Whose Public Action?
Analysing Inter-sectoral Collaboration for Service Delivery
NGPA Workshop, 28 February 2008

Discussion Paper 1: The Research Approach

INITIAL DRAFT

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The Research Approach

1. Introduction

This paper explains the purposes of the research, how the research questions were generated, the approach that was adopted to address them, and the work that remains to be done. The next section gives an outline of the issues covered by the research. Section 3 indicates the general argument of the research and indicates how this relates to the ESRC programme's concerns with 'non-governmental public action'. Based on our earlier research, section 4 indicates the scale and nature of non-state service provision and sketches the history of relationships with governments in South Asia. Section 5 outlines the reasons why in the original research proposal it was suggested that this relationship may tend to be rivalrous, and indicates how in the course of the research we modified the hypothesis that the relationship would be particularly contentious in the case of not for profit providers. Section 6 outlines the factors that emerged from our initial literature review and from the exploration of alternative theories that were influential on our research approach. Section 7 goes on to describe the research framework that we adopted, including the leading research questions and the structure of causality that underlies the questions. Section 8 focuses on a particular aspect of the research framework, proposing a way of understanding the *organization* of relationships and the role of actors in their evolution. Section 9 goes on to describe the method we adopted to undertake the research through a series of stages derived from the research framework; it also indicates the programmes and cases that were studied. Section 10 indicates what has been achieved to date, the work that remains to be done, and in particular what we hope to achieve from the Workshop.

2. The Focus of the Research

This research is part of an ESRC research programme on non-governmental public action which is defined as "purposive collective action for public or private ends by a range of actors". Our research project focuses on service provision as a sphere of non-governmental public action

Governments have widely failed to provide adequate public services. This is particularly important for poor people who need the basic services - primary health, primary education, water and sanitation - that will allow them to satisfy their own needs and to be productive citizens. In many developing countries, non-state providers complement or collaborate, compete with or fill gaps left by government services. As a result responsibility for the delivery of basic public services is often unclear and contended between government and non-state providers of services.

This research focuses on situations where government and non-state actors enter into collaborative relationships for service provision. The research hypothesizes that, even under these circumstances, they are likely to have different views about public services and how they should be provided. As independent actors they have

structurally and perhaps ideologically different perspectives on the means and ends of public services. The way that their relationship is formally and informally organized, by setting the rules of the game, affects the capacity of the 'partners' to assert influence. Moreover, the relationship may itself challenge their established perspectives and lead to change in their approach and identity.
Our research is therefore concerned with the interaction between governmental and non-governmental actors' views about 'public action' - with regard to policies about service provision, and the processes through which policies are made and service provision is implemented.

The research examines how and why relationships between governments and non-state service providers (NSPs) have been formed and evolved, and what balance of influence emerges between these actors. Among NSPs, its particular focus is on non-governmental organizations including voluntary and community organizations.

The aims of the research are to understand:

1. The factors that condition government and non-governmental actors' definitions of public action (policies and practices) about service provision;
2. The effect of the organizational form of the relationship on the influence that government and NSPs are able to assert;
3. The strategies actors employ to manage the relationship and their influence in it.
4. The effect of service characteristics on the perspectives of actors and the forms of collaboration between organizations.

The research focuses on Pakistan, Bangladesh and India and on three service sectors: primary education, primary health care, and community-based sanitation. These countries offer a wide range of different types of state/non-state collaboration within some broadly similar social, political and administrative traditions, though with clear divergences in their state formation and regime type. In each country, the research examined relationships between state and non-state actors first in their *historical evolution*, then at the level of national *programmes of activity*, within which particular *case studies* of relations between government bodies, NGOs and voluntary organizations were undertaken.

3. Non-State Service Providers and Relationships with Government

The selection of primary education, primary health care and basic sanitation as the services for study initially arose from earlier DFID-funded research which followed the World Development Report 2004 ('Making Services Work for Poor People'). DFID asked us to analyse the experience of collaboration between state and non-state actors in these three service sectors which have particular prominence in the Millennium Development Goals[1].

[1] Research was undertaken in the three South Asian countries and three countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/nonstateprovidersDFID.htm)

The DFID-funded research showed that there was little systematic information on the type or scale of non-state service provision. However, the research pieced together a general description (summarized in Batley 2006):

1. The non-state sector (including entrepreneurs, voluntary organizations and NGOs, faith-based and community organizations) is large and sometimes dominant, particularly in the health sector. Over 70% of Pakistani households use private health practitioners (a third of whom are unqualified); in Bangladesh, the proportion is 88 percent (and 48% of allopathic doctors are unqualified). In India, although there is great variation between states, 80 percent of qualified allopathic doctors and 57 percent of hospitals operate 'privately' (including NGOs, FBOs and market providers), and non-allopathic medicine is almost entirely private. In all three countries the proportions using education as well as private health services is growing. In Pakistan, more than a quarter of total school enrolment is in non-state schools, with the proportion reaching 55 percent in urban areas of Pakistan; in the Punjab, two-thirds of these operate on a for-profit basis. In Bangladesh, 43 percent of enrolment is in non-state (mainly community) schools though half of these are state-assisted and registered with teachers' salaries paid by government. In India too, there are private aided and unaided schools with variable practices between states: Kerala and Maharastra subsidize private primary provision and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have removed the need for registration. As for sanitation, almost all the rural population depends on street level drains for sullage and sewage disposal, and the majority of the urban population use private or shared latrines connected to septic tanks or pits that are constructed by households and communities, though sometimes with NGO or government support.
2. Whereas NSP in water and sanitation is largely for the poor and for areas beyond the reach of public systems, non-state health and education services address a broader span of consumers. Non-state health services are as likely to serve the poor as the rich in all three countries; in Pakistan, even the most 'vulnerable' population was as likely as the better-off to use private healthcare but less likely to use non-state schools (CIET 2003).
3. NSP offers a spectrum of services in terms of quality. However, it is wrong to assume that the poor choose non-state provision only for want of access to public services. National surveys in Pakistan have found that users report dissatisfaction with government services and greater satisfaction with non-state provision of healthcare, education and water supply (CIET 2003 and Planning Commission 2003), and local surveys elsewhere suggest a similar position.
4. There is a great variety of types of provider. For-profit firms and individual entrepreneurs operate in health, education, water and sanitation, and are often the most abundant but least known category. Faith-based organizations and NGOs appear as direct providers in health and education, but more rarely in water supply and sanitation except as facilitators. Community and household provision is most prevalent in

water and sanitation, although community organizations often also act as funders and managers of schools.

