



BRINGING GOVERNANCE EVIDENCE INTO THE POLICY PROCESS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN POST-CONFLICT SERBIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of ensuring that strategies to build governance are grounded in empirically-based research. This has led to expanding efforts to develop indicators and tools to measure governance. In post-conflict environments, the challenges of both producing and bringing evidence on governance to bear on reforms are very complex. This paper explores the State of governance evidence production and usage in Serbia in the context of its various types of governance challenges. The study (1) documents existing initiatives of local actors to generate knowledge on governance and promote its uptake into policy, (2) analyses the extent to which there is both demand for and supply of governance-related knowledge and (3) examines the ways governance data is produced and shapes reform in the social protection sector. The study is based on a literature review of English and Serbian language sources and on semi-structured interviews conducted with staff from 20 government, civil society and international organizations carried out in late 2008.

SETTING THE SCENE

Serbia was one of the last eastern European countries to embark on a transition from socialism to liberal democracy in 2000. Since then some progress has been achieved — most notably the peace has been re-established, genuine participatory democracy reinstated and living standards generally improved. However, signs are emerging that Serbia is still struggling to establish more democratic and effective governance. The legacies of the violent conflict have made the task of rebuilding a legitimate and resilient State very challenging. The new political system has undergone repeated crises, resulting in at least four key governance-related issues: difficulty in preserving the territorial integrity of the State; transitional justice and the need to face up to the past; the inheritance of severely weakened public institutions and widespread corruption; and deep social divisions within society exemplified by fractious politics and a severe lack of trust between different groups. Consequently, a major difficulty has been to work collectively and reach a broad societal consensus on the goals and sequencing of the governance reforms.

KEY FINDINGS FROM ANALYSES

Evidence-based governance reforms: Despite the importance of democratic governance in Serbia, State initiatives to measure the quality of governance reforms are acutely lacking. Civil society knowledge actors are the main drivers of policy-relevant assessments and sometimes the key suppliers of evidence. The mapping exercise conducted for this study focused on decentralization, anti-corruption and human rights domains. It found that the availability of empirical research and diagnostic data is increasing steadily. Civil society organization (CSO) efforts provide essential information on a range of governance topics: from in-depth analysis about how a country is governed and how well the public sector is performing, to perceptions of corruption and the State of democracy in Serbia. Broadly speaking, the analysis of specific CSOs revealed a number of their contributions to policy-making. CSOs help to produce baseline data about various governance dimensions largely absent in the official surveys, direct attention to emerging problems, highlight potential solutions, and provide the impetus for new legislation and discursive policy change. For example, the analysis found non-State knowledge actors to be actively engaged in many areas: assessing and informing processes of decentralization (e.g. PALGO); monitoring the quality of local governance institutions and processes at a grassroots levels (e.g. CeSID); assessments of the extent of corruption, its causes and consequences (e.g. TS, CLDS); and monitoring and reporting on the activities of legal and judiciary institutions in Serbia with regard to the promotion of and/or discrimination against citizens' rights (e.g. Belgrade Centre for Human Rights). Thanks to persistent public awareness campaigns by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the concepts of human rights and discrimination have entered the public discourse in Serbia.

Serbian CSOs continue to face many political and institutional barriers that hamper the uptake of their research, although there is an increasingly more open political context within which to work. The main obstacle to developing an evidence-based culture lies primarily at the political level. The following factors have been identified that seem to affect the ways governance policies are designed and implemented: pervasive **influence of politics and party ideology** on policy-making; **relatively limited degree of openness of policy processes** to non-State knowledge actors; **relationships between civil society and State, which in many ways are still tense and ad-hoc**; **policy-making being highly susceptible to various vested interests**, most notably business and donor influence; and **weak institutional capacities of State actors** to develop governance indicators and/or use research. The level of political contestation seems to be another major dimension affecting the likelihood that evidence on democratic governance will influence governance reforms in Serbia. The key implication of these obstacles is the emergence of a strong conceptual barrier to arriving at a national, broadly-shared definition of democratic governance for the purposes of measuring its quality and assessing progress.

Governance in the social protection sector: The situation appears much more promising in the social protection sector. This case is revealing for a number of reasons. First, it is a rare example of a sector in Serbia influenced by the evidence-based policy paradigm. Governance evidence does not only shape reforms, but also actively promotes the emerging inclusive and systematic approach towards monitoring reforms. It is notable that the evidence-informed approach to policy-making is led by the State. Second, both State and civil society knowledge actors play an equal role in generating data and the institutional mechanisms are in places to help align findings of assessments with social protection policies. Third, policy actors are more inclined to expand ownership of policy-making to civil society and accept the qualitative evidence coming from NGOs. It should be also highlighted that CSOs' most valuable and important roles are as agenda setters and providers of public space for the voices of vulnerable and excluded groups whose experiences are usually missing from official data.

Conclusion

In sum, much credit should be given to non-State knowledge actors and government champions working in Serbia today as they continue to exert influence on governance processes. While the study has distilled the various examples of good practice, more work remains to be done to improve the enabling environment in which these actors operate, including:

- Promoting greater awareness of the importance of governance assessments among policymakers and evidence-based policy-making in general;
- Institutionalizing mechanisms for open public dialogue and cooperation between government and civil society across policy sectors;
- Putting efforts into developing CSOs' research skills to increase their legitimacy, effectiveness and credibility;
- Boosting institutional capacities of policy-making actors, both at individual and systems level, by introducing incentives to promote research use.

Finally, since one of the key threats to peace in Serbia is the lack of social cohesion, national ownership of governance assessments would create important opportunities to bring together different parties to dialogue and thus rebuild the trust between citizens and government. As the case study on social protection demonstrates, such a strategy is not only desirable but also very viable, provided there is strong political will.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALAC	Anti-Corruption Legal Advisory Centre
AWC	Autonomous Women Center
CeSID	Centre for Free Elections and Democracy
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CLDS	Centre for Liberal and Democratic Studies
CSAC	Civil Society Advisory Committee
CSO	civil society organization
DOS	Democratic Opposition of Serbia
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LI	Leaken Indicators
LSMS	Living Standard Measurement Survey
MandE	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organization
PALGO	Public Administration and Local Government
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRS IFP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation Focal Point
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RI	Research Institute
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
SE	Social Exclusion
SI	Social Inclusion
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SIF	Social Innovation Fund
TS	Transparency Serbia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this discussion paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or UN Member States.

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INTRODUCTION

Development of democratic governance in post-conflict countries can be considered a critical factor in ensuring sustainable peace and overall human development. There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of ensuring that governance-building efforts are grounded in empirically-based research. The consensus on the importance of monitoring governance has led to expanding efforts — mainly by international donors — to develop indicators and tools to measure governance. At the same time, agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been working with national counterparts to establish country-led governance assessments and enhance national ownership through the inclusive participation of civil society. Notwithstanding the importance of these approaches, producing evidence on governance as well as bringing this to bear on reforms, especially by civil society, are very complex endeavours in post-conflict environments. Evidence is only one of the many determinants that shape government policies. Contentious knowledge may even exacerbate the tensions when the political context is fragile.

This paper explores the State of governance evidence production and usage in Serbia in the context of its various types of governance challenges. It provides an empirical illustration of home-grown initiatives to expand the national ownership of governance assessments. It specifically aims to:

- document existing efforts of local actors to generate evidence on governance and promote its uptake into policy processes, with a specific reference to non-State actors;
- analyse the extent to which there is both demand for and supply of governance-related evidence and factors affecting this dynamic;
- examine the ways in which governance evidence is produced and how it shapes reform in one specific policy area: social protection.

Research methods

The study is based on a literature review of English and Serbian language sources and on semi-structured interviews conducted with staff from 20 government, civil society and international organizations in November and December 2008. The paper is divided into four sections. The first aims to briefly introduce the reader to the nature and implications of the 1990s conflict on the current governance context in Serbia. The second section presents a preliminary map of the production and use of knowledge, focusing on key areas: decentralization, anti-corruption and justice, and human rights. The third section provides a more in-depth assessment of the extent to which there is both demand for and supply of governance-related evidence in the social protection sector. In the final section, the paper highlights the key lessons on opportunities in and constraints to the uptake of governance evidence in contemporary policy processes, with specific attention to the role of think tanks/research institutes in influencing governance reforms in Serbia.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Serbia was one of the last eastern European countries to embark on a transition from socialism to liberal democracy at the turn of the millennium. The first phase of the transition (2000-2002) was represented by an enthusiasm for new opportunities as well as high expectations for the fast recovery of the economy and the improvement of living standards (Bajec et al.: 2008). To fulfil these expectations, a new coalition government began to undertake comprehensive institutional changes. The priority became to build democracy — a modern State founded on rule of law — and a market economy.

Since the early transition days, some progress has certainly been achieved: peace has been re-established and functioning parliamentary democracy was reinstated in 2000. Serbia has finally

been reintegrated into the world community. The socioeconomic situation has improved as well. After a dramatic fall in gross domestic product (GDP) during the 1990s, economic progress and improvements in living standards have been realized, reflected in a steady rise in Human Development Index (HDI) rankings¹ (Bajec et al.: 2008). While these are important achievements — eight years on — Serbia is still a country struggling to establish more democratic and effective governance. More signs are emerging that an important opportunity for systemic reform has been only partially utilized. The legacies of the violent conflict have made the task of rebuilding a legitimate and resilient State, let alone a more democratic State, very challenging. In the next section, the links between conflict in Serbia and its impact on governance challenges are briefly discussed.

1.1. The Violent 1990s

The country has been deeply affected by the civil war arising from a disintegration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The conflict had its roots in underlying political, economic and cultural problems exacerbated by intergenerational ethnic and religious tensions (Janjic: 2002). The hostilities between federal republics began as a political conflict over the redistribution of the financial burden of economic reforms. The first wave of conflict was initiated by the move to secession of Slovenia in 1991. Soon after, Croatia declared independence. The Serbian minorities living there opposed this move by announcing their secession from Croatia, which erupted into violent conflict. In 1992, the war spread over to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The FRY, comprising Serbia and Montenegro, was under the sway of the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic. On the grounds that Serbia had failed to cut support for the Serbian armed forces in Bosnia, the United Nations imposed an embargo on the country in 1992. Six years later, the violent inter-State conflict in Serbia resulted in growing demand for the separation of the Albanian ethnic majority living in Kosovo, one of Serbia's two autonomous provinces.² At the same time, the Milosevic regime stepped up its repressive behaviour in the country, further curtailing civil liberties. During this time there were frequent confrontations between the regime and civilians who opposed Milosevic's nationalistic tendencies. Since the Serbian State was accused of acting as the aggressor in the Kosovo crisis, the country was placed again under United Nations sanctions. In 1999, the war in Kosovo ended with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) bombing Serbia, and Kosovo was placed under the protectorate of the United Nations. The Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) finally ousted the Milosevic regime from power in 2000, although political instability continued. In 2006, a referendum in Montenegro put an end to the loose State Union. Two years later, Kosovo declared independence. To understand how ethnic conflict slowed down the consolidation of democracy in Serbia, this paper briefly considers the main implications of violence in the context of contemporary governance.

1.2. The Challenges for Governance Reforms

The short-term damage is well-known, from the the expulsion of large groups of refugees³ to an entrenched sense of economic insecurity among people. But violence has also been damaging for Serbia in the long run. Historical legacies have made a significant impact on contemporary institutions and governance outcomes, according to a growing literature (World Bank: 2007). The violent legacies continue to haunt Serbia's political landscape and path to democratic governance. Since 2000, the new political system has undergone major institutional upheaval and repeated crises, resulting in at least four key governance-related challenges.

The first challenge is preserving the territorial integrity of the State through peaceful means. The unilateral declaration of the independence of Kosovo has endangered this process and

¹ Increase was recorded from 0.729 to 0.804 in the period 1999-2005 (Bajec et al.:2008).

² The other is the northern multi-ethnic province of Vojvodina.

³ According to the UNHCR, there are around 97 000 refugees and 206 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) currently living in Serbia. These are mainly Serbs who have been expelled from Croatia and ethnic Serbs and Roma who fled out of Kosovo when Yugoslav forces withdrew in 1999.

there is a concern that this act may trigger another wave of demands for border revisions and/or territorial autonomy for minority groups (Huszka: 2005). Ethnic tensions in Presevo Valley in southern Serbia, populated by an Albanian majority, still pose one of the main threats to peace and security. Albanians recently declared their intention to be united with Kosovo if the Serbian villages in the North of Kosovo would join Serbia (ibid). The situation in southwest Serbia — the region also known as Sandzak, where a Bosnian Muslim majority lives — has also been unstable for some time. Although both regions have been relatively calm in the past few years and the resurgence of armed conflict is unlikely at the moment, the situation is still fragile. Much effort is needed to overcome years of ethnic tension and establish a stable multi-ethnic State.

The second challenge is related to issues of transitional justice and the need to face up to the past. The Serbian government is required to address human rights violations committed by the previous regime and extradite war criminals to The Hague Tribunal. To this day, cooperation with the international court is presented as a key condition on Serbia joining the European Union (EU). This also means addressing the legacies of human rights violations at home, as there are accusations that the Milosevic regime frequently disrespected the civil liberties of its citizens and rigged elections (Hatschikjan et al.: 2005).

