Globalised technologies of development: A study of voice and accountability in public services delivery.

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GLOBALISED TECHNOLOGIES OF DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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Summary

Participatory methods have been deployed in different ways by actors in pursuit of a diverse range of personal, organisational and development objectives. With the rise of globalisation, neoliberalism and new aid delivery systems, so these methods have been adapted, re-branded and deployed to serve the objectives of a new range of actors. From these macro level currents come micro level initiatives which enrol the global poor in new projects of development.

Most recently, the Millennium Development Goals have focused the agenda of participatory development on new models of public service delivery. With this new imperative comes an emergent focus on governance as a determinant of improved service provision. The same influential actors that have taken a lead role in redefining the problem have also offered new solutions. Just as many populations in the Global North have historically taken a role in the production of services that are responsive to their needs, so it is proposed that others in the Global South can be supported to claim similar rights, demand similar accountability.

This thesis explores the increasingly popular technology of voice and accountability as a solution to inequalities in access to health services. I explore the extent to which the model is constitutive of a broader neoliberal discourse which is coproduced by a range of actors from Washington to village. Using a case study from a maternal health programme in Nepal; I discuss the implications of this social technology, with reference to the range of personal and organisational projects of which it is constitutive.

I discuss how these discourses shape the way development is performed, and reflexively reproduce diverse regimes of power. I examine what is produced by such initiatives, and, the ways in which actors gain from this globalised project, or are disenfranchised in new ways.

Declarations and Statements

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed

(candidate) Date 15th March 2011

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Statement 2

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Acronyms

BCC	Behaviour Change Communication
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
DHO	District Health Officer
GoN	Government of Nepal
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	Implementing Organisation
KIM	Key Informant Monitoring
NSMP	National Safe Motherhood Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
P&E	Poor and Excluded
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RHCC	Reproductive Health Coordinating Committee
SSMP	The Support to Safe Motherhood Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VDC	Village Development Committees
VCO	Voice Capture Organisation

Introduction

Government is undergoing a reconstruction. Despite a huge diversity in globalised regimes of power, new patterns are emerging. The ideal-type state as guarantor of social welfare is being subtlety superseded by a revised discourse. In the process, many are exposed directly to a new kind of social contract, and implicated in new rationalities of citizenship. In the developed world, 'austerity' measures form part of a powerful discourse in support of what some have called a post-neoliberal world order (Altvater, 2008). In low income nations, and particularly for an increasingly globalised poor; the unrealised vision of a Welfare State is being similarly reconstructed.

For 'public' services such as health, a project of neo-liberal reformulation that started in the 1980s is becoming more deeply embedded in development processes. A process that began with decentralisation and user fees has now permeated to the more fundamental arena of the citizen-state compact. Globalised forces increasingly shape the nature of citizenship, incorporating the further privatisation of responsibilities for health seeking, service access and wellbeing. As the life chances of individuals are increasingly influenced by networks of actors operating across state boundaries, they are variously exposed to and enrolled in new forms of governing.

Indeed, the global poor are progressively more implicated in an experiment characterised by the penetration of global institutions into the tissue of day to day life (Giddens, 1994: 58). The interrelated phenomena of neo-liberalism and globalization are dynamically linked to complex configurations of power, actors and social technologies. These may only be partially understood through a structuralist lens and social theorists increasingly turn to notions of *assemblages* to denote the contingent ensemble of diverse practices at play (Ong, 2005: 5099). A key feature of these assemblages are networks; particularly global 'flows' of knowledge which are revealed to have certain disciplinary characteristics in the Foucauldian sense (Ilcan and Phillips, 2008). As a globalised neoliberalism is reproduced through these complex processes, the personal projects of a myriad of actors involved in

development are reflexively altered. Relationships of power shift as new development discourses emerge that imply altered configurations of citizenship. Normative and institutional frameworks are revised which redefine entitlements and responsibilities. These processes arguably represent the projection of neoliberal rationality into new geographical arenas and areas of social life.

Within international development, these reconfigurations are frequently understood and legitimised through discourses of citizen ownership and participation (World Bank, 2005). A range of new 'social technologies' (Foucault *et al.*, 1988: 18) are both produced and reproduced by these discourses; these find expression in a variety of donor funded projects promising systems strengthening and improved quality and access to social services, particularly health care.

The unintended consequences, or externalities, of these social technologies have profound implications for the wellbeing and life-chances of the world's poor. However, whilst they are the subject of numerous programme evaluations, donor reports and policy discussion papers, there has been little empirical investigation beyond a narrow and bounded 'instrumentalist' literature stemming from a public health research agenda dominated by structuralist positions that has for the most part failed to synergise with insights from the social development profession, sociology, anthropology and political science.

In recent years, some emergent literatures *have* sought to constructively engage with specific aspects of these social technologies, and the contexts in which they are deployed. These have examined the implications for development practice of interpretive approaches to citizenship (Jones, 2006), agency in development (Cleaver, 2007; Cornwall and Edwards, 2010a), governance (Booth, 2010b) and the performance and understanding of aid (Gould, 2004; Eyben, 2010a; Mosse, 2003). This thesis makes a contribution to these literatures in relation to one such technology, that of 'voice and accountability'.

The voice-accountability model implies causal relationships between initiatives to support individual and collective agency, and improved governance; the 'citizenry' are expected to place pressure on government institutions who, in theory, respond

with improved services. In recent years this model has come to dominate the discussion on public service delivery in development (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 15). Agency, described as the "capability, or power to be the originator of acts" (Cleaver, 2007: 226), is frequently conceptualised by proponents of the model in terms of discrete individual action and choice, exercised in relation to various institutional actors related to 'the state' (eg. Kafewo, 2009). Such is the importance given to this paradigm, that the strengthening of these relationships has been widely described as 'the single most important factor that determines whether or not successful development takes place' (DFID, 2006b: 8; cf. Goetz, 2009; cf. World Bank, 2005); particularly so when addressing the chronic deficiencies in access to and delivery of health services for the world's poor (WHO, 2008: 8).

The case study

Using a single case study based on observations conducted during my professional engagement with a large maternal health programme in Nepal, I seek to unpack the voice-accountability model as it relates to systems strengthening and service delivery in maternal health care. I explore empirically ways in which the model is constitutive of a wider discourse; one active in reframing the language and social technologies of participatory development and citizenship in the interests of global capital and a neo-liberal social order. I demonstrate that whilst there are significant disciplinary dimensions to the deployment of these technologies, the determinism often implicit in works of Foucauldian deconstruction (Tamas, 2007: 4) offers an overly simplistic model. My data demonstrates the significant extent to which these discourses are also reflexively reproduced and reinterpreted; with actors at each temporal stage and level in the programme hierarchy often adopting hybrid or fluid positions, to fulfil a range of projects and objectives.

The discourses associated with these social technologies are revealed as elastic, variously deployed to serve a multitude of organisational, institutional and individual interests, often taking precedence over the overt objectives of the interventions concerned. Indeed, whilst the technologies themselves appear to offer limited promise in improving service quality and access (Paul, 1991), they nevertheless hold significant value to a range of actors involved in the global

'development project'. My analysis reveals configurations of power and discipline which link meetings of women in rural Nepal with the interests of global capital that coalesce around institutions such as the World Bank.

By using detailed ethnographic data gathered over two years of engagement with a range of programme actors, I take the argument beyond the confines of the dominant input-output conceptualisation of development processes. These data expose the fundamentally relational nature of the performance of aid (cf. Eyben, 2010a) and allow an exploration of both what was achieved and what was produced by these social technologies. In this sense I attempt to answer Ferguson and Lohmann's provocative question "what do aid programmes do besides fail to help poor people?" (Ferguson and Lohmann, 1994: 180). Whilst I largely reject the anti-development stance implied by the question; I do argue that an analysis of 'what is produced' by such technologies in the broadest sense is important. It allows sectorial initiatives such as those in maternal health to be understood in the wider context of international development. Indeed, it demonstrates that they cannot be understood in the disciplinary or sectorial silos which dominate professionalised disciplines.

Case study context

In development terms, Nepal is characterised by extreme poverty, internal political turmoil and inequality. The country has made extremely slow progress in reducing poverty and most development indicators are amongst the worst in the world. Difficult terrain and poor transport communications put Nepal on the 'edge of the periphery', presenting significant challenges for economic development. The complex social history of the country presents additional challenges and in the past decade it has been in a state of constant political upheaval. The pro-democracy movements of the 1990s, the royal massacre of 2001, royal coups of 2001 and 2005 together with the intensification of the Maoist insurgency from 2005 provide a complex backdrop for development (Riaz and Basu, 2007: 1).

Despite the transition to a fledgling democracy, inequality remains deeply entrenched in all aspects of social and political life. Indeed, elite ruling groups based

on caste and ethnicity have been a central feature of the Nepali state for hundreds of years. During this period the caste system, feudalism and the patriarchal gender system were reinforced, with no influential alternative world views that might catalyse change (Bennett, 2006b). The modus operandi of the state remained similarly stable with a high degree of resource capture by elite groups and very limited penetration of any welfare imperatives. The result is reflected in the various development indicators for Nepal with more than half of the population living on less than $1.25 per day (ADB, 2009). The country is highly iniquitous with much of the 85% of the population in rural areas living in poverty and reliant on subsistence agriculture (ADB, 2006).

Women suffer extreme inequality and marginalisation in much of Nepal. Women's lives are characterised by patrilocal residence and patriarchal decent and inheritance (Bennett, 1983). In rural Nepal marriage is perceived as an arrangement between clans, often focused on the value of women's labour, the average age of marriage for women is 18. Both the ethnographic data used to support my own field work, and previous work on Nepal provide graphic descriptions of how rural women are often viewed as disposable family assets (Bennett, 1983). Maternal mortality is also extremely high at 281 per 100,000 live births (Bennett *et al.*, 2008), although suicide is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age (Pradhan *et al.*, 2009: xxii). The broader context of maternal health is similarly bad with only 19% of women delivering with a skilled attendant (Pradhan *et al.*, 2009: 12) and the vast majority of women delivering at home, often alone (Suwal, 2008).

A large maternal health programme initiated in 2005 and supported by the British Department for International Development (DFID), in which I was personally involved, was one of the first donor initiatives to explicitly support the social technologies of 'voice' and accountability. It did so in a context where there was a great deal of existing research to demonstrate that the 'public health problem' of maternal mortality had many determinants that were clearly located in the wider sphere of social relations (Manandhar, 2000). In its design, the programme drew on an emerging discourse of 'best practice' around 'voice' and community engagement, largely propagated by the World Bank (World Bank, 2003).

For this enquiry, my involvement with the programme provided an opportunity for the construction of a case study to facilitate an exploration of 'voice' in relation to the social transformation that it was theorised to produce (Menocal and Sharma, 2008). It provided privileged access to data that would shed light on the nature and extent of the agency that the programme intended to support, involving women in overcoming a diverse range of barriers to safe delivery services. Part of this programme also involved the commissioning of an extensive rapid ethnographic research exercise (see Price and Pokharel, 2005; Price and Hawkins, 2002), of which I along with colleagues was a key architect.

The range of data collected between 2007 and 2009 from rapid ethnography, Key Informant Interviews and field notes, has allowed me to explore the development and implementation of the intervention, from global policy to delivery at 'local' level. In doing so, I analyse what was produced by the often contested and competing discourses that constituted the programme (cf. Ferguson, 1990: 28); and describe the ways in which actors and organisations re-interpreted these discourses in pursuit of both the overarching programme objectives, and their own personal projects.

Chapter 1 - The Neoliberal order and global development project

Introduction

Development is an inherently political process and much of the literature on social technologies of development such as 'voice', are founded on specific, liberal understandings of power and government (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010). Consequently, the academic study of the practice of development is often limited by liberal understandings of power. Normative, substantialist conceptualisations of for example, 'the role of the state', frame these institutions as discrete entities, rather than seeing development praxis as operating through dynamic, fluid and relational networks that cut across these simplistic conceptualisations.

These normative constructions have limited engagement with the complex ways in which relational structures of power mediate in the implementation of development initiatives (Eyben, 2010a). Much of literature on voice and accountability has focused on the role of 'the state' (O'Neil *et al.*, 2007); yet as Foucault argued, "the state possessed neither the unity nor the functionality ascribed to it; it was a 'mythical abstraction' which has assumed a particular place within the field of government" (Foucault, 1979). Indeed, an increasing body of sociological literature provides a range of analytical tools to explore the ways in which individual conduct, social participation and economic activity all take a reflexive role in reproducing power relationships and asserting forms of coercion and control (Rose and Miller, 2010; Ong and Collier, 2005; Ilcan, 2006; Dean, 2010). A similar literature has attempted to explore the role of various actors, technologies and knowledge in this regard (eg. Ferguson, 1990; Otsuki, 2010; Coelho, 2005; Cleaver, 2007; Mosse, 2006a).

A discussion of social technologies of development is therefore inevitably also one on government and governance. However, the shifting nature of both mechanisms of power or rule, and the range of theoretical tools at our disposal, makes for a complex contextual backdrop. What is clear however is that 'state power', having moved from a discrete and centralised position in the 19th century to an increasingly embedded role in numerous aspects of social life during the past century, is now losing this dominant position (Giddens, 1990: 168; Beck and Grande, 2010).

To consider modern states as unified and autonomous actors would be to obscure the characteristics of modern forms of political power (Rose and Miller, 2010: 274). However, it is also important to realise, as an increasing literature acknowledges, that a shift to a neoliberal configuration results not in 'less government', but simply new forms of governing (Dean, 2010).

Governmentality: From Liberalism to Neoliberalism

Rose and Miller (2010) argue that whilst liberal government separated a 'private sphere' of family economic and social life from the 'public sphere', this private realm was always subject to 'control at a distance'. Here, the liberal state was implicated in attempts to control family, individual, economic and social activity through various 'technologies of government'. According to Foucault et.al. these processes were, and remain, embedded in various 'mundane practices'; an assemblage of managerial, administrative and other social activities (Foucault et al., 1988).

These are forms of power and control which may fulfil certain interests that are external to the individual, but flow through mechanisms other than the hierarchical power of the state. Power manifests in institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools (Foucault and Senellart, 2008). Certain forms of knowledge are also implicated; *regimes of understanding* (discourses) have 'disciplinary' dimensions, that is, they are constitutive of a complex and multifaceted 'governmentality'; forms of control beyond the state. Thus 'government' becomes dispersed into the mundane practices and routine interactions of everyday life. Foucault and Senellart define this as:

> "1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
>
> 2. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of savoirs ['knowledges'].

> 3. The process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes 'governmentalized'."
> (Foucault and Senellart, 2008)

Over the past century, many of these mechanisms have been associated with the Welfare State, with a number of writers exploring the mechanisms by which education and health services fulfil 'disciplinary functions' (eg. Bulpitt, 1986). With the rollback of the Welfare State and reconfigured economic order, the nature of these forms of control has changed (see Schram et al., 2010: 742).

The Welfare State in fact provides a good example of the way in which the neoliberal order reconfigures the nature of rule. Many aspects of the 'private sphere' previously governed at a distance through social welfare institutions, are transferred to commodified forms regulated by the market or market inspired mechanisms (Rose and Miller, 2010: 296), while citizens are effectively transformed from 'entitled recipients' into consumers of public services. This new 'informed consumer-citizen' in theory at least, both demands quality service, and assists in its production; perhaps by engaging with a provider on market terms, or by collaborating in their stewardship as a member of a governing body or user organisation (cf. Le Grand, 2003). As the role of the unified state diminishes, power becomes increasingly multi-centred and discourses of freedom and entrepreneurship take a disciplinary position vacated by the welfare state (Rose and Miller, 2010: 298).

We see then that individual autonomy is not the antithesis of power and control; the social construction of the 'free' individual is deeply implicated in its production, arguably more so under neoliberalism. Rose argues that liberalism attempted to limit government through the separation of the private and public spheres. Conversely, neoliberalism uses market techniques to achieve this regulation in an expanded private sphere where the 'lives of individuals, groups and organisations' are 'connected to the aspirations of authority' (Rose and Miller, 2010: 274).

Market inspired relations are then central to the neoliberal project. Just as privatisation of state assets proved a central theme to the neoliberal discourse of the last two decades, more recently it appears to have extended to the privatisation of both the citizen, and collective action previously the domain of social struggle (Dean, 2002). Ilcan (2009: 1) has addressed these processes in detail, describing them as a constituent part of "a mobile assemblage that brings into play actors, groups, practices, events, and domains of conduct, and manifests in different parts of the world often to the detriment of people's lives and livelihoods" (Ilcan, 2006: 1).

Technologies of agency

This reconfiguration toward a neoliberal order (Altvater, 2008) implicates a range of organisations and organisational forms in a process analogous to Bauman's concept of 'order building' (Bauman, 2004). This holds that, through what Dean (2010) describes as 'technologies of agency', a range of powerful and less powerful actors seek to support development though the promotion of new forms of knowledge and conduct (Ilcan, 2006: 851). In particular, this involves the promotion of notions of citizenship which ascribe new responsibilities to the individual, and new normative notions of citizen-state relations (Dean, 2010).

It is the application of these social technologies, both in terms of knowledge and conduct, which form a focus of this thesis. Whilst my attention is on the micro level impact of these phenomena; the cause is acknowledged as an assemblage of multiple, globalised economic and social relations and practices. At a macro level, the implicated agents are bilateral donors and the World Bank who have been shown to have a particularly important role as brokers of knowledge and power in international development (Dean, 2002: 54; Ilcan, 2006: 856).

Associated with these technologies are processes that implicitly depoliticise poverty (Ferguson, 2006b) and bound the scope of thinkable change. Particularly, these exclude notions of collective political struggle which to a large extent founded the democratic Welfare States enjoyed by many in the developed world (McMichael, 2000: 284; Bates, 2010). This order building discourse marks out a bounded space for thinking about poverty reduction; a process which largely excludes those

concerned. It encourages the "poor to participate in technologies of agency that demand their engagement in a range of normalizing and training measures designed to make redundant ways of knowing that ... work against the optimization of their skills and entrepreneurship for the global market" (Ilcan, 2006: 864).

Ilcan (2009: 1) describes this phenomena as 'privatizing responsibility', a process where the scope of solutions and possible actions are bounded, normative objectives of 'development' are defined, and normative notions of the roles and agency of the various actors are fundamentally shaped by neoliberal governmental styles of thinking about and acting on problems (Ilcan, 2009:1). There are deeper implications of this process for voice and accountability; a dominant theory of change emerges as part of a discourse with wide ranging disciplinary characteristics, which have far reaching practical implications for actors within the development nexus.

Voice and accountability, an introduction to the discourse

No treatment of international health systems would be complete without reference to the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration, promising 'Health For All' through the expansion of Primary Health Care (WHO, 1978). This promise has, however, proved illusory, with many health indicators showing slow progress, or even decline (UN, 2010). For women and particularly poor women in developing countries the situation is most dire; with gross inequalities in access to basic services and only very slowly reducing rates of maternal death. Maternal Mortality has declined by only 34% in the last 20 years, with huge variation by socioeconomic status and geographic region (UN, 2010: 1). In Nepal, only 19% of women are attended by a skilled attendant at birth with a life time risk of maternal death of 1 in 31, a risk factor which increases significantly in rural areas (Pradhan *et al.*, 2009: 12).

In tandem with an increasing international commitment to strengthening health systems (Govender *et al.*, 2008), there have been important changes in thinking around the most effective way to improve access to quality services (Ensor and Weinzieri, 2006). This thinking, whilst often presented as a purely technical debate, has not taken place in a political vacuum. Whilst many in the public health

'community' have argued that vertical bureaucratic control is inadequate for health systems strengthening (World Bank, 2003; DFID, 2006b; Ensor and Weinzierl, 2006: 5), the proposed solutions of user fees, community stewardship, health insurance or equity funds (Standing, 2004: 34) have reconfigured the public participation envisioned by Alma Ata into a discourse of consumer power ('voice') and individual responsibility (WHO, 2008), that arguably have important implications for equity, responsibility and the role of citizen and state.

This discourse has been reinforced by a variety of powerful actors such as the World Bank (2003) and translated into numerous 'projects of development' in which Social technologies of agency have become particularly popular (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010). This thesis explores the implications of these developments, both in terms of their practical applicability to developing country contexts, and the wider implications for transformative change (DFID, 2006b) and the life chances of the poor. In the following two chapters, I trace the origins of this discourse, and discuss the model in relation to a broader literature on institutional accountability, social development and participation.

Chapter 2 –Accountability

Introduction

At the beginning of the millennium, a shift in thinking among a range of influential actors[1] in the 'West' (Callinicos, 2001: 2) brought about a renewed focus on the role of state institutions in development and service delivery (Cameron, 2004: 97). The notion of consumer-provider of the 1990's was maintained (Cornwall, 2000), but with notions of accountability, rights and social 'voice' (Alsop, 2004) providing a revised conceptual framework for this 'third way', 'new-institutionalist' agenda.

A new generation of writers embraced and expanded the agenda, (Callinicos, 2001: 1) prescribing improved accountability achieved by decentralisation (Blair, 2000), the re-conceptualisation of government as consumer driven service provider (Jayal, 2007), provision of services through quasi-governmental, third and private sector institutions (Stiglitz, 2000) and radical reformulations of public sector management (Le Grand, 2003). Importantly, whilst these writings have in common an empirical foundation largely relating to modern industrial economies (Giddens, 1999; Hutton, 1996) they significantly informed the 'second generation' of neoliberal reforms instigated in the developing world by the World Bank. These focused around institutional strengthening and decentralisation (Cameron, 2004: 97) and played a profound role in shaping the policy of major bi-lateral donors such as DFID (for example DFID, 2006b).

These reforms have in turn lead to the development of a range of technologies for the realisation of reconfigured development objectives. Certain commentators, such as Ferguson and others, argue these technologies have been employed to mask the expansion of state bureaucratic power and the centrality of politics to development; reposing political questions as technical 'problems' responsive to the technical 'development' intervention (Ferguson and Lohmann, 1994: 270; Ong and Collier, 2005; Ong, 2005; Unsworth, 2009).

[1] Alex Callinicos traces the emergence of 'third way' thought from Schröder to Clinton to Blair, with origins in Giddens' thought epitomised in his book *The Third Way* (Giddens, 1999) and other work by Ulrich Beck and Manuel Castells (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2004).

Understanding the consequences of these policies and technologies, i.e. what is produced by their application, is far from straightforward. Discerning their various effects requires close investigation of how plans are executed, and the broader context in which this takes place; the way in which action is framed and practiced, and claims of efficacy made (cf. Li, 1999: 297). Nevertheless, whilst mindful of the power of these development discourses, we must first attempt to understand them as they are understood by their principal proponents. Whilst the dominant positivist paradigm of international public policy should make this kind of analysis relatively straightforward, we find that even within this same analytical framework, questions of history, difference and context are often ignored.

The theory of change

In their major review of voice and accountability initiatives, Menocal and Sharma describe the dominant voice-accountability theory of change, where

> "increasing citizens' voice will make public institutions more responsive to citizens' needs and demands and thereby more accountable for their actions. This combination of voice and accountability will in turn i) generate outcomes that will directly contribute to broad developmental outcomes, such as the MDGs; or ii) will have considerable influence on other (intermediate) factors believed to impact poverty reduction and other broad development objectives" (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 17).

'Voice' then, is widely purported to form the first stage in the theory of change leading to improved accountability and subsequent delivery of more responsive public services which results in better human development outcomes. This change process requires further exploration, particularly in relation the cause-effect model which assumes a relationship between 'citizen voice', improved accountability and improved responsiveness (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: ix). This thinking strongly reflects neo-institutionalist perspectives which focus on relatively simplistic notions of institutional accountably as a panacea for improving a variety of development outcomes; the most important example being the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2003).

Unpacking the model

Voice and accountability can be conceptualised as 'two sides of a coin', with 'voice' on the 'demand side' of an equation balanced by a response from the 'supply side' characterised by improved accountability and responsiveness (Agarwal *et al.*, 2009). 'Voice' is generally represented to be that of the 'poor', who participate though a raft of "new forms of inclusion, consultation and or mobilisation designed to inform and to influence large institutions and policies" (Gaventa, 2004: 27). This implied agency must, it is argued, be augmented by supply side interventions which "strengthen accountability and responsiveness of these institutions and policies through changes in institutional design, and focus on the structures for good governance." (Gaventa, 2004: 27). These perspectives have subsequently informed the work of influential academics, providing the foundation of, for example, Gaventa's 'active' or 'participatory' citizenship in development (Gaventa, 2004: 29).

The rise of accountability

Following the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2003), accountability focused solutions have gained increasing currency (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 1) with many actors such as DFID, UNIFEM, WHO, and the EC, using the concept to account for and resolve the current 'crisis in public sector service delivery' (Standing, 2004: 27; Goetz, 2009: 120). However, the construction and application of these concepts, falling under the rubric of governance, are frequently simplistic and poorly theorised (cf. Unsworth, 2009; see for examples: DFID, 2008; Goetz, 2009; World Bank, 2003). Whilst reductionist models of cause and effect (eg. World Bank, 2003) clearly have utility; it would seem they have mistakenly become the end point in an analysis that would benefit from a far more nuanced exploration. Theoretical approaches and empirical techniques are required which ground the dominant input-output models in the complex realities of individual and collective agency, and into the complex web of formal and informal institutions which determine their use and mediate their efficacy (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001).

Social Accountability

The donor literature describes a wide variety of definitions for accountability, many of which describe the obvious relationship of *"A being answerable to B"*. Ackerman, noting common definitional inadequacies, highlights the necessity of an *enforcement* or *sanction* dimension (Ackerman, 2005: 3); while Mulgan (2000) takes this further, acknowledging that the concept should imply external relationships, rights, and an authority or power relationship. Figure 1 demonstrates the way in which the model is typically used in an attempt to map out relationships in the context of public administration. In the model, which is largely consistent across the various multilateral and bilateral donors who use it; vertical accountability is analogous to 'voice', expressed via elections, the media and civic engagement. It is purported to have a positive impact on the operation and 'responsiveness' of various areas of the state. 'Horizontal accountability' is used to denote relationships between state institutions, said be supported and strengthened by vertical accountability, or 'voice'. It is important to note that it is the horizontal relationships, the realm of Public Financial Management reform that form the focus of governance operations of major donors, such as the World Bank (World Bank, 2011).

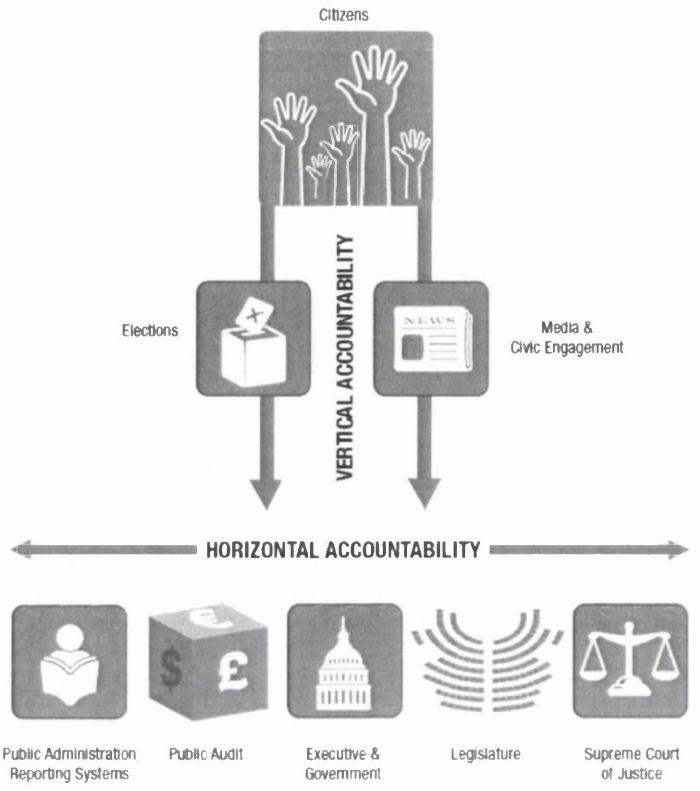

Figure 1: Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Accountability (Goetz, 2009: 3)[2]

The World Bank uses the term 'Social Accountability' to describe the vertical, or 'voice' dimension of the model. This can be defined as "an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability" (Malena *et al.*, 2004b: 79)[3]. The model is described by Figure 2, which demonstrates 'voice' and client power, which are not distinguished significantly in the model, resulting in responsiveness from the state, and from service providers.

[2] Reproduced with kind permission, UNIFEM

[3] Note the World Bank use an alternative, but not substantively different definition: Social Accountability "Refers to the broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens and their organizations can use to hold societal power-holders (such as the state) to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts" (World Bank, 2010: 1).

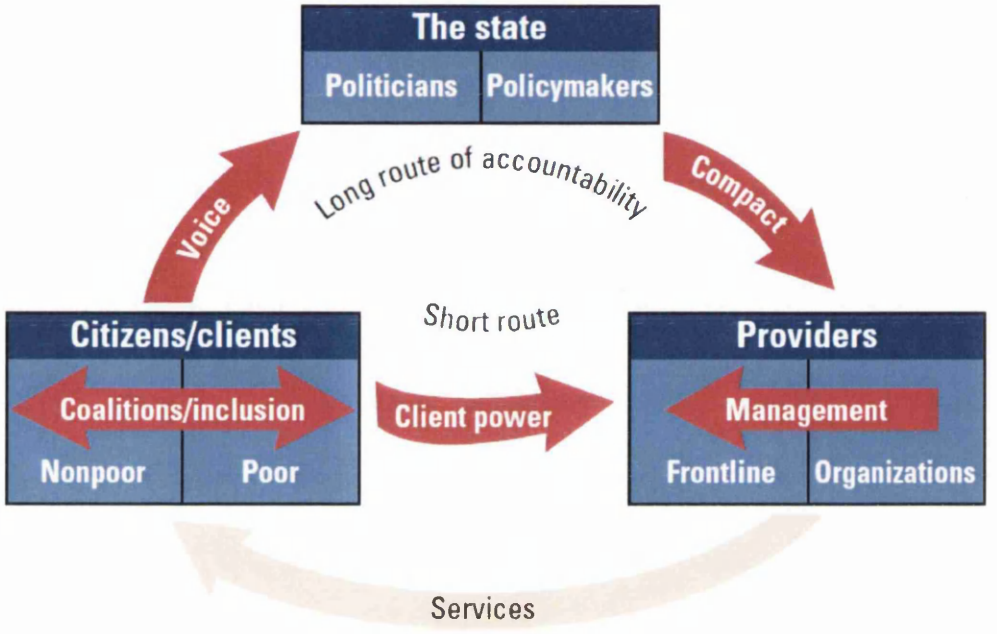

Figure 2: The World Bank 'Accountability Triangle' (World Bank, 2003: 49)

What is not adequately captured by the model is that accountability is a *process* rather than a state of being (Ackerman, 2005: 3). Some of these broader historical processes are discussed later; however, an appropriate starting point for a focused examination of Social Accountability would be to explore its emergence within a principal proponent, namely the Social Development Department at the World Bank[4].

Francis (2007) identifies a significant shift in the World Bank's general approach to social development following the appointment of James Wolfensohn as the Bank's president in 1995. He notes an increasing willingness of the Bank to engage with a broader constituency of stakeholders, together with an increasingly multi-dimensional conceptualisation of development, accounting for "social, structural, human, governance, environmental, economic, and financial" dimensions. He

[4] Specifically the Participation and Civic Engagement Group, Social Development Department.

further notes that what followed was the subsequent adoption a Social Development Strategy (World Bank, 2005), specific social development inputs into Country Assistance Strategies, and, the use of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). A number of commentators further chart the rise in the Bank's interest in accountability to both broader global trends around governance (Francis, 2007), aid architecture (Cornwall and Brock, 2004; Cameron, 2004; Francis, 2007) and social development (Eyben, 2003; cf. Cernea, 1991).

By 2004 the World Bank was arguing that "enhancing the ability of citizens to engage with public servants and politicians in a more informed, direct and constructive manner is what the Social Accountability practices ... are all about" (Malena *et al.*, 2004b: 1). As a result, increasing attention was paid to 'demand side' interventions that aimed to strengthen systems for public service delivery (Standing, 2004). In the previous chapter I discussed the ascendancy of these perspectives which co-opted an existing development agenda (participation) and applied the concept as 'voice' to a newly framed set of development problems conceived to stem from widespread accountability failures.

Criticism

The notion of Social Accountability as conceptualised by the World Bank focuses on various community actors holding public officials to account (see for example World Bank, 2010). Almost universally participation is framed as technical processes where citizens exercise agency in predetermined ways, in partnership with government within strictly 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2004: 35). 'Public officials' are acknowledged as central, yet treated as a unified body synonymous with government, rather than human actors who act independently and relationally. Specific examples include participatory policy-making, expenditure tracking, citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery, education around legal rights, public commissions, hearings, advisory boards, citizen scorecards and report cards. (Paul, 1992; Paul, 1994; Blair, 2000; Malena *et al.*, 2004b; O'Neil *et al.*, 2007). Miraftab makes the distinction between 'invited' and 'invented' spaces, arguing that the former, the domain of Social Accountability

interventions, represent the focus of 'legitimate civil society' and to a large extent serves neoliberal agendas. The latter "challenges the status quo in the hope of larger societal change and resistance to the dominant power relations" (Miraftab, 2004: 1; cf. Cornwall, 2004).

Social accountability is then perceived as an institutional response to a narrowly defined set of 'legitimate' citizenship practices. Little reference is made to political movements, trade unions or other institutions that have had such a profound effect on accountability within the historical development of northern states (Zinn, 1980: 581; Unsworth, 2009: 885; Bates, 2010). The notion rests on a neoliberal conceptualization of citizenship, favouring those with access to the recognised and invited civil society institutions where it is practiced. This practice legitimises bounded notions of social capital[5] (Fukuyama, 1995) whilst ignoring or criminalising resistance to the potentially devastating impact of neoliberal policies (Miraftab, 2004: 2,7).

Miraftab notes the inherent contradiction where neoliberal policy "erodes women's livelihoods and... access to the most essential services, although at the same time it opens up certain public realms of decision-making from which women had been excluded." (2004: 2). My own research in Northern Nigeria echoes this point where significant resources have been channelled into user led facility health committees, principally to manage the user fees implemented as part of Nigeria's Structural Adjustment Programme (PATHS2, 2010); such interventions harnesses user 'voice', but with limited potential to challenge, or transform the status quo.

[5] I later discuss how the Voice/Accountability discourse has been aligned to neo-institutionalist thinking partially characterised by the expansion of economics and rational choice theory into a realm previously occupied by social theory. Similar charges have been set against the notion of social capital. Ben Fine in particular argues that the notion has 'colonised' social theory in the interests of neoliberal institutions. Fine writes: 'Tell us what non-economic factors you think are important to the economy and how they reflect or create market imperfections. We will then model them on the basis of our own methodology and return them to you as a contribution to your own discipline' (Fine and Green, 2000: 85) quoted in (Spies-Butcher, 2006: 52).

Ackerman notes that score cards, where communities rate and problem solve around public services, "have been criticized for being grounded in a fundamentally naïve view of politics and bureaucratic inefficiency" (Ackerman, 2004: 458). Jenkins and Goetz have similarly argued that such accountability mechanisms "can be considered 'weapons' only if the politicians and bureaucrats in question are ignorant of the service-delivery problems in the first place. Most, in fact, are already aware of the dismal state of public amenities..." (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999: 619).

The Social Accountability discourse appears to engage with these issues with little sophistication. A common pattern emerges indicating firstly, an operationalisation of 'voice' which more closely matches *consultation* than the literature on 'participatory citizenship' would imply (World Bank, 2003). Secondly, there are significant prerequisites that must be met for accountability initiatives to be established, among them, an existing commitment and capacity by the state to engage with the citizenry. Indeed a somewhat circular argument emerges where a degree of accountability and responsiveness is required in order to facilitate 'voice' interventions. This has the potential to prove a 'killer assumption' for the 'voice' agenda, where only accountable bureaucracies may be held to account.

These conceptual limitations raise important questions about what the most productive level of analysis of policy engagement might be. Mosse (2003) notes that, "On the one hand there is an *instrumental view* of policy as problem solving — directly shaping the way in which development is done. On the other hand there is a *critical view* that sees policy as a rationalising discourse concealing hidden purposes of bureaucratic power or dominance, in which the true political intent of development is hidden behind a cloak of rational planning" (Mosse, 2003: 2). Thus we see policy as a social construct which may account for, or fail to account for specific external factors for numerous reasons. A critical analysis will attempt to explore both these internal weaknesses, and the potential processes by which they are produced.

Voice, Accountability and the Welfare State model

The rules that govern accountability, that govern the power relationships and the 'answerability' of various actors within a state system appear highly variable and socially constructed. Yet, the essentialist construction of the discourse provides little room for the accommodation of varied contexts. The voice-accountability model is assumed to function uniformly, ignoring the complex evolution of the relationships in play. In reality, however, specific contexts are important especially as Social Accountability initiatives tend to *invite* participation by *certain groups* into *certain aspects* of a given bureaucracy (Miraftab, 2004: 1) and thus accountability is not demanded but rather granted by willing institutions who themselves set the terms of this engagement.

If accountability *as a concession* is a prerequisite for successful voice and accountability interventions, then these contextual factors have been given insufficient attention in the literature and, the dominant discourse is based on unacknowledged assumptions. In particular, the notion is founded on a 'Welfare State' model of mature bureaucracy operating within a liberal democracy; an environment where accountable services are provided for a range of, often not entirely benign, political and historical reasons (Bulpitt, 1986; Hewitt, 1983). Indeed, the majority of the writing originates from thinking about service provision in developed contexts, from writers based in the global north (Standing and Taylor, 2007).

The subsequent instrumentalist development literature, and public sector reform praxis is still very much focused on the Weberian 'ideal type' model of bureaucratic management and accountability (Stiglitz, 2000), with important implicit assumptions about the behaviour of agents within. Ackerman (2005) argues that this model provides the dominant theoretical foundation for the understanding of public service bureaucracies around the world. This can be described as a vertically accountable bureaucracy with professionalised civil

servants, a system where bureaucrats conduct themselves in a strict framework of rules and accountability relationships (Ackerman, 2005: 8)[6].

The extent to which these models are applicable to the often fragile state and bureaucratic systems in developing economies is open to question. The boundaries between state and citizen are rarely clear cut, with the potential for multiple and overlapping formal and informal institutions with complex underlying power relations and dynamics (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 20). Furthermore, the Welfare State model exists both as a bureaucratic structure, and as a social construct. The roles, responsibilities and expectations of the actors in both the state and citizenry (Crozier, 1964) have often been determined by locally specific political histories. The notion of entitlement is by no means universal (PATHS2, 2010), any more than notions of public service (Lipsky, 2010; 1980a). Little attention has been paid to the implications of the huge variation in notions of entitlement and public service across the range of developing world contexts.

Accountability and Bureaucratic Control

A critical analysis of the rise of the accountability discourse serves to 'unveil' the rhetoric around 'voice' as empowerment (eg. DFID, 2008). It reveals more modest ambitions, a technocratic approach to controlling dysfunctional bureaucracies. The majority of the theory has disciplinary roots in economics, with many commentators noting the almost hegemonic dominance of the field within organisations such as the World Bank (Francis, 2007; Marshall, 2008: 151). It would seem that the resulting dominance of positivistic approaches to theory building and problem solving has had a profound effect on the voice accountability discourse. In particular, the accountability discourse reflects a deterministic and reductionist conceptualisation of what are in reality, complex structure - agency dynamics (Giddens, 1987: 187-195). These are combined with similarly complex institutional

[6] Sbaih sees the attempt to put the assumed in written form as an informal patients charter "a move from Dingwall and Strong's concept of the invisible organisational charter to an explicit set of statements" (2002: 22). This echoes Lipskeys Street level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980b), particularly where nurses discuss the implementation of the charter.

dynamics and power relationships (Li, 1999). This in turn, leads to a praxis which takes little account of the nature of specific bureaucracies, or of the socially constructed nature of the citizen–state compact.

Consumer citizens, entrepreneur providers

The shift in conceptualisation of this relationship was, of course related to a rightward shift in ideology around public service provision in wealthy countries. Only in this context can we fully understand the movement in thinking by influential actors in international development, such as the World Bank. Le Grand (2003) discusses this shift in significant detail.

> "In the closing years of the 20th century, several countries, including Britain saw some significant changes in policy makers' perceptions about motivation and agency: changes that in turn lead to radical reforms in the way in which public services were delivered. In particular, a belief that those who worked in the public service sector had their principal aim not in the satisfaction of their own desires, but as meeting the needs of essentially passive beneficiaries of the service, **was replaced by** a conviction that public service workers were motivated largely by self-interest and users of services were (or should be) active consumers. This led to a policy drive to replace state-based delivery systems by market based ones, which were viewed as a better place to harness the forces of self-interest to serve the newly discovered consumers of public services" (Le Grand, 2003: 23, my emphasis).

What is particularly important to note is that the neoliberal revolution led not only to changing ideas about the citizen state relationship, but also about public service providers, their motivations, and their relationship to the bureaucracies and state under which they operate.

Whilst Le Grand (2003) has been influential in the thinking around public service delivery, and specifically the reform of the British National Health Service; much of his thinking focuses on strengthening responsiveness through the improvement of hierarchical control and internal accountability measures. Like similar commentators (Stiglitz, 2000), his treatment of 'voice' as a mechanism to strengthen accountability is relatively limited and indeed, much of his thesis actually relies on the potential of consumer choice rather than 'voice'.

The dominant discourse around public (and private) production of public goods prompts two important observations. Firstly, policy analysts have thus far had a rather simplistic and ideologically driven attitude to the agency of both citizens and public sector employees (Stiglitz, 2000). Secondly, that insufficient attention has been paid to the relational, socially constructed nature of these organisations themselves, and how broader political and ideological changes may impact on service delivery through social processes played out by constituent actors (cf. Cleaver, 2007).

Public sector reform in the international development literature

Taking the discussion back to the development literature, it is worth exploring Paul's (1992) work "Accountability in Public Services: Exit, Voice and Control"; in many ways a ground breaking attempt to link a growing debate around public sector service accountability at the time, with an increasing focus on the demand side of the service delivery equation (Dwivedi and Jabbra, 1989). The paper captures the contemporary discourse around public sector management, and implies a broader shift in attitudes to the Welfare State within a dominant neoliberal hegemony:

> "With the expansion of the public sector, macro level accountability systems have become overloaded...this overload can be offset by the use of accountability mechanisms at the micro level with a focus on the public as 'customers to be served'" (Paul, 1992: 1048)

The notion of the public as consumers to be served *as a novel concept* puts the development of the accountability discourse in temporal/historical context. This highly individualistic approach to conceptualising the consumption of public services fits well within the neoliberal model. Paul's paper marks an important point in the development of the accountability agenda at the end of the 1980s, and 10 years before the production of the landmark 2004 World Development Report "Making Services Work for Poor People" (World Bank, 2003).

