
Making Change Matter:
Exploring issues of power, rights and citizen government
engagement

December 2007

Rights & Voice Initiative (RAVI)



“...now people appreciate our efforts, before we were seen as anti-development but now power is transforming and we are putting pressure on duty bearers. There is nothing that can stop the flow of civil society demanding their rights.”

RAVI grant partner

Making Change Matter was influenced by a number of people. It was written by Renee Kantelberg with candid thoughts and ideas from government officials, RGPs from year one and the communities they work with. Their patience in responding to lengthy and sometimes intrusive questions is much appreciated. Last, but not least, this piece of work would not have been possible without the consistent support from the RAVI Management Agency and Secretariat staff, in particular, Robert Abaane. I hope the ideas offered in this study will give all of those involved in RAVI that I have met and their partners the energy to continue down the path of social justice.

Contents

Summary of Changes.....	4
Introduction	5
Engaging with Duty Bearers.....	6
Engagement takes time, commitment and perseverance.....	7
Organisational Capacity to Engage	8
Rights based approaches	9
Internal systems, procedures and rights based practitioner skills.....	10
Capacity building for citizen government engagement	11
Government Responsiveness towards Citizenry	12
Challenges with government responsiveness.....	12
Inability and unwillingness to respond	13
Attribution	14
Conclusion	16

Acronyms

CB	Capacity Building
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CIKOD	Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development
CEPIL	Centre for Public Interest Law
CGE	Citizen Government Engagement
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DA	District Assembly
DCE	District Chief Executive
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DVC	Domestic Violence Coalition
FYC	Federation of Youth Clubs
FWG	Forest Watch Ghana
GCRN	Ghana Community Radio Network
GFD	Ghana Federation of the Disabled
IPA	Institute for Policy Alternatives
LAWA	Alumnae Ghana Incorporated
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
MA	Management Agency
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NYC	Noble Youth Club
PCA	People Centred Advocacy
PSI	President Special Initiative
RAVI	Rights and Voice Initiative
RGP	RAVI Grant Partner
RBA	Rights Based Approach
SOLACE	Solidarity Action for Community Empowerment
VoY	Voices of Youth Club
WACAM	Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining
ZOVFA	Zuuri Organic Vegetable Farmers Association

1. Summary of Changes

The Ghana Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI) gives a high priority towards supporting the capacity of its partners in engaging with duty bearers in order to affect governance agendas and priorities but also and more importantly to enable partners and Ghanaian civil society to work towards holding duty bearers and government accountable. At the heart of RAVI is the perspective that a 'service delivery' focus alone will not support citizens to overcome long term poverty. Instead actively engaging in 'rights' processes which demand greater democracy, transparency and accountability is likely to achieve long-term sustainable changes for the marginalised and poor in Ghana.

As partners develop rights based goals along side RAVI, there is a critical need to understand the processes of change and the dynamics involved in those changes. This is important for three reasons. RAVI can:

- Assess the value of its work so far in citizen government engagement
- Improve and inspire the on-going learning and quality of its work in the domain of engagement
- Ensure that rights based approaches and citizen government engagement is indeed improving the lives of the poor and marginalised in Ghana.

This assessment of change study has attempted to identify and document changes that have happened in three key areas. These are summarised in the table below.

Before RAVI partnership	Now with RAVI partnership
<p>The extent to which partners were engaging with duty bearers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very few partners were engaging with duty bearers on rights based claims • CBOs and their communities generally did not engage • Poor and vulnerable groups have no voice, no rights, feared or felt intimidated by duty bearers • Inadequate inclusion and participation of the vulnerable and poor in key engagement processes • Community attitudes unreceptive and unappreciative to RBA • Low demand for accountability on the part of duty bearers from partners and their communities • Partners motivation for poverty reduction focused solely on specific community needs or particular organisational interests 	<p>The extent to which partners are engaging with duty bearers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBOs and their communities are advocating for their rights, inviting duty bearers to engage on issues that are relevant to community needs • Poor and vulnerable believe in their voice and boldly sit across duty bearers sharing their opinions • Partners are mapping out and planning strategies to improve engagement outcomes beyond their immediate scope • Communities have opened up to RBA and have a new found assertiveness. • Communities are less sidelined by duty bearers • Stronger collective voice of partners, they determine the issues • Partners understand the depths of opposition but still struggle to build alliances • Engaging with local and national level government structures using RBA on issues concerning policy, legislation or community development • Communities now have access to dialogue spaces with local organisations working on issues and plans • More engagement and some positive outcomes with government is empowering partners to push other plans and activities forward

<p>Partners organisational capacity to engage with duty bearers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of partners grappled with capacity to engage • Very limited capacity of CBOs to engage with duty bearers • Very little work in negotiating, lobbying and advocacy • CBOs had extremely low understanding of RBA and PCA • Weak organisational structures and systems with CBOs • Partners were internally focused on how to achieve and influence change and lacked coalition or alliance building perspectives to meet those changes • Organisational attitudes and goals had unrealistic expectations of change 	<p>Partners organisational capacity to engage with duty bearers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational capacity to engage has significantly improved • More skilled in PCA and RBA to further their engagement efforts • More accountable in practice to their partners and looking beyond their own targets • CBOs and community attitudes have shifted from a focus on only recipients of charity to a pro-active stance on engagement for their rights • Improved and stronger organisational systems with all partners • Attitudes and awareness around how to approach the spaces of engagement are now helping partners to sit together with duty bearers and dialogue on local development plans that affect their communities • Partners are more aware of the complexity and multi-layered process of CGE • Greater ability of Intermediary RGP to work with CBOs to stand on their own
<p>The extent to which the Government of Ghana and other duty bearers were accountable and responding towards the rights of citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwillingness and inability to respond to rights based claims • Lack of transparency and accountability towards citizens and communities • Government does not easily disclose plans or budgets • Duty bearers perceived NGOs / CBOs as political troublemakers • Community leaders are corrupt and only satisfy their own needs • Duty bearers determined the priorities for development within the community 	<p>The extent to which the Government of Ghana and other duty bearers are accountable and responding towards the rights of citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes are happening in government responsiveness and collaboration with partners but at a slow pace • Real changes that need to happen to make rights realized and felt across civil society in Ghana are still on the margins • DCEs and local government work with partners on their development concerns to a degree and listen to community needs • Government transparency and accountability continue to remain low • Government continue to expose plans and respond to requests if partners demand access to them • Traditional authorities, communities and CBOs link together on decision making much more

2. Introduction

RAVI is a DFID funded initiative which supports Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to carry out citizen-government engagement with a focus on the knowledge, respect, protection, promotion and fulfilment of civil, political, economic and social rights of all citizens particularly the poor and marginalised. The aim is to strengthen the voice of Ghanaians, especially the poor, vulnerable and marginalised, to engage with government. RAVI has sought to achieve this through funding large and small CSOs. It reaches community-based organisations (CBOs) through larger 'Intermediary' CSOs. The Intermediary grant partner role is one that accompanies/ supports CBOs in their efforts to engage with government and duty bearers by providing organisational capacity building in order to further their rights based agendas.

