

Citizens, State, and Good Governance: Building a 'Social Contract' in South Sudan

In South Sudan, Oxfam is bringing together civil society and power-holders, enabling them to engage in dialogue and promote good governance.



Hon. Rebecca Michael, Women's Representative for Wulu County, Lakes State Legislative Assembly, interacting with her electorate at the end of the MP/public dialogue. Photo: Crispin Hughes

Within and Without the State (WWS) is piloting innovative approaches to working with civil society, to promote more accountable governance in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. In South Sudan, WWS is bringing together citizens and those in power – enabling them to engage in dialogue and work together for development.

This approach promotes the idea of a 'social contract' between civil society and those at different levels of governance. Each actor has their own roles and responsibilities to fulfil; by engaging with each other – sharing views, experience, and expertise – they can work together to build a more effective state.

The 'social contract' model takes a different approach to that of traditional civil society

'advocacy', in which citizens make 'demands' of the state. And rather than simply building the technical or administrative capabilities of the state, the model is able to work with both civil society and government at all levels to build accountability, transparency, and mutual trust.

Citizens are able to tell power-holders about the issues they face and hold government accountable for its decisions and allocation of resources; power-holders benefit from feedback and input from citizens – and from the push to be more accountable. Six months since it began, WWS in South Sudan is generating demonstrable interest and engagement from a wide range of groups and organisations – from citizens and grassroots communities to elected politicians and government officials.

Within and Without the State in South Sudan

Oxfam is grant-funding five civil society organisations (CSOs), which are working with communities and power-holders to promote good governance through a number of distinct projects. The CSOs are working at national level in Juba, and at local level in Lakes State, building on Oxfam's existing development programme. Projects range from working to build civil society networks and a high-quality, independent media, to promoting civil society engagement in legislation and ensuring government accountability for allocation of resources.

Partner selection and training

It was initially difficult for WWS to select appropriate partners, as the long-running civil war meant that there had been no accurate mapping of civil society. A 'roundtable' of CSOs was therefore convened in Juba to share expertise, nominate possible organisations, and support the selection of partners.

Oxfam has been building the capacity of the five selected organisations over the last six months, enabling them to recruit staff, purchase essential equipment, and rent office space. It has also trained them in aspects of effective organisational governance, programme management, finance, and advocacy.

Partners have commented on the quality of their relationship with Oxfam. "This is a true partnership, not just a donor relationship. We have designed the project ourselves – with Oxfam supporting us," says the head of one organisation. The experience of participation and accountability which CSOs are developing through WWS is also valuable in

WWS PARTNERS IN SOUTH SUDAN

- Agency for Independent Media (AIM)
- Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation (CEPO)
- Sudanese Domestic Election Monitoring and Observation Programme (SuDEMOP)
- Sudanese Disabled Rehabilitation and Development Agency (SDRDA)
- African Partnership for Rehabilitation and Development (APARD)

itself. It is helping to strengthen democratic skills in the newly-independent country, while good organisational management puts CSOs in a stronger position to ask government itself to be more accountable.

Civil society networks

The CSO 'roundtable' continues to meet in Juba to support WWS and has created a wider forum for civil society dialogue and engagement. In Lakes State, an existing Civil Society Network has been revived and re-constituted; the network now includes partner organisations and other locally-based CSOs representing women, youth, religious and other interest groups. The network has an agreed mission and ways of working, and meets regularly to share information and plan joint action. Chair of the network, John Malith Rual of APARD, says: "If you speak to government as just one organisation you will not be listened to. But if we speak as a network, we are more likely to make our voice heard."



Hakim Ciponyu Awur, Director of SDRDA, takes part in advocacy training as part of the Civil Society Network. Photo: Crispin Hughes

A community elder asks a question at the MP/public dialogue in Wulu.
Photo: Crispin Hughes



Constituency Engagement Project

“The public is used to the idea that they are not allowed to question power-holders, but this is helping them to see that actually it is their role to do so and that it helps the government to be more accountable”. Hakim Cipounyu Awur, SDRDA

Many citizens complain that their MPs have not visited them since their election and have not delivered on their campaign promises; MPs report that they don't have the resources or mechanisms to engage with communities. But WWS is bringing MPs together with their constituents to answer their questions and account for allocation of resources.

Initial consultation with communities helps to identify constituents' issues. MPs are then briefed about the process and invited to an MP/public dialogue in the community a week later. A month after the dialogue, SDRDA (the partner in this project) goes back to both the MPs and the community to assess progress.

