constraints to Taking Action 10
   A. Laws & Institutions 10
   B. Capacity 11
   C. Influences 13
   D. Opponents 14
   E. Timing 14
5. Stimulating Change 15
   A. Coalitions 15
   B. The importance of time 16
   C. Benefiting from External Inputs 17
   D. The Importance of Being prepared to Compromise and Reframe 18
6. Is There a Role for External Agencies? 18
7. Bibliography 20

SUMMARY

This note is intended for use by those considering why hoped-for changes are not materialising, often summed up in the term "Lack of Political Will". The note is intended to help practitioners to go beyond surface level explanations, and to understand underlying factors. It provides a framework of analysis to help practitioners explore the motivation and agency of individuals or organisations that might drive change. It also considers aspects of collective action problems that may stifle efforts for reform.

A concluding section uses the evidence[2] presented to consider key factors often present when change happens. One conclusion is that opportunities for effective participation by external practitioners are generally fewer than many assume, but there are potential steps that can help build a momentum for change.

The note is aimed at helping practitioners develop a better understanding of why promised change is not happening, enabling them to reach conclusions on the implications for their programmes and influencing work. It is not intended to provide a "toolkit" or "checklist" of ready-made solutions.

	Contents
Section 1: Introduction	Introduces readers to why a failure to take action may not be a "lack of political will," but could reflect the absence of the supporting structural and institutional factors required to tackle Collective Action Problems.
Section 2: Toolkit for Analysing the Political Trade-offs of Change.	Provides an overarching framework, in a one-page diagram (Figure 1). It identifies three areas of analysis: 1. Has the right person or agency been identified as the change agent? 2. What is their motivation and agency for becoming involved? 3. What are the constraints to them taking action? Questions 2 and 3 are considered in greater detail in the Sections 3 and 4
Section 3: Motivation and Agency	Sets out questions, from Figure1, to help practitioners assess the motivation and agency of those involved in addressing collective action problems.
Section 4: Addressing Constraints to Taking Action	How can practitioners explore the constraints to actions on collective action problems?
Section Five: Stimulating Change	Key factors in successful efforts to overcome barriers to change: capacity development; facilitation; challenging power: introducing ideas; awareness raising; providing information; and providing expertise.
Section Six: Is There a Role for External Agencies?	Explores ways in which external agencies can help build a momentum for change, as well as ways in which poorly informed actions might make securing change more difficult.

[2] A note on sources Two principal sources of evidence used were case studies from:

- Carmen Malena (ed.) (2009) "From Political Won't to Political Will: Building Support for Participatory Governance"; and
- Hudson et al. (2018) "Inside the black box of political will: 10 years of findings from the Developmental Leadership Program"

A high proportion of other case studies quoted were from FCDO-funded research programmes, particularly the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID). Open access materials were used as much as possible.

1. Introduction

This note has been written from the perspective of donors ("development partners") providing support for development programmes, and in particular those supporting nationally led reform processes. Most of the examples are drawn from this area of work, but the lessons learned can equally be applied to more developed environments, (which have also provided some of the examples).

Box 1: Attempts at defining Political Will

Where writers have attempted to define political will, they have generally done so with reference to a particular issue. Brinkerhoff (2000), for instance, looks at political will in the context of corruption. Treadway et al (2005) look at political will in relation to motivations and behaviours in firms. Kosack (2009) looks at it with reference to funding for primary education. The writers in Malena (2009) look at political will with respect to participatory processes. Idris (2022) looks at it in relation to combating Serious Organised Crime (SOC). Post et al (2010, p. 657) list several authors' definitions, as well as providing their own (ibid: 659).

The question of a "lack of political will" is referred to often in development, usually as part of a complaint. As Hammergren has observed "political will" is an unusual term in that it is "never defined except by its absence" (Hammergren, 1998: 12). Marquette (2020) has noted "Political will has become a global shorthand for explaining why reforms succeed or fail. The phrase 'we can't do anything here because there's no political will' has become like a resigned shrug to end a difficult conversation." At its simplest "lack of political will" is offered as an explanation for why something that might be expected to happen has not. For development partners this can make "lack of political will" a convenient explanation of why X programme underperformed, or Y policy change was never agreed.

This note is intended to help practitioners to go beyond the surface level explanations of political will (see Box 1 for attempts at defining it) and to think about underlying factors. In considering these issues the note recognises that trade-offs involved in change must be weighed by individuals: leaders, officials and other stakeholders. As a result, issues of political will relate to personal agency, context constraints and capability. It is important to move beyond an external perspective and ideas of introducing external "best practice" (Booth, 2012; Andrews, 2012) and develop an understanding of how issues look from the perspective of the counterpart. This requires looking at a failure to take action not as a "lack of political will," but rather as reflecting various aspects of collective action problems.

Collective action problems can occur in any context or organisation. Securing change usually requires action, or at least acquiescence, by multiple stakeholders. A Cabinet of Ministers may need to agree the change, a group of implementing departments may need to collaborate on delivery. However, suppose that one actor believes that they could let the others do all the work, reaping the rewards without the effort? Or that, while there is agreement to act, the fine details (e.g. co-ordinating, timing) become impossible to reconcile, owing to conflicting pressures or commitments. There may also be weak co-ordination, with actors unclear about the detailed plan, including their own responsibilities. The myriad of co-ordination problems that can occur are often loosely labelled `Collective Action Problems', a term that the World Bank explains as:

> "Collective action problems include those solved through coordination (the coordinated actions among actors based on a shared expectation about what others will do) and cooperation (the cooperative behavior among actors, whereby opportunistic behavior—free-riding—is limited). (WDR 2017 p33)"

Where an actor has sufficient authority and determination, they may be able to impose solutions on Collective Action Problems. However, often actors lack the combination of skills, mandate and capacity necessary to offset faults or problems in their systems.