A third challenge is that the new establishment inherited severely weakened public institutions, repeatedly devasted during the 1990s.⁴ Their erosion during the war years opened the way for crime and corruption, with illegal networks penetrating political structures, the commercial sector and the justice system. Many critics in Serbia believe that the post-Milosevic government has not made a resolute split with the former regime. For example, some argue (Barac: 2008) that current rule of law is weakened by an inheritance of the former authority, especially strong ties between organized crime, war crimes and political extremism, causing an ongoing obstructive presence in some parts of the political, institutional and military system.

Finally, the confluence of these dramatic events has led to divisions within Serbian society, exemplified by fractious politics and a severe lack of trust between different groups. It is widely accepted that violent conflict can be very damaging to the social capital of communities. Drawing on Robert Putnam's (1996) typology of social capital, the author of this study identifies major weaknesses with regard to both **bridging** (horizontal connections between heterogeneous groups) and **institutional** (formalized relationships between citizens and the State) social capital. In Serbia, a lack of bridging social capital is manifested in the historical animosity between ethnic groups. The tension between national minorities (e.g. Albanians and Bosniaks) and the Serbian majority has been exacerbated by the latest conflicts. Similarly, problems with institutional social capital can be seen in the fact that the repressive and corrupt behaviour of the previous regime has severed citizen-State relations and led to a lack of public trust in key institutions. This trend has not reversed since the democratic transition. In fact, a CIVICUS study from 2006 shows that distrust has been growing continually since 1996.⁵ The lowest level of citizen trust is in the legislative and judiciary institutions (Mihajlovic: 2006). The implication of declining social capital at the community level is manifested in a reluctance of individuals to engage in collective action and civic initiatives.

The situation is further complicated by the division of the elites into factions. The regime change has not resulted in political settlement. Instead, there is a strong ideological schism between political elites. It stems from conflicting strategic visions of the Serbian State over the nature of national identity and the future governance system. Broadly speaking, two main ideological positions have been identified. One faction, composed of conservative parties, could be

⁴ For example, courts have been run without systems of accountability, thus restricting possibilities for citizens to seek redress in cases of violations.

⁵ According to a more recent survey undertaken by the Standing Committee of Towns and Municipalities in 2007, citizens more frequently feel themselves as a group opposed to the government, rather than as an actor with mutual interest. Only 6 percent of citizens think that political leadership works for the public good.

characterized as inward-looking, promoting nationalist politics and a centralized governance system. The other promotes a pro-European State based on a free market economy and democratic values, including decentralization and a multi-ethnic national character. Party platforms and positions on all the major issues are shaped along these lines.

As indicated by the World Bank (2007), social polarization poses many difficulties for democratic governance. As a fragmented society, a major difficulty has been to work collectively and reach a broad societal consensus. The country is still lacking a strong political commitment to reform, as well as agreement concerning the goals and sequencing of transition. For example, lack of compromise over key policy issues — EU membership and Kosovo independence — led to ongoing fighting and divisions in the previous coalition (Kesic: 2008). Irreconcilable differences eventually led to dissolution of the government and prompted new elections. In May 2008, citizens elected a new government for the fourth time since 2001. These social rifts are a constant source of political instability.

1.3. Democratic Governance as a Means for Preserving Peace?

The importance of democratic governance in preventing violent conflict and helping to create the enabling environment for sustainable peace is highlighted by UNDP (2007). Despite the obvious drawbacks, the post-conflict context in Serbia has afforded the new leadership an opportunity to fundamentally alter governance norms, institutions and processes in order to establish a capable, accountable and responsive State. Since 2000, the main task for reformers has been to (1) build legitimate structures to ensure political stability and personal security for citizens and the effective delivery of basic services, and (2) foster an inclusive political culture with citizens actively participating in decision-making.

This governance agenda has been strongly shaped by the reform roadmap for integrating Serbia into the EU.⁶ In this sense, the agenda has been externally driven and buy-in is not universal, although there has been strong buy-in from some segments of the population. For the current government, attaining EU membership as rapidly as possible remains its central strategic priority (Tadic: 2009). The prospect of EU accession thus provides a compelling motivation for governance reforms. Yet, what does this mean in terms of actual policies? This paper briefly discusses the necessary reform efforts and how far Serbia is from achieving these reforms. Reconciliation is an overarching strategy. The rebuilding of social capital and social cohesion through reconciliation is an overarching strategy to ensure effective governance and lasting peace. Building trust between the government and its citizens is thus a priority. Without these values, genuine governance reforms will not take root. The following paragraphs describe the interconnected policies that are necessary for trust and reconciliation.

First, Serbia needs to recreate itself as a **genuine multi-ethnic State**. This involves respect for human rights and a culture promoting interethnic understanding and tolerance for cultural diversity. In the case of conflict-prone regions (e.g. Sandzak and Presevo Valley), the key is to transform underlying ethnic grievances by combating prejudice, animosity and exclusion. Albanian grievances, for example, centre on basic governance issues such as weak political representation and participation, economic inequality and poor access to social services. The Coordinating Body for southern Serbia⁷ has invested significant resources to re-establish human and economic security in the region and to start to integrate Albanian citizens into the political system. Targeted policies are also required for successful inclusion of other minorities who live in Serbia and successful reintegration of war-affected populations.

Second, Serbia needs to continue to develop accountable, responsive and transparent public institutions. Establishing the **rule of law** and **transitional justice** are key. As discussed earlier,

⁶ The agenda has been formally defined in the the National Strategy for Serbia's Accession to the European Union, adopted in 2005. The strategic goals include building responsible, transparent and efficient public administration, establishing the rule of law and the protection of human rights and minorities (Djilas et al.: 2005).

⁷ The body was set up in 2000, as a Republic of Serbia programme for the peaceful settlement of the crisis in the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja Municipalities.

the legacies of human rights violations put pressure on the new government to address the complex issues of forgiveness, justice and truth-telling. Recently, progress has been made with regard to cooperation with The Hague Tribunal. At the same time, as argued by Calie (2006), the lack of comprehensive transitional justice initiatives at the national level – rather than a narrow application of conditionality with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – has jeopardized the possibility of a genuine national reconciliation. Moreover, the failure to reform the judiciary is considered one of the main disappointments of transition. Much remains to be done to ensure the population is confident that redress for grievances can be obtained through legitimate structures and the fair administration of justice.

Serbia also needs to continue with public administration reform and re-intensify its commitment to **fighting corruption in the public sector** and **organized crime**. The current political climate has been described as one of 'weak political institutions and weak parliamentarianism with the concentration of all power in the hands of ruling political parties, a high degree of corruption and growing passivity in the attitude of the citizens towards the authorities exercising power' (Milivojevic: 2008). As a response, the government has been promoting the so-called principle of 'open government' as one of the main pillars of Public Administration Reform (Government of Serbia: 2004). This strategy implies that the work of public administration agencies will be subject to the permanent control of the executive government, the judiciary and citizens. After considerable pressure from civil society and the EU, a range of regulatory bodies has been set up with the purpose of continually monitoring the work of government and preventing the abuse of power.⁸ The effectiveness of these regulatory bodies depends largely on their ability to maintain an autonomous position vis-à-vis the State and their links to the judicial system. To date, the majority of these institutions have expressed concerns about working conditions that undermine their independence, and insufficient follow-up on their recommendations by authorities.

A fourth pressing governance strategy involves promoting **citizen participation and a devolution of power to local authorities**. In order to enhance the legitimacy of local institutions and mobilize popular support at the local level, Serbia needs to accelerate its decentralization policies. The legacy of centralization is still present in State structures and divesting powers to local government remains a highly political topic. Weak civic participation in the decision-making process and the absence of functioning mechanisms to stimulate citizens' engagement is also a concern (Mihailovic: 2005). For the first time since the early stages of the transition, the government has explicitly acknowledged the importance of engaging civil society in the country's development agenda and facilitating opportunities for people to engage in political decision-making processes (Cvetkovic: 2008).

Having described the current governance context in Serbia, the paper now turns to examine local initiatives to expand national ownership of governance assessments. This section begins by looking at the general State of governance evidence production and usage in Serbia, with specific reference to the civil society actors and the post-conflict environment.

2. EVIDENCE-BASED GOVERNANCE REFORM: AN OVERVIEW

Despite the importance of governance reforms in Serbia, State initiatives to measure the quality of governance are acutely lacking. A national monitoring system to track the progress of reforms currently does not exist. In the absence of State demand for governance evidence, policy-relevant governance assessments are driven mainly by CSOs through donor-supported projects. The international community and local research organizations are the main producers as well as the main users of governance data.

⁸ The key regulatory and control agencies are: The Anti-corruption Council, the Ombudsman, the State Audit Institution, the Commissioner for Free Access to Public Information, the Committee for the Suppression of Conflicts of Interest, the Public Procurement Commission and the Commission for the Protection of Bidders' Rights.

2.1. The Role of Civil Society Actors as Knowledge Producers

Civil society has played an important role in ousting the authoritarian regime in Serbia. From the early stages of transition, independent think tanks and research institutes have adopted an activist and policy-oriented approach in their work to bring about desired changes in society. Like in other countries in the region, many of these actors became the most qualified and loudest voices promoting democratic governance values and marking departure from the dogmatic and State-controlled systems of knowledge production. While the objectives of their efforts have changed somewhat from the early days, non-State knowledge actors continue to exert influence on governance processes through independent advice and intellectual analysis of social problems (interview: 2008). Table 1 identifies the examples of CSO actors engaged in the promotion of democratic governance through research and advocacy in Serbia.

This report's mapping exercise found that the availability of empirical research and diagnostic data is increasing steadily in Serbia. CSOs provide essential information on a range of governance topics: analysis about how a country is governed, how well the public sector is performing, and perceptions of corruption and the State of democracy in Serbia. Some analysis can be characterized as 'broad-brush' assessments, taking stock of the wider context of governance, evaluating reforms, and gauging public opinions and value orientation with regard to democracy.⁹ Second, there are studies investigating particular aspects of democratic governance such as the decentralization process, justice reform and anti-corruption initiatives.¹⁰ These will be analysed in more detail in the following section. While there is an increasingly more open political context within which to work, Serbian CSOs continue to face many political and institutional barriers that hamper the uptake of their research. The following section describes the general policy-making environment in Serbia and sets the background for understanding the national context within which local knowledge actors operate.

Table 1. Examples of democratic governance champions in Serbia

Knowledge actor	Organization's mission
<i>Decentralization and local governance</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PALGO Centre • Centre for Free Elections and Democracy • Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think tank working to develop the capacities of State institutions and organizations and to encourage the effective and functional decentralization of government • Advocacy and research organization working to contribute to the establishment of the rule of law and the enhancement of democratic values and institutions in Serbia • National association of local governments in Serbia with a mission to create efficient, sustainable and democratic local government
<i>Anti-corruption</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency Serbia • Center for Liberal and Democratic Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and research organization devoted to fighting corruption in Serbia by promoting transparency and accountability across State agencies • A think tank promoting liberal democracy, and influencing a range of political and economic policies in Serbia
<i>Judiciary and human rights</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center for Anti-war Action • Belgrade Centre for Human Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and research institute committed to establishing a durable peace, democracy and reconciliation in Serbia and among countries in the region • Research association concerned with the advancement of theory and practice of human rights

⁹ See Fund for an Open Society: 2007; CeSID: 2008; CLDS: 2004, 2008.

¹⁰ See Pestic: 2007; CLDS: 2001, 2005; Hatschikjan et al.: 2005.

2.2. The Policy-Making Context and Factors Influencing Knowledge Uptake

The prevailing view in the current literature is that policy-making is 'a dynamic, complex and, above all, unpredictable process involving multiple stakeholders with differing ideologies and political leverage' (Court et al.: 2006). While this is highly relevant to Serbia, the post-conflict context affects the dynamics of the knowledge-policy interface in unique ways. The environment in which knowledge actors operate differs on a number of levels from developed democracies. Most notably, a threshold has yet to be reached in Serbia, which will merit a greater focus on evidence-based policy. In recent years, the government has taken steps to develop and reform various elements of its policy system based on rational decision-making¹¹, but the overall process continues to be fragmented.¹² And while there have been notable attempts to challenge the status quo (see box 1)¹³, the overall culture remains resistant to research evidence. The main obstacle to developing an evidence-based culture lies primarily at the political level. Owing to the fragile nature of the Serbian State, policy-making is still highly susceptible to various vested interests. The following factors have been identified that seem to affect the ways governance policies are designed and implemented.

2.2.1. Political Instability and the Role of Ideology

Often-conflicting political ideologies and interests influence the governance reform agenda. According to the findings of a Centre for Liberal and Democratic Studies (CLDS) study on the policy-making process (2005: 12), 'key decisions are still made and implemented according to "political feeling" in the surroundings where administrative and professional capacities are still rather low'. As a result, evidence plays a limited role in influencing governance decisions. This is specifically the case with regard to highly contentious issues. In these situations, policymakers often display resistance to or reject information that challenges their core beliefs and values. In some cases, the political struggle is so significant that it consumes most of the space for rational policy making. For example, it has proven very difficult to raise the issue of transitional justice in Serbia and the need for lustration¹⁴ policies, owing to the political sensitivity of the issue. A broad and well-balanced public debate on the issue of war crimes has never really occurred, as the policy arena is unable to guarantee that diverse opinions and values can be expressed openly and with tolerance.

