

## Public Participation and Good Governance

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Hello, I'm Larry Diamond I'm Director of the Centre on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at Stanford University. I'm very excited to be part of this online course that's coming from the University of Oslo. I think it's very important to think about what works in development and not to yield to the cynicism and despair that nothing works, that development assistance is all the waste, and that countries are condemned to indefinite poverty.

First, let me stress why democracy matters to development. There are many assumptions, and they've been in the literature for a long period of time, that democracy is irrelevant or even a heavy burden in terms of development aspirations. That if you want to get to rapid development, do it the way China did it and have a dictatorship. That just doesn't square with particularly the recent evidence which is showing from the poorest region of the world, namely sub-Saharan Africa, that democracy can actually be a resource for economic development. The work, for example, of the former Chief Economist at the US Agency for International Development, now a distinguished professor at Georgetown University, Steve Radelet shows that the countries that have done best in producing relatively sustained and vigorous economic growth in Africa have mainly, not exclusively, since the early 1990s been electoral democracies. And in fact, the democracies of sub-Saharan Africa more recently have had better overall performance in delivering sustained and rapid economic growth and human development, and better governance than the authoritarian regimes.

Authoritarianism is a big risk. It can deliver on some development miracles like China, Taiwan, Korea, but it has more often delivered does some cataclysmic development failures, like the former Zaire Zimbabwe, Burma, which slipped into several decades of autarchy and prolonged ethnic and regional violence. Burma's had the longest running civil war in the world. And you see a number of countries in the world which lacking any institutional constraints on the arbitrary power of rulers settle in to not just authoritarianism, but really predatory dictatorship. One reason why a democracy is a good bet, and often a better bet to deliver sustained

development is that it does a better job of controlling corruption and producing accountable open and transparent government.

We know that there's a correlation, it's far from perfect, but there is a correlation particularly among in the developing countries, between the extent of democracy and other governance indicators such as Rule of Law, control of corruption, and so on. This make sense not only because democracies have embedded formal institutions to constrain the arbitrary power of rulers but also because democracies allow freedom, freedom of the press, freedom of civil society to organise and monitor government and gives voice to people's concerns, which makes it much more likely that institutions of accountability will work to produce better public administration and more robust institutions to monitor government spending and control corruption.

There's another important dimension to democracy which is having a very significant impact now in Latin America, and that is democracy empower citizens to organise, to express voice and to demand responsiveness from government that it meet their needs. And as democracy settles in, this happens not only with middle class people who have the education and resources to get on the internet, or contact a public official, or protest in front of the government, but with poor people as well. And as poor people organise and mobilise to vote they are able to use their political power to demand the government respond to their needs, the biggest need of which is effective public services and income support to reduce and hopefully alleviate poverty. And we are seeing now in a number of Latin American countries, including Chile, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, the provision of income support programmes, conditional cash transfer programmes, focused on low income people, pretty carefully on low income people. And these are achieving some significant reductions in poverty and reductions in inequality in the region of the world, Latin America, that has had historically the highest levels of inequality in the world. And these conditional cash transfer programmes are really quite ingenious, because they achieve two things at once. First of all, they provide the truly needy with income support so they can get food, nutrition, better access to health and education, income generating opportunities that might flow from modest amounts of cash that can be applied to generate initial investments for small scale enterprise. And second of all, the conditional end of it is that in order to get these cash transfer payments, mothers have to commit to inoculate their children, to keep

them in school, if they're pregnant often there's a requirement that they make one prenatal visit at least for a check-up to ensure that the baby will be healthy and a postnatal visit as well.

And so, this generates a whole infrastructure or system of other services and other commitments on the part of the poor and behavioural changes on the part of the poor that have a synergistic quality to them in terms of everything working together to reduce poverty. So when you give the poor voice to a degree the democracy is much better able to do than authoritarianism, when you have a civil society that's energised, when people can secure and defend their rights through civil society action, through pressure on and participation in political parties, through the work and exposure of the mass media and monitoring organisations, then the promise of democracy can really be tapped into not just to give people a vote but to actually improve their material well-being and the quality of their lives.

We know this isn't uniquely the ability of democracies, and that sometimes you get miracle performance from very determined authoritarian leaders, but if we can show and the recent evidence certainly shows, that at a minimum democracy is not a burden, that electoral democracies and even more so liberal or higher quality democracies can perform at least as well as dictatorships in delivering broad based development and improvement in human well-being, then of course democracy is to be preferred because it also provides other dimensions of the full measure of development in terms of political and civil liberties, and political dignity, freedom from fear, a rule of law, protection for people's human rights to speak, to worship, to organise, to protests as they wish are not just a luxury. As the great Indian economist Amartya Sen has written, poor people need these rights every bit as much as wealthier people, and these rights have been very instrumental in helping poor people secure their material interests as well.