A typical sketch history of post-independence state/non-state relations in service provision would go through the following stages – though only roughly and with variations:

- An immediate post-independence period of development of the role of the state, leading to the establishment of state water supply and sanitation, education and health systems in conjunction with pre-existing voluntary and private provision. In the 1960s and 1970s, this led on to assertion of state predominance, associated with expropriation by government of private and faith-based providers particularly of education in Pakistan and Bangladesh, or to their incorporation through state funding and (under the internal emergency) limits on access to foreign funding in India.
- From the late 1970s through the 1980s and beyond, the deterioration of public services and the inability of governments to maintain public spending. Country studies describe a period of real decline in the quality of services and an increasing tendency for users to find their own solutions in private provision. The voluntary sector shifted increasingly from relief to welfare roles and the low-income private commercial sector burgeoned to fill the gap in state provision.
- From the 1980s international NGOs started to become increasingly active in service delivery, sponsored by international agencies and in response to the deterioration of state services.
- The mid-1990s until the present can be characterized as a period of at least formal recognition of the case for 'partnership' by government with NGOs and the private sector, a policy which has been strongly backed by donors.

India, though reflecting all of these stages, shows a greater continuity - with the state remaining pre-eminent throughout, acting more to co-opt than to suppress non-state provision and NGO advocacy. The strongest lurches in the policy environment can be seen in Pakistan – from state takeover, to severe public service decline, to the active courting of NSPs by military governments, through the incremental growth of market provision, to 'partnership' with NGOs strongly supported by donors. Bangladesh is characterized by the large scale of NGO activity, and by a small number of very large NGOs that work across sectors and channel donor funding to smaller organizations, in systems that are relatively autonomous from government but which are nevertheless politicized.

The history shows that there have always been relationships of governments with non-state providers, though often tacit and usually mixing control with selective support. What is exceptional about the modern era is the explicit policy commitment to 'partnership' - in the case of social services particularly with the NGO or voluntary sector, but in infrastructure provision particularly with the commercial sector. Our research aims to understand these explicit attempts to collaborate.

4. Types of NSP and Hypotheses about their Relationships with Government

The research proposal to ESRC posited that each side to a relationship of government and NSPs brings to the table characteristics which may lead them to rivalry over the nature and purpose of public action, and to problems of capacity to maintain commitment to agreements. Collaboration must span gaps in culture, power, resources and perspective (White and Robinson 1998; Brown and Ashman 1996). The proposal suggested the following factors that might differentiate government and non-state actors: (i) their financial dependence on and accountability to different constituencies, (ii) established commitments and ideologies, and (iii) their organizational form.

The research proposal defined non-state providers to include for-profit and not-for-profit organizations providing services directly to the public. An earlier phase of this research funded by DFID covered both types of organization – from unregistered private entrepreneurs, to formal firms, voluntary associations, NGOs and CBOs (see Batley 2006, Moran 2006, Palmer 2006, Rose 2006, Sansom 2006).

The research proposal hypothesized that tensions about policy would be less likely to arise in the case of for-profit agents because they are unlikely to have their own public policy goals and the relationship is more likely to be based on material interests. In principle, the interests of principals and for-profit agents are relatively easily aligned, defined and represented in a contract. However, this advantage is only realisable if the contract can be specified and managed in such a way that opportunistic behaviour by the provider is minimised (Williamson 1985; Le Grand and Bartlett 1993). In the case of non-profit organizations (whether NGO, CBO, charity or professional body), their goals, interests, ideologies and accountabilities are likely to be more complex and less easily specified or subsumed in contractual arrangements with government (Lewis 2001; Smillie 1996). The need for detailed contractual specification might be (and indeed often is) thought to be unnecessary if it is assumed that their motivations are altruistic - to maximize social welfare - rather than the more 'knavish' aims of the for-profit sector (Le Grand 2003). However, even then, there is plenty of room for disagreement about *how* to maximize social welfare. As Le Grand (2003: 63) observes, "there is no guarantee that they [NGOs] will be motivated to serve the public interest – or if they are, it will be their own conception of the public interest, one which may be very different from that of the purchaser or principal".

The scope for tensions might therefore be greater in the case of non-profit organizations having their own established practices and ideologies about the nature, purpose and processes of the 'public action' in which they are involved. These established positions are built on accountability to different constituencies than those of government. In addition, NGOs are likely to have multiple accountabilities to voters, members, subscribers and communities which may lead to difficulties for non-profit organizations in reconciling internal differences of priority and sustaining agreed positions (Edwards and Hulme 2002) and therefore also in maintaining an agreed position with partners. The proposal therefore

suggested that non-profit organizations would show (i) greater resistance than for-profit enterprises to the subordination of their perception of the public interest and (ii) greater difficulty in entering into and maintaining agreements with government because of their uncertain or multiple accountabilities and looser organizational form.

This led to two propositions: first, that where non-profit NSPs are subordinated to government, service delivery is likely to become an area of dispute about whose version of 'public action' should prevail; second, that forms or agreement with government that are less hierarchical than mutual (co-production or joint venture) and more informal (loose agreements) might be better able to coordinate the interests of the partners.

In the early stages of the current research, it was decided to redefine the distinction between for and not-for profit organizations. In the spheres of action we are looking at (basic health, education and sanitation), there is rarely any economic profit, in the sense of revenue exceeding the total cost of inputs. The question is rather about how the cost of inputs including (high or low) wages is covered. This suggests a more fluid distinction than between profit and non-profit organizations. Whether private, NGO, faith-based or voluntary organizations, the NSP has the following possible financial sources:

a) Membership subscriptions
b) Charitable donations
c) Tax allocations by government or international donors in return for (contractual) obligations to provide particular services to users
d) Fees by customers for services.

The form of organization and accountability (to whom? for what?) and therefore purpose are probably more influenced by these different sources of financing than by organizations' formal designation as private, NGO or charity. The big difference is likely to be between organizations that have customarily survived on the basis of 1 and 2 (contributions in support of the organization's general objectives), or 3 and 4 (payment for particular services). Organizations of types 1 and 2, with a history of financial, ideological and organizational independence and of relative freedom in defining their public purposes (not being bound to give direct account to those who pay for services), are more likely to be rivalrous with government about the definition and modes of public action.

In practice, many of the organizations we studied had mixed financial sources. Most of them received some funding either from government or channelled through government by international agencies, but most also had other national and international sources. None of them were private companies dependent on government contracts or on fees for services; these were of less interest to this research because, as noted above, they would be unlikely to be pursuing public policy agendas of their own. We therefore studied non-state service providers which described themselves as voluntary organizations, charities, community organizations or NGOs. They depended on different sources of finance and

therefore had different accountabilities, motives and levels of autonomy from government in setting their public policy goals. We retained the general term 'non-state service providers' because it embraced organizations that described themselves in a variety of ways, and it avoided the connotations that are often attached to the term 'NGO' in South Asia (foreign-funded, high salaries).