Political will as a concept therefore remains relevant; but it is not the whole story. What may seem a simple question of political will to outsiders may look very different to those involved. Mintzberg (1983, 1985, quoted in Treadway et al, (2005: 229-230)) argues that to be effective in political arenas, individuals need to demonstrate both their willingness, or motivation, to expend personal resources, what he called "political will", but also that they needed to execute these behaviours in politically astute and effective ways, what he termed 'political skill.' Brinkerhoff (2000, p. 243) notes that political will does not exist in a vacuum, but is influenced by wider factors. Malena (2009: 19-25) takes this further, by identifying three mutually reinforcing elements of political will: Political Want, Political Can and Political Must (see Box 2).

In their different ways, these writers and those referred to in Box 1, are introducing the idea that behind what is seen as "political will" are a set of supporting structural and institutional factors. Similarly, there will be explanatory factors behind an observed, "lack of political will". It is not a simple case of an organisation or individual doing or not doing something.[3] This note will help practitioners to understand these structural and institutional factors, and through them, to better gauge the real story behind political choices and actions. Practitioners will then be better able to develop strategies for engaging with reform and change as a process of stakeholders grappling with real-world dilemmas.

Box 2: Elements of Political Will

Political Want – Ideally, political leaders and public officials accept the need to do something not because they are forced to but because they want to. Such people can be divided into two categories, natural champions and converted champions. In the latter case, conversion comes from seeing the benefits to themselves, those they govern, or both.

Political Can – To secure change, political leaders and public officials need to be confident in both their own and others' capabilities to do so. This includes having appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks and adequate resources and support.

Political Must – Given all the demands on them, even if political leaders and public officials want to undertake an action, and have the capacity to do so, the chances of action actually occurring is much greater if the Want and Can "are accompanied by some compelling force or pressure that demands action and renders inaction politically costly." (Malena, 2009: 22)

2. Toolkit For Analysing the Political Trade-offs of Change

When exploring the impact of political drivers and trade-offs on the prospects for change our starting point should be some form of political economy analysis (PEA). PEA can be light-touch or in-depth, and a variety of tools exist, as in FCDO's Understanding PEA[4] (FCDO, 2023), to help understand the issues affecting the agency of leaders and stakeholders.

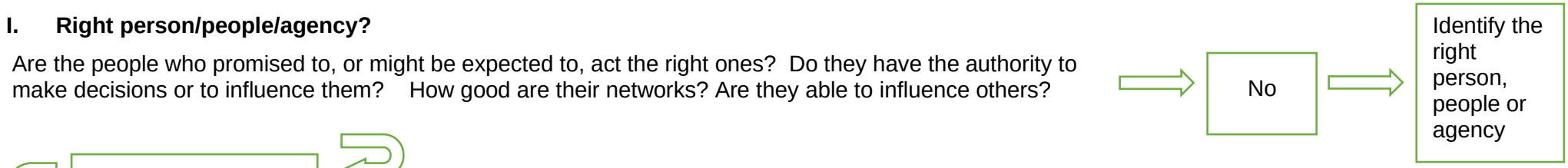
This note adapts one approach to PEA to specifically address issues of politics and change. Figure 1 suggests a route to get behind the factors manifesting themselves as a lack of political will. It draws on the note on Everyday Political Analysis (Hudson et al, 2016). The first part of the exercise is to make an initial assessment of the most likely people or agencies to secure the change sought. This might be best done through stakeholder analysis, since major change rarely relies on one person or organisation acting alone (Hudson et al, 2018:)[5]. The process might be iterative: in the course of undertaking the next stages, further, or even alternative, candidates might be identified.

Once the candidates who might introduce change have been identified, the next step is to assess what factors could motivate them to make the effort involved; as the Everyday Political Analysis note observes we need to understand their context, "the pressures they face from others and the rules within which they have to work." (Hudson et al, 2016:1)

[3] See Post et al (2010:656) and Hudson et al (2018: 8) on whether political will is an individual-level or a collective concept.
[4] Written with the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice (TWP-CoP)
[5] See, for example, the note on political will in the water and sanitation sector by the University of Birmingham's Development Leadership Programme (DLP, 2021)

Finally, if the conclusion is that logically they should have an interest in taking action, the next stage is to consider the constraints they might be facing that mean that, in practice, they do not take action, or that their actions are inadequate, or, indeed, the wrong actions. Figure 1 below provides a list of questions to consider when thinking about motivation and constraints, with evidence supporting these questions following afterwards. This approach will help practitioners to consider the challenge of change from multiple angles.

Figure 1: Why is change not materialising? – Identifying underlying factors



3. Motivation and Agency

In line with Figure 1 the starting point for an assessment of factors hampering change or reform is to consider the motivation and issues that will guide the personal agency of those involved. Suggested factors to consider are covered below. The examples used as illustrations demonstrate that politicians' interests, perspectives and priorities can vary greatly, and can be difficult to anticipate. For practitioners, this brings out the importance of undertaking a good political economy analysis to understand the many factors that influence motivation and agency.

How do the issues that need to be addressed fit with their beliefs and interests?

To outsiders looking in, a situation may appear quite simple, with obvious priorities and paths to reform. However, those with the responsibility to bring about change are likely to see issues as a series of trade-offs and competing priorities. Politicians' incentives to invest in water, sanitation and health (WASH), for instance, might be greater where they can target these services to favoured constituencies (DLP, 2021, p. 2). Zalmanovitch and Cohen (2015: 37-39) outline how a politician's need to secure their political survival in office and re-election means that political cost-benefit calculations about whether to become involved in health promotion can mean that they are likely to come out against doing so. In many cases it is not electorally popular and brings few votes.