This study assesses three core areas:

- The extent to which RGP are engaging with duty bearers
- The extent of RGP organisational capacity to engage with duty bearers

- The extent to which the Government of Ghana (and other duty bearers) are respecting, protecting, promoting and fulfilling the rights of citizens.

The research was carried out over a period of two months using participatory tools and inclusive approaches throughout. Focused group discussions and dialogue with seven out of thirteen RGPs¹ along with their CBO partners informed the outcome of the study. Government of Ghana at the national and local levels were interviewed. There was also an overall 'barometer of change' survey where nine out of thirteen RGPs from the first batch answered questions in relation to the three core areas noted above.

This study is in six sections. Following this brief introduction, section three assesses one of the most important areas for RAVI – engaging with duty bearers in particular the government of Ghana. Section four builds from the previous section and examines the capacity of RAVI partners to engage with duty bearers. Section five assesses the extent to which the Government of Ghana is being responsive to the demands of its citizenry and fulfilling its role and obligations. Section six examines attribution and the contribution of RAVI in the three core areas. Finally, section seven provides recommendations by suggesting building on core capacity building principles along with relationship principles.

3. Engaging with Duty Bearers

"I am so proud of myself to have stood before dignitaries to present issues bothering my community and this has given me more courage to advance these till our voices are heard."
Tetauko Community Member working with ZOVFA (CBO of BEWDA)

All partners who informed this study shared that there has been a great change in their ability to engage with duty bearers. Several commented that they did not genuinely understand the practice of engagement and making their voices heard until they partnered with RAVI. They noted as well that initially communities were not speaking for themselves that they felt powerless because issues that affected them were not coming out in the open and vulnerable groups didn't know how or have the courage to voice out concerns. Partners felt this was because of two key reasons; 1) communities were not working towards an engagement practice with a rights based understanding at their core and 2) duty bearers were largely neither interested nor willing to engage with communities or CSOs on development issues.

Collaboration and engagement with duty bearers was minimal before working with RAVI and often partners felt when there was an opportunity to meet their issues were sidelined and not representative. There was less awareness around rights, principles of participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability. The focus for most was service delivery with little emphasis on 'rights' per se. Engagement largely was to the neglect of rights based development and using rights based approaches as a solution to meet the needs of communities was rare.

Very few partners understood or practiced people centred advocacy, lobbying or negotiating with duty bearers before RAVI. Efforts for rights based change were not necessarily organised, coordinated effectively or participatory in practice. Advocacy was ad hoc in nature and strategies did not consist of an analysis of the problems needing to be addressed, the variety of causes of those problems and the possible variety of solutions to address those problems. The awareness around the importance of lobbying and engaging with duty bearers was limited for most partners and much less for their constituents.

However, the situation is changing. The capacity of partners and the general engagement environment with duty bearers on rights based issues has improved significantly over the last two years. As one RGP mentioned, "unlike before the climate now is advocacy - engagement friendly, even the government recognises that advocacy cannot be swept away." The practice of lobbying, negotiating, and advocating on a key rights based issue for partners is being recognised by duty bearers and they are slowly coming to terms with this changing trend.

¹ Seven out of thirteen grant partners from RAVI's first year funding were part of the assessment visits. They were Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), LAWA Ghana Alumni Inc, The ARK, Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM), Belim Wusa Development Agency (BEWDA), Legal Resource Centre (LRC) and the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD).

Partners and the communities they work with are catalysts for this change. They are now speaking up and engaging with key stakeholders and duty bearers on issues that are of concern to their organisations and constituents. Communities are mobilising and raising awareness on specific rights based issues that marginalise them further. Vulnerable groups such as people living with disabilities, street children, women, farmers, exploited labourers and many more are appearing now in community forums and durbars expressing themselves, demanding access to information and wanting to get involved in bringing about change that matters for their families, communities and country. As one community member said, “this demanding and giving our voices out is becoming a way for me. Here we no longer sit back...we are becoming informed and aware of what is rightfully ours because of this RAVI work.”

Engagement takes time, commitment and perseverance

Partners are up against three significant challenges; first, *power imbalances* between themselves and the government, second *lack of accountability and political will* from the government in meeting demands and negotiating terms to secure rights, third *inadequate capacities* in partner strategies to move beyond awareness raising / claiming rights.

Although partners now appreciate the importance of rights based approaches, the process of engagement is slow. They recognise that most of the engagement that has taken place is due to their own efforts (not the governments) in taking advantage of opportunities to make claims for rights and in mobilising and being pro-active in trying to meet and engage with government around those claims. The constant need to plan and re-plan strategies and build collectively can be exhausting. Constraints often outweigh the possible opportunities for engagement. Often an imbalance in power between partners and duty bearers place the former in inferior positions of little bargaining power. Although vulnerable and marginalised communities have been empowered, are able to voice their demands and understand the greater context of rights based efforts, they continue to find it very difficult to negotiate in these engagement spaces effectively. Financial resources withheld, corruption and lack of information from government are three key areas that partners expressed frustration in the process of engagement.