5. Developing the Research Approach – a dynamic process

The research proposal set the framework of our research agenda. Our concern was with situations where there is a relationship, purportedly of collaboration, between government and NSPs. The steps in the argument were:

- Government and NSP actors are likely to have different perceptions and goals about the desirable means and ends of public policy which may constitute an organizational identity
- These are built on structural conditioning factors
- The relationship between organizations (government and NSP) is itself structured and creates conditions within which actors interact and are able to assert their means and ends
- The actors' perceptions, goals, organizational forms and identities may change as a result of the interaction.

Since this research had a tight time-scale (two years) and involved a team of researchers, it had to advance on three parallel tracks that might ideally have been sequential: developing the conceptual basis, creating a shared research framework, and getting the empirical research underway. The whole team (see Annex 1) participated in all three activities: while the fieldwork was mainly undertaken by the three country researchers, the UK team participated in this and also gave guidance. A framework and a set of activities had to be agreed for the fieldwork while the search for a theoretical approach and the review of the literature were undertaken. In the first three months from January 2006, we undertook (i) scoping studies in each country to identify relevant literature, key policies, the main actors, their activities and services, and (ii) initiated an exploration of theoretical approaches and an international literature review. Within five months – by June 2006 - the framework of our research approach had been developed (sections 6, 7 and 8 set out the approach and method). This was subject to continuous influence from the emerging reviews of international literature and theory. As indicated below, the research approach was underpinned by diverse theoretical perspectives identified both in the original proposal and in the reviews that were subsequently undertaken.

i) Search for an overarching theoretical approach

Our research proposal referred to analysis of public action as being governed by relationships of principals with agents, where different inter-organizational arrangements could be seen as ways of aligning the incentives of agents (service providers) with those of principals (clients, citizens and governments acting on their behalf). Government, acting for the citizen as principal, ideally aims to

achieve public policy ends by creating incentives for agents; to do so government requires information about the motivation and performance of agents. The principal-agent model is concerned with understanding the factors (limited measurability, bounded rationality, asymmetric information, opportunistic behaviour and moral hazard) that stand in the way of the principal's control of the agent. While this is a useful way of analysing some relationships, it became apparent that it was inadequate on its own for our research. Inasmuch as NSPs are unwilling agents, principal-agent theory can identify the 'problem' but not explain the very issue that we wish to understand – why the actors may have alternative views of the purpose of public action, and how they may seek to protect or negotiate them in a relationship. Also, it clearly cannot explain relationships that are not between principals and agents but based on mutuality (as in co-production and joint ventures).

We therefore explored ways of elaborating our approach by referring eclectically to theory that seemed useful in helping us understand (i) the factors that influence or condition organizational identities and public policy agendas and (ii) the nature of the relationship between organizations engaged in service delivery.

- Institutional theory: Institutions are shaped by humans but in their turn shape the way that people behave. So, rather than individuals simply acting on the basis of rational calculations of their interest, they interact within an established framework of ways of doing things. 'Social outcomes depend not only on the interests involved in confrontation and collaboration but also on the institutions through which interaction takes place' (Lane 2000: 227). Institutions may themselves be reformed by the process of interaction.
- Network theory: Modern policy-making is characterised by the splintering of power between multiple, interdependent actors with limited knowledge of each other, different perspectives and different levels of commitment to goals even when they are similar. The policy network literature challenges the simplicity of the rational choice model (including principal-agency). The policymaking process is characterized not by the maximization of objectives but by interactions involving complex reciprocities between multiple players who vary with the policy arena and who have incomplete information and inconsistent preferences. (Lane 2000: 112-115)
- Networks as social capital: "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" (Putnam 1995) act as social capital in two ways that are relevant for our research. First, networks of connections external to the relationship between government and NSP may act as a resource that individuals or organizations use to strengthen their position in the relationship. Second, the relationship may itself over time build a new basis of trust that acts as a way of privileging the partners and excluding others.
- Contract theory offers a way of understanding the range of relationships from the more formal and hierarchic to those based on mutuality and trust. Concepts of relational contracts and co-production have arisen in recognition of the limits of formal (adversarial) contracts. In principle, the latter assume a clear-cut principal-agent relationship in which the terms and

> conditions of the contract can be spelled out in advance based on information about all future risks and eventualities, and where there is sufficient information to monitor performance and enforce contract compliance. Relational contracts, on the other hand, present the possibility of the parties foregoing these short-term, opportunistic gains for the long-term benefits of repeated cooperation based on trust (Macaulay 1963). Co-production extends the trust relationship to include collaboration between state agencies and organized groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions. (Ostrom 1996, Joshi and Moore 2004)

ii) Responses to the literature review

We reviewed the literature on relations between government agencies and not-for-profit service providers to identify how relationships are analysed, what contribution this could make to our approach, and what comparative basis it could eventually provide for our findings (Teamey 2007). The review was undertaken iteratively over the course of the research - initially with the intention of guiding our approach, and then to explore whether the approach we had in fact adopted was supported in the literature. The first two sections of the review therefore looked at the theory and methods underlying earlier research, while the remaining sections took the opposite stance examining whether the main elements of our research approach were present also in the wider literature.

A large part of the literature is concerned with the comparative advantages of non-state actors (for and not for profit) as service deliverers, and the argument for or against their complementarity in partnership with government agencies. It proposes or questions whether NSPs are more efficient, closer to the poor, more responsive and innovative. A growing body of evidence from the mid-1990s threw doubt on both the claimed advantages of NSPs and on the meaning of 'partnership' identifying the tensions and power imbalances in the relationship. In our research, we have avoided the term 'partnership' in favour of the more neutral, general term 'relationship' to describe the object of our study. An important observation is of the essentialism that underlies much of this debate: the idea that types of organization have fixed characteristics which they bring to a partnership (Tvedt 2006). Instead the characteristics of organizations and relations between them should be seen as evolving in response to history, context and the social interactions that occur across organizational boundaries.

Our literature review identified 21 studies that were comparable with our research in the sense that they were empirical studies of relationships between government and non-state actors in service delivery. In practice, the NSPs studied were mainly NGOs. A central theme of these studies, like ours, is their concern with the impact on the organizational identity and autonomy of NSPs of their financial dependence or role as agents of government. The question is whether this relationship subordinates the NSP's own agenda and leads to a transformation of the organization itself as it adapts to contractual requirements. In practice, many of the studies show a much less clear outcome: the boundaries between government and

NSPs are often unclear or porous; NSPs do adjust but also exercise strategies to protect their position, using networks to influence government; autonomy is negotiated rather than absolute; and identity evolves.