Linking Voice and Accountability in the mainstream: The Paul Framework

Paul has been influential since he presents the most comprehensive attempt to explicitly link 'voice' with public sector accountability in developing contexts within any kind of cohesive theoretical framework. This literature was influential in the World Bank's construction of the 'voice' concept[7]. Consequently, it is worth exploring this model, presented in three papers between 1991 and 1994[8], in some depth. Paul uses the term 'Public Accountability' (1992), later developed by the World Bank to 'Social Accountability' which they define slightly differently[9]. Paul's definition refers to "the spectrum of approaches, mechanisms and practices used by the stakeholders concerned with public services to ensure a desired level and type of performance" (1992: 1047). Using econometric models, in common with Le Grand (2003), Paul develops a highly individualistic model of accountability relationships between citizen, consumer and provider.

Understanding how Paul conceptualises the voice - accountability nexus requires a basic understanding of the underlying econometric model that informs his conceptualisation. The model presents particular insights into how complexity and context are accounted for. Paul argues that in a perfect market, where there are few barriers to switching between suppliers, dissatisfied consumers can easily switch (exit) from one supplier to another because this is easier than voicing complaints to the existing supplier. As the market becomes less of a 'perfect market' (i.e. market failure increases) exit becomes less of an option. Relatively speaking, voicing complaints becomes more attractive (although the complaining consumer expects to achieve less from both as market failure increases). A practical example might be the market for dental care: Where there are many providers, a

[7] Paul was also involved in the production of the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2003).

[8] (see Paul, 1992; Paul, 1991; Paul, 1994)

[9] "The broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens and their organizations can use to hold societal power-holders (Such as the state) to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts." (World Bank, 2003)

dissatisfied consumer may easily switch (exit). Where there is a monopoly, exit is pointless and 'voice' whilst being the only remaining option, has decreased utility. Thus to summarise, an effective market promotes switching (exit), while a failed market makes 'voice' a more attractive option, although since monopolies are likely to be less responsive, even 'voice' has diminished utility.

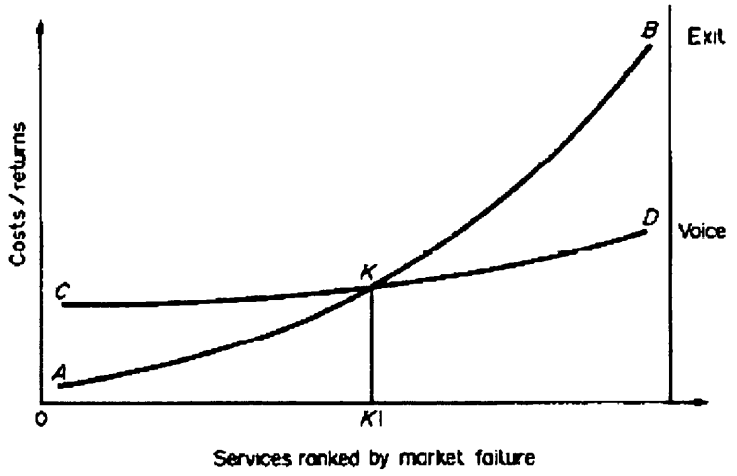

Figure 3: Costs of exit and voice from (Paul, 1992: 1049)

Consequently, in a perfect market exit (A in the graph) will be less costly than 'voice' (C) whereas in a failed market 'voice' (D) is more cost effective than exit (B), which becomes very costly. The practical example that forms the focus of this thesis is primary healthcare, in the model an example of a 'failed market'. Paul represents this model by the above graph, in which, as markets fail (moving to the right), both 'voice' and exit become more costly, with the relative costs of exit increasing more steeply (B).This example is important when discussing the state provision of primary health care. In most cases markets will be located at the far right of the graph, with exit impossible or at least very costly, and 'voice', whilst still costly, representing the preferred alternative. From this figure we can see that increasing the effectiveness of the market (moving to the left on the X axis) should theoretically give consumers more choice in terms of exit and increase the market responsiveness to 'voice'.

Using Paul's model enables us to further ground the discussion of 'voice' and accountability in the realities of health seeking in resource poor environments. In the case of government provision with one health centre (a market failure in Paul's terms), exit is extremely costly (perhaps travelling to the next town) making voice 'preferable'. Public services with little or no fear of losing clients are likely to be less than responsive to voiced concerns (hence the cost of 'voice' also increases – high cost of effort spent for little gain). Inevitably, there comes a point on the curve where the returns for either exit or 'voice' are zero, or indeed negative in terms of effort exerted. Consequently, as a policy response in failed markets, one might promote 'voice' on the demand side, or try and improve the market (through vouchers or privatisation) on the supply side.

On the supply side, Paul adopts a revealing framework for conceptualising different classifications of public services and individual responses to them, tabulated below in Figure 4.

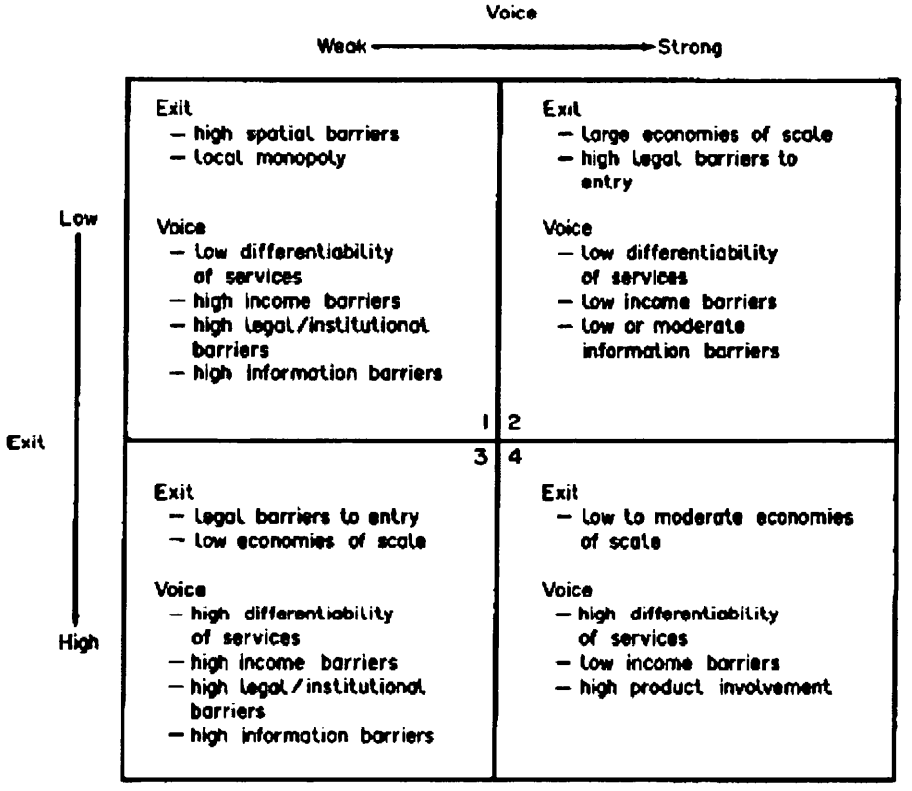

Figure 4: Paul's characterisation of 'services and publics' (Paul, 1992: 1052).

From the categorisation in the above table, it is immediately apparent that the public provision of health care services falls firmly into the top left sector of Figure 4, characterised by low ability to exit and weak impact of 'voice'. In this box, exit barriers are largely spatial and therefore unavoidable. Paul notes that accountability in this box can only be achieved through what the World Bank later described as 'Social Accountability'. Here consumer 'voice' is supported by external agents such as NGOs and responsiveness supported by bureaucratic hierarchical control mechanisms.

The Paul model represents a milestone in applying Hirschman's original model of 'voice'[10] to the development context in a theoretically robust manner, and one can see in Paul's work, the essence of the Social Accountability approach later expanded on in the World Development Report 2004 (World Bank, 2003).

> "the only way the behavior of service providers can be made more responsive to the public is through the signals from the hierarchical control function (e.g., monitoring and incentives) of the agency. When the incentives facing public service providers are wrong, the latter may continue their 'quiet life' despite the exit or voice actions of the public. These propositions challenge the conventional wisdom that competition on the supply side (facilitating exit) or public participation (use of voice) at the micro level alone are adequate to ensure the accountability of public agencies." (Paul, 1992: 1048)

Paul thus acknowledges that services *may* not be responsive to 'voice' or exit, but that in any case, 'voice' only has meaningful utility and exit only becomes a realistic option when effective hierarchical control mechanisms transmit signals from consumers to an operational level within the organisation. This final point is of crucial importance because there is an implicit acknowledgement that for services such as primary healthcare, the voice accountability framework, as presented by the World Bank and others, is unlikely to be effective, let alone transformational. Indeed, Paul asserts that advocacy or 'voice' initiatives alone are insufficient and that policy or provider led initiatives are a central pillar.

[10] Hirschman is arguably the originator of the voice concept, described in his influential (1970b) work "Exit, Voice and Loyalty".

In a similar vein, we find that the literature on the inherent 'market failures' in healthcare (Light, 2003; Mohmand and Cheema, 2007) are scarcely discussed in the accountability literature (World Bank, 2010; World Bank, 2003); again raising questions over the applicability of models with origins in market economics to public service delivery. In exploring the fundamental differences between healthcare markets, and the commercial markets from which the 'voice' concept originated (Hirschman, 1970b), we can immediately see the inadequacy of the theory in conceptualising consumer choice. Furthermore, we can hypothesise about how these failures may impact on the ability of individuals to exercise a 'voice' with the inevitable consequences for accountability relationships (see Light, 2003: 1 for a concise description of this issue).

The voice-accountability model is both attractive in its pseudoscientific determinism and flawed in its many and often unexplored assumptions: It treats the demand side as homogenous, it assumes a demand for accountability through a sense of entitlement, and that voiced dissent will be forthcoming. Employing Paul's model enables us to see the complexity that belies such a simplistic model, both on the demand and supply sides. On the supply side there may be a range of factors impacting on responsiveness to 'voice' and exit, while on the demand side many social, cultural and economic factors will mediate in the propensity for individuals (or collective groups) to 'voice' or exit.

It is the propensity and agency of communities to act using 'voice' in any given political economy, the potential transformative nature of that agency, and the degree to which transformation is equitable that is a central focus of this thesis. I argue that a micro level understanding of both political economy and socio-cultural context of health care seeking is required to understand agency. This is not to say econometric models do not have utility, but the need to subsequently move beyond this level of reductionism is not adequately acknowledged, reflecting the dominant epistemology of the discipline (Giddens, 1987).

Responsiveness

The result of these conceptual weaknesses in the voice – accountability model is that 'voice' is less likely to lead to institutions becoming more responsive to the needs of citizens. Responsiveness is presented as the primary outcome of an effective accountability relationship (DFID, 2006b), in health care this is realised in terms of service improvement. However, the literature for the most part fails to define a well-articulated pathway for this relationship, and in reality accountability is only one potential determinant of responsiveness. Mulgan notes that whilst complaints procedures, ombudsmen and administrative tribunals are all institutions of accountability, there are numerous other determinants of responsiveness. Management incentives or changes in corporate culture may serve to make a service more 'responsive' but not necessarily more 'accountable' (Mulgan, 2000: 568).

This is particularly true in contexts where services are outsourced to the private or non-governmental sector. Here, for example in the case of rural health care, the mechanisms of exit are often no more realistic than in the public sector. 'voice' is even less of an option, since the accountability relationship is more towards the owners or shareholders than to the service users. In other contexts elected representatives may provide 'upward' accountability, but with limited mechanisms for this to translate into responsiveness. The importance of clearly articulating the mechanisms by which the framework is purported to function cannot be overstated, and is sadly lacking in much of the literature (eg. DFID, 2006b; World Bank, 2010).

Accountability in health care: The dominance of liberal discourse

The dominant discourse which presents liberal 'welfare' based models of health provision as a 'gold standard' in healthcare provision (Giddens, 2006) has had a profound effect on wider discourses around 'effective' health systems in other contexts. It has predisposed commentators to use a normative framework when defining the optimum or desirable relationship between public sector provider and consumer (eg. Le Grand, 2003). Implicit assumptions are made around the

accountability relationship between state and citizen; which serve to bound the expectations and limit the range of legitimate practices which come to define what might be described as the 'rules of the game' (Korpi, 2003; Green, 2002). The assumption in much of the literature (eg. World Bank, 2003; DFID, 2006b) that these rules are, or should be universally applicable is clearly open to question.

Many health systems in underdeveloped countries are tacitly modelled on systems found in liberal democracies (Berman, 1998), and follow similar assumptions regarding accountability; indeed many of these are enshrined in the 1978 Alma Atta declaration[11]. Any attempt to explore voice-accountability and responsiveness in the public sector must therefore link this discussion back to 'first principles'; that is the origins of the social contract between state and citizen.

Writing on this contract has a long and complex lineage from origins in Locke's transference of 'natural rights' to the state (1690) and Rousseau's collective sovereignty in the name of 'the general will' (Rousseau, 1966); however, after World War II thinking around the social contract coalesced around a Keynesian welfare model (Korpi, 2003: 589). This liberal model held that citizens require material means to benefit from rights, indicating a greater role for government in the administration of economic affairs (Young, 2002). Thus the post enlightenment social contact broadened to encompass expanded 'safety nets'; full employment, free health care and comprehensive social insurance. Since this 'golden age' of 'Welfarism' between the early 1950's and mid '70s (Kwiek, 2005), the role of government has narrowed. Increasingly, markets have become the central arbiters

[11] Specifically provisions four and five and eight: (4) The people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care. (5) Governments have a responsibility for the health of their people which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures. A main social target of governments, international organizations and the whole world community in the coming decades should be the attainment by all peoples of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life. Primary health care is the key to attaining this target as part of development in the spirit of social justice. (8) All governments should formulate national policies, strategies and plans of action to launch and sustain primary health care as part of a comprehensive national health system and in coordination with other sectors. To this end, it will be necessary to exercise political will, to mobilize the country's resources and to use available external resources rationally (WHO, 1978).

of resource allocation with an increased emphasis on voluntary action and 'individual choice'. This represents a shift in the social contract from the 'Keynesian settlement' to new, neoliberal forms (Hansen, 2003: 123).

The importance of this social contract has been brought into stark relief because of its extremely rapid transformation during the neoliberal ascendancy of the 1980s and 90s. New models of state - citizen contract which have emerged from public sector reform in the 'developed world' have significantly informed the approaches to public sector reform in developing nations; models 'recommended' by powerful institutions such as the World Bank (Li, 2006). Some have argued that such institutions typically fail to take account of the key differences between the Welfare State in mature capitalist democracies and underdeveloped contexts (for example Booth, 2010a). Furthermore, significant areas remain under-researched; in particular, the diversity and complexity in the citizen-state relationship (Cornwall, 2002), the common lack of legitimacy of post-colonial governments, public ownership of institutions (Englebert, 2002; Kelsall and Booth, 2010) and notions of public entitlement to services (PATHS2, 2010).

The liberal and increasingly neoliberal construction of the 'social contract' defines the normative 'rules of the game' within which accountability relationships are understood. A dominant discourse emerges, captured and reproduced by high profile commentators such as Julian Le Grand; relationships are framed in terms of substantive bureaucratic systems relating to substantive individual actors (Le Grand, 2003). Yet, it is also clear that the underpinning notions of liberal democracy are socially constructed and the resulting institutions function relationally in concert with equally socially constructed norms of behaviour and power.

In the dominant discourse however (for example World Bank, 2003; World Bank, 2010), we see little or no reference to locally constructed understandings of the 'rules of the game' as they relate to citizen and state, or citizen and service. Instead, we see an assumed ideal type based upon a substantively contrived 'gold standard' which is at best simplistic when applied to developed contexts, and may

have very little relevance or legitimacy in developing contexts. The political economist Steve Abah has for example written on the evolution of the citizen state relationship in Nigeria, Lynn Bennett on Nepal; both expose the folly of applying normative assumptions from developed nations to such different and diverse contexts (Abah, 2005; Bennett, 2005).

Emerging interpretive approaches

Under neoliberal development theory, mechanisms of Weberian hierarchical control have been supplanted by theories of change whereby the power or 'voice' of 'the consumer' are hypothesised to elicit the reaction from bureaucracies of improved accountability, responsiveness and ultimately service delivery. However, the preceding discussion indicates that to a significant extent, both these conceptualisations of accountability have been atheoretical, implicitly technical, based on Eurocentric normative assumptions, concerned only with planned development processes, inherently non-transformative and increasingly co-opted by neoliberal interests. Given the limitations of hierarchical control mechanisms for inducing responsiveness in these institutions, how might new discourses in development theory address these concerns?

Within the literature there have been calls for the need to better understand the complex dynamics of political economy, structure and agency at the macro and micro level, particularly regarding citizenship and the state (Gaventa, 2006a). At the micro level particularly, there have also been calls for a more interpretive analyses; Jones (2006) discusses the central role of citizenship as a 'package' of daily identities and belongings, institutional relations, rights and duties[12]. She provides a model of citizenship that may be applied to the reconfigured institutional landscape of global aid agencies, the neoliberal state and privatised civil society. Elsewhere Mosse's (2003) account of the commoditisation of participation as a development intervention commercially exploited by a fertiliser company is instructive. It

[12] Jones argues that the shifting nature of subject positions relating to these factors creates fluid notions of 'citizenship moments' where 'at any moment, different subject positions are 'articulated' together ... to produce contextualised identities" (Jones, 2006).

provides an early example of how concepts such as 'voice' have been deployed in pursuit of increased responsiveness, yet also gain currency for a variety of other complex reasons, in programmes which are inherently relational institutions. These new ethnographically informed and interpretive approaches serve as theoretical platforms to make alternative analyses 'thinkable'; in contrast notions such as Social Accountability construct presented by the World Bank appear simplistic and essentialist.

Social Accountability focused 'theories of change' have been conceived deterministically as input-output models in development interventions. Yet, both policy and projects are better described as a contested and relational enterprises, constituted by actors who operate in ways that are far more fluid than the dominant theoretical discourse surrounding development would suggest (Eyben, 2010a). There is of course a long history and considerable literature around individual and popular agency in development. In the next chapter, I examine the construction of 'voice', both as a central component of the Social Accountability discourse, and as a 'social technology' with important ideological components. This sets the stage for an empirical analysis of the voice-accountability model presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3 – Voice

Introduction

In this section, I examine the 'voice' model as it is articulated in mainstream development practice, both in terms of its role as a social technology for development, and its wider position as part of a 'discourse of development'. I develop the discussion of Social Accountability with a focus on the 'voice' side of the equation, both as a mechanism for improving service delivery through the use of popular agency; and, in terms of the potential of the model to be transformative in relation to control over political and economic resources. In order to frame the discussion, I first trace its conceptual origins in management theory, to its use amongst powerful agents of development such as the World Bank in the context of Social Accountability.

With particular reference to the literature on participation, I then explore the extent to which the concept of 'voice' in its current iterations reflects origins in liberal theory and the ways in which it is implicated in the development of transnational regimes of discipline. I then go on to discuss the extent to which this relatively simplistic approach is able to take into account social, economic and political complexities at community level, with a particular focus on interpretive approaches to citizenship and notions of rights. This is particularly important if one wishes to assess the transformative potential of interventions based on the 'voice' concept; exploring the extent to which it represents a purely technical intervention focused on improving service delivery, over more genuinely transformative approaches to participatory governance. The focus of this discussion is then broadened to encompass accountability, with reference to the state-citizen compact and new models of aid architecture and delivery. I examine the various globalised political currents that have influenced these approaches, and explore the implications for the utility of the 'voice' model in resource poor contexts.

I discuss the evolution of 'new democratic spaces' (Cornwall, 2002), and their potential for promoting more genuine engagement and equitable participation in policy development and decision making via newly emergent governance structures. Finally, I address the need for more sophisticated approaches to

understanding complexity, with a particular focus on how human agency is mediated by numerous factors beyond the control of traditional development interventions. I explore how concepts of rights, citizenship and governance have been theorised and applied to the model, and the potential of emerging tools such as peer ethnography, to explore these issues in greater depth.

Origins of the 'voice' concept

In the context of 'voice' and accountability in development, the concept may be defined as:

> "both the capacity of people to express their views and the ways in which they do so through a variety of formal and informal channels and mechanisms. Referring primarily to the efforts of the poor to have their views heard by more powerful decision-makers, voice can include complaint, organised protest, lobbying and participation in decision making, service delivery or policy implementation" (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001: 11).

The concept has its origins in management theory. Based on the agency of the individual consumer in a free market, it has recently ascended to a central position within international development theory and practice; becoming part of a pervasive and powerful discourse that has profoundly shaped the nature of international development over the last decade.

Albert Hirschman developed the original theory of *voice and exit* to describe the *dynamic* nature of consumer responses to various failures within American organisations (1970b: 11). He particularly focused on how these responses vary in relation to the nature of market failure. Located in economics and management theory, the model was subsequently used as a framework for discussing public service delivery; despite its origins being focused on the responsiveness of private sector commercial enterprises to individual consumers.

Hirschman argued that typically, an institution's management learn about deterioration of the quality of their products or services via two routes: either exit, where customers stop buying the firm's products, or 'voice'. 'Voice' is where an organisation's customers or members express their dissatisfaction directly to the

management (or some other authority to which the management is subordinate), "through general protest addressed to anyone who cares to listen" (Hirschman, 1970b: 4).

Although Hirschman's original work related largely (although not exclusively) to private commercial enterprise, its significance is that it represents the first attempt to bring together theory located in economics (exit/choice) with ideas associated more with political science (voice and dissent). However, with relatively limited scholarly work on the subject, subsequent attempts in the instrumentalist literature to adapt the voice-exit framework to the public sector have thus far been rather atheoretical, as Banerjee and Somanathan describe, gaining "more currency than content" (2001: 189). The concept of 'voice' has however, evolved significantly. One can trace its development from Hirschman's original conceptualisation through the work of Paul (Paul, 1991; Paul, 1992; Paul, 1994) in the 1990's, to more sophisticated and sociological work (for example Cornwall and Coelho, 2006; Gaventa, 2006a).

The modern use of the term occurs with a variety of meanings and interpretations. These include passive expressions of the opinions implying consultation or, 'listening to the voices of the poor (Narayan, 2000)[13]. There are also demands that these voices be 'heard' (Holland *et al.*, 1998), and a more current usage which implies an explicit sense of agency and control (Ackerman, 2004). As the case study presented later demonstrates, these numerous interpretations find expression in very different approaches for programmatic implementation. Indeed, strong parallels exist between debates around popular agency and 'voice', and those around popular participation in development that have been part of mainstream discourse since the 1970's, see for example (Freire, 1970; Chambers, 1997).

[13] The Voices of the Poor report was prepared for the 2000 World Development Report, based on participatory research in twenty-three countries. It described a crisis in governance, where the poor are excluded and institutions neither responsive nor accountable; and a public who were willing to engage but only under fairer rules (Narayan and Chambers 2000). Gaventa notes how this was interpreted as a global crisis of governance pointing towards the need to build a new relationship between government and the people (Gaventa, 2004).

This thesis focuses on the 'voice' concept as it has formed an ascendant and influential part of donor discourse in the last fifteen years; an important milestone being the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2003), which put the concept centre stage within mainstream development. The report, and subsequent donor literature (eg. DFID, 2006a) use 'voice' variously as a tool for use in public sector reform, service delivery and 'participatory governance'. 'Voice' is described as having an implicit sense of agency, and it is this agency that forms a central focus of discussion in this thesis.

I explore the utility of the concept as a foundation for operationalising user involvement in service delivery and governance and for promoting political and social transformation around power relationships and control of resources. Given the limited scholarly work on 'voice', I first seek to ground the concept in relevant theory, particularly that of participation and governance.

Voice and Participation

'voice' focuses on the agency of actors exercised in relation to service provision, development and governance initiatives; as such, strong parallels may be drawn with notions of participation. Indeed, the broader literature on participation is clearly highly relevant, providing a substantive body of work that can be used to locate the concept within the historical and theoretical context of broader development approaches (for example Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cornwall, 2002; Hickey and Mohan, 2004a; Cleaver, 2007; Coelho and Favareto, 2008; Rosato *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, it provides a theoretical foundation against which to critically analyse the 'voice' concept, as the notion is used to conceptualise and intervene in social development; particularly as the discourse on 'voice' has limited explicit grounding in social theory.

Despite the parallels between the two concepts of 'voice' and participation, scholarly and popular discourses around both have failed to find common ground.

Critical debate on each concept has for the most part circumvented the body of literature and theory on the other, for three reasons.

Firstly, critics on the 'left' seeking structural transformation in power relationships and control over resources have generally failed to critically engage with the concept of 'voice' *per se*. These commentators have preferred instead to criticise 'technocratic' or 'managerialist' models of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Coelho and Favareto, 2008). Indeed, the 'voice' concept has managed to prosper despite what Hickey describes as a growing backlash against the 'ways in which participation managed to tyrannise development debates' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004c: 3). As I discuss later, for many on the left, participation has become a technical intervention which simultaneously ignores the political agency of the 'interventionist' and the deeper 'malign' structural forces in development, which are consequently sustained (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cooke, 2004). This focus on participation has allowed the 'voice' concept, against which similar charges may be brought, to largely escape such explicit criticism.

Secondly, disciplinary bias has allowed the 'voice' concept to avoid such critical analyses; the notion being largely confined to a less *explicitly* ideological governance and public sector reform literature; known for the dominance of positivist paradigms (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003: 45). Indeed, Bevir and Rhodes (2003: 48) provocatively describe the "lukewarm positivism" that pervades the political science and governance literature.[14]

Lastly, proponents of the concept, principally found among large bilateral and multilateral donors, have generally not engaged with more radical formulations of participation; those which seek to both engage with and transform relationships of power. Popular engagement in power and politics is supported only in a highly controlled and 'bounded' manner (eg. DFID, 2006c; World Bank, 2003). Indeed,

[14] It is certainly true that an extensive literature search identified relatively few authors who critically engage with the voice and social accountability agenda from a critical and/or interpretive perspective.

despite a practice which many have argued is deeply ideologically laden (Mosse, 2006b), the World Bank's 'Articles of Agreement' contain a political prohibition clause which is used to justify their avoidance of 'political affairs' (Gunduz, 2004: 11).

These theories present credible explanations for the failure of the twin conceptual disciplines of 'voice' and participation to merge or learn from each other. In the final analysis however, I argue that the ascendancy of 'voice' is a function of its direct utility to the needs of the donor community rather than its lineage in the history of participatory development. The literature does not indicate that the notion evolved from increasing evidence of best practice, rather that donors found utility in a concept supporting approaches which harness the power of the 'consumer' to improve service delivery (World Bank, 2003), without challenging more fundamental power relationships between citizen and state (Unsworth, 2009). Hirschman's 'voice', with firm foundations in liberal mainstream economics, proved an ideal candidate.

'Voice' as a social technology

It is clearly then not appropriate to see 'voice' as a culmination of forty years of global experience in participatory methodologies. Rather, the model stems from a largely separate conceptual and disciplinary heredity, a response to new trends in development theory and aid delivery. It represents a 'technological' approach by virtue of the application of knowledge to a defined problem against which it is deployed. More specifically, as a 'technology of agency' (Ilcan, 2006: 864) it is a technique by which development practitioners deploy the agency of citizens in pursuit of development objectives, in this case, improved accountability.

Whilst proponents have arguably traded on the credibility and authenticity associated with approaches allied to grassroots participation practice (for example Narayan and Chambers, 2000), the technology is not politically neutral. The 'problem' to which the technology is applied is constructed around a market based model, with the range of thinkable solutions largely bounded by the appropriate

roles for a service 'consumer' (eg. World Bank, 2010). In participating in initiatives informed by the model, it would seem subjects are somewhat inevitably enrolled in, and therefore constitutive of, a broader political project (cf. Busch, 2010: 333).

Consequently, here a second concept is introduced, that of 'social technology'; the notion developed by Foucault to describe various techniques of domination that are used to control both others, and the self (Foucault et al., 1988).[15] Social technologies are for Foucault mechanisms by which disciplinary power is exercised; technologies "which delegate responsibility for individuals to other autonomous entities: enterprises, communities, professional organizations, individuals themselves" (Donzelot and Gordon, 2008: 54). Foucault argued that it is "this contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call governmentality" (Foucault et al., 1988: 20), the concept to which I now turn.

'Voice', state, and non-state power

Whilst a sociological understanding of governance has long recognised the phenomena as socially constructed and produced (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003), the instrumentalist development literature typically exploits the term normatively. It is used to describe characteristics of 'effective' states, and structures of rule and regulation (eg. DFID, 2006b) within and beyond the state (eg. World Bank, 2005). Indeed, as powerful knowledge brokers such as the World Bank have developed

[15] The term technology may be defined in terms of knowledge as in "the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area" (Merriam-Webster Inc., 1991) or in terms of practice, as Ursula Franklin defines it "the way we do things around here" (Franklin, 2004). Foucault uses the term Social Technology (although he was not the first to coin it) to describe various techniques that are used to govern. He describes "(I) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. These four types of technologies hardly ever function separately, although each one of them is associated with a certain type of domination" (Foucault *et al.*, 1988: 17). See also http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en.html accessed 14/3/11.

and refined theories of governance, so the normative interpretations of the concept have gained increasing currency in the 'development industry' (see for example World Bank, 2010). Whilst the term has become part of a hegemonic discourse dominated by tenets of neo-liberal thought (Cooke, 2004: 42), a substantial parallel and more critical sociological literature has developed (see for example Cleaver, 2007; Dean, 2002; Ong and Collier, 2005; Ilcan and Phillips, 2008).

Much of this literature points toward ways in which knowledge and social technologies such as 'voice' are implicated in forms of Foucauldian discipline; characterised by processes that are superficially egalitarian, but also constitutive of systems of 'micro-power' that are non-egalitarian and asymmetrical (Foucault, 1975: 222). These are essentially processes of government which Rose argues are inextricably bound up with the activity of thought and knowledge creation (Rose, 1999: 8). In remodelling the place and role of the individual in relation to the state, such social technologies implicitly define what can and cannot be thought in a given spatial, social or temporal context. Thus the production and use of this knowledge and technology is neither ideologically nor politically neutral. Foucault's notion of governmentality (Foucault *et al.*, 1988) is particularly useful in furthering our understanding of the processes by which these regimes of knowledge and truth are created, legitimised, reproduced and operationalised.

Whilst Foucault had little to say on the issue of international development, and indeed his work has been criticised for its eurocentricity and covert libertarianism (Elliott, 2009: 2155); a small number of theorists have usefully developed his ideas in ways that illuminate the 'voice' model both as a specific social technology, and as constituting part of a wider discourse within globalised processes of knowledge creation, power and discipline (Rose and Miller, 2008). Whilst theorists such as Rose (1999), Ong (2005) and Ilcan (2006) have not applied the notion directly to 'voice', their work on globalisation, neoliberalism, knowledge transfer and technologies of development is highly relevant. They explore the ways in which 'government' extends beyond the nation state implicating a variety of institutions, knowledge and routine practices and the conduct of development.

Foucault argued that understanding "the techniques and processes of guidance and control used to bind individuals and collectivities to the government's rationality is the foundation for understanding governmentality" (Foucault *et al.*, 1988). In this context, 'voice' may be understood as one of many social technologies by which the liberal citizen is constructed (cf. Guarneros-Meza *et al.*, 2010) in which renewed emphasis is placed on the individual as an autonomous rational citizen (Arneil, 2009: 76; Ajzenstadt, 2009). In doing so it redefines the potential, and limits, of calculated individual agency, often under the guise of supporting collective action (cf. Babu, 2009: 90).

In this context both the agency implicit within the 'voice' model, the promotion of the model itself, and the broader framework of 'governance' would seem to have disciplinary dimensions. As Rose notes 'to govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and use it for one's own objectives' (Rose, 1999: 4). I discussed earlier Rose's assertion that where the state was once central to the analysis of power, it appears now as only one element, within 'multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages"(Rose, 1999: 5).

Whilst voice and accountability may clearly be located in the trends outlined above, much of the literature provides only limited insight into whose interests disciplinary mechanisms operate. Consequently, within the case study presented later, I use governmentality as a lens rather than a central analytical model (cf. Larner and Butler, 2005: 81). The perspective is used to explore the different ways in which a range of actors, including the intended 'beneficiaries' of 'voice' initiatives, use social technologies of participation in support of their own diverse projects.

Whilst these diverse interests may be explored in a nuanced way through notions of assemblages; this need not forestall a parallel analysis from a more critical realist approach; one which allows engagement with the projects of organisational forms such as the World Bank as substantive entities. It also avoids Larner and Butler's (2005) charge that Foucauldian approaches have been used to "tell and retell

stories of unrelenting doom: of the global hegemony of market logic; the shrinking state, and the new emphasis on individual responsibility" without acknowledging the agency, diverse interests and projects of these actors (Larner and Butler, 2005: 82).

Seen through a critical realist lens, the multiple processes by which constructions of 'voice' and participatory development are framed and implemented appear less neutral and more implicated in the reproduction of complex relationships of global power.

Power may be explored both from the relatively simplistic standpoint of a 'structural actor', for example the World Bank, and as part of an assemblage of rationalities and technologies which are relationally produced (Busch, 2010: 344). Importantly, a flexible epistemological approach also serves to implicate both powerful organisational institutions and relatively powerless actors in the exercise of sometimes malign and self-serving power, exercised through the mundane practices of the development project.

Exploring 'voice' through participation

Whilst the theory on participation in development provides a useful framework to illuminate an occasionally athoretical discourse on 'voice'; the normative conceptualisation of participation has resulted in the dominance of often inadequate one dimensional models (such as Sherry's (1969) 'ladder of participation'). Whilst the notion of participation encompasses a variety of complex ideas, the term has such a long linage of reinvention and interpretation, that its meaning can be ambiguous.

For this enquiry, participation is taken as the ability of individuals and collectivities to "influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them" (Nelson and Wright, 1995: 10). In order to build a conceptual starting point, it is necessary to unpack the various constitutive domains as they relate to development practice.

'Voice' and development theory

Fundamental to understanding any development intervention is an exploration of links to broader theories of material and social development and the broader discourse in which they are located. A recurrent theme in much writing on 'voice' and participation in the grey or instrumentalist literature is the failure of authors and practitioners to make these links explicit, increasingly so 'post-impasse' (Schuurman, 1993)[16]. Discourses on 'voice' and participation have implicit theoretical and ideological positions, which may be compared with other dominant currents in development theory. Despite the complexity of the contemporary theoretical landscape, these positions have significant implications for the transformative potential of respective approaches.

In exploring the notion of 'voice' against this broader backdrop, we find it to be located in very specific ontological spheres; strongly influenced by currents in neoliberal development. 'Voice' can be aligned broadly with models of participation which support development as a managerial enterprise, a linear endeavour that can be directed and designed through the administration of appropriate interventions (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). Indeed bi- and multi-lateral development actors take a highly mechanistic approach to the dynamics of political and economic change (Berger and Beeson, 2003: 5; See for example DFID, 2006b: Chapter 2 Building effective states and better governance).

Whilst donors have in recent years increasingly engaged with issues of political economy and power at a macro level (Heymans and Pycroft, 2003; Leftwich, 2006), engagement with the role of individual and collective agency within development often remains simplistic (see particularly World Bank, 2003). Furthermore, the acceptable scope for collective action often appears strictly bounded (cf. Bebbington *et al.*, 2004; see for example Agarwal *et al.*, 2009). Despite rhetoric

[16] Schuurman discusses the impasse in development theory in relation to an "aborted modernity project" and the "de-legitimisation of Enlightenment discourses (liberalism and socialism)..[and the].. end of grand narratives of development" including the failure of dependency theory and a socialist project to maintain relevance to debates on international development (Schuurman, 1993).

around broad based participation in 'civic life', in the reality the focus on service delivery issues (World Bank, 2003) ignores the deeper social and political processes of development which influence sustained change (Fine and Green, 2000; Elson, 2002; Bates, 2010; Unsworth, 2009). Within these principally neoliberal constructions, 'voice' and participation are characterised as 'bolt on' activities required to realise the institutional transformation that improved accountability might bring (see for example World Bank, 2010).

The result of this deficit is that attempts to theorise 'voice' tend not to adequately engage with the social and political factors which define the citizen-state relationship, and ultimately mediate the efficacy of the model. The effect of this narrow discourse is to reproduce knowledge practices that compel limits over what it is possible and desirable to do (Ilcan, 2006). The transformation of all but the most superficial barriers to social inclusion and equity get scant regard, setting limits on what can realistically be achieved.

This phenomena is clear in much of the literature (for example Malena *et al.*, 2004a; Bitekerezo *et al.*, 2008; McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006), where we see a bounded engagement with 'voice' as agency, with little discussion of development as a broader social, political and economic process that is constituted and constructed by a range of actors, with important relational dimensions. Hickey and Mohan note:

> "the convergence between participatory development and governance can be seen in the context of an increasing interest in the synergies and division of labour between public and civic spheres. However, we would also argue that development theory is far from limited to such institutional debates, and that real contests remain concerning the form that development and democracy, state and civil society can and should take, and concerning how to theorise the role of agency within debates over development and governance."(Hickey and Mohan, 2004c: 10).

In the Nepal case study presented later, this issue is starkly presented in a context where DFID supported initiatives to promote 'voice' around maternal health

coexisted with running battles on the streets by those seeking more profound, structural change.

Development theory has in fact long sought to engage with individual and collective agency in relation to social change, institutional reform and service delivery (Chambers, 1997). Locating the 'voice' discourse within these debates serves to place the notion in historical and theoretical context at a time when there is a renewed interest in participation as it relates to citizenship and governance (Cornwall, 2002: 13). Beyond critical engagement with 'voice', the discourse and practice of participatory development in the 1990's is widely regarded as having 'lost its way' in terms of addressing the central challenges facing human development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cornwall, 2002: 4). Cleaver argues that the "radical, challenging and transformatory edge [of participation] has been lost. The concept of action has become individualised, empowerment depoliticised" (Cleaver, 1999: 599).

Whilst there is a broad consensus that much of the development practice labelled as 'participatory' was far removed from earlier radical formulations (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mohan, 2001), some have argued that a re-politicisation is taking place (Cornwall, 2002: 7)[17] and that a shift to encompass rights has necessitated a move away from technical to a political understandings of development (Alsop, 2004: 7). Thus, in the literature we see a renewed interest in rights, power (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Cornwall and Molyneux, 2006) and the participatory empowerment approaches of the 1970's, for example:

> "DFID's and the World Bank's interest in moving beyond their traditional support to service delivery NGOs may lead to an engagement with social movements and community and interest-based organizations that have developed a voice and a capacity to influence change through the strength of power with [collective action]... Power to organize is related to a person's self-worth and sense of dignity that has been described as power within. There has been a long-standing tradition of civil society activity, such as

[17] See for example McNeil and Mumvuma (2006).

Action Aid's REFLECT, based on Freirean principles that seek to enhance the power within." (Alsop, 2004: 22)

In comparing the critical literature on social development (Eyben, 2003; Eyben, 2010a; Cleaver, 2006) with the arguably more influential[18] literature on governance (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006), academic engagement with this 're-politicisation' remains incomplete. Indeed, John Gaventa perhaps one of the most high profile proponents of the 'voice' model, acknowledges that work on citizenship and political participation emerging from political science still has a lot to learn from social development (Gaventa, 2004: 28). He argues that in fact the two perspectives of the political and the social are increasingly being brought together under the concept of 'participatory citizenship' (2004: 29); a notion that de-emphasises the liberal normative conceptualisations of citizenship (i.e. legal rights and responsibilities bestowed by the state), and emphasises a more participative, active notion of citizenship. A model where a more direct connection between citizen and bureaucracy is formed (Gaventa, 2004: 28) over and above that provided by electoral ballot, or the invited spaces (Cornwall, 2002) defined by participatory development projects. Cornwall in fact traces a range of these 'new spaces' for participation, both "within and beyond the domains of 'state' and 'civil society' " (2002: 4).

In general however, whilst the academic discourse has made headway in theorising notions of participatory citizenship, one has to agree with Gaventa that "...the political participation literature has paid less attention to issues of local knowledge, participatory process, or direct and continuous forms of engagement by marginalised groups" (Gaventa, 2004: 29). Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) also note the superficiality of donor discourses on rights and power. This fragility of theory around process and equity is clearly reflected in the literature on 'voice', most starkly in the donor literature (O'Neil *et al.*, 2007: 41). 'Voice' as agency is conceptualised simplistically and individualistically; alternative models (eg. Long,

[18] Whilst difficult to prove empirically, an analysis of the donor literature, particularly the most recent DFID White Papers (DFID, 2009b; DFID, 2006b) appears to support this conclusion.

1992) of a complex web (or field) of power relations are ignored. Whilst institutional structures are engaged with under the rubric of accountability, the discourse often focuses on managerial failures (Le Grand, 2003) at the expense of a more sociologically informed analysis.

The literature indicates that the perspectives brought together under participatory citizenship still bear the hallmarks of disciplinary silos, the mainstream analysis remaining firmly located within the neo-institutional thinking of the late 1990s (Coelho and Favareto, 2008: 3; also cf. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; and see for example DFID, 2006b). Processes of social exclusion are simplistically characterised, the dynamics of participation, particularly the relational nature of the performance of development, are largely ignored and whilst rights and power feature in the discourse, the normative and neoliberal construction of the individual as citizen-consumer remains the dominant model (Ajzenstadt, 2009).

Whilst there is a clear trend in the academic discourse toward more sophisticated understandings of participation and citizenship (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010a), there is a literature which indicates that the popularity of the 'voice' model among the influential donor community is driven by a different imperative.

'Voice', participation and new institutionalism

Over the last decade, the influence of new-institutional perspectives on donor thinking (Cameron, 2004: 97; cf. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004) can be linked to the ascendance of the 'voice' concept. In a manner analogous to the increasing popularity of 'social capital' (Bebbington *et al.*, 2004; Spies-Butcher, 2006), the notion to some extent represents an attempt by economists to provide a more sophisticated approach to conceptualise the structural constraints imposed on individual economic actors (cf. Fine and Green, 2000). In this sense, the writing provides a stronger structural dimension to notions of 'rational choice' dominant in neoliberal economic theory (Ingram and Clay, 2000: 525).