2.2.2. Degree of Openness of Policy Processes

In recent years, 'invited participation' has increased, opening up opportunities for CSOs to contribute to policy-making. There have been examples of serious and effective consultation, mainly within social policy, but a systematic practice to engage non-State knowledge actors in cross-cutting governance dimensions is largely absent. Again, the level of transparency and openness of the policy process to non-State actors is influenced by the extent to which a policy issue is contested. The more sensitive topics are, the more likely it is that decisions will be determined by a small group of policymakers, largely behind closed doors. A case in point is the new Serbian Constitution and the events related to its preparation and the approval process. The leaders of the four biggest parties agreed literally overnight on their Constitution Proposal (Pestic: 2007). The proposal was passed through the Parliament based on the decisions of the

¹¹ The elements include appropriate procedures for inter-ministerial consultations, public debate assessment of alternative approaches, assessment of financial consequences, and a full regulatory impact assessment (RIA) (SIGMA, 2008).

¹² Although the government has set up the General Secretariat of the Government in order to consolidate central policy management functions this body still lacks the resources and skills to manage this process (ibid). The lack of central policy coordination often leads to incoherent planning and final policy outcomes lacking in quality.

¹³ Another important initiative is a recent inclusion of the training curricula on evidence-based policy-making for the public administration staff.

¹⁴ The word derives from the Latin *lustrum*, a ceremony of purification for the Roman people after every five-year census. In modern times, lustration has borrowed the meaning "to purify" from the Latin historical sense and has applied it to the procedure in which a country will go through in order to deal with past human rights abuses or injustices that have occurred. This entails exposing those who collaborated with the former regime and barring them from public office (Rohozinska, 2000).

party leaders. Neither Members of Parliament nor the public had the chance to discuss and debate the document.

2.2.3. Interface between Non-State Actors and Decision Makers

In Serbia there is a political challenge in arriving at a consensus over what 'ownership' of governance assessments means, further aggravated by the weak tradition of partnership between different societal actors. And while think tanks and research institutes play an important role in initiating public discussions, the potential to expand the knowledge base by having non-State actors collect and analyse a wide range of information about governance is still in an embryonic phase. The relationship between civil society and State is in many ways still tense and problematic, often characterized by mutual suspicion and lack of trust (interview: 2008). This is particularly the case in the human rights arena. According to the CSO actors interviewed for this study, there is a lack of clearly demonstrated political will to recognize the advocacy role of civil society. Interviews with a few government officials revealed that authorities view the contribution from the non-State sector as often lacking in constructive, complementary contributions, and sometimes CSOs are even antagonistic.

2.2.4. Dominance of Special Interests

Partisan divisions and vested interests are also significant factors affecting policy-making in Serbia. First, the study confirms the findings elsewhere that institutional structures constrain and guide behaviour of State officials, limiting transparent and participatory opportunities for policy change. What is unique in the Serbian case is the excessive dominance of party politics in the process of passing and implementing strategic decisions. The lack of mutual trust between coalition partners results in a so-called vertical division of executive power in which a particular political party on its own completely controls the ministry assigned to it (CLDS: 2006). Consequently, party policy may trump the interests of rational policy-making. The blockage of inter-ministerial collaboration particularly affects governance reforms as many policies span across sectors. Anti-corruption policy is a good example, as it often entails coordinated institutional reforms across executive, legislature and judicial areas.

Second, the influence of donors' agendas on research production is pervasive. In fact, consistent demand for governance assessments comes mainly from international actors — the European Commission (EC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank being the main examples. But most importantly, it is the EC that exerts substantial influence on the overarching governance agenda, which it does through the process of EU accession. The strategic direction and funding that come from the EC often determine policy agendas and knowledge-production processes. For example, the pressures to export policy debates regarding transitional justice issues (e.g. extraditing war criminals to The Hague) has both shaped and restricted the contestability of knowledge domestically.

The last source of identified influence is the powerful business lobby. The presence of economic interests in policy decisions is most explicit in the anti-corruption domain and process of privatization. Despite the magnitude of evidence pointing to corrupt practices occurring during the early stages of privatization of certain public enterprises, these findings were largely ignored (Pestic: 2007). In the view of those interviewed, special economic interests and a lack of political will to resist the same have obstructed the uptake of research into modifying the government's approach to policy-making.

2.2.5. Weak Institutional Capacities to Use Research

Knowledge related to developing and using governance indicators at the State level is very rudimentary. The official government agencies producing data (e.g. the Republic Statistics Office) still have limited capacity to define indicators and collect and interpret governance data. Statistical offices collect predominantly socio-economic data (interview: 2008). Policymakers are not used to drawing on scientific research and evidence; also lacking are effective mechanisms to

use research findings and/or policy papers supplied by CSOs to shape their decision-making processes.

There have been notable exceptions to this lack of capacity to use research, and important attempts have been made to challenge the status quo. The first significant step in this direction has been the establishment of a nationally-owned and participatory process for developing the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) and monitoring its implementation. A team established within the Deputy Prime Minister's office — the PRS Implementation Focal Point (PRS IFP) — has been a key champion driving the cross-government initiative to promote evidence-based policy-making. Box 1 describes its efforts in more detail.

Box 1. Reducing poverty through more inclusive and evidence-informed policies

Understanding of the need for improved policy-making and coordination appears to have gradually strengthened in recent years. The PRS Implementation Focal Point (PRS IFP) has been driving the new policy-making campaign in Serbia, one committed to replacing ideologically driven politics with rational decision-making. First, **the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) was the first national document based on systematic research.** The strategy used data from the first Living Standard Measurement Survey (LSMS) conducted by Strategic Marketing Research. Although the emphasis is on poverty reduction, the PRS acknowledged the importance of effective governance for eradicating poverty. This foray into evidence-based policy-making continues through participatory monitoring of the implementation of the PRS.

Second, **efforts were made to identify and institutionalize mechanisms that promote meaningful participation of various stakeholders.** Design of the PRSP was the first attempt at participatory policy-making in Serbia. It included representatives of the National Assembly, civil society, local government, labour unions, business community, ministries and international donors. PRS IFP launched the initiative to establish more effective cooperation with civil society and set in place the mechanism for communication between NGOs and their team. Consequently, civil society advisory committees (CSACs) were formed. The wide consultation with CSOs successfully influenced the final form of the PRSP — most notably, poverty was defined as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, rather than solely income deprivation. During the implementation stage, NGO focal points were set up to assist in the realization and monitoring of the PRS. Their main task was to facilitate cooperation and flow of information between policy makers and civil society, including multi-stakeholder design of monitoring indicators and participatory monitoring tasks. Under the leadership of the PRS IFP, the partnership between the Republic Statistics Office (RSO) and civil society actors was also promoted. To date, civil society has contributed to collecting, analyzing and sharing poverty and governance data. CSOs have already made a significant contribution by ensuring that issues and voices of marginalized people are included in the policies. It is also acknowledged by various stakeholders that the inclusion of CSOs in this process has enhanced the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of government initiatives. Successful cooperation is now paving the way for the establishment of institutional mechanisms for future partnerships to be formalized.

Finally, **PRS IFP has recently initiated the first analysis of the impact of poverty reduction policies** implemented in the period between 2003 and 2007. Six policy areas were selected, covering employment, private sector development, education, social protection, agriculture and health initiatives. The CSO partners commissioned to carry out the analyses drew on the comprehensive data of the 3rd LSMS. The evaluation aims to fill the knowledge gap about the effects of government policy on the poor and most vulnerable citizens, and to provide the basis for recommendations on poverty reduction policies to be implemented in Serbia in the following years.

Source: Author interviews, 2008.

3. MAPPING GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES

Having described the general characteristics of the governance knowledge–policy dynamics, this study now moves on to map specific examples of CSO efforts to generate evidence and influence policies. Efforts are documented within three governance dimensions — judiciary and human rights, decentralization and anti-corruption — as these are the crucial policy domains. The analysis draws on typologies of the UNDP Users' Guide in order to drill down into the nature of the specific initiatives, examining the type of evidence and research methods used to generate knowledge.¹⁵ Reference is also made to the degree that evidence collected is gender- and poverty-sensitive.

3.1. Decentralization and Local Governance

3.1.1. The Policy Context

Main advocates in Serbia view decentralization as a means of improving the quality and accessibility of public services, and also of promoting local development to benefit communities (Damjanovic: 2008; Matkovic: 2006). Cross-country evidence indeed suggests that decentralization, particularly revenue-raising and expenditure responsibilities, is associated with lower corruption (World Bank: 2007). In post-conflict Serbia, encouraging the greater participation of citizens and local authorities in decision-making processes is also an important peace-building strategy. Transferring power to the grassroots level opens the opportunity for a dialogue, partnership and trust to form between citizens and government. It also allows the voices of the poorest, most vulnerable people to be heard and facilitates social cohesion between multi-ethnic communities. Some argue that the main objective in southern Serbia and Sandzak should be to strengthen local governance as a way of addressing the everyday problems and political grievances faced by minorities (Fund for an Open Society: 2007; Huska: 2007).

Since the regime change, the restored political, social and economic jurisdiction of municipalities has been recognized in major legal acts¹⁶, defining the comprehensive list of responsibilities and the greater financial autonomy of local authorities. Nevertheless, some argue that the system is still quite centralized, as national-level authorities retain their influence and power (Fund for an Open Society: 2007). The issues of territorial integrity make the devolution of power a highly political topic.¹⁷ While some competencies have been legally transferred, the State has done little in practice to strengthen the capacity of authorities to deliver services. The situation is particularly acute in smaller/underdeveloped municipalities which lack financial and strategic resources to function independently (ibid). On the other hand, government claims that a gradual transfer of duties is necessary since a great deal remains to be done to reinforce democratic institutions and processes at the local level in order to really benefit the community. This corresponds with a growing international sentiment that decentralization should not be treated as a panacea to development problems. Increasing evidence seems to suggest that local politics can be as or more dysfunctional (e.g. captured by local elites) than national politics (World Bank: 2007; Manor: 2004). This is why an ongoing assessment of the extent of involvement and the impact of interactions between all actors in the process of decentralization is crucial to inform more effective programmes.

¹⁵ An adapted version of UNDP typology has been used to briefly assess the following dimensions: (i) purpose for which the assessment was intended, (ii) how the evidence is used, (iii) the type of evidence collected and (iv) the methodology applied (e.g. data-gathering techniques). A matrix-based summary version including the web addresses of the publicly available sources is found in Annex 2. Please refer to the UNDP Users' Guide for further details about indicator typologies, at www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs07/undp_users_online_version.pdf.

¹⁶ Key laws are the Law of Local Governments (2003) and the Law on Financing of Local Governance (2006).

¹⁷ The controversies have recently flared up over discussions about the Vojvodina Statute, which is a proposal for greater authority for the Province, setting off alarm bells among conservative parties, which were quick to oppose the document as a secessionist move.

3.1.2. Generating Governance Evidence

This study has found that a number of civil society actors have been actively engaged in assessing and monitoring the process of decentralization since the process restarted in 2001. CSOs are the main drivers of governance assessments. The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), a national association of local authorities, also plays a significant role. Knowledge production operates at two main levels: (1) efforts aimed to assist the formulation of decentralization policies and assessing their implementation; and (2) monitoring the work and performance of local governance institutions and decision making. Each of these has attracted different sets of actors.

Two local actors have been encouraging the **process of decentralization** through independent research and analysis. One is Public Administration and Local Government (PALGO), profiled among the first think tanks in Serbia. PALGO tries to influence policy through high-level research producing large number of independent studies, policy briefs and inputs into draft legislation in the areas of local governance and public administration. Another actor is the Standing Conference on Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), established in 1953, whose key mandate is to advocate for the interests and needs of local authorities. Both actors have participated in the preparation of key legislation and strategic documents defining the greater autonomy of local governments. Yet the legal framework for decentralization is still incomplete and fiscal decentralization remains a work in progress. For example, the law regulating the property ownership rights of local municipalities is still missing. As a result, both actors have focused their efforts to bring the attention of policy makers to this issue, actively arguing for an adoption of legal measures to return land property to local authorities. This is considered a crucial step to define the necessary sources of funds to enable municipalities to carry out their main responsibilities. PALGO and SCTM collaborated in drafting the Law on Local Government Property. Box 2 describes their long-term struggle in getting the law to be adopted.

Box 2: The uncertain fate of the Law on Local Government Property

Given that all property used by local governments is in the possession of the Republic of Serbia, local authorities face numerous problems that aggravate the functioning and performing of their regular activities. The new Law on Local Government Finance, which came into force in early 2007, resulted in greater fiscal decentralization — but the necessary regulations on municipal property and management have still not been adopted. This has serious economic implications for local development. According to the SCTM study 'Economic Costs of Assets in State Property Used by Towns and Municipalities in the Republic of Serbia', after 10 years of implementing the old law, the total damage to local economy was around €1.3 billion. Therefore, it is essential that the property gets devolved to municipal governments. PALGO and SCTM have prepared the Draft Law on Local Government Property to assist the reform of the ownership rights. In preparation of the draft, actors carefully analyzed the issues related to the coordination of the process of devolution and possible impacts of property denationalization. The draft law received strong approval from local government representatives and was sent to the Prime Minister on 14 February 2005 and later to the National Assembly for adoption. So far, however, the draft law has not met political agreement. The government is continually postponing the adoption of the law.