Some of the literature strengthened our concern with human agency in what could otherwise have been an over-deterministic research framework. While many writers classify relationships passively on continuums, for example from competition to collaboration, some analyse them as multi-faceted and continuously evolving in response to the strategies and tactics of the actors: actors actively choose how to handle interactions and are not just conditioned by their environment.

Nevertheless, much of the literature also calls for attention to be given to the conditions that constrain actors – such as national and local structures of authority, economic conditions, policies, legal requirements, resource dependency and consequent accountability, and the history of relationships between government and non-state actors. Our research framework had already proposed to examine how such factors affected (i) organizations, their identities and policy agendas and (ii) their relationships. It added an additional dimension which is hardly dealt with in the literature: how the characteristics of service sectors themselves affect the conditioning environment, organizational forms and relationships. Indeed, the main challenge of this research may be of over-ambition in attempting to link all these factors.

Our research framework has added another element which does not appear to be clearly present in the literature: the definition of forms of relationship. The literature identifies dimensions of relationships, e.g. finance, interpersonal relations, the roles of participants, formal and informal interactions, contract, communication systems, tactics, and accountability arrangements. It does not appear to clearly identify the organizational forms or arrangements within which these dimensions may cohere. We needed to do so because we had elected to examine *organized* relationships between government and NSPs, that is cases where there was a conscious effort to organize collaboration (ranging from more formal to more informal arrangements). Section 6 describes our general research framework, while section 7 goes on to explain how we have understood the organization of relationships.

6. The Research Framework

We established the following **leading research questions** which then became the basis on which more detailed questions were framed for the different stages of the research:

1: What factors condition the perspectives or agendas of government and NSPs on the means and ends of public action (about service delivery)? How do they do so?

> Sub-question: Do the characteristics of the service sectors influence these perspectives? How?

Implication: We need to understand actors' perspectives or agendas for public action, how these have been derived historically, how far and why they vary by service sector.

2: Which/whose agendas for public action (both means and ends) prevail in a given engagement? Why and how? Does this change over time and by issue?

Sub-question: Are actors' agendas for public action, organizational goals, identities and forms affected or re-defined by the engagement?

Implication: We need to understand how actors with different agendas engage, how and what public action emerges from this engagement, whose perceptions and interests prevail, and how the action taken then affects the organizations themselves.

3: What is the influence of the organizational form of the relationship between government and NSPs on the agendas that prevail?

Sub-question: Do the characteristics of the service sectors influence the organizational form of the relationship? How?

Implication: We need to understand the explicit, formal organization of the relationship, whether and how this varies (by case and by sector), and whether specific organizational arrangements influence outcomes. We also need to understand the effect of implicit power dynamics on relationships between actors.

The questions above should lead us to be able to offer practical suggestions with regard to a final general question:

4: What forms of relationship facilitate joint working and are appropriate to different balances of power, purpose, task and sector?

*Implicatio*n: We need to identify whether there are forms of organization that allow government and NSP to work together in ways that accommodate their different agendas and are beneficial to poor people.

Underlying the research questions is **a causal flow** that is expressed in the diagram that follows. This indicates a hypothetical chain of influences on the organizations and their relationships……

- a range of factors constitute the environment in which government and non-state providers operate. These include macro institutions (politics, laws, social and culture) and meso institutions (i.e. particular 'proximate' factors that link organizations to their environment: resource dependency, lines of accountability, personal and organizational networks……..
- this environment conditions the formation of these organizations – their interests; identities, values, ideologies, understandings and goals; assets and capacity; decision-making processes and organizational structures…….
- this affects the 'agenda' (of commitments to means and ends of 'public action') that organizations bring to the encounter with 'partners' and their incentives for entering into relationships……
- government and NSP organizations, shaped by the influences described above, meet in a relationship about service delivery. Their relationship is organized through formal and informal rules and structures that influence

the power balance between them, and the capacity of actors to assert strategies of influence
- the experience of the relationship feeds back into possible redefinition of goals, public action agendas, identities, interests and organization, for the particular project or for the organization as a whole.

None of this is static: a historical perspective is fundamental; views about public action are formed and re-formed.

Our research has a particular interest in *non-governmental* public action in these encounters. However, we are also concerned with the conditioning factors that operate on government because these influence the nature of the relationship between them. If there were room in the diagram, all the same factors would appear on the left of the diagram. Our overall research method is to pursue this chain. To spell it out in more detail and working across the chart from the right to the left:

Service characteristics: We recognize that the characteristics or features of service sectors may give rise to different conditioning factors and relationships between government and NSPs. In particular they are likely to have different (i) technical-economic characteristics (e.g. monopoly, information asymmetry, networked services), (ii) levels of political salience, (iii) balances of power between principals (clients, citizens and policymakers) and agents (e.g. professions, unions). Moreover, our earlier research indicated that the different service sectors have their particular national and international professional cultures and networks of communication. Also the service sectors may have cultural or ideological attributes that may differ between societies (the importance of education to national identity, for example). It would not make much sense to try to characterize a whole service sector (healthcare) but it might be useful to look at the characteristics of the particular sub-sector we study (primary healthcare).

Macro-conditioning factors: There are some macro-level (i.e. beyond the particular case) institutions that are likely to affect the way that organizations operate, define their agendas and influence their relationships. These may be somewhat similar across sectors, but may well affect them differently: the political régime type (e.g. closed and exclusive or open and inclusive); authority structures in terms both of traditional or religious authority and of formal systems of political control at different levels of government; legal and constitutional requirements (to the extent that they are effective); the past history of relations between government and NSP; and macro-economic dependence and the role of donors in influencing national policies.

Meso-conditioning factors: These are factors (again probably mainly institutional factors) that directly relate to the organizations we are studying. By setting the framework of constraints and opportunities within which they operate, they condition organizations' room for manoeuvre. On whom are they financial dependent? To whom are they accountable? How (far) do they operate in networks

with other organizations? How far are they governed by policy objectives and standards set elsewhere?

Nature of the organization: The above factors help to condition three aspects of organizational life, but these also have their own internal dynamics, based on the organization's history, previous commitments and current membership:

i) The organization's arrangements for decision-making and leadership, particularly in regard to decisions about policy, action, finances and staffing.
ii) Interests, identities and understandings within the organization and how these coalesce into goals and views about proper ways of executing organizational agendas (e.g. whether to engage in client participation).
iii) The material or social resources they can deploy to support their position.