In Rwanda, a seeming lack of political will to improve educational quality had its origins in a specific view of the world and assumptions on how to improve national outcomes, with indirect impacts on education. The government that came to power in 1994 focused on quantity in education: ie building schools and getting students into them. Less attention was paid to improving quality. Instead, the government was more focused on implementing its 2008 decision to change the language of instruction from French to English. This was driven by cultural reasons (most of the ruling elites had been educated outside Rwanda in English) and also economic reasons (English was seen as a more useful language for international commerce). The language change dominated efforts to improve educational quality, the logic being that pedagogy did not matter if teachers could speak the language of instruction. The government's improvement programme produced mixed results (Williams, 2019: 86-92). These persist (in a 2020 baseline assessment of teachers' English language proficiency, only 3% of the 33,460 teachers tested had intermediate to advanced skills in English). However, the Rwandan government is prioritising efforts to build a more resilient and better performing education system, which will be reflected in a new education strategy, while education's share of total government spending has increased from 11% in 2016/17 to 15% in 2020/21 (World Bank, 2022: pp. 11-12).

Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful (2019:165-167) point out that where electoral competition is as fiercely fought as it is in Ghana, political dynamics can revolve around securing votes from organised social groups, such as trades unions or business associations, or ethno-regional groups. In such circumstances, the incentives are to spread (tangible) resources thinly to secure the support of different groups, rather than to adopt programmatic agendas, including women's rights. This is the context in which it took six years from the introduction of a draft Domestic Violence Bill to it being passed into law, with implementation being caught up in protracted processes and there being little evidence that subsequently norms around domestic violence have started to shift.

Where does addressing these issues fit within their priorities? Will it help them achieve personal or career goals?

As priorities change, the desire to take action may wane. Sutton & Judah (2021: 25) argue, for instance, in a paper on the rise of "kleptocracy" that corruption-related financial crimes were deprioritised relative to terrorism and narcotics after the September 11 terrorist attacks, which led the United States and many of its key international partners to emphasise the financial threat of terrorist activities in the collection of financial intelligence. The United

States, for its part, explicitly emphasises terrorism in the organisational structure of its counter-illicit finance bureaucracy.

A seeming lack of political will can also reflect a difference between actions which support the personal goals of a person with power and those which benefit wider society. Ampratwum et al, (2019) discuss the situation in "AK" district in Central Ghana, where they suggest that a significant factor in the failure to tackle high teacher absenteeism was the rivalry between the District Chief Executive (DCE) and the sitting MP to be their party's parliamentary candidate in the next election. The DCE felt that his political ambitions would be better served be providing classroom blocks and teachers' quarters then "invisible" projects aimed at promoting improved accountability and higher performance. In contrast, in another Central Province district, "TM", there was limited intra-party competition, and the MP, DCE and officials of the District Education Directorate worked closely to ensure that their party, rather than individuals, was identified with projects and efforts to improve service provision, including efforts that resulted in a much lower level of teacher absenteeism (Ampratwum et al, 2019: 56-57).

Are they aware of the role they might play?

In Guelph, Ontario, Canada, the Neighbourhood Support Coalition (NSC), a civil society organisation comprising grassroots neighbourhood groups run by local residents, oversaw the participatory budgeting process for allocating 0.1 per cent of the city council's budget. The NSC member groups agreed that funds would be allocated on the basis of need with previous unused funds from better-off areas being transferred to less well-off ones, and they wanted more funds to be allocated in this way. However, city councillors were generally not aware that the council's approach to providing and managing services and focusing on financial return for use, tended to favour better-off areas. Once the NSC made councillors aware, the council agreed to the funding request (Pinnington, 2009).

In Kenya, the Aga Khan Foundation was introducing its Coastal Rural Support Programme (CSRP-K), designed to help identify and address factors that inhibit the effective engagement of community groups in development. They found that there were some government officers who had embraced the idea of partnerships. However, there were no colleges that trained government officials on partnering. Those officers who lacked previous experience of interaction with actors outside government, often also lacked the capacity and skills to operate and engage at the community level, even if they wanted to. Equally, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and communities were often unaware of the role they might play, being unwilling to engage with policy makers. Some CSOs seemed "set in their own way of doing things" without appreciation of collaborative approaches (Holloway et al: 59). Low levels of literacy had also made communities unaware of the role they could play in development planning and were vulnerable to manipulation by elite leaders, who did not necessarily have their best interest at heart. As will be elaborated in section 5 of this note, much of the work of the Aga Khan Foundation involved helping all parties understand the part they could play in facilitating development.

In Uganda, when developing its Pressure From Below (PFB) initiative targeting corruption and mismanagement, the NGO, Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA), found that some communities were likely to have missed opportunities to participate in government planning and budgeting exercises, because they had adopted a negative stance and did not proactively engage before the implementation stage. The limited capacity of CSOs could mean that they were not always diplomatic in their interactions, meaning that opportunities for collaboration were lost (Namisi: 127). Such examples illustrate that what typically lies behind a perceived lack of political will are collective action failures, in this case resulting as much from the CSOs and communities failing to understand the role they could play, as from the intransigence of officials and politicians.

Are they prepared to undergo the costs and risks, both personal and financial?

In the Guelph example above, Pinnington found that a factor in bringing about change was that some councillors and senior staff devoted time to researching participatory processes and attended meetings to understand the NSC's request. Three officials also invested considerable time to persuade more senior staff of the value of participatory processes. They had been working for the main advocate of participatory processes in the council, who had departed at short notice, and were putting their own careers at risk as well as giving up their time (Pinnington, 2009)

In Ghana, a study reports that there was significant opposition to the proposed Domestic Violence Bill, referred to above, both within the government and wider society. It indicates that for the first two years of the campaign to have the draft Bill introduced in Parliament, opposition within the government included the then minister for women and children's affairs, even though her Ministry was meant to champion women's rights. The new minister came from a civil society background and was prepared to support the coalition advocating for the Bill to be adopted by Parliament (Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful, 2019:167).