Source: Adapted from the PALGO website <http://www.palگو.org/english/index.php>

One actor stands out for **assessing the quality of local governance**. The Centre for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) is a leading research and advocacy NGO in Serbia undertaking participatory governance assessments at a local level for more than a decade. As a national player, CeSID has also been committed in developing the capacity of local grassroots organizations, also known as citizens' forums, to conduct governance monitoring. The initiatives carried out by CeSID are diverse, including assessing local leadership and administration, investigating public opinion on problems of local communities and satisfaction with service delivery, as well

as educating citizens about the importance of monitoring. What follows are examples of the types of initiatives featured in CeSID's work.

CeSID has focused on **monitoring the work of municipal assemblies**, which are the crucial units of local government and the main locus of decision-making. As such, they have strong influence on the life of the local community. Key indicators being measured include:

- *Quality of decision-making process*: planning, consensus-building and results of decisions made;
- *Level of transparency*: processes and mechanisms used to inform the public; extent and depth of engaging public in consultations and discussions and reaching citizens' agreement on decisions;
- *Quality of intergovernmental relationships*: exploring the level of democracy, structure, nature and functioning of relationships between municipal assemblies and other local government units, through assessments using two main indicators: participation of officials in the assembly meetings and their contribution to debate;
- *Citizens' exercising their rights*: monitoring the efficiency of the work of municipal administrations and the extent of achievement of citizens' rights before local government bodies.

CeSID mostly uses qualitative methods to collect its data. Its methods include participant observation of meetings and other relevant events, interviews with officials and document analysis (e.g. normative frameworks, legal documents, agendas and minutes of meetings). Quantitative data are collected mainly from municipal bureaus of statistics. Accumulated experience has recently led CeSID to design a 'good governance matrix' tool, which offers a more comprehensive indicator framework that can enable systematic monitoring of governance institutions and allow for cross-institutional comparisons. The matrix is further described in box 3.

CeSID's assessments over the years have also focused on **grassroots democracy, with attention to social capital and civic activism**. This has provided significant insights into the level and intensity of citizens' participation in the policy-making processes at the local level. Much of the participatory research deals with problems of local communities in Serbia, e.g. the question of citizens' trust in political institutions, electoral participation and abstinence, citizens' political activism, citizens' attitudes towards local leaders and administrators and citizens' satisfaction with service delivery. The studies are particularly valuable because they explore the extent and nature of social capital at the micro level, gauging citizens' attitudes towards community leadership, local governance institutions and each other. Public opinion polls are the most commonly used method to collect this evidence.

Box 3: Good governance matrix

For a USAID-funded pilot project on good governance, CeSID has designed a unique methodology to assess the extent of development of central and local government agencies. The analysis covers the efficiency and effectiveness of the government's work, as well as responsiveness and accountability of State institutions towards citizens. The USAID methodology has been adapted to fit local circumstances and is based on a large number of indicators, ensuring comprehensive and in-depth analysis. The governance areas under analysis include: institutional structure, management processes, degree of voice and participation, accountability and open entry/competition. The research findings will be presented in quantitative format, as the scale is expected to facilitate easy cross-institutional comparisons of results. CeSID also hopes the scoring method may elicit a vibrant debate among municipalities. The long-term goal is to persuade municipalities to use this in their own work as a self-assessment tool

Source: Author interview, 2008.

3.2. Anti-corruption

3.2.1. Policy Context

Although corruption has a long history in Serbia, going back to communist (pre-Milosevic) rule in Yugoslavia and seen in Communist Party privileges, the heritage was fully developed by Milosevic and his cronies (CLDS: 2001). The first action plan to fight corruption was developed in 2001. It emphasized building a new institutional framework, public administration reform, active inclusion of civil society and the development of an enabling political environment conducive to fighting corruption (ibid). Since then, important steps have been taken to combat the problem, primarily at the policy level. Measures to date have entailed a package of anti-corruption legislation and the establishment of a number of advisory and independent regulatory bodies, most notably the Anti-Corruption Council, staffed with prominent NGO actors.¹⁸

Despite these achievements, there are many criticisms regarding the implementation of policy. The most recent EC assessment report (2008) stated, 'results of the government's fight against corruption were limited in practice'. According to the Anti-Corruption Council (2008), the government lacks the political will and sincere intent to combat corruption — which is reflected in the absence of sufficient support to oversight bodies in core areas such as party financing, conflict of interest, public procurement and privatization.

These criticisms are of concern considering that 'corruption is still a wide-spread and dangerous phenomenon in Serbia', according to the latest study produced by the local think tank CLDS (2007). Political corruption is perceived as particularly dangerous because of its damaging effects on decision-making processes, the loss of confidence in democratic institutions and processes, and the loss of legitimacy of decision makers to perform necessary reforms (Transparency Serbia: 2005).

3.2.2. Generation of Governance Evidence: Tools to 'Measure' Corruption

In the early stages of the transition, at a time when the policies were being formulated, much of the research focused on assessing perceptions of corruption — both its nature and its impact and consequences. Recently, there has been a shift towards monitoring the implementation of anti-corruption measures. Assessments have been taken for the purposes of formulating anti-corruption strategy and other policies, and also in some cases to fulfil a condition imposed by a donor. Both generic international tools and home-grown approaches for measuring corruption have been identified.

Tools to 'measure' corruption: unsurprisingly, the public opinion survey is the most commonly used corruption assessment tool to assess the extent of the problem. There are examples of both 'perception' and 'experience-based' evidence. The bulk of research is based on 'local' perceptions of eminent experts and general public. International studies relying on generic assessment methods such as The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI), or the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) produced by eminent organisations (e.g. the World Bank, Transparency International) are also prominent. The CPI, for example, is frequently used by both State and non-State actors for the purpose of influencing decisions.¹⁹ Serbian Minister of Justice Snezana Malovic recently called attention to the latest CPI results commenting that 'Serbia should be concerned since its rank in this year's Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is extremely low compared to other countries in the region, including the former Yugoslav republics'. This study examines home-grown approaches only.

¹⁸ Also a National Anti-Corruption Strategy was developed and, more recently, the Law on Anti-Corruption Agency was adopted, which will facilitate the foundation of the Anti-Corruption Agency to monitor the implementation of this strategy. Moreover, a number of independent bodies have been established, whose mandates are crucial in the fight against corruption (e.g. the Supreme Audit Institution, the Commissioner for Access to Free Information, the Ombudsman, etc.)

¹⁹ A press conference is regularly organized by TS to communicate the CPI findings and specific policy recommendations, and advocate for more effective government action to curb corruption.

'Perception-based evidence': Public sector diagnostics (both quantitative and qualitative) are particularly useful, since they assess the strengths and weaknesses of public institutions. The National Integrity System survey was one of the early studies produced by Transparency Serbia (TS), a local chapter of the international advocacy organization. The survey was commissioned by the Government to serve as an assessment base in the process of designing the original national strategy for the fight against corruption. The aim of the survey was to identify vulnerabilities within the 11 'pillars' on which fighting against corruption rests: the executive power; the legislative power; the judiciary; the Public Prosecutor's Office; the police; public services; the Auditor General; anti-corruption agencies (commissions); the ombudsman; the media; and civil society. Based on the diagnostics, concrete measures were defined and deadlines set to guide public sector reform.

Another example includes Corruption in Serbia, a study produced in 2001 by the CLDS. This is considered by many to be the first comprehensive research of corruption in Serbia. Adopting a historical perspective, it had a broad purpose of discovering the level, causes and consequences of corruption. It also proposed a working definition of corruption, which would later be adopted by public agencies. The study was based on surveys that engaged both the general public and the private sector, exploring their perceptions on the fairness and effectiveness of the justice system and relative transparency of public administration. A triangulation of results provided a more complete picture of corruption challenges faced by the institutions. CLDS prepared a coherent proposal for an anti-corruption strategy and recommended it to the Government.

More recently, a new policy issue has been emerging on the governance agenda. The concept of so-called 'State capture' – an example of grand corruption – has come under increasing scrutiny. Pestic (2007) defines 'State capture' as 'any group or social strata, external to the State, that exercises decisive influence over State institutions and policies for its own interests against the public good'. There is growing research among CSOs exploring this controversial topic (CLDS: 2006, Pestic: 2007). Pestic's latest study analysed the causes and mechanisms of the phenomenon in Serbia, including the nexus between political (party) elites and privileged business elites who finance all the relevant parties. According to the author, political elites in Serbia have seized State influence and all public institutions for their own interests, and traded them for the illegitimate needs of tycoons in return for secret party financing. Her study used both objective data and public perceptions to support these claims. Knowledge on the topic has been very important in the efforts to influence the policy on the financing of political parties (see box 5).

'Experience-based evidence': A key methodological issue related to corruption assessments pointed to in the literature is the difficulty in collecting evidence (June et al.: 2008). Corruption is often successfully disguised and people are not readily encouraged to report it. Two initiatives in Serbia attempt to overcome this problem by collecting so-called experience-based evidence. The Anti-Corruption Council and TS carried out the projects, which relied on people's complaints as a main source of corruption evidence. The TS project is described in box 4.

The Anti-Corruption Council was established in the early days of transition as an independent body to monitor the effectiveness of government policies in combating corruption. It collects citizens' complaints about corruption and, after legal and statistical processing, forwards them to the State agencies in charge and monitors the measures undertaken to redress grievances. Despite the numerous problems affecting its autonomous functioning, the Council has a favourable reputation both among the Serbian public and internationally.

Box 4. Transparency Serbia Anti-Corruption Legal Advisory Centre (ALAC) project

The main goal of establishing ALAC was to increase citizens' participation in the fight against corruption as well as the number of corruption cases reported and resolved. It boasts a similar approach to that adopted by the Anti-Corruption Council discussed above but, in addition to collecting complaints, advisors provide legal advice to victims. The advocacy team also lobbies competent authorities on behalf of citizens to resolve reported cases and to police the causes of corruption. Key challenges encountered by the ALAC team included: establishing a working

definition of corruption; people 'seeing corruption everywhere'; and citizens complaining of corruption without clear and relevant information to support their claims or a lack of will to testify further. Within a one-year project period, 184 cases were reported. Despite the challenges, the ALAC team was able to draw on evidence and draft concrete recommendations to inform the improvement of the legal framework and implementation measures.

Source: Adapted from Transparency Serbia website, www.transparentnost.org.rs/index_en.htm.

3.2.3. Generation of Governance Evidence: Tools to Assess Anti-corruption Initiatives

Tools to assess anti-corruption initiatives: This is currently the focus of CSO assessment efforts. TS is the most consistent knowledge actor in its efforts to analyse the quality of anti-corruption measures and monitor their implementation. Emphasis is on the implementation of government regulations in the following areas: free access to information, financing of political parties, public procurement and, most recently, implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy. Consequently, implementation evidence and impact analyses are most commonly generated by TS, as a person interviewed explained: "Bearing in mind that we are mostly dealing with implementation of anti-corruption legislation, these methods are considered most relevant. We are using also public opinion and other research, but only when presenting data in order to give conclusions in a broader context (citizens' expectations and confidence in institutions)" (interview, 2008). The analysis often includes quantitative aspects (e.g. compliance of public authorities with regulations) and also qualitative aspects (e.g. quality of implementation). For example, monitoring of the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy focuses on the work of Parliament. In particular, it tries to assess whether Parliament fulfils in a timely and satisfactory manner its duties deriving from the strategy and its action plan. Another important objective is to raise public awareness about the work of popular representatives and about implementation of the country's anti-corruption strategic measures in general.

Box 5. Why is there a need to revise the Law on Financing of Political Parties?

The relationship between parties and business is not regulated in a transparent manner because the Law on the Funding of Political Parties, passed in 2003, is deficient in its controlling mechanisms and was never strictly and effectively implemented in practice. The effectiveness of this law depends on 'political will'. The law did not meet the necessary conditions to prevent secret, under-the-table party financing, which has become a tradition in Serbia since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1990. Political parties are supported by big capital contributions and it is a well-known public 'secret' that the tycoons finance all the major parties. What is needed is a transparent model for financing parties and an efficient control mechanism to prevent abuse by economic elites.