Agenda of engagement: Together the above institutional and organizational factors contribute to explaining the 'agendas' for public action that NSPs and government bring to the relationship with each other. This column suggests two aspects in which agendas are set and affect the relationship with other actors in the 'partnership'. First is the definition (both implicit understandings and explicit commitments) of the ends and means of public action (e.g. urban slum sanitation implemented through participation). Second are the incentives (material or ideological) to collaborate or not to collaborate.

Nature of the relationship: Government and NSP organizations with the hinterlands described above meet in a relationship about service delivery. We expect them to have different agendas for public action and it is likely that in some respect these will be in contention. Given the deep roots of their agendas, we would expect some of the rivalry to be threatening to an organization's agenda for public action and even to its sense of identity. The relationship might be analysed in three main ways:

i) First we examine the form of the relationship itself. Two bases of the organizational relationship may interact:

- Its formal or explicit form: e.g. as a contract
- Its informal or implicit form, and particularly the power relations that arise from the actors' financial, political and social resources

Through what combination of explicit and implicit arrangements, rules and understandings is the relationship governed?

ii) What are the organizational factors that are at issue in the relationship? How far does the relationship conform to each organization's own commitments or 'style'?

- How far do the incentives for collaboration fit the incentive structures or systems of the organizations?
- How far does the organizational form of the collaboration fit with the organizations' arrangements for decision-making?
- How are differences resolved? Whose organizational arrangements are dominant? What compromises emerge?

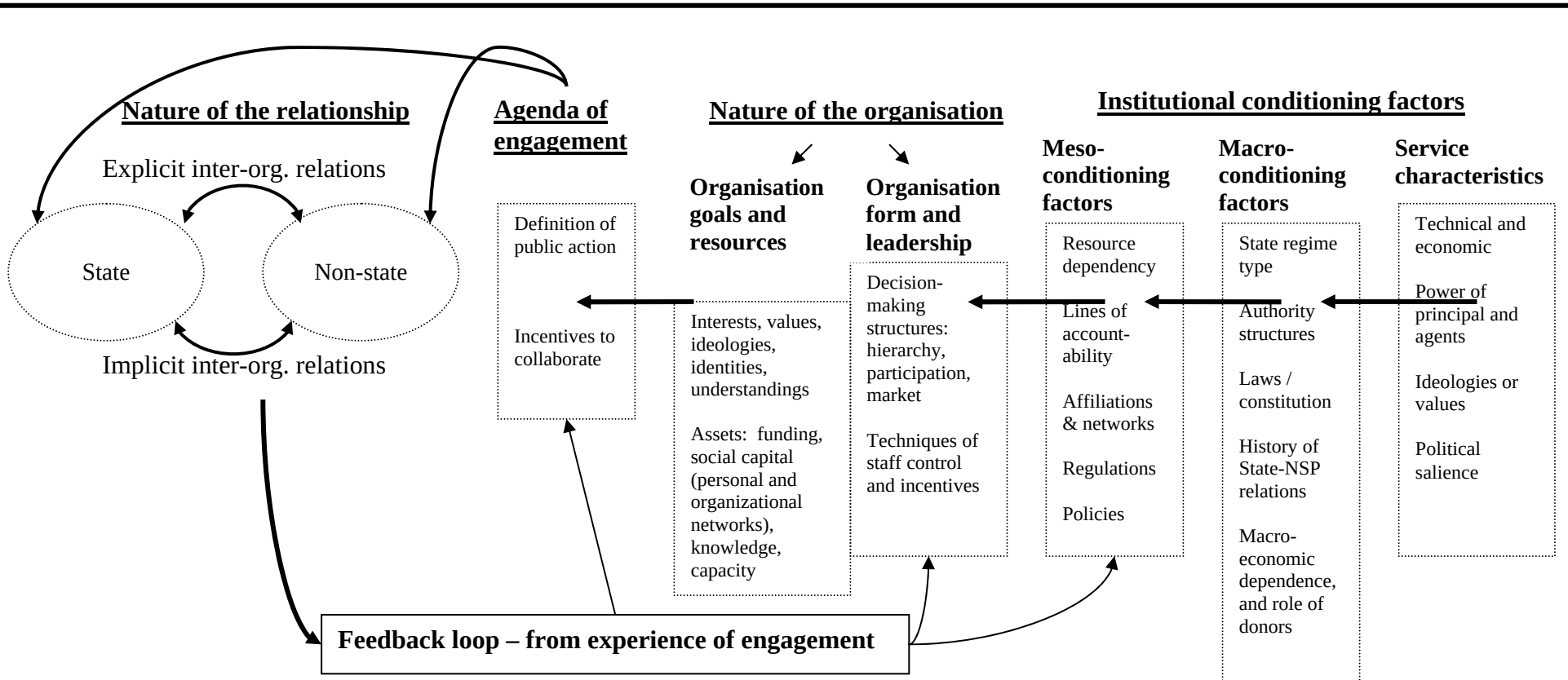
The relationship may take a simple principal-agent form, especially where one side brings financial resources to execute its agenda; sometimes the relationship will be more balanced where each side depends on the other.
iii) What are the substantive issues that arise in the relationship? Referring back to the nature of the organizations and their agendas,

- How does the agenda for collaboration fit with the agendas (means and ends) of the organizations involved?
- Does the arrangement for collaboration conform with or challenge each organization's interests, goals, ideologies and identities?

Feedback to organizational change
Because they arise from underlying conditions, organizations' agendas can rarely change without challenging and changing their goals and identities, and perhaps even challenging the underlying institutional environment itself (organizational networks, funding sources and accountabilities etc). Three types of feedback effect can be anticipated:

- Relationships between government-NSPs in service delivery may be collaborative without any challenge to one or the other's goals etc.
- There may be challenges and change on one and/or the other side.
- There may be challenges, resistance to change and collapse of the relationship.

So, the research analyses how organizations are changed by their relationships with others.



NOTE: Arrows denote stages of our research and flows of conditioning factors to both the state and non-state actors involved in the partnership.

7. The Organization of Relationships

As noted in section 5, what seems to be missing in much of the government-NGO literature is a framework for understanding the organization of relationships. On the other hand, this is at the core of the literature on public-private partnerships. Our initial hypothesis was that it may be easier for governments and for-profit organizations to make and maintain 'subordinated' contracts (formal, vertical arrangements where there is a clear principal and agent) and easier for governments and NGOs to enter into mutual joint venture or co-production agreements or contracts (formal or informal, horizontal arrangements of mutual responsibility).

We describe alternative organizational forms in the following diagram, using two basic variables:

- Relationships may vary from the more to the less formal, where formality means there is some form of overt agreement (probably in writing, but perhaps recorded in particular meetings or public policy statements) about the way the relationship is supposed to function. At one extreme the relationship is fully prescribed in the law.
- Relationships may vary from the more vertical to the more horizontal where, in an extremely vertical relationship, one actor (the principal) subordinates or controls the other (the agent). A horizontal relationship is not based on subordination but on mutual responsibility.