There is still a significant amount of learning to do in citizen government engagement. RAVI will have to manage partner expectations on rights based processes as citizen government engagement and holding duty bearers accountable takes time. Working with an analysis and focus that builds on citizen participation, critical thinking and effective strategies that partners have used so far in the face of engagement challenges will support some of this learning. Areas for RAVI and partners to build on in engagement with duty bearers:

- Encourage partners individually to identify *specific* problems and explore possible solutions based on small achievements made so far in spaces of engagement
- Examine the challenges faced in the space of engagement and plan next steps linking potential exchanges, networking and cross learning for a more collective voice
- Continually analyse the challenges of power imbalances and action on shifting those imbalances in citizen government engagement work and strategies
- Develop approaches that continue to work with the uniqueness of partners so that connections are made, impacts felt and relationships at all levels are strengthened.

Case Study 1: Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) Advocacy for a Broadcasting Law Gains Recognition – Lessons in CGE

GCRN serves as the Secretariat for the Ghana Advocacy Steering Committee for a National Broadcasting Law. They have been advocating for a broadcasting law in order to harmonise the already existing laws in line with the 1992 constitution, so that airwaves can be equitably allocated so as to serve the needs of all sections of society, support freedom of expression and democratic governance, promotion of national languages and cultures and to insulate broadcasting from control by government and other vested interests.

GCRN and the Steering Committee's basic strategy has been to involve all stakeholders at all levels of engagement through a series of interlocking consultations. These include; community (resource owners), broadcasters ('lease holders' of frequencies and facilities), regulatory authorities, ministries, agencies and departments.

The challenges that GCRN has faced in trying to engage at the policy / legislative level of national government have been several: long period of deregulation without legislation, lack of clarity in ministerial responsibility for broadcasting, changes in ministries and functionaries, differences in perspectives and priorities of broadcasting operators, government agenda, constraints on government from development partners, and the bureaucratic processes involved.

Even though the challenges have been many GCRN and partners are beginning to experience successes due to their advocacy efforts the drafting of the broadcasting bill with inputs from all stakeholders, deepened collaboration with government and stakeholders, MPs and communities are coming together, dialogue between regulatory bodies and a high awareness of the need for a broadcasting law.

Some of the lessons that can be shared from the GCRN experience are that engagement is an important tool for connecting all stakeholders and that it helps to deepen communication as it removes suspicion. As well, engagement creates ownership as a result of inclusion, participation and supports the practice of participatory governance in policy formulations. Although GCRN has experienced several constraints and resistance from government through dialogue there is now a better sense of balance in broadcasting interests and the foundation has been laid for a comprehensive broadcasting law.

4. Organisational Capacity to Engage

“Now that we have been given training duty bearers listen to us, there is a sense of mutual understanding and we can easily speak. There is no more fear.” Member of Akoko Traders Association (a CBO partner of the Ark Foundation)

RAVI takes a holistic and people centred view of organisational development. It recognises that strong organisations and institutions are pillars of a stable civil society and that they cannot develop and sustain their organisational strengths without continuous attention to all the dimensions of organisational development. More specifically RAVI has two key purposes in its organisational capacity building - to support its partners to engage effectively with duty bearers at all levels and to become better 'learning' organisations.² What this means in practice is improving the effectiveness of RGP and the CBOs that the intermediaries support, supporting RGP to build their internal capacity, helping to create an enabling environment in which partners can be more effective and supporting them to become better facilitators.

For RAVI, a partner with strong capacities would have the following qualities:

- it has the right people with the right skills, attitudes and commitment

² See RAVI's Capacity Building Framework a more in-depth understanding on how RAVI supports partners in the area of organisational capacity building.

- it seeks to create an enabling environment
- it has good institutional linkages
- it appreciates and practices the concepts of RBA / PCA
- it has financial strength

Partner organisations at the initial stages of RAVI funding and partnership had a limited combination of the above qualities. They had some familiarity with RBA. In practice they were working in a combination of rights based awareness creation and service delivery. The difficulty always being that poor communities were not recognising the potential of rights based approaches in gaining services and therefore challenging partners on how they delivered - “talk - talk” instead of services for the community (medical clinics, schools, electricity, proper housing, sanitation and water).

People centred advocacy in theory and practice was not recognised by most partners or community members as an approach for community mobilisation and empowerment before RAVI partnership. Advocacy efforts were minimal and largely uncoordinated therefore unable to provide any substantial clout in engagement spaces. Advocacy strategies remained weak and individualised (organisation and community level). Most partners were engaged in a limited level of grassroots advocacy before RAVI but the advocacy was not connected to a deeper and bigger picture of change beyond the community - “we didn’t consider people centred advocacy, we did advocate to some degree but it was only connected to an immediate goal of gaining something.” (Staff member, The Ark Foundation).

Internal organisational development was also weak for most partners. Formal financial procedures were loose and disorganised. For most of the partners a finance manual / policy were not considered to be important. The same is true for monitoring and evaluation (M&E). All partners had very little understanding of what it takes to undertake M&E and did not carry it out in any way that would adequately assess outcomes or impacts projects. Documentation was non-existent for CBOs and for many RGP’s documentation was not seen as an organisational or learning priority. Instead, most understood documentation as an internal requirement that consisted of standard donor reports instead of also being a part of organisational learning and monitoring.

The current situation for organisational capacity to engage is far better then ever before. In the three areas of this assessment *‘capacity building for engagement’ by far has felt the greatest change*. All focused group discussions and survey materials highlight the great shift and improvement in:

- RBA discourse and practice (building voice, participation in decision making spaces, engaging with duty bearers and claiming rights)
- PCA knowledge and practice (planning, promoting political awareness, conscious raising, research, public influencing strategies, increasing voice of marginalised, organising and mobilising)
- Internal systems and procedures (finance, M&E, documentation, management, organisational culture)
- Rights based practitioner skills (facilitation, downward accountability, transparency, conflict resolution)

Rights based approaches

RBA for partners at all levels of RAVI is more deeply understood because of the experiences in practice e.g. through practical application and face to face encounters as opposed to the theory and discourse of RBA³. Using a rights based focus to their work has helped to highlight for partners where tensions and challenges continue to exist, where constraints continue to persist and block on-going claims for rights. These approaches focus on power, people and rights and they challenge core fundamental beliefs and practices (e.g. do young women actually have a right to the speak and voice concerns when employment practices exploit them, do communities and farmers have a right to demand fair compensation for land that is being unjustly taken from them?). The

