The kind of democracy that we find in Malawi today, according to my results, is a democracy at top-level, managed by a few people, an elite democracy. Democracy in Malawi has not fostered participation and enthusiasm among women in the rural areas. At the same time, democracy has been unable to satisfy people's basic needs. Therefore women in Malawi feel alienated from the democratic institutions; the institutions are not relevant for their everyday struggle for survival, for their children's future and for a decent way of living.

My main concerns are therefore:

1. The kind of democracy we find in Malawi is not what the women think is democracy, and therefore it becomes irrelevant for them;
2. The kind of democracy we find in Malawi is not able to reduce poverty more effectively than the former regime, at least partly because poor people are not able to participate;
3. And I wonder: for how long will poor people, in my case rural women, support a democracy that does not seem relevant to them?

If we are interested in promoting democracy, because we think – and I do – that democracy is the best governing option, we have to support democracy that is substantial and gives ordinary people control over their lives. And they do not get control only by voting in elections. People have to be given the chance and opportunity to decide for themselves. I think participation from below is the key to substantial democracy; through participation, people can find their own ways to make democracy real, and they can take control over the means to development.

Note

[1] After Huntington, S., *The Third Way. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1991.

Assessing Problems and Options of Democratisation

Olle Törnquist

One of the most remarkable paradoxes in the last few decades is that a wave of democratisation has coincided with globalisation and decaying statist projects that have undermined much of the earlier attempts at promoting democracy in developing countries by, for instance, hollowing out nation states, weakening organised labour, and undermining programmatic political parties. Hence it comes as no great surprise that both standard efforts to compensate for those harsh conditions by international intervention in favour of human rights and pacts among the moderate elite (at the expense of reactionary hawks as well as 'rebellious masses'), and opposite efforts among popular oriented groups to counter globalisation and engineer 'empowerment and participation', have met with great difficulties.[1]

In the world's largest democracy, India, for instance, the people in general are increasingly active in elections while the middle classes are not. The dominating groups have introduced market driven politics and reinvented reactionary forms of democracy, including manipulation of religious and ethnic loyalties. In the world's second largest democracy, the USA, moreover, few people cast their vote and a majority seem to believe in exporting democracy through the barrel of a gun (like Maoists once thought that war was simply the extension of politics). And in the world's third largest (infant) democracy, the post-Suharto Indonesia, ordinary people are increasingly disillusioned with the new rights and institutions. Often, these do not make sense even to people who really like to use human rights based democracy to promote their interests and alternative ideas. In other words: there is an apparent risk that democracy becomes irrelevant. Even the students who did away with Suharto lost out immediately as elections came on top of the agenda. Similarly, the south Indian activists behind a most

impressive attempt at saving and renewing Kerala's internationally idolised model of human development through decentralisation and participatory planning from below also stumbled in the process of institutionalisation and elections, as 'conventional' administrators and politicians, including from the officially supportive leftist parties, entered into the field.

This seems to be a general pattern. But why is it so? Why have both the elitist democratisation and the popular efforts at alternative institution building not been more successful? A year ago, I made a brief presentation at the Uppsala Conference on *Democracy, Power and Partnership* of early results from a comparative study during twelve years in three specific contexts (the Philippines, Indonesia and the Indian state of Kerala) about general theories of democratisation, particularly on the role of popular movement. Hence, we may now refer the interested reader to the conference report[2] or to my little book,[3] and proceed directly to the policy implications. Very briefly, these were as follows:

1. The standard crafting of instant elite democracies – including the unqualified promotion of civil society – has not been very successful. Support should rather be directed to specific popular pro-democratic efforts. These have proved more genuine and the pro-democrats involved must nevertheless be regarded as necessary (though not sufficient) forces in any meaningful process of democratisation.
2. Such popular oriented efforts, however, have usually stumbled over two major problems to which one must pay close attention : (a) that of combating social and political fragmentation, and (b) that of making their pro-democratic work and activism in civil society more politically significant by both connecting civil and political action and the work at local and central levels. Support should primarily be given to efforts at overcoming these special problems.
3. This means turning against the current depoliticisation and technocratisation of democratisation, both on part of the Right and the Left. We should speak up against attempts at exporting and crafting ideal rights and institutions without considering that these must make sense within different contexts of people, interests, and power relations. Democratisation and democracy is about power and politics. And this, thus, calls for concrete studies of concrete situations, even beyond the most ideal blueprints and elegant theories.

The remaining crucial question, then, is how we should proceed from those problems and demands for difficult and time-consuming studies? Only a year after having presented the results, I am bold enough to put forward a tentative proposal for your consideration. That proposal is not just based on my own comparative work. It has also grown out of a Sida/SAREC sponsored research project with *and* on the democracy movement in Indonesia that I have been involved in since the mid-90s. At a conference in Jakarta in January 2002 (with additional support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs/the Human Rights Dialogue with Indonesia), concerned scholars and campaigners entrusted a task force with finding out the best way of proceeding from our results so far and the challenges for the democracy movement.

