

# PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

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VSO works with governments and civil society organisations to ensure individuals understand and can exercise their rights and responsibilities.

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## INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Addressing governance issues and involving citizens in development planning and decision-making continue to be priorities for many countries where VSO works.

Donors such as the UK Department for International Development and the European Union are increasing funding for programmes that work towards good governance, and the African Union is also prioritising the issue in its development objectives.

Elections in a number of countries where we work caused some disruption to activity due to political sensitivities, change in the activities of partner organisations and closure of government departments. However, elections also provided VSO and its partners with opportunities to promote participation and good governance, and have enabled lobbying on key issues.

## OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

VSO's corporate programme objectives offer direction to our country programmes as they develop strategies to address specific contexts and needs. This year, VSO's work in participation and governance was driven by three objectives, outlined below, and a number of success indicators. The following provides a summary of a larger report and offers key examples of success rather than a complete picture.

Countries where VSO works in participation and governance are Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ethiopia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, the Thailand-Burma border, Uganda, Vanuatu and Zambia.

### 1 ENSURE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ARE ABLE TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF POOR AND VULNERABLE GROUPS ARE MET

More than 70 civil society organisations in 14 countries reported improvements in their organisational and strategic development, which resulted in better working relationships with government institutions, particularly local government.

- **Government agencies and elected representatives are more aware of the needs of all constituents.** Gram Bikash Kendro is a civil society organisation supporting the rights of 65,000 indigenous people in 17 districts in north-west Bangladesh. It trains local government bodies to engage with and support local indigenous communities and helps to resolve land-related conflict. With VSO support, Gram Bikash Kendro now has a strategic plan, an advocacy strategy and increased levels of knowledge and skills through learning visits and training. As a result, the organisation is much more effective and has encouraged over 2,000 indigenous community households to start paying tax; increased registration of land by communities; and encouraged the local government support to indigenous communities' needs.
- **Civil society partners implement new, expanded or improved advocacy programmes.** On the border between Thailand and Burma, where VSO supports Burmese refugee communities, a number of activities have brought together 15 different ethnic groups to work on advocacy initiatives. For example, the Mon Women's Organisation, the Mon Human Rights Forum and Peace Way Foundation received a VSO small grant to organise two exhibitions in Bangkok to educate Thai citizens about the situation in eastern Burma and how it impacts on Thailand.

## 2 GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS DELIVER APPROPRIATE BASIC SERVICES AND ARE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE

VSO worked with more than 60 government partners in eight countries to improve their management structures, planning processes, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation methodology, ensuring that more people benefit from good quality, appropriate public services.

- **Government institutions consult their constituents to implement more appropriate policies and development programmes.** In Zambia, VSO has supported local authorities to decentralise their project planning and management. In one district, 22 sub-committees have been established and trained in project identification, proposal writing, budgeting and reporting, and local people are playing a significantly bigger role in deciding what development initiatives are needed in their communities.
- **Government institutions implement accountability mechanisms.** In Sierra Leone, a volunteer has been working with Makeni City Council to develop its tax policy and processes. Records were updated and new documentation and database systems introduced. The new systems have had a major impact on the council's transparency and accountability, as this influences how confident local people feel about paying their taxes. During 2008, revenue from business tax alone is set to increase by over 400 per cent. This programme of support and training for systems and staff is now being replicated in other councils around the country.

## 3 CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS PRACTISE INTERNAL GOOD GOVERNANCE TO INCREASE THEIR CREDIBILITY WITH COMMUNITIES

VSO worked with over 100 civil society organisations in 14 countries to develop internal management processes and accountability to the people they represent.

- **Civil society organisations ensure more women and vulnerable groups are involved in decision-making and as staff.** In India, the Badlao Foundation, which supports poor women and vulnerable groups, was looking to adopt new strategies and develop documentation and planning systems to promote good governance, as well as the participation of its beneficiaries in the organisation. One volunteer worked with the management to establish a human resources function, recruit HR staff and develop policies for the workplace and for the support and development of staff. The foundation now employs more women and disabled people.
- **Partners practise financial accountability so that money is spent to benefit poor and marginalised groups, especially women, directly.** In Pakistan, a financial management volunteer was placed with the Centre for Peace and Development Initiative to help restructure its financial system. Following this input, the centre has been officially registered, set up a new financial and assets management system, and supported the appointment of a new finance manager.

### FUTURE DIRECTION

VSO will continue to build on these corporate objectives, ensuring national governments and civil society organisations are supporting all people to participate in society, and ensuring individuals understand their rights and responsibilities. Specific areas for consideration include:

- the role civil society can play in influencing government
- the need for continued focus on good governance of civil society organisations and national institutions
- the potential to increase focus on women's rights
- the growth of activity that engages with the media to bring about change
- research into VSO's potential niche in peace building and the role national volunteering can play in promoting community development
- opportunities for VSO to increase support for access to justice for poor and vulnerable groups and for more effective justice systems
- opportunities to raise funds to support new and existing areas of work.

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VSO works in five other goal areas: Education, HIV and AIDS, Disability, Health and Secure Livelihoods. For more information on these goal areas go to: [www.vsointernational.org/what-we-do/focus](http://www.vsointernational.org/what-we-do/focus)

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