

Emerging Governance Systems in Fragile and Post-Conflict States and the Achievement of the MDGs

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Introduction

Whereas, there is no general consensus on the definition of governance; the definition of the committee of experts on public administration is very broad enough and captures most of the essential elements of governance. The committee defines governance as the exercise of political and administrative authority at all levels to manage a country's affairs. It is however, imperative to slightly by way of inclusion further broaden this definition of governance to the exercise of political, administrative, economic and cultural authority to manage a country's affairs.

In this brief paper, I flag and discuss some of emerging forms of public governance in last decade; with a view of facilitating the current debate on the role of governance in achieving the MDGs and post -2015 development agenda. My interest is the public governance systems in fragile and post-conflict countries in Africa.

The central argue made by the paper is that; in the last decade African countries have experimented with different forms of public governance systems –both internally and externally generated –but the results seems to be the same. There is still limited change to guarantee that public governance systems will be able to deliver on all the MDGs or post -2015 development agenda. It is however, imperative to note that the last decade has also witnessed significant shifts within the development community with regard to how aid and development is delivered to Africa as well a recognition that Africa has to play a key role in terms of ownership and participation in development design and delivery. Nonetheless, the pace at which the strategic goals of the development community and those of the political elites in Africa are reconciled seems to be slow often creating a disconnect between stated policy objectives and practical realities.

Broadening Governance

Development community now places a high premium on good governance as a key fundament in the achieving of socio-economic development. As such the past decade has witnessed debates on governance modes some seeking to reconceptualises the how governance is approached, the role of the state, the place of citizens in development and state-society relations. Most importantly the debate on governance has sought to broaden governance and governance reform from merely focusing on the technical aspects of public administration to bring into the fold the voices of the citizens, group representation, responsiveness, and accountability. All these are geared at creating or at least enhancing legitimacy of the governance systems.

New thinking of about governance notably argues that governance is more than public institutions staffed with personnel and computers public services (DFID, 2005; OECD/DAC, 2008; World Bank, 2011). It is also about the interaction between the political and administrative arms of the state, the nature of opportunities public systems are able to create for the citizens to achieve in life, the ability of public systems to respond in an effective manner to the demands and expectations of the citizens, the ability of the public systems to redistribute wealth across and within communities, public systems portraying an image of certainty and predictability to those who seek services, establishing impartial legal and justice systems and also creating inclusive, representative and accountable institutions.

The other aspect of governance in the last decade has been the inclusion of non-state actors for instance; traditional governance systems, civil society –into the spot light of public governance. Whereas, in the past most of the emphasis was placed on the formal systems, there is an emerging recognition of the informal structures and processes in particular their relation with formal processes either as centres of power or potential sources of drivers of conflict. It is also true that in fragile and post-conflict states power often hardly lays with the formal government institutions. However, it is important to note the politics and dangers of how some of the informal or non-state actors are included into governance processes.

It is argued that formal and informal –private sector, NGOs, traditional systems, groups –systems can co-exist or overlap in the provision of social service. In some contexts especially post-conflict countries like South Sudan the rationale for non-state actors and informal governance system is one of complementary. The danger with complementary is that some agencies with the interest of reporting on the successes of their programmes, they pay more attention to informal or non-state actors as venues for the delivery of social services. In some countries this has led to a bloated NGO sector. The increase attention put on NGOs, informal and non-state actors as vehicles for delivery of development undermines meaningful attention to restructure public organisations and system. The end result often a state structure which is detached from its citizen and vice verse.

Whereas some of the above aspects have been included into the governance calculus in the last decade, the manner in which they have been pursued appears to be more cosmetic and may pose some challenges for the post 2015 period. What is stated in policy documents with regard to governance is hardly followed at the level of development delivery. Most often delivery of development is guided by strategic and practical imperatives not stated in official documents. It is also true that some of the state governance imperatives are hardly responsive to contextual aspects and interests of the political elites in some of the African countries. It is common for the development community to articulate political objectives in terms of the nature of governance regime needed, but at the level of delivery of development exhibit an apolitical tendency. There is also a tendency to approach governance reform with standardised interventions experimented in other contexts. The idea has always been to show the world that these

standardised templates can work in all contexts because they have been developed over a period of time and resources spent on them. Lastly, the idea of complementary, co-existence, overlap of formal and informal governance processes has to be re-examined. Attention should be paid to reforming the state rather than creating different – sometime competing –power centres.