Ideal types: On these variables, the diagram indicates three 'ideal-types':

- Principal-agent (or 'subordinated') contracts based on law and where one party is expected to execute the requirements of the other. The principal controls the flow of finance. However, some deeper and longer-term principal-agent contracts (management and service contracts, franchise and concession) give more responsibility, discretion and autonomy of action to the agent.
- The term 'relational contracts' is used to describe unwritten understandings about obligations, built on trust, and sustained by the wish to preserve future relationships. They are likely not to depend on formal institutions for enforcement.
- Mutual contracts or agreements where parties take on separate tasks, probably funded by their own sources and where each expects to benefit from the other's contribution. These may be based on legal or relational contracts or agreements. Such relationships between producers or suppliers are described as joint ventures. Between producers and consumers, the term 'co-production' is used.

These categories may overlap: there may be relational aspects of principal-agent contracts (no contract is complete); co-production and joint venture are likely to have a strong relational element.

Relationships in practice: Most of the relationships we are examining will not belong to any of these ideal-types. The world we are looking at is one of incomplete contracts and loose agreements where there are uncertainties and

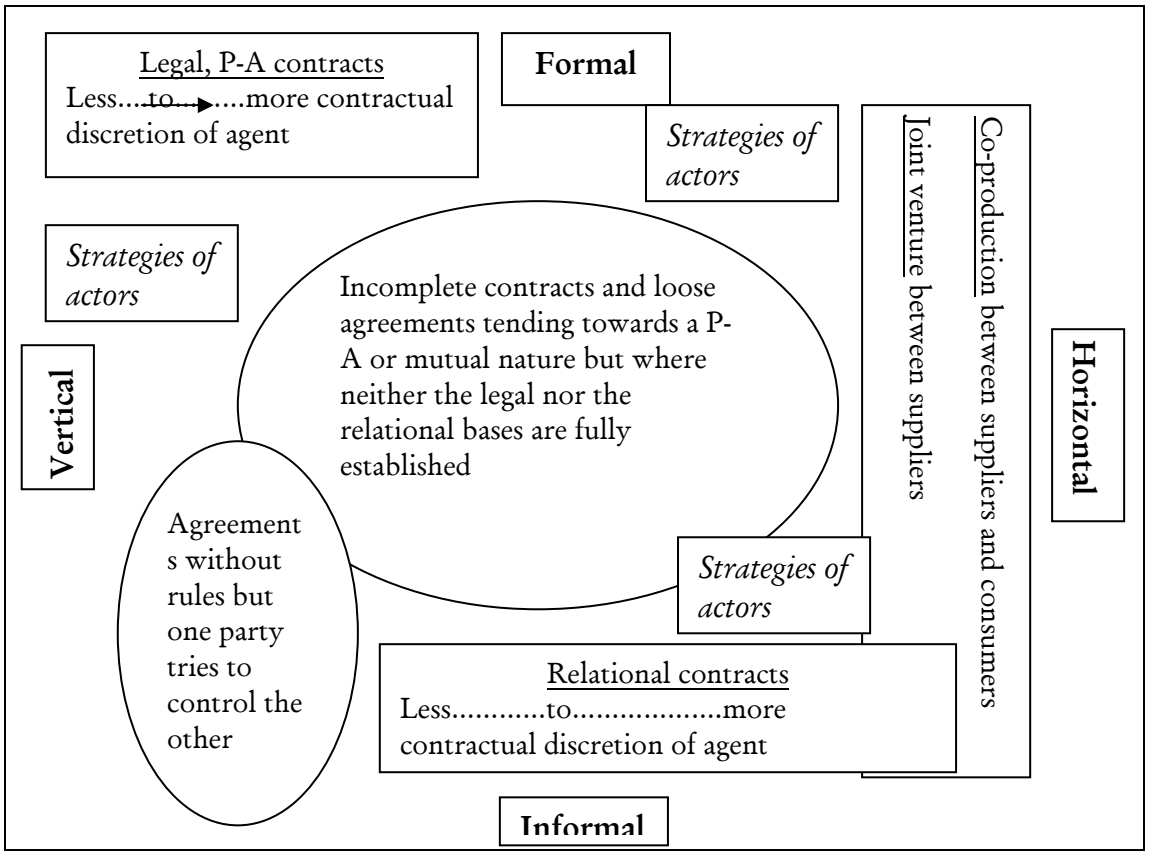
disagreements between the parties about means and ends (the processes and goals of 'public action'). Rather than being fully covered by the law or by established relationships, these are evolving arrangements where the parties will adopt strategies to maintain their particular identities and commitments to public action. They may seek to drag the relationship towards one or the other ideal-type.

Contract theory addresses these same problems of incomplete contracts, moral hazard due to the difficulty for the principal of measuring outcomes, and unenforceability. These problems are likely to apply particularly in our cases, due to

- The nature of the sectors we are studying: health and education outcomes are particularly difficult to define in contracts
- The nature of the parties: For reasons described in our ESRC proposal, NGOs/NSPs are unlikely to see themselves as contractors but rather as bodies with their own view of the means and ends of public action who will adopt strategies to advance these. This is precisely the point of our research.

Bringing the elements together: The following diagram brings the elements of our analysis of relationships together:

- We are analysing the dynamic, evolving and unclear relationships in the circles in the middle of the diagram, but they may be understood in relation to the ideal types described in the boxes.
- We need to understand the strategies of the actors – their use of cooperation, complementarity, co-optation and confrontation to maintain their identities and commitments. Perhaps any of these strategies may be associated with attempts to move towards any of the organizational relationships; or perhaps confrontational or competitive strategies may arise more on the left of the diagram and complementary strategies more on the right.
- Relationships are not fixed: (a) they evolve, (b) are likely to have characteristics of more than one of the pure types described, and (c) organizations are likely to be involved in more than one type of relationship with different or the same 'partners'. Organizational strategies may involve playing off one sort of relationship against the other.
- Flow of funds: Vertical (especially formal) relationships are likely to be based on financial dependence on the principal; horizontal relationships are likely to be based on financial mutuality between the actors – i.e. separate funding sources.
- Duration of relationships: Relational contracts are built on long-term relationships through which trust is built, but long-term P-A (subordinated) contracts may lead to isomorphism where the weaker partner adopts the characteristics of the stronger.