Source: Adapted from Pestic, 2007

3.3. Judiciary and Human Rights

3.3.1. Policy Context

As argued already, establishing the rule of law (i.e. an efficient justice system and protection of human rights) is crucial to guaranteeing social stability in post-conflict Serbia. The fight against organized crime, effective implementation of lustration policies, anti-discrimination laws and securing equal access to justice for all citizens are the necessary steps to consolidate democratic structures and norms. Yet, despite efforts to reform the judiciary²⁰, the sector in Serbia may still be categorized as weak. Serbian courts are still overloaded with cases, and there is a consider-

²⁰ Reform was initiated in 2001 when a set of five laws was passed which separated the judiciary from other branches of authority. The Government of the Republic of Serbia established the Commission for Reform of the Judicial System in April 2004. Its working groups gave proposals for changes in the legal regulations to ensure that the same are harmonised with international and European conventions for human rights protection. The National Judiciary Reform Strategy was adopted in May 2006.

able backlog (EC: 2008). The main reasons affecting the efficiency of judiciary pointed out by a few interviewees include: lack of technical conditions to implement various laws on courts; judges who live in the constant fear in terms of electoral uncertainty; low professional capacity of personnel who 'barely know international standards and conventions'; and systemic dependence on partisan politics (interview, 2008). On the other hand, judges themselves are unable to persevere with the process of lustration within the profession and to resolve issues of corrupted personnel. Consequently, in the current climate, citizens' trust in justice is limited. At the same time, organized crime groups are using the poor image and inefficiency of the judiciary to further their own interests.

With regard to the protection of human rights, overall the legal and institutional framework for the observance of human rights is in place, but doubts remain over its effective implementation (EC: 2008). The Constitution, for example, prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on any grounds, but in practice there is still widespread discrimination, primarily against sexual minorities, the disabled, Roma and women (SDD: 2007). The majority of citizens are still only vaguely familiar with the concept of human rights, and the State needs to accelerate efforts in order to empower individuals to claim their entitlements (CIVICUS: 2007). The situation is particularly acute within most vulnerable groups (e.g. IDPs, refugees, ethnic minorities).

3.3.2. Governance Evidence

Human rights efforts: Thanks to persistent NGO public awareness campaigns, the concepts of human rights and discrimination have entered the public discourse. Owing to a diversity of human rights issues, there has been a proliferation of knowledge actors. These include proponents of anti-discrimination policies in general, gender equality advocates and activists for Roma rights and disabled, and IDPs/refugees. More recently, groups of proponents of gay and lesbian rights and children's rights have emerged. In each of these cases, a number of NGOs and think tanks are involved in knowledge production, recording instances of various types of discrimination. Their records are crucial sources of data, as State efforts in this regard are acutely lacking. The current draft Law on Anti-discrimination has incorporated knowledge on these issues supplied by key CSO actors. NGOs have also been instrumental in the establishment of the Ombudsman's office. A long overdue independent State institution was set up in 2007, whose main task is to defend citizens' rights and monitor and report violations of State administration institutions.

The Belgrade Centre for Human Rights is an example of a think tank that has been systematically monitoring, assessing and reporting on the activities of legal and judiciary institutions in Serbia. To date, their assessments have focused on organized crime, war crimes, discrimination and domestic violence. The Centre hopes these activities will contribute towards the strengthening of civil society and legal professions in Serbia through improvements in human rights protection initiatives, protection of people's rights before the courts and prevention of human rights abuses. Court cases are the main object of monitoring. The Centre also publishes an annual human rights report that tracks the quality of law-making and implementation of legislation covering all types of rights covered by the main conventions that Serbia has ratified.

The thrust of the methodology involves comparing and contrasting existing laws in Serbia with the international standards set by the key human rights conventions. In cases where Serbian law and regulations are not on a par with international standards, the Centre makes specific policy recommendations to amend laws. The Centre is also monitoring the work of key judiciary agencies, the legislative and executive arms of government and other relevant public agencies. This involves continuous and systematic collection of data during the year as well as participant observation and fieldwork. Reports are based also on monitoring the media and other CSO reports. In the absence of alternative sources of data, the Centre uses official State data, although an attempt is made to scrutinize official sources carefully. When information is believed to be incorrect, the centre makes a recommendation to the relevant authority to correct the data. According to the Centre, in Serbia there is a general problem with 'statistics' and collection

of data on human rights, which often results from a lack of attention to and understanding of the importance of rigorous data collection.

Transitional justice efforts: CSOs have also been most vigilant to advocate that both authorities and society at large acknowledge the atrocities committed by the Milosevic regime. This included campaigns for lustration policies. Nevertheless, it has proven considerably more difficult to raise these issues owing to high political sensitivity. Despite early efforts, NGOs never succeeded in establishing a functioning Truth and Reconciliation Committee and, despite the adoption of necessary laws, lustration never really took place. Box 6 describes the challenging path of the transitional justice process.

Box 6. Failure of lustration policies in Serbia

Those who argue for lustration policies in Serbia believe that dealing with sensitive issues of the past is the most useful way of promoting dialogue and reconciliation and helping avoid similar mistakes in the future. This action is essential to removing the consequences of authoritarian party rule. Although NGOs have been very active advocating for lustration policies, their campaign has not been very successful. Soon after the fall of the Milosevic regime, a few NGOs and a group of citizens launched an initiative to pass a law on lustration and accountability for violating human rights. The reactions by the authorities were mainly negative. In 2003, the government finally passed the lustration law, entitled the Accountability for Human Rights Violations Act. Victims and NGOs with relevant expertise were not included in the preparation procedure. Major public debates on the legislation did not take place. The law was adopted in an emergency procedure and, to date, practically nothing has been implemented. The National Assembly tried appointing members for the Commission for Investigation of Accountability for Human Rights Violations but the body never became functional. Similarly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in March 2001 remained on paper only. Two and a half years later, the commission just vanished, without having undertaken any substantial activities and without having achieved any tangible results. The main reason for these failures was the lack of political will to implement the policies. The failure of lustration policies had negative repercussions for democracy and the rule of law, since values remained unchanged. In this respect, one might say that the authoritarian regime is continuing.

Source: Adapted from the records of Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe.

3.4. Uptake of Governance Evidence into Policy

3.4.1. Strategies Used to Disseminate Research Findings

For many of the actors described above, policy influence is an explicit part of their organization's agenda. As a result, all the organizations interviewed try to engage in policy processes in a strategic manner and use evidence in an effective way. There is a high degree of transparency in the disclosure of governance evidence. Although their resources may be limited, many organizations use a range of different approaches to try and influence policies.²¹ Two types of actors have been identified: those that engage in more direct advocacy efforts (e.g. TS, CeSID, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights) and those who incorporate indirect tactics such as insider lobbying (e.g. CLDS, PALGO).

When asked what increases the chance of policy influence, the interviewees commented that it is crucial to ensure that the evidence is rigorous and credible and findings are communicated through short and concise policy papers. CeSID highlighted the importance of engaging directly with government when disseminating the results of research. For example, after research is completed, CeSID often presents the findings to key audiences, comprising local authorities, media and community. Brochures and pamphlet-style material are used to communicate key findings and raise the awareness of local community about the work of government.

²¹ Some of the mechanisms include: comments on draft policy documents; organising seminars/conferences; publications on policy issues; submitting articles in media; lobbying.

3.4.2. Uptake of Evidence into Policy

As there is a serious lack of sources available on the impact of research in Serbia, it is not clear how much of the evidence generated is taken up by policy makers to inform governance reforms. It is undoubtedly difficult to evaluate the impact of a particular research project on policy, given the complexities of the policy process. This paper nevertheless makes an effort to distil some lessons on the role and scope of CSOs' influence by exploring the dynamics of the knowledge-policy-practice nexus. To assist this reflection, the analysis is based on the conceptual framework on sector-specific characteristics of evidence-based policy discussed in Pomares and Jones (2008). The following variables are briefly examined: the number of issue champions involved in a given policy space; hierarchies of knowledge; the stage of the policy process; the extent to which a policy area is contested; the relative strength of economic interests; and the type of policy change sought. As the lessons put forward have not been based on an in-depth analysis, further research would be needed to assess these variables in a comprehensive fashion.

- 1) **Issue champions:** In all three areas of governance reforms, the number of knowledge actors driving the policy change has been relatively small. One of the main reasons is the lack of consistent demand for policy research. The small size of the market and the absence of institutional funding compel actors to diversify their portfolio rather than deepen their expertise in a specific policy area (interview, 2008). There have been some notable changes recently. For example, given the increasing spotlight on the high level of corruption in Serbia, a growing number of actors are developing tools to measure the extent of the problem. In the local governance area, for example, CeSID works to ensure that there are institutional mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring by setting up local bodies, known as citizen's forums. These are community-based organizations whose mandate is to improve efficacy and transparency in the work of local authorities. They are particularly important in municipalities, where watchdog capacities of civil society are weak. As already highlighted, the largest proliferation of actors appears to be in the area of human rights, owing to a wide range of issues. It also emerges that actors championing transitional justice issues are more engaged in coordinating efforts to effect policy change, not only at the local but also at the international level.
- 2) **Different hierarchies of knowledge:** The use of qualitative or mixed method approaches is common to all three governance reform areas. It appears there are no different hierarchies of knowledge involved when it comes to policy uptake since, for many of the governance assessments, qualitative evidence is the main source of data. Apart from generating their own research, actors also utilize official data in their work. The study has identified certain variations in the type of knowledge and evidence generated. Events-based data and narrative reports are most frequently used in human rights monitoring. Surveys (opinions/perceptions/attitudes) and implementation analysis are key tools in the anti-corruption domain. 'Grassroots knowledge' obtained through participatory approaches is most common in efforts to assess the work of local government. One of the main weaknesses of documented initiatives is the lack of disaggregated data (see Annex 2 for a summary version of the findings). Rapid analysis of the methodologies found that the majority of the tools did not allow for analysis of particular groups such as the poor, women and minorities. In some cases, the lack of disaggregated analysis can be explained by financial constraints forcing actors to use smaller survey samples, but limited awareness of the importance of such analysis appears to be the overriding reason for this knowledge gap. This highlights the need for developing actors' capacity to create more gender-sensitive and pro-poor evidence in order to strengthen policy advocacy efforts.
- 3) **Knowledge uptake across stages in the policy process:** Certain trends with regard to the role and impact of knowledge actors in shaping policy can be identified according to the stage of the policy cycle. It appears that knowledge actors — across all three areas — have been most successful at the initial stages, when the objective is to try and set the *policy agenda*. Actors working in decentralization, anti-corruption and human rights have

drawn policymakers' attention to many issues in their respective domains. For example, human rights knowledge actors focusing on discrimination against certain vulnerable groups (e.g. disabled, women, Roma) have worked hard to raise the awareness of the problems these groups face. There have been successful examples of CSOs contributing to the creation of new narratives, and raising policymakers' attention of new policy problems. Since 2000, the situation of the Roma has gradually become part of the social agenda and policy discourse, partly as a result of civil society efforts in systematically documenting the instances of discrimination and analyzing their socioeconomic conditions. Similarly, despite the lack of political clout of people with disabilities, NGOs have effectively advocated on the behalf of their clients to ensure that systematic barriers faced by these people were addressed at the institutional level. The Anti-Discrimination Law for People with Disabilities is one of the concrete policy outcomes.

The research has also identified a few examples of knowledge contributing to **policy formulation**. In case of the anti-corruption policy, after the problem was identified, the government provided incentives to the research community to produce research to inform policy options. As there was no valid knowledge about the nature, extent and causes of corruption in the early stages of reforms, TS was commissioned to undertake a National Integrity System survey. This served as a baseline in the process of designing the national anti-corruption policies. PALGO is another example of a think tank that has contributed its independent analysis to the development of key legislation and regulations in the area of decentralization.

With regard to the **implementation stage**, the ongoing monitoring of local government by CeSID has helped authorities improve their approaches to service delivery. The grassroots ownership of the assessments provides a platform for greater citizen engagement, and enhances the accountability of government. In the Serbian post-conflict context, monitoring becomes a peace-building tool by bringing together different parties to dialogue, thus building relationships and trust between local authorities and citizens. Evidence has been used in the **monitoring stages** of policy in the anti-corruption domain most consistently. By monitoring the implementation of certain legislations, TS has been monitoring the implementation of numerous anti-corruption laws and the collected evidence has been used to propose policy recommendations to amend the inefficiencies in laws and enforcement measures.

Evaluating the impact of policy is least common. The only example found by the authors of this paper is the CLDS' last study on corruption entitled Corruption in Serbia – Five Years Later (2007). Changes in corruption levels are analysed in the study, as are effects of government policies during the five years of transition in Serbia from 2000. The intention was to look at the dynamics of corruption and anti-corruption efforts in this period and assess the success of the measures undertaken. The research demonstrated that government anti-corruption efforts were mostly legislative and that practical activities were much more limited, proposing that the future of anti-corruption policies should be directed towards strengthening the police, judiciary and prosecutor's office. The proposed approach has been showcased in the government's new plan to combat corruption and organized crime.

- 4) **Type of policy change sought:** The first phase of CSO efforts was unavoidably directed towards legislative changes. Actors still predominantly tailor knowledge to encourage **discursive** commitments from States and secure changes in policy, such as the passage of new **regulations**. This is understandable, as much legislation was either missing or had to be updated at the start of the reform process. Nevertheless, the legalistic approach towards reforms still prevails in Serbia. As a successful reform extends beyond the adoption of legislation efforts, more attention should be paid to securing **procedural** changes in the way policy decisions are made and influencing **behavioural** change in key actors (e.g. change in perceptions or values).