Hundreds of people attended the MP/public dialogue in Wulu, near Rumbek, in February 2013. Mary, a community member, commented: “Those MPs said, ‘If you vote for me we will provide boreholes and tools for the community.’ I want to ask the MPs where those things are now.” MP Moses Aier Maneyiel said: “The people elected me to represent them in parliament... so I need to know what their concerns are... to be their voice.” MPs were able to explain why some issues had not been addressed and to reassure constituents that they were making progress on others. It will be challenging to ensure promises are delivered in testing economic times, but such public engagement is a good start.

The Public Accountability Forum

Some international aid from donors such as the World Bank is earmarked for poor communities and distributed through the local government system; but much of this funding does not reach the communities it was intended to help.

“Government money’ is actually the people’s money... so it is important to show how it is being spent.” Issac Majier Majok, State Coordinator, CEPO

The Public Accountability Forum, organised by WWS partner CEPO, is looking at how such public money is accounted for. The first Forum, hosted with the South Sudan government's Anti-Corruption Commission in January 2013, was extremely well-attended; the meeting was scheduled to last until 1.00pm, but the discussion was so engaging that it continued until 5.00pm. Now the Anti-Corruption Commission has recognised that the Forum is a good way to engage citizens and the state, and will be holding it on the first day of every month.

Women's decision making

WWS partner APARD is also working in remote rural communities to promote women's decision-making and power-sharing. Women in such communities are often extremely marginalised, with little control over household resources such as livestock.

Mobilisers trained by APARD are visiting individual households and holding community meetings to discuss issues of power and resources with both men and women. Although views and traditions are deeply held, there is evidence that things are changing. Rebecca Alek Meen comments: “What has changed here is that before, the wife and husband did not eat together. The man would eat alone. Now, as a result of training, dialogue and discussion, women and men eat together. It is a big change.”

Media freedom and access to information

"The right of access to information empowers the local community to allow them to know what the politicians are doing... so they can make informed decisions." David de Dau, AIM

A strong media is able to contribute to the rule of law, good governance, and promoting freedom of expression. But the media in South Sudan is currently not able to play this role and the public is not able to use it to express their views.

WWS partner AIM is organising Public Information Forums with groups such as youth, women, and traditional leaders. These Forums raise awareness about proposed legislation around 'media' and 'access to information', and gather views and opinions. Meetings are then held with key legislators to discuss the citizens' feedback. The hope is that the redrafted bills will be stronger and better reflect the views and interests of civil society.



Mary Adawei Dhlkoc talks about women's rights at a community meeting in Maper, North Rumbek. Photo: Crispin Hughes

SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is Africa's newest country. It gained independence from Sudan in July 2011, as a result of peace accords signed in 2005 ending Africa's longest-running civil war. It is a land of expansive grassland and tropical rainforest, and is very ethnically and linguistically diverse. South Sudan stands to benefit from inheriting the bulk of Sudan's oil wealth; but, for the moment, continued disputes with Sudan have halted oil production and the government has been forced to cut services and impose austerity measures.

AIM has also been training journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting, and raising awareness of their role in communicating civil society views. In February 2013, AIM organised a national media forum to bring together media representatives, political figures, and civil society leaders to explore the role of media in good governance.

AIM is positive about this work: "The government is interested to know what citizens think of proposed legislation and how it can be strengthened; they have no other way of obtaining this information. Women and youth, in particular, are outspoken at grassroots level – but they have no formal channel to communicate with government at national level. This is why WWS is important. By the end of the project, I believe we will be in a position to say Oxfam has taken us a step ahead, from a weak media to stronger media institutions."

WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE STATE was initiated in April 2011 and will run until April 2014. To find out more about the project, to receive our newsletter or join the Conflict and Fragility Learning Group, please contact: Amanda Buttinger, Programme Coordinator: abuttinger@oxfam.org.uk or Louie Fooks, Global Learning and Communications Officer: lfooks@oxfam.org.uk

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OTHER RESOURCES

See: www.policyandpractice.oxfam.org.uk

- *Programming in Fragile and Conflict-affected Countries: A learning companion.*
- *Programming in Fragile and Conflict-affected Countries: Programme policy guidelines,*
- *Within and Without the State: Strengthening civil society in conflict-affected and fragile settings.*