8. Method

The research was organized in five stages of between four and six months each, over a period of two and a quarter years. The stages of the research roughly corresponded with the flow diagram on page 13, each stage looking at different elements of the diagram or looking at the same elements in different ways. The stages broadly moved from the macro-institutional factors on the right of the diagram to the study of particular cases of government/NSP relationships. We described this as a 'funnelling' approach that goes from the general to the particular and back up to the general again. Stages 1 and 2 began at the general level (describing the history of relationships and some broad programmatic areas of government/NSP collaboration) and worked 'down' to the identification of case studies. Stages 3 and 4 undertook the detailed case studies, raising questions that we then took back 'up' for explanation at the level of broader policies and institutions in Stage 5.

The stages approach meant that the studies in each of the three countries (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) and three service sectors (basic education, health and sanitation) were pursued in parallel, allowing the team to meet (approximately every six months), compare and make joint decisions about how the research should advance. Research guidelines were developed for each stage together with detailed sets of common questions. It was important to balance the need to maintain a common structure, so as to ensure comparability, with the need to

allow country researchers to pursue the specific characteristics of country and sector experience.

Stage 1 (February to May 2006): Scoping studies to identify literature (international and national), key policies, main actors, activities and services in each country.

Tools: Documentary analysis and limited interviews with key informants

Stage 2 (July to December 2006):

- Outline history of state/NSP relations, events in evolution of the relationship, and macro-factors likely to condition government-NSP relations

  Tools: Documentary analysis of literature, legislation, policy documents, and key informant interviews with researchers, commentators.
- Select a broad programmatic or thematic area for study in each service sector. Description of main programmatic areas and types of government-NSP relationship occurring within them; selection (based on agreed criteria) of one programme per sector for the research focus

  Tools: Interviews with key informants (leading government, non-government and donor officials, researchers, journalists, donors) and analysis of literature, legislation, policy documents
- Scope two cases selected from each of the three programmatic areas, describing the actors/organizations, preliminary questioning on their agendas for public action, the conditioning factors, the nature of state/NSP relationships

  Tools: Semi-structured interviews with actors from the state and NSP directly involved in the partnership, plus documentary analysis.

Stage 3 (February to end June 2007)

- Undertake in-depth case studies of government and NSP organizations involved in a service delivery relationship, focusing on the explicit and implicit form of the government-NSP relationship, its dynamics, evolution and effect on the partner organizations' identities and agendas for public action, and the experience of beneficiaries

  Tools: Semi-structured interviews with actors from the state and NSP directly involved in the partnership, focus groups, participant observation and documentary analysis.

Stage 4 (July to October 2007)

- Analyse and write up case studies

Stage 5 (October to April 2008)

- Fill gaps in and queries about case studies in response to cross-country analysis
- Take issues from in-depth cases back to questioning at programme level so as to test broader relevance of explanations to relationships of government with other NSPs
- Undertake cross-country and cross-sectoral analysis and write-up.

This approach was intended to obtain the benefits of the case study approach while also avoiding its weakness: to understand relationships we needed to look at how they operated in concrete cases, but we also needed to understand how the

dynamics of the relationship were externally influenced. Moreover, we wished to locate the case studies in a wider framework so as to use them as 'windows' on more general experience.

An important part of this approach was the identification of what we called 'programme or thematic areas' of state non-state engagement. By this we meant broad spheres of public service delivery which would be common across the countries and within which we could select case studies. The criteria for selection of programme areas were that:

- There were substantial state and non-state roles
- Non-state actors were involved in direct service delivery
- There was a range of different types of NSP (e.g. large/small, old/new)
- There was the likelihood of (or scope for) contestation over the means and/or ends of public action
- The programme had some continuity/history (or the NSPs within it had a history) that would allow us to observe change
- Within the programme there were some types of relationship that would allow us to choose 'typical' cases for study
- If similar sector programmes could be identified across countries this would facilitate comparison or at least offer us some similar benchmarks

The programme areas eventually selected were:

1. Education: The improvement of government primary schools by NSPs under school adoption programmes, and NSP provision for out of school children (often referred to as non-formal education - NFE)
2. Health: The management and improvement of government basic health units by NSPs
3. Sanitation: Collaboration of NSPs with government in the implementation of community-based sanitation programmes.

After studying each of these programmes at a general level, the research then focused on cases of governmental collaboration with specific NSPs in each programme area. Cases were selected with similar criteria as for programmes, but picking cases that seemed to have the status of a type or model that was seen by the parties as replicable. In these case studies, we were concerned first with the field level point of encounter between government and service provider, but also with the relationship at higher levels of the government and NSP's organization.

The Selected Cases

	Sanitation	**Health**	**Education**
Pakistan	Orangi Pilot Project Research and Training Institute's facilitation of low-cost sanitation in Karachi	Punjab Rural Support Programme's management of basic health units in Faisalabad	Idara-Taleem-o-Aagahi's support for government school improvement and NFE provision for child labourers
Bangladesh	Unnayan Shahojogy Team's implementation	Population Services and Training	Friends in Village Development 's own

	under contract of Community Led Total Sanitation programme	Centre's management of primary health care centres in Dhaka	primary education programme and implementation of government NFE programme in Sylhet
India	Shelter Associates collaboration with Pune MC in low cost sanitation	Management of primary health care centres by Karuna Trust in Karnataka	Door Step School's relations with Mumbai MC in NFE and school support programmes

The case studies were analysed and written according to a common structure as follows:

i. Organizations in the relationship
Research question: How are the organizations (both NSP and government) themselves structured to pursue their visions of or commitments to public action, supported by what internal perceptions, interests and motives?

ii. Conditioning factors
RQ: What 'external' factors condition the perspectives or agendas of government and NSPs on the means and ends of public action (about service delivery)? How do they do so? What variations exist by service sector?

iii. The design of the relationship
RQ How was the relationship designed, by whom, with what purposes?

iv. The relationship in practice
RQ: Which/whose agendas for public action (means and ends) prevail in the relationship?
RQ: What is the influence of the formal and informal operation of the relationship between government and NSPs on the agendas for public action that prevail? Do service characteristics influence this?

v. The effects of the relationship on the organizations
RQ: Are actors' agendas for public action, identities, organizational goals and forms affected or re-defined by the engagement?

9. What is To Be Done?

The research is now in the final stage of field analysis and write-up. Annex 2 lists the outputs that have already been achieved, including reports on the field research, papers produced for conferences, and articles. In addition to a general literature review, and occasional papers guiding the field research, the direct outputs of the fieldwork in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are country historical reviews, analyses of selected programmes for each of the three sectors, and case studies. All are on the website (http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/nonstateprovidersESRC.htm), except for the case studies which contain confidential elements and are in the process of refinement under Stage 5 of the

project. As indicated above, Stage 5 includes filling gaps in the case studies and taking issues from the specific case studies back to a more general level in order (i) to seek explanation at the level of wider conditioning factors and (ii) to test the generalizability of findings.