³ Partners and communities knowledge of RBA do not always conceptualise rights the way RAVI does, especially those who have never come across RBA. Often what is perceived as the ‘lack’ of knowledge of RBA is an external misconception of local knowledge and practices around rights, because they are viewed as too informal, inadequate or not grounded in RBA principles. However, through discussions with partners and communities what was highlighted was communities do understand what the core of RBA is because they know what the government is not responding to their needs by the little they have. They may not understand the term ‘lack of government responsiveness’ or ‘RBA’ but they do in fact know what it means to not have running water, access to a nearby hospital or clinic.

more partners engage with RBA in an environment where rights are severely denied the more in tune they become with the complexity of claiming and realising rights. Hand in hand with RBA practice is the increased openness towards RBA from partners and communities. Previous criticisms around rights based development being more about talking than actual tangible development results are slowly disappearing. Partners are working hard at creating awareness and communities are seeing some tangible benefits such as participation, inclusion, increased voice of vulnerable, service delivery improvements and community recognition.

Understanding the complexity of rights and generating practical training around partner needs is relevant for RAVI to continue to build on the work partners are doing if rights are to be realised. Investment in training needs to place more emphasis towards partner benefits and experiences in CGE along with the limitations of those experiences. For example, challenges in negotiation, lobbying and planning advocacy strategies that effectively bring partners closer to engagement spaces needs attention. Many partners applaud the RBA knowledge and skills they now have but it is at a level which focuses more on awareness creation and less on the realisation of rights. Once they reach a certain outcome of their efforts, it is not always clear for them on how to take it to the next level. Training needs to continue to support partners and communities to ask their own questions and to develop their own approaches based on their experiences in order to overcome constraints in realising rights.

Internal systems, procedures and rights based practitioner skills

There have been significant changes for partner organisations internally in the last two years because of RAVI's ongoing support. In particular better record keeping, improved documentation, improved financial systems and procedures. Attitudes and values continue to change as staff mature and learn from the practice of RBA within their own work. Values of equality, respect and openness are stronger now than at the beginning of the RAVI partnership. The greatest notable change was with CBOs. Training and skills development received from RAVI has greatly improved partner organisations at all levels. Training in RBA, PCA, facilitation skills, conflict resolution, financial management, M&E, proposal writing, needs assessment, RAVI requirements and the learning that trickles down from other events has supported partners organisations to become better learning organisations and to foster that learning towards engagement with duty bearers on rights based issues that concern them.

CASE STUDY	Case Study 2: Rights, Empowerment, Access and Participation (REAP) Project of The Ark Foundation
	<p>Located in the East Akim District of the Eastern Region of Ghana the focus of the REAP project is on strengthening five selected CBOs to be effective and efficient in implementing their work for the benefit of the poor and marginalised in their communities.</p> <p>The specific objectives of the project are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build the capacity of selected CBOs and associations to engage in people-centred advocacy from a rights-based perspective regarding specific broad issues of their choice that require change • facilitate a process of bringing together the selected CBOs into a network for presenting a collective voice and for mutual support • facilitate a process of internal capacity strengthening for the selected CBOs to enable them to deliver more effectively and efficiently on their work, particularly regarding their engagement with local power structures. <p>One CBO, Noble Youth Club speaks about some of the simple but important positive changes for their community and the club since their partnership in the REAP project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is now an official NYC office in the community 2. Membership of club has increased and youth are becoming more involved in community issues due to exhibiting good leadership skills and behaviour 3. Youth are becoming more engaged with duty bearers on community issues 4. Elders are getting more involved and pulling resources together for community projects 5. Efforts have resulted in a school, clinic and a hospital is now being considered 6. The community now understands that development is about rights not charity 7. The avenues of learning are expanding and empowering youth to make a difference

M&E has improved to some degree. In documentation, dissemination and information gathering have improved significantly. Most CBOs indicated that before their partnership with RAVI they were not documenting any of their activities or work. The fact that they are now writing and proactively documenting engagement processes is a huge success for many CBOs. However, there is still much to improve on in documentation. Critical analysis and reflection are low in reports and other documents received by RAVI. The quality of thinking about the process of partners work in most documents does not go that extra mile and only meets the basic requirements. In theory, RAVI partners recognise the importance of monitoring, reflecting, reviewing and shared learning but in practice the culture of M&E remains a rather technical one for tangible outcomes. As the need to monitor more abstract development concepts grows (participation, accountability, power, inclusion, empowerment, voice, and transparency) partner frustration on *how* to measure and monitor these concepts will also grow. RAVI will need to consider addressing this shift in M&E practice and adapt and mix a combination of frameworks and concepts (logical framework, results based management) with complimentary approaches and schools of thought (outcome mapping, MSC).

Capacity building for citizen government engagement

In everyway RAVI's capacity building efforts are supporting, improving, inspiring and changing partner organisations and the CBOs they work with. The quality and quantity of RAVI capacity building for better CGE is commendable. Despite much of the progress made, below are further points to consider:

1. **Develop and promote cross learning and networking.** Many partners consider their work is isolated and not connecting to other partners within RAVI. RAVI needs to address this learning gap (beyond the Learn & Share options) so partners can learn how others are working on engagement, community awareness raising and to share best practices generally.
2. **Longer term funding and support.** Partners are concerned about what they will do after RAVI funding. This is even more of an issue for CBOs. Partners appreciate that the project life cycle is two years but it does raise concerns on how sustainable project results are, particularly if organisational capacity building is developing at a slower pace. Requests for changing the timeframe, offering alternative funding sources and helping with proposal writing were suggestions brought forward.
3. **Knowledge transfer.** RAVI emphasises a 'learning culture' with its partners but how is training applied in practice? Partners do not do a regular assessment of organisational training needs or monitor how skills are being applied in practice. New knowledge received is not trickling down to all members of staff but only those who have received training.
4. **Financial planning.** This is an area that most partners stated change has happened for the better. But there is still room for learning. Issues of financial accountability and transparency, how to plan ahead and forecast annual expenditures could be further supported.
5. **Enhanced communication, information and shared learning.** Sharing information, communication tools and having knowledge on dissemination approaches are areas that are not effectively working for partners and their engagement strategies. There needs to be a *regular* space, platform or mechanism (website, e-newsletter, e-group) that links all the information and learning between partners.
6. **Skills to undertake 'critical thinking' research and documentation.** Most partners do not have the capacity to do comprehensive and analytical research. A critical analysis spirit needs to be championed if partners want to develop better programme and project strategies in CGE and dig deeper into areas of power inequalities, process and rights based change.