The new institutionalist agenda, articulated by Joseph Stieglitz (2000), Julian LeGrand (2003) and others proved extremely influential on the thinking of actors

such as the World Bank. For development, this agenda forms the theoretical and ideological backdrop to the 1990s 'second-generation reforms' that:

> "built upon earlier neoliberal reforms by seeking to strengthen judicial systems, banking regulations, and capital markets, combat government corruption, make bureaucracies more efficient and responsive to client needs, and decentralize administrative, fiscal, and political power from central to sub-national levels of government" (Cameron, 2004: 97).

From the late 90's to the present, institutions, i.e. bureaucracies for service delivery, have come back in vogue, and citizen-consumers are, in theory, to take a leading role in their strengthening (Cornwall, 2000: 6).

Cornwall in particular stresses the way in which a new neoliberal orthodoxy co-opted emerging participatory models with their origins in grassroots development, noting that the 1970s slogan of self-reliance fast transformed into the 'do-it-yourself' ethos of the 1980s (Cornwall and Brock, 2004; Cornwall and Edwards, 2010a). She notes that the unprecedented power of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) refocused meanings around participation and poverty alleviation. Community participation focused only on 'intended beneficiaries' as co-producers of services. Ideas of ownership and control took on strictly bounded definitions that clearly remain in the voice and accountability discourse to date (Cornwall and Brock, 2004: 9).

It is interesting to note Cornwall's assertion that the failure of critics to address the inherent *structural deficiencies* of Structural Adjustment Programmes, proved to be a gift for the neoliberal agendas of the IFIs. The focus on improving *implementation* through 'adjustment with a human face' presented the IFIs with a means to credibly neutralise resistance to reforms under the rhetoric of participation; whilst, at the same time redefining the concept as a technical fix under the rubric of community participation and 'best practice' (Cornwall and Brock, 2004: 10). Indeed, one might critically analyse the various World Bank supported key texts around the 'Voices of the Poor' Study (Narayan and Chambers, 2000; Narayan, 2000) in this vein; lending an unquestionable moral authority and grassroots

credibility to an essentially neoliberal agenda (Alejandro Leal, 2007: 542; Bryceson, 2004: 622). Cornwall indeed goes on to criticise a more contemporary expression of this phenomenon in Participatory Poverty Assessments, using the term "ventriloquy of the poor" (Cornwall and Brock, 2004: 11; cf. Alejandro Leal, 2007)

Here we see the foundations for a simplistic conceptualisation of the relational nature of development processes (Eyben, 2010a), of the role of agency within these processes (Cleaver, 2007), and the imperative towards a weak theorisation of 'voice' as a bolt on tool to strengthen accountability and responsiveness (cf. Cornwall and Brock, 2004); the results being well articulated in the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2003). This thinking has subsequently gone on to inform a generation of development interventions with significant 'voice' components (O'Neil *et al.*, 2007). It seems likely that utility of many of these interventions would be restrained by the limited extent to which they are conceptually able to account for the complexities described above. In particular they fail to encompass advances in thinking around agency in development, emerging from interactionist and social constructionist perspectives since the 1970s (Cleaver, 1999; Cleaver, 2007; see for example O'Neil *et al.*, 2007).

Cleaver (2007) describes these institutionalist models as erroneously based on individualist assumptions of a collection of rational actors responding discursively to various incentives, rules and sanctions. In contrast, she argues that agency is "deeply relational, and constituted by routine practice as well as purposive action" (Cleaver, 2007: 224). The dominant institutionalist models give some acknowledgment to structured inequality in the ability of actors to leverage resources for agency (DFID, 2006b). However, they do so without acknowledging that the rules governing access to resources are themselves socially constructed (Giddens, 1987); produced and reproduced by relational, routine and purposive practice (Bennett, 2005). Cleaver presents the example of women who in many contexts may claim "rights to natural resources as legal and equal citizens but also through their subject positions as daughters, wives, mothers as members of a particular caste or ethnic group...[pointing out] that exercising their agency

through public institutions may not always be the proffered option" (Cleaver, 2007: 233).

The literature provides convincing evidence that the limited extent to which institutionalist models account for this complexity of lived experience would likely jeopardise the efficacy of 'voice' initiatives. The theory of change implicit in the design of many such interventions is very possibly flawed; based on false assumptions about the exercise of agency, and underestimates the drivers and impediments to the expression of agency experienced by different actors.

'Voice' and the tyranny thesis

Much of the 'post tyranny' literature on participation recognises that participatory spaces are 'imbued with power relations that may result in the conscious and unconscious self-muting of disadvantaged people' (Cleaver, 2007: 236). These notions of inequality inform the concern of giving 'voice to the voiceless' evident in many writings (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 15) and interventions focused on 'voice'. However, the dominant conceptualisation of structural barriers to agency remain individualised, determinist, linear and exogenous (Long, 2001: 10).

Whilst not depoliticised as such, 'voice' has been stripped of any concern for the transformation of underlying political and socio-economic processes of development (Williams, 2004; cf. Bebbington *et al.*, 2004). Indeed, whilst the literature around 'voice' has failed to engage with the body of theory around participation; an exploration reveals an agenda akin to approaches that have been heavily criticised under the 'New Tyranny' thesis (Cooke and Kothari, 2001); approaches that are fundamentally technocratic rather than transformative (Holland *et al.*, 2004).

The result of this technocratic focus is again a bounding of what is 'thinkable' and 'doable', a process which remains largely unacknowledged in the instrumentalist literature which frequently conflates the notion of 'voice' as a mechanism to increase efficiency, with its potential to be empowering (Cleaver, 1999: 598) and transformative. Thus there is a clear argument that this subversion of language

(Cornwall and Brock, 2004: 10) and practice (Cleaver, 1999: 599), represents one part of a wider process by which knowledge is produced (Rose, 1999). This argument parallels those outlined in my earlier discussion of governmentality in which more fundamental determinants of power are ignored and 'empowerment' is restricted to de-pollicised and individualised notions akin to the 'voice of the consumer' or client (Cornwall, 2000) with very different implicit theories of developmental change (Bebbington *et al.*, 2004).

The case study presented later offers an example of how 'voice' initiatives 'play out' in developing contexts. I explore both explicit theories of change, and those implicitly expressed in practice. In doing so I respond to Mosse's (2003) concern to explore "not only the way in which policy theory is implemented in practice, but rather... the manner in which development practices produce and reaffirm theory and models of development." (2003: 43). This approach offers the opportunity for an analysis firmly grounded in the reality of development practice; it is also well suited to the 'voice' model, which has been widely operationalised with limited explicit grounding in social theory.

New models of participation and 'voice'

I noted above that the discussion of 'voice' typically encompasses individual agency, but implicitly addresses power relations without explicitly challenging the terms on which this engagement takes place. How then do we explore the potential for more progressive or transformative conceptualisations of 'voice'? Again, I turn to the literature around participation to facilitate engagement with these debates in a more rigorous manner. The discussion of 'voice' is informed by emergent novel conceptualisations of participation in response to the 'Tyranny' critique (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004b).

In seeking to reinvent a transformative model of participation, Mohan and Hickey revisit a fundamental debate around models of development. They frame a theory of 'critical modernism' as a foundation to discuss participation; arguing for the acceptance of 'multiple modernities' (Arce and Long, 2000). Development is seen as

a dynamic process continually reinvented and re-embedded in locally situated practices, in contrast to the deterministic homogenising tendency of both modernisation and dependency theories. The implication is that a theory is created that embraces the postmodern acceptance of contending rationalities and multiple modernities (Beck and Grande, 2010), without rejecting development outright (Maiava, 2002) or entering in to a postmodern "anything goes relativism" (Mohan and Hickey, 2004).

This model of progressive development towards various locally specific modernities leads to the question of where concepts such as equity and participation fit in. Mohan writes "we locate our epistemology within a socialist political economy, which seeks social justice through a transformation away from capitalism as currently formulated" (Hickey and Mohan, 2005: 236). Thus they argue that modernity may be separated from 'capitalist rationality', and quoting Harvey, suggest that particular rationalities be contested (Harvey, 1993).

This perspective is particularly important for this thesis, in that it recognises three central ideas. Firstly, the importance of acknowledging local, diverse models of creative 'resistance' over what they describe as an assumed and reactionary rejection of either capitalism or modernism (Mohan and Hickey, 2004). Secondly, it acknowledges the heterogeneity of political opinion or aspiration that may exist in any one group or community. Thirdly, it puts genuine political, social and economic transformation at the heart of development theory.

This argument takes analysis of participation away from discussion of technocratic 'projectised' interventions, toward a conversation concerned with more fundamental political and social processes of development. We see Mohan, Hickey and Gaventa's ideas converging around new models of 'participatory citizenship'; the practice of which is framed as the primary means by which transformative forms of participation can be realised (Hickey and Mohan, 2004a: 65; Gaventa, 2006b).

Interpretive constructions of citizenship

Much of the writing on participation and to a lesser extent 'voice', fails to explicitly discuss the implications of a reliance on normative notions of citizenship. The citizen-state relationship is assumed to be static and essentially liberal in conceptualisation (McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006). However, the promotion of *various models* of citizenship is "woven through most approaches to participation to date" (Hickey and Mohan, 2004c: 9), from forms of communitarianism through liberal models of political participation to neoliberal individualised social obligation and philanthropy (cf. Derbyshire *et al.*, 2010). Making implicit notions of citizenship explicit is of central importance in assessing the utility and transformative potential of the 'voice' concept. Whilst the literature on participation has often failed to discuss political notions of citizenship (Holland *et al.*, 1998; Chambers, 1997), a new and interesting discourse on governance, participation and citizenship has emerged over the past decade (for example Bennett, 2006b; Hickey and Mohan, 2004a; Cornwall, 2000; Gaventa and Barrett, 2010).

In conceptualising citizenship, many authors have acknowledged the dominant normative and liberal definitions of the concept (Lister, 2005; Jones, 2006; Benedicto and Morán, 2007; Rosaldo, 1999), often defined within an ontology of political science. The extent to which these may be applied to an exploration that seeks to explore the relational construction of citizenship is debatable. Feminist criticism serves to illuminate the issue in a way relevant to this enquiry; that these narrow conceptualisations "effectively ignore the political activities and agency of women in grassroots neighbourhood and community-based groups, those most readily available to them and where they are most effective" (Miraftab, 2004: 2). It seems clear that many project-induced citizenship practices might be analysed in a similar vein. More recently Beck and Grande have described in detail the fallacy of using a Western individualised model of citizen to apply to social and geographical space with very different histories (Beck and Grande, 2010: 412).

There appears however, to be an increasing emphasis in the literature on what might be described as emic notions of citizenship. These constructions describe the notion as "practised rather than given" (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001: 33), referring to the diverse ways in which relationships with state and government power are locally constructed and performed (Jones, 2006). Drawing on these insights, the citizenship concept has the potential to bring together the divergent disciplines of social development and political science; and, arguably improve the theoretical integrity of notions that seek to explain individual and popular agency as it relates to development, and in particular, to 'voice'.

Lived citizenship

New models of citizenship have the ability to inform a more nuanced critique of 'voice', providing an analytical framework which can take account of the diversity of emic constructions of citizenship, and which is consistent with a more actor centred approach. Such an approach also avoids liberal notions of rights and participation that construct populations as merely consumers or co-producers of services (Cornwall, 2000).

Many writers have explored this territory. Mohan and Hickey note the potential for "relocating participation within citizenship analysis, situated in a broader range of socio-political practices, or expressions of agency through which people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities, thereby increasing their control over socio-economic resources" (Mohan and Hickey, 2004: 66). Stevenson reminds us that "Cultural understandings of citizenship are not only concerned with 'formal' processes, such as who is entitled to vote and the maintenance of an active civil society, but crucially with whose cultural practices are disrespected, marginalised, stereotyped and rendered invisible" (Stevenson, 2010: 276). Lister (2007) describes a notion of citizenship constructed "from below... from the standpoint of the excluded" (Lister, 2007: 50).

Jones (2007) offers a particularly relevant example for this thesis, taking an explicitly interpretive approach to citizenship, informed by ethnographic fieldwork

in northern Nigeria. In seeking to explore how the concept is grounded in the everyday realities of people's lives, she attempts an analysis that moves beyond the etic, normative assumptions that prevail in 'voice' and citizenship discourses. In what might be expressed as *lived citizenship,* Jones presents a 'performative' model of 'citizenship practice'. A model of "intersecting relationships between identity, belonging, institutional relations, rights and duties [which] when articulated altogether become 'citizenship'" (Jones, 2006: 16). Definitions of these 'citizenship-s' are then constructed empirically, based on the *implicit* logic how these 'citizenship moments' are articulated. For example:

> "Because I am Nigerian, a Christian, of Jaba ethnicity, because I have constitutionally or culturally defined rights, because I fulfil the duties required of members of this unit of belonging ... I have (by the logic of citizenship) a particularised set of consummate rights, duties, identities, belongings and institutional relations" (Jones, 2006: 19).

Such interpretive constructions of citizenship offer the potential for a more cohesive theorisation of the 'voice' concept which can take into account the complexity and diversity within communities, allow us to explore the gendered nature of 'civic participation', and provide a more grounded starting point for discussing agency and interface with institutions under the rubric of accountability.

Kafewo (2009) offers another such a perspective better located in the operational realities of social development interventions, and 'voice initiatives' in particular. He demonstrates clearly how "identities, interests, and belonging shape [a] sense of entitlement to different rights and privileges" (2009: 681). His research demonstrates how notions of citizenship can be conceptualised as complex constructions emanating from a combination of factors such as the historical evolution of the nation state, tribal, social and gender identity. We see that these fluid emic notions of citizenship allow a better understanding of the varying ability and propensity of individuals to exercise agency in relation to social or state institutions.

Emergent trends in citizenship research then underline the importance of moving beyond liberal definitions in order to understand the different ways in which relationships between peoples, the state, and other forms of power are constructed. Here citizenship is inherently political, acknowledging the diversity of ways in which the concept is constructed whilst maintaining an explicit overarching focus on power, authority and social justice.

The need to better understand these phenomena raises questions over the potential utility of emergent approaches such as rapid ethnography, to provide empirical data suited to understanding, and informing 'voice' interventions. For example, to understand how emic notions of citizenship may help us conceptualise agency where the 'right-way' to influence government is to pray (Jones, 2006), to defer to local leaders (Heymans and Pycroft, 2003). Or, where by virtue of ethnicity, gender or geography, citizenship confers almost no rights at all (Kafewo, 2009).

The 'voice' concept and the notion of rights

In seeking to use 'voice' and the allied notion of 'participatory citizenship' to explore agency and social transformation, the constituent notion of rights is clearly central. In common with the literature on citizenship, that on rights has also been charged with taking a liberal stance largely built on normative conceptualisations (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005; Miller *et al.*, 2005; Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). Part of the process of exploring emic notions of citizenship would therefore be to incorporate emic notions of rights. This conceptualisation defines rights as something that, in being interpreted and produced within communities or other groups of belonging, can also be 'claimed' without recourse to liberal legal definitions.

In a similar vein, Miller argues that the predominance of liberal, legalistic approaches to rights interventions has in fact lead to a 'crisis in rights methodologies' (Miller *et al.*, 2005). She notes that interventions typically use law as an entry point, failing to understand that "rights do not come in neat packages,

but rather are part of dynamic, sometimes messy, processes of resistance and change that work to engage and transform relations of power". (Miller *et al.*, 2005: 36). As Miller argues that liberal notions of rights convey entitlements based upon external agendas, Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2005) contend that there has been a broad failure to acknowledge the origins of rights in development. They argue that rights have historically been something 'fought for and won' dating back to colonial struggles for independence, rather than something perceived "in the classic liberal sense as something bestowed by a benevolent nation-state" (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005: 11).

We see that both development practitioners and populations may construct, experience and perform both citizenship and rights in very different ways. Proponents of the 'voice' model promote 'citizen voice' and social accountability explicitly as an exercise in securing rights (Agarwal *et al.*, 2009: 2; McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006: 19). Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) have however, described the many motivations of development actors in embracing a rights discourse (2005: 1424), and the many meanings given by them to the notion (2005: 1427). Izugbara and Undie (2008) similarly discuss the many ways in which local constructions of rights depart radically from the liberal definitions employed by donors. This raises the question of how these competing understandings and potentially conflicting interests will play out in the implementation of the 'voice' project. Indeed, the way in which institutional actors attempt to promote 'voice' at community level is a central focus of this thesis. A number of commentators have argued that an opening up of 'new democratic spaces' for participation offer fresh opportunities for public involvement in governance at a local level (Miller *et al.*, 2005; Gaventa, 2006a; Cornwall and Coelho, 2006).

New democratic spaces

The decentralisation agenda, and donor supported initiatives around accountability have made participation, governance and Social Accountability an increasingly significant part of the development landscape (DFID, 2006c; O'Neil *et al.*, 2007). Whilst some established development processes at a macro level have incorporated elements of 'social voice', for example the Participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Gould and Ojanen, 2003)[19], the majority of 'local' interventions remain as components of temporary donor driven projects (O'Neil *et al.*, 2007) with a significant impacts on their efficacy and sustainability (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 47). Whilst new, there are questions to be asked regarding the extent to which these represent any kind of 're-democratisation' of development as suggested by Cornwall and Coelho (2006).

Cleaver (2007) notes a fundamental incompatibility between project approaches to development and transformative participation; where time bound and specified objectives preclude engagement with underlying processes that shape access to power and resources. Furthermore, the *terms* on which participation takes place is often significantly defined by the mode of project delivery. Cornwall (2002) explores the increasing prominence of civil society organisations in participation, noting that they "in some contexts, took over social sector activities to such an extent that they not only supplanted the state, but became part of a reconfigured public sector whose accountability, as Tvedt (1998) notes, often left something to be desired" (Cornwall, 2002: 13; cf. Gould and Ojanen, 2003).

Cornwall (2004) uses the notion of 'invited spaces' to describe many of these initiatives, which she distinguishes from 'popular spaces' or 'claimed spaces' (cf. Miller *et al.*, 2005: 32). Cornwall and Miller both cite the need to improve the way in which participatory spaces are managed to avoid these new spaces replicating the "sorry state of mainstream efforts to promote participation in development"

[19] Gould and Ojanen's analysis of the process is both illuminating and extremely scathing of the processes' participatory credentials.

(Cornwall, 2004: 75). In describing the 'naive populism' of PRA "where the poor are assembled to represent their realities and negotiate action plans" (Cornwall, 2004: 79), Cornwall echoes criticisms by Price and Hawkins (2002) around the methodological weaknesses in many mainstream research methods that claim to be inclusive and participatory.

There is a considerable literature describing the way in which social institutions (Cleaver, 1999) and NGOs (Gould, 2004: 19) serve to render populations 'legible'; Cornwall and Brock (2004) take a similar position regarding 'voice', citing the World Bank's "Voices of the Poor" study (Narayan, 2000). Here legible discourses are captured, mediated and legitimised, arguably reflecting the interests of the powerful (cf. Gould, 2005). Here we may look again to the literature on governmentality which looks beyond discussions of a conspiratorial process to subvert the opinions of 'the poor', to broader processes of discipline (Rose and Miller, 2010).

The literature demonstrates the numerous motivations for supporting 'voice' (Gould, 2005), and that the ability to exercise it is mediated by diverse lived experiences of power, access and hierarchy (Cleaver, 2007) which clearly places limitations on the transformative capacity of the 'voice' concept in many contexts. Whilst new spaces have undoubtedly emerged (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010; O'Neil *et al.*, 2007); the critical literature indicates the likelihood that initiatives to support 'voice' may well support agency in ways that are localised, individualised and skewed by powerful mediators (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). The extent to which the new engagement of politics, citizenship and rights merge under the rubric of 'voice' to create spaces that are genuinely new, and furthermore transformative, poses another question central to this enquiry. These discussions can be developed further through their application to empirical study. I now turn to introducing a case study in Nepal through which I explore the use of this model in the operational setting of a large donor supported development programme.

Chapter 4 - Methods

Introduction

A central contention of this thesis is that notions of voice and accountability have emerged from specific disciplinary paradigms, often disconnected from the socially constructed, lived experiences of the proposed recipients, or those 'being developed'. The institutionalist discourse is often characterised by normative notions of government, state, bureaucracy and citizenship, and the relationships between them. Within this discourse, the 'rules' of these relationships are often applied rather uniformly to public sector service delivery in a variety of social and institutional contexts that have very different histories (Beck and Grande, 2010). The dominance of normative liberal economic perspectives (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 26) has resulted in a failure to account for the diverse and fluid ways in which actors understand and interact with the state bureaucracies and their agents.

What is less clear is the extent to which these issues have impacted upon the design, delivery and likely efficacy of development interventions. From the literature, I acknowledge the possibility that the prescribed 'voice and accountability' interventions are predicated upon flawed theories of change, perhaps unlikely to hold true given the social, cultural and institutional realities of many developing countries.

This thesis exploits multiple data sources to provide an empirical basis with which to critically analyse voice and accountability interventions. Taking a safe motherhood intervention in Nepal as a critical case study, I use data drawn from observation, interview and document review to better understand the 'voice' component of a broader intervention in detailed context. Additionally, I explore the potential for emergent ethnographic methods to improve future voice and accountability intervention, potentially facilitating a better understanding of the lived realities of the actors concerned.

Epistemology of the case study approach

Notions of voice and accountability inevitably form part of wider international and local development discourses within which the concepts are given meaning and operationalised by development professionals and proposed beneficiaries. The

impossibility of separating the study of these interventions from the context in which they take place makes case study methodology particularly appropriate; particularly in its ability to accommodate multiple data sources to provide an empirical basis for theory building and discursive enquiry. The case study method is particularly appropriate where boundaries between the phenomena under study and context are not clearly evident. The approach allows multiple methods and data sources to be triangulated to construct a detailed and contextualised understanding of the phenomena of interest; providing for both iterative exploration and, where used rigorously, a degree of generalisable explanation.

The sophistication of case study method has evolved significantly from the individualised case studies of the Chicago School in the 1930s (Yin, 2009). However, whilst the case study has a significant lineage within anthropology, the development of a cohesive and well theorised epistemology within health systems and social policy research is relatively recent (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009) and it is only in the last 20 years that case study practitioners working on issues of social policy have developed a relatively well established set of operational approaches and tools (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003; Yin, 2004). In this thesis I attempt an epistemology that draws on both the recent social policy research and the broader anthropological literature. This supports an enquiry which delivers the coherent external validity required for health systems research whilst capitalising on the depth and internal validity provided by institutional ethnography.

Data from multiple sources are used to construct a 'story' of the programme, accounting for the diversity of actors, perspectives and interests as they relate to the central research questions on voice and accountability. I focus particularly closely on discourses around the programme theory of change, a central project narrative that is socially produced and legitimised (Mosse, 2005b: 15) by various actors within the programme and target populations. In this sense the enquiry draws on the work of Mosse (2006a), Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995), with a range of data explored and triangulated to critically analyse multiple actor perspectives.

These data are provided principally from four sources. Firstly, analysis of a range of literature spanning the life of the programme, including 33 policy documents against which the design was framed, 29 reports detailing various aspects of programme implementation, and a series of 35 external evaluation and consultant reports providing multiple perspectives on project outputs. Secondly, interviews with key informants associated with the programme, both programme staff and external consultants conducted until the point of programme completion in mid-2010. Thirdly, I explore 'ethnographic monitoring data', drawn from research conducted for the programme between 2007 and 2009 by an independent process using third party NGOs and external consultants, including myself; this includes 180,000 words of Key Informant interview transcripts from 2007 (translated into English), almost 30 formal reports produced as outputs of the KIM process and a secondary analysis of an extensive synthesis produced in relation to KIM data set from 2008 (Manandhar, 2008). Finally, I use my exposure as an external consultant supporting this process of rapid ethnographic research; I therefore also draw on my own experiences and interactions with programme staff, including over 200 pages of field notes made between early 2006 and the end of 2009.

The enquiry requires an explicit treatment of ethics. I was particularly careful to ensure that the various organisations involved in the programme were aware of, and consented to my use of these data to support this research. Organisational consent was obtained for the inclusion and analysis of various programme documents. My role as a consultant *and* researcher was widely known by programme staff and informed oral consent was obtained from individuals who participated in key informant interviews. The numerous routine interactions I had with programme staff, government officials and beneficiaries were not primarily data collection exercises, although my own field notes based on these interactions inevitably inform the study. For these, references that risk identifying the individuals concerned have been avoided, unless they also provided oral consent as key informants. In order to preserve the anonymity of individuals responsible for drafting the various reports cited in this thesis, documents are referenced using a

randomly generated three letter code (eg. ERG), associated with a look-up table to which only I have access.

References to specific interviews are avoided, unless they provided explicit informed consent as key informants. Many of the organisations concerned are not mentioned by name, these organisations have not been anonymised; rather the names of the specific organisations involved were considered not relevant to the enquiry, and therefore omitted. Further details of the procedures used to ensure safe and ethical conduct of the research, particularly Key Informant Monitoring, are included in Annex 1

The Critical Case Study

A case study necessarily incorporates rich description in order to deal with the nuances and complexity of local conditions. The strength of the method lies in its ability to allow for the discursive analysis of phenomena such as agency, participation and accountability, and for the complex and 'messy' reality of development interventions. Whilst a key strength, this has also attracted criticism that in accounting for context, the generalisability or *external validity* of findings are consequently limited (Cutler, 2004: 368). The use of case study method therefore requires the articulation of an explicit epistemology, not only to counter potential criticism from generally positivist health systems research paradigms (Scambler, 2002: 8; Levers *et al.*, 2007); but also to ensure findings are indeed generalisable to an extent which gives them practical application. Consequently, this thesis seeks to answer Milne's call "to ask how interventions interact with the context so that transferable lessons can be learned" (Milne *et al.*, 2004: 339).

To facilitate this, a 'model' voice and accountability intervention in Nepal is selected as a 'critical case' (Yin, 2009: 41) for study. Flyvbjerg (2006: 230) describes the critical case as that has strategic importance in relation to a general problem, a situation where, if the findings are valid for this case, they are likely to be valid for

all (or many) similar cases. For reasons discussed later, the Nepal case study can be regarded as a critical case in relation to voice and accountability interventions.

The choice of a *single* case study is also worthy of brief discussion, in particular to address the utility of the critical case study in generalising to a large and complex universe of similar interventions. Gomm et. al. (2000) note that there are ultimately only two strategies for drawing conclusions from one or more cases to a larger universe; empirical generalisation and theoretical inference (Gomm *et al.*, 2000: 6). The process of drawing conclusions from case studies is clearly founded on the latter; the *theoretical integrity* of a proposition is critically examined against relevant empirical data. The number of times a contention is demonstrated empirically is far less relevant that the integrity of the logic explaining the relationship. The fallacy that the utility of case studies relies on empirical generalisation, i.e. sampling logic and pattern replication has led to widespread misunderstanding and arguably unfounded criticism of the method (Yin, 2003; Gomm *et al.*, 2000). It is important to note early on that the case study method rests on a very different epistemological foundation.

The process of theoretical inference often consists of proposing and subsequently demonstrating a plausible relationship between phenomena in a given context; a process where 'a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare empirical results from a case study' (Yin, 2009: 38). To a great extent, it is this approach that forms the basis for enquiry in this thesis: issues identified from a review of the literature and personal experience are subsequently explored against contextualised empirical data from a critical case study. However, a case study also allows for iterative enquiry which can incorporate emerging issues, provided a clear logic can be demonstrated through triangulation of empirical data.

Why the Nepal Support to Safe Motherhood Programme

The Support to Safe Motherhood Programme (SSMP) in Nepal represents a specific, well defined and bounded intervention utilising notions of voice and accountability as articulated in mainstream development discourse, and as such offers an ideal 'critical case' for study. In particular SSMP provides data relevant to the *full scope*

of enquiry, significantly improving the external validity of the findings (Eckstein 2000, cited in Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999: 148). Additionally, that SSMP adopted a quasi-project approach makes for a more straightforward case study than many similar initiatives which typically provide support only at a policy level, with little operational content.

SSMP attempted to simultaneously intervene in both the policy and structure of the health system, whilst also managing a significant social development intervention at 'local' level. The scope of the programme therefore offers a broader 'end to end' theory of developmental change for analysis compared to projects dealing with only one of these areas. A further advantage is the significant ethnographic monitoring component that took place during the programme. This provides a valuable empirical basis for the comparison of project defined theories of change with 'emic' notions of 'voice', accountability and citizenship. All these factors mean that this case provides the range and quality of data required to support a detailed enquiry into voice and accountability discourse in detailed context.

At its inception, the SSMP programme was one of the most significant of the British Department for International Development's (DFID) programmes in terms of voice and accountability (HMSO, 2010) (Options, 2004)[20]. Whilst the design of the programme slightly preceded the DFID White Paper 'Making Governance Work for the Poor' (DFID, 2006b), the programmatic approach captures the zeitgeist of both DFID policy, and that of the World Bank, enshrined in their 2004 World Development Report (published in 2003). As such, it was one of the few programmes on a significant scale that has completed delivery of a 'voice and accountability' intervention in health at the time of writing.

[20] DFID has been supporting safe motherhood activities in Nepal since 1997, initially through the Nepal Safe Motherhood Project (NSMP; 1997-2004) and currently through its support to the Nepalese Government's National Safe Motherhood Programme, the SSMP.

Defining the case

The case definition comprises the components of the Nepal Support to Safe Motherhood Programme that intended to improve access and service delivery through initiatives to strengthen 'voice' and, consequently, Social Accountability. In addition, in line with the growing body of work broadly considered 'global ethnography', (Gould, 2004: 3), the study encompasses the broader 'policy environment' and policymaking processes, which extend beyond the classical geographically defined 'field'.

In practice, the 'voice' component of SSMP was implemented by an International NGO as an almost discrete project. This Implementing Organisation (IO) was primarily tasked with improving equitable access to maternity services through the promotion of 'voice'. This component of the SSMP sought to "capture the voices of the community people as well as front-line health workers... to use the data to advocate safe motherhood as the right of all women and influence policy changes at all levels, as well as programme design and development" (IO, 2008). The IO used a range of participatory social development techniques in order to address physical and socio cultural barriers to access to Emergency Obstetric Care in Nepal. A detailed description of the programme is provided in the next chapter.

Positionality

I was personally involved in SSMP and the IO between 2006 and 2009 as a consultant in public health for, the lead implementing agency working in partnership with the Government of Nepal under contract from DFID. My role was principally to advise on the use and local adaptation of a 'rapid community monitoring approach', known as peer ethnography or Key Informant Monitoring (KIM). I facilitated a number of workshops for SSMP and IO staff between 2006 and 2008, and had substantial input into the design of the monitoring tool. Significant work also preceded my inputs (Price and Pokharel, 2005), and as the implementing agency the IO took final responsibility for the design and implementation of KIM, my role was largely advisory. Whilst I was significantly involved in the design of KIM, my involvement did not extend to analysis of the resulting data. Similarly, I

was not involved in the design or implementation of voice and accountability or social mobilisation interventions, or in drafting of any of the design, review or evaluation reports that form part of the data for this study. Whilst my role in the design and operational aspects of the voice and accountability aspects of the programme was limited, the influence of my position regarding the programme is far from irrelevant.

It is important to attend to issues of reflexivity and the inevitable influence of my own positionality as a consultant to the programme in question. As the methodology for this enquiry draws heavily on ethnographic approaches, I make no claims to any kind of positivist objectivity. I do however attempt an enquiry which builds theory with internal validity such that the findings may be applied to a wider universe of interventions; consequently, my own influence on the research process requires discussion.

The reflexivity of the enquiry clearly stems from numerous factors, including but going significantly beyond my personal involvement in the programme under study. The framing of research questions, my relationships with those involved, my previous professional experience and numerous other factors serve to influence the construction and selection of data deemed relevant. Whilst this debate has the potential to lead to a degree of postmodern circularity, the *a priori* inevitability of my subjective experience requires that it be explicitly incorporated into analysis and discussion. I note Davies' position, that "ethnographers must seek to use the insights of these postmodern perspectives – insights that encourage the incorporation of varying standpoints, exposure of the intellectual tyranny of meta-narratives and recognition of the authority that inheres the authorial voice– while at the same time rejecting the extreme pessimism of their epistemological critiques" (Davies, 2008: 5). Davies subsequently argues that with these pitfalls in mind, the role of the ethnographer is to mediate between different constructions of reality, including one's own (2008: 6).

A subsequent question is the extent to which my specific positionality as a consultant to the programme might influence by analysis in novel or important

ways: is my analysis and claim to understanding less credible as a result of my role? I argue that simplistic notions of 'bias' are less applicable to this kind of interpretive enquiry which rejects the idea of an objective position in relation to the exploration of a relationally constructed programme. Rather, I look to the notion of reflexivity, which has very different attributes with very different implications for the conduct of such an enquiry. With research of this type, the status of the researcher as an insider/outsider, national/non-national etc. all have different, unquantifiable and in many cases unknown impacts on 'the data', its selection as such, interpretation and analysis. This is a very different question to that of bias, which I interpret to mean any vested interest the researcher may have in manipulating (deliberately or subconsciously) data to achieve specific findings.

A more salient question is the impact of my professional relationship with the programme, and wider professional culture as a consultant on the construction of meaning within the case study. In reality this mirrors the ubiquitous concern of poststructural ethnography; the manner in which the scientist co-manages their connection with the subject under study, whilst maintaining a degree of separation from it (Davies, 2008: 10): the mediation of reality construction. In short, the social scientist is always positioned, reflexivity ever present and the argument that one position is *a priori* more or less credible than another, unconvincing. Whilst I contend that most of the challenges facing the practitioner/observer are in fact akin to universal methodological challenges of reflexive ethnography, there is a significant literature discussing this specific 'instrumental' positionality. Reference to this body of work on the anthropology of development assists in delineating and exploring the various methodological stances.

In an examination of the history of anthropology in development, Lewis suggests that development anthropologists can be characterized by three different (and sometimes inter-related) positions: as 'engaged activists', as 'reluctant participants', or as 'antagonistic observers' (2009: 36). Whilst many of the key authors in development ethnography provide little introspective analysis of their positionality, the work of Escobar and Ferguson (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995)

clearly fall into the latter category of 'antagonistic observer'. Mosse's controversial (2006a) Indian case study (2005a) is atypical in its comprehensive treatment of positionality and clearly associated with the 'engaged activist' category. My own position may be similarly (albeit loosely), aligned to the engaged activist and instrumentalist categories. However, in comparing the substantive work of these authors it becomes clear that their treatment of empirical data and analytical strategies have a far more profound impact on the apparent validity of their enquiry than the nature of their personal and professional engagement with the programme in question.

Reflexivity then, forms a *universal* challenge for research, with development ethnographers all contending more or less explicitly with these methodological issues. I argue that whilst the nature of engagement with the programme under study is far from irrelevant, it is the broader approach to issues of reflexivity that ultimately assures the 'research consumer' of validity. This requires explicit engagement with this issue throughout the process of capturing, creating and analysing data; avoiding the 'non-solution' of writing out the positioned role of the researcher. Only by this transparent, yet measured and realistic engagement with reflexivity can the reader make their own evaluation of the internal and external validity of the work.

To this end, I adopt a critical realist approach (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 2000): a position where issues of reflexivity are made explicit whilst allowing for a social science that may provide explanations of social reality despite its inevitable role it its production (Davies, 2008: 21; Bhaskar, 1989: 48). Reflexivity is embraced, "without allowing such awareness to blind us to the existence of a reality beyond ourselves which provides a legitimate basis for the production and critique of theoretical abstractions." (Davies, 2008: 21). Thus a world beyond that constructed by human consciousness is acknowledged, whilst at the same time accepting *the multi-dimensional* nature of reality, including the inevitability of the researcher's socially determined knowledge (Jakobsen, 2007: 10). Within development ethnography, this approach accounts for the nature of the researcher's

engagement with the programme whilst highlighting the primary importance of a sound analytical approach.[21]

Critical instrumentalism and deconstruction

Given my limited role in the voice and accountability components under investigation, the Nepal case study can only partially be described as 'instrumentalist' research. I do however clearly acknowledge that by dint of my long term involvement, professional relationships with programme staff and employment by the principal DFID contractor, my claim to 'impartial observer' status is weak. I argue however that the notion of the 'impartial observer' in the social science of development has limited validity (Olivier de Sardan, 2005) and, that the nature of the professional relationship with the programme is secondary to the integrity of the methodology. An analysis of recent literature (Lewis, 2009; Olivier de Sardan, 2005; Mosse and Lewis, 2006) clearly supports a proposition that the impact of my positionality in terms of professional engagement can best be 'managed' by the competent and transparent use of basic research methods, in particular theory built on the basis of triangulated empirical evidence, an approach which Olivier de Sardan contends is lacking in the most well-known examples of the instrumentalist genre (for example Escobar, 1995).[22]

[21] Issues of ideology and methodology often collide. Mosse and Lewis (2006) provide in important framework with which to explore this issue. Building on the work of Olivier de Sardan (2005), they present three central trends in the anthropology of development: as instrumental, populist and deconstructive. This model focuses on the theoretical approach of the scientist and their research, and defines positionality more substantively in terms of an epistemological and ideological construct. These inevitably reductionist typologies do not automatically provide a clear category into which this enquiry may be neatly located however, the model does present a framework against which to define a methodological stance.

[22] The work of Escobar and others has met with criticism, again principally from Olivier de Sardan who argues that a reliance on vague terms such as "discourse" and "narrative" has allowed empirical data to be used selectively to support a predetermined thesis. These criticisms may be addressed relatively straightforwardly by the transparent use of triangulated empirical data to develop and support propositions with a strong and well-articulated internal logic.

Whist the extent to which this enquiry can be described as instrumentalist, or 'critical instrumentalist' (Eyben, 2010a: 3) is open to debate, the research is explicitly 'deconstructionist'. In this respect I follow an established 'genre' of deconstructive development research (Eyben, 2010a; Eyben, 2010b; Escobar, 1995; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Li, 2006) focused on programme and actor discourse. Olivier de Sardan (2005) however, presents a scathing critique of recent practitioners of development discourse analysis engaged in the "deconstructionist business" (2005: 3). He argues that the literature is dominated by narratives juxtaposing the necessarily professionalised language and reductionist models of development policy against a complex reality 'on the ground'. This "endless stream of value judgements on development" is used to justify a position presenting a configuration of a monolithic development enterprise following a narrative condemning "Western hegemony bent on denying or destroying popular practices and knowledge" (2005: 5). This process of speciously demonstrating the simplistic nature of global policy against a complex 'local' reality is indeed a danger in this kind of enquiry, one which Olivier de Sardan accuses anthropologists such as Escobar and Ferguson of falling foul.

Olivier de Sardan also notes the ubiquity of a 'romantic populism' (for example Chambers, 1997) associated with this mode of *'ideological'* deconstruction. This is juxtaposed against a *'methodological'* deconstructionism which values the insights of "locally produced knowledge" (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 8), whilst also acknowledging the positionality and partiality of beneficiaries. He discusses how "the high and mighty attitudes of Western experts combined with their ignorance of the field is an endless source of frustration for Africa's civil servants. But it is also true that the latter are experts in the use of double speak, while manoeuvres, intrigues, power struggles, appropriations, rhetoric and manipulations are initiated from all sides" (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 6).

The recent literature (Mosse and Lewis, 2005; Mosse and Lewis, 2006; Olivier de Sardan, 2005) universally acknowledge that many anthropologists make a living from their position as masters of complexity. Mosse and Lewis imply a degree of

cynicism, arguing this often takes place in a context where they are "compelled to adopt the instrumental 'means ends' rationality that characterises these policy worlds, paying their way with knowledge products that are normative/prescriptive, predictive, and usable in enhancing development effectiveness" (Mosse and Lewis, 2006: 3). Whilst both Olivier de Sardan and Lewis & Mosse are somewhat guilty of using deliberately weak examples to make a case for these failings, this insight again raises the issue of positionality, and the equally partial, yet different positions of the social scientist as antagonistic observer (Lewis, 2009: 36) or instrumentalist / engaged activist. Again however I follow Lewis' call for the need to "travel beyond the dualist position that distinguishes between applied and non-applied categories", arguing that the "boundaries between development anthropologists and anthropologists of development no longer hold firm under criticism of their artificiality" (Lewis, 2009: 37). Lewis reaches a common conclusion with Olivier de Sardan that what is required is focus on discursive over populist approaches to the anthropology of development. I apply these insights to the context of this enquiry through requiring an overt treatment of positionality as part of a rigorous discursive approach which acknowledges and engages with my situated role throughout the discussion.

Implementing a critical deconstructive approach

The Nepal case study is built on an analytical approach drawing *inter alia* on Escobar's work on discourse analysis and institutional ethnography. Escobar discusses the need for discursive analysis of 'regimes of representation' (Escobar, 1995: 214), and mechanisms of Foucauldian governmentality whereby dominant development discourses are shaped in the interests of the powerful; including the way in which notions of 'the poor' and indeed 'developing countries' are constructed, and the solutions proffered by professionals are developed. I argue it is possible to present an analysis which presents these ideologically laden notions as hypotheses to be explored, without recourse to specious, populist oversimplification.

Escobar argues that discourse analysis, political economy, and institutional ethnography should be woven together in order to provide an adequate understanding of how development works. In this vein, with a focus on triangulated empirical evidence, I trace the dominant discourses emerging from different levels within the programme: from the conceptual architects in the donor 'community', to the intended beneficiaries in rural Nepal. In doing so I define 'discourse' as encompassing both rhetoric *and* practice, acknowledging Escobar's call to account for *institutional practices* which "contribute to producing and formalizing social relations, divisions of labour, and cultural forms" (Escobar, 1995: 105). In particular, I examine how the intended beneficiaries are socially constructed as part of this "bureaucratization of social action" (Escobar, 1995: 53) [23], and how this contrasts with the ways in which the beneficiaries themselves construct identities of power, agency and their relationship to the state.

In comparing dominant discourses at each level, I demonstrate the institutional production of social reality as it relates to voice and accountability, and the extent to which it constitutes a hegemonic technology of (neoliberal) governmentality. I attempt to answer Eyben's (2006: 1) call for researchers and policymakers to pay more attention to the 'relational' aspects of development work 'within and between society and state institutions at local, national and global levels. The fluid and relational discourse is produced during everyday interaction but 'captured' as empirical evidence for research through interview and documentary analysis.