Writing on the Sierra Leone local tax revenue example, covered in greater detail in the next section, Jibao and Prichard (2013: 38) point out that "the core political challenge of property tax reform is that it promises benefits to the large, and relatively uncoordinated, mass of citizens, while it disproportionately threatens the interests of concentrated, organised and often powerful actors." In Freetown, Makeni and Kenema observed that early increases in property tax revenue from identifying new properties and expanding the tax base was not necessarily threatening to elites, being aimed at the majority of taxpayers. However sustaining and deepening tax reforms was threatening to their interests. In Makeni, for instance, collection efforts stalled because the city council was not prepared to challenge strong vested interests or sacrifice patronage opportunities. It also had concerns that greater transparency and consultation risked exposing it to critique and challenge (ibid: 26-27).

In Bo, in contrast, the council invested its time in encouraging voluntary compliance through two strategies. Firstly, it provided clear rules governing tax assessment, while offering fora for taxpayers to raise objections where enforcement was considered unfair. Secondly, it informed citizens about the revenue raised and about how it was being used by the council, including through a weekly radio dialogue and efforts to explicitly link new services to local revenue-raising (ibid: 37). The mayor and Chief Administrator led from the front in these efforts (ibid:19).

4. Assessing the Constraints to Taking Action

Having assessed factors that can influence motivation and agency, the next area of analysis is of constraints people may face if they seek to take action. This section provides examples to illustrate the five areas of constraints covered in the lower half of Figure 1.

A. Laws & Institutions

Are there gaps in the formal laws and policies required for action? Equally, are there laws and policies that inhibit action?

Collective action problems have been present in attempts to tackle corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country's anti-corruption body was established in 2009 with nationwide jurisdiction, but its outreach and effectiveness have been limited due to the complexity and decentralised administrative system of the country, in which each entity, district and canton has its own anti-corruption arrangement with different mandates and focuses (Zvekić and Vidličkagi, 2020: 8). This has complicated strategic, country-wide implementation of anti-corruption measures. In 2021, the EU reported that a new law on public procurement was yet to be adopted. In addition, the State Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption was still awaiting amendments to its law, which would strengthen its independence and funding. Other anti-corruption

bodies were not uniformly organised and were generally under-staffed while waiting for the relevant government bodies to appoint the necessary personnel (Zvekić and Roksandić, 2021: 10). Whilst the public procurement law was amended in 2022, the EU continued to report that the legal framework on concessions and public-private partnerships was still highly fragmented and that administrative capacities were still insufficient, particularly concerning monitoring and support functions (European Commission, 2022).

In Serbia, law enforcement bodies have significant discretionary powers when they decide whether to investigate and prosecute a given case. Similarly, they do not always provide a full explanation of why they have decided to abandon an investigation. This can lead to a belief of possible political motivation hidden behind apparently routine police and prosecutorial decisions (Open Society, 2018: 5–6).

International conventions on tackling wildlife crime are set within trade law not criminal law. In reflecting on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Scanlon (2019) argues, "CITES is not a crime-related convention; and while it obliges countries to penalise trade that does not comply with the Convention, it does not oblige countries to criminalise illegal wildlife trade." He goes on to quote UNODC (2016) saying that it is "aptly described as a convention that `defines the rules that the traffickers seek to circumvent`".

In contrast to the above examples, one of the factors identified in the success of the Pressure From Below (PFB) initiative in Uganda, mentioned in in Section 3 above, was the fact that a legal and policy framework favourable to enabling citizen participation was already in place (Hamisi: 128).

Are there informal or unwritten rules or ways of doing things that inhibit action?

In Bolivia, 1982 saw the end of military rule and the rebirth of democracy, but as MacLean-Abaroa (2009: 196) puts it, "neither the power-holders nor the disempowered had any models of how this might be achieved, or tools that could be tried". Bolivia's first democratically elected mayors only had previous top-down, authoritarian models for governing their municipalities available to them. The urban poor learned during the years of dictatorship that the only way to get attention was to make demands that were extreme and often violent, and to demand immediate satisfaction. They learned to distrust politically appointed authorities, who might suddenly be sacked. Their distrust of authorities persisted well into the democratic period, even though they now, in theory, had more peaceful paths to pursue to get their needs met. If their needs were not met, they did not re-elect the mayor, which meant few mayors were able to meet or renew their mandate.

B. Capacity

I. Human resources and support

Is there a lack of resources or knowledge for an effective response? Are there shortages in quantity and quality of staff?

In 1994 "Participacion Popular", or "Popular Participation" (PP) was introduced in Bolivia. This was an exercise in citizen participation, institutionalised by law and promoted from the top and centre of the political system. Following the return to democracy, but before the introduction of PP, democratically elected mayors faced constant pressure to address every issue affecting citizens, as mentioned above. They could receive hundreds of requests and complaints, but generally lacked the resources and the knowledge of how to prioritise to give a satisfactory response. PP helped address this collective action problem as it gave citizens the mechanisms, both political and economic, to better participate in their own governance, whilst governors discovered that it generated a new and more positive governance relationship (MacLean-Abaroa, 2009, p 195).

Sutton & Judah (2021: 19) note that in many EU countries agencies focusing on financial crimes vary tremendously in their expertise and staffing. Although the EU had recently

created a regional-level prosecutorial agency focused on fraud, it had only a handful of staff to handle thousands of cases.

In India, Burra et al (2018) reviewed the performance of the Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP) component of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). BSUP was launched in 2007, eventually covering 63 cities, in response to growing urban need in India, but was generally unsuccessful. Insufficient funding was a major factor, but in their research in five recipient cities, Burra et al found that limited capacity was a significant explanatory factor in relative differences in performance in three, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, and Patna compared to Pune and Visakhapatnam.