Forms of Governance

Transparency and Accountability as ‘governance’

There is an emerging body of knowledge within the development community and some sections of the international Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) that argues that governance is pushing governance should be part of the post-2015 development agenda. Whereas, there is no consensus on what constitutes governance, it is clear that the most important element of governance currently being considered for inclusion is transparency. Some of the arguments advanced to justify why transparency not other elements of governance should be included in the post -2015 development agenda include but not limited to; transparency increases accountability, promotes growth and reduces income equality. Transparency is also justified on the basis of availability of measurement data sets (World Bank, 2013; IDS, 2009). Whereas, the talk of transparency is not new to the development community; the reviewed emphasis on transparency and elevating it to the point of equating it to governance is very problematic. First, this reviewed interest in transparency does not offer new thinking about governance beyond the technical aspects which have been part of the open governance aid agenda for a period. Transparency is mostly understood in terms of access to information mostly related to finance and budgets. It is about tracking how governments use revenues. Hence in terms of improvement of governance, this discourse puts emphasis on legislation of access to information Acts, open government, use of Information Technology for Development and facilitative institutional frameworks for access to information.

There is no question that these are important elements of public sector governance but it is imperative that this renewed interest in transparency focuses on the broader elements of governance regardless of the complexities related to gathering empirical data about them. For instance, state-society relations are very critical in how citizen access and utilise information. In most conflict and fragile countries this becomes even more complex because often some sections of the population do not perceive themselves as citizens due to their changing identities –Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, victims and citizen. There are also constraints like high illiteracy level. In some countries citizens hardly interact with the formal state, but are constantly in touch with the informal state apparatus or non-state actors. Any form of public governance in the post-2015 has to factor in all these elements if it is to speak to the interest of the populations living in fragile and crisis countries.

Emerging governance discourse in fragile and post-conflict countries

There is a growing frustration within the development community with the manner in which development aid and technical support has been delivered to fragile and post-conflict countries. This frustration is mostly concerned with the fact that regardless of the enormous aid pumped into some of the countries like Afghanistan, there is limited empirical data to suggest the achievement of the intended outcomes. There is also recognition that most of the emphasis has been put on achieving donor determined outcomes while paying limited attention to country dynamics in particular their ability to either support or undermine the delivery of development aid. It is also recognised that support to governments in fragile and post-conflict countries has mostly been a technical enterprise concerned with technical capacity building and assistance with the intention of creating a liberal democratic state.

As we approach 2015, the emerging governance discourse with regard to fragile and conflict countries is one which puts emphasis on building responsive and accountable institutions; promoting inclusive political processes; fosters resilient state-society relations and promotes partnerships (DFID, 2005; IDRC, 2009; OECD/DAC, 2008; UNDP, 2012; World Bank, 2011). This new discourse and thinking about governance in fragile and post-conflict countries has its origins in the 2007 OECD's Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile State, which argues that development assistance has to be concerted, sustained and focused on building the relationship between the state and society. Inherent in this new approach, is the focus on state legitimacy and broadening of the state-building agenda to include non-state actors. The state is also redefined as a framework within which social demands and claims are negotiated and settled in an inclusive, responsive and accountable manner.

It is argued that states have to restore confidence in citizens and transform security, justice and economic institutions (Osaghae, 2007). Hence state institutions have to reconcile citizen expectations from the state on one hand and state expectations from the citizens on the other hand (OECD/DAC, 2008; World Bank, 2011). The inability to offer formal channels –institutions –through which political pressures, discontent and claims brought onto the state are negotiated and settled offers avenues for the development of other forms of political organisation and redress, that effectively illegitimatises the state apparatus.

Although this new thinking about governance in fragile and post-conflict states is very good in so far as it attempts to inject into the governance discourse a focus on context and local agency, at a practical level it reflects disconnects between stated policy objectives on one hand and strategic interests of the development community on the other hand.

For example, in face of the renewed interest in the political dynamics and context in fragile and post-conflict countries there is limited

evidence to suggest a uniform approach and strategies for building the desired governance systems. Western governments have tended to be more geo-strategic in their crusade of building global democratic governance systems. The US government for example has been criticised for singling out only Sudan and Ethiopia for its transitional initiative to encourage democratisation in fragile and post-conflict states, leaving out states like Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic (Williams, 2009). In addition, despite the rhetoric that building inclusive and legitimate governance systems in Africa is a key ingredient for global security, Africa is yet to attract a major aid and governance assistance as marshalled by western powers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Timor-Leste (Williams, 2009).

As such, when external powers have tried to address state failure by way of reconstituting and building state institutions, their initiatives have often tended to focus on state failure to control its territory and state failure to promote human rights. It is such partial initiatives and narrowly conceived that often buttress the logic that the new governance agenda as espoused in the New Deal on Aid and Busan – as part of the global democratic agenda – can only benefit from external interventions but cannot be an exportable commodity from one country to another. Research on this new form of engagement and the subsequent governance and institutional systems is still mostly driven by the donors and INGO not in-country institutions. Whereas, donors and INGOs can undertake good research and analysis; they are often conflict conscious and security minded, with formal and informal restrictions on movement. These restrictions are placed onto researchers limiting their movements and contact with the communities they are supposed to engage with. Hence the outcomes of the research are mostly devoid of the deeper interaction and interrogation of the contextual aspects of each country, leading to the preference of standardised notions of governance perceived to delivery on the donor set development agenda.

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