Regarding the latter, there is a significant literature which identifies the reflexive nature of textual documents as mediated by, and as a mediator of, institutional discourse (eg.Weltman and Upchurch, 2010). Mosse (2005b) argues that early institutional anthropology lent too much weight to policy text as representative of discourse, ignoring the both divergent points of view both encoded within, and

[23] Escobar notes "This does not deter the agent or institution from presenting the results of the interaction as "facts" that is, as true discoveries of the real situation characterizing the client. The institution possesses schemata and structuring procedures, embedded in the institution's routine work practices that organize the actuality of a given situation and present it as fact, the way things are. (Escobar, 1995: 107)

those left unrepresented. They argue for 'a sociology of the document ... to dispel the discursive hold of the text' (Mosse and Lewis, 2005: 13). Similarly Escobar notes that "documentary practices are thus by no means innocuous. They are embedded in external social relations and deeply implicated in mechanisms of ruling"(Escobar, 1995: 108). Gould presents a similar analysis, again highlighting the relational nature of the 'performance' of aid. He argues that organisational narratives are variously presented in 'frontage' representations in project literature, and 'backstage renditions' presented in trusted or professional 'off the record' exchanges (2004: 14). In deconstructing these documents, a discourse analysis allows for a process of 're-contextualisation', a process of comparing the normative 'consensus narrative' (Cornwall and Brock, 2004: 13) with alternate realities expressed elsewhere in the data. The objective is not to reach some kind of realist consensus narrative, but rather to "make sense of the minute inconsistencies and variations among actor renditions" (Gould, 2004: 15).

At the level of the 'developee' (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 178), I draw on data from the emergent participatory ethnographic technique, peer ethnography. This presents a method with the potential to provide a counter perspective to that "charted out by the rational discourses of economists, politicians, and development experts... who seek to frame and bureaucratise social development" (Escobar, 1995: 53). Whilst peer ethnography was part of a programme sponsored monitoring approach (one in which I was intimately involved), the participatory and unstructured nature of the raw data provides an opportunity to develop more 'autonomous regime[s] of representation for the 'beneficiaries' of development interventions (Escobar, 1995: 17). The formal analysis of these data, conducted by the programme (in which I was not involved), are compared with both an external analysis of the data, (Manandhar, 2008) and my own.

Analysis

The primary analytical focus involved a comparison of the discourses on power, agency, voice and accountability across the Nepal case study with the explicit programme theory (or theories) of change. For example, the articulation of the

core programme theory by the various actors is compared with peer ethnographic data to assess the extent to which programme and 'beneficiary' have a common understanding of how 'voice' or individual and collective agency may achieve social change, the proposed or likely nature of that change, and the process by which this would be realised. Discourses around public services are analysed in the light of beneficiary notions of entitlement and programmatic constructions of accountability. Comparing data from the 'developers' and the 'developed' reveals the extent to which normative notions of voice and accountability hold true for the range of actors involved. The extent to which these findings may be generalised to other contexts is then discussed, and an assessment made of the utility of these emergent methods to other programmatic settings.

A range of programme documentation will inform the discourse analysis, focused on programme theories of change. Miller (1997) notes that "Ethnographies of institutional discourse take account of the ways in which interpretive and interactional activities are organised within institutional discourses, how oral and textual discourses are arrayed across settings, and the practical meanings that are produced within institutional discourses" (Miller, 1997: 155). This approach links well with the literature on programme theory driven evaluation, which provides a sound theoretical foundation for a critical exploration of programme theories of change (Pawson and Sridharan, 2009).

Programme theory driven evaluation

At their core, all development interventions are based on a theory of change; obviously, how and through what processes an intervention is expected to instigate change in a given setting. The foundation of the concept is well expressed by Pawson and Sridharan (2009) who argue that public heath interventions can be understood *as theories;* that "spark into life in the heads of policy architects, pass into the hands of practitioners and, hopefully, into the hearts and minds of programme subjects... like all hypotheses, these speculations turn out to be true or false (or more usually – a bit of both)" (Pawson and Sridharan, 2009: 1). *Programme theory driven evaluation* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) provides an

established approach for unpacking these programmatic theories of change and thus the explicit or implicit causal pathways that lie at the core of all program design.

The original literature on programme theory driven evaluation tends to present these theories as largely objective hypotheses that may be tested empirically as part of a programme evaluation (Pawson and Sridharan, 2009: 1; Donaldson, 2007: 9). Whilst this approach provides a good basis for an exploration of a common narrative running though the programme, it is located in a relatively positivistic epistemology and the literature largely underestimates the extent to which these narratives are constructed and contested. Whilst the practice of critically analysing the chain of cause and effect relationships that constitute a programme is sound; I argue that one must account for the range of discourses in order to understand a programme as a socially constructed entirety.

The manner in which the theory and practice of voice and accountability in development is framed, and the ways in which certain theories and practices gain currency form a central focus of this thesis. I look at the processes though which policy prescriptions are localised and given meaning, agendas agreed and expressed though action. In his 1995 work, Escobar presented an example of how Foucauldian notions of discourse and power may be applied to development interventions. In similar vein, I explore how models of voice and accountability are modified and translated from their origins in liberal economic thinking, and understood and operationalised by a diverse range of actors within the Nepal case.

I explore the notion that neoliberal constructs are legitimised socially through the development of a central project discourse, despite significant variations across the range of actors involved, across time and context. This forms the central focus of discourse analysis, explored particularly in relation to the various theories of change demonstrated across the data. Thus whilst Foucault did not adequately theorise the notion of global social policy and the dominance of non-state actors as forms of neoliberal authority, a similar model of 'non-state governmentality' may be constructed as I explore the subject positions and agendas of the actors

concerned. Neoliberal policy prescriptions and notions of citizenship, and rights, may be shown to be both globalised and contested as social policy plays out in local contexts where the state is relatively weak, and Cornwall's new spaces for citizenship (2004) are discussed, particularly the extent to which they may be co-opted by NGOs and other local power brokers as potential new agents of globalised hegemony[24].

The programme theory of change embodied in project documentation is compared with perspectives from a range of actors, using data from interview, observation and field notes. Triangulation of data sources is used not to identify single, dominant programme logic, but rather to provide verification of inferences resulting from descriptive accounts of diverse actor perspectives, ensuring a coherent research logic that stands up to critical analysis. Through this analysis I explore how the static, simplistic and reductionist voice - accountability model is reinvented through implementation. I explore how this static theory is expressed as a range of contested and relationally reproduced theories, contingent upon the subject positions of a range of actors. I explore the process by which these theories are translated 'down' from international technocratic discourse and given meaning locally; and, the reverse process by which narratives are constructed to report back 'up' to an international audience.

Observation, interview and documentary analysis

This research was conducted on the premise that "social settings are potentially shifting formations. Setting members discursively constitute and reconstitute social settings by using available interactional and interpretive resources to organise and pursue their practical interests" (Miller and Dingwall, 1997: 167). Within an organisation, individual actors' knowledge claims, identities, and subject positions are relationally and reflexively constructed (cf. Muhlhausler and Harre, 1990). In

[24] This echoes Burawoy's call for "a research agenda to replace abstract globalization with a grounded globalization that tries to understand not only the experience of globalization but also how that experience is produced in specific localities and how that productive process is a contested and thus a political accomplishment" (Burawoy 2001:158) cited in (Lapegna, 2009: 9).

collecting data from these human subjects, my intention was not to objectively ascertain the 'role' that specific individuals, or categories of individuals took in the construction of a common programme narrative; but, rather to understand the processes by which the programme, itself a fluid narrative, is constructed. I draw on data from interview, observation and documentary analysis to identify competing discourses; shifting models, stories and vocabularies which are contingent on context, on written or spoken medium and, on actor perspective. Interviews were conducted opportunistically both in Kathmandu and during field visits using an unstructured approach. Key informants' positions within the programme are not specified to retain anonymity; however, they were selected on the basis of their access to, and experience of different aspects of the programmatic intervention. Discussion focused on the process of programme development, the emergence of voice, issues of power and participation and the way outcomes were perceived and framed by different actors within the programme.

Material for documentary analysis was obtained from the central project database, some of which is in the public domain but much of which are comprised of internal policy reports, programme documents and consultant reports. All documents that related directly or indirectly to the 'voice' intervention, 'community' and 'demand side' components of the programme were included. Email communications inevitably and unavoidably informed my observation of programme conduct, but were not included in the documentary data set.

The analysis strategy brought these sources together as one data set, within a central database using Atlas Ti v6 by Scientific Software. Using an open coding approach (Cope, 2009; Lindlof, 1995), each document was read three times and emerging themes iteratively coded. The resulting output provides rich data from multiple sources for both core and emergent themes. Within this thematic output, each data type is ascribed equal value. Taken together, they provide clear evidence that discourse is more than talk, and that social realities cannot be defined from observation alone; they are produced as they are performed, simultaneously ways of understanding and being (Miller, 1994). Only by triangulating all sources of data;

comparing the ways in which, for example, the objectives and achievements of 'voice work' are described in different media and context, is one able to piece together a picture of the range of actor perspectives, and processes by which they form more or less dominant discourses that constitute the 'programme'.

Clearly at the 'local' level these discourses permeate beyond project staff and are constructed and renegotiated by the proposed beneficiaries themselves. It is, however, not only 'beneficiary' notions of voice and accountability that are under study, but the extent to which the interventionist praxis is compatible with the determinants and experiences of agency and power described by beneficiaries themselves. To critically analyse this compatibility and how these notions are reconstructed, I rely on ethnographic data provided by peer ethnography; a research method developed at the Centre for Development Studies at Swansea University (Price and Hawkins, 2002).

Peer ethnography and Key Informant Monitoring (KIM)

Peer ethnography is a rapid ethnographic approach in which often non literate members of the community are trained as 'peer researchers'. These researchers use their existing relationships of trust among their peers in conducting a series of in depth interviews with others in their social network. The resulting interview data is formed from the narratives that make up everyday discourse between peers. Price and Hawkins (2002) contend that these data, emerging from the gossip, hearsay and stories of normal social interaction provide an 'insider' or emic perspective on the phenomena under study. In this context, peer ethnography provides insights into the lived experiences of citizenship, state institutions and actors. These are then contrasted with the various discourses and theories of change with which development actors seek to promote voice and accountability.

The KIM approach is a variant on peer ethnography (Price and Hawkins, 2002); both are rapid ethnographic methods, approaches which utilise the pre-existing relationships of trust between peers to gather data within timeframes realistic for development interventions, avoiding the need for extensive trust and rapport building. In the programmatic context, these methods allow data collection from

numerous sites, arguably providing an 'insider perspective' where it may be impossible to place a researcher long term within a community, particularly pertinent to the armed conflict setting of rural Nepal at the time of study.

Peer ethnography was built on the premise of a need for an 'actor centred development research method that enables a more rigorous engagement with the realities of the everyday lives of poor and marginalised people' (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 152). The approach involves training often non-literate members of the target population as 'peer researchers' (in Nepal known as 'Key Informants') to conduct interviews with others in their social network. Within the context of Nepal, the term *peer* was not employed, since it has limited meaning in the highly stratified and hierarchical relationships that characterise significant parts of Nepali society (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 152). For this reason the approach was renamed KIM.

KIM was an attempt to develop a rapid, programmatically relevant monitoring tool which allows for an interpretive approach to social enquiry. It recognises that 'far from being a static set of norms and expectations, culture is continually constructed and negotiated in social interactions and everyday practice (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 152). Clearly it is not only culture that has these attributes, I discussed earlier how issues of 'voice' (Cleaver, 2007: 224), citizenship (Jones, 2006) and rights (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005) are deeply relational and socially constructed.

The KIM approach provides the necessary rich contextualised data, with a significant focus on stories and experiences. It provides the researcher with key insights into the different ways in which the range of actors interpret their lifeworlds with a particular focus on 'voice', agency, power and entitlement. As such, the data presents an insider view of the lived reality of service access, entitlement and agency which may be compared with perspectives embodied in the programmatic discourse.

Key Informant Monitoring Implementation

KIM comprises a series of conversational interviews conducted in private between a trained member of the community, a Key Informant (KI), and another community member in the same social network as the KI. The pre-existing relationship between the interviewer and respondent together with the relaxed structure of the interviews are designed to elicit responses more in line with the shared, emic understandings of social realities between members of a social group. Questions are posed in the 'third person', with a focus on story and gossip. This allows sensitive or controversial topics to be explored indirectly whilst the inclusion of gossip provides clear insights into the shared normative structure around the issue of interest (Hawkins *et al.*, 2009).

In Nepal, KIM was implemented as a central component of the IO programme monitoring and evaluation strategy, a strategy design which preceded my involvement with the programme, although I had a role in improving the implementation of the approach later in the programme. The IO operated in 8[25] out of the 75 administrative districts in Nepal. Within each of these 8 districts, 2 Village Development Committees (VDC)[26] were selected for KIM. Thus, a total of 16 VDCs were chosen for what was described as 'voice capturing' (IO, 2007). Geographical, ethnic, and population representation of the district were the bases for VDC selection which was managed using local knowledge to maximise diversity.

Whilst a formal sampling frame was not developed by the programme due to the absence of quantitative data on case and ethnicity, implementers made use of local intelligence to identify VDCs that were broadly representative in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Voice Capture Organisation staff were debriefed by me following the exercise, where they were able to provide credible descriptions of significant efforts ensure representativeness. As a primarily opportunistic data set,

[25] Districts were: Dandeldhura, Dailekh, Surkhet, Baglung, Parbat, Myagdi, Rupendhi, Nawalparasi, Chitawan, Morang.

[26] In Nepal, the VDC refers to the smallest unit of local governance, as such it is commonly used to refer to an administrative area, rather than to the committee itself.

there are inevitably limitations to my ability to control of such variables; these and other constraints are addressed later.

From each VDC, 7 female Key Informants (KIs) were selected with the help of an IO district supervisor, a village motivator and VDC staff. Selection of KIs took into account marital status, age, religion, ethnicity/caste, literacy level, and coverage of wards and communities in an attempt to make the 'voices' representative of the selected VDCs. Additionally, women with basic literacy skills, outgoing personality, ability to offer time for training and data collection, those who belonged to relevant ethnic or caste groups were given preference; all the KIs belonged to one of the four key social strata known to impact on 'voice' and access, specifically: mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, newly married and unmarried.

A four day residential training for IO district coordinators, staff members of the Voice Capture Organisation (VCOs)[27], and district supervisors was facilitated by two national KIM experts in 2007. The training focused on principles, concepts and objectives of KIM. From each VCO, six members (all women) of the 'debriefing team' were trained; these staff provided support to the often non-literate KIs by recording their data in written form at regular supervision sessions. For the KIs themselves, a training programme appropriate to the social and cultural norms of rural Nepal was developed. In order to remove women from the often constraining home environment, residential training was provided to all selected KIs.

The training started with the discussion of three main themes that had been identified as part of the programme monitoring and evaluation strategy. These were i) status of women ii) barriers to access to safe motherhood and new-born health care (SMNH) and iii) women's access to SMNH services and perceptions of quality of services. In a participatory manner, the KIs themselves developed and finalised sub-themes and prompts for the three main themes suitable to their own local realities and language; ensuring they were able to discuss SMNH issues confidently with their interviewees. The KIs were trained to select others in their

[27] Two Nepali NGOs were contracted to manage the implementation of KIM, HICODEF and SAC.

social network and conduct open ended semi-structured interviews in the third person[28]. The training methodology comprised of formal and informal lectures, group exercises, and simulation of interviews and a debriefing session. During the training period, each KI identified two interviewees from her own community, age, and ethnic group; and fixed a schedule for interviews and subsequent debriefing.

The KIs subsequently returned to their own communities and conducted interviews at a time of their respondents choosing. Some were interviewed in their home while others as they worked in the field. KIs were given a week to conduct their interviews, one theme at a time. They were asked to debrief back to their supervisor the day following their interview, to promote effective recall.

Each theme and 'sub-theme' represented a prompt for an open ended, relatively unstructured conversation; each interview ideally took the form of a relaxed conversation between friends and lasted between one and two hours.

Over a three week period, interviews on all the three themes and debriefing were completed. The majority of the KIs did not take any notes while interviewing their peers. However, some KIs wrote down some cases and points of the discussion after the peer interview to aid their memory during debriefing session. On average, each debriefing session was reported to have lasted for about 3 hours, during which the responses and stories provided by the respondents to the KIs were noted down by a supervisor.

These data, comprising the detailed debriefing notes which emphasised the 'capture' of stories, were typed and 50% of the interviews were selected randomly and translated into English. This allowed for a full analysis of the data by Nepali Social Scientists (Rai, 2009) with a secondary analysis conducted by an expatriate anthropologist (Manandhar, 2008). I conducted my own analysis on the 180,000 words of English translations, using an open coding approach supported by Atlas TI by Scientific Software. This thesis makes reference to both my analysis of the 'raw'

[28] In order to ensure confidentiality, all interviews were conducted in the format 'what do other people say about', with a strict rule ensuring no names were used.

data available in English, and to the analytical reports produced by the social scientists and the wider programme. As a consultant to the programme I provided some inputs into the analysis of Manandhar (2008) and Rai (2009), and insights drawn from these reports are acknowledged where appropriate.

Limitations

The use of an essentially opportunistic data set, the collection of which was less under my direct control than might have been the case in a more conventional study, lead to some specific limitations. Despite obtaining a very significant amount of data in terms of 180,000 words in KIM data, some 200 pages of field and interview notes together with a substantial database of documentary data; limited field exposure, limited control of the KIM data collection process and a large part of the data set originating in Nepali were clear constraints.

Language

Whilst programme documents and key informant interviews were in my mother tongue of English, the KIM data were transcribed from the Key Informant researchers in Nepali. There is a considerable literature on cross cultural interpretation in ethnographic research which informed my approach to data management and analysis (see Squires, 2009). A key concern was maintaining 'conceptual equivalence' in translated data (Gee, 2008).

The standard technique of 'back translation' was used in a modified form; the 50% of KIM transcripts that were translated into English were handled by bilingual social scientists with a good understanding of the social context from which the data originated. A sample of these transcripts were checked by Nepali social scientists with an equally good knowledge of the Nepali context. Thus translations were not only conceptually equivalent in terms of the linguistic context of paragraphs; the stories and sayings within the data were translated to convey meanings that may only have been apparent to those familiar with the deeper context in which they were spoken (Adamson and Donovan, 2002: 820). In many cases explanatory notes

were appended to the translations by the social scientists contracted to process data for my benefit.

Whilst back translation of for example, structured interviews, provides a functional check that a concept is appropriately conveyed (avoiding the flaws often found in the 'direct' equivalence of literal translation) it does not account for context. Rich ethnographic data, and particularly the KIM method relies heavily on stories, anecdotes and sayings; data that is inherently rich in context and meaning beyond the specific 'research question' under study (Hawkins *et al.*, 2009; Price and Hawkins, 2002).

Access and immersion

The limited access to the 'ethnographic field' was constraining. As a consultant I was limited to only five visits of approximately 10 days each over 4 years. Interviews, documentary collection and observation were undertaken concurrently with a busy professional schedule of workshop facilitation, training and meetings.

In discussing methodological considerations for institutional ethnography, Muhlhausler and Harre call for 'deep immersion' in institutional setting to facilitate analysis of social encounters, reality claims and discourse (1990: 159). My own prior experience similarly echoes Scrimshaw and Hurtado's position that qualitative data analysis is best conducted as a reflexive process of on-going engagement with the data, subjects and local context, rather than from data transcripts analysed thousands of miles away (Scrimshaw and Hurtado, 1987). Direct exposure allows for theory to be iteratively constructed, tested and discussed with members of the 'target' population; a central tenet of peer ethnography as it was originally conceived (Price and Hawkins, 2003). In this case the sheer scale of the KIM operation prevented this level of field engagement. I do however contend that what was lost in first hand insight was gained in terms of the substantial size and scope of the KIM dataset, which is to my knowledge unique in the Nepali context.

Irrespective of these concerns, additional time in 'the field' both for KIM and more general observation would have been difficult; this not only for logistical reasons,

but because my 'access rights' were largely contingent on my professional engagement with the programme to fulfil my ascribed role as 'technical assistance'. This is particularly true for the observational component. In my judgement there was little appetite in an often hectic programme office for *'non-participant* observation'. Additionally, with *participant* observation such a central component to the data collection strategy, I contend that it was only through *active* engagement that my experience, observations and resulting field notes retain value as data. Lastly, I think it likely that my staggered engagement with the programme was in fact preferable to Muhlhausler and Harre's (1990) long term 'total immersion'. Whilst impossible to demonstrate, and without wishing to make specious claims of 'objectivity', there is a significant literature that suggests the value provided by periods of separation and distance in allowing important processes of analysis and reflection (see for example Emerson *et al.*, 1995: 18; Halstead *et al.*, 2008: 17; Haviland and Haviland, 2011: 345).

Data veracity and 'social facts'

A frequently discussed potential limitation in working with data obtained from Key Informant interview, and more specifically KIM, is the veracity and verifiability of informant accounts. This limitation is occasionally expressed in relation to an inability to demonstrate that the data reflect 'objective' or 'true' accounts (Hemmings, 2008). I argue that this criticism if not specious, makes false assumptions about the epistemological basis for such methods. Here it is useful to refer back to the work of Price and Hawkins (2002), who addressed this issue during the initial development of peer ethnographic method from which KIM originates. They note "The aim of the interviews is not to collect demographic or social 'facts' through accounts of individual experience, but to elicit the meanings that actors attribute to the social behaviour of their peers" (Price and Hawkins, 2002: 1329). This more 'actor centred' epistemology has a firm grounding in social theory (see for example Hammel, 1990). It represents a standpoint that makes no claims to a positivist process of seeking and defining overarching 'social truths' or 'facts'; rather, the focus is on the broader discourses that are revealed by comparing the ways in which a range of actors within social networks choose to

construct, express and account for different aspects of their social worlds (cf. Price and Hawkins, 2003).

There are however issues of quality that have the potential to limit the credibility of the data. Firstly, the appropriate selection of Key Informants (see Price and Pokharel, 2005) and secondly, the accurate recall and reporting of data. Whilst I took a role in training the research staff to undertake KIM, the VCOs tasked with implementing the process were to a large extent left to their own devices, providing regular but largely unverified reports back to Kathmandu. Those managing the raw data reported significant variations in data quality, with some Key Informants failing to interview the required number of peers, and others reporting data with limited detail or in the 'first person'. Representations to VCOs were made by a number of staff members, myself included, with a positive impact on data quality. I also met with all VCO managers to reaffirm our requirements for high quality data, and the need for local insights on socioeconomic stratification and geographical distribution of different groups, to ensure representative KI selection. Ultimately however, with limited detail in written progress reports, I was forced to rely on the quality of training, professionalism of the staff concerned and their verbal assurances that the appropriate protocols had been followed. My use of comparison and triangulation within the extremely large data set, and comparison of findings against other ethnographic work in Nepal (for example Bennett, 1983) do however significantly increase the reliability and external credibility of the analysis.

Generalisability, applied research and expanding the 'thinkable'

Even with a substantial and high quality data set, there are clear limitations in 'extrapolating' findings that are primarily based on the Nepali experience, to a wider universe of development practice. Whilst I make a clear case for the selection of a single case study approach at the start of this chapter, I also acknowledge that the opportunistic nature of the data set precluded the inclusion of further cases. Other voice – accountability focused interventions in which I have personally been involved, for example a large DFID health sector programme in Nigeria, would have

provided additional empirical evidence and likely resulted in stronger research findings.

This research was however not focused on proving an existing hypothesis regarding voice – accountability; rather just as I later argue that powerful proponents of the model "exercise legitimate and calculated power" by framing knowledge "rendering the world thinkable" (Rose and Miller, 2010: 280), so empirical research has the potential to provide counter narratives to expand the range of the 'thinkable'. This research deliberately eschews an operational or applied focus and avoids making 'evidence based' recommendations. Instead it represents, in the context of research on emergent social technologies, in an early attempt at theory building. In this sense, whilst the Nepali context is of course unique, it also serves well as a *critical case*; it provides a platform to demonstrate empirically that the 'products' voice-accountability discourse are far more closely aligned to the specifics of the discourse, than to the specifics of the context. Moreover, the unpacking of the processes by which these 'products' are realised, provides a framework to critically explore similar contexts. In this sense the thesis is able to make a specific and novel, if imperfect, contribution to scholarship of neoliberal social technology.

Chapter 5 – The Support to Safe Motherhood Programme

The context

Nepal is the second poorest country in South Asia after Afghanistan (IMF, 2010). At the inception of the Support to Safe Motherhood Programme (SSMP) in 2005 it had a population of 23 million and an annual per capita GDP of less than $300 (ADB, 2006: 2). Eighty per cent of the population live in rural areas, many of which are extremely remote. The population suffered, and still suffer from a high burden of maternal mortality, estimated at around 539 per 100,000 live births in 2005 (Pradhan *et al.*, 2009: 28)[29].

The country is characterised by a diverse, complex and entrenched systems of social stratification, heavily influenced by the Hindu caste system (Bennett, 1983; Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009). The hierarchical nature of Nepali society, combined with iniquitous intra-household and intra-village power inequalities render notions of 'community' simplistic and inadequate (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 154). Despite widespread variation, the social structure tends to significantly constrain both social and geographical mobility, particularly for women (Price and Hawkins, 2002: 162; Bennett, 1983). These same processes severely constrain available livelihood strategies, control of social and material resources, decision-making power and access to public services.

The pervasive inequality, poverty and social tension have resulted in chronic instability and conflict (Pandey, 2010). A long-running Maoist insurgency in the North, ethnic rebellion in the southern 'Terai' lowlands, and powerful 'people's movements' demanding political change have served to add additional complexity to development in the country. The result is that over the five years under study, development interventions were conducted in a complex and difficult conflict setting, often constraining options for implementation (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 157). Nevertheless overseas development assistance over the period 2005-2010

[29] The exact Maternal Mortality Ratio has been subject to a degree of controversy with WHO, UNICEF and the Government of Nepal offering conflicting figures. There is a general consensus that the figure in the early 2000s stood at between 500 and 800 declining to approximately 229 towards 2010 (Pradhan *et al.*, 2009).

grew consistently[30] from 347 Million USD in 2005, to over 500 Million USD in 2010[31].

DFID Nepal

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the largest OECD bilateral donor in Nepal (DFID, 2009a; DFID, 2011), and was, at the inception of The Support to Safe Motherhood Programme joint third largest [31]. DFID aid to Nepal has grown steadily over the past decade, from 33 Million USD in 2001, through 66 Million in 2005, to 135 Million in 2010[31]. Despite a growing financial contribution, DFID's support over the period under study was significantly affected by domestic political turmoil, and financial pressures resulting from the 2004 Asian Tsunami (Chapman *et al.*, 2007: 7). The poor security situation, shifting bilateral relationships and an unpredictable fiscal situation lead to a fluid environment where changing priorities of DFID had a significant degree of influence over its supported programmes (Acharya *et al.*, 2007).

DFID provides direct support and oversight of country programmes from the Country Office in Kathmandu (DFID, 2005). Whilst the DFID Health and Social Development Advisors do not intervene in the day-to-day running of country programmes, as one Key informant put it "they are active in steering the programme around obstacles", principally through responses to periodic reviews and, via direct contact with the management consortia, visiting consultants and ad-hoc engagement with programme staff (cf. Bovill, 2005). Whilst DFID is increasingly moving toward a model of Sector Wide support, and budget support (DFID, 2010); their bilateral programme in Nepal has been primarily focused on a range of programme approaches to support government systems strengthening in various

[30] The data cover flows from all bilateral and multilateral donors, including concessionary loans.

[31] Official Development Assistance Disbursements 2A, OECD-Stat., http://stats.oecd.org accessed 19/4/09. See also Chapman (2007).

sectors (DFID, 2003). In health, the largest such programme to date[32] was the Support to Safe Motherhood Programme (HMSO, 2010).

The Support to Safe Motherhood Programme

The Support to Safe Motherhood Programme (SSMP) 2004-2009 was conceived as a subsector initiative with a remit to support the Ministry of Health and Population in implementing the National Safe Motherhood and New-born Health Long Term Plan 2002-2017 (Options, 2004: 23). The programme was designed and delivered by a consortium of companies, NGOs and the Government of Nepal in response to a call for proposals by DFID in 2004 (Options, 2004).

The programme supported a range of activities from system strengthening to facility renovation and supporting access. Formally contained within the Ministry of Health and Population, SSMP delivered a mixture of technical assistance and material assistance to the health sector; providing support to service delivery, behaviour change communication and social mobilisation.

SSMP and the 'supply side'

The programme was to a significant extent focused on the supply side, that is initiatives to support an enabling environment for service delivery, and service delivery itself (Options, 2004). SSMP was a key advocate for the Maternity Incentive Scheme (Ensor *et al.*, 2009: 8), later known as the Aama Programme which provides free care for safe delivery, and financial incentives to both women and midwives (Ensor *et al.*, 2009). The scheme is recognised as a ground-breaking initiative to improve access to skilled attendance at birth (Powell-Jackson *et al.*, 2008). The programme also took a leading role in strengthening Nepal's Health Management Information System, instigating reforms to make the system more sensitive to issues of social inclusion (SSMP, 2010).

Also on the 'supply side', SSMP worked to support Government in addressing an acute shortage of Skilled Birth Attendants, principally through policy reform

[32] The larger "Nepal's National Health Sector Programme Phase 2" programme is current in only the inception phase at the time of writing (2/1/2011).

allowing local contracting, and improving training capacity (Options, 2010). The programme took a direct role in the construction, upgrading and maintenance of Emergency Obstetric Care centres, and birthing centres. Improved logistics and procurement procedures introduced by SSMP have also had a considerable impact on Government service delivery in Nepal (HMSO, 2010). SSMP undertook a significant amount of policy advocacy, and supported a research range of research projects (eg. Pradhan *et al.*, 2009) which have had a considerable impact on national policy around safe motherhood in Nepal (Ensor *et al.*, 2009).

SSMP and the 'demand side'

The design of SSMP incorporated a construction of 'safe motherhood' that highlighted the many and complex social determinants of access to appropriate care; a significant shift from the medicalised supply side models that dominated the field at the time (Johanson *et al.*, 2002). It represented a new and explicit acknowledgment of the disproportionate burden of maternal mortality, morbidity and neonatal death endured by poor and socially excluded women, and the socially mediated pathways that determine this inequity (Options, 2004). The programme's formal objective was to support the National Safe Motherhood Plan 2002-2017 (GoN, 2002a) which aims to "empower individuals, groups and networks to adopt practices leading to sustained increase and equitable access to safe motherhood and maternal and neonatal health services" (SSMP, 2007: 2). The National Safe Motherhood Plan itself represents a considerable shift in thinking from previous interventions of this type in Nepal (Suwal, 2008: 2), identifying gender discrimination, social exclusion, poverty and limited respect for human rights as key determinants of service demand, access and utilisation (Options, 2004).

Interestingly in early documents there is little specific mention of 'voice'[33], accountability or governance. Despite acknowledgement of a complex socio-cultural context, the early 'stakeholder analysis' offered only 'clients and potential

[33] The word 'voice' appears twice in the Project Memorandum, but as references bearing little relation to the meaning defined in the 2004 World Bank Development report or subsequent DFID White Papers.

clients ... including the poorest and excluded' as the 'key stakeholder group' [PMR 2004]. This documentation focuses on access, promoting 'social mobilisation' as a strategy to support women in 'overcoming' social barriers to utilisation. 'Social Mobilisation' is an amorphous term, but one described in programme documentation as an approach where social interventions are tailored to be appropriate to 'local culture', using coalitions of NGOs [PMR 2004]. These organisations were deemed appropriate by way of their existing knowledge and rapport with local populations [PMR 2004].

The initial programme documents, emerging in 2003 and 2004[34] indicate that SSMP, at the request of DFID was to have a significant NGO led community mobilisation component which would potentially seek to intervene on the social determinants of maternal mortality, most importantly, access to services [PMR 2004].

Improving access

A concern to improve access (Options, 2004: 5), together with a belief that many of the determinants of access related more to the 'demand side' than simply the number and location of functioning facilities in operation (Options, 2004: 5), indicated the need for a specific and separate area of programming. This resulted in the decision to appoint a separate international NGO as an 'Implementing Organisation' (IO), to support the demand side 'community level' work of SSMP [FDE 2005].

This was at the request of DFID, in response to recognition that previous interventions devoted inadequate attention to issues of exclusion, access and community mobilisation [NMS 2004]. The IO had fully delegated responsibility for its operations, with its own results framework, offices and staff. The formal 'purpose' of the demand side programme was "To empower individuals, groups and networks to adopt practices leading to increased and equitable access to safe motherhood and new-born health services particularly for poor and socially

[34] The DFID Terms of Reference, Programme Memorandum and Technical Proposal.

excluded" [EIP 2006]. This was done primarily via 'social mobilisation', described as activities that focused on the establishment of women's groups, emergency transport and birth preparedness schemes and communications [EPO 2007].

In designing this sub-programme, the architects[35] argued that the desirability of a significant level of institutional technical capacity associated with an International NGOs should be balanced with the perceived practical benefits of supporting small Community Based Organisations (CBOs) [FDE 2005]. These CBOs were preferred for their superior local access, local understanding, sustainability and established relationships [FDE 2005]; factors particularly important in a conflict setting. Consequently, a high profile International Non-Governmental Organisation was contracted to set up and manage the Implementing Organisation (IO). The IO deployed one 'Adviser' to each of the implementation districts (see map Figure 5); in turn the Advisers contracted and supported a number of local implementing CBOs who were recruited in each local area [FDE 2005][TPP 2005].

[35] There was no single architect of the IO programme. The call for proposals and Terms of Reference were designed by SSMP staff with inputs from the management Consortium and external consultants. Contemporaneous documents also indicate inputs from DFID [NMS 2004 / JTB 2004 / TSR 2004]. Furthermore the IO technical proposal contributed considerably to the final design, which also evolved considerably over the period of implementation [DTT 2008].

Figure 5: Map of Demand side IO Implementation Districts [36]

The IO implemented in 10 of Nepal's 75 districts[37]. Within each district, roughly one quarter of the Village Development Committees (VDCs) areas, the basic unit of administrative delineation in Nepal,[38] were selected for targeted interventions of "social mobilisation and empowerment, behaviour change communication, voice for action and advocacy" [FDE 2005]. The intervention was implemented in each district over periods of between two and three years. These operations were subcontracted by the IO to a network of approximately twenty six CBOs working in seven municipalities and 120 VDCs (see Figure 6). In two of these districts only mass

[36] Reproduced with kind permission of UNHCR . Available www.unhcr.org/3c2357144.html Access 3/3/2009

[37] Districts were: Dandeldhura, Dailekh, Surkhet, Baglung, Parbat, Myagdi, Rupendhi, Nawalparasi, Chitawan, Morang.

[38] The smallest administrative unit in Nepal, with an average population of 5000, but wide variation (Measure DHS, 2006).

media behaviour-change interventions we conducted due to limited funds[39] [OPA 2007]. In the remaining eight districts approximately 216 staff worked to support various interventions to promote demand, improve access and service quality. The central IO contractor provided a level of capacity building and on-going technical support to these CBOs. The IO also brought some ideological and technical influence to bare on programmatic implementation, principally around notions of 'rights based approaches' which gained considerable currency as part of the local discourse of social mobilisation [DTR 2008].

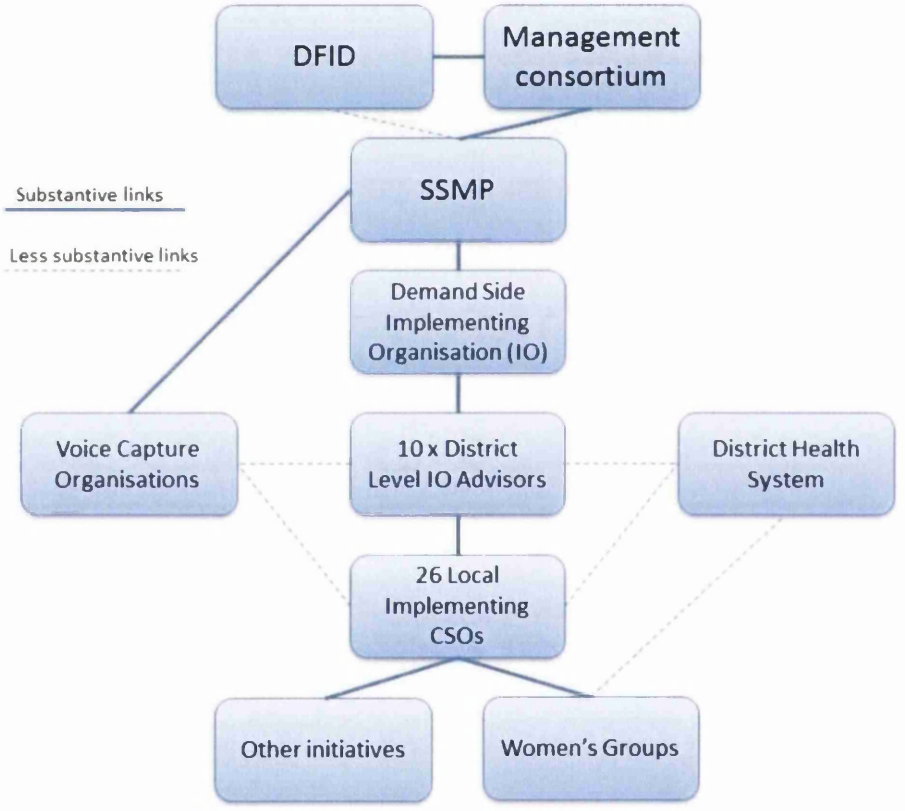

Figure 6: Demand side IO - Organisational structure (simplified)[40]

[39] Surkhet and Baglung districts implemented communications initiatives only

[40] For further details on the programme, see http://www.safemotherhood.org.np/

The demand side programme

In order to target interventions, Village Development Committee (VDC) areas were selected according to the proportion of the population originating from 'poor and excluded' groups, or 'P&E'. In each VDC following the training of local implementing CBOs, a social mapping exercise was conducted to identify poor and excluded groups [SIS 2007]. A process of VDC orientation was then initiated, 'sensitising' officials, teachers, social leaders and politicians to the range of barriers to access for maternity services. Women's groups were formed, where possible under 'P&E leadership' [EIP 2006]. At district and 'community level', activities managed by the IO via the CBOs were separated into three distinct work streams [FDE 2005] see Figure 7.

Demand Side Implementation Strategies

1) Community targeted approach: Working in targeted communities through groups using social mobilization strategies that focus on behaviour change communications for improved maternal and neonatal health and which build up local resources to allow women to reach health services quickly. Suggested activities include the formation of VDC safe motherhood and neonatal health groups, running various orientation, interaction and "public entertainment" programmes such as street dramas and puppet shows and promoting emergency fund and local transport schemes.

2) District coverage approach: Working primarily with mass media communications techniques (e.g. radio programmes and printed materials) and by integrating safe motherhood and neonatal health messages into programmes enjoying greater community outreach e.g. non-formal education programmes through the district education office and community mobilization efforts of forest user groups under the department of forestry.

Group orientation and facilitation	**Non-formal education initiatives**
Formation of mothers groups and blood donor groups	Promotion of emergency funds
Guided Interactions between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law	Creation of transport schemes
Radio programming	Promotion of the Birth Preparedness Package (BPP)
Printed materials: comics, flip charts, posters, newsletters etc	Cinema slide shows
Mobilising local drama groups and puppet theatres	Assessing community voice through key informant monitoring

3) Voice Capture

Figure 7: IO Implementation Strategies [FDE 2005]

The first was focused on a 'community targeted approach' to behaviour change and 'mobilisation'; meetings and 'women's groups' where issues were discussed and action points agreed. The second delivered Behaviour Change Communication (BCC), largely using a mass media approach supported from directly from SSMP head office in Kathmandu. The former was the most significant part of the

intervention in terms of scale, one wholly implemented by local mobilisation CBOs, reporting to district level IO advisors, and ultimately IO headquarters in Kathmandu. The third was 'voice capture', subcontracted separately by SSMP. It is important to note that whilst 'voice' was specifically used by name under the 'voice capture' work stream, the entirety of the IO programme was functionally a voice and accountability initiative [FDE 2005, DTR 2008, TPP 2005]. A detailed list of key activities undertaken by the CBOs at VDC level is presented in Figure 8.