- 5) **Level of contestation:** Level of political contestation seems to be the key factor affecting the likelihood that evidence on democratic governance will influence governance reforms in Serbia. While human rights think tanks focusing on issues of discrimination against Roma populations and/or disabled people have been successful in situating the key problems on the public agenda, the actors advocating lustration policies have failed to ensure that the topic has entered the reform discourse. Strong political interests blocked the policy issue from reaching the agenda in any significant way. In the early years of transition, several legal, advocacy and media representatives initiated discussions on lustration and related topics at roundtables and seminars, but all reports indicate that the interest of both the public and policy makers was generally rather small and the effect even smaller (Hatschikjan et al.: 2005). Moreover, in 2003, the Center for Antiwar Action and the Center for Advanced Legal Studies put forward a model of a Law on Opening Secret Police Files. The Ministry of Police refused to discuss the model and, consequently, neither the government nor the Serbian Parliament ever considered the law. In both instances, collaboration with government proved to be very problematic since the view civil society was espousing conflicted with the traditional values, political ideologies and even prevailing attitudes of the public. War crimes and lustration policies are topics still by and large considered cultural taboos. In these instances, the empirical evidence was not sufficient to influence the formulation of the policy. "In general, collective amnesia is preferred," said one of the activists interviewed, "Many people did not want to believe the truth or even listen to the facts, especially not to believe or confess that Serbs were directly involved in war crimes".

The case of transitional justice is also revealing because it is an example of a post-conflict issue where evidence risks reinforcing conflict. A number of NGOs, in particular human rights defenders, were subjected to threats and verbal abuse for holding diverging views on issues such as the situation in Kosovo (EC: 2008). According to the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, the status and validity of evidence on war crimes are often contested. While some ministries are more open to their inputs at the same time, others are very antagonistic.

But even when knowledge actors are successful in raising a lively debate and bringing attention to a governance policy problem, hotly debated issues might not always lead to policy change if the level of policy contestation is high. This point is illustrated by PALGO and SCTM's experience in trying to influence government's decision to pass legislation on local government property. Both organizations engaged in a complex and lengthy process of generating evidence about the adverse economic consequences resulting from the lack of municipal property. The draft Law of Local Government Property was based on years of research. Yet, in spite of this, the law has still not met political agreement and therefore has never been passed by Parliament.

- 6) **Strength of economic interests:** Finally, the authors have identified economic interests as an important factor shaping governance policy processes. Analysis of the anti-corruption policy domain shows that the strong role of large private sector players in privatization processes has made the involvement of knowledge actors more complicated. The Anti-corruption Council has disseminated numerous evidence-supported reports criticizing the State-led process of privatization of public enterprises. Nevertheless, as the Council's recommendations could affect the private sector (i.e. stall the privatization process), the government chose to ignore their reports, despite compelling evidence about the magnitude of the problem (Pestic: 2007).

Having described the State of governance evidence production and uptake at a more general level, the final section of the paper investigates the extent to which governance evidence is shaping reforms in the social protection sector. The case of social protection is revealing for a number of reasons. First, it is a rare example of a sector in Serbia influenced by the evidence-based policy paradigm. Second, it is an example of good practice in expanding national ownership and inviting various non-State knowledge actors to contribute

to research-informed policy-making. Third, sectoral reforms – both strategic goals and process – are directly influenced by the main principles of democratic governance.

4. GOVERNANCE EVIDENCE AT SECTORAL LEVEL: INSIGHT INTO SOCIAL PROTECTION

Background

Conflict had a devastating impact on the socio-economic situation in Serbia. The country saw a dramatic decline in its GDP in the 1990s caused by the deep economic, social and political crisis in the country. Many people were plunged into poverty as a result of high unemployment and a dramatic decrease in real wages and social benefits. At the same time, there was an influx of nearly 700,000 displaced persons and refugees (PRS: 2007). The number of citizens eligible for social assistance increased exponentially as a result. The effort to fight against poverty and improvement of social protection of vulnerable groups became one of the three main aims of the new government's programme of reforms in the early 2000s (Bajec et al.: 2008). At the same time, the democratic government was faced with enormous challenges in responding to the increasing needs of the population, such as severe shortage of funds, debts to citizens for overdue welfare entitlements and deteriorated capacities to deliver necessary basic and social services.²² It was clear that improving sectoral governance was critical if Serbian people were going to gain access to better and more sustainable services. Not only were people impoverished owing to the years of conflict, but also it was expected that structural reforms during the transitional period would exacerbate the hardship for traditionally disadvantaged groups, making individuals even more vulnerable to poverty and related social problems. To meet these challenges the consensus was reached that social welfare system had to be modernized (Government of Serbia: 2005).

4.1. Emerging Social Welfare Reform

Already in 2001 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MoLSP) had defined the first set of reform initiatives through a large multi-level project entitled Reform of Social Protection. The pilot introduced an integrated approach to social protection in order to respond to special needs.²³ With the aim of encouraging decentralization through the involvement and expansion of the NGO sector in the area of social welfare service provision, two special mechanisms were launched: the Social Innovation Fund (SIF)²⁴ and the Fund for Financing Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. SIF would become one of the key actors driving the NGO-government partnerships in service delivery and evidence-based reform process. Already during these early activities the emphasis was placed on systematically managing new knowledge arising from experiences that would later be used to inform the welfare reform strategy.

In 2003, the Serbian government adopted the strategic document for reducing poverty — the PRSP. This was the first key policy document describing the situation in the social protection sector and outlining the new approach to welfare. Sectoral reform was now a part of the broader set of policies aimed at reducing risk and vulnerability.²⁵ The PRS identified two major shortcomings of the welfare system. First, **citizens were unable to access services and use their entitlements**, owing mainly to a lack of public awareness and information on existing benefits. For instance, a number of internally displaced members of the Roma minority did

²² The immediate response was to overcome the burning issues inherited from the past decade, most importantly the accumulated arrears in social protection payments. International donor funding was used to cover this debt and re-establish services with a focus on a humanitarian assistance for refugees and IDPs.

²³ Focus of early initiatives was on the protection of children against neglect/abuse and foster care, the elderly and disabled people.

²⁴ Through SIF the new welfare services were gradually introduced at the local level according to the priorities of individual municipalities.

²⁵ The main aim of the social welfare was defined in the PRS as a system to 'secure a basic social safety net for the whole population in addition to the provision of safety nets for specific vulnerable groups' (PRS: 2003).

not exercise their right to financial allowances owing to a lack of personal documents or a lack of information about the entitlement (PRS: 2003). Second, the **capacity of local government was judged as weak**. The cumulative effect over the years led to diminishing interest and commitment of local government to delivering services. A highly bureaucratic approach in combination with weak strategic planning and management capacities meant that services were not tailored to the needs of local residents. Consequently, the objective of the reform became to 'build an efficient, sustainable and accessible social welfare system, which meets the needs of all citizens in Serbia' (PRS: 2003).

The process of designing the PRS was evaluated as open and highly participatory, as it created the opportunity for a large number of CSOs and citizens to get involved. This is worth mentioning because the positive experience of the PRSP provided legitimacy for a similar inclusive planning approach to be adopted for the development of a welfare strategy. The National Strategy for the Development of Social Welfare was adopted in late 2005 and set out a detailed roadmap for reforms. The strategy was based on the knowledge and lessons learnt in the MoLSP's projects (e.g. the SIF) and key findings of the PRSP. The welfare strategy took forward commitments from the PRS, such as achieving better targeting, putting in place specific programmes for particularly vulnerable groups like the Roma and refugees, developing professional standards and improving the public's knowledge and understanding about the different types of social services on offer. Reforming the social welfare system became closely related to reforming sectoral governance by making it more transparent, accountable and responsive. In order to assess the extent to which governance evidence shaped the reforms in social protection it is important to first briefly discuss how democratic governance impacted on sectoral practices.

4.2. Governance Reforms and Social Protection

It could be argued there has been a historical shift in the approach to conceptualizing social protection policy marked by the new system of values and approach in providing services. General democratic governance discourse shaped the reform in the following ways:

- **Placing greater focus on rights, voice and participation:** Respect and protection of both the economic and social rights became the guiding principle of social welfare. Beneficiaries and their needs have been positioned at the very heart of the social protection system (author interview, 2008). The emphasis was on empowering poor people and vulnerable groups to fully utilize their own capacities in overcoming poverty and risk.
- **Placing greater focus on building a capable State:** The institutional capacity of government to meet the needs and priorities of all people through efficient service delivery became a priority. The reform set out to gradually transform delivery from a centralized to a community-based service realized through a partnership between various social actors.
- **Fostering transparent and accountable policy processes:** Finally, strengthening public institutions is only possible through better governing practices, which entails increased transparency of the policy-making process and making informed policy decisions based on research. The focus was thus placed on an enabling environment for the local government, citizens and CSOs to be more directly involved in the process of planning, implementation and monitoring of reforms and service delivery.

So how did these general principles translate into actual policies? For the purpose of this paper two main approaches are described. These appear to be most relevant as they affect the extent and the ways in which evidence is shaping governance reforms in the social protection sector.

4.2.1. Addressing Risk and Social Exclusion through a Rights-Based Approach

The MoLSP has committed itself to systemically improving the position of vulnerable individuals in Serbia. The PRSP (2003) has identified the following groups to be most vulnerable to poverty: the population in rural areas of southeast Serbia, the less educated and the unemployed,

children, the elderly, Roma, IDPs and refugees and persons with disabilities. Although the problems experienced are unique to each group, what seem to be common among them are the substantially higher rates of unemployment than among the average population.²⁶ In many of the cases, the multiplicity of causal factors negatively affects social status, making individuals vulnerable on several grounds. According to Bajec et al (2008), the majority of Roma in Serbia still live in traditional ethnically exclusive settlements. This way of life poses a number of drawbacks, often associated with their socio-economic exclusion from society. Roma children are extremely vulnerable, as they live in inappropriate housing conditions, without family incentives to pursue better life through education and formal employment.

Major efforts have been directed to establish services that recognize the diverse and specific needs these groups have. To date progress has been made — mainly through the formulation of specific strategies and legislations — to improve the position of vulnerable citizens, but a lot remains to be done to mitigate the risks completely. More recently, the phenomenon of social exclusion has been growing on the policy makers' agenda as it is becoming increasingly clear that mainstream poverty reduction initiatives often fail to help many vulnerable people because they suffer from both social and economic exclusion. Political marginalization and institutional barriers, which prevent their participation in society, are often the main causes of person's vulnerability. Social prejudice, cultural stereotyping also leads to various kinds of institutional and social discrimination. The Government is looking into adopting special efforts to address social exclusion within social protection. This requires an integrated approach to ensure access for all to the resources, rights and services needed for participation in society, preventing and addressing exclusion, and fighting all forms of discrimination leading to systemic marginalization.

4.2.2. Strengthening the Role of Local Governance through Decentralization Policies

The principle motivation for carrying out decentralization reform in the social protection sector is to increase efficiency, flexibility and innovation to enable better access to services and improved targeting. It can enable representation of the views and interests of marginalized groups in government policies regarding basic service provision. This is crucial in conflict-affected areas. The government is currently promoting a gradual transfer of ownership and responsibility to local authorities to ensure authorities are more deeply involved in the process of implementing the reforms. The effort is focused on building local capacity in the area of planning, implementing and monitoring social welfare services. Local governance actors are encouraged to develop partnerships between different stakeholders at the local level to deliver quality services. As decentralization can increase exclusion of certain socially vulnerable groups, control mechanisms at central level must also be strengthened, to ensure that fulfilment of rights and provision of services are non-discriminatory (Matkovic: 2006).

4.3. 'Fostering an Evidence-based Policy Culture'

At the beginning of this section, social protection was held up as a rare example of a sector in Serbia influenced by the evidence-based policy paradigm. This assertion will be explored further by mapping out the ways in which evidence has been collected and taken up in various policy processes, specifically looking at the role non-State actors play.²⁷ A few characteristics have been identified that differentiate the knowledge-policy dynamics within a social protection area from the cross-cutting governance themes discussed earlier.

First, in contrast to the cross-cutting governance dimensions, where efforts are instigated primarily by civil society, here the evidence-informed approach to policy-making has been State-led. Thus there is a clear demand for research and for improved policy-making more generally. This is partly affected by the need to devise effective solutions to tackle new social problems that have emerged in the past decade. The social exclusion phenomenon is the latest example.

²⁶ For example, within IDPs unemployment rates are two to three times higher, while 80percent of disabled citizens are unemployed (PRS: 2007).

²⁷ This section also documents the existing efforts of State actors to produce knowledge and shape reforms. Where relevant, an attempt is made to analyse governance knowledge with a specific reference to three cross-cutting governance dimensions: human rights, decentralisation and corruption.

Second, government has set up several institutional mechanisms to facilitate systematic production and collection of evidence and thus ensure knowledge is taken up in policy processes. Civil Society Advisory Committees (CSAC) and Social Innovation Funds are examples. Third, policy actors are more inclined to expand ownership of policy-making to civil society and accept the evidence that is coming from NGOs. Moreover, non-State actors within social policy have been more coordinated in their policy advocacy efforts. These trends are important, as they also influence the ways governance evidence shapes the social protection policies.