5. Government Responsiveness towards Citizenry

‘...we don’t listen, we never have. Civil society recognises the crookedness of this government. We need to be prepared to listen and implement opinions from CSOs and citizens, but the government does not embrace such suggestions. We don’t attach weight to such suggestions. If we did Ghana would be a paradise on earth!’ Member of Parliament - Majority Party

The environment of government and duty bearer accountability in Ghana towards citizenry before RAVI and now has changed very little. This part of the assessment shows the least change and indicates where the most challenges are for real change in citizen government engagement processes.

Government, duty bearers and traditional authorities in the past were not willing to fulfil or respond to the demands of partners. There was disregard for civil society attempts to engage and demand a space for collaboration and dialogue on service delivery let alone key rights issues. Government at all levels did not easily make available information or development plans and there was a serious lack of respect in terms of how CSOs were received. An equal level playing field was not an option for marginalised and excluded groups or partners who advocated on their behalf. CBOs and their communities were perceived to be unprofessional and told that “they lacked expertise on development priorities and had no right to tell government officials how to do their job and responsibilities.”

The level of resistance, lack of transparency, lack of downward accountability, corruption and power games played out were examples of what partners reported of duty bearers and government at the beginning of RAVI projects. Serious constraints and lack of influence from partners existed in citizen participation in local and national governance processes. Partners had no accessibility towards government information and a culture of opacity with government structures made accessing information even more difficult. Processes for exploring ways of accessing data for public disclosure and expenditure in sectors were unheard of. The ability of government to meet rights obligations was undoubtedly insignificant. Mechanisms for citizen complaints at the national and local level were ineffective and weak.

However, the picture is improving and is better now than before but there is still a great distance to go. Government attitudes and actions towards the fulfilment, protection and respect of rights and its responsiveness towards these rights claims is slowly improving. Government understands that they need civil society input because the knowledge partners have is closer to the causes that concern national and local development. Partners stated that although they still come up against constraints there is not the same restrictive attitude. Whereas before government and duty bearers would simply state, “who are you to want to know or ask?” they are now shifting their thinking towards listening to the demands of partners.

The picture is also better for traditional authorities. Previously, chiefs did not consult communities with a participatory and inclusive approach on issues and not all members of the community were able to voice their concerns to the chiefs. Partners indicated that now chiefs are collaborating, supporting and working together more with their communities to find solutions to the numerous development problems communities are facing. Chiefs are recognising the good work that CBOs are championing and how community leadership and rights based efforts are making change for the better.

Challenges with government responsiveness

Although there is a small improvement in government accountability to meet rights obligations it remains far behind the expectations of partners. Partners indicated the lack of commitment and political will by national and in particular local government towards fulfilling rights obligation is a major challenge. For example, there are still ‘obligation’ challenges with local politicians (DA officials – notably the DCE and DCD) and public servants to provide information / resources towards partners and communities they work in. Partners explained that at the local level processes are uncoordinated and ad hoc. It takes time and constant negotiation to work with District Assemblies to fulfil their obligations. Most partners emphasised the fact that it is often difficult to meet local government officials because of their busy schedules and the tendency for government officials to be in meetings and workshops as opposed to finding time to ensure the realisation of their commitments to the people of the area.

A culture of political patronage and corruption at all levels continue to pose challenges for appropriate government responsiveness. Downward accountable processes do exist (e.g. inclusion of CSOs in the design of multi-sector programmes) but access to information, equal playing field, empowering voices of the poor and spaces of collaboration and engagement that serve basic rights are still on the margins. Below are areas in which tensions and challenges continue to exist for partners and the communities they work with.

Inability and unwillingness to respond

There are two factors that account for the lack of accountability and responsiveness on the part of the government. Willingness and structures. Currently, there is a culture of monotony towards public service and inadequate accountability mechanisms towards rights holders. For example, there is a lack of financial accountability at the district level, assembly members are not aware of what is available and this poses a challenge in monitoring what is being spent in the district. As well, Assembly members and constituents are to meet regularly in order to bring views and claims of constituents to the General Assembly. Partners stated these types of engagements rarely happen even though the Assembly person(s) are the key focal point of contact for partners to the District Assembly. A bigger challenge is government staff have not been oriented to share information, as one informant who works at the Parliamentary Centre in Accra stated, "they still look behind their backs, if they share and become more transparent they are worried about getting sacked...they need to know they will not lose their jobs that in fact it is their job to be transparent."

Structures as well need to be in place in order to respond. Information management is weak and systems are inefficient. Coupled with this is the perception that government information is not public knowledge. As attitudes are slowly changing systems and structures also need to change. For example, there is no information unit within the government that is adequately addressing or interacting with transparency and information demands from the public⁴. At the local levels partners explained that there is even more antagonism towards CSOs as access to information is very limited. There is a lack of willingness on the part of District Assemblies to disclose and share information. Partners continue to demand information that should be publicly accessible. It is through their efforts and awareness on the right to information and freedom of information (this bill is also pending action) that partners are making local governments accountable to opening up their books and making information available to the public.

Ways forward for RAVI

For RAVI and its partners, power and its dynamics continuously shape the day-to-day processes of rights based change. Government is now beginning to realise you cannot have national laws and policies, local systems or procedures in place without a power and influence rearrangement. Encircling strategies need to be in place that are 1) capable in including citizen voice 2) accountable in practice to the challenges that partners are up against when engaging with duty bearers and 3) responsive to the demands of key stakeholders and their rights. RAVI partner organisations are finding new ways to work against the poor and slow responsiveness of government. Due to power dynamics and opposition from duty bearers, partners' work is deepening and their practices are challenging power. Box 1 at the end of this section highlights some of the practices and successes partners have experienced so far as agents of social accountability.