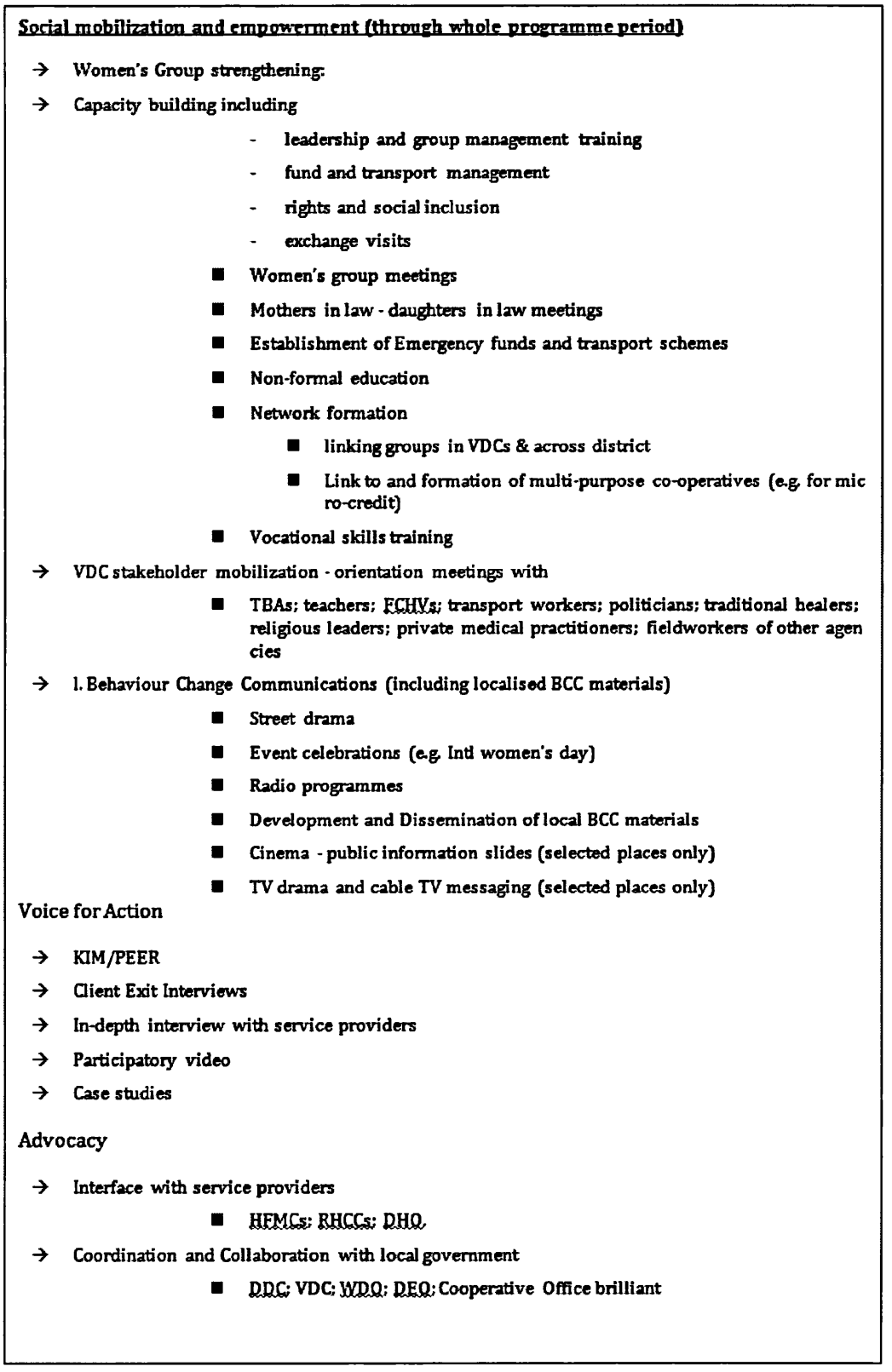

Figure 8: Community Mobilisation under the IO programme. Source [AKP 2006]

'Voice capture'

In addition to the contracting of a main demand side IO which subcontracted to local CBOs for local implementation; SSMP also contracted two small Civil Society Organisation to manage the 'voice capture process'. Through this mechanism the 'voice' of disadvantaged groups was to be 'heard directly rather than through others' [FDE 2005]. These two 'Voice Capture Organisations' (VCOs) were to use a variety of methods but principally Key Informant Monitoring, to elicit 'voice data' to be used for advocacy and planning (Price and Pokharel, 2005). The VCOs were asked to 'capture' and 'disseminate', 'community voice', 'user voice' and 'provider voice' [EPO 2007]. They were to 'promote' this 'voice' to government partners at district level by undertaking advocacy activities, and at national level to encourage the 'monitoring' of 'voice' by 'national advocacy organisations' [EPO 2007]. In addition, they were to use these data to support the independent monitoring of the IO intervention. An overview of the key stages, developed by the programme toward the end of intervention (and perhaps presenting a 'best case' scenario [MVR 2008]) is provided in Figure 9. An early document describes the process:

> **"Voice of right holders (citizens) and service providers captured and used to influence policy and program development.**
> The social inclusion and 'voice' promotion function focuses on the provision of support for capturing of voice and disseminating at different levels so that management functions at village, district and national level formal and informal organizations can be improved. In the process, [The IO] has developed TOR, identified two voices capturing organizations (VCOs) which are independent region based NGOs, developed guideline for voice monitoring, and provided support in building capacity of VCOs and key informants to articulate their views. [The IO] has conducted first round of voice monitoring using appropriate tools (eg. KIM, client exit interview, in depth interview with service providers, case studies, social audit etc.) and currently is in the process of data analysis and documentation for both user and provider. The data from voice capturing will further be used at different levels for programming and policy reform." [TPP 2005]

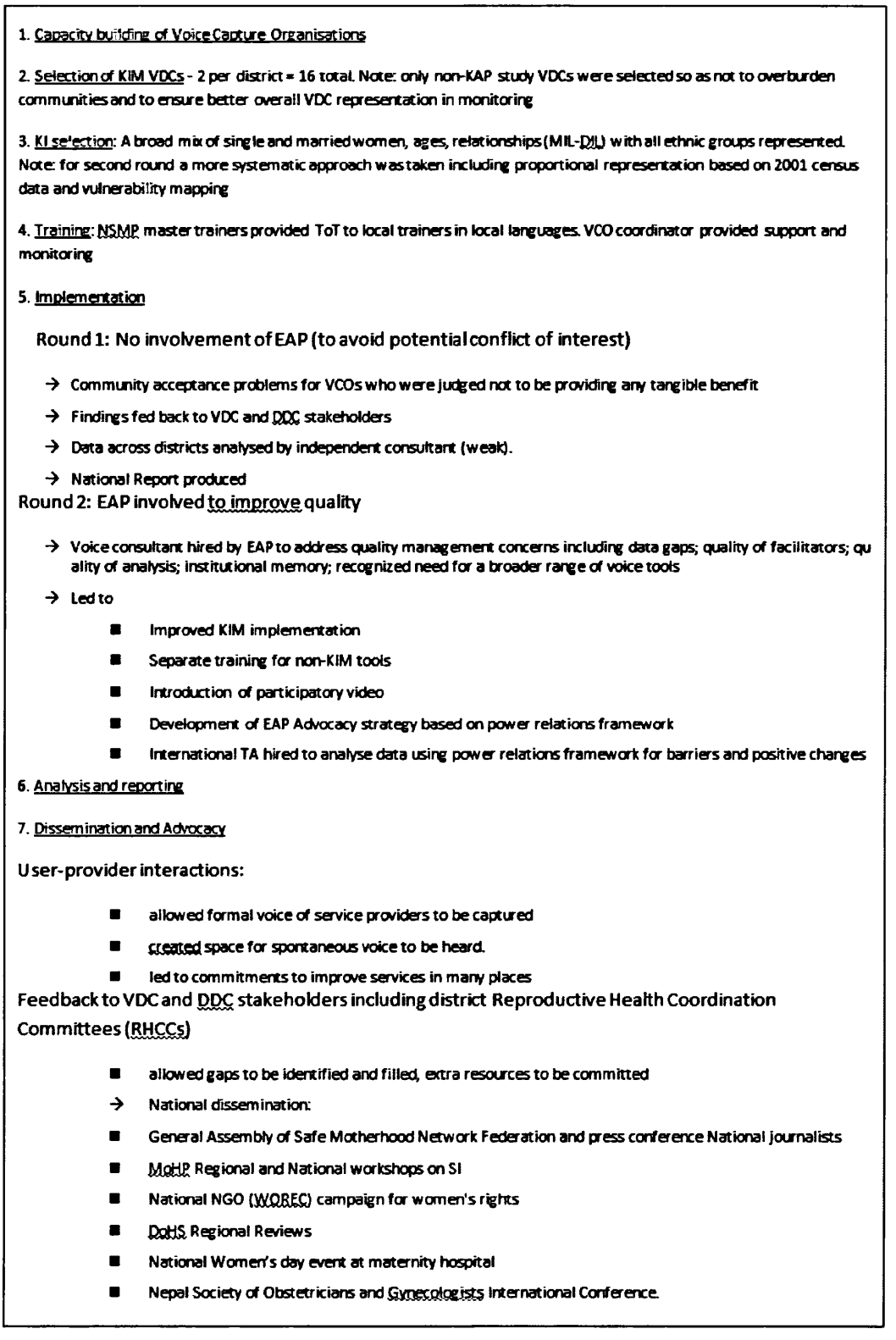

Figure 9: A presentation of Voice Capture under the IO programme. Source: [AKP 2006]

From Social Mobilisation to 'Voice'

Between 2000 and 2006, an ideological shift took place within DFID, in tune with a similar shift among the IFIs. This supported a more managerial and less 'fundamentalist' (Green, 2008: 92) approach to Washington Consensus ideology; particularly around trade liberalisation, globalisation and development. As these notions of 'best practice' changed, at the start of implementation in 2005 the programme similarly embarks on a clearer trajectory toward a voice and accountability imperative. Contemporaneous programme documents [CCC 2007, DCP 2006, SIS 2007] reflect the focus on governance contained in the 2006 White Paper Making Governance Work for the Poor (DFID, 2006b).

> 'Whether states are effective or not – whether they are capable of helping business grow, and of delivering services to their citizens, and are accountable and responsive to them – is the single most important factor that determines whether or not successful development takes place. Good governance requires: capability – the extent to which government has the money, people, will and legitimacy to get things done; responsiveness – the degree to which government listens to what people want and acts on it; and accountability – the process by which people are able to hold government to account." (DFID, 2006b: 8)

Comparing the extract above with previous White Papers (for example, DFID, 2000) we see a fresh willingness to engage with both 'new institutional economics' *and* the "structures of power which not only underpin the formation of institutions, but are also embedded within them" (Leftwich, 2007: 7). For the Nepal programme, whilst early programme documentation fails to fully engage with these issues in terms of empowerment and agency [FDR 2005]; an analysis of later documentation, and interviews with senor staff in Kathmandu in 2007 reveal that these notions eventually became embedded within SSMP under the rubric of 'rights-based social mobilisation activities' [EPO 2007].

The process by which this took place is hard to define explicitly; both key informant interviews conducted in 2008, and analysis of over 150 programme documents indicate the significant role of international consultants in introducing new ideas, many of whom had close links with DFID, and DFID supported programmes in other

contexts [DTT 2008]. The combined influence of this 'Technical Assistance', together with that of DFID in-country technical representatives was an emerging discourse around 'best practice' strongly influenced by World Bank, including via their own country office in Kathmandu [LLL 2006].

The IO conceptual model; the demand side and the new public health

Here I turn to the conceptual model which underpinned the development of the IO programme. Programs are inevitably modified through the formal processes of design, planning and implementation; they are also to a significant extent socially constructed by the actors which constitute them. In describing the process in Nepal, my intention isn't to demonstrate the weakness of specific strategies, as in any kind of programme evaluation; but rather, to explore the process of production of the programme. In doing so I attempt to understand how different actors interpreted the purpose of the programme, and their role within it in different ways. This exploration may be used to critically analyse the ways in which the voice - accountability model structures such interventions. In particular to explore the range of products emerging from programmes designed to support human agency to bring about social and institutional transformation.

The model used in the design and delivery of the IO programme was in part a response to the influence of a new 'best practice' emerging from the International Financial Institutions (World Bank, 2005; Bennett, 2005); it was also however also linked to an increasing interest in what was termed the 'demand-side' of the health system (Standing, 2004). There was a growing recognition that the prior focus on strengthening institutional health systems i.e. the 'supply side', had been an inadequate approach to improving the health of populations (Standing, 2004); particularly as it largely neglected the many social, cultural and economic factors which limit both demand for, and access to health services.

New institutionalism and the new public health

This shift can in turn be seen as a consequence of a broader international trend. Over the last twenty years, Public Health, a field traditionally encompassing epidemiology, environmental health and health education, took an increasingly

central role in policymaking beyond the realm of health services (eg. Sachs, 2001). At the same time the discipline became increasingly cognisant of equity and the broader social and economic determinants of health (Bambra *et al.*, 2005); a move sometimes described as 'the new public health' (Awofeso, 2004).

This move is in fact also associated with the rise of *new institutionalist* thinking described earlier (Craig, 2006: 194). A discourse characterised by a strictly bounded analysis of inequality with a focus on rational choice, social capital, and 'civil society' responsibility for redistribution and social change (Craig, 2006: 210). It is argued that this package often resulted in programmes promoting poorly strategized decentralisation; shifting responsibility downward to local government, frontline workers and NGOs (Craig, 2006: 211); voice and accountability models frequently feature within such interventions (see for example DFID, 2007) which are increasingly prevalent across the developing world (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010).

In Nepal, SSMP's early engagement with these notions was reflected in the design of the IO programme. This was expressed in an acknowledgement that service access was mediated by a range of physical, but also social cultural and political factors. An early programme document argues:

> "Access relies upon good provider attitudes, trust, honesty, responsiveness, accountability and quality service delivery both at established facilities and through outreach programmes. Access engages socially marginalized and vulnerable communities, is inclusive and empowering" [FDE 2005]

In maternal mortality reduction, SSMP's conceptual framework attempted to build in a stronger equity and 'social inclusion' component to an existing and highly influential 'three delays' model developed a decade earlier (Thaddeus and Maine, 1994). This model categorised the delays to accessing emergency obstetric care into three phases; firstly, delays in deciding to seek care; secondly, delays in reaching care and thirdly, delays in receiving appropriate care at a health facility. The model was influential not only because it emphasised the significance of previously neglected demand-side issues; but because these were delineated in a way that related directly to the different intervention strategies required to

improve access. The first delay focusing on behaviour change at household level, the second on communication and transport at the 'community' level, and the third on supply side health systems strengthening.

The SSMP approach to these first two 'demand-side' factors was a significant departure from work on safe motherhood that had gone before in Nepal. Previous interventions had focused principally on information giving or 'sensitisation' as a solution for the first and second delays. This assumed a direct relationship between knowledge and behaviour, a notion sometimes described as the Health Belief Model of behaviour change (Janz and Becker, 1984). There was an assumption that if women, and indeed 'communities' understood the 'correct' behaviours for maternal health care seeking, all that remained was to eliminate logistical barriers and improve supply.

The determinants of access

These psychological, anthropological and political models implicitly underpinning the design of SSMP's demand side work are not entirely reconcilable, the tension between them proved to be significant in the evolution of programme design and implementation. The new millennium saw the adoption of increasingly sophisticated thinking on the dynamics of behaviour change (Schwarzer, 2005). Various 'Stages of Change Models' based on the work of James Prochaska at the University of Rhode Island largely discredited the Health Belief Model (Prochaska, 1994). In turn, these models, themselves also criticised for individualistic physiological determinism (van der Riet, 2009: 38), were augmented by ethnographic perspectives on the social dynamics of behaviour and behaviour change (Hawkins *et al.*, 2009; Price and Hawkins, 2002).

In Nepal, these developments coincided with an influential report conducted under the previous DFID maternal health programme, *Ethnographic Perspectives on Obstetric Health issues in Nepal: A Literature Review* (Manandhar, 2000). The report highlighted the importance of intra household power dynamics and cultural norms around decision-making. In particular, it underscored the relative powerlessness of younger women, and the importance of the mother-in-law as a

central figure determining care seeking and access. At the 'community' level, it pointed towards the disproportionate barriers to access suffered by the poor and those marginalised by various determinants of social status, including caste, class and ethnicity (Manandhar, 2000).

The demand side component of SSMP attempted to push these agendas beyond that specified in relevant national policies[41]. Issues of equity and exclusion, together with the targeting of priority groups, and the *processes* of exclusion were highlighted in programme documents. This formed part of a broad push by certain individuals and donors to prioritise and institutionalise issues of gender and social exclusion within government systems[42] [FDE 2005, LLL 2006, DDT 2005, BCC 2007, CCC 2007]. The resulting intervention design was clearly closely aligned with emerging international consensus of the 'new public health', a new institutionalist governance agenda, and emergent 'best practice' around behaviour change and safe motherhood programming [AKP 2006].

Theory, practice, and implementation

Whilst IO design was technically driven, the technical discourse is itself heavily contingent upon broader currents in a global development discourse. In particular, both in the framing of the design and the ultimate implementation we see a strong influence of the ascendant voice and accountability agenda, described in project documentation as "Equity, access, voice and governance issues"; where governance served to encompass accountability and responsiveness [FDR 2005].

[41] The National Safe Motherhood Plan and Nepal Health Sector Programme Implementation Plan (NHSP-IP).

[42] An early programme document describes the need for "a coherent plan to address social inclusion without which there is a risk that interventions will be haphazard and ineffective. Such a strategic framework would include but not be limited to: rationale for selection of geographical phasing of the programme, poverty, ethnicity and need based criteria for allocating resources, human resource development and deployment implications, monitoring and evaluation, and targeted social inclusion initiatives such as financial incentives." [FDE 2005]

A 'programme' cannot be seen as a linear process where theory and design are implemented and outcomes achieved (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 21). The competing narratives and power relationships that feature in the programme discourse are not deviations from what should be a homogeneous and cohesive operation, but rather form the very substance of the programme and the subject of discursive enquiry. By triangulating the various perspectives and imperatives of the programme, I arrive at a more nuanced critique of the programme theories of change and dominant narratives. Indeed within SSMP, theory and practice were inevitably divergent [CCP 2007, BCC 2007] and the ways in which individual and organisation actors both cause and manage these disconnects is instructive.

Perhaps the most obvious example from SSMP is that the programme suffered from a significant systemic weakness; one tacitly acknowledged but substantively ignored [ORP 2007, MVR 2008]. Ostensibly, SSMP aimed to support both the 'supply side' and 'demand-side' of the health system; denoting the need to work with both the bureaucracy of health service delivery to improve supply, and then increase the demand for, and use of those services by working with the 'client base'. The reality within SSMP was that these twin components were implemented in *different* geographical areas due primarily to internal contracting issues. This represents a major departure from the central theory of change embodied in early programme documentation (Options, 2004), requiring that generated demand be matched with improved access and service quality. With no support to the supply of services, and given the appalling state of unsupported health facilities in Nepal (Rai, 2009), initiatives that generate demand for these inadequate services are hard to justify. Indeed, it is difficult to construct a plausible theory of change that would link the intervention to the goal of maternal mortality reduction.

That this crucial and central aspect of the programme design was omitted from implementation and featured only rarely in verbal or narrative descriptions of programme conduct is interesting. It provides an early example of the way in which the nature of 'the programme' was highly subjective and largely contingent on the

forum in which it was re-interpreted and expressed by the actors involved, a focus on 'style' that I will return to later.

Women's groups, mobilisation and empowerment

That SSMP had a significant demand side programme in itself was seen by many as an example of emerging best practice in the region (Manandhar, 2008). Nepal has a long history of initiatives to promote 'community participation' or 'social mobilisation' (Armon *et al.*, 2004). Widespread Community Forestry initiatives date back to the 1970s, and involve up to 30% of households (ADB, 2006: 4). An only partially implemented decentralisation strategy[43] made some provision for popular participation in local government decision making (Regmi *et al.*, 2009), whilst numerous other donor funded initiatives worked to promote models of participation and mobilisation around water supply, poverty alleviation, transport, education and other development sectors (ADB, 2006: 5).

For SSMP at 'community level', in addition to 'voice capture', the dominant implementation process (subcontracted to the IO) was women's group formation; a process supported by monthly visits from a 'social mobiliser' to facilitate information giving, discussion and maternal health emergency preparedness. In many communities new 'birth preparedness' and emergency transport savings groups were formed, in addition IO programme documents described how "Existing community groups (women, mothers, forest users, savings and credit) and networks [of these groups] have been oriented on SMNH [save motherhood and new-born health] equity and access issues and a broad range of awareness raising... Further efforts are being made to integrate key SMNH messages into non-formal education and local forest user group orientation" [EPO 2007].

As the principal 'social mobilisation' technique adopted by the programme, women's groups were focused around the development of emergency funds and transport schemes, combined with informational messages around the importance of antenatal, delivery and postnatal care. A comprehensive review toward the end

[43] Under the 1999, Local Self-Government Act (LSGA) (MoH, 2002)

of the programme [DTR 2008] identified that the focus on informational messages was leading to 'group fatigue', as women who had heard these messages participated in the groups only by sending their financial contribution, in some cases via their children. The review also identified a number of barriers to participation, including the shame of being unable to provide 'voluntary' contributions to emergency funds, the opportunity costs of attending and the social stigma of mixing with members of higher or lower castes. Whilst individual home visits to 'self-excluded women' were initiated in 2007 as a solution, is important to note that little analysis of the barriers to access experienced by these groups was conducted, and very little detailed mapping or analysis of social groups that may be excluded took place. Indeed one member of the intervention team noted in a 2008 monitoring report that:

> "The team came to know that almost all the productive age men from all families had gone abroad to work and women who are at home are extremely overloaded with work as they have double responsibilities as man and woman. Though some wanted to join the group they could not spare time" [ELR 2010]

Thus, despite the relative sophistication of the original conceptualisation of the programme, particularly around equity, inclusion and socio-cultural determinants of care seeking (Price and Pokharel, 2005; Manandhar, 2000); the reality of implementation bore very little resemblance to this thinking, other than a maintained normative narrative of 'reaching the P+E'. The focus of the intervention was information giving and whilst women had normative notions of 'their rights' described to them, a number of external reviews commented on the limited extent to which this could be described as empowering [44].

[44] Specific references withheld

Chapter 6 – Insights from Key Informants and their peers

Introduction

I have discussed how notions of voice and accountability are constitutive of an influential discourse, emerging from specific political, disciplinary and cultural roots. They are laden with normative notions of state, bureaucracy and citizenship, and sometimes somewhat specious conceptualisations of agency and power. These have been rather generically applied to public sector service delivery in a variety of social and institutional contexts with very different histories. Whilst chapters 2 and 3 sought to unpack these issues, here and in subsequent chapters I turn to a further exploration of the case study data to better understand these notions in the context of the SSMP. Drawing on data from observation, interviews and documentary analysis; I focus particularly on the question 'what was produced' by 'voice' and allied community mobilisation in Nepal?

The preceding discussion alluded to a number of conceptual weaknesses in the voice and accountability that emerge from observation of the IO; the limited 'empowerment', and the folly of expecting marginalised communities to take responsibility for often non-existent services, absent staff and poor standards of care. To explore these issues in a way more deeply grounded in the realities of rural Nepal, I look again to the extensive data gathered in the course of two rounds of Key Informant Monitoring (see also Manandhar, 2008; Rai, 2009). Using these rapid ethnographic data, I explore the new configuration of citizenship implied by the IO intervention and wider proponents of the 'voice' model, against accounts of the lived experiences described in the data. I address the neglected issue of local level power relationships and what they might tell us about how the reality of life as a Nepali woman compares with the notion of the Active Citizen (Cornwall, 2000: 67).

Exploring the KIM Data

The primary objective of the IO was to increase service utilisation by women through empowerment, awareness raising and supporting 'voice' to instigate service improvement [EPO 2007]. The KIM data provide a rich insight into women's 'health seeking behaviour', including preferences amongst a pluralistic provider

'market' (including traditional healers) and the broad range of cultural and social factors which influence choice and agency.

An overarching theme emerging from these data are the numerous constraints placed on women's agency by intra-household and village level power dynamics. The Key Informants related stories gathered from amongst their social networks that described extreme marginalisation in all areas of personal and social life. Indeed, the state citizen relationship implicit in the notion of the 'active citizen', finds few parallels in the realities expressed through the data.

Within the household a lack of decision-making power and fear of shame (laj), or loss of household prestige (ijjat) severely limit the freedom of women. Women are socialised into a role where the father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband makes all key decisions. Responses such as "we can only make small decisions like what to cook today" [woman Dailekh, Newmule VDC] and "we must be under our husbands, it is like that from a long time ago, women mainly don't have decision-making power" [woman Dailekh, Newmule VDC] recur throughout the data. This domination extends to every area of social and household life; women described limited mobility and networks of peer support and limited control over their own bodies in terms of sexual relationships, care seeking and childbirth.

> The decision whether to call a rickshaw or other vehicle for a woman in difficulty is managed by the husband, father-in-law or brother-in-law".
> [Woman, Morang, Katahari VDC]

> There are a very few examples of when a *Majhi* woman can decide to take a sick child somewhere by herself. She has first to ask her father-in-law or her mother-in-law.
> [Woman Chitwan, Ratna Nagar VDC].

> The TBA and family members try to convince woman to deliver at home by saying that all hospital nurses and doctors misbehave, beat them and make them deliver forcefully. This makes women afraid to go to hospital.
> [Woman Morang, Katahari VDC.]

> Once a woman's waters have broken, she is unclean, she should not be touched.
> [Woman Chitwan, Ratna Nagar VDC.]

> There was a pregnant woman who is going to give birth the next moment. On the previous months the husband forcibly had sex with her, because of this woman could not walk properly till the delivery. After the delivery she was ok.
> [Woman Rupandehi, Bogewli VDC]

> One woman went to PHC for condom. They just sent her back to get her husband. If he wants condom let him get it. So her husband came later and got it.
> [Woman, Parbat, Pangrang VDC]

> Here they say a woman's knowledge is like a hole in some wood – like a hollow trunk.
> [Woman Dadeldhura, Sirsa VDC]

Women described in detail how decisions around household finances and physical movement were made by others. All these decisions take place within a patriarchal framework which discourages woman's geographical mobility, associating it with shame. This restriction is reinforced by traditional beliefs relating to fear of exposure to 'spirits' whilst 'wandering' far from the village. These structures are reproduced by 'senior' women in the household, often the mother-in-law. A significant wider literature also validates the emerging theme in the data that senior women, elevated to the status of mother-in-law, take on a servant-master relationship with their daughter-in-law (Bennett, 1983; Lohani-Chase, 2008; Tamang, 2002; Pigg, 1996).

> If some visitors come, she should not show her mouth to them –she should cover it with a cloth. If she goes out the family prestige goes out with her.
> [Woman, Parbat, Pangrang VDC]

> Those women ... cannot decide on anything. Because they are not employed, do not earn money, and because of fear, poor women cannot decide. Even those women who are literate and earn, for any sort of monetary activities they need to ask with their husband. If they want to make a phone call, they have to ask their husbands because they fear that they will get scolded.
> [Woman, Parbat, Pangrang VDC]

There is a woman in a poor family of *Bohara* caste. They have only 4 *ropani* of land and are uneducated. She is 30 years old and has had 6 children. She has had a problem of prolapsed uterus since the birth of the youngest child who is now 3 years old. Once she went to a health camp to have this treated and they told her she had to go to hospital... She told this all to her husband but he just scolded her. "Why do you need to go?" he said. Everyone else is getting well from the treatment here. You are a slut *(rundi)* if you want to go. I won't take you for treatment. If you are going to die, do it here." In her uterus a lot of waste blood was collected and wounds so that she could not sit down or stand up easily. It was also painful to have sex with her husband. Her husband refused to take a loan from the village, saying "We don't have any money to pay it back.
[Woman Dadeldhura, Sirsa VDC]

Because of their mothers-in-law, only a few women can decide themselves on permanent or temporary family planning methods.
[Woman Rupandehi, Bogewli VDC]

In a case last year of a *Prajapati* woman from a rich family whose husband had gone to work in Bombay and the family makes money from clay pipes, the daughter-in-law was pregnant for the first time. She was attacked by *bhut* (spirit) and, at three months, she miscarried. She was given traditional medicines and she became pregnant for the second time. She was frequently attacked by *bhut* and she used to see *rachas* (demons) in bad dreams. This second baby did not move properly in the womb. After she was given traditional medicine, she delivered the baby. But at night the *bhut* strangled the baby and killed it. She only came to know this when she got up at midnight. After that, she has not been able to conceive. Now they are continually going to the traditional healer and taking medicines.
[Woman Rupandehi, Pokharbhindi VDC].

If a pregnant woman goes out alone at night she will be caught by evil and witchcraft.
[Woman Morang, Katahari VDC]

Her placenta was retained after the delivery of the baby. She was then made to tie a stone on the cord but of no avail. So, on the sixth day, accompanied by her friend and in-law, she walked to Team Hospital carrying her newborn baby as no one could touch them [due to ritual pollution].
[Woman, Manilekh VDC]

It is hard to exaggerate the extremely hierarchical and frequently abusive nature of intra-household relationships; in the data frequent analogies are made to indicate the inferior value of wives verses cattle to the household. In narratives around maternal death, women are often discussed as marginal and almost disposable

household assets. This status is continually reinforced in ritual, for example by the act of patrifocal deference of junior daughter-in-laws expected to drink the water with which they wash their mother-in-laws feet. A 'privilege' that may be removed as a further humiliation in sanction for poor behaviour (Bennett, 1983: 175).

> Here they say that the heavier the work you do, the easier the birth will be. If she doesn't work and she sleeps too much, the baby will have a pointed head. The mother-in-law and the husband say "if a daughter-in-law doesn't work, then what is the point of having her? Why else did we bring her into the house?" The daughter-in-law is like a cloth to protect the hand from burning. She is there to ensure that family members don't have to work *(hat doreao bhannera ta, panyu laeko ho ni, bhannera okhan halchan).* After delivery pollution cleansing ritual *(umkaune),* we go straight back to work because they say this will make us strong. We are just machines. What to do? This is women's fate, a lost life.
> [Woman Chitwan, Ratna Nagar VDC]

> In this place, *dalit* women are kept in the *goth* animal shed for 11 days [after delivery] because there is not enough space in the house and they must not be touched *(Dalitkko sutkeri gaibaisi rakne gothma rakchan).*
> [Woman Dadeldhura, Modilekh VDC]

> The mother in law says if a woman dies during pregnancy or delivery or post-partum, it is one's fate, gods will. If one's fate is good, she survives, otherwise she dies, it's up to god.
> [Woman Rupandehi, Bogewli VDC]

These data also indicate that these years of subjugation are considered a rite of passage. Whilst mother-in-laws enjoy their elevated status, this becomes incrementally challenged by increasing seniority of the daughter-in-law; often resulting in uncompromising reinforcement of hierarchy. Again, a feature identified in other ethnographic work on Nepal (Bennett, 1983: 180)

> A strict mother-in-law, especially *Brahmin Chhetri,* tells her daughter-in-law to do even heavy work as it will be easier to deliver. Her mother-in-law will scold her otherwise saying "Why are you pretending? Are you the only one who has been pregnant? We also had nine or ten babies. If I had shared such problems with others, everyone would laugh at me."
> [Woman Chitwan, Kalyapur VDC]

The KIM data provide a unique insight in to the lived experiences of Nepali women as they describe them to each other, raising two key implications for this enquiry.

The first relates to the applicability of the 'community mobilisation' approach to the social and cultural context of the districts in question. The second relates the implications for the 'voice' model of these findings, particularly contrasted with the normative notions of citizenship and the citizen state compact implicit with the models.

Community mobilisation in the context of the KIM data

In terms of the utility of the IO community mobilisation model, it is clear that the focus on information giving sits uncomfortably with the picture painted by the KIM data. These highlight the role of poverty, and hugely important influence of traditional beliefs deeply embedded in cultural practices.

> Among the *Gurungs,* the older women give us alcohol to drink or to put in our vaginas at delivery as it flushes out the dirty and unnecessary blood. If there is prolonged labour, a train ticket is tied around the waist but it must be removed right after the baby is born otherwise the woman may die. If the baby comes out quickly, like a train is running, the ticket must be removed quickly otherwise the mother's organs may also come out.
> [Woman Chitwan, Kalyapur VDC, One of many references to train tickets as a solution for obstructed labour]

> Here there is a strong belief that daughters-in-law have to deliver the baby in the exact same place in the house where the mother-in-law had her babies otherwise there will be attacks by bad spirits *(bhut lagcha)* which will be dangerous for the mother and baby. In a middle class *Prajapati* family, a daughter-in-law, aged 24, was in her second pregnancy. When she was in labour, her mother-in-law told her to have the baby in the same place as she herself had delivered. But that room was changed in reconstruction and was now a *verandah.* Still the daughter-in-law was forced to give birth in the same place. She stayed there throughout her *sutkeri* [ritual pollution / exclusion] period.
> [Woman Rupandehi, Bogewli VDC]

> Those who don't have the Rs6 for the registration charge don't go to health centres. Instead they call the traditional healer. And only if he can't help, then they take a loan and go to PHC. At the PHC they give money only according to what they can give but they are also sent to medical for the rest. So if they can't buy, they don't get, and they return home. And only a few take a loan for medicine. Though most believe in the traditional healer, some also believe that the PHC does good work but they just don't have money to go.
> [Woman Dailekh, Newmule VDC]

> *Dalits*, Gurungs and *Tamangs*, especially who are poor, they first go to consult with the *dhami*. They have more belief on the *dhami*. With him, there is less need for money. They can treat only with alcohol and meat. If that is not enough then they bring a male goat or a black cockerel by getting a loan from somewhere. Many women depend on the *dhami*, to them, *dhami* is like god.
> [Woman Chitwan, Ratna Nagar VDC]

These practices however, have significance beyond the realm of their 'biomedical' or curative value. They form a part of wider structures of social hierarchy and gender roles. Whilst harmful medical practices have a significant impact on women's health, so also issues of shame and ritual pollution have a profound influence on access to care and care seeking. Thus maternal mortality is determined not only by lack of knowledge, but by issues of status, power and the control of mobility, fertility, sexuality, household resources etc.

> A woman died in that village. Her family was poor and not able to meet basic needs for food and clothing. She lives with her husband, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and brother-in-law. They didn't permit her to go for antenatal checks in her pregnancy. They didn't let her go out to attend meetings or discussions in the community. They made her do heavy work at home. She experienced a long and difficult labour of four days but the family didn't take her to the health post. Finally she was taken to the PHC where she was referred to the district hospital. But they didn't take her there. Instead they took her home. After some time she died. The baby was cut out of her abdomen. The woman was cremated but the baby's body was buried.
> [Woman Dailekh, Paduka VDC]

> If relations with mother-in-law and father-in-law are not good, it doesn't matter how much money they have, they won't care about her. She will not be able to go to hospital alone. Unless someone goes with her, she is stuck.
> [Woman Rupandehi, Bogewli VDC.]

> A Brahmin woman started labour pains that lasted for two days. The FCHV helped her at delivery but her vagina was torn badly and she had excessive bleeding. She told this to the mother-in-law but the mother-in-law just went into the kitchen to make soup. When she came back into the seclusion room she found the daughter-in-law dead.
> [Woman Chitwan, Kalyapur VDC]

> Our earnings from the jute factory must be submitted to our husbands and mother-in-law. We can't go to the market, we can't save on our own and we can't even spend our own earnings. We work at the jute mill right up until our labour starts and go back one and a half months after delivery because we are so poor. Mothers-in-law quarrel with daughters-in-law: "why should my son give his earnings to you?"
> [Woman Morang, Katahari VDC]

> "After those 11 days, I felt so weak. There was not enough food for me to eat and to regain my strength. By then, I was expected to perform all the domestic work and my husband started demanding regular sex. I am afraid; these things may cause my uterus to come out. There are so many women in our village with such problem."
> [Woman Manilekh VDC]

Stories around traditional beliefs clearly demonstrate that whilst knowledge resources have a major role to play, so to do various other social resources not addressed by the IO model. Indeed, I argue that in the light of these data, providing information alone is a response which almost colludes in maintaining the status quo for younger women of childbearing age. Thus, effective 'behaviour change' would require modification of deeply embedded cultural practices among the range of actors which define the social production of womanhood.

Crucially, the rights and responsibilities of women are tightly enmeshed in these roles and expectations. Not only will women likely experience significant and immediate sanctions from deviating, they will also forgo the privileges that eventually come from the increasing seniority associated with multiparous motherhood. Just as elsewhere, child workers have complained that empowerment approaches ask them to "march against their own jobs" (Swift, 2001: 4), so the IO mobilisation approach assumes women can simply refuse to participate in discriminatory practices. This ignores the complex web of responsibilities that also define rights to, for example marry, participate in social networks and indeed secure the basic necessities of life.

If ten fingers do not work, then five fingers cannot go in the mouth. *(Das ewlo nachalaera, panch awla muckma jandeyna)*
[A local proverb which means if women don't work, then they don't get to eat. Woman Dailekh, Newmule VDC.]

There is no use for women to be smart or come forward, don't they say, that the frog in the well shall always remain there, the same?
[Woman Ratnanagar VDC]

"People consider it bad if women come forward or speak publicly; it is believed that such women would likely elope and to listen to such scatter brained women is absolutely not good."
[Woman Kalyanpur VDC]

Women are always busy. There is too much work. Women have to work because otherwise they won't get food and because the men don't do the work and also they are away. Others will call them lazy if they don't work. Poor women are not trusted, they are not listened to and they cannot give time in meetings because of all their work.
[Woman Nawalparasi, Pahli VDC]

They can't tell others about pregnancy, abortion, about using family planning devises, about their husband's scolding or forced activities (rape) because if they tell, they may be thrown out of their home. They know these must be kept secret. [Woman Parbat, Banau VDC]

It is clear that the IO's focus on information giving, whilst not irrelevant, largely misses the point. This issue was to some extent recognised by the programme, explaining the high profile of 'empowerment' in the front stage narrative, and indeed the decision to commission the KIM approach. However, I have discussed earlier how the failure to address power relations was a major constraint on the likely efficacy of the intervention in terms of its explicit objectives. Crucial is an overall failure to utilise the KIM data to explore and programme around these deeply embedded power relationships. The resulting model focused on information giving, failed to account for the pervasiveness and complexity of socially defined roles and entitlements that define citizenship as a lived experience. Indeed when the KIM data failed to show evidence for positive improvements from 'community mobilisation', a consultant was contracted to conduct a re-analysis of the data to pull out more positive examples of change [MMR 2008].

The IO was by no means alone, there is a significant literature on the failure of such programmes to address both the social (Standing and Taylor, 2007) and economic (Sachs, 2001) determinants of service access and care seeking. Many 'voice' initiatives display simplistic and externally defined and oversimplified notions of community (cf. Williams, 2004: 561) and citizenship (see for example Gaventa and Barrett, 2010). However, the focus of this thesis is rather more on what *is p*roduced by such interventions.

Returning to the IO, it is clear that interventions, whilst sub-optimal in terms of stated objectives were not benign. At the intra-household level, contrasting the inequality described by the data with the focus of IO 'sensitisation' efforts, I make two observations.

Firstly, that given the extreme limitations on the mobility of women, it is likely that those women exposed to 'empowering' women's groups, were likely those least constrained and in need. This almost tokenism risks reinforcing exiting inequalities, and indeed in more than one IO report women not participating were referred to as 'self-excluded' [ERT,EAE]. Indeed Jha *et al.* note that in many areas of Nepal, wealthier families will join several groups so as to secure donor funded services and "not to miss development" (2009: 39)

> Only mature women, those over 30 years old, can go to Women's Groups. Mothers-in-law mainly go, not younger women.
> [Woman Rupandehi, Katahari VDC]

> If a woman walks freely, they say she is acting like a leader [derogatory].
> [Woman Dailekh, Paduka VDC]

Secondly, in accepting and programming around these simplistic and normative notions of social exclusion, IO might be implicated in taking a role in their reproduction. Here pseudo-participatory approaches not only 'draw a veil' over repressive structures (Williams, 2004: 562); they provide a powerful alternative discourse. Women's lack of access is explained by ignorance or a failure 'to behave'. These notions are reproduced in their subsequent 'sensitisation', often described as 'empowerment'. They are given further legitimacy by the formal state

sanctioned quasi-bureaucratic setting of the externally facilitated women's group (cf. Kothari, 2001: 147). Again however, the data indicate the limited transformative potential of this mode of participation; we see the individual projects of both facilitators and participants taking precedence, with the 'target group' of more marginalised women excluded.

> In meetings nowadays, women do participate but it is just for show that they put them in the management. Still their voices are not heard. They don't listen to what women say.
> [Woman Dailekh, Newmule VDC]

> In society, in school management committees and community forestry committees, women are kept only for fulfilling the quota. Women's voices aren't heard. They don't listen to women there or listen to women's concerns.
> [Woman Dadeldhura, Sirsa VDC]

> Daughters can be involved in the groups. Their names get written but, when it comes to it, the mother goes. They don't actually allow their daughters to go because they will be spoilt (bigrincha).
> [Woman Rupandehi, Katahari VDC]

> They participate in groups but their decisions are not heard. Their decisions are not given importance.
> [Woman Dailekh, Newmule VDC]

> Women are involved in social committees but only in the name of membership. Any work or decisions are performed by men who don't listen to women's voice.
> [Woman Dailekh, Paduka VDC]

> Still now in the woman's group there are only two women involved in making decisions. The registration is just to show on the name list.
> [Woman Dailekh, Paduka VDC]

> "Women are illiterate, cannot speak and do not have any ability. Therefore, even in the mothers' group meeting, the men participate and make decisions, while we sit and listen to them. However, they never ever invite women in their own meetings."
> "Men do not consider it important to invite women for their meetings. They say, what was the use of women in such meetings? They hold meeting in their own building, where women are not allowed in. They make decisions but expect us to comply by carrying stone and sand to construct building and water tap". [Woman, Manilekh VDC]

Voice, accountability and citizenship

I have described how the KIM data, triangulated with the broader case study data provide important insights into the credibility of the theory of change for 'voice' and 'empowerment' within IO/SSMP. The data equally raise important questions over the applicability of the wider voice accountability model to rural Nepal. In particular, one may contrast the notions of *active citizenship* and the *accountable state,* with the 'performative' models of citizenship i.e. rights and obligations expressed by women themselves, and largely absent state bureaucracies described by the case study data.

Here it is worth reiterating the assumptions of the voice - accountability model with the reality of rural Nepal. Despite decentralisation, the health system in Nepal largely falls into the Weberian model of the hierarchically controlled bureaucracy (Stiglitz, 2000; Macfarlane, 2002; Dangal, 2005). The management structure is however relatively weak (Housden, 2009), calling into question the notion that this system might be 'held to account' and made 'more responsive'. A DFID report from 2004 echoes the findings from the case study data:

> "The conflict has further undermined government access to rural areas. Some services, for example postal and telecommunications, have become almost completely dysfunctional...frontline workers are increasingly being intimidated by both the security forces and the Maoists...All government workers are the target for Maoist extortion, with staff being taxed up to 30 per cent of their salaries...The structures that support government workers are almost completely dysfunctional. The smallest unit of governance in Nepal, the Village Development Committee (VDC) has ceased to function in most areas of the country and government staff have retreated to the district centres...A ministry official reported that they have difficulty spending their budget as the structures no longer exist through which to work. The government's capacity to monitor and support providers has also been seriously affected by the conflict. For example, according to the secretary of education, the Ministry has to rely on newspaper accounts of the situation because District Development Committees (DDCs) are no longer functioning well"
> (Armon *et al.*, 2004: 10)

The overwhelming thrust of the data similarly point toward the limited capacity of the Nepali State and Health System to demonstrate the kind of responsiveness to

'voice' envisioned by the model. Whilst the conflict setting described is peculiar to Nepal; it provides a particularly accessible example of the way in which the voice - accountability model has been applied to contexts where it is difficult to square the theory of change with the reality of the operating environment (Olivier de Sardan, 2009: 3). Similar interventions in for example, Nigeria (DFID, 2007) represent a comparable degree of state failure, and raise similar questions over the model (Heymans and Pycroft, 2003). Indeed, the data from this case study support a growing literature questioning the integrity of the idea that the agency of consumers can have a significant effect on public services, where mechanisms of hierarchical control are weak (eg. Booth, 2010b: 19; Ramshaw, 2010: 68).

Understanding supply side accountability and responsiveness

The *potential* for responsiveness to 'voice' within the supply side[45] will be significantly mediated by various constraints within the health system (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006), clearly a key factor for exploration. To understand these constraints, it is however necessary to account for the constituent actors; the shared culture of norms, values and imperatives that define accountability and responsiveness within any organisational structure (Kelsall, 2011). In this regard, Weber's legal-rational model of bureaucracy clearly provides inadequate conceptual tools with which to explore the accountability interface between state and citizen. Again, a significant literature describes the way in which these systems are commonly "pervaded by patrimonial as well as by modern bureaucratic logics of behaviour" (Booth, 2010b: 7), one of many factors indicating that bureaucracies frequently fail to perform 'as expected' (Olivier de Sardan, 2009) by mainstream theory and theoreticians.