Apart from individual articles that members of the research team may publish, we wish in principle to jointly write a book and a special issue of a journal, as well as to run seminars and other forms of dissemination in the three countries. A book proposal has been made to the NGPA programme. We hope that the current workshop will help us to clarify our findings and to compare them across sectors and countries using our research framework. Our presentations are intended to facilitate this, and we look forward to receiving the panellists' comments and guidance. The presentations by team members will include:

- The current paper on the research approach (Batley)
- Papers by the country researchers (Alam, Nair and Bano) on historical and institutional factors conditioning the cases that we have studied
- Papers by the sector specialists (Palmer, Rose and Sansom) comparing findings across countries, particularly in relation to the organization of relationships
- Notes towards cross-sector, cross-country findings, referring back to the wider literature (Teamey, Batley).

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Annex 1: Research Team Members

S.M. Nurul Alam: Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka. Bangladesh country researcher

Masooda Bano: Wolfson College, Oxford. Research associate with Pauline Rose and Pakistan country researcher

Richard Batley: IDD, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham. Principal investigator

Padmaja Nair: Independent consultant, Lucknow. India country researcher

Natasha Palmer, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Co-investigator leading on health sector

Pauline Rose, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. Co-investigator leading on health sector

Kevin Sansom, Water and Engineering Development Centre, University of Loughborough. Co-investigator leading on sanitation sector

Kelly Teamey, IDD, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham Research associate with Richard Batley

Annex 2: Outputs of the Research, January 2008

1. Working papers

S.M. Nurul Alam:
- Bangladesh Country Review: History of State-NSP relations, February 2007
- Identification of Programmes for Study in Bangladesh, February 2007
- Case studies on Unnayyan Shahjogy Team (sanitation), Friends in Village Development (education), Population Services and Training Centre (health), and comparative report

Masooda Bano:
- Pakistan Country Review: History of State-NSP relations, February 2007
- Identification of Programmes for Study in Pakistan: Initial Notes and Methodology, February 2007
- Case studies on the Orangi Pilot Project (sanitation), Idara-Taleem-o-Aagahi (education), Punjab Rural Support Programme (health), and comparative report

Padmaja Nair:
- Scoping Study of Relationships between the State and the Non-Governmental Sector in India, July 2006
- Historical Analysis of Relationships between the State and the Non-Governmental Sector in India, February 2007
- Identification of Programmes for Study in India, February 2007
- Case studies on Shelter Associates (sanitation), Door Step School (education)

Kelly Teamey
- Literature Review on Relationships between Government and Non-state Providers of Services, June 2007

2. Publications

Special Issue of *Public Administration and Development*: Vol. 26, No.3 2006
- Batley, R, 'Guest editor's preface, pp 193-196
- Moran D, 'Comparing services: a survey of leading issues in the sectoral literatures', pp 197-206
- Sansom K, 'Government engagement with non-state service providers of water and sanitation services', pp 207-217
- Rose P, 'Collaboration in education for all? Experiences of government support for non-state provision of basic education in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, pp 219-229
- Palmer N, 'An awkward threesome – donors, governments and non-state providers of health in low income countries, pp 231-240
- Batley R, 'Engaged or divorced? Cross-service findings on government relations with non-state service providers, pp 241-251

Forthcoming

Special Issue of *Compare* guest edited by Rose on 'Non-state provision of education: Evidence from Africa and Asia' (forthcoming, 2009) to include a paper by Rose on:

- NGO Provision of Basic Education. Alternative or Complementary Service Delivery to support Access to the Excluded?

Special Issue of *Development in Practice* guest edited by Rose on 'State/non-state relationships in achieving Education for All' (forthcoming, 2010) to include :
- Rose, 'Strengthening education systems through collaboration? Exploring relationships between non-state providers and the State in South Asia'
- Papers by Batley and by Bano.

3. User-oriented briefing papers

Briefing Papers commissioned by DFID on non-state providers in
- Sansom, sanitation services, May 2006
- Palmer, health services, June 2006,
- Rose, basic education, September 2006.

Batley, 'Governments and service providers' for Capacity.org (www.capacity.org) which is published quarterly in English, French and Spanish with an accompanying web magazine by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) and SNV the Netherlands Development Organisation.

Rose, Government and non-state sector collaboration to reach education for all, http://www.id21.org/education/e1pr1g1.html Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 17 March 2007.

Batley, 'Addressing mistrust between governments and non-state service providers', id21 urban development main page, http://www.id21.org/urban/u1rb1g1.html Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 14 August 2007.
- Also in Local Government Analysis and Research Bulletin of The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/13956

4. Conferences: user- and academic-oriented (in date order)

Rose - Convenor of Panel on non-state providers, and paper presentation on Non-state provision of education in sub-Saharan Africa. African Studies Association, SOAS. September 2006

Siegmann - Seminar in Islamabad, Pakistan on 'Public-private partnerships in healthcare' and Public-private partnerships in water and sanitation, organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute and papers by Karin Siegmann (ex-research collaborator, Pakistan), 18 September and 27 November, 2006

Batley and Nair - Organized Workshop in Sydney, Australia on *Effective partnerships for the provision of essential services*, within biennial conference of the

Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Development, papers by Richard Batley and Padmaja Nair, 21 October 2006

- Batley: 'Creating an enabling environment for non-state service delivery' and 'Facilitating and regulating non-state actors'
- Nair: 'Contracting and collaboration'

Rose - Presentation at the Stakeholders Forum of the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Cape Town, 10-14 December 2006

Palmer and Rose – Presentations on non-state provision in health and education at DFID Human Development Retreat, 6 February 2007

Rose - UK Forum for International Education and Development – Convenor of Section on Non-state providers and new education systems: http://www.cfbt.com/UKFIET/sections/themedsection/non-stateproviders.aspx Paper presented on 'Growth in education systems through collaboration? Exploring relationships between non-state providers and the State in South Asia', September 2007.

Batley - Presentation to DSA NGO Study Group on 'Government's relations with NSP. Can they work together?', University of Sussex, 19 September 2007

Rose - Invited presentation on 'NGO provision of education in urban slums: Opportunities and obstacles for migrant children and youth, *Migration, Education and Socio-Economic Mobility Workshop.* University of East Anglia [paper to be prepared for a Special Issue from the workshop] November 2007.

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The 'Whose Public Action?' ESRC/NGPA papers are published at http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/nonstateprovidersESRC.htm

Further research papers on non-state service delivery are published at http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/nonstateprovidersDFID.htm

Papers from concurrent research funded by DFID on faith-based service providers are published at http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/service-providers/faithbasedprovidersDFID.htm