Ways in which RAVI can build on its overall programme approach in the area of government and duty bearer responsiveness towards rights obligations are:

- Continue to work to build the capacity of RGP intermediaries to help support CBOs in monitoring local government performance. RAVI could consider developing a more formal CBO 'monitoring' body within each region.
- Train specific partners on how to engage, collaborate and dialogue with government officials in order for them to be able to advocate for policy / legislation changes in areas of their work. One result of this group could be an 'action learning manual' on how to work within the context of legislation processes

⁴ The lack of access to resources such as information (which is a right) is a fundamental freedom [Article 21 (l) (f)].

- Continue to use information gateways (newspapers, commercial and community radio stations, websites and newsletters) to highlight rights issues partners are facing in order to move government to act
- Provide a regular 'platform' for government and partners that parallels RAVI events to reflect on best practice, share insights and learn on how to collaborate and overcome challenges together.

Box 1. Agents of Social Accountability

- A) **A number of RGP's with their CBO partners are pressuring duty bearers in a rights based way.** CIKOD, The ARK, BEWDA, and LRC which are RAVI intermediaries have helped train and foster RBA in community development. As a result, CBOs are engaging and collaborating with MPs, DCEs and traditional leaders on projects that are of concern to communities. This has given partners more ownership and has empowered communities to take up issues that matter to them.
- B) **RAVI is supporting parliamentarian and partner negotiations for legislative change.** RAVI has provided training on RBA, citizen government engagement, conflict resolution and linked partners who are addressing similar legislative issues to share lessons and ways to engage the legislature. This has affected how WACAM, DVC, GCRN, CEPIL and GFD have developed and planned specific advocacy efforts which engage with government for legislative change. This has resulted in better collaboration, representation and voice on issues that promote the rights of their constituents.
- C) **RGP's with direct funding are transforming power at all levels.** WACAM, LAWA and FWG are working with vulnerable groups who do not have control of resources which matter to them. RAVI capacity building events has helped them to plan, monitor and to support forms of progressive change that is empowering the most excluded. WACAM in collaboration with CEPIL support community advocacy plans, forums and demonstrations which are promoting voice, accountability and challenging power relationships using public interest litigation against mining companies. FWG continues to build on its membership network base and connections to empower forest communities to push for pro-poor forestry policies. LAWA has organised workshops with employers of domestic workers this has resulted in behavioural changes on the part of the employers who now have formal employment relationships with domestic workers and signed contracts which protect domestic workers rights.
- D) **Participatory monitoring and evaluation is improving inclusion for community members.** RAVI's participatory monitoring and evaluation processes directly include poor in needs assessments and community stakeholder analysis. FWG, CEPIL, WACAM, The Ark, LRC, BEWDA, GCRN and GFD have supported community members / stakeholders to be more involved in monitoring advocacy and community development plans and agreements. This shift towards a shared responsibility in monitoring is changing perceptions and approaches to planning and how decisions are made as well as making organisational plans more relevant and effective.
- E) **Using tools such as community radio as key drivers in social accountability.** As RGP's and their community partners find support in spreading their messages with community radio it is serving as a strong educator for citizens on how district assemblies and local government structures should work to benefit poor communities. Resulting in accountability from duty bearers towards communities, informing communities on key issues of concern to them and transforming obligation of roles and responsibilities from both sides.
- F) **Developing working relationships with traditional authorities and District Assemblies through CBOs.** Although the space in which RGP's and duty bearers interact is often challenging the space for collaboration and negotiation is slowly opening up. BEWDA CBOs are a strong example of CBOs who are learning to work together with Banku Municipal Assembly and influencing plans that would improve conditions for marginalised groups in communities. Being included in meetings and providing information to the DA has empowered partners and transformed the way both the DA and CBOs perceive each other.
- G) **Awareness creation is empowering stakeholders to fight for their rights.** FWG developed a network of environmental practitioners to share reports, lessons and advocacy issues, LAWA developed a manual which improves access to information for domestic assistance on their rights, IPA launched a full research report based on community voices and responses to the quality of health care and national health insurance policy and CEPIL developed a manual to enhance capacity of judges and the legal profession to deliver proper judgements on cases having social rights implications. Such efforts are resulting in a louder and more collective voice on particular issues of rights and are laying the foundation for a critically demanding citizenry which is holding duty bearers accountable.

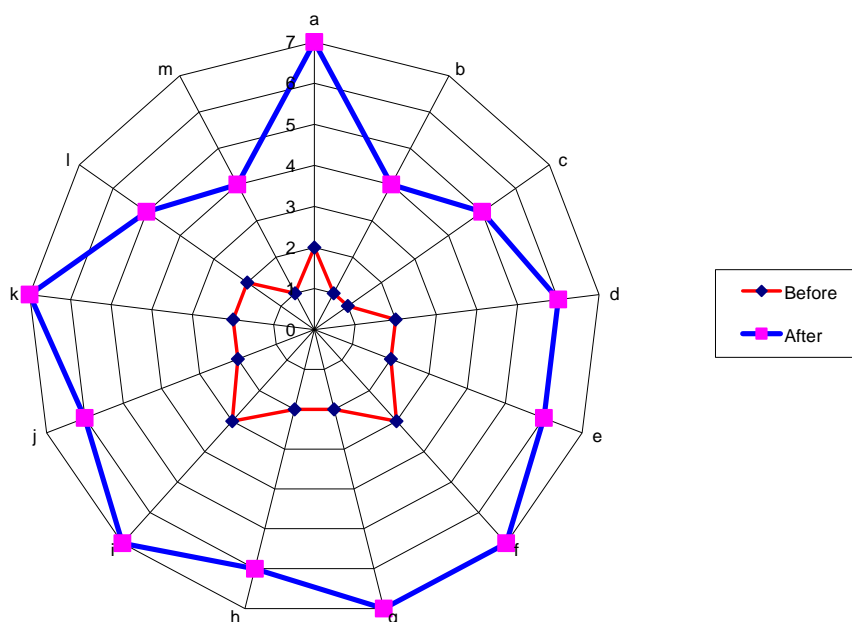
6. Attribution

"...these things take time, too much time! We are up against many challenges and feel resistance from duty bearers...but we remain persistent in our efforts. We have a right to demand. It is our persistence that is taken things forward!" Member of FYC (CBO of RAVI)

The spider diagram below represents an overall assessment of changes from 12 CBOs and 3 RGP's. The thick outer blue line represents the current assessment of the changes that have occurred whilst the inner red line closer to the centre represents the situation at the beginning of RAVI partnership. There were 13 domains used for scoring with a maximum total of 10 points and a minimum of 1 point for each category.