It is unfortunate that the 'voice data' on 'Provider Voice' (Rai, 2009), an area of SSMP/IO in which I was not involved, provided very little data to support an analysis of the culture of bureaucratic management. The relatively few field visits I

[45] Described as 'duty bearers' within the IO

was able to make to District Headquarters as a consultant/researcher did not provide the rich, contextualised narratives necessary for such an enquiry. There are however two sets of literature which may be applied to the case study data; one describing the importance of 'institutional culture' within state bureaucratic systems, and a second describing the specific pervasive culture of Nepali bureaucracy.

The relational determinants of bureaucratic failure

Beyond the material constraints to responsiveness such as limited financial allocations to clinics, the relational nature of these institutions produce specific accountability failures in the Nepali context. Dangal corroborates observations from my interviews with 4 key informants conducted in 2010 around health system organisational culture in Nepal; particularly that these systems strongly reflect the broader stratification of Hindu society (2005: 65). This results in an ethos of deference, obedience and respect for authority both at clinic and district administration levels. Orders are followed to the letter with significant sanctions and disincentives for creative thinking or individual initiative. The result is a civil service that is inherently unresponsive to challenges from below. The 'voice' of users, health facility staff or junior managers does not permeate upwards within the system; as a result, the agency of these actors is significantly muted. One senior informant described as 'culture of silence', where decisions would never be questioned and bad news never conveyed.

These structures cannot however, be solely determined by cultural norms around respect and my field observations indicate significant 'perverse incentives' in terms of 'capture' or rent seeking. In the absence of coherent, formal procedures for decision making, officials are widely understood to work on the basis of verbal instructions passed downward through a strictly observed chain of command. This inflexibility drives the locus of state authority upwards within the bureaucracy, and with it, the opportunities for patronage and rent-seeking. 'Citizens' requests for healthcare, documents or other government services are referred upward to progressively higher decision making authorities, where they are expected to pay a

bribe, or other engage in some kind of neopatrimonial social transaction. The structure provides increasing rewards for those a senior level, or compensation for those at a more junior level for the risk of taking decisions, something considered undesirable in Nepali professional culture (Macfarlane, 2002: 11).

Narratives describing the role of bribery feature strongly in both the KIM outputs and my own key informant interview data from 2010; respondents describing regular requests for *speedy money*, *chiya khane paisa* or *bus bhada* (money for tea or bus money). The academic literate provides valuable additional context; work examining corruption in the Nepali civil service describes the use of similar phrases in the normalisation of routine petty bribery (Dangal, 2005: 58), to be understood in the context of low and infrequently paid salaries.

The role of social networks is also revealed as of preeminent importance, with a significant literature describing the existence of accountability relationships between those in the same 'clan' or similar network (Dangal, 2005; Macfarlane, 2002; Bista, 1991). *Afno Manche* analogous to "one's own people" is a central concept influencing both accountability and responsiveness from officials to citizens, and career mobility within bureaucracies themselves. These relationships link strongly to an extensive literature on neopatrimonialism in developing country administrations (Olivier de Sardan, 2009; Booth, 2011; Kelsall, 2011; Kelsall and Booth, 2010). In the Nepali context, Dangal offers a particularly illustrative example of this selective accountability; the case of a high cast citizen being asked to pay a government fee from an official of a similar status angrily responding *"If I also should pay this fee, then why are you here."* (2005: 56).

Whilst the system offers a degree of accountability and albeit unpredictable responsiveness for some, the KIM data, corroborated by other research (see for example Bista, 1991) strongly indicates the exclusionary nature of this system. The KIM data provides evidence of the risks and costs associated with these intransparent systems. A visit to District Headquarters, often many days on foot to reach, will frequently result in continuous requests to 'come back tomorrow', or the need for a bribe; particularly so for women, and those from low caste families.

The often negative experiences of women using government facilities is also to a large extent socially produced, with poor accountability and responsiveness often unrelated to the material resources in the clinic. The KIM data demonstrates both significant abuse of women by both male and female staff, together with a lack of cultural sensitivity or 'competency' (Manandhar, 2008: 48). Looking at these data presented below, the differential treatment and levels of accountability again raises questions about the extent to which citizenship is a uniform attribute, something inherent in being Nepali.

> During antenatal checks, when asked how long since you have stopped your period, if you can't answer, then they shout at you. Also during delivery they try to make women walk and, if they can't, they will shout saying "you have had fun sleeping with husband." They shout or even beat on the legs and ignore those who can't pay the money. Rich people get full treatment but the poor can't. They ask people to buy a lot of material and don't use it and don't give it back but then use it for women who can't buy. At the hospital, the poor are not treated well but in the medical they are treated equally and even provide medicines in credit.
> [Woman Chitwan, Kalyapur VDC.]

> Health workers abuse us when they see our old clothes. People here think that if there is money we can save ourselves, otherwise we die.
> [Woman Chitwan, Ratna Nagar VDC.]

> There is not equal treatment in the health post. Also in the medical store, people behave differently for rich and poor people. The rich get good check-ups, full doses of medicine and are asked to come again. Poor people only get enough medicine for the amount of money they have. In the health post, those who can't raise their voice are asked to take medicine from medical shop. If they can't handle the case they refer to Bharatpur Hospital but no treatment is possible without money there so poor women just have to stay at home with their illness. Some doctors behave differently in government and private hospital. Even though they ignore the poor in the government hospital, people prefer to go there for delivery because of the (maternity) incentive.
> [Woman Chitwan, Kalyapur VDC.]

> Poor women are ignored in Mangalbare Health Post so they go to the *dhami* and the TBA who uses bamboo to cut the cord.
> [Woman Morang, Pathari VDC.]

The KIM data provide a unique insight into the many determinants of responsiveness in the complex social and organisational context of the Nepali health system. The data demonstrate the extent to which a 'voice' model, generically applied to a complex context, may not be expected to yield the expected results in terms of equity and access. However, beyond this relatively superficial deconstruction, the data indicate systemic deficiencies in the implicit programme theory of change. Factors that not only mitigate against the realisation of better access by poor women to more responsive services, but which have the potential to reproduce some of the determinants of their exclusion. I now move on to a more detailed examination of the 'voice initiative' as part of the wider programme theory of change, and potentially ideologically laden discourse.

Chapter 7 – The construction of ‘voice capture’

Our life goes in crying and playing with this mud and stones.

We didn't study. Our life has gone in work. Our life is still in darkness. We still can't write our own names. There have been changes but our condition is still the same.
[Two Women, Dailekh, Newmule VDC]

Introduction

In early design documents we first see the emergence of the term 'voice', and more specifically 'capturing voice', and the broader theory of change of which it is part. 'Citizen voice' is discussed in parallel with social inclusion; design documents discuss "informed citizens" with "access to information", and a "role in policy and decision-making" [FDE 2005].

The theory of change for 'voice capture' was not well articulated, but very clearly implicit in the design was a process whereby CBOs would facilitate a health service and government more willing and able to 'listen to client voice'. These organisations would promote two way communication that would contrast with unidirectional 'user sensitisation' that had gone before [FDE 2005]. It was envisaged that with a focus on supporting the 'voice' of disadvantaged groups, particularly *Janajati* (tribal peoples) and *Dalits* (those from disadvantaged castes), 'voice capture' would make services more equitable and responsive to their needs [BKM 2006]. Beyond the detail presented in Figure 10, the mechanisms by which this would take place were not well articulated, a key issue that lies at the centre of this enquiry and is discussed later in some detail.

The schematic presented in Figure 10 is taken from early programme documentation; it attempts to describe the theory of change for 'voice' within the programme. District and National level planners were to be 'exposed' to 'captured voice', which was to focus on issues of equity and access of the 'P&E' [BKR 2007].

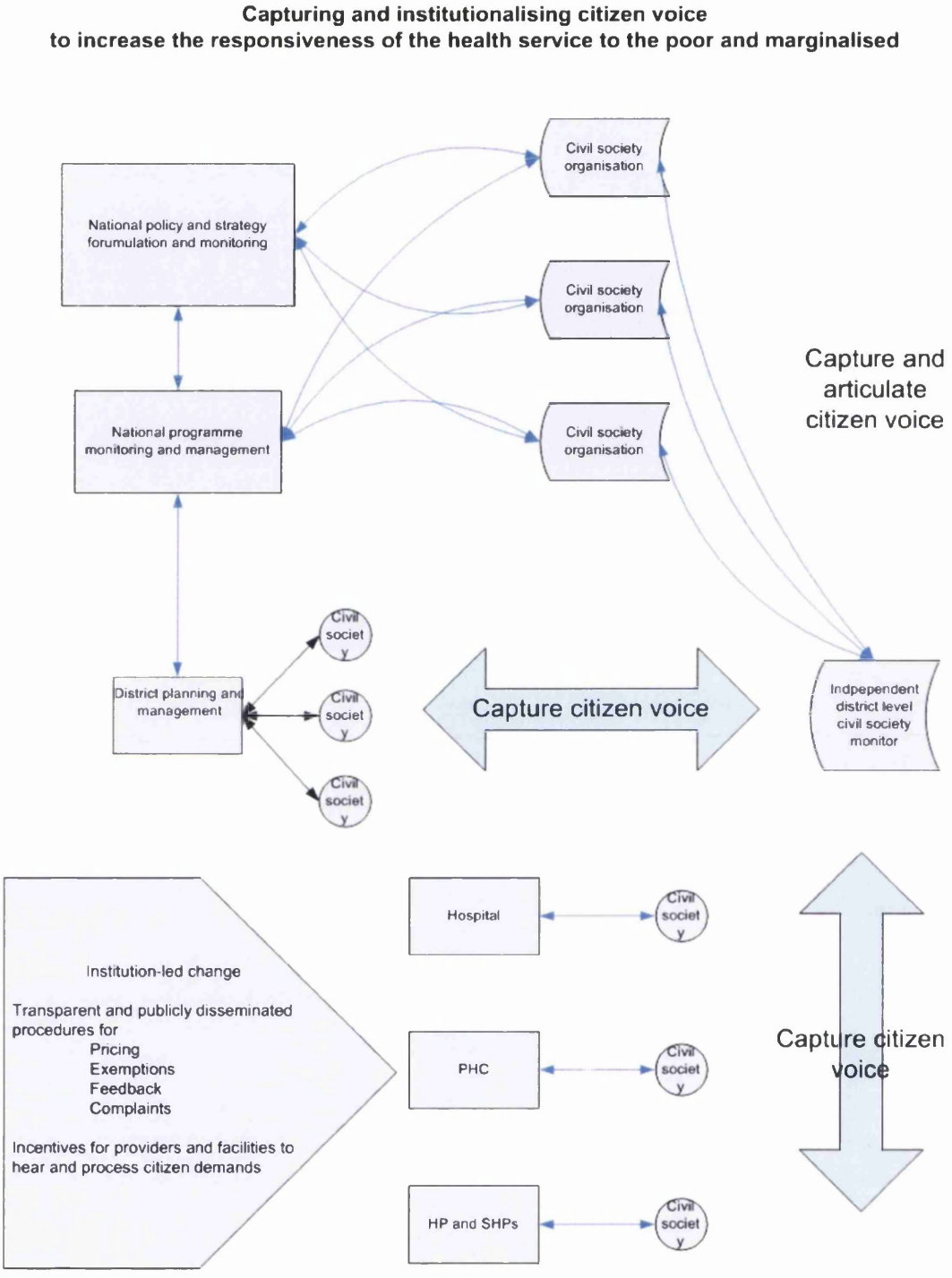

Figure 10: The 'voice capture' theory of change [FDR 2005]

The dominant programme discourse puts this equity agenda at the heart of demand side programming, described as a 'targeted approach' [FDR 2005]. This was done primarily to differentiate it from previously supported 'blanket coverage' approaches which it was argued, by definition tend to exclude 'hard to reach', poor

and other populations most in need [PMN 2003]. Design documents required that "Social inclusion and equity considerations were to feature strongly in district level mapping, planning and monitoring including the dis-aggregation of communities on the basis of caste, ethnicity and poverty status" [FDR 2005]. Whilst as the programme developed, internal documents increasingly discuss inclusion and equity [SIS 2007], they do so without a treatment of the social production and relational nature of these inequalities, particularly the intra- and inter - household power relationships highlighted in Manandhar's report (2000), and the KIM data. My interviews with programme staff conducted in 2007 and 2008 similarly indicate a lack of detailed engagement of the implications of these concepts for programme implementation. 'Voice' had entered the discourse and was given a high profile in the programme narratives, but did not translate in practice to support the agency of women to promote change.

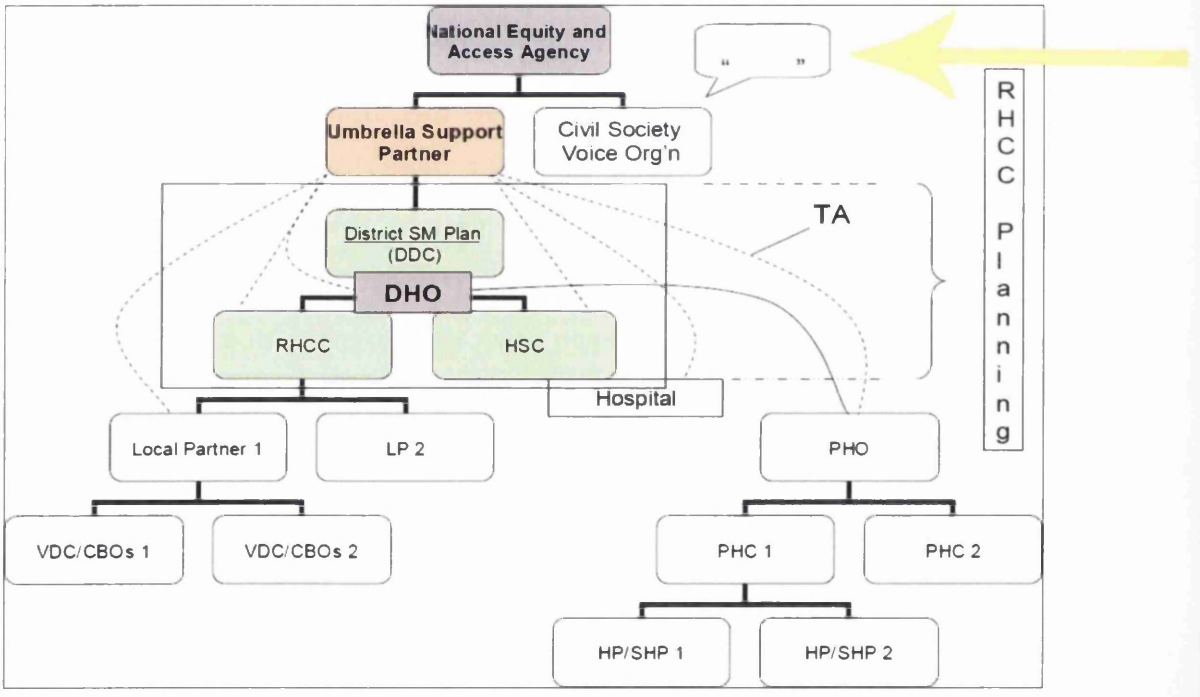

Figure 11: District Implementation, 'voice capture' as an 'orphan' [FDE 2005]

The schematic in Figure 11 is taken from early programme documentation and indicates the separation of 'voice capture' (top right), an orphan programme structure lacking a systematic role, yet persistently referred to in the programme narrative [FDR 2005].

'Voice Capture' - theory and implementation

A deeper exploration into the ways in which 'voice' was conceived and operationalised with the IO programme provides a picture that links extremely well to the issues around participation and agency discussed in Chapter 3. Despite the poor articulation of the mechanisms through which this 'captured voice' was theorised to achieve change, the activity was enthusiastically promoted by a range of actors across the programme. Interview data from staff at all levels of the organisation demonstrate a shared narrative around 'the voice of the poor and excluded'; processes where 'right holders' would 'voice' demands to 'duty bearers' at facility, district and national level. Indeed, the process was presented at a number of national and international conferences in 2007, 2008 and 2010 [AHD 2007, NPD 2008, VCP 2008, BRP 2010]. However, an analysis of these narratives, particularly in comparing reports of activity at each level of the programme, paints a picture of a rather more flawed process, and one which was by no means benign.

The specifics of this process are worthy of consideration, including my own role as a consultant to what became 'voice capture', focused around Key Informant Monitoring. The KIM approach was, in its conceptualisation supposed to incorporate both a logic and practice of participation (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 153); a process where Key Informants (KI) supposedly, embedded in the 'target community' were invited to take a role in framing the research questions, and analysing the results (Price and Pokharel, 2005: 156). These KIs were subsequently to present 'their' findings to local political leaders and service managers, and advocate for change [VCF 2008]; a concept closely aligned to the voice and accountability discourse of the World Bank and DFID (World Bank, 2010). It was envisaged that this advocacy would be linked with broader community mobilisation in pressing for local level change; principally better access to health services, more equitable access, and better quality provision [FDR 2005, VMT 2006]. These findings were also to be aggregated and used in national level advocacy campaigns around similar objectives [DTT 2008].

The practice was significantly divergent from theory. The local CBOs contracted by the IO programme to conduct social mobilisation reportedly felt that the Voice Capture Organisations were monitoring their performance, and consequently in many cases refused to collaborate [DTT 2008 and KI interviews]. The lack of any substantial links between the Voice Capture Organisations and district government or local CBO staff, together with limited capacity of the Voice Capture Organisations themselves, severely hampered any advocacy (or 'voice') at local level. 'Voice capture' and 'social mobilisation' activities were conducted as entirely separate exercises. The huge amount of 'voice data' 'captured' through the KIM process was not used successfully in any systematic way at distinct level, and likely in most cases not used at all.

At national level, the 'voice data', for each of two data collection rounds consisting of two suitcases of notebooks from the eight implementation districts, were delivered to Kathmandu on each occasion for analysis. For the first round in 2007, this was conducted by a team of two, a gynaecologist with broad public health experience, and a social scientist. After an extended period of report writing and revision, the team failed to produce a coherent analysis and the document was shelved[46]. Approximately a year later, there was recognition that in order to use these data to promote change, an advocacy strategy was required. Efforts were refocused in this direction, with a significant quantity of international expertise contracted. The second round of 'voice capture' was conducted in 2008; in this instance an international consultant was recruited to analyse the data and write a report (Manandhar, 2008). The data were used to a limited extent in national level advocacy initiatives; principally by presenting findings to Ministry of Health staff, and by the production of a short report and participatory film, made with the involvement of selected Key Informant researchers (Reffell, 2008).

[46] Update May 2010: A document based on these data, The Unheard Voices: Untold Stories: A National Voice Report on Safe Motherhood and Neonatal Health by Uddhav Rai was recently produced at the point of programme closure; unfortunately too late to inform the programme, or to be used for programme advocacy.

At district level the KIM process was envisaged to form part of a wider participatory process, and assumed to be empowering in itself. However, the notion that Key Informants would make effective advocates for change in local health services, or oppressive social structures appears in hindsight as flawed. Whilst the data indicate that many of the Key Informants did self-report that involvement developed their confidence and social standing; it would be stretching a point to argue this was empowering in any transformative sense. Furthermore, as a programme working across large geographical zones and populations, the small number of Key Informants make any 'empowerment effect' of participation marginal; particularly given the significant resources (and expectations) invested into the exercise. Whilst the Voice Capture Organisations tasked with implementing 'voice capture' attempted a limited synthesis of some kind of 'average voice' around predefined themes [VCR 2008] see Figure 12; ultimately the data did not move far beyond the notebooks in which they were recorded.

Voice captures right holders (users) voices on:

- Women's workload
- Perception attitude towards women
- MNH practices (during pregnancy, delivery, postpartum and related to newborn-both good and harmful practices)
- Decision making and role of women
- Perception attitude towards service providers
- Barriers to accessing SMNH services (Economic, physical. Social and cultural)
- Acceptability of services
- Affordability of services
- Attitude and perception towards service providers

Figure 12: IO KIM 2008 target issues; predefined themes 'captured' as 'voice' [SSR 2007]

This was clearly not the intention of the original architects; in the original conceptualisation of KIM (Price and Pokharel, 2005; Price and Hawkins, 2002); Key Informants themselves were intended to have an important role as advocates. It was envisioned that these individuals would present their findings to VDC and

District level 'stakeholders', and decision makers. Given that cultural norms prescribing the behaviour of *Dalit* and *Janajati* populations are so exclusionary, the extent to which this was actually feasible is open to question. Indeed, the notion that rural Nepali women could be supported as effective agent-consumers on any scale by such an intervention can be questioned. However, with appropriate support one may speculate around the degree of agency and influence they may have had in this role. From my personal experience, triangulated with programme documentation [DTR 2008, ELR 2010, VWP 2009] and external programme reviews[47]; what appears beyond conjecture, is that the capacity to support these individuals and use 'voice data' for advocacy at district or national level was absent.

Irrespective of the technical failings, given the scale of the problem and of the programme, in retrospect the participatory credentials of KIM, as it was implemented in practice, appear token and superficial; a fact that I, as the primary consultant tasked with adapting the tool to SSMP, largely failed to acknowledge at the time [VAM 2007]. Contemporaneous notes and consultancy reports [BTT 2008, SIS 2007] demonstrate a failure to engage with the 'tyrannical' issues discussed in the remainder of this chapter. For example, the external framing of issues, de-politicisation, blame shifting and 'privatization' of social struggle were not substantively addressed. The reality is that KIM data were used in a way analogous to the *Voices of the Poor* study (Narayan and Chambers, 2000); an extractive process used to add credibility to an existing and predefined external agenda. Importantly, a credibility that was gained by the *performance* of the exercise which was widely promoted in Kathmandu and beyond [VCP 2008], rather than in its results, which were conspicuous by their low profile in the programme narratives [PCR 2010].

Community mobilisation as part of a voice and accountability discourse

Just as 'voice capture' produced a 'managed product' with no agency dimension, so community mobilisation had fairly superficial participatory credentials. Community

[47] Codes withheld

mobilisation activities were conceptualised largely along the lines of a 'classic' 'voice' initiative; both programme documents [FDE 2005, NPD 2008, VAM 2007] and staff[48] discussed the ways in which individuals from poor and excluded groups would be mobilised to demand access to better services. It is important to note the divergence between a 'voice' model where free agents use their agency to realise their aspirations for government services, and the experience from Nepal. Prior to the IOs intervention, demand for modern maternity services was limited with the vast majority of women seeking care from traditional providers, or delivering alone (Manandhar, 2000). In the absence of a 'voiced need' for services, IO interventions were designed to work first on behaviour change in order to create a demand. This somewhat engineered demand was to be subsequently 'captured' as 'voice', with communities mobilised to *request* improved services.

It is important to note the circularity in the programme *theory* around voice and accountability. The implementing IO and subsequent local CBOs were Ministry of Health and Population lead[49], donor funded and therefore effectively quasi state agents. These actors worked to create active demand for a public good, to be delivered by other quasi state agents working under the same project (albeit in this specific case, in different geographical areas). If one compares this dominant configuration with the literature on 'voice' (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001), one immediately sees inconsistencies between the discourse around empowerment, choice and expression of agency in the voice - accountability model, and the reality of implementation.

This phenomenon is by no means unique to Nepal. Indeed, one finds this circular configuration repeated consistently in the literature (for example Gaventa and Barrett, 2010) and technical reports from similar programmes (Hemmings and Abah, 2011; PATHS2, 2010). 'Voice' is not the spontaneous agency of empowered

[48] In interviews with staff, the desire to support the voices of the 'P&E' was a constant and high profile part of the programme narrative. Indeed, one had the impression that the phase become a new word, divorced from the substance of its original meaning.

[49] SSMP was located within the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health and Population

citizens toward the state, but rather a carefully managed process, usually with significant involvement of the same state actors who are expected to respond with improved accountability. Returning to Cornwall, these are 'invited spaces' (2004: 75) with limited opportunities for participation with any implicit agency dimension; yet, within the programme they form part of an overt discourse which frames them as 'claimed spaces' in a reconfigured civic relationship.

In Nepal then, we see a situation where both the theoretical model and implementation of voice and accountability are somewhat flawed. Whilst we do see the notion of 'voice' significantly reframed from its conceptual origins; interviews with staff at all levels indicated a flexible approach in their use of the concept. In general, whilst notions of empowerment pervaded discussion of 'community mobilisation' and 'voice', in implementation these approaches were imbued with little of the sense of autonomous or collective agency implied by the original proponents of the model.

Applicability of the 'voice' concept

The separation of 'voice capture' as a discrete activity from other aspects of social mobilisation, even using different CSO implementers, appears at first sight to be a confusing decision. 'Voice', with its implicit mobilisation and empowerment components would seem to logically form an essential or even core part of interventions aimed at empowering marginalised peoples to claim health entitlement and access services. There are two possible explanations for the apparent disconnect.

Firstly, it is possible that programme planners misunderstood the 'voice' concept. Interviews with Voice Capture Organisation staff certainly indicate a relatively unsophisticated conceptualisation of the voice - accountability model. Additionally I have already noted that the notion of 'voice' is particularly prone to a passive interpretation akin to the 'airing of views'; certainly the pervasive use of the term 'voice capture' within the IO programme did little to clarify matters. However, my interviews with programme staff in 2008 indicate that the central feature of having an implicit sense of agency was understood. Whilst in these discussions staff talked

about 'right holders raising their voices to demand accountability and claim their rights' [VVP 2007], there often seemed little clarity and limited consensus on how this might be operationalised. Ultimately, with considerable autonomy given to the local CBOs contracted in each district, *activity* focused around information giving whilst *narratives descriptions* focused around 'voice' and 'empowerment' [DTT 2008, BCC 2007, CCC 2007, MVR 2008 and personal observation]. Women were repeatedly informed about danger signs in pregnancy and birth preparedness [ELR 2010]; whilst a necessary activity in the context of limited awareness (Measure DHS, 2006), these activities can only be described as empowering in the most limited sense of the word.

Whilst undoubtedly the lack of capacity of the local implementing CBOs was a key factor in the limited focus on power or transformative change of the 'voice' initiatives [MVR 2008, DTT DTT 2008], there were additional, more systemic causes relating to the model itself. The model of 'voice' presented to the programme by international consultants and a range of instrumentalist literature was not readily applicable to complex reality of social exclusion and bureaucratic dysfunction facing programme staff. My interviews with actors at all levels, and personal experience of training staff in participatory research methods during 2007 and 2008 indicated a difficulty amongst these actors in reconciling the 'voice' model with the local context. Consequently programme staff were confronted with a need to integrate 'voice' as a central component of the programme, yet struggled to build a coherent theory of change which applied notions of voice and accountability to a complex and diverse social and institutional configurations of rural Nepal. Such issues included extreme inequality, complex intra household power relationships, entrenched and varied cultural beliefs circumscribing the agency of different individuals, varied non-liberal and non-normative conceptualisations of citizenship, a fluid conflict setting[50]. On the government side, then a monarchy, the state was

[50] The extent to which the on-going conflict in Nepal precluded the use of "voice" is open to debate. Whilst KIM was explicitly designed for use in such settings, (Price and Pokharel, 2005), an initial design document states "The collection, analysis and dissemination of "voice data" will require skilful and sensitive management if voice processes are to remain viable in the current security

inherently unaccountable for maternity services which were in some cases in limited demand. There was limited government penetration into the periphery, with a largely unformed and unrecognised citizen-state compact.

Thus whilst it is true that limited local capacity had a significant impact on the quality of implementation, the vague theory of change was in fact an inevitable function of the limited applicability of the 'voice' model to the situation in rural Nepal. The weak and inherently unresponsive nature of Nepali bureaucracy (Bennett, 2005) and deeply entrenched processes of social exclusion (Manandhar, 2000) exposing the assumptions contained within the model as flawed. Confronted with disconnects between theory and practice, development actors resorted to producing a *stylised rendition* of programmatic activity; both 'voice' and empowerment featuring strongly in programme reports, workshops and interview data. These notions were to a large extent retrospectively woven into various narratives; presented with increasing levels of confidence and sophistication as the lens moves 'upwards' in the spatial and bureaucratic hierarchy toward Kathmandu, Figure 8 and Figure 9 on pages 115 and 117 provide good examples.

Reconstruction of 'voice'; the multiple projects of a knowledge programme

With formal programme monitoring focused around knowledge transfer[51], both organisations and individual actors sought to demonstrate their effectiveness through written and verbal accounts. However, with implementation subcontracted to 'community level' CBOs, the architecture of the programme meant few had direct exposure to interventions themselves. Travel in Nepal is time consuming and difficult; a Maoist insurgency served to add additional challenges. The resulting disconnect between the 'field', district and national offices left considerable room for the fluid reinterpretation of project activities, partially as the

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context. Careful guidance will be needed on the development of monitoring indicators, dissemination methods, target audiences and approaches to influencing" [BKM 2006]

[51] The monitoring strategy focused around improvements in knowledge. In particular, the 'Knowledge Attitude and Behaviour' Survey conducted at the start and end of implementation, collecting data on indicators such as danger signs during pregnancy (VaRG, 2009).

programme was largely focused around knowledge and information transfer. It is this *knowledge*, rather than the action that was expected to result from it, that formed the dominant 'substance' of the intervention. It is this that formed the content of casual conversation observed among programme actors, the presentations given at conferences, and the descriptions of initiatives given in key informant interview. In this sense the professional currency of project talk was not focused around anecdotes of describing activity within the field, but rather the 'knowledge work' of Kathmandu based technical experts.

Importantly of course, much more was produced in terms of intangible 'knowledge outputs' than was acknowledged in the normative programme discourse. These products might be described as 'externalities'; unintended consequences of programme activities, for example, the reproduction of ideology, or reinforcement of negative labels. Indeed the data indicate that for the demand side programme, less tangible development outputs had a profound effect on the 'performance of aid' (cf. Gould, 2004).

Whilst a programme with physical outputs may be relational in many ways; attention will always be drawn to the tangible outputs, for example to the boreholes or latrines constructed. With the demand side programme principally working with knowledge, behaviour and relationships; there was very little in terms of a concrete reference point. In its design and maintenance, ideas and knowledge relating to best practice, programme objectives and appropriate roles for staff and beneficiaries was transmitted and reproduced at every level; from Washington and London, to rural Nepali villages. The results and experiences of these interventions were similarly transmitted, interpreted and reinterpreted up the chain of command, ultimately to donors.

Specifically, the 'voice' model, which proved of limited relevance to the situation facing Nepali women, and with inherent internal flaws, was applied to rural Nepal; largely due to notions of best practice emanating from donors and international experts. The almost inevitable sub-optimal implementation featured rarely in programme narratives. Instead, actors at each stage, from village to donor

reinvented or reinterpreted the experience of implementation for their own individual or organisation purposes, usually consistent with a broader programme discourse.

We see then the complexity that belies the superficial substantive homogeneity of 'a programme'; particularly the creation and control of knowledge by various actors. For visiting consultants, this was expressed in carefully managed field visits to meet with women's groups. Travel for internationals (such as myself) was arranged by plane to a convenient yet plausibly remote location, whist programme staff travelled by road. Consultant's reports were edited and re-edited to remove criticism that might be 'counterproductive' or 'upset the Ministry' [CCC 2007, MVR 2008]. What became obvious from observation and interviews with programme staff was that similar management took place at all levels throughout the programme; a two way process of reflexive construction between women's group and CBO, CBO and Advisors, Advisors and the IO, the IO and SSMP, and so on. A process played out in villages, offices, international conferences, and academic journals. A picture emerges, not of a disconnect between rhetoric and reality. Rather, we see multiple projects co-existing in the minds and actions of various actors as the programme is continually produced and reinvented.

In order to further conceptualise the social construction of the programme it is useful to explore Gould's notion of front and backstage narratives. He argues that the 'aid organisation' imposes such powerful limits on both speech and practice, 'one could say that these organisational cultures are actors in their own right' (2004: 13). The front stage narratives are therefore, 'stylised' agreed renditions of the organisational mission for an external audience. More than this, they form a discourse that has power and influence over those who interface with the programme. These actors will of course themselves offer a myriad of other more personal 'backstage' representations and performances that also make up the programme as a relational body, and indeed actor.

Whilst the notion of one single formal, i.e. front stage, programme narrative from which constituent actors deviate is overly simplistic; it is important to acknowledge

this role of the organisation in mediating the production and reproduction of programme logic. For the various organisations involved under the IO programme, this resulted in a complex field of performances; whilst imperfect and subjectively constructed, a more or less coherent front stage narrative provides a useful starting point against which to explore the *performance of aid*.

Chapter 8 - Aestheticism and the performance of aid

Introduction

Over the period of involvement with SSMP/IO, I participated in the construction of many programme narratives. Renditions that were not simply reconstructions of events as publicity initiatives or 'spin', but rather reflexive processes which, were both affected by, and influential on the flows of resources and exercise of power within the programme. Indeed, numerous contemporaneous consultancy reports incorporating various comments on numerous drafts serve to capture this negotiated, relational and reflexive process very clearly. Referring directly to the three substantive reports I authored during 2007 and 2008, but also a series of reports in which I took as active role; criticism was toned down, development jargon inserted, participatory credentials inflated and failures reframed as 'learning for subsequent programmes' [DTR 2008, CKR 2007].

It is through these processes that a front stage discourse of community engagement and mobilisation developed within SSMP and its subcontractors as a localised version of a broader international discourse. Closely aligned to the voice and accountability literature [DTT 2008, EAD 2008], this held a 'vision' of participation by 'poor and excluded' citizens in activities that would support their exercise of agency to encourage and force health system improvement. The way in which these processes of 'knowledge transfer' and reinterpretation took place has important implications. It links back to earlier discussions of the programme discourse as an assemblage of rationalities and technologies which are relationally produced (Busch, 2010: 344).

As part of this process of localisation, a series of front stage narratives were constructed by actors at different levels within a system with important spatial and hierarchical dimensions. Both interview data and documentary analysis indicate that as these concepts percolated down through the structure, the discourses were reconfigured in important ways. This was particularly so with smaller NGOs at the periphery who are perhaps most vulnerable to the vagaries of funding within the aid industry, and most keen to demonstrate participatory and access credentials [VWP 2009].

The imperative for practitioners and organisations to present themselves as cognisant of 'best practice' as a marker for professionalism has profound implications for the chain of institutional and professional relationships that produce and reproduce neoliberal models of intervention. Gould's (2005) discussion of style and capacity building links well with experience in Nepal; interviews conducted with key informants continually reinforce the importance of a cognisance of best practiced principles, often assumed to emanate from the reports of visiting international consultants [CCC 2007]. Gould (2005) similarly notes the primacy of aesthetic aspects of programme implementation; reporting styles and behaviour that fulfil normative notions of professionalism and 'capacity'. This chimes with the report from more than one consultant working with the IO who noted a disconnect between the language of 'voice' and empowerment, and the limited apparent understanding of the concepts or tools to implement them [MVR 2008]. In particular, my analysis of the significant documentary evidence collected demonstrates the common use of anecdote, acronym and technical language to describe processes with little technical content.

This performance of profession is by no means confined to the IO or indeed development practice and my experience of the IO indicates a significant degree of professionalism among staff. However, the authority that is imbued into the language of development appeared in practice to circumvent the need for critical analysis and deconstruction. Phrases like 'voice', 'P+E' and 'right holders' took on an authority that was divorced critical engagement with the underlying construction (cf. Cornwall and Brock, 2004). In the case of the IO, in common with many development interventions, this focus on style and linguistic authority took precedence over an analysis what were in reality relatively unsophisticated approaches to implementation.

What is produced by such a relational programme?

The various organisations involved in SSMP/IO were of course themselves constituted of individual actors. It is however important to reiterate that for practical purposes, organisations may be understood as mediating in the conduct

of development as influential actors in themselves. And furthermore, that individual actors may 'reproduce an overarching organizational narrative that frames their professional existence' (Gould, 2004: 15), even if this contradicts their personal experience. In this sense, 'the programme' is a contested space of more or less influential individual and organisational actors; one constructed by a perhaps narrow range of frontage narratives, together with a multitude of backstage renditions. These features are clearly not unique to the IO or Nepal; but only by acknowledging this central feature of 'a programme' are we able to explore the ways in which ideology and relations of power are produced and reproduced by programme actors.

Consequently, whilst the various 'voice' and community engagement interventions will have resulted in varying degrees of knowledge transfer, behaviour change and empowerment; what was *produced* by the programme is broader. These products or externalities spans beyond the objectives captured in front stage renditions; to include for example the legitimisation and reproduction of neoliberal discourse, or legitimisation of modes of citizenship that exclude certain individuals, such as low caste rural women. Thus I now turn to explore the political ramifications of both what was, and what was not produced by these interventions; demonstrating ways in which programmes operate politically as they seek to "exercise legitimate and calculated power" by framing knowledge "rendering the world thinkable" (Rose and Miller, 2010: 280). The IO programme may have had only limited success in changing local and intra-household power dynamics, but I argue the programme did operate as an effective conduit for new ideological perspectives on health service access and utilisation.

Staff conflated group membership with empowerment

In triangulating observation field notes, programme documentation and my key informant interviews, it appears that whilst empowerment and rights features strongly in 'front stage' renditions, those made by programme staff to outsiders; an analysis of the day-to-day conduct of the programme reveals imperatives almost exclusively focused on the efficient dissemination of information to large numbers

of women and the management of emergency transport schemes. One respondent noted:

> "in some of the networks, the main problem felt was that an individual from a group attended the network meeting and received training on an issue but, she hardly could explain one quarter of the content she was taught and explain to her group members on her return. " [ELR 2010]

IO programme staff demonstrated a consistent tendency to conflate collective meetings of 'women's groups' with empowerment and collective action, a fact reflected both in my interviews and document review. That relatively benign 'community meetings' become framed as empowering and transformative has a long linage in participatory development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; cf.Thomas *et al.*, 2003; Mahmud, 2004). Within the IO programme, 'Group mobilisation' became part of an overt narrative around empowerment, which differs significantly from aspects of its implementation.

It is important to note that this does not imply any degree of dishonesty among programme staff, and indeed such saving schemes do offer some limited empowerment for members. However, the disconnect between the substantive focus of interventions and the programme discourse indicates the flexibility of concepts and language. Documentary analysis and observational field notes allow a comparison of the written and verbal narratives of senior staff in Kathmandu [PCR 2010] and those in rural implementation areas [KTM 2007, MVR 2008]; it seems clear that renditions are heavily dependent upon the various subject positions occupied by these actors, and the context in which renditions are produced. Most importantly, the information focused community meetings were reframed *post hoc* in line with best practice or rights based mobilisation, consistent with the voice - accountability model [PCR 2010].

Empowerment as an emasculated notion

My observations over three years of involvement with the programme indicate a configuration where the front stage discourse contained a relatively poorly understood and articulated theory of change; but one based on notions of

international best practice. This co-existed with a mode of implementation that was largely disconnected from this already weak conceptual model, yet one which was reinterpreted and reconstructed as a process of empowerment. This is not incompatible with the body of work within public health which criticises the term 'empowerment' as forming part of a coercive and paternalistic discourse, creating illusions of choice (Powers, 2003: 229,232). Powers argues that rather than becoming de-politicised, the term *empowerment* has long been implicated in projects with a neoliberal and disciplinary tendency, in hindsight one reason why Freire refused to use the term (Shor and Freire, 1987: 108).

In this context, it is possible to argue that the deployment of the term *empowerment* by SSMP/IO was in fact entirely in keeping with its popular usage; and, expectations that it should encompass some form of transformation in the power relations which service to limit agency are misplaced. Indeed, Powers presents a convincing case for the disciplinary nature of much public health policy, noting "power and knowledge are inextricably interwoven and are productive of socially constructed truths that support the agendas of the dominant ideologies that created them" (2003: 230). It is to these ideological components that I now turn.

Conceptualising the target population; Communities, users or consumers

A key feature of 'voice' interventions is the reconstruction of the individual as individual consumer, together with the reframing of the citizen state relationship as one of citizen-consumer (eg. Gaventa and Barrett, 2010)[52]. This notion was to some extent implicitly transmitted in the IO intervention with the individual as 'client' prominent in the programme discourse [VVP 2007, NPD 2007]. The IO programme theory of change encompasses the need for the power of collective

[52] One may draw parallels with many processes by which consumption reframes the nature of citizenship, for example the privatisation of public space in the urban environment (Steel and Symes, 2005).

action to request or demand accountability. However, despite this, the frame of reference is individualistic; founded on a model of largely autonomous individuals as independent actors [ELR 2010]. The programme was to "sensitize local services providers, including 'community level' health workers, to the special needs of the socially excluded, and to mobilize the socially and economically disadvantaged to make better use of existing health services and to 'voice' their additional needs and requirements" [TPP 2005]. Elsewhere, mother-in-laws were 'sensitised' to the need to promote care seeking among daughter-in laws [EPP 2006]. Group members were similarly 'mobilised' to modify their behaviour and patronise government health facilities [TPP 2005]. With a focus very much on women as consumers of services, there was little or no attempt to intervene in the social determinants of decision making or the social production of knowledge or power relations [EIP 2006].

One cannot assume that an individualistic approach, albeit working in groups, resulted in a programme with no power dimension to implementation. That individuals experiencing extreme marginalisation were able to attend sessions was in itself described as empowering by some participants [SSR 2007]. Taken as a whole however, the data, including at least four 'expert' reviews conducted on the programme[53] in 2008 and 2009, unanimously agreed that despite some positive examples, in general there was little systematic attempt to support group members in challenging power relations or determinants of exclusion individually or collectively. With a focus on individual behaviour change; issues of power and decision making around maternal and new-born health were not ignored, but marginalised. Broader determinants discussed in Manandhar's report (2000) were not substantively addressed.

Beyond the programmatic failings however, more profound questions are raised around the role of the IO programme as a purveyor or reconfigured political rationality. The role of individualisation as part of the neoliberal project is well established. Rose and Miller argue that the neoliberal project has attempted to re-

[53] Reference codes withheld.

frame citizenship from something constructed in terms of solidarity and commitment to something individual and active; manifested thought the free expression of personal choice. (2008: 48). Whilst I argue that notions of citizenship should, to be meaningful, be very much embedded in local cultural contexts; in comparing liberal notions of rational choice with the socio-cultural context of rural Nepal (Manandhar, 2000), it immediately becomes clear why implementing NGOs struggled to apply the an individualised model based on the free will of independent actors.