In Bhubaneswar, for instance, the State government was keen to address urban poverty, but the city authority had limited capacity: plans were poor as was planning for implementation. The failure to allow for cost escalations meant that there were no bids from commercial contractors, and an NGO took over the project, including revising plans and making up funding shortfalls from its own resources. Most households did benefit from in-situ upgrading and were broadly satisfied, but some struggled to cover their financial contribution.

In Patna, the State government did not prepare or plan for the BSUP and made an opportunistic application. There was poor documentation of process and implementation, leading to the absence of an institutional memory. Frequent transfers of officials led to disruptions in planning and implementation. The inability to complete sanctioned dwelling units led to a significant downscaling and suggestions of poor construction.

In contrast, in Pune the ability to both plan and to implement were present. Pune had a realistic implementation plan, with support provided by the city authorities. There was competent management of projects, with problems being identified and resolved. The Municipal Commissioner decided, after difficulties in phase one, that the most effective way to implement the BSUP was through coproduction with civil society, which meant that implementation benefited from non-state capacities and particularly the ability of numerous self-help groups to work with NGOs and deliver project outcomes.

Do they lack potential coalition partners (individuals or groups, including those who may provide finance or intellectual support)?

In writing about the role of coalitions in helping Philippines President Benigno Aquino secure passage in 2012 of a law to significantly raise taxes on cigarettes and alcohol, Sidel and Faustino (2019: 37) points out that an earlier top-down effort to raise excise taxes on alcohol and cigarettes foundered in the 1990s despite the strong support of the then President Fidel Ramos and supporters in Congress.

Levy et al (2016 & 2019: 121 – 127) compared education in Western and Eastern Cape Provinces in South Africa. Western Cape had the highest attainment scores amongst South Africa's provinces and a high performing bureaucracy at central level, what they term "hierarchical governance" in relation to schools. However, when comparing Western Cape with Eastern Cape, the difference in education scores was not as great as the difference in hierarchical governance would suggest. While the Western Cape did much better on educational attainment and hierarchical governance, Eastern Cape overcame some of the difference in levels of hierarchical governance through better performance on horizontal governance (local governance arrangements at the school level eg relationship with parents). One contributory factor was parental contributions to school building and teaching materials, with 57% and 65% of Eastern Cape parents assisting with school building and school maintenance respectively, compared to just 13% and 18% in Western Cape.

The researchers' case-study research supported these findings. Several aspects of horizontal governance were found to be stronger in the four Eastern Cape case-study schools than the four Western Cape ones. In both provinces, there were examples of the inspirational school principals, a form of hierarchical governance, but for sustained impact

they needed support from a network of horizontal interactions with teachers, the School Governance Board (SGB), parents, and with the community more broadly (horizontal governance). These factors were found to be more present in the Eastern Cape schools and were factors in examples of overcoming poor hierarchical governance, being particularly important in ensuring a successful succession from one principal to another. In contrast, in Western Cape, these factors were much less present, and their absence was a factor in the poor succession experience of two previously well-performing schools whose inspirational principals left.

II. Finance and Infrastructure

Are there shortages of finance and "infrastructure" required to complete the task?

In Uganda, the NRM government's success in the 1996 elections was partly built on its pledge to introduce Universal Primary Education, which it did the following year, abolishing school fees and promising free education to a guaranteed four children per family. There followed a significant expansion in the school attendance, with the support of funding by development partners. Subsequently, however, Uganda has faced collective action problems around the need to improve the quality of education: there has been a general agreement that quality needs to be improved, but there has been insufficient stakeholder momentum to do so. The government acknowledged that the quality of education in UPE schools was poor and introduced some initiatives to improve it, such as improving the quality of teachers' houses, but weaknesses, such as monitoring systems, remained in some areas. While some development partners provided funding for projects to improve quality, the finance needs far exceeded what was available. The only other option to raise the finance would have been to reintroduce school fees, which existed informally in any case, and surveys suggested that the majority of parents supported this. Yet the NRM government was caught by a policy commitment of allowing free education in an appeal to rural constituencies and fears that going back on this would lose it electoral support (Kjaer and Muwanga, 2016).

C. Influences

Do they work with or report to people or organisations, both national and international, who may make involvement in these issues difficult? Do they face any threats if they act?

In Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, the African National Congress had been in power since the restoration of multi-party elections in 1994. However, the province was characterised by weak bureaucracy and political infighting, so that "patronage, not programmatic commitments to improve services, became the default mechanism for maintaining the political allegiance of non-elites." (Levy et al, 2019: 118-119). The Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) experienced frequent turnover at political (provincial education minister) and administrative (Superintendent General) levels. The management and oversight of education suffered as a result (Levy et al, 2016: 17-18).

Superintendent General, Modidina Mannya, tried to turnaround ECDoE in 2000, but was said to have received death threats following his suspension of ten departmental managers, including some with close political connections (Lodge, 2005: 747, quoted in Levy et al, 2016: 19)

Would taking appropriate action be counter to social norms about what is appropriate?

According to a retrospective 2018 study from Malaysia, the socioeconomic environment had been very unfavourable to people in power who might want to advocate for women’s rights. Social, cultural and religious norms often limited women’s access to the public sphere as well as their ability to exercise and advocate their rights, both from a cultural and legal perspective. Legally enforceable fatwa had been issued against diverse behaviours including the celebration of Valentines Day and women behaving like “tomboys”. Furthermore, discourses, often couched in religious and cultural terms, reinforced women’s

roles as housewives and mothers and their subservient position to men (Spark and Lee, 2018:3). As will be seen in Section 5 below, this has influenced the approaches adopted by groups advocating for change.