4.3.1. Governance Evidence and Sectoral Reforms

In the early period of reforms, policymakers had to deal with new issues but had only limited research on which to draw. The need to understand overall patterns of poverty and vulnerability created substantial demand for new knowledge. The period after 2001 was thus characterized by an increased interest in research among academic and government circles.²⁸ The paper turns to explore the main knowledge areas pursued by these actors, relevant to sector-based governance assessments.

- 1) **Human rights agenda, focus on vulnerable groups:** In order to develop responsive and effective social protection policy, an efficient information system had to be established to appraise the situation of vulnerable groups. Without the right knowledge about different population groups, it was impossible to plan accurately. The PRS document represented the first multi-disciplinary analysis of poverty with a special emphasis on the rights of vulnerable groups. The MoLSP commissioned a study entitled Poverty and Reform of Financial Support to the Poor (Bogićević et. al.: 2003). This served as a background study for the PRSP as it provided an in-depth insight into poverty trends and inequality and recommended reform of financial support to the poor. The study was using the data from the first LSMS conducted by RSO in 2002.

Although LSMS filled the data gap on identified vulnerable populations, the national statistical system did not secure the coverage of all vulnerable groups. Some were partially or completely outside of statistical reporting (e.g. people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, victims of family abuse and homeless persons). The precise and most comprehensive data on these individuals to date were collected by NGOs. In this regard, the government has recognized that non-State actors offer crucial expertise because of their direct contact and access to most vulnerable and marginalized groups (Markovic: 2008). Civil Society Advisory Committees (discussed above) have enabled more systematic communication and flow of information between civil society and policy makers involved in the design of PRS. The mechanism facilitated the inclusion of CSO research findings in policy design and proved an effective forum for civil society to raise awareness of certain issues and deepen understanding of issues affecting most vulnerable citizens. A more complete poverty profile and insight into social and economic risks was gathered as a result. Non-State knowledge actors continue to play an important role as agenda setters. A CSO depicted in the next example played a crucial role as data producer on the important issue of women's rights violations through domestic violence.

Box 7. Placing domestic violence on the policy-making agenda

Special attention has been paid by civil society to the improvement of the status of women and raising attention to the problem of domestic violence. The structural reforms introduced in Serbia since the transition, coupled with the general economic collapse and deterioration of social security systems, had adverse effects on women's empowerment, poor women in particular. There has been an evident strengthening of patriarchal values, which reinforced traditional gender roles within society (SDD: 2007). As a result, violence against women, including domes-

²⁸ There has been a proliferation of studies with a focus on poverty, inequality and social transfers (Bogićević et. al.: 2002, 2003), poverty of different vulnerable groups, e.g. Roma (Bjeloglav et. al.: 2007; UNDP: 2006) and refugees and displaced persons (UNDP: 2005, 2006; Cvejić and Babović: 2008).

tic violence and human trafficking, has also been on the rise (PRS: 2007). Basic information and records on abuse and family violence are provided by NGOs, while the State has no organized and integrated records on this phenomenon. One of the key actors working in this field is the Autonomous Women Center (AWC), which has been involved in analysis and trend identification for years. Much of its work focuses on analysis of the causes and effects of domestic violence, and the experience of those who directly provide assistance to victims. AWC has been lobbying State institutions to develop an integrated preventative approach to address this problem (e.g. better cooperation of social welfare and judicial bodies, establishment of round-the-clock call centres and support for urgent interventions). As a result of their consistent campaigning and support from other women's groups, the phenomenon of domestic violence has become more evident on policy agendas and domestic violence was introduced as a criminal act in 2002.

Source: PRS, 2007

- 2) **Human rights agenda, measuring social inclusion:** The MoLSP tries to promote the systematic investigation of linkages between rights and social and economic risks and vulnerabilities to inform social protection policies. For example, the National Institute for Social Protection was set up as a part of the overall effort to promote evidence-based policy-making in the sector. Its mandate is to strengthen research and professional capacities in the country necessary for the improvement of the welfare system. The institute proposes new research topics and methodologies to contribute to policy development, advises the MoLSP on existing and future policies and undertakes impact assessments. One of the key strategies is to pro-actively seek partnerships with government and NGO actors in order to produce policy-relevant research.

The NISP's most important work to date has been a project to define a set of indicators to standardise monitoring of the process of social exclusion (SE) in Serbia. This is part of the larger national initiative – driven by the PRS IFP – to define future policies to increase social inclusion (SI). Considering this topic has been under-researched in Serbia, it is essential to develop a detailed understanding of the experiences of marginalized people from mainstream society and try and identify the specific institutions and/or practices that perpetuate the unfair provision of services to these groups and hamper their realization of rights. The institute has prepared a draft framework to develop a methodology and process and adopt an institutional framework for monitoring SI in Serbia. The main objectives are to: identify the multi-dimensional status of socially excluded populations in Serbia, identify and recommend a group of indicators, and identify the existing data sources and point out gaps. Indicators will enable government to measure progress and better target inclusion policies.

Two local CSOs have also been engaged to assist in the study. SeConS, a research institute specialising in social policy, was responsible for qualitative research on social exclusion of vulnerable groups. The institute conducted participatory research with marginalized groups to investigate perceptions of the process of marginalization and to verify the validity of recommended indicators. CeSID conducted consultations with various stakeholders to verify findings. The study has considered the use of Leaken Indicators (LI), which are the EU standard indicators to measure social exclusion. LI broadly monitor four dimensions: income poverty, employment, health and education. What is important for our study is that two additional dimensions are currently under consideration in the Serbian case – social participation and social housing. If accepted, the social participation set of indicators will measure degree of political and cultural participation, access to justice, protection of rights, social networking and discrimination. These are all essential components of democratic governance.

Another interesting aspect is that 10 out of 16 basic Leaken Indicators are monitored already by RSO. Data for the remaining LI would be supplied mostly by independent researchers. This is one of the areas where the data housed in official institutions (e.g. RSO) can be further strengthened through partnership with other non-State actors, which are ideally positioned to produce and disseminate non-quantitative evidence (using qualitative

and participatory methods). This will also create an opportunity to triangulate evidence and bring together official statisticians with other in-country producers and users of evidence in order to better address trends and respond to societal needs.

- 3) **Evidence-based decentralization and anti-corruption policies, strengthening local governance:** Systematic research has been used to shape the pace and nature of the decentralization process of social welfare. Here too, civil society actors have played an important role in advocating for reforms. The social policy department within CLDS has been assessing the situation in social welfare at the local level for years. Its 2006 publication *Decentralisation of Social Welfare*, for example, was based on empirical research conducted within an EU-funded project. To assess the situation, interviews were conducted in 30 municipalities in Serbia, covering 20 percent of the total population of the country. The overall sample included both large municipalities and smaller, less developed and underdeveloped municipalities. The sample targeted also those municipalities that had a high percentage of refugees and IDPs and Roma (CLDS: 2006: 38). A valuable insight was gained about local stakeholders' level of knowledge on the overall situation, problems in the area of social welfare within their municipality, types of activities undertaken and extent of cooperation and interaction between different actors at the local level. The situational analysis extended policymakers' knowledge on the existing level of decentralization in Serbia and on opportunities, preconditions and barriers in continuing the process of transferring responsibilities for social welfare to the municipal level. Key findings reinforced the government's approach to gradually transfer mandates to the local level.
- 4) **Monitoring the implementation of welfare reforms:** Another important area of governance assessments is the evaluation of service delivery. The most important actor in this regard has been the SIF, a unique mechanism linking local project experience to national social welfare reform. Since its establishment, SIF has been engaging six NGOs to undertake the work of monitoring and evaluation. Their role is to monitor and assess the process and impact of SIF's interventions and its contribution to the implementation of the social welfare reform strategy. Pilot experiences are analyzed and lessons translated into policy recommendations. Decision makers are encouraged to actively incorporate the tested approaches into the regular social protection system. Following the success of the monitoring and evaluation initiatives, SIF has been working with the MoLSP to replicate its monitoring model for the Fund for Financing Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. For the first time, the Ministry has recruited 10 NGOs in the capacity of Monitoring and Evaluation Units. The model has been accepted as a long-term assessment mechanism. SIF also engages external resources to evaluate the quality of its service delivery and monitor client satisfaction (see box 8).

The point needs to be made that – while in both of the cases a general reference to the State of corruption and its implication for social welfare at the local level is made – there are no empirical efforts to assess the impact of corruption on social service delivery. It appears that monitoring of corruption within the social protection sector more specifically is currently not a priority for either civil society or government.

Box 8. Beneficiary assessment of social care services in Serbia, 2006

In 2006, SeConS undertook a beneficiary assessment of SIF's social welfare services. The goal of the project was to ascertain the level of user satisfaction, identify achievements and difficulties and evaluate the contribution of the SIF programme to the well-being of its clients. The survey sample included over 400 beneficiaries using various benefits (e.g. daily care centres for the elderly, children in foster care and youth with behavioural problems, home care services for the elderly and shelters for victims of violence). Drawing on experiences from previous beneficiary assessment surveys, SeConS designed a research methodology that enabled a strong participatory approach and better opportunities for beneficiaries to describe and explain their satisfaction and recommend improvements. The fieldwork was conducted by the NGOs engaged as SIF's Monitoring and Evaluation Units.

Source: Adapted from SeConS website, <http://www.secons.net/index.php?sid=2andlng=1>

4.4. Factors Affecting the Likelihood of Non-State Actors Influencing Social Protection Reforms

This analysis has highlighted the ways in which the social protection sector in Serbia can be seen as an example of good practice for enlarging national ownership of sectoral governance reforms by actively involving civil society in the knowledge production process. What are the key factors that have made this possible? Reference to the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) framework (focusing on evidence, context, linkages and external influences) helps to tease out these dynamics.

4.4.1. National Context and External Factors

The shift in the *national context* has been the most striking factor influencing the demand for evidence on poverty and vulnerability in Serbia. The magnitude of problems inherited from the past generated a pressing demand to find solutions. At the same time, the regime change opened up a policy window for actors to envisage new approaches to social protection. In many situations, policy makers had to deal with completely new issues. This triggered demand for knowledge production. Although social protection is an issue that potentially affected a large swathe of the population, there was limited knowledge of the specific vulnerabilities of marginalized groups such as children, women, the elderly and the Roma. The need for specialized knowledge and know-how on how to target such groups has increased demand for expertise from the political domain. This shaped opportunities for CSOs with expertise in this area to access government funding and provided scope for research to have an impact on policy. Social exclusion is the most recent example of political institutions influencing knowledge production as funding for research is provided in line with government strategies. It is important to highlight the role that *external factors* play here as well. The goal of EU accession is currently driving the focus in Serbia on issues of social exclusion. Countries wishing to accede to the EU will need to demonstrate a commitment to tackling social exclusion.²⁹ Recent attempts to improve the evidence base for social inclusion policies shows that governmental commitment to EU accession pushed the issue of social exclusion up on the political agenda, creating a growing demand for comprehensive and reliable data and expertise from CSOs.

Another important factor facilitating an evidence-informed approach to policy-making is the existence of the *political consensus* on the strategic directions of reforms. The political schism characterizing more contentious governance issues like transitional justice is largely absent from the social welfare domain. Rather, there is a high level of commitment by the political elite to curb social injustice. Political actors to a large extent share the traditional values and norms of social solidarity and equality, which makes social welfare a very important issue in Serbia. Begovic and Mijatovic (2005) claim, for example, that a majority of citizens are of egalitarian orientation. This has significantly shaped the government's choices post-2000 in defining and implementing various policies. Economic security and living standards have traditionally been key priorities for people. Consequently, the government is still expected to play an active role in solving social problems (Mihailovic et al.: 2004). Because the policy domain is less volatile to political confrontations, policy actors are more open to research as well as the evidence supplied by civil society. This is not to say that contention is fully absent from the social protection sector — recently, the elderly demanded space to push for more equitable social protection measures (e.g. an increase in old age pensions).

Key democratic governance values, such as transparency, accountability and greater responsiveness, have been actively promoted within the sector. PRS IFP, the Institute of Social Protection and SIF are important *drivers from within*, committed to improving governance performance and facilitating inclusive ownership of policies. For these actors, evidence-based pol-

²⁹ Achieving greater social cohesion by 2010 is one of the EU's principle aims of social policy adopted in the Lisbon agenda (Bajec et al.: 2008).

icy-making is seen as a strategy that not only ensures better policies but also contributes to the making of a more transparent and responsible government (Markovic: 2008). The policy space for social protection debates is thus generally open — citizens and CSOs are invited to participate in consultative processes. In contrast with human rights, justice or corruption areas, relationships between CSOs and government are rarely tense and constructive. Moreover, policy makers are prepared to recognize the range of roles non-State knowledge actors can play.

For example, it is largely accepted that CSOs play a watchdog role and monitor government activities. As we have discussed already, CSOs focus their efforts on effective implementation of existing services, to ensure that the government lives up to its commitments to tackle poverty and vulnerability. Government's positive attitude in this regard is captured in the following quote from SIF: 'We believe that our way of working with NGOs that are acting in the capacity of M&E agencies represents a new way of understanding the monitoring role in society and opens up a field of cooperation, which can help in further development and profiling of NGO sector in Serbia.'