Experience of the IO programme resonates with Mosse's concern that "NGOs become arbiters of appropriate citizenship; caste and class barriers are 'transposed into the idiom of being a proper consumer" (2005b: 22). As the IO sought to 'sensitize' and 'raise awareness', the 'poor' were classified and lectured on their roles as consumers of health services. These messages contained an implicit political rationality, with a clear disciplinary dimension. Within the IO this is brought into particularly stark relief by language discussing the 'rights *and responsibilities'* [BTT 2008] of women as service users, particularly when so many women have no realistic access to modern health services of any kind (Bennett, 2006b). This echoes Ilcan and Philips who note how such projects empower only those who 'earn' it, i.e. empower in ways that "privilege the virtues of individualism, choice and independence", individuals "who can be held accountable for these acts, and who can *therefore* exercise certain rights. (2008: 719 my emphasis).

'Voice' as decontextualizing

My field notes and interview data reveal a widespread *appreciation* of the complex household and village dynamics impacting on women's reproductive lives; indeed, most programme staff were exposed to the KIM data and aware of Manandhar's (2000) report. Yet, these understandings are not applied to the programme action in substantial ways [TPP 2005, DTT 2008]. Rather, they are applied to the programme discourse; a powerful and pervasive rendition of the programme *as it might have been* [PCS 2007]. Again, this phenomenon is in no way unique to SSMP/IO. Gould (2004) notes "such normative frames are not 'realistic', nor are

they meant to be. Rather than defining achievable goals ...the normative narratives of aid agencies legitimize their operations as well as their access to public resources" (Gould, 2004: 15).

The KIM data in particular demonstrate the extreme disconnect between the social complexity of roles and obligations in Nepali society, and the roles ascribed to the informed consumer. Here, it is important to note again the extremely limited accounting for social complexity in the IO programmes attempts to intervene on the 'upstream' factors affecting care seeking. The role of the mother-in-law as a key mediator in the intra household determinants of access was a key issue raised in Manandhar's influential report on ethnographic perspectives around obstetric health issues (2000). However, these relatively nuanced descriptions of the socio-cultural context around care seeking were reframed in project documentation as a need to improve the understanding of key safe motherhood messages by mother-in-laws.

As such, the programme was implicitly largely reliant on the Health Belief model of behaviour change; a concept closely aligned to Rational Choice Theory that forms much of the basis for new institutionalist thought (Leftwich, 2007: 7). Here health risk is associated with a deficit of knowledge, ignoring often more powerful determents such as poverty and inequality (Basu, 2003: 228; Borghi *et al.*, 2006; Cunha, 2007). This is in stark contrast with the frontage empowerment agenda which one might expect to focus on decision making and care seeking by junior daughter-in-laws of reproductive age. It also provides further evidence of the way in which by focusing on the individual, the 'voice' model largely bypasses issues of power and inequality, a characteristic with apparent 'disciplinary' dimensions.

Inequality and determinates of access, empowering the 'P+E'

A similar bypassing of these issues took place in the ways in which the IO programme sought to tackle issues of 'social exclusion'. The focus on the 'Poor and Excluded' formed part of a rights discourse in which 'targeted approaches' were used to address inequalities in access to services, principally to recruit *Dalit* and *Janajati* members into 'community groups'. The decision to use caste and tribal

labels as a proxy for marginalisation and social exclusion was not solely the decision of the IO alone, but dates back to DFID's Livelihood and Social Inclusion (LSI) monitoring framework (DFID, 2005), which incorporated extremely simplified notions of social and cultural determinants of inequality. Later work supported by DFID and the World Bank largely discredited this approach, in favour of a more nuanced disaggregation of caste and ethnicity, and respective impacts on social exclusion (Bennett, 2006b; Bennett *et al.*, 2008). However, what the early and later DFID approaches have in common with the IO programme is an extremely reductionist construction of the way in which social status mediates the roles and relationships that determine decision-making and access to social and material resources.

Again, whilst the dominant narrative of programme staff focused around empowerment, the targeted interventions for the poor and focused around enrolling these members in awareness raising and behaviour change interventions. In doing so, the unacknowledged theory of change implies that these individuals failed to 'behave' principally due to their lack of knowledge and understanding. Whilst informational barriers are by no means irrelevant, it is problematic that the effective programme theory of change is focused on this issue. Again, following the Health Belief Model, these individuals are expected to modify their behaviour in accordance with the new information gained from a programmatic intervention.

Whilst membership of a group externally labelled 'excluded' is very likely an important determinant of health seeking preferences, the notion that this may be rectified by information alone is clearly flawed. Information giving, particularly information giving relating to birth preparedness and danger signs, undoubtedly implies a *coherent* theory of change. However, again, it is one that differs significantly from any attempt to tackle the norms and power relationships which determine access to key resources. It is certainly divergent from the overt focus on empowerment.

In particular, a decision to focus interventions at around *Dalit* and *Janajati* categories, identified geographically using a social mapping approach, ignores the

broader social context of poverty and exclusion. A long history of social struggle in South Asia has resulted in a significant literature around caste and ethnic based social exclusion (Bennett, 1983; Shrestha, 1994), and attempts by those suffering disadvantage to challenge the status quo (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009: 221; Riaz and Basu, 2007: 78; Parker, 2005). The failure of the programme to engage with notions of social struggle is on one level surprising, given the prevalence of very active and politicised social movements in Nepal. It was a marked feature of discussions with staff however that involvement in any transformative political action was not only absent, but beyond discussion.

Where there *were* signs of 'autonomous' political action around safe motherhood, i.e. beyond the confines of IO 'mobilization', it was discussed as inappropriate, even with humour. For example an occasion where a women's group were so angry at the poor quality of services they were receiving, they chose to mount a protest by locking a district official in his office. Here women were described as 'taking the messages too literally' or 'going too far'. Programme staff even blamed themselves for perhaps passing on 'the wrong messages'.

It is important to note that at a time when ethnic and social tensions were being fought out through armed conflict, with much of the country beyond government control; there was a clear hesitance to tackle the social institutions that form the foundation of social exclusion in any way that might align work with the Maoist insurgency. Again however, the disconnect between the language of rights and empowerment and the reality of implementation remained stark and structural. Simplistic models of social change, and flexible narratives within a powerful discourse allowed implementation to proceed unchecked, despite demonstrating very little of the learning gained from decades of work on power, participation and social conflict.

Participation within the IO programme: the difficulty to scaling political interventions

A striking feature of the discourse reproduced in both IO documentation and staff narratives, is the absence of discussion around participation. Much of the language

of both IO staff, and external 'expert' consultants was derived from disciplinary roots in social development, but drawing heavily on theory and practice emerging from 'voice' models [CCC 2007, BTT 2008, DTR 2008]. In its implementation the programme largely failed to incorporate or carry forward the significant body of knowledge and experience that the discipline of participatory social development had amassed since the 1960s. I have already discussed how community mobilisation activities followed a limited range of mostly predefined, simplistic and prescriptive interventions. The data from the case study indicate that the 'voice' concept supported this focus, providing a convenient and credible alternative model of participation; one which allowed implementers to avoid engaging with technically and politically challenging issues of transformative social change. In doing so, the programme effectively disinherited the long lineage of knowledge around participation, resulting in a degree of conceptual poverty.

It is important to note that whilst the bounded nature of the 'voice' model fulfils a range of political functions, there are also practical reasons for the rejection of more transformative models of participation. The key proponents of 'voice' such as DFID and the World Bank have promoted tools both with a view to their applicability to their notions of political economy *and* to their scale of operation (World Bank, 2005; Derbyshire *et al.*, 2010; DFID, 2008). In discussions with staff from the World Bank Nepal, they highlighted the implications of a move from discrete project approaches to sector wide programming in Nepal; approaches that present challenges to the practice of participatory development, particularly regarding the required scale of operation.

There appears little discussion of the limited scalability of more transformative participatory approaches (exceptions Rosato *et al.*, 2009: 963; Mogre and Gyamfi, 1998); the resource intensive nature of the interventions and very limited capacity to support their implementation arguably militates against their use at national scale, particularly in the context of Nepal. Where potential scalability *is* suggested, the approaches concerned tend to be rather token and similarly apolitical (for example Manandhar *et al.*, 2004; Tripathy *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the 'voice' model has

gained currency as a 'best practice' approach, due to its influential proponents, its purported scalability (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001), and a paucity of work on more transformative models of participation that may promote change on a national level[54].

Of course this latter factor is also a function of donor funding, heavily influenced by changing perspectives on participatory development (Cornwall, 2009). Nevertheless, experience from Nepal raises serious questions over claims for the scalability of 'voice' interventions. The evidence points towards multiple factors that militate against the effectiveness and scalability these models, at least where properly implemented (cf. Ramshaw, 2010). I argue that in implementation it proves not to have the political or conceptual sophistication required to be implementable in a way consistent with the empowerment narrative. What the Nepal case demonstrates is that relatively simple and token 'voice' initiatives may be *reframed* as both scalable and successful; the complexity of intervening at scale to create empowered consumers that stimulate responsive services militates strongly against scalability.

Indeed, the Nepal case raises the question of the extent to which the discourse around the 'voice' concept actually requires interventions to deliver the proposed results. One might convincingly argue that as a Social Technology, it is the legitimacy that the model lends to the neoliberal project that gives the notion value. Whilst there is no deliberate conspiracy to ignore the relevant experience around participation, neither is it accidental. It represents the ascendancy of a discourse which serves interests concerned to bound notions of political action; in doing so it offers superficial legitimacy to neoliberal trends in public service delivery. In this sense the model may be perceived as specious in its overt objectives, but effective in propagating modes of political rationality with a range of disciplinary functions.

[54] Recent (2011) protests in the Middle East being a case in point.

Taken together, we see the emergence of a discourse heavily influenced by neoliberal thinking, but one containing superficial elements of empowerment which do not translate to implementation. The seemingly innocuous messaging around safe motherhood is revealed to contain elements of disciplinary power. This is reproduced both in terms of what is produced, i.e. individual responsibility and knowledge as a key determinant of service access. And, also what is 'not produced, i.e. the absence of substantive discussions relating to power, access to resources and inequality.

Mechanisms of de-politicisation

The process by which inherently political issues become depoliticised in the 'anti-politics machine' of aid organisations (Ferguson and Lohmann, 1994) are complex and manyfold. From Nepal, interviews and field notes and indicate two distinct but related issues. Firstly, as I have discussed, the conceptual models offered to the programme, such as 'voice', rights etc. are inherently apolitical. Secondly and more directly relevant here is the way in which these notions of 'best practice' come to define professionalism among Nepali development practitioners.

From observations of SSMP/IO employees, it is clear that the mission and lexicon of donor funded CBOs became incorporated into professional identity and reproduced as a mark of status and employability. Among senior staff in Kathmandu, this was expressed in an enthusiasm to use the language of rights, empowerment, voice and accountability; often lifted from consultants reports that had in turn reproduced the latest buzz-words from donor think tanks. For staff of smaller CBOs based 'nearer the community', professional identity and status is related more to an ability to interface with the 'the community people'; to gain access, interpret, relay and manage their needs. This experience finds corollaries with Mohan's argument that where 'the local' is privileged as the site of 'authentic' knowledge, the development expert becomes the only one able to bridge the gap between local 'lowers' and global 'uppers' (Mohan, 2001: 153).

Interestingly, the 'global lowers' are also co-opted into this process. By deliberately recruiting the most able leaders from 'P+E' backgrounds as staff, and by managing

the structures through which the P+E were to express their opinions; the programme had a significant role in managing and framing the political agency of these groups. In doing so, these groups are enrolled into a global configuration of knowledge and power expressing an essentially neoliberal rationality. A process previously recognised by Kothari as drawing "previously marginalised individuals and groups in to the development process, but ... in ways that bind them more tightly to structures of power that they are not then able to question." (2001: 140)

The professionalism of a 'new class' (Bhatta, 2007: 1) of CSO actors is of course tied up with the historical development and role of Nepali Civil Society. Despite little scholarly writing on the topic, there have been critics on the Nepali left arguing CSOs form a "petty bourgeoisie as neutralizer of people's war" (Dahal, 2001: 24). Beyond the hyperbole, the role of CSOs in transmitting and legitimising neo-liberal ideology is well documented (Ilcan, 2009; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002) and discussed later.

The processes involved are however complex, the 'voice' discourse was reflexively shaped and at each level within the programme. My interviews with a wide range of programme staff indicate that employees were not faithful relays of a standard technical doctrine; rather they re-interpreted the technology and constructed their position in pursuit of their own 'personal projects' (cf. Rose and Miller, 2010: 287). In Nepal these appeared to range from promotion, relocation to urban centres or winning contracts, to increasing social status and access to international travel. Through these various actors and process, discourse was produced and reproduced; from international organisations and consultants, to members of 'the P+E'.

We see then an emergent picture of the mechanisms by which various actors in the configuration reproduce and localise a global discourse in pursuit of their own projects. Actors interpret the concepts such as 'voice' and implement them in diverse ways for example as 'voice' became 'voice capture', the concept was reconfigured in technical detail; yet, the central 'tyrannical' aspects such as individualisation, blame shifting and de-politicisation remain. Whilst part of a

disciplinarity configuration, my experience of the IO indicates these mechanisms are perpetuated with little or no government intervention. The rewards and incentives are conveyed externally by way of 'a project' or promotion, and internally through status, professional recognition and job satisfaction. As such, these mechanisms are clearly demonstrative of a 'globalised' governmentality (Rose and Miller, 2008), with the state largely bypassed.

Global Networks

Within Nepal it is clear that transfers of knowledge were strongly linked to power relations and disciplinary practices. The configuration was complex, with multiple organisational actors in London, Washington, Kathmandu, districts towns and rural Nepal. Whilst the Government of Nepal was a 'partner', its role at central and district level was relatively minor. Indeed, the most influential actors in the programme were 'transnational', for example DFID, the World Bank, international consultants and the management consortium. This links well with the more recent governmentality literature holds that the state is not necessarily the origin of diffuse regimes of power (Ilcan, 2009: 715); and indeed, globalised organisations, whilst powerful, are similarly only part of this diverse configuration of government. A complex assemblage of mechanisms, technologies, and narratives interact with individual and organisational actors to shape conduct reflexively in ways that reproduce power through the mundane practices (Beck and Grande, 2010) of amongst others, development practisers (Ilcan, 2009: 715).

Indeed, international consultants had a particularly influential role in defining and shaping programme narratives in ways subsequently reproduced by programme staff. Again however the process was bi-directional, with Nepali staff often defining the mission of consultants, who were often carefully 'managed' by both senior and junior programme actors.

There is a significant literature which discusses the role of international 'experts' as intermediaries in processes of governmentality (for example Rose and Miller, 2010:

285; Ilcan and Phillips, 2008: 717). Mosse in particular discusses the ways in which these actors work to link global development trends to local initiatives. He notes that "in doing so they become the conduits through which resources flow but also the agents in interpretive processes that legitimise the application of often inapplicable theory and practice whilst concealing what are often in reality overbearing political concerns." (2005a: 123). There is clear evidence of such a process with the IO where, as in any organisation, actors struggle to demonstrate status, professionalism, effectiveness within 'rules of the game' largely defined by international institutions. For international consultants, this was often managed as a process of capacity building, a practice Ilcan (2009) similarly notes provides a routine mechanism though which power and authority are exercised in development (2009: 715).

A key rational for all actors within this configuration to reproduce, was a view of 'development' as a series of planned interventions. A notion that progressive change was contingent upon initiatives administered by professionalised individuals and organisations with this necessary *capacity*. Also, that change was reliant on the production of "particular forms of knowledge; the mobilization of certain kinds of agents of change; and the establishment of networks of professionals, technicians, politicians and public servants" (Ilcan and Phillips, 2008: 711). This process of professionalization is also linked to a shift to corporatisation of the 'aid industry', and the continued ascendancy of the role of NGOs as an organisational form within transnational aid networks (Nelson, 2006: 709).

The NGO

In the Nepal case study, the structures of power, decision making up and down the 'chain' of implementation were complex: a configuration of a project funded by a foreign donor, in partnership with national government, designed by a UK based consortium, delivered via international NGOs in order to support essentially 'private' civil society organisations in Nepal. These were in turn required to support 'excluded' individuals to demand more accountability from government. The resulting structure was of course profoundly undemocratic and opaque. This raises

important questions about the central organisational form in the delivery of 'voice' initiatives (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010), the 'NGO'.

I have argued that 'the programme' is a relational assemblage constructed by numerous individual actors, yet also that the constituent *organisations* may be analysed discretely, almost as actors in themselves. The ascendancy of 'Non-Governmental Organisations' as implementers of development assistance is worthy of specific focus; viewed for the sake of clarity through a more structural lens. This is particularly important to address phenomena what was particularly prevalent within the IO, the common conflation of 'NGO' with 'Civil Society'.

Both the Nepal case, and a significant literature demonstrates the idea of the NGO sector as representative of 'the community' as specious on many levels. The extreme social 'unrest' and turmoil both endured and often supported by Nepali citizens during the life of SSMP makes the question of what does, and what does not constitute civil society a particularly salient question. The almost privatised practice of citizenship, supported and legitimised through Nepali NGOs contrasts vividly both with Maoist insurgency in rural Nepal and mass popular protest on the streets of Kathmandu during 2006 (Pandey, 2010).

In this context Coelho's provocative definition is illuminating; quoting Chatterjee (2001) Civil Society is perceived as "the bourgeois associational forms derived from Western modernity, embodying the principles or rather, the discourses-of equality, autonomy, contracts and deliberative processes of decision-making" (Coelho, 2005: 174). Thus civil society is perceived as an elite institution which does not include 'the public'. Coelho contrasts civil society with 'political society'; whilst this latter notion may encompass higher-level national politics, or local political struggles, it is implicitly not the appropriate domain of neoliberal voice and accountability interventions which are framed and implemented to avoid overt political engagement.

Consequently, a configuration emerges whereby the 'public' unable to match the standards of 'civil society' are encouraged to look to NGOs, or their projects, in

order to legitimately represent their interests. Writing in relation to public service providers, Coelho argues, referring to her case study on water engineers in south India, that "political society's claims on the state are made not through the orderly associational citizenship of civil society, but in a different form of collectively; the crowd, the mass that the engineers abhor and fear" (Coelho, 2005: 191).

In Nepal, both documentary analysis and interviews reveal a conceptualisation of civil society that is both normative and value laden. It is simultaneously used almost as a proxy for society; to indicate an acknowledgement of the need for the programme to engage with 'the community', and do so at a level that gets 'down to the grass roots'. Yet, in my interviews with programme staff, the more specific the discussion, the more civil society became 'civil society organisation'. The implicit construction of this concept closely follows the argument outlined by Coelho above. 'Political society' is absent from the narratives which define the programme discourse. The multi-level bureaucratic machine of a 'programme' requires familiar organisational forms with which to interface, the language of implementing CBO reports discusses meetings, networks and objectives of women's groups as if they were similarly privatised and professionalised organisations [VWP 2009]. My data clearly supports the Cleaver's assertion that civil society is the "public made legible" to development agencies (1999: 61), and indeed in some senses represents a deliberate recreation of bureaucratic style structures at 'community level'.

Whilst Nepali development professionals would certainly balk at such a description, the narratives from my interviews almost present a distinction between civil society and the perception of a 'rabble beyond'. Within the IO, discussion was universally focused on working with 'the poor and excluded'; this *externally* constructed constituency did not in themselves constitute civil society, rather they were enrolled and made legible by NGOs. I argue that the framing and bounding what are and what are not legitimate citizenship practices, and the effective exclusion of 'political society' is significant. Indeed this exclusion of any organisational form not sanctioned by programme actors is a very concrete mechanism by which orthodoxies of neoliberalism are imposed. The way in which civil society is

conceptualised as either being formed of an externally constructed notion of the orderly consumer, or organisations representing this orderly constituency, finds close parallels with New Public Management and the neoliberal reformulation of the ethos of public service provision (Coelho, 2005: 176).

It is important to note that the rationalisation by programme staff for this exclusion of political society was presented as on 'practical' grounds. Whilst organisational forms with political agendas were bypassed; they were crowded out-not by a conspiratorial liberalising design, but by the needs of scale and timing-favouring NGOs with internationally funded, sanctioned and designed 'capacity'. At all but 'community level', NGOs required organisation forms with which to interface that closely resemble their own. At local level, the 'last mile' was supported by 'Community Based Organisations' (the implementing CBOs) which sought to organise 'the community', along almost similar bureaucratic lines, in this case into women's groups and networks of women's groups.

These mechanisms emerge largely without the deliberate intervention of any central authority. They are nevertheless clearly part of a disciplinary configuration; one analogous to Gould's assertion that it is through these processes that indigenous social movements, or innocuous service delivery groups "become (self-) disciplined clients of donor agencies" (Gould, 2005: 79). Thus we see transnational configuration of transnational 'private' aid agencies as an instrumental link in establishing these disciplinary mechanisms. Indeed Ilcan argues these can less be seen as discrete institutions, but more as networks (Ilcan and Phillips, 2008).

Whether these are conceptualised as discrete institutions or global assemblages is largely a function of one's conceptual lens. Gould discusses the necessity of shifting 'resolution' in order to conceptualise the complex special and positional characteristics of a globalised ethnographic 'field'. Thus I contend that whilst in discussing the production of knowledge, it is convenient to focus in on the networks of actors; in exploring the ascendance of networks of relatively unaccountable private NGOs, it is worth acknowledging these as substantive agents

in their own right; agents embedded in a complex structure of transnational power relations.

NGO access claims and the privatisation of citizenship

A major end of programme evaluation[55] concurs with my evidence from key informant interviews that attempts by the IO, itself a 'CSO', to use other smaller CBOs to create 'grass roots' associations to 'promote voice' were somewhat flawed. The resulting networks of women's groups who were to collaborate to put pressure on government actors for change proved largely ineffective. Various respondents indicated flaws in this model where network spokespeople were not recognised by other women's groups as legitimate representatives. Similarly district officials failed to recognise the legitimacy of the networks as representing women or the 'citizenry'. Furthermore the IO funded civil society organisations supporting these groups were themselves often not recognised as legitimate by government.

To take a specific and personal example; in 2008 I attended a 'voice workshop' as an observer in a meeting of the government Reproductive Health Coordination Committee at a District Headquarters. This was one of many such events held across the IO implementation districts to sensitise this 'key stakeholder group' to the 'voice of women' [SSU 2008] in the area. Coming at the end of a large, locally focused research exercise, this should in theory have been a major advocacy event. Indeed, subsequent reports discussed these workshops as effective and a key output of the programme [IOV 2009, PCR 2010, VVP 2007]. The actual substance of the meeting was a 20 minute PowerPoint presentation by a member of staff from the 'Voice Capture Organisation'. This was delivered to a crowded room as one item in a long agenda. The serving of tea significantly distracted the majority of participants and the presentation itself focused far more on the methods of KIM than the findings. VCO staff and subsequent consultant's reports indicated that this largely represented the norm for such presentations, which apart from advocacy work in Kathmandu, were the central outputs of the 'voice capture' initiative.

[55] Reference withheld.

This finding has two important implications. Firstly, the way in which the impact of the activity was substantially and positively re-framed after the event. More important however is the apparent 'dead end' for 'community voice'. Communication with government was mediated by Voice Capture Organisations and Implementing CBOs, yet in reality their engagement with officers at district level was extremely marginal. They lacked the skills, legitimacy, status and access to deal with government on anything like equal terms; they did so in an environment where government was inherently unresponsive (Dangal, 2005). Yet, they took a role as the key link in a chain, providing for no direct communication between government and women's groups or networks. The one attempt by an international consultant to involve the KIM Key Informants directly in district advocacy largely met with failure, when both government officials and CBO staff failed to treat KIs with appropriate respect [MMR 2008]. Following 'voice capture', the rich experiences of hundreds of women largely remained 'captive' (cf. Manandhar, 2008) in some 100 notebooks.

It seems that despite this ability to demonstrate capacity to 'perform' development', the capacity claims and 'access claims' of these NGOs are then open to question. There is evidence from Nepal that whilst these organisations were proficient at presenting information to women, information flows 'upward' from women to other institutions were extremely poor. These privatised conduits for the practice of citizenship in fact proved conduits to nowhere; certainly not to local and national government decision-makers and power brokers that had such an important role in the front stage discourse and voice accountability model [IOV 2009]. In the context of the IO, formal links between 'the programme' and national or district government appeared largely cosmetic. Indeed, implementing CBOs as clients of larger international NGOs financed by international donors, these organisations become even less linked to, or dependent on state bureaucracy. The promises made to the women who participated in the programme regarding the impact of their 'voices' were false. NGOs traded on the ability to make credible

access claims both to government and the community, claims that are revealed rather as the 'performance of capacity'.

Indeed, aspects of the voice - accountability model are almost diversionary; there is an unaddressed question of the extent to which local government, with an inherently unresponsive culture and limited resources, had the ability to respond to this 'voice'. Certainly any response would have no potential to address the chronic inequality and socio-economic marginalisation which form the key determinants of maternal mortality in Nepal. Thus market and state failures are provided, by IFIs and donors, with a cosmetic avenue for resolution that explicitly avoids political engagement, either in structural relations of power, or liberal democratic political processes.

Privatisation of discipline

From the preceding discussion it is clear that as NGOs become an increasingly central tool for the delivery of development programmes, so the social construction and discourse surrounding these institutions becomes more important to understanding the performance of aid practice. Whilst this discourse is laden with moral imperatives; interviews with practitioners reveal little substantive difference in many domains between NGOs and private for profit entrepreneurial ventures. Both positions require a similar performance; the ability to demonstrate 'capacity' as a prerequisite to resource flows. Both are equally only truly accountable their funders; in this case, from women's groups to women's networks to CBOs, IO, SSMP and ultimately the donor.

The configuration in Nepal therefore finds strong parallels with Gould's (2004) argument that increasingly NGOs find themselves functioning as "a local gatekeeper's for the BWI [Bretton Woods Institutions] driven policy agenda" (2005: 76). Certainly these relatively small CBOs are implicated as the 'last mile' in a transnational private aid network, and one very clearly implicated in a variety of disciplinary mechanisms discussed throughout this chapter.

Much of the governance literature is focused on an essentially Marxist analysis describing the *structural role* of these organisational forms. However, for both Marx and Foucault, the *locus* of power was seen to increasingly move outside the sovereign state and into 'society' (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 258). This displacement of sovereign authority with more dispersed regimes of discipline (Golder and Fitzpatrick, 2009) can again be well related to civil society in the Nepali context. A process whereby as NGOs become disciplined clients, so individuals become envisioned and constructed as disciplined consumers of health services[56].

The data indicate that SSMP is ultimately implicated in the promotion of social technologies of control within a configuration of 'Neoliberal governmentality' (Anders, 2005: 40). 'Voice' forms a central tool and what Ilcan and Phillips describe as a 'technology of citizenship', the means by which government "works through rather than against the subjectivities of citizens" (Ilcan and Phillips, 2008: 723). These technologies have not so much evolved over decades of participatory practice, but rather been designed by influential agents such as the World Bank. These are promoted in a quite deliberate attempt to define and control the state-of-the-art in social development practice. As such, voice and accountability have become part of a new 'global orthodoxy'. It is an indicator of the success of this project that voice and accountability have indeed become what Coelho has described in relation to similar technologies, "a new common sense and a mark of professionalism" (2005: 171).

[56] For an interesting discussion on the reified consumer still very much relevant to neoliberal thinking, see (Israel and Eliasson, 1971)

Chapter 9 - The construction of citizenship in Nepal

Introduction

In previous chapters I have discussed the way in which notions of citizenship provide a useful conceptual model with which to explore the relationship between actors and state power. I argued that 'legitimate' citizenship practices have been framed to exclude 'political society' in favour of tightly managed invited spaces for participation; whilst agency and empowerment was inflated and re-styled *post-hoc* by various actors in pursuit of individual and organisational projects. I now turn to discuss implications of the data from the Nepal study for notions of citizenship. Particularly, the way in which voice and accountability implies a reconfigured construction of citizenship with important disciplinary characteristics.

Citizenship in decentralised Nepal

The Tenth Plan 2002-2007, being also the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), purported to set the agenda for a decade of participatory development policy in Nepal. The plan mandated that women, poor and excluded groups be involved in district planning with a legally enshrined, but unspecified role in decision-making and service planning[57]. The PRSP in fact follows a range of prescriptive solutions strongly associated with the World Bank.

> "...limiting the role of the public sector and prioritizing public interventions; enhancing the participation of the private sector, NGOs, INGOs, and community-based organizations in development activities; developing alternative delivery mechanisms, particularly through greater devolution of functions, responsibilities and resources to local bodies; and greater community involvement in the formulation and management of key programs aimed at meeting the needs of the rural population"
> (GoN, 2002b)

As such, like many PRSPs, the Tenth Plan represented "a new reincarnation of Structural Adjustment" (Labonte, 2004) in Nepal. The document clearly replicates

[57] Both under the Policy on Decentralisation. (MoH, 2002) and the 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GoN, 2002b)

the neo-liberal discourse propagated by the IFIs, and provides important evidence for the policy context in which the case study takes place.

Similar discourses can be found reproduced, reinterpreted and modified by a range of actors in Nepali policy development throughout the decade (MoH, 2002; GoN, 2002a; DFID, 2005; Regmi *et al.*, 2009). Whist policy approaches like 'decentralisation' appear plausible at a macro level, some question the applicability of similar prescriptions at the micro level. For example, Bennett (2006a: 20) notes that whilst the plan recognises that lack of 'voice', political representation and empowerment are important dimensions of poverty; whilst proposing 'affirmative action' it fails to present a realistic strategy or mechanism to mainstream inclusion.

In the health sector there had been a similar drive to promote decentralisation, with concomitant rhetoric promoting a vision of equitable access and community participation (Regmi *et al.*, 2009: 2). Again this vision remained largely rhetorical and over the life of SSMP as State capacity to implement these policies was limited. Large sections of the country were effectively outside government control, and local government capacity within controlled areas severely constrained (Armon *et al.*, 2004: 6; Pandey, 2010; Jha *et al.*, 2009).

Citizenship in the periphery

How then is the 'active citizen' to manifest herself in areas where the state has limited penetration; and, where the state-citizen compact has a very different history (Riaz and Basu, 2007; Housden, 2009) to that in the Western dominated academic discourse? Post-war Scholarship has traditionally ascribed the nation-state the status of a unified and autonomous actor (Giddens, 1994). Whilst poststructuralist approaches have challenged this nation (Foucault and Senellart, 2008: 112), processes of globalisation also provide an additional imperative for a reconfigured analytical model (Ong, 2005: Loc 5123; Beck and Grande, 2010: 430). Rose and Miller argue that the question is "no longer one of accounting for government in terms of 'the power of the state', but of ascertaining how, and to

what extent, the state is articulated into the activity of government" (Rose and Miller, 2010: 275).

"The state" is therefore rather more a linguistic device for articulating ways of ruling, then a substantive entity in itself. Indeed Foucault *et al.* (1988) argue that the state possessed "neither the unity nor the functionality ascribed to it, it was 'mythical abstraction' " (Foucault *et al.*, 1988: 5). As such, globalisation does not so much represent the marginalisation of the nation-state, but rather forces a re-examination of the discourse of 'the state'. As the narrative elements of this discourse falter in the light of globalised configurations of power, so the diverse ways in which power[58] is operationalised appear more obvious targets for discursive enquiry.

In much of the academic writing on citizenship and power (Lister, 2007; Ramshaw, 2010; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006), 'The State' takes a primary position, yet in the 'extreme periphery' of rural Nepal, the state clearly does not take on the full range and extent of roles ascribed to it in a literature primarily focused on the West. In Nepal particularly, a relatively weak regime and under resourced state apparatus raises questions over the nature of the citizen-state relationship. Where the state operates at such low intensity, and women are rather enrolled into globalized regimes of power; again we are forced to ask, what does it mean to be a 'citizen' as a low caste rural Nepali woman?

An exploration of citizenship in this context is particularly important to address the 'capture' of the concept by liberal theory. Hindes (2002) notes, "where the Liberal government of non-Western populations was once predicated on a denial of citizenship, contemporary liberal attempts to govern the people of the non-Western world are increasingly channelled through citizenship itself" (2002: 128).

[58] Rose and Miller note that "to speak of the 'power' of a Government, a Department of State, a local authority, a military commander or a manager in an enterprise is to substantiate that which arises from an assemblage of forces by which particular objectives and injunctions can shape the actions and calculations of others." (Rose and Miller, 2010: 282)

Thus whilst it is not necessarily important to develop an alternative definition of citizenship, it is important to explore a range of ways in which citizenship is used to support relatively powerful agents to define the normative roles, rights and expectations of marginalised populations. Particularly so, where these choose to ignore lived experiences and performance of rights and duties, and the context of diverse regimes of power from household to state, and beyond. Specifically, in the context of Nepal it is important to challenge the normative, tyrannical and disciplinarity discourse of the *active citizen*. The KIM data presented in chapter 6, clearly supports Mahmud's assertion that the omnipresent state with supreme legitimacy is discourse that resonates with donors and implementers, and maybe entirely meaningless in a village setting (2004: 15)

Insights from Key Informant Monitoring

The KIM data did not seek to explore emic notions of citizenship; they do however reveal characteristics of women's experience which shed further light on this enquiry. Importantly, there are very few references to the State of Nepal either as a geographical entity or as a regime of government. Both the KIM data and personal observation indicate a limited penetration of normative notions of the state into rural Nepal. Furthermore, it is implicit in the normative definition of "poor, excluded and marginalised" that these actors or even further removed from such regimes of power. Consequently, we see the centrality of the state fall away from performative notions of citizenship (cf. Jones, 2006).

Of equal importance is the extent to which women described the ways in which rural Nepal is closely intertwined with global capital. There were numerous references in the data to the impact of men working in the Gulf; in some cases whole villages were devoid of men of working age, with significant implications for women's decision-making, workload, social and power structures. The KIM narratives attest to the ubiquity of externally facilitated groups and civil society initiatives, but also the uneven access to such structures; and consequently the differing extent to which women are enrolled in globalised regimes of power.

Indeed, for woman, access may increase with gravidity, or remain static where they are a member of a more excluded caste or ethnic group. Here again, we see the inadequacy of normative notions of citizenship, those relating to state-hood, to account for the fluidity of citizenship as it is performed.

The KIM data provide clear evidence for women's experience of diverse regimes of discipline. From the data, the two most central 'non-household' regimes implicated are firstly, the networks of employment markets from local companies to corporations in the Gulf States. Secondly, networks of development practitioners, from small private NGOs to bilateral and multilateral donors. These networks are of course complex assemblages of actors, human, financial and knowledge resources and relationships of power[59]. What is conspicuous by its absence in the data, are references to the Government of Nepal, or the formal agents of state power, including the Village Development Committee.

Referring back to Jones' (2006) construction of the concept of lived citizenships[60], if citizenship is to mean anything, it must refer to a reflexive construction of relationships between actors and regimes of power that span geographical distance. For Nepali women, it is very clear that whilst they are subjects of disciplinary mechanisms, including those in which the IO is implicated; any rights conferred by virtue of their citizenship are heavily mediated by patriarchal regimes of power located at village and household level. Whilst Cleaver (2007) argues that

[59] Rose and Miller note that "Liberal government identifies a domain outside 'politics', and seeks to manage it without destroying its existence and its autonomy. This is made possible through the activities and calculations of a proliferation of independent agents including philanthropists, doctors, hygienists, managers, planners, parents and social workers. And it is dependent upon the forging of alliances... Between these authorities and free citizens, in attempt to modulate events, decisions and actions in the economy, the family, the private firm, and the conduct of the individual person." (Rose and Miller, 2010: 278) To this, in Nepal one might add the husband, and the mother-in-law.

[60] Jones provides the example " 'because I am Nigerian, a Christian, of Jaba ethnicity, because I have constitutionally or culturally defined rights, because I fulfil the duties required of members of this unit of belonging ... I have (by the logic of citizenship) a particularised set of consummate rights, duties, identities, belongings and institutional relations', To me, it is this logic which makes 'I am a citizen and this gives me rights' a powerful statement" (Jones, 2006: 19)

rights to resources are ascribed *not only by* status as "as legal and equal citizens but also through their subject positions as daughters, wives, mothers as members of a particular caste or ethnic group" (Cleaver, 2007: 233); the data indicate that at least in rural Nepal it is almost exclusively these subject positions that mediate what it is to be a female citizen in rural Nepal.

Neoliberal modes of government and health

Rose and Miller (2010) argue that as the Western Welfare State developed, the health consumer was transformed from passive patient to individuals actively engaged in the administration of treatment and indeed the health system. They note that out of this concatenation of programmes, strategies and resistances, a "new 'neoliberal' mode of government of health was to take shape" (2010: 293). This was clearly the vision intended by the high-level architects for voice and accountability in Nepal [FDE 2005, DCP 2006, NMS 2004], a vision which all the data indicates was unrealistic. It was however also constitutive of a broader discourse which had significant disciplinary characteristics, defining what might be described as a 'citizenship project' (Rose and Novas, 2005: Loc 6684). This project attempted to ascribe rights of participation to women as 'right holders' within a prescribed 'invited' space (Cornwall, 2002). Yet, it did so as part of a configuration which individualises, privatises and erodes entitlement to welfare provision (cf. Miraftab, 2004: 2). Within this discourse we see the beginnings of a citizenship project that exists in more advanced forms elsewhere in Asia. A process Ong has described as 'graduated sovereignty', whereby rights and privileges are ascribed not by 'nationhood', but by ability to participate in certain activities; in Malaysia the global market (Ong, 2005: Loc 5093), in rural Nepal a certain kind of liberal civic participation that is for the most part only accessible by urban middleclass men participating in an externally legitimised civil society (Dahal, 2001: 36). Access rights are both strongly patrilineal, and patriarchal (Lohani-Chase, 2008: 55).

There is a significant literature on civil society in this role globally, much of it addressing the way in which *nation states* govern through the activities of this

sector; again by separating the civic from the 'political' (Mouffe, 2000: cited in ; Lipschutz, 2005), shifting certain responsibilities from state to society (Dean, 2010: 176), and consequently maintaining social stability and the illusion of the 'naturalness' of the free market in the face of market failure (Lipschutz, 2005: 176). Lipschutz for example, argues that the state 'returns through the back door', more intent on providing stable conditions for capital than addressing externalities and market failure (2005: 176; cf. Grugel, 2000: 90). Ultimately, this literature concludes that these disciplinary characteristics prevent an unravelling of the social contract spilling over in to 'the political'.

In this context, Miraftab (2004) calls for a recognition of citizenship practices that fall outside the invited spaces of formal politics, and recognise *invented spaces* which she describes as the 'main arena of poor women's activism'(2004: 3). Whilst an important notion, it is striking the extent to which the KIM data, and indeed other ethnographic work on Nepali women's lives (Bennett, 1983; Manandhar, 2000; Lohani-Chase, 2008: 36) paints a picture of extreme marginalisation of rural women. The data contain very few examples of resistance or what might be called civic participation outside the household.

An extremely important exception is women's participation in the 1996 to 2006 Maoist guerrilla movement. Whilst this mostly relates to areas of Nepal not served by the IO, I personally observed Maoist fighters in routine meetings with health officials in District Headquarters on more than one occasion. However, at the time of the KIM exercise, both ethical and practical considerations prevented the collection of any data on Maoist activity. Other ethnographic work has extensively documented women's participation in the insurgency, reported to form approximately 40% of the militia (Lohani-Chase, 2008: 2). This serves to underline the extent of the required transformation for women's citizenship to encompass significant entitlements beyond the household. It also points towards the extreme inadequacy for Nepali women of donor funded initiatives based on neo-liberal

notions of the Active Citizen, particularly where 'political society' may have so much more potential.

> Pointing to her AK-47, Asha Bista, a sub company commander of the Maoist PLA, famously shouted these words to journalists covering the Maoists' celebration of the International Day of Women on March 8, 2006. "This rifle is my jewellery. You hurry along with your housewives; we have to return to our bunkers and carry on our liberation struggle. . . Nepali women will not be freed by talking nonsense in five-star hotels in Kathmandu.
> "Women's Day," The Nepali Times, No. 290, 2006. cited in Lohani-Chase (2008: 1).

Conclusions

"I think we have been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it.' I have a problem, I get a grant. 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and their families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves, and then to look after our neighbour."
Margaret Thatcher in an interview with Women's Own, October 8-10-87.

"The very thrust of the programme has been to enable the community to realise that the problem is theirs and the responsibility to address the problem is also theirs so that they should volunteer and start advocating for support and services. In this way, the community people learn to address their issues on their own by advocating and accessing the available resources around." **Nepali Implementing Organisation Report [AIE 2010]**

"Women shouldn't plough. Women can only make decisions regarding what to cook and what to do. All material and money matters are kept by men. Here our life will all be gone by working. Men view women as a working group. They dominate us. It is our traditional concept. In Brahmin Chhetri community, they don't give permission for women to eat milk, curd or, ghee. They still think that buffalo cannot produce milk if women are given milk at the time of menstruation. They still keep women in the cow shed during menses and at delivery. There is no value given to women's work. They arrange marriages with us to get us for work, for generating inheritance, and giving birth to babies. After having babies, the man can marry another girl. But if the husband dies, women have to stay without getting married. That's the attitude, the concept of society. When a wife dies, the man gets married as soon as possible. So women have to stay without speaking." **KIM Data: Nepali Woman Dailekh, Paduka VDC**

"She doesn't speak up *(mukh na lagne).* Here they send daughters to school only till grade 4 or 5. If they get further they say they will be spoilt *(bigrinchha).* When she gets bigger and moves around outside the house, they say "she is walking with men". If she teaches others about going to hospital, she will get scolded "you know a lot from your studying". This is women's work. What else to do? There has to be someone to work. It's OK. Even for what to cook, she has to first ask her sister-in-law and mother-in-law. If she wants to go to her maternal home *(maiti),* she must ask husband, mother-in-law and father-in-law... Men here decide everything, even about marriage." **KIM Data: Nepali Woman Rupandehi, Bagweli VDC**

Introduction

Amidst a public health literature dominated by structuralist analytical frames, this thesis set out to provide an alternative type of analysis. The application of case study methodology, combined with a more interpretive epistemology has made it possible to unpack the multiple 'products' of a development intervention, and understand them as a 'critical case'. The detailed context provided by multiple sources of data enables an analysis of the 'unintended' consequences of both the intervention itself, and the broader discourse of which it is constitutive; facilitating a depth of understanding beyond the superficial 'front stage' discourse.

The research intended to describe a critical example of a 'voice programme' as it was substantively conceived, relationally constructed and performed. This 'performance' was of course contained in and defined by, a range of documents, interactions and understandings. The research built on the case study data to explore the ways in which such performances are constitutive of the 'programme' as an 'assemblage', with important disciplinary characteristics; one part of a discourse reproduced by 'mundane' interaction, yet penetrating into fundamental areas of social life such as the construction of citizenship itself.