Government / Duty Bearer Accountability	b
Community interaction with local Govt	c
People centred advocacy / lobbying	d
Behaviour changes within communities	e
Organisational behaviour changes	f
Regular documentation / communication of lessons learned	g
RBA / PCA practice and knowledge	h
Organisational systems and functions	i
Building alliances / networks	j
Empowerment of poor	k
Transforming power relations	l
Government Transparency	m

Overall Changes by CBOs and RGP



The visual diagram above shows a low score (1 before and 4 now) overall for government and duty bearer transparency and accountability both before and now. Those domains (point b and m) did change slightly but not to the extent of the other indices. Both RGPs and CBOs scored themselves relatively low (ranging from 1-3) when initially starting with RAVI funding in all areas but most categories show improvement over time. Categories partners are still grappling with and where change is taking more time are point's c, l, j, on the diagram.

Overall this diagram illustrates that change has taken place in most areas that matter to RAVI. It also highlights that capacity building is playing a significant role for partners (point's a, f, g, h, i, k) and that the biggest challenge continues to be government responsiveness, transparency and accountability in the arena of supporting citizenry in realising rights (points b, c, m).

A combination of factors are responsible for the changes that have occurred. The two areas of assessment; engaging with duty bearers and organisational capacity to engage have one common cause for change – *rights awareness creation*. Many informants spoke of how awareness creation and building the capacity of poor,

marginalised and vulnerable groups on issues of rights is changing the way they understand their work now. It seems simple to most development professionals but on the ground and in practice it is revolutionary to those who have never had a voice and never stood up to those in positions of authority. Partners spoke with passion on how important this process of creating awareness around rights issues is because it is “waking people up” to a better way of living with dignity, power and freedom.

In the assessment of government and duty bearer responsiveness towards citizenry there is no one simple cause or reason for the subtle changes that have emerged. Instead there are a few interlinking factors:

1. International donor agenda and conditionalities for good governance
2. Global trend / practice of consulting with civil society in development plans and projects
3. Pressure from CSOs within Ghana for more responsiveness, transparency and accountability from government in the arena of rights

Numbers one and two are very similar in that they are influenced by bilateral and multilateral donor aid effectiveness agendas. Currently, development partners call for more collaboration between government and civil society in the design and implementation of projects. Considering the perspectives of civil society is gaining more recognition as an important component of the Multi Donor Budget Support to Ghana. Where there are challenges in government downward accountability and responsiveness towards respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights, donors are setting up civil society watchdogs and mechanisms to hold government accountable. For example, DFID’s white paper clearly states, “Where poor countries are ruled by governments with no commitment to helping the poor realise their human rights, we will help them – where we can do so – through alternative channels. These will include the institutions of civil society...” (DFID, White paper on International Development, 1997. Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century).

RAVI is one such example that DFID is supporting towards its aim of good governance and pro-poor development. Added to the heavy muscle of the donor community and the growing trend of consultations with key local stakeholders is the voice from civil society organisations within Ghana. It is here RAVI has helped in raising the profile of CSOs, giving voice to the concerns of the poor, securing access to government services for excluded and marginalised groups and influenced changes on the part of duty bearers towards citizens of Ghana.

Finally, the government itself is slowly realising that with the above three factors they have very little choice but to include civil society on rights based issues and become more responsive to their demands. This acknowledgement is one result stemming from the first three factors. As the relationship between RAVI and government continues to grow and is influenced by a combination of these factors there is a greater possibility for more understanding and dialogue to occur.

For RAVI it will be important to continue to scrutinise how government and duty bearers invite civil society into spaces of negotiation, decision making and partnership. For now, there are attempts to listen to the claims that partners are making but the majority of rights are still not being met or realised. Securing basic rights continues to be a great challenge. Moving past demands for compensation, proper health care, better sanitation, more clinics, schools and other basic services and asking ‘why’ there is no bore hole, why there are no clinics, why children are not receiving better schooling etc. will help partners to deepen their analysis of rights, further empower their voice, open up spaces for relationships to transform so that rights can begin to be realised and not only claimed.

As the relationships unfold and the process of CGE continues RAVI will need to pay attention to:

- The capacity of its partners to participate and engage with government at all levels
- The capacity of partners to follow up on government and duty bearer promises
- The quality and quantity of spaces that are created for engagement by the government
- The actual outcomes of these collaborations towards realising rights

7. Conclusion

RAVI is fundamentally important to the process of governance and accountability in the current development context of Ghana. There is tremendous potential to improve the responsiveness of government and other power

holders towards the needs and voice of the excluded, marginalised and poor. RAVI needs to continue to support the work of its partners and how they respond to specific challenges and power imbalances. The delicate balance between cooperation and conflict with duty bearers, partnership and / or separation with duty bearers, successes and challenges are the more complicated dilemmas that RAVI faces in trying to achieve its main goal.

RAVI's current path to tackling inequality, power imbalances and lack of government transparency is largely through building the capacity of its partners which in turn challenges government accountability and responsiveness towards its citizenry. RAVI will need to continue to pay attention and support the pace partners can grow considering the constraints they face and the complicated dilemmas in the relationship it has with duty bearers.

This assessment of change has offered recommendations and ideas throughout each core area assessed and concludes with recommendations to consider in making change matter.