The women's coalition which fought for the introduction of a Domestic Violence Bill in Ghana initially framed it in terms of women's rights. Framing it in this way raised opposition to the bill from a broad range of groups, including religious groups, male parliamentarians and a cross-section of the Ghanaian public, who perceived the introduction of the bill as a foreign imposition and a potential threat to marriage and the social and cultural norms of Ghana. Opposition to the bill from these groups coalesced around the clause outlawing marital rape, with many seeing this as foreign and "almost unthinkable within Ghanaian culture." During the government's consultations on the draft bill, it was opposed on the basis that it would lead to marital breakdown. As a result, the coalition had to reframe domestic violence as threatening to family life and the bill as helping to protect families. One result was that whilst the Domestic Violence Act, passed by Parliament, marital rape was not explicitly prohibited. (Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful: 161-162).

D. Opponents

Which people or organisations might oppose actions to address the issues? How powerful are they? What is their scope to disrupt?

In Sierra Leone, the 2004 Local Government Act was accompanied by efforts to develop the capacity of newly established local councils, including help to increase their local tax revenue to finance local services. In Makeni, UNDP supported the local council to increase property tax revenue. Revenues rose 2007-2010 on the basis of reforms undertaken in 2007 and 2008.

However, collection efforts appeared to reach a plateau as official support for the reform programme began to waver as early as 2008 because of a reluctance to prosecute (often well-connected) tax evaders and resistance to the transparency of the IT software, which had been set up by consultants to make it difficult to alter records and ensure openness. The dispute between the consultants and officials was also reflected in the gradual disappearance of many of the early initiatives for increasing the transparency of the system, as sensitisation and communication efforts (which had been extensive) declined significantly after 2008 (Jibao & Prichard, 2013:.12-17).

In contrast, the programme that had been pioneered in Makeni was initiated in earnest in Bo City Council in 2008, including the new IT software. Property tax collection increased from Le 70 million in 2008 to Le 200 million in 2009, and Le 310 million in 2010, with per capita collection about 35 per cent higher than in the comparable cities of Makeni and Kenema (Ibid: 17-19)

With reference to the Eastern Cape Education Department example above, Levy et al (2016) suggest that by 2011, the province was suffering from severe crises in budgeting and provisioning (the allocation of teachers across schools, which was severely unbalanced). The study states that when the aforementioned Modidina Mannya, on a second term as Superintendent General, attempted to address the crisis through redeployment of teachers from overstaffed to understaffed schools, the South African Democratic Teacher Union (SDATU) called for his dismissal. The study suggests that several Superintendents General were ousted following union protest (Levy et al, 2016: 18-19).

E. Timing

Is the timeline clear? Do the times when they will need to act fit with their own timetable? Which decision points are likely to expose them personally or politically?

In Sierra Leone, getting the timing right made a big difference. When a consultant first visited Bo City Council in the Sierra Leone revenue-collection example above, there was no immediate action, given that there was an election in sight, but afterwards, the reform programme "was initiated in earnest" (Jibao & Prichard, 2013: 17).

5. Stimulating Change

The examples used to illustrate the questions in Figure 1 bring out that when examining a seeming lack of political will, it is the "political" part that is the most important, rather than the "will". Bringing about change is "political" both with a small "p", inside an organisation for instance, and writ large within local or national governments. Securing change involves addressing collective action problems, as well as: the institutional and structural constraints faced by those charged with, or expected to, bring about change: gaps in laws and institutions, cultural norms; knowledge gaps; capacity limitations; weak support networks; financial and infrastructure shortages; powerful opposition groups; and time constraints.

The examples in this paper also bring out the fact that the collective action problems that are behind a perceived "lack of political will" are generally complex and involve many actors. Nearly always, the majority of these are internal and there is little that an external actor can do. Indeed, development partners can often be part of the problem if they come with fixed ideas of how to solve a problem with insufficient understanding of the complex relational dynamics within a country (Andrews, 2012; Yanguas, 2018). Therefore, rather than provide thoughts on what external actors can do to stimulate change in a country they are working in, this section looks at evidence on successful approaches to overcoming barriers to change. Examples are provided of the role of **capacity development, facilitation, challenging power, introducing ideas, awareness raising** and **providing information**. **Coalitions** can be an important means by which political will is created. Development partners can bear these examples in mind when thinking about what (small) role they may play in bringing about change. **External inputs** can certainly be important, particularly for ideas and expertise.

A. Coalitions

The formation of coalitions seems to be a significant factor in overcoming a lack of political will. Coalitions can often **challenge power**, **overcome resistance, provide facilitation**, **develop capacity**, and **raise awareness,** and introduce **ideas.**

Most of the examples in Malena (2009) involved successful coalition forming to overcome a lack of political will and create political will. For example, in the Guelph example above, the Neighbourhood Support Coalition **overcame resistance** and **developed capacity** by **providing information** in learning sessions with the more supportive councillors (CD), who could advocate on its behalf (political can). NSC members and council officials used the media to **raise awareness** and promote the coalition's participatory budget process. For the NSC this was part of a strategy to create support from elected officials, many of whom included support for local participatory governance initiatives in the election campaigns (political must) (Pinnington, 2009).

The DLP review paper by Hudson et al (2018) also highlights many examples of coalitions enabling political will. In the Malaysia study looking at the period up to 2018 mentioned in section 4 above, the Joint Action Group on Gender Equity (JAG), a coalition of NGOs, operated on a broad front to coordinate activities which support women's rights and needs. This broad base was built up ahead of campaigns on more specific issues that challenged authority. Spark and Lee (2018: 8) suggest that JAG's advocacy was more palatable for its targets as a result of its middle-class image. Often politicians and other elites, would not respond well to appeals that were blunt, given the general hostility to women's rights, or which appeared to come from working class groups. Amongst its successes of influence have been the enacting of Malaysia's Domestic Violence Act and influencing the content of the Child Act (ibid: 9).

