

Good governance makes all the difference

What is good governance?

By 'governance' we mean the processes by which decisions are made and the ways in which what has been decided is carried out, or not carried out. Governments are the major players in governance, whether at federal or state level. But others, such as civil society organisations, tribal leaders and citizen groups can influence governance too.

In a country that has 'good governance', the country puts its resources to good use. Basic public services work well. Citizens - including the poor and marginalised - have schools, health services, in fact all the essential services they need.

The rights of people

What people want and need is enough food to eat and water to drink. A roof over their heads, a job, a school for their children, and medicine and care when they are sick. The chance to live in peace, without fear of violence or war. And the opportunity to realise the potential in each and every one of us.

Hilary Benn, UK Government White Paper
Eliminating poverty: Making governance work for the poor 2006

"Effective states are central to development. They protect people's rights and provide security, economic growth and services like education and health care. Building better governance takes time and has to come from within each country, but international partners can help. This means we need to work not just with governments, but also with citizens and civil society."

UK Government White Paper Eliminating poverty:
Making governance work for the poor 2006



What makes for good governance?

Among the things that make for good governance are systems for making decisions that are open to scrutiny. The people who run these systems listen and respond to the needs of the citizens they serve and are accountable to them. The systems work well and efficiently, and do what they are supposed to do. And all citizens benefit equitably, even the poorest and excluded.

Why does good governance matter?

Good governance matters because without it states do not function well and cannot tackle poverty. DFID, along with most other international development agencies, considers 'good governance' to be vital for tackling poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

What can governments do for good governance?

To bring about good governance, governments must respect the rights of citizens. They must have sound policies for economic growth. They need to make sure that money spent on public services like health and education is used properly, and they need to manage public finances well.

To do this, leaders and governments must be able to get things done. We call this capability. Second, public policies and institutions must meet the needs of citizens and uphold their rights. We call this responsiveness. And, thirdly, different sections of society must be able to scrutinise what public institutions and governments do and hold them to account for their actions. We call this accountability.

State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC)

What is SPARC?

The UK Government believes that helping states to function effectively - to be capable of delivering basic public services, and responsive and accountable to citizens - is key to tackling poverty. So, in 2008, the Nigerian and UK Governments decided to set up a partnership - The State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) - to build on reforms already under way. The two governments agreed to work together on two fronts: first, to support governance reforms in Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano and Lagos states and, second, to support governance reforms at federal level. The programme started in April 2008 and will run for six years.

SPARC is one of five governance initiatives that DFID supports in Nigeria. These support and work in harmony with each other.

DFID governance initiatives in Nigeria

The common goal of DFID governance initiatives is to support Nigeria and work with other development partners to help Nigeria use its resources more efficiently and effectively.

SPARC (State Partnership for Accountability Responsiveness and Capability) supports public service reform

SAVI (Partnerships for Accountability and Voice in States) supports citizens in demanding better governance

ESSPIN (Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria) supports education governance

PATHS2 (Partnership for Transforming Health Systems 2) supports health governance

GEMS (Growth, Enterprise and Markets in States) supports growth

How is SPARC going to make a difference to governance?

Clearly, making the changes that will help states function effectively - bring about good governance - is by no means an easy task, especially when there are vested interests, corruption and many politicians aren't committed to making things better.

But, the biggest obstacle to better public services is the misuse of resources. This is why SPARC focuses on technical assistance. Rather than providing the country with funds, SPARC supports more effective use of the resources Nigeria already has.

SPARC supports governance reform in three areas

- Public financial management
- Public sector reform and policy
- Strategy development

Support to these areas will be backed up by help with monitoring and evaluation and the management of knowledge.

This means making people and institutions want to change. While it's necessary to strengthen skills in both government and civil society, what must also happen is that both must have strong incentives to change the way they behave.

SPARC's budget will be spent over six years on supporting measures that give institutions and people real incentives to change. What SPARC is doing is helping make improvements to systems and providing technical assistance. SPARC is investing in small infrastructure projects linked to public advocacy and spreading the word about successes in improving the delivery of public services. SPARC is also making some funds available to measure trends in performance and help organise surveys to collect data that will support policy making.

Contact details

SPARC has six offices in Nigeria.

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The SPARC logo features the word "sparc" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. A green, wavy line starts above the 'a' and extends to the right, ending above the 'c'.

Funded by:

The DFID logo consists of the letters "DFID" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, set against a black rectangular background. To the right of "DFID", the words "Department for International Development" are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, stacked vertically.