The quotations above serve to illustrate the findings of this enquiry; the power of a narrative that provides little for women, yet takes a broader role in legitimising and reproducing globalised discourses of development. In this regard, the thesis provides a unique insight into the application of the voice and accountability model as a 'Social Technology'. An approach to development with often specious technical credentials, that nevertheless serves to enrol a range of actors, from Washington to village, in a global project of neoliberal citizenship.

The framework

In highlighting the way in which this assemblage is reflexively constructed but also practically 'implemented', the thesis provides a novel framework for discourse analysis; in doing so, it expands the dominant structuralist analytical frame to make new critical perspectives 'thinkable'.

The basic voice and accountability model implies causal relationships between initiatives to support individual and collective agency, and improved governance; the 'citizenry' are expected to place pressure on government institutions who, in theory, respond with improved services. The 'front stage' voice and accountability 'theory of change', already widely criticised for its opacity (Menocal and Sharma, 2008; Gaventa and Barrett, 2010), is revealed as just one of many constituent parts of a broader development discourse.

This thesis has built on programme theory driven evaluation to encompass interpretive perspectives, allowing for a deconstruction of vital ideological and performative aspects of development praxis. In order to construct a more nuanced picture, normative notions of government, state, bureaucracy and citizenship, and the relationships between them, are understood as socially constructed constituent parts of the programme assemblage.

The analysis also extends to the mechanisms by which these discourses are reproduced. I have discussed how for implementers, the primacy of aesthetics and the performance of aid to a significant extent overshadowed attention to change experienced by 'beneficiaries'. In the case study, 'change' or indeed 'development' is revealed as only one of a diverse range of objectives and outcomes.

In exploring one of the first well-resourced interventions to explicitly deploy the voice and accountability model for health in a developing country context, the deconstruction of this programme has considerable strategic importance. In this final section, I will outline the key lessons from this enquiry. Acknowledging the need to reconcile the tension between the treatment of organisations as substantive entities, and the relational processes of policy and implementation (cf. Davies, 2008: 20).

In this regard, an acknowledgement of the dominant structuralist or substantialist (Eyben, 2010a; Gaventa and Barrett, 2010) frame of development theory is important. It allows direct engagement at a practical, policy level with approaches that have achieved significant penetration into development practice. It also

supports an analysis which avoids implicating individuals in failings which are determined far beyond the realm of the individual actor.

Protecting relationships, protecting anonymity

This research took a cautious approach to anonymity, ensuring it for those who did not consent as formal 'informants', and avoiding the use of references which might indirectly implicate or identify individuals involved in a programme undergoing critical analysis. Nevertheless, deconstructing a programme is fraught with risks both to researcher and researched; careers, identities, livelihoods and development paradigms are at stake.

The case of Professor Gordon Crawford is particularly germane. In his 2003 article "Partnership or Power? Deconstructing the 'Partnership for Governance Reform in Indonesia", Crawford discusses the notion of 'partnership' in aid relations. He notes:

> "contrary to the official discourse of partnership as encouraging locally formulated reform strategies, the notions of 'partnership' and 'local ownership' simultaneously disguise and legitimise the interventions of international agencies in domestic reform processes, serving to mystify power asymmetry" (Crawford, 2003: 139).

Facing a barrage of subsequent criticism, Crawford was forced to publish a comprehensive defence of his thesis (Crawford, 2004). He sought to defend himself against accusations of a 'rush to judgement' and of 'being unable to see beyond what I wish[ed] to find' (Crawford, 2004). David Mosse faced similar criticism for his work 'Cultivating Development' (2005a). He notes:

> "Objections were made by my co-workers and informants to the publisher, to my university research ethics committee, my Department convenors, the Dean and the academic head of my university, as well as to my professional association ... on the grounds that the book was unfair, biased, contained statements that were defamatory and would seriously damage the professional reputation of individuals and institutions, and would harm work among poor tribals in India" (Mosse, 2006a: 935).

These dangers are in fact inherent in the ethnographic method, and one might well argue that it is only the common and stark power differential between researcher and researched that prevents such controversy becoming a routine part of the ethnographic process. The Peer ethnographic method was to some extent designed to allow a kind of validation of outsider interpretations (Price and Hawkins, 2002: 1333) which may potentially serve as a forum for a 'negotiated settlement'. However, I argue that as a work that eschews claims to objectivity, my own positioned interpretation of events in 'the field' is the only substantive analysis that I, as a single participant have to offer; inevitably one of many possible accounts and interpretations.

What became increasingly clear as the research progressed is that the boundary between researcher and the field is significantly blurred. Indeed, Mosse argues that increasingly, 'the field' has become 'unbounded' so as to include 'webs of regional and transnational connections and communities', resulting in all anthropologists working to some degree as 'insiders' (Mosse, 2006a). As a type of 'insider ethnography', this enquiry is perhaps no less at risk of rendering the researched subaltern (Prakash, 1994) than any other 'non-institutional' work. Findings and interpretations are always contestable and relational; the primary risk is to relationships, both those between the researcher and researched, and the researched and their own community of practice, including future employers. As Mosse notes:

> "turning relationships into data, and placing interpretations in public, can also disturb and break relationships of fieldwork. It may be 'anti-social'. Those interlocutors – neighbours, friends, colleagues, or co-professionals – who directly experience ethnographic objectifications now surround the anthropologist at her or his desk" (Mosse, 2006a: 937).

This research may have benefited from some kind of validation exercise; certainly a negotiated analysis would potentially have limited any risks to my relationships with programme actors. However, in this thesis I instead chose, as far as possible, to avoid implicating individuals; not only through protecting anonymity, but by asserting that analytically, programmes as 'assemblages' cannot be understood at

an individual level. They are more than the sum of the actors and institutions that created them, and consequently the analysis is not 'divisible' in a way that might implicate individuals either positively or negatively. Additionally, I assert that my analysis and presentation of phenomena that was relationally constructed is only one interpretation; the credibility of my account compared to any potential knowledge claims of other involved actors, is ultimately up to the reader alone to ascertain (cf. Hastrup, 2004).

The significance of the findings

Since the inception of SSMP in 2004, the World Bank and other donors have invested heavily in 'community driven' development projects that broadly follow the voice - accountability model (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010; O'Neil *et al.*, 2007). Through 2008 (Coelho and Favareto, 2008: 5) to the present day (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010: 14) commentators have noted that these methods are 'unproved', whilst spending on these approaches continues (Menocal and Sharma, 2008; DFID, 2010). The argument that the voice - accountability model can be 'proved' is in fact rather specious; the huge range of contexts and objectives of this broad 'genre' of interventions militates against the reductionism of such input-output conceptualisations. It is also worth reiterating that 'efficacy' is only one, and perhaps a minor factor, determining the ascendancy of such technologies which for their proponents serve important political as well as 'development' objectives (Bebbington *et al.*, 2004; Weltman and Upchurch, 2010).

This analysis views the voice-accountability model not as a rigid framework with inherent neoliberal tendencies; but, as a key constituent part of numerous complex processes that are implicated in the production of disciplinary discourses that pervade 'international development'. These processes reflexively reproduce neoliberal rationality, to the detriment of already marginalised populations.

Maintaining a constructive approach

Whilst categorical statements on the utility of the model are problematic, vague findings alluding to complexity and context are equally unhelpful. Interventions based on the voice-accountability model do of course have a number of both positive and negative impacts for a range of actors. Service providers should be under scrutiny from the populations they serve; these populations should have a say in the way services are provided. Empirical enquiry into how these relatively simple notions are operationalised has a significant contribution to make to scholarship (see for example Ferguson, 2006a; Weltman and Upchurch, 2010; Bennett, 2006b; Eyben, 2010a). With so much development research focused on the technical intricacies of implementation, there is an important place for work that takes a more critical stance, in many cases perhaps providing more questions than answers.

In the following discussion, I attempt an approach that is both critical and constructive; avoiding either anti-development 'handwringing' or futile deconstruction. Instead, following a brief review of the key findings of the study; I explore how this enquiry might strategically inform, or, raise important questions for development, particularly within the likely immutable reality of a dominant neoliberal paradigm.

In discussing the questions posed for development practice by the voice-accountability model, I have argued that careful attention should be made to justify deconstruction. This in order to avoid what Olivier de Sardan (2005: 3) has termed the 'deconstructionist business'; a process where one juxtaposes the 'complexity of reality' with the inevitably reductionist models that pervade development, perhaps calling for more social science or technical engagement in implementation. One must engage constructively with complexity, and here experience from Nepal is particularly instructive.

Constructive deconstruction

It clearly *is* the case that implementers under SSMP struggled to apply the voice-accountability model to the local context of rural Nepal. This study demonstrates that the model itself contains implicit assumptions that are bound to Western, liberal traditions, largely incompatible with the Nepali context. Whilst other emerging models (for example Kelsall, 2011; Olivier de Sardan, 2009) seeking to improve governance take a starting point for theory building grounded in local context; the voice-accountability model brings with it preconceived notions. The approach ascribes specific and assumed attributes to the relationship between citizen, state, and the internal dynamics of both institutions.

Despite this, voice and accountability have been promoted uncritically by the World Bank and others, with little concern for these and other inherent flaws (eg. World Bank, 2010). I have argued that amongst the IFIs, the ascendancy of the model may be attributed to its ideological functions; legitimising wider neoliberal modes of development by providing a convincing narrative that 'citizen voice' can ameliorate deficits in hierarchical control. Amongst the wider 'development community', in a desire to follow 'best practice', technical experts from both donors (DFID, 2007; DFID, 2006a) and implementers have sought to deploy the approach uncritically to developing country contexts (many examples may be found in Gaventa and Barrett, 2010), with a range of negative consequences.

Structural flaws in the voice - accountability model

In its conceptualisation as a mechanism to support service delivery in developing countries (World Bank, 2003), the model ignores key differences between 'developing' environments, and the Western contexts against which the model was formed; in particular the latter's citizen-state compact formed through centuries of social struggle (Bulpitt, 1986). In its implementation, the voice-accountability model does not provide the necessary flexibility to adapt to the peculiarities of the local institutional, social and cultural environments. Indeed, I have argued that the

limited applicability of the model to rural Nepal was a contributory factor in the need for programme actors to reconstruct interventions *post-hoc* for the purposes of upward reporting.

Numerous development theorists have argued for the need to better understand local context in order to improve interventions (Davies, 2002: 255; Olivier de Sardan, 2009). Whilst the history of development intervention is littered with sometimes spectacular failures of blueprint approaches (Roe, 2005: 313), actors in the Nepal case had an extremely good understanding of context. The research work informing the programme, both that which proceeded KIM (Bennett, 1983; Manandhar, 2000) and the KIM data itself, provided almost unparalleled access to detailed knowledge of culture, social structure, attitudes and practices.

A crucial observation from the Nepal case was, however, that the capacity to work with this complexity was absent. Additionally, the diversity across implementation areas (Manandhar, 2000) was such that it is unlikely there were a sufficient number of social scientists in the country to effectively apply a nuanced analysis of power relations, hierarchy and citizen state relationships to interventions across even eight districts.

The adaptation of generic models to the specifics of the local 'landscape', whilst theoretically desirable, is also problematic. The various interventions that fall under voice and accountability, such as user report cards, appreciative enquiry and facility health committees (World Bank, 2010) are not in themselves fatally flawed, but rather constitutive of a broader approach to strengthening service delivery that appears unlikely to achieve the ambitious promises made of it (see for example Barder, 2010). This is not only because of the internal inconsistencies discussed in this thesis, but also because it is unlikely that such generic approaches are scalable to meet the huge challenges facing development practice in diverse contexts.

Whilst the limited capacity within the programme to adapt a simplistic model to the complex realities of Nepal is relevant, the specific strengths and weaknesses of the organisations involved in the Nepal project are not the subject of this thesis. All

development interventions are subject to significant deviations from theory to practice (Pawson and Sridharan, 2009: 1) and the diagnosis of these, whilst not irrelevant, is not the focus of this enquiry.

From Nepal, the data shows that whilst the programme's achievements in supporting the 'agency' of individuals were perhaps divergent from the way in which they were subsequently presented [MVR 2008, CCC 2007, DTT 2008], health related knowledge, and to limited extent behaviour did change positively [EES 2009]. It is import to acknowledge the significance of these achievements in the challenging context of Nepal, whilst also reiterating the point that the assumption that these initiatives alone would alter power relations is fallacious.

Similarly, the focus on CSOs as almost privatised vehicles for empowerment (Kamat, 2004), an increasingly common feature of such interventions (Hemment, 2004), is flawed. The access claims of CSOs commercially contracted to 'promote and capture voice' were inflated as part of the 'performance of capacity'; imperatives of ownership and control featured strongly in the front stage narratives of these organisations, despite a lack of substantive content.

More fundamentally, the circular nature of the programme theory discussed in Chapter 7 has significant implications for the voice-accountability model. In the Nepal case, I demonstrated how the configuration of donor funded and Government sponsored initiatives supporting citizens to press for improved government responsiveness is flawed. Particularly so, given the inherent limits that government or donor funding places on the range of possible citizen action within the invited spaces created 'for them'.

Implications of the Nepal study for broader theory

I contend that findings from Nepal allow a better informed appraisal of the voice-accountability model, which is revealed as inadequate for two principal reasons.

Firstly, that those who do not enjoy accountability and responsiveness from government require a degree of agency in order to demand it; an attribute that they almost by definition lack, and that state sponsored single-sector interventions are unlikely to facilitate. Agents may have power in a range of domains, but where the state is 'unresponsive', this implies an inherent lack of agency against the state. Here increasing citizen power would seem more the realm of 'political society' (Coelho, 2005: 191) than that of the 'active consumer' which pervades the voice-accountability model (Cornwall, 2009: 34; Ackerman, 2005: 1).

Looking back to the origins of this model (Paul, 1991; Dowding *et al.*, 2000: 472; Hirschman, 1970a), there is acknowledgement that where state systems are weak, responsiveness is not necessarily a function of 'voice' or human agency. By implication, the challenges facing health systems in many fragile states are simply beyond the realm of user 'voice'. From a structural standpoint, the Paul model (1991) presented in Chapter 2 clearly demonstrates the inherent limitations of the voice-accountability model for public services such as health. Indeed an emerging literature concurs with my observations in Chapter 2, questioning the integrity of the idea that the agency of 'consumers' can have a significant effect on services where mechanisms of bureaucratic hierarchical control a weak (Booth, 2010b; Ramshaw, 2010). These weaknesses are a characteristic of many African and Asian nation states (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2010); particularly in health sectors which traditionally enjoy marginal status in the ministerial hierarchies (Govender *et al.*, 2008; Durairaj and Evans, 2010), and poor horizontal accountability, especially in peripheral areas (Paul, 1991: 10).

The Nepal case study indicates that the *consumer agency – bureaucracy response* relationship is also far less linear than the model suggests. The study describes a bureaucracy that is inherently unaccountable, not purely as a result of resource constraints, inadequate procedures or a weak citizen compact; but, also as a result of the neo-patrimonial and relational nature of the performance of government (Dangal, 2005; cf. Kelsall and Booth, 2010). Bennett (2005: 4) argues eloquently

that in this regard that policy change is culture change, indicating that the determinants of 'citizen' agency and organisational accountability are equally socially constructed, and reproduced by similar processes. This is not to argue that these features are immutable, but to highlight the importance of the relational determinants of bureaucratic failure. Nepal is by no means alone in possessing a civil service that is inherently unresponsive to challenges from below (Heymans and Pycroft, 2003).

Secondly, I argue that the aid system, intimately tied up with broader systems of governing, is politically an inadequate vehicle to instigate transformative change. This is particularly true in a configuration where quasi state agents (in Nepal, donor funded implementing CSOs/CBOs) seek to support citizens to exert strictly bounded agency toward other state agents (in Nepal, Government service providers). That in Nepal CSO agents were relatively unsuccessful in promoting 'Active Citizens' is important; however, one must also ask, had they organised more effective women's meetings, is it likely that an inherently unresponsive bureaucracy would respond any more positively? It is these inherent flaws rather than the quality of implementation that indicate that the model is unlikely to be applicable in many contexts; particularly those that characterise a large proportion of the developing world. This includes regions where the state-citizen compact is weak for large sections of the population (e.g. women); and also contexts where the dominant capacity for collective agency among the citizenry is located in donor supported civil society, rather than indigenous political organisational forms (Kamat, 2004; Grugel, 2000: 90; Derbyshire *et al.*, 2010)[61].

[61] Grugel (2000) argues CSOs that have a structural role on a micro level to replace the state, and at a macro level, to legitimise the reduction of the state. "In general, the official donors tend to see civil society a social complement to the development of the market and economic restructuring that reduces the state's role in providing social assistance. Strengthening civil society this essentially has become a way of promoting social cohesion as the states provisions are reduced" (Grugel, 2000: 90).

The fallacy of Active Citizenship

I have discussed how the evolution of the Welfare State and accountable government in northern Europe has been fundamentally tied up with a history of social struggle (Bulpitt, 1986). The potential to replicate these models of relatively accountable service provision in low income settings, through the managed support of individual and collective agency is of course superficially very plausible. However, in implementation we do not see a focus on collective social struggle, but rather on individualised complaint (World Bank, 2010). This ideologically laden approach finds strong parallels with Hindess' (2002: 128) position, that liberal attempts to govern the people of the non-Western world are increasingly channelled through citizenship itself. This phenomenon is very clearly expressed in the notion of 'Active Citizenship', an idea that has gained considerable currency with Global NGOs such as Oxfam (for example Green, 2008). The concept is superficially attractive as an attempt to apply relatively recent 'innovation' in 'third way' new-institutionalism (Giddens, 1999) to new contexts in a way loosely analogous to the social agency that was associated with the emergence of European Welfare States. In its implementation however, the application of the notion to Nepal reveals a flawed theory with multiple inconsistencies which are directly applicable to other developing contexts (cf. Callinicos, 2001).

Indeed, just as the British model of health service delivery was exported to many developing countries with little account of local context (Berman, 1998; Porter, 1999), the same can now be said of models of service strengthening. Many of these appear to be based on a reconstructed and artificially apolitical history of the development of the European Welfare States (Glasgow, 2005: 42), with a history of deeply politicised social struggle largely written out (cf. Hobson, 2003). The concept is also applied without reference to the political-economy, nature of bureaucracy or citizen-state compact in the countries concerned (Dangal, 2005; Bhatta, 2007). The ethnographic data from Nepal echoes the work of others (eg. Jones, 2006), in finding stark contrasts between the normative notions implicit in the concept of the 'active citizen', and the lived realities of citizenship, particularly for women.

Application of the Active Citizen

At the most basic level, we see from the Nepal IO experience that the programme theory failed to acknowledge the multiple roles played by Nepali women. Not only did the manifold and time consuming responsibilities of women often preclude their ability to find the various resources required to participate in a group; the groups also failed to address anything like the totality of their barriers to access or experience of marginalisation and disempowerment. This crucially echoes Bovill's (2005: 5) point that women don't live in sectors. The 'cross sectorial' nature of lived reality is not only ignored by such interventions, it is written out of the discourse. An analysis of IO programme documentation, particularly internal analyses of the KIM data, reveals a picture of women as completely dominated by, indeed defined by, their reproductive lives [NVR 2009, PCS 2007]. This point finds parallels with a feminist literature which has long argued that the burden of simultaneously balancing multiple roles is underestimated, and inherently ignored by sectorial planning (Moser, 1993: 95).

More generally however, the KIM data reveals the misguided notion implicit within the voice-accountability model that liberal rights form a central part of the citizen state compact in non-Western contexts. Indeed, references to the government of Nepal are conspicuous by their absence in the data. In rural Nepal, women do have clearly defined rights and responsibilities; not those conferred by the state but rather by virtue of their membership of various units of belonging. Thus, the rights *and* responsibilities of women are tightly enmeshed in roles and expectations. The KIM data indicate that attempting to 'claim' etic liberal rights with no basis in collective norms and values evokes significant social sanctions. Beyond the immediate risk of emotional and physical abuse, they may also forego the rights and privileges that ultimately come with completion of the difficult rite of passage as a junior daughter-in-law (cf. Bennett, 1983; cf. Manandhar, 2008).

These data demonstrate the limited penetration of normative notions of the state into the lives of rural Nepali women, and consequently we see the centrality of the state fall away from performative notions of citizenship. The data leads one to

question the extent to which citizenship is a uniform attribute, something inherent in being Nepali. Pervasive cultural norms circumscribing the agency of women, again point towards the inadequacies of normative notions of citizenship. These constructions based on statehood take little account of the vast differences between the experiences of middle class consumers in the developed world and rural Nepali women, or indeed any similarly marginalised populations where the state has limited penetration. This possibly explains why some have rightly called for the need for recognition of citizenship practices that fall outside the invited spaces of formal politics (Miraftab, 2004: 4), and recognise invented spaces that are the main arena of poor women's activism (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010a).

I contend that the Nepal case provides evidence for the inadequacy of normative notions of citizenship, those relating to statehood. The voice-accountability model encourages women to participate in initiatives that risk social sanctions whilst pursuing a model of change that is fundamentally flawed. Again, whilst there are globally many examples of women's collective agency achieving very significant transformational change (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010b), enrolling women in a single sector two year programme in pursuance of rights that have little local meaning and almost no chance of realisation finds strong parallels with the Tyranny of Participation critique (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) discussed earlier. It provides evidence for the way in which participants are enrolled in global regimes of power, which are both tyrannical and disciplinary. Whilst the discourse of the Active Citizen and omnipresent state resonates with donors and implementers, it is often not only meaningless in the village setting, but actively prevents more potentially transformative action; that which challenges the range of patriarchal structures, including perhaps the disciplinary regimes of privatised donor programmes.

A configuration emerges where the public, unable to match the standards of 'civil society', must look to NGOs or their projects in order to legitimately represent the interests. In this deliberate recreation of bureaucratic structures at 'community level', just as NGOs become disciplined clients of donors, so individuals become

constructed as disciplined consumers of health services, or disciplined agents of 'change' attending meetings to raise a 'voice' that leads nowhere.

A model that is flawed, but not benign

Voice and accountability work in the Nepali context had likely only limited success in changing local and intra-household power dynamics, but the data indicate that the model was far from benign. Whilst community meetings reinvented as empowering and transformative are nothing new; in Nepal, seemingly innocuous messaging around safe motherhood are, in their deployment, revealed to contain elements of disciplinary power. The poor were classified and lectured to on their roles as consumers of health services. In reconstructing Nepali women as individualised consumers, the IO becomes a purveyor of a reconfigured political rationality. The voice-accountability model is revealed as a both a technology and a discourse which legitimises the penetration of new citizenship practices into the extreme periphery of the globalised neoliberal project. From the data however, we must also acknowledge that the intervention graphically failed to achieve this reconfigured role and promote active citizenship.

The Nepal case therefore raises questions over why the model has reached ascendancy, and the extent to which the discourse around 'voice' actually requires interventions to deliver results. I argue that the empowerment objectives were not only unrealistic, but that their achievement was only ever a cosmetic requirement. Certainly in the case study, transformation and empowerment were ultimately not formally monitored, even by donors. Moreover, an analysis of this entire genre of interventions calls into question the claim that they are a practical solution to the scale of the problem against which they are deployed (Menocal and Sharma, 2008). There appears little discussion of the limited scalability of these approaches, nor the limited amount that may be achieved in a typical three year programme cycle (Menocal and Sharma, 2008: 47; cf. Cleaver, 2007: 236). Certainly, the IO intervention in Nepal was a relatively large programme, yet covered a small

proportion of the Nepali population, and achieved relatively little at a population level [EES 2009].

Broader objectives

In exploring the reasons for the ascendancy and reproduction of the voice - accountability model, I argue that post-structuralist approaches which account for complexity must not do so at the expense of analyses of wider systems of political power (cf. Cleaver, 2006). For this enquiry, this requires a treatment of both the local and the global interests involved in the model's reproduction.

At a local level, I have discussed the way in which a flexible 'voice' concept supports the objectives of actors within privatised aid organisations. The Nepal case provided evidence for Gould's (2004: 15) assertion that empowerment objectives are often deliberately unrealistic; legitimising the avoidance of engaging with politically challenging issues of transformative social change, whilst allowing NGOs access to public resources.

Indeed the model is almost diversionary, drawing a veil over issues of inequality and power, providing a powerful alternative discourse explaining for example, high levels of maternal mortality by failure to behave, or a failure to mobilise to claim rights. Market and state dysfunction are provided (by donors) with a cosmetic avenue for resolution, one that explicitly avoids political engagement with power and inequality in favour of solutions more in line with the Washington Consensus.

At a more macro level, I argue that the success of the model in terms of its reproduction as an increasingly central part of international development discourse (DFID, 2010; Ramshaw, 2010), relates directly to the legitimacy that it lends to the neoliberal project. It represents the ascendancy of the discourse which serves interests concerned with bounded notions of political action, and in doing so it offers superficial legitimacy to neoliberal trends in public service delivery. Whilst

specious in its overt objectives, it is effective in propagating models of political rationality with a range of disciplinary functions[62].

'Voice' is by no means the first technology to take a role in reproducing neoliberal ideology and past experience is instructive. On an ideological level, the ascendancy of the model finds similar parallels in the notion of social capital, an idea that was in some way a forerunner in a common discourse. Bebbington *et al.* argue that social capital became popular within the World Bank due to its ability to link participation to the broader structural concerns of power and governance that concerned the institution[63]. It did so in a way that was compatible with a neo-liberal agenda and the post Washington Consensus (Bebbington *et al.*, 2004: 36); legitimising non market interventions to ameliorate market failure without challenging the underlying mode of production or distribution of resources.

A Social Technology for Global Governing

Some commentators (eg. Grugel *et al.*, 2008: 499) have addressed the development of the 'Washington Consensus' as a binary configuration between the 'rule makers' of the IFIs and the 'rule takers' of the developing world. Whilst this case study does largely focus on the 'rule taker' side of the equation; I attempt to avoid the binary simplicity and determinism that dominates such critiques. I agree with Tamas (2007) who argues that these traits feature in many attempts to apply Foucauldian notions to neoliberalism in development. Rather than denouncing the 'rule makers' as perpetuating a 'bankrupt hegemony', a discourse that seeks the 'justification and naturalisation of their ruinous neoliberal programme" (Tamas,

[62] As a constituent part of a wider discourse, rather than as a reified actor.

[63] Cammack (2003) argues that "The Bank is far more coherent than its critics allow, and the degree of control it exerts is real, and central to its purpose. For the most part, critics of the Bank have judged it in light of progressive aspirations of their own, and failed to grasp its logic. In particular, they have failed to appreciate that behind the commitment to poverty reduction and even the commitment to economic growth is a consistent commitment to the systematic transformation of social relations and institutions in the developing world, in order to generalize and facilitate capitalist accumulation on a global scale, and build specifically capitalist hegemony through the promotion of participation and ownership" (Cammack, 2003: 4).

2007: 902), I have attempted to describe some of the processes by which actors reflexively produce and interpret theory, and perform development. Whilst I argue that it can be productive to analyse organisations as having many of the characteristics of actors in their 'own' right, I reject the functionalist assumption that they possess the kind of agency that might suggest they exist simply to depoliticise or tyrannise (cf. Bebbington *et al.*, 2004: 36).

In a study of a development agency, Tamas (2007) notes the way in which actors work with discourses they tacitly understand as disciplinary, or at least flawed and find ways to subvert or accommodate them in pursuit of their own, sometimes more progressive agendas. This study has similarly identified the way in which actors at the 'business end' of the development machine, including beneficiaries, operate in comparable ways. However, it also points towards the exclusion of large sections of the population who are so marginalised that they stand only to loose from the individualising consumer focused discourse that offers them no scope for political change, subversion or dissent.

It is important to note that voice and accountability will not be the last well-funded model with powerful advocates to populate development debate. As Bebbington (2004: 58) argues, the political economy of the World Bank will always limit discussion around the basis of social power; it seems clear that this may be applied to a larger universe of donor supported development discourses and interventions. Nevertheless, just as with social capital before, I argue that where empirically supported, constructive counter narratives can play an important role in identifying where new spaces might emerge which provide opportunities for strategic resistance to the constraints imposed by neoliberal power.

Opportunities for resistance are however limited by a constrained debate. The 'adoption' of social capital by the donor community sparked a range of critical responses and deconstructions, often informed by anthropological perspectives (Bebbington *et al.*, 2004; Fine and Green, 2000; Harriss, 2002). A similarly 'radical' critical literature on 'voice' has perhaps been rather slower to emerge; possibly due

to the significant donor financing of the major research centres focused on the topic[64]. Despite this limited alternate discourse, one can speculate on potential avenues for more progressive engagement with agency and citizenship for transformative change.

[64] For example the DFID supported Development research centre on citizenship, participation and accountability at the Institute of Development Studies and The Africa Power and Politics Programme at the Overseas Development Institute.

Implications for transformative development

There are some issues identified from the Nepal case studies that can in many cases be considered inevitable. Donor supported projects will always be constrained in terms of their political rationality; the subsequent technologies of development will inevitably have some tyrannical overtones. Sectorial implementation and short programme cycles similarly have political origins, and militate strongly against transformation of power relations often deeply embedded in complex and intransigent assemblages.

The experience from Nepal does however provide potential opportunities. The narratives of Nepali women in the KIM data, whilst fatalistic, demonstrated a striking awareness of injustice and oppression. Indeed, evidence from wider Nepal demonstrates many examples of transformative change in power relations for women; Leve notes the 'unprecedented degree of women's participation' in the Maoist movement which at one point controlled 70% of the country (2007: 130). She further discusses how the level of participation of women within the Maoist hierarchy was 'boosted' by two decades of adult women literacy programmes supported by American NGOs (Leve, 2007: 130).

The point here is not to romanticise the Maoist insurgency, which had many negative consequences for Nepali women (Maskey, 2003). Rather, it is to explore what opportunities lay in the by-products of severely constrained development initiatives. It is instructive to note that the recent Nepal Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Study found that relationships between maternal mortality and the percentage of deliveries by a skilled birth attendant were rather weak. The strongest district level relationships were seen with wealth and female literacy (Pradhan *et al.*, 2009: 22).

Finally, I return to Ferguson and Lohmann's (1994: 180) question 'what do aid programmes do besides fail to help poor people?' and pose an additional question; 'in what ways might interventions that are inevitably constrained by neoliberal

discourses be tailored to produce the most positive externalities for transformative development?'[65] Could similar initiatives be developed to provide basic social resources such as improved geographic mobility, literacy and financial independence without enforcing the means by which any resulting agency is realised; initiatives that may provide a foundation for the development of 'political society' whilst remaining acceptable to neoliberal paymasters? The KIM data provide some limited indications that were women to be supported in developing more resources with less direction, there is scope for the construction of diverse lines of action (Swidler, 1986: 273) defined by indigenous concerns (Booth, 2010b: 23) and applied to projects beyond those constructed by privatised aid organisations.

Implications for future research

In the light of this discussion, the potential implications of this work for future research are worthy of brief treatment. It is important to remember that this enquiry is not primarily about Nepal or Safe Motherhood; it is about development practice and the implications of a specific type of neoliberal discourse. Whilst it follows in the tradition of institutional ethnography, it represents an early attempt to extend a deconstructive analysis, using a mixed method case study approach, to voice and accountability. It attempts to provide the conceptual tools required to better research and understand the 'products' of a genre of governance interventions that is gaining increasing popularity (Unsworth, 2010). Furthermore, by providing a counter narrative to the dominant discourse, based on evidence grounded in a relatively high profile and well-funded intervention, this thesis may serve to 'open space' in a scholarship with few critical voices.

Specifically, I hope that this accessible methodology and conceptual framework opens opportunities for a greater use of deconstructive discourse analysis of public

[65] Tamas,(2007), Eyeben,(2010a) and Bebbington et. al (2004) have all discussed the sometimes deliberate actions of development actors to strategically work with the grain of powerful institutions in order to find opportunities to pursue more progressive agendas.

health interventions. Beyond the study of agency and empowerment the work has the potential to encourage the use of similar approaches within Development Studies. By making new directions of critical analysis 'thinkable', this work opens the possibility of discourse analysis moving from academia into more mainstream development practice. Beyond this deconstruction, there is scope for considerable new work on maximising the positive externalities of inherently bounded development interventions. I argue that only by accounting for and understanding disciplinary discourses, can an informed debate on transformative development emerge.

'Informing transformation' is a growing theme within Development Studies with a rapid expansion in work exploring issues of political economy and seeking to work 'with the grain' of 'local' political systems (Brown, 2009; Kelsall, 2011). This thesis however, highlights the fact that it is not only 'recipient' government institutions that need to be better understood. Donors themselves require much greater critical attention; the 'giving' of 'development assistance' is a highly politicised field[66].

Scholarship on the workings of the 'aid industry' is extremely thin, particularly compared with the resources invested in that focused on understanding recipients. The growing trend for Political Economy Analysis ('PEA') is an inadequate response; these approaches adopt a narrow conceptualisation of change, accounting for an even narrower range of actors (see for example Brown, 2009). I argue for an expansion in scholarship that includes but goes beyond these structuralist frames. New approaches must account for the perspectives, interests and performances of a much broader range of actors, and encompass the discourses which reflexively impact on processes of development. These analyses will provide a crucial counter narrative to persuasive but specious discourses which individualise and disempower. This thesis is intended to be a small and early contribution.

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[66] Consider for example allegations that AusAID's expansion in Africa may be related to a bid for UN Security Council membership (Fullilove, 2010)

Annex 1 Ethical Considerations for the use of KIM

Introduction

Whilst this specific enquiry is not directly involved in the design and fielding of ethnographic research, data from KIM forms an integral part of the research and as such, it is incumbent upon the author to ensure ethical conduct (Sade, 2003: 325). In this case I was intimately involved in the design of the KIM process and consequently am able to describe the ethical precautions in some detail.

There are a number of specific issues that need to be considered by both local and international researchers when working with disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable groups in Nepal. Many of these issues are founded in the inevitable inequalities of power between researcher and researched, wherein there is the possibility that researchers will unwittingly coerce individuals into participation or expose them to unacceptable burdens or risk. It follows that careful planning, involving those with a depth of understanding of potential respondents, is a minimum and essential prerequisite to the ethical conduct of research with vulnerable communities. Women in Nepal are perhaps particularly vulnerable due to the range of limitations of their freedom and significant risk of stigmatisation resulting from breaking various social norms (Manandhar, 2000).

Overarching principles

There are usually considered to be three overarching moral and ethical principles that guide research: respect for autonomy, beneficence and justice. These form the foundations of most other ethical guidance (Butler, 2002). Respect for autonomy entails that individuals have intrinsic value, dignity, and the capacity to decide. Individuals should be given all the information needed to make good decisions, particularly relevant to informed consent discussed later (Rivera *et al.*, 2004). Beneficence refers to an obligation that researchers not only work to protect individuals from harm, "but also by making efforts to secure their well-being" (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Researchers should give forethought as to how the exercise will minimise harm and maximise benefits to the community in question.

In the case of KIM, research was only conducted in those communities where interventions were on-going, or planned in the future. Key informants were asked not only to provide data from the interviews, but also take part in a participatory analysis workshop. During the workshop, key informants were given the opportunity to input their own interpretations on the data, and the implications for future programming.

Governance

KIM was a collaborative enterprise involving a number of actors, notably members of the community under study, field staff and a range of other technical and operational staff. Maintaining high standards required careful management, as the individuals came to the process from different organizations, disciplines and geographic locations. The need for clear agreement on the ethical responsibilities of all participants, and how these responsibilities are to be operationalised can be conceptualised as 'research governance'. Here it is used specifically to highlight the importance of having a clear operational structure to implement effectively the principles of ethical research. For the implementation of KIM, a comprehensive governance framework was established as detailed below. The implementing NGOs received extensive training, and on-going supervision from senior program staff. In turn, implementing NGOs provided on-going to supervisors in the field, conducting a cursory examination of incoming data to ensure protocols around confidentiality were maintained.

Risk assessment

Researchers have a responsibility to assess the level and nature of risk to which all collaborators in the research process may be exposed. These risks will vary with context and may include physical, social or psychological risks. Members of a researched community may, for example, be stigmatised by involvement with researchers on certain research topics. Involvement may impact on them in complex and unpredictable ways. It is important to note that part of effective governance entails working with all stakeholders, using local expertise to identify

these risks and communicate them effectively to participants who should then be in a position to make a judgement about their level of participation. The advice of an experienced local anthropologist was sought in advance of fieldwork. Issues of stigmatisation and social norms were discussed during the training, and role play was used to assess risk, and mitigate any negative consequences. During a final debriefing, Key Informants were asked to feedback on any negative experiences. These findings were used to inform future rounds of the method.

One challenge encountered during the research was the difficulty in finding private space in which to conduct Key Informant Interviews, and to debrief Key Informants. Whilst the *third person* and *no names* rules should have mitigate the risks of stigmatising Key Informants where they are overheard discussing research findings, it was not always possible to ensure privacy. However, it is the opinion of the program staff that the risks involved were not significant.

Managing expectations

Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders have a realistic understanding about what they can reasonably expect in terms of outcomes from research, both for themselves and their community. In geographically isolated communities, or socially marginalised groups, the arrival of a researcher may be a significant event. Giving the opportunity for marginalised individuals or communities to express a 'voice' can be an empowering experience for them, but can also lead to unrealistic expectations and ultimately disillusionment (Rivera *et al.*, 2004). For KIM, participatory research constituted one part of a wider process; ensuring full participation, including input into the research design, fieldwork process and analysis ensured that both the research, and subsequent programme in were as far as possible responsive to the Maoist needs of the researched community. Given the extreme poverty, and difficulties expressed by respondents, it is inevitable that to some extent un-realistic expectations may have resulted from the research. The extreme marginalisation of women in Nepal the context creates a

difficult environment for ethical programming; program staff were satisfied that these risks were mitigated to the best of their ability.

Technical and material support

The disparity between the technical and financial capacity of different stakeholders in the research process can place individuals at a disadvantage and expose them to risk. Where participants who are poor, non-literate, less educated or do not share a common language are invited to collaborate with the research team, they will need support in order to participate effectively in the research and not be further marginalised by their involvement. For KIM, additional supervisory support was provided to ensure Key Informants were adequately supported.

Key Informant Monitoring can be time-consuming and relatively costly for participants. Many of the women working as Key Informants were extremely poor, and it is likely that some researchers were not be well placed to understand the implications of time spent away from family, business or land. The issue of compensation was considered carefully, particularly in regard to the following points:

• Even extremely small costs borne by participants as potentially worthy of compensation. The cost of a short bus journey or telephone call may equate to many hours of work.

• Compensation may have a coercive effect in resource-poor communities. Individuals may not have a genuine choice to decline to participate when presented with financial incentives, whatever their misgivings.

• Power and exchange relationships in families and communities are complex. The recipient may not be able to keep for themselves the material compensation they receive for their participation.

• Inappropriate compensation may cause conflict and jealousy.

• Financial compensation, however welcomed in the short term, may not adequately compensate for the longer term implications of neglected crops or businesses.

• The individual involved may not have the authority within family or other power structures to negotiate spending time away from other responsibilities, whatever the remuneration.

• Compensation may influence the way in which the researched community responds to researchers, and this may impact on the objectivity of the research. It may also influence (positively or negatively) the longer term relationship between the community and the programme.

In consultation with national research specialists and an expatriate anthropologist familiar with the Nepal environment, it was decided to offer minor compensation to participants. The incentive was designed to be in no way a coercive, covering the cost of a small refreshment for the Key Informant and their respondent.

Informed consent

Informed consent provides a challenge for KIM, where both the researcher (Key Informant) and subject may not be literate, and therefore unable to administer or provide written informed consent. However, informed consent is a fundamental principle of research with human subjects, and all those involved in research need to have an understanding of the practical implications. Procedures are in line with guidance from the American Anthropological Association code of ethics (AAA, 1998) and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth Ethical Guidelines (ASA, 2011).

Informed consent is a 'decision to participate in research, taken by a competent individual who has received the necessary information; who has adequately understood the information; and who, after considering the information, has arrived at a decision without having been subjected to coercion, undue influence or

inducement, or intimidation' (WHO/CIOMS, 2002).The process of informed consent requires researchers to:

- Describe the research and the role of the participant, clearly describing the commitment involved.
- Describe reasonably foreseeable risks.
- Describe expected benefits.
- Explain how information that may identify individuals or communities is managed, including the extent to which confidentiality and/or anonymity is guaranteed.
- Make clear whom the participant may contact if they have questions or concerns
- Explain that participation is voluntary, participants have a right to withdraw at any time and that no sanctions will be imposed for either non-participation or withdrawal.

Adapted from (Rivera *et al.*, 2004)

As informed consent requires that potential participants understand the nature of the research, it was important to include during the training a thorough explanation of this concept, and the use to which the data would be put. In the past, biomedical research has in the past been accused of blurring the boundaries between research and the provision of health care (Molyneux *et al.*, 2005). In the case of KIM, care was taken to separate the research activity from any perception that it may be 'government business', where participation might be erroneously perceived as compulsory. Similarly, coercion may be realised in terms of participants feeling unable to decline when their participation is requested by outsiders perceived as having high social status. Developing a rapport with researchers, and ensuring research staff are cognisant of these risks were central to the KIM process.

Involvement of local authority figures such as village leaders or medical staff may lead to a real (and often justifiable) fear of future sanctions imposed for non-cooperation; for example denial of health services. Understanding local power structures was essential and failure to observe these (Brown *et al.*, 2004), and local advice was sought in this regard.

Informed consent is often explained and recorded in writing. However, in this context a number of factors particular to the KIM process were considered:

- A written format may not be accessible to participants who are non-literate, or unwilling to disclose low levels of literacy.
- Official forms may be associated with specific institutions, such as the government. This may give the work inflated legitimacy, be inherently coercive or associate the work with others in undesirable ways.
- Lengthy forms using unfamiliar terms may be intimidating, cause anxiety and confuse rather than inform.
- Written consent may not ultimately lead to the verification that its use sought to provide. That a form is signed does not in itself mean that informed consent has taken place (Brown *et al.*, 2004).
- There may be other stakeholders whose consent may need to be sought. These may include husbands, mother-in-laws or other official and unofficial gate keepers at village or district level.
- Consequently, verbal informed consent was secured by Key Informants, following extensive training using role-play.

Right to information

Those involved in research, and other relevant stakeholders should be given access to information about the research before, during and after the process. Making information available may allay local fears or help to prevent inaccurate rumours developing about the nature of the research. Following the study, findings should

be shared with and among as many participants and community members as possible in an accessible format (Rivera *et al.*, 2004). The implementing NGOs were tasked with providing feedback to the Key Informants following the execution of the research.

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