strands of each approach co-exist. And to deal with particular issues and settings, different combinations of elements will be required. In some cases, deliberative approaches may be effective in including the views of marginalised people. In others, more antagonistic politics that challenge corporate political economy through organised social movements, for instance, may be required. A pluralistic approach that recognises the value of and draws selectively across different approaches, grounded always in an appreciation of political history and context, is thus essential to understand and build pathways to Sustainability in a dynamic world.

Case 1: **Networked, hybrid governance in practice: the case of health**
Since the 1970s, health development strategies have largely relied on standard models assuming state organisation and management of health services and their delivery. Yet in many parts of Africa and Asia, these have proved unworkable. Instead, a wide diversity of pluralistic health systems has emerged: health providers confound and mix state, community, formal and informal structures, and almost all public sector employees engage in market activities. Meanwhile, trans-national networks linking patients' groups, pharmaceutical companies and international actors are emerging as crucial in pushing for health service reforms.

More reading

Understanding Governance; pathways to sustainability STEPS Working Paper 2 by Melissa Leach, Gerry Bloom, Adrian Ely, Paul Nightingale, Ian Scoones, Esha Shah and Adrian Smith (2007)
ISBN – 13: 978 185864 651 0

Pathways to sustainability: an overview of the STEPS Centre approach by Melissa Leach, Ian Scoones and Andy Stirling.
ISBN – 13: 978 1858646561

For other titles in this series (agriculture, water, health, dynamics, governance, designs) see: www.steps-centre.org/publications

Credits
This briefing was written by Melissa Leach and edited by Julia Day

About the STEPS Centre
The STEPS Centre (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) is an interdisciplinary global research and policy engagement hub uniting development studies with science and technology studies. We aim to develop a new approach to understanding, action and communication on sustainability and development in an era of unprecedented dynamic change. The STEPS Centre is based at the Institute of Development Studies and SPRU Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Sussex with a network of partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Find out more: www.steps-centre.org

Contact us
STEPS Centre, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261,
ask for Harriet Le Bris
Email: steps-centre@ids.ac.uk
Web: www.steps-centre.org

STEPS centre

Governance and Pathways to Sustainability

From STEPS Working Paper 2: Understanding Governance: pathways to sustainability

STEPS briefing 2

In today's highly dynamic world, development challenges involve addressing complex interactions between people and their social processes, and rapidly changing technologies and ecologies.

Which directions or pathways such systems move through over time - and how far these are sustainable, resilient, poverty-reducing or socially just, for instance - is strongly shaped by political processes and institutions, or governance, in its broadest terms. If we are to understand patterns of change, as well as to attempt to influence them through policy or practice, then governance is central.

Approaches to understanding governance are highly varied, reflecting diverse histories, theories and ideologies. And particular ways

Anti-poverty campaigners, Kenya / Sven Torfinn / Panos

of understanding governance often support, and are supported by, the actual governance practices of policy-makers, state agents and organisations.

Many mainstream approaches are, we suggest, fundamentally unsuited to deal with the dynamic realities of the contemporary world. Alone they are inappropriate for developing effective forms of governance that can shape pathways to Sustainability. But combining their insights with several more recent approaches offers ways forward.

From government to networked governance

Many dominant approaches to governance can be traced to the experience of advanced market economies during a period of relative stability, in the second half of the twentieth century. These mainstream models focus on state-led policy and regulation or 'government', often linked to top-down, linear assumptions about planning and progress.

Since the 1980s neo-liberal reforms and the 'new public management' have emphasised shifts towards a greater use of markets, especially in delivering public services. This is linked with neo-liberal agendas in development and the Washington consensus, with its emphasis on free competition, trade and capital movement.

Despite variations in political leaning, these mainstream approaches tend to view states, corporations and civil society largely as distinct, bounded organisations and interest groups, interacting mainly in formal arenas and spaces. Yet such models fail to fit many societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and have been fundamentally challenged by contemporary processes of globalisation, social, economic and technological change.

So instead of realities conforming neatly to the assumptions of mainstream models, we now see new emergent forms of 'networked governance' that are responsive to the dynamic complexity of different contexts. Key features include:

- Complex intermingling, blurring and hybrids of state, market, civil society and community institutions, with networks and alliances forming within and beyond them
- Dispersed power operating through networks, as well as seen in terms of centralised sovereignty and material political economy
- Multi-level governance arrangements that link local, national and global institutions, with networks often cross-cutting local and global scales
- Messy politics and bureaucracies in practice, with day-to-day negotiations, informal processes, discretion, and street- and field-level bureaucrats often crucial to outcomes
- Importance of history, culture and context, in which governance arrangements emerge through particular political histories and path-dependencies, and political culture shapes practices and styles of decision-making.

Contemporary settings pose two further sets of challenges, suggesting a need to link understandings of networked governance with further approaches:

Dealing with uncertainty: towards adaptive governance

Development amidst complex, dynamic systems involves many uncertainties, unintended effects, and possibilities of surprise. Many mainstream approaches to government and governance either ignore these, treating the world as stable and predictable, or treat them more narrowly as calculable, manageable risks.

"Many mainstream approaches to governance are fundamentally unsuited to deal with the dynamic realities of the contemporary world"

Community meeting, Guinea / Giacomo Pirozzi / Panos

"Situations of rapid change and high uncertainty need different, adaptive and flexible approaches to governance and institutions"

Yet situations of rapid change and high uncertainty suggest the need for different approaches to governance and institutions. These need to be adaptive and flexible, to incorporate precaution, learning and reflection, and to be 'experimental', focused less on securing definite, stable outcomes than on guiding systems in favourable directions, within a constant process of learning and adaptation.

Dealing with the politics of knowledge: towards deliberative and reflexive governance

Much mainstream governance and policy relies on official expertise or so-called 'objective evidence' or 'sound science'. Yet on closer inspection, development and policy problems usually involve multiple, contrasting and competing forms of knowledge, as different people and groups understand the world and 'frame' problems in ways that reflect their positions, experiences and values.

Responding to the politics of knowledge requires governance approaches that recognise the interplay of knowledge and power in supporting some views while excluding others; that promote the inclusion of diverse knowledge bases - including citizens' knowledge and experiential expertise - through participation and deliberation, and that encourage reflexivity, through which all actors recognise the positioned and partial nature of their particular view.

Governance of and for pathways to Sustainability

A shift from 'mainstream' state-society-corporate politics, to networked and then to adaptive, deliberative and reflexive governance is not a linear history. In practice,