Elsewhere in the DLP series Sidel and Faustino (2019: 31-51) document the considerable **facilitation** and **awareness-raising** role that a diverse coalition of reformist actors and organisations played in helping a reformist president, Benigno Aquino, secure the passage into law in 2012 of the "Sin Tax" Reform Bill to significantly increase excise taxes on alcohol and cigarettes in the Philippines. This included helping to build up a constituency for reform as well as working with Aquino and allies in Congress to manoeuvre against significant opposition to the Bill from blocks of MPs, as well as tobacco and beer producers. This example of overcoming opposition can be contrasted with those in Section 4 where opposition defeated reformers.

Looking at examples in Sections 3 and 4, coalitions frequently feature. One example is the campaign which led to the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in Ghana. Against a background of limited political representation for women (29 out of 275 MPs in the 2008 elections and 7% of elected officials to District Assemblies in 2010[6]) and limited provision for women in the 1992 constitution, the National Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation (DV Coalition) played an instrumental role in securing the passage of the Domestic Violence Law It brought together various elements (CSOs, academics, journalists, lawyers and grassroots advocacy groups) of the women's movement in Ghana, provided a strong secretariat, a capable coordinator and a committed core of leaders. The coalition was effective in reaching out to other potential allies, including the female caucus in parliament, some male MPs, students, and the minister. **Awareness-raising** and lobbying of key figures (including potential opponents) were important parts of their strategy. It was also the coalition which decided, as noted in Section 4, to reframe domestic violence from a rights issue to being a threat to family life in order to increase acceptance of the Domestic Violence Bill (creating a political must), (Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful: 156-161).

B. The importance of time

Even when coalitions exist, it may take a long time to have an impact. In Ghana, as noted in section 4, it took six years from the introduction of a draft Domestic Violence Bill in 2001to it being passed into law in 2007. However, discussions on domestic violence legislation had started much earlier in 1998/99 (Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful: 159). Likewise, in Malaysia, the work of women's groups to bring about the Domestic Violence Act took twelve years (Spark and Lee, 2018:9).

In Bhubaneswar, India, a coalition of NGOs, the Indian Alliance (comprising the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) and Mahila Milan) and the Urban and Development Resource Centre (UDRC), worked for fifteen or more years to nurture a pro-poor orientation through a mixture of **awareness raising, ideas, and developing capacity**.

Awareness-raising activities included a housing exhibition with a life-size model cloth house to demonstrate (ie **provide information** on) preferred shelter solutions. The coalition also undertook city-wide surveys of informal settlements in three cities in Odisha, including Bhubaneswar. This work helped to change the approach of the State government away from the option of eviction towards upgrading.

In the following years, the Indian Alliance and UDRC began a partnership with the authorities to plan slum upgrading and resettlement projects (including the BSUP projects mentioned in section 4 above being one example), including conducting informal settlement surveys, housing projects, service provision, resettlement and in-situ upgrading. They also shared their concerns about factors, such as poor interdepartmental coordination and inadequate implementation procedures. These contributed towards the small scale of government interventions and their inability to reach the households most in need of help.

Over time these efforts have changed the attitude of senior staff in city and State governments towards civil society involvement and have helped tackle some of the capacity

[6] Whilst there have been improvements since, numbers are still low, 40 female MPs in 2020, for instance

constraints described in section 4 above. The Alliance and UDRC have intensified their engagement with both City and State governments, and have built support for alternative approaches. At the time of their research Burra et al (2018: 35) observed multiple efforts being under way. The State government had passed a law that a percentage of all new housing and 25 per cent of the municipal budget for service provision will be allocated to the urban poor. The Administrative Staff College of India had been asked and had agreed to track these legislative commitments. Finally, the State government and municipalities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack were working with the UDRC and Indian Alliance to provide basic amenities in some informal settlements and prepare city-wide plans for upgrading.

C. Benefiting from External Inputs

Potential reformers are not always aware of what reforms look like or how to implement them. Often external inputs have been important contribution to creating political will, particularly in the form of **facilitation** and **ideas**. These inputs can often be part of a process of **capacity development**.

I. Facilitation

Often there is potential to tackle "lack of political will", but NGOs need to take advantage of those opportunities. The external NGO, DENIVA facilitated a creation of political will in a number of ways. The mission of its Pressure From Below (PFB) programme was to facilitate capacity development for communities by strengthening intermediate organisations to demand and challenge local leadership to be responsive to community needs, through community participation and a sense of social responsibility. It did this through approaches such as holding meetings and providing information to raise awareness, as well as working with organisations and communities to strengthen their organisational capabilities. PFB also worked with the people, including local government councillors, whose behaviour community organisations wanted to change.

There have been some notable impacts. For example, in Jinja, DENIVA worked with CSOs to form pressure groups to challenge the quality of local government services. Through dialogues, open days, discussions, radio talk shows, and music and drama performances, citizens were able to educate people and **raise awareness** of their rights. This helped to prepare them to lobby their leaders on improvements to the quality of services. Citizens took pictures of collapsing classroom blocks at the local primary school and, after presenting evidence to local authorities and the municipal engineer, succeeded in having the building reconstructed and the corrupt contractor, responsible for the shoddy work, blacklisted (Namisi: 117-120).

In the Sierra Leone tax example, covered in sections 3 and 4 above, at the time of the passage of the Local Government Act in 2004, the capacity of local government to take on the powers newly granted to them was extremely limited. However, relatively modest external inputs, in the form of technical knowledge and financial inputs played a major role in making the required adjustments. Local officials in Makeni, Bo and Kenema all credit a VSO volunteer with facilitating the transformation of the local tax collection system, particularly property tax, and subsequent significant increases in tax collections. This volunteer's inputs over a long period of time, which included transferring knowledge to local officials, was supplemented by relatively modest amounts of funding ($2000) from a local NGO and support from UNDP in developing the IT platform ((Jibao & Prichard, 2013:.23).