Capacity building principles

1. **Confronting invisible power** is one of the greatest challenges RAVI is facing in CGE. The need for rights based strategies becomes clear when one looks not only at how power operates but what's needed for change to occur that challenges forms of power over others. Partners are continually learning how to rise above these challenges because they are active agents in the process. What needs further scrutiny is how to learn from these experiences of overcoming power inequalities and build on this understanding in order to engage more directly where these challenges are felt and in which diverse actors and strategies are located.
2. As constraints in CGE outweigh opportunities **paying attention to the pace partners can grow**, the expectations of achieving outcomes and how to work with partners to keep pushing forward will need to be balanced.
3. **Build on more learning, documentation and critical analysis of best practice** on the experiences of engagement processes of partners who are advocating at all levels. RAVI's capacity building and M&E work could further help support this need to learn and document information in a variety of creative ways beyond quarterly reports.
4. **New energy but no need to reinvent the wheel.** RAVI needs to continue to invest in its key priorities. Strengthening areas such as gender equity, facilitation skills, power analysis, lobbying and negotiating, people centred advocacy, critical thinking documentation, confrontation and conflict and participatory M&E are all areas that partners specifically mentioned could help develop their work more.
5. **A power analysis needs to be built into partner advocacy efforts and strategies.** To some degree this is already happening, but there is currently a weak analysis and understanding of power. Power needs to be analysed in terms of learning, planning processes, accountability and obligation. For example, in some communities there is evidence of working with marginalised groups and to invest in their access to certain resources, facilities, spaces for inclusion etc. However, when probed deeper on how their marginalisation or power inequalities are tackled it remained somewhat unclear to them. RAVI needs to further provide support for partners to develop their own capacities for analysing power. Activities and plans should endeavour to first acknowledge power barriers and the dynamics that exist so they do not marginalise groups further and create deeper divides. Processes that ensure a power analysis approach are far more effective in creating change in the long term.
6. Values of RAVI are in part expressed through the principles of RAVI organisational culture but mainly through the 'attitudes and behaviours' expected of partners. Partners willingly opened up about their organisations limitations and struggles, the problems that inhibit them as well as what great achievements they have had as an organisation. RAVI will need to consider how to foster more of this willingness to reflect on behaviour and 'ways of change' to **develop an organisational culture that is critical in its thinking and reflects a spirit true to the principles of RAVI.** One such consideration should be communication forums between partners and RAVI staff for trust to build, concerns and questions to be shared, innovations to be analysed and achievements to be celebrated. Communication mechanisms like the website and e-newsletters should highlight this learning and be shared widely.

Relationship principles

1. **Donor support needs to continue to uphold initiatives like RAVI** and be aware that accountability processes are messy, uneven and take time. As RAVI is an important test case of accountability through civic engagement donors will need to manage their expectations and be willing to learn with RAVI along the way. An example may be that instead of requiring 'quarterly' reports that speak to 'what has been done' there can be 'shared learning and reflection' reports that will help both RAVI and donors understand what changes are occurring and why.
2. **The concerns and aspirations of partners need to continue to come into the centre of RAVI decision making.** There has been a remarkable shift that has occurred for partners in bringing voices of the poor and marginalised in engagement and advocacy spaces towards duty bearers. This process however needs to contribute further to RAVI as a whole, particularly in its internal decision making processes. Inviting not only RGPs but their partners to participate in decision making processes for RAVI is one such way to inspire a shift in power but also to encourage an open and transparent relationship.
3. **Citizen government engagement is time consuming.** This has meant that RAVI has had to get the basics right first. Learning, sharing, planning, and exploring issues of CGE has to go at the pace that partners are able to support. This however, can at times be in conflict with the need to deliver results that meet early on project expectations. To support the reality of citizen government processes RAVI (with its partners) and DFID will need to reconsider how it provides funding, clarify expectations of change and to what extent the timeframe of funding is realistic.
4. **When spider webs unite they can tie up a lion⁵.** There is a challenge on how partners can collaborate and network at all levels in order to engage more. The level of cooperation and collaboration has to increase and where it is happening it needs to deepen. RAVI needs to respond with concrete ways in which networking and collaboration actually turns into genuine collaborative engagement where partners work with duty bearers in finding solutions to rights based issues together. To date, most partners tackle challenges on their own, with their own capacity. Cementing the role of collaboration for further engagement will mean that partners need to find spaces of commonality and influence that discover and learn from each other.
5. **Working with government / duty bearers on articulating their understanding** of citizen government engagement, responsiveness, accountability, transparency and obligation is important. RAVI needs to find ways with partners that will inspire government – RAVI dialogue and learning around these core issues. This 'bridging' role in the engagement process is one aspect to the relationship that needs further building.
6. **Learn and work along side other genuine partnerships** that are committed to rights based change and enhancing the capacity of civil society to hold government accountable. RAVI should stretch out and collaborate realising that CGE is a long term process and with many layers and players it would be helpful for RAVI to learn and identify allies both locally (sister funds) and internationally (DFID Civil Society Initiatives). This could help to assess its own work, draw lessons from and possibly apply some new ideas to improving RAVI rights based approaches and actions.

⁵ Ethiopian proverb.

Annexes

Annex 1. RAVI Grant Partner Information

	Year One RAVI Grant Partner (funded from August 2005)
1	The ARK (Intermediary) Strengthening CBOs and Community associations to be efficient and effective in implementing their stated issues for the benefit of communities
2	BEWDA - Belim Wusa Development Agency (Intermediary) Capacity building of CBOs/NGOs in the area of reducing poverty in the Upper East Region through citizens' engagements with Government of Ghana
3	CIKOD – Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (Intermediary) Contribute to creating an assertive and proactive rural sector through capacity building, grant disbursement and technical support to rural communities
4	CEDEP – Centre for the Development of People Independent monitoring of the implementation of the National Health Insurance Scheme
5	CEPIL – Centre for Public Interest Law Public interest litigation for communities affected by mining
6	FWG – Forest Watch Ghana Campaign for the rights of communities to forest resources.
7	GCRN – Ghana Community Radio Network Campaign on community radio law amendment
8	GFD – Ghana Federation of the Disabled Advocacy on a national disability law – ensuring inputs of disabled people into drafting of Disability Bill and mounting sustained campaign for its passage and implementation
9	IPA – Institute for Policy Alternatives Social accountability initiatives and evidence based advocacy.
10	LAWA – Alumnae Ghana Incorporated Advocacy on the rights and protection of domestic servants
11	LRC – Legal Resource Centre (Intermediary) Capacity building of CBOs in RBA and provides legal and mobilisation skills to each CBO for backstopping and technical assistance
12	NCDVLG – Ghana Domestic Violence Coalition Campaign for the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill
13	WACAM – Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining Strengthening voices of communities affected by mining.