4.4.2. Evidence and Linkages

Owing to the cross-sectoral nature of social protection policies and programmes, there has been a proliferation of non-State knowledge actors. These include proponents of participatory policy-making and decentralized services in general, gender equality advocates (especially around protection against domestic violence), children's rights proponents (especially the United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF) and advocates for Roma rights. In each of these cases, a number of NGOs and think tanks are involved in knowledge production. This means that CSOs are important suppliers of governance evidence in this sector.

One of the major roles of non-State actors is providing situational analyses at the local level and **mapping of the needs of vulnerable populations**. NGOs have a heightened and in-built sensitivity to the needs of beneficiaries because their representatives often belong to beneficiary groups themselves (e.g. people with disabilities lead NGOs), or are legitimate representatives of beneficiaries (e.g. parents of children with disabilities). Qualitative research methodologies applied by non-State actors enable in-depth insight into the situation of these groups and generate knowledge needed to inform policy. NGOs and research organizations have already been very active in developing methodologies to identify the situation of vulnerable groups. Unlike economic policy sectors, qualitative evidence is well-respected by policy makers in this field. Qualitative approaches/participatory research methodologies enable information to be gathered about vulnerability and about patterns of discrimination that form the basis of exclusion. Grassroots knowledge is seen as a vital part of improving the design and effectiveness of targeted social protection interventions. A brief analysis of the methodologies, however, points to a lack of attention to ensuring that collected data are gender sensitive. This is consistent with findings across governance areas.³⁰ A participatory evaluative approach is the preferred method to monitor and assess service quality and its impact on service users.

Finally, institutional mechanisms such as the PRS NGO Focal Point and SIF have facilitated development of the **strong linkages** between government and civil society over the years. These modalities have encouraged collaboration between research and policy worlds. Both have improved access to information, which has helped CSOs prioritize their research and advocacy.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

By exploring the State of governance evidence production and usage, this paper's authors aimed to produce a first map of governance assessment efforts in Serbia. In this final section, some conclusions are drawn from the analysis and some implications for establishing a more inclusive evidence-based process in governance reforms. The analysis of cross-cutting govern-

³⁰ It should be noted, however, that a more gender-sensitive approach to research is emerging in Serbia. An important example is a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, carried out by the Republic Statistics Office since 1995. This survey collects important socioeconomic data on the situation of women and children in the areas of food, (reproductive) health, child protection and environment.

ance dimensions has found that a national monitoring system to track the progress of reforms currently does not exist in Serbia. The most important obstacles to developing an evidence-based culture lie at the political level — frequent political divisions, institutional pressures, vested interests and weak policy-making capacities are the main impeding factors. As a result, there is a strong conceptual barrier to arriving at a national broadly shared definition of democratic governance for the purposes of measuring its quality and assessing progress.

The situation appears much more promising in the social protection sector. Here, governance evidence does not only shape reforms but also actively promotes the emerging inclusive and systematic approach to monitoring reforms. State and civil society knowledge actors play an equal role in generating evidence and the institutional mechanisms are in place to help align findings of assessments with social protection policies. The most significant drivers of the positive change seem to be the elite's commitment to curbing social injustice, a political consensus on the directions of the reforms and modalities that encourage cooperation. As this was a preliminary assessment only, it is proposed that future systematic efforts be undertaken to analyse the specific drivers in more detail. The lessons about good practice may be useful for other actors trying to affect changes in their work.

Another key finding is that non-State actors are important players in governance reforms in Serbia. Throughout the study, specific cases have been identified where think tanks, research institutes and advocacy NGOs are the main and sometime only suppliers of evidence. Broadly speaking, they contributed to policy-making by producing baseline information about various governance dimensions largely absent in the State data, directing attention to emerging problems, highlighting potential solutions and providing the impetus for new legislation and discursive policy changes. Their most important roles, however, within both general governance dimensions and social welfare, are as agenda-setters and providers of public space for the voices of vulnerable and excluded groups, whose experiences are usually missing from official data. These actors help marginalized citizens increase their 'visibility' and relevance in policy-making.

At the same time, the systematic uptake of CSO knowledge in the cross-cutting areas is hampered by the lack of institutional mechanisms. In contrast with the social protection sector, knowledge is not regularly collected and institutionalized into policy-making. Moreover, presence of political contention and the influence of economic interests seem to be prominent factors affecting the likelihood of research uptake. In order to maximize their influencing strategies, it is essential that actors acknowledge the presence of these factors and tailor their influencing strategies to engage in value-charged policy debates. In the case of transitional justice policy, where the channels between local actors and policymakers are largely hampered, domestic actors should mobilize transnational alliances to have more influence on policy in Serbia.

Much credit should be given to non-State knowledge actors and government champions working in Serbia today as they continue to exert influence on governance processes. However, more work remains to be done to improve the enabling environment in which these actors operate. Specific efforts should focus on:

- Promoting greater awareness of the importance of governance assessments among policymakers and evidence-based policy-making in general;
- Adopting broad institutional mechanisms that will facilitate an open public dialogue and cooperation between government and civil society across policy sectors;
- Making policy processes more transparent and providing ongoing access to information and space for CSO contribution;
- Putting effort into developing CSOs' research skills to increase their legitimacy, effectiveness and credibility, with particular attention paid to the importance is strengthening capacities to generate gender-sensitive and pro-poor data;
- Boosting institutional capacities of policy-making actors at both individual and system level by introducing incentives to promote research use;

- Securing support from donors willing to help by providing incentives and pressuring governments to ensure space for CSO engagement in policy as well as funding for policy research.

Returning to the main premise from the beginning of the paper, democratic governance needs to be considered a crucial strategy for preserving peace and improving development in Serbia. State-led governance assessments can assist in this process. The systematic monitoring of the quality of governance would not only improve State-building efforts but also provide critical information for early warning/conflict prevention interventions. Likewise, grassroots ownership of the assessments would create a platform for greater citizen engagement, increasing the transparency and accountability of government towards its electorate. As one of the key threats to peace in Serbia is the lack of social cohesion, national ownership of governance assessments would create important opportunities to bring together different parties to dialogue and thus rebuild trust between citizens and government. As the case study on social protection demonstrates, such a strategy is not only desirable but also very viable, provided there is strong political will.

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ANNEX 1: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Note: The interviews were conducted in November and December 2008

Name	Position	Organization
1. Prof. Damjanovic Mijat	Director	PALGO Centre
2. Ms Filipovic Jasna	Director	CRNPS
3. Dr. Goati Vladimir	President	Transparency Serbia
4. Ms Kovacevic Vera	Consultant, Social Protection Centre	CLDS
5. Ms Lazarevic Milena	Advisor	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Government
6. Ms Licht Sonia	President	Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence
7. Ms Manic Jelena	Project Officer, Capacity Development for Accountable Governance Cluster	UNDP Serbia
8. Ms Markovic Jelena	M&E Coordinator	PRS IFP
9. Ms Milivojevic Zdenka	Director	Argument
10. Ms Milojevic Slavica	Head of Department, Information, Promotion and Support	Republic Institute for Social Protection
11. Mr Mojsilovic Milos	Projects Coordinator	CeSID
12. Mr Nenadic Nemanja	Programme Director	Transparency Serbia
13. Ms Dragana Djokovic Papic	Head of Division, Social Standards and Indicators	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
14. Mr Paunovic Marko	MPA, Executive Director	CLDS
15. Mr Popovic Aleksandar	Programme Manager	SCTM
16. Ms Puric Olivera	Team Leader, Capacity Development for Accountable Governance Cluster	UNDP Serbia
17. Ms Radojkovic Jelena	Program Manager	Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
18. Mr Sarandrea Livio	Senior Coordinator, Judicial and Legal Reform	The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
19. Mr Sestovic Lazar	Country Economist	World Bank (Serbia)
20. Ms Veljkovic Lela	Programme Manager	Republic Institute for Social Protection

ANNEX 2: ANALYSIS OF SELECTED GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES

	Assessment	Purpose of the assessment	Type of evidence collected	Data gathering method	Poor/gender sensitive
Decentralization and local governance	Monitoring Work of Municipal Assemblies URL: www.cesid.org/lt/articles/programi/istrazivanje-i-analize/aktuelni-projekti/ (Please note the document is in Serbian language only)	To monitor the work of municipal assemblies including these dimensions: quality of decision-making process; quality of inter-governmental relationships; ability of citizens to exercise their rights; and citizen satisfaction.	Both objective and subjective data collected. Subjective data include experience-based and internal perception-based evidence. Data sources also entail events-based data usually collected through participant observation.	Qualitative and quantitative methods: research organization undertakes participant observation, key informant interviews and document analysis. Document sources: legal and official policy documents; assembly reports (e.g. meeting minutes), media reports, surveys.	No
	Good Governance Matrix URL: as above (Please note the document is in Serbian language only)	To assess the level of development of central and local governance agencies looking at efficiency and effectiveness of government work, as well as responsiveness and accountability of State institutions towards citizens.	Details not available.	Details not available.	N/A
Anti-corruption	National Integrity Systems Survey URL: www.transparentnost.org.rs/eng-lish/ACTIVITIES/NIS/index.html	Survey aims to identify vulnerabilities within the 11 'pillars' on which fighting against corruption rests: the executive power; the legislative power; the judiciary; the Public Prosecutor's Office; the police; public services; the Auditor General; anti-corruption agencies (commissions); the Ombudsman; the media; and civil society. Based on the diagnostics, concrete measures are defined to guide public sector reform.	Expert-based evidence. Both objective data collected through official policy documents and laws supported by perception-based evidence – both internal and external collected through surveys of expert individuals.	Public sector diagnostics are performed. The first part is a questionnaire in which the experts provide answers to questions formulated on the basis of the Source Book 2000, published by Transparency International. In the second, narrative, part, the authors elaborate on the answers provided in the questionnaire (for each of the 11 sectors), highlighting the main findings and giving specific recommendations at the end.	No

<p>Study of Corruption in Serbia URL: www.clds.rs/pdf-e/e-korupcija.pdf</p>	<p>Study explores causes, nature and main consequences of corruption in Serbia, looking at legal, public administration and health sectors. Based on the findings, recommends a strategy for fighting corruption.</p>	<p>Single study. Objective evidence is collected through desk-based analysis. Data are supplemented by both perception and experience-based evidence of general public.</p>	<p>Methodology included: document analysis and public opinion surveys engaging both the general public and private sector representatives – to explore their perceptions on causes and effects of corruption; the fairness and effectiveness of the justice system; and relative transparency of public administration.</p>	<p>No disaggregated data, although the survey sample is gender stratified.</p>
<p>Study on State Capture and Widespread Corruption in Serbia URL: http://www.ceps.be</p>	<p>Aim is to analyse the causes and mechanisms of the phenomenon of 'State capture' – an example of grand corruption in Serbia – including the nexus between political (party) elites and privileged business elites.</p>	<p>Study utilized both objective data and public perceptions/opinions to support the claims. Internal perception-based evidence is collected.</p>	<p>Methodology included: document analysis and public opinion surveys. Public perceptions were collected on: (i) their concerns about corruption and public confidence in the main State institutions; (ii) judgment about the existing criteria for job allocation for the leading positions in public office; (iii) tolerance and awareness of corruption in public offices and recommendations on the most efficient strategy to fight corruption in Serbia.</p>	<p>No disaggregated data, although the survey sample is gender stratified.</p>

Human Rights	<p>Human Rights Monitoring and Reporting URL: www.bqcentar.org.yu</p> <p>(Please note the report is in Serbian language only)</p>	<p>Assessing the activities of legal and judiciary institutions in Serbia, focusing on organized crime, war crimes, discrimination and domestic violence.</p>	<p>Implementation evidence. Both primary and secondary data sources. Primary sources include events-based data and narrative reports. Mainly relying on objective data.</p>	<p>Desk study: document analysis of official policy documentation and State reports, media and CSO reports working on human rights issues.</p> <p>Narrative reports: continuous and systematic collection of data during the year as well as participant observation and fieldwork.</p>	<p>No.</p>
Social Protection	<p>Decentralization of Social Welfare in Serbia URL: www.clds.org.rs/newsite/goga_knjiga_engleski.pdf</p>	<p>To assess the situation in social welfare at the local level to inform the reform policies. Specifically, it examined local government knowledge of local problems and demands, types of activities undertaken and the extent of cooperation between various actors.</p>	<p>Study utilized both objective data and public perceptions/opinions to support the claims. Internal perception-based evidence is collected.</p>	<p>This is a single study incorporating both desk-based and empirical research. Desk study included document analysis of international and local literature sources. Survey included interviews with representatives from local government and NGOs.</p>	<p>Focus on vulnerable groups; not gender-disaggregated data.</p>
	<p>Beneficiary Assessment of Social Care Services URL: http://www.secons.net/index.php?sid=16andlng=1</p>	<p>To ascertain the level of user satisfaction, identify achievements and difficulties and evaluate the contribution of the SIF programme to the well-being of its clients.</p>	<p>Evaluation evidence; perception-based data.</p>	<p>Beneficiary assessment surveys. Participatory evaluation was conducted based on the opinions/ perceptions of 400 clients using the services.</p>	<p>Focus on vulnerable groups; not gender-disaggregated data.</p>