II. Ideas

As well as through coalitions, **ideas** can also be introduced by external parties. The example in Section 3 above of the Coastal Rural Support Programme (CSRP-K) is an example of an external organisation providing both **facilitation** inputs and **ideas.** The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) was faced with a situation in Kenya where there was a need to change mind-sets. In the CSRP-K, the AKF employed a number of strategies

to create a new climate of collaboration and partnership between local government officials and communities and NGOs. It encouraged more open communication and dialogue between citizens and their leaders, which was initially moderated by CSRP-K, and then continued on their own. It also encouraged CSOs to assist government officials, rather than simply receiving assistance from them, for example by providing transport to the field. During parliamentary or local elections, the CSRP-K encouraged communities to be informed about issues, rather than just personalities.

CSRP-K also made suggestions to solidify the new ways of working. The first was to strengthen the bottom-up planning process. There was "an abundance of committees," but they did not reach down to village level. CSRP-K facilitated the evolution of planning structures that started at the village level, with opportunities for consolidating the plans upwards. At the same time technical inputs were incorporated from various government departments and other stakeholders. The second was to promote the formalisation of CSO federations at various levels for negotiation and collaboration with the development planning structures, politicians, and local authorities.

As well as providing ideas, CSRP-K also provided material support and **capacity development**. It supported CSOs holding consultations with government departments and political leaders on projects they proposed. It also helped communities to participate in the formulation of community development plans and be clear about what they expected their leaders to deliver. It also trained CSOs and communities on how devolved development funds work, and how they can access resources from them. Finally, it assisted women, youth, and other marginalised members of society to become involved, speak up, and actively participate in discussions.

The action research project, initiated by the CSRP-K, created a new climate of collaboration and partnership. Those who were prepared to work collaboratively revealed themselves, and, for the most part, those who rejected such an approach were voted out of their positions. Community groups were also better able to hold their leaders to account. In addition, the partnership approach minimised any resistance that CSOs, working on their own, would have faced from local and central government officials and politicians (Holloway et al: 60-62)

D. The Importance of Being prepared to Compromise and Reframe

Compromise can be an important part of creating political will. As noted in Part 3, in Ghana the coalition campaigning for women's rights decided to reframe domestic violence from a rights issue into a threat-to-family-life issue. They did this in order to increase acceptance of the Domestic Violence Bill (Allah-Mensah and Osei-Afful: 156-161). A similar approach was adopted in Jordan, where a coalition campaigning for domestic violence legislation framed the issue in terms of the principles of Sharia, focusing in particular on the suffering of children and the elderly, rather than women's rights and gender equity, which would have resulted in resistance from the conservative ruling elite (Tadros, 2011, quoted in Hudson et al, 2018: 18).

In the Philippines "Sin Tax" example above, an early agreement to restrict increased taxes for beer and spirits secured support from MPs associated with the beer producing companies for significant tax increases on cigarettes (Sidel and Faustino, 2019:38). As the bill passed through parliamentary committee stages, other compromises were made to scale back the initial extent of excise tax increases on cigarettes, and earmarking some of the revenues raised for projects in tobacco-producing areas (ibid: 38).

6. Is There a Role for External Agencies?

This note started with the notion of a "lack of political will," but has aimed to help readers move beyond frustration at inaction on the part those they hold responsible for addressing a particular problem. It should be clear once someone has worked through the identification process outlined above that the paths towards change can be many and will be context

specific. The identification process may provide insights on pathways for engagement to build a momentum for change. Those pathways may be diplomatic or developmental, and could include practical support in areas such as capacity development. However, in considering the lessons of Section 5 the starting point has to be realism and accuracy in understanding the nature of the problems.

There might be limitations on what an external organisation, particularly one representing a foreign government, might be able to do. Recognising that change requires patience, perseverance, and may even take some years is a useful starting point. It is unlikely to be linear, and there are likely to be setbacks and changes to both the approaches used, and even to the final objectives (perhaps as a result of compromise). Assuming that the appropriate political economy analysis on acceptability of external advice has been undertaken, support to raise awareness, provide ideas and information, and develop capacity could be helpful in bringing about change through shifting the incentives and calculations of the actors working on Collective Action Problems.

Taking account of the political cycle is also important. The Sierra Leone tax example (section 4) provides one instance where this made a difference. In addition, in the Guelph example, the efforts of the Neighbourhood Support Coalition (NSC) to build up a strong media campaign promoting the participatory budget process helped create support from elected officials. Many of these officials were "quite vocal" in their support of participatory budgeting, both during campaigning and subsequent terms in office (Pinnington: 184).

Given the role that coalitions often play in securing change, an option development partners are likely to consider is to support NGOs. The evidence presented in this note brings out the fact that external technical or financial inputs may not be essential, and were absent in most of the examples of stimulating change in section 5. In their paper on the Malaysia example above and a related one in the Papua New Guinea, Spark and Lee (2018:13) urge caution from donor countries thinking of funding coalitions: "donors will need to be sensitive to issues that apply broadly to NGOs and activists who often need to manage accusations that they are agents of foreign intervention or undue foreign influence." This does not rule out supporting NGOs, but development partners will need to ensure that their approaches are rooted in processes of inquiry, consider the risks and *do no harm* issues for the NGO partners, and that they identify how they can best work with coalitions and whether their offers of help might actually be unnecessary or a distraction.

Finally, as well as being sensitive to context and how their aid may be perceived, development partners will also need to bear in mind that their support to NGOs and coalitions may change the way organisations function (eg setting up formal offices, developing internal accounting systems to meet donor requirements). Long-term core funding may also be required to develop capacity to promote general aims (eg women's empowerment), rather than more specific ones that fit development partner desires for specific measurable time-bound outputs (Spark and Lee, 2018:13). The examples of successful external inputs presented in this note are generally ones where these could be presented as technical ones, rather than political ones: for example, tax development in Sierra Leone, or developing relationships between community groups and local councillors in Kenya.

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