4. Drivers of Change (DFID)

An approach for understanding the forces that bring about change and the key policy and institutional 'drivers' for poverty reduction

What is the Drivers of Change approach?

Drivers of Change (DoC) is an approach developed by DFID to address the lack of linkages between a country's political framework and the operations of development agencies. The approach focuses on 'the interplay of economic, social and political factors that support or impede' poverty reduction (OECD DAC, 2005). The evolution of this approach has gone hand-in-hand with an approach to development that emphasises that: i) the way development happens, or does not happen, is shaped by political context; and ii) to be effective, donors' country strategies must be based on a sound understanding of historical and political context. More specifically, DoC is rooted in a concern to better understand *how* to make change happen in specific country contexts:

> Usually, we have a good idea about what needs to be done to achieve poverty reduction, but are much less clear about why it's not happening. All too often, we attribute slow or no progress to lack of political will … It's this black box of lack of political will that DOC analysis unpacks. This should result in this phrase disappearing from the risk column of a Country Assistance Plan or Regional Assistance Plan (Suma Chakrabati, DFID Permanent Secretary, quoted in Thornton and Cox, 2005: 2).

How does the Drivers of Change approach work?

DoC analyses are initiated and carried out by DFID country offices, usually by selecting expert consultants (international and local) to coordinate the process and write the reports. Practical and methodological support to the country teams carrying out the studies has been provided by a DoC Team in DFID headquarters. Over 20 such analyses have been carried out so far.

DoC is not a highly standardised approach. The framework sets out broad guidelines, but it is designed to be led at the country level. There is enormous variation in the scope of the studies and reports, and the resources and time allocated for their completion. The duration of the studies ranges from 15 days to over two years. Costs have varied from GBP4000 for Georgia to GBP2.1 million for Nigeria (Thornton and Cox, 2005).

Each DoC report identifies specific drivers. Certain themes recur frequently in the reports. These include corruption and elite capture, the role of civil society, the role of the media, and the importance of political opposition and the middle classes.

Elements of the Drivers of Change approach

Conceptual approach and indicators

• The approach focuses on power relationships and the institutional and structural factors affecting the lack of political will. It is based around a three-part conceptual model of structures, individual agents, and mediating institutions, and is coupled with an emphasis on how to effect change. As a result, this tool is better suited than many others to capturing the importance of informal institutions and relationships. The approach – of identifying structures, agents and institutions – is one which CSOs could readily employ.

Figure 4: The Drivers of Change conceptual model
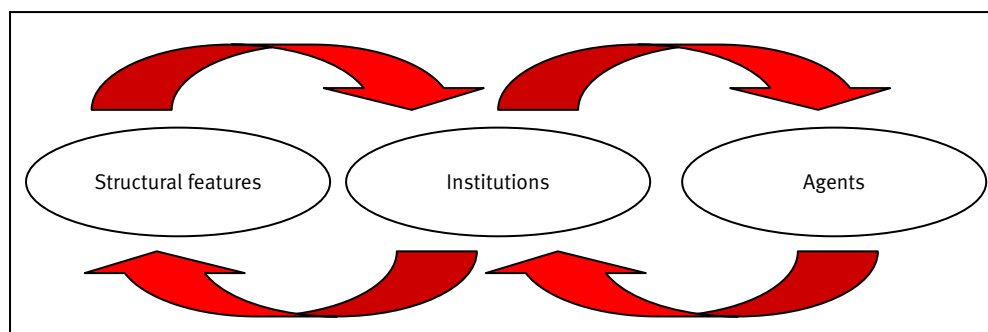
Source: Warrener (2004).

- Guidelines for analysis are provided, as a broad template. These include six types of question: basic country analysis; medium term dynamics; role of external forces; links between changes and poverty reduction; operational implications; and DFID incentives (Warrener, 2004). For example, they recommend using the framework for basic country analysis as seen in Box 6.

Box 6: Framework for basic country analysis

Foundational factors

- Is there a political community?
- Does government control the territory?
- How have the history of state formation, political geography, geo-strategic position, embedded social and economic structures shaped the basic characteristics of the political system?
- Is government dependent on taxpayers?

More medium term, institutional factors

- How 'institutionalised' are the bureaucracy, policy mechanisms, political parties, civil society organisations?
- How embedded is the constitution?
- What is the basis of political competition, and the composition of the political elite?
- How important is ethnicity?
- How is power shared between the political executive, the military, the legislature, the judiciary, other levels of government, the private sector, religious organisations?

Short-term factors

- What is government's bureaucratic and financial capacity?
- Key mechanisms for vertical and horizontal accountability?
- Political resources (including point in the electoral cycle)?

Source: Moore (2001).

- Although the approach is rooted in a conceptual framework conceived with donor requirements in mind, other actors may find this approach useful in understanding how their own priorities and resources are related to those of others with the potential to drive or block change.

Data

- The methods of data collection and the type of evidence used have consisted of desk studies of secondary evidence and interviews or consultations in the field. It is essential that teams conducting DoC analyses include people with good country knowledge.

Analysis, presentation and recommendations

- The type of information produced is of a qualitative nature. This, combined with the considerable flexibility of the approach, hinders cross-country comparison. CSOs need to be aware of the trade-off that all approaches to context mapping make between allowing flexibility and enabling systematic comparison.

- Many of the Drivers of Change studies have not been made publicly available. A good place to find those which are available is http://www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides/drivers-of-change.

- As an approach to mapping context, the uses of DoC are numerous. A recent DFID briefing (DFID, 2005b) reports that country offices have found a variety of uses for the process of undertaking a DoC study and for the findings produced. These have included:
  o Informing the planning process;
  o Improving the quality of engagement and influence with partner governments;
  o Analysing the risk of interventions and suggesting ways of mitigating these;
  o Strengthening harmonisation processes with other donors.

Key references

DFID (2005a) 'Lessons Learned: Planning and Undertaking a Drivers of Change Study', How To Note, DFID, London, online at http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/DOC84.pdf.

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Warrener, D. (2004) 'The Drivers of Change Approach', Synthesis Paper, ODI, London, online at http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Projects/R0219/docs/Synthesis_3_final.pdf.