At the same conference, there was broad agreement on the need for a fresh and unifying agenda in order to make democratisation more meaningful to people. But the participants also agreed that there was insufficient knowledge. Most actors (Indonesian and foreign) seemed to rely on their own assumptions, beliefs, priorities, and influence. And the available sources were often contradictory. To move ahead, therefore, one needs more reliable and, thus, more generally acceptable facts – so that democratisation can be supported on the basis of the primacy of the argument instead of power and beliefs. Ideally, the pro-democrats should be able to say: "these are the real problems and options according to the best available information; if something is seriously wrong with those findings or if anyone has better sources that point in other directions, please come forward; otherwise we cannot see why priority should not be given to the problems and options that have thus been identified".

Consequently we set out to design and implement a series of both theoretically informed and empirically grounded assessments of the actual (hindrances) obstacles and possibilities.

Not substantive but substantial democratisation

A typical answer to the question of what is wrong with the current effort at democratisation in Indonesia and elsewhere is that common people do not feel that they benefit from democracy: 'democracy is just formal, not substantive'. This, in my experience, is premature. The focus on outcome negates the actual importance of democracy as such 'even' for vulnerable people: that democratic rules of the game may open up some space for their own efforts and prevent the resourceful people from making use of their raw powers. Increasingly many scholars agree with e.g. David Beetham[4] that such democratic rules of the game should not be defined on the basis of institutions that change over time and context, but in accordance with the basic principles and values involved: popular control over collectively binding decisions on matters of common concern in a country or an association by people who in this respect are equals. Of course

many of us would also like to have justice in a more general sense and equality in many more aspects of life. But if one aims at reaching all good things in life first and directly, what is then the need for time-consuming, frustrating, and always a bit 'dirty' democracy?

The bottom line, instead, I suggest, is that democracy and democratisation must be substantial in terms of people's (and not just the elite's) capacity to make meaningful use of the rights and institutions involved. The level of this substantiality may differ, but for a start there must be – or democratisation must promote – basic political equality and popular capacity to use democratic rights and institutions that cover critical and not just symbolic parts of what people have in common in a given society. Indeed this only refers to a sufficiently wide public sphere that may be more or less political. Hence it is far from the equality and justice within all aspects of life and all parts of society that many of us also like to see. Yet, substantial democracy and democratisation may be a way of achieving much of that general justice and equality.

The major dimensions of democratisation

Given that focus on the problems and options of substantial democracy and democratisation, we need information within three major areas:

1. The actual *state of democracy*, both in terms of the quality of the rights and institutions and their scope (to what extent they cover vital matters in society).
2. The vital *actors' relation to democracy*, including if they make use of and improve the rights and institutions or ignore them.
3. The vital *actors' capacity to make more or less use of democracy.*

1. The state of democracy

To seek information on the actual state of democracy, we need to disaggregate democracy beyond the common but arbitrary and biased indicators that, for instance, were applied and combined in the recent UNDP report on democracy.[5] The best and increasingly widely accepted attempt in this direction is by David Beetham. His approach crystallised in the course of conducting so-called democratic audits and then refining and extending them for general use in co-operation with International IDEA.[6] As already indicated, Beetham has fruitfully distinguished between the universal aims of democracy – popular control and political equality –[7] and the more or less contextual means to implement them. This makes it possible to avoid both overgeneralisations and cultural relativism. Further, Beetham and his collaborators have combined

democracy and human rights thus giving precise meaning to what may be called 'liberal democracy' minus implicit assumptions that Western liberalism and free market economies are necessary prerequisites. Most importantly, Beetham's team has disaggregated and conceptualised human rights based democracy by identifying 85 kinds of rights and institutions that should be rather generally acceptable around the world. Simultaneously, they have thus opened up for studies of not just the mere existence of various versions in different settings but also of their quality. Democracy is not a question of either/or but of the degrees to which the means support the aims.

In addition to the quality, however, we argue, one also needs systematic information about the scope of the rights and institutions. How widely and deeply do they apply with regard to vital public concerns – geographically and within their subject matters? This is in order to know, for instance, if we talk of a widely or narrowly defined public and political sector, and whether it is a so-called choiceless democracy or not.

To be able to also handle this additional aspect of scope, one may reformulate, regroup, try to simplify and thus reduce some of Beetham's rights and institutions (plus add a few missing factors).[8] We have brought down the numbers by almost half and arrived at the following 35 rights and institutions to be assessed for both quality and scope:

I. **Citizenship, Law and Rights:** *(a) citizenship:* equal citizenship; minority and immigrant/refugee rights; citizen conflict moderation; *(b) universal law and rights*: upholding of universal law and rights; *(c) rule of law and justice*: subordination of government and public officials to the rule of law; equal and secure access to justice and independent courts and judiciary; *(d) civil and political rights:* individual freedom from violence and fear; freedom of speech, assembly and organisation; freedom of trade unions; freedom of religion, language and culture; *(e) economic and social rights*: gender equality; children's rights; right to work, social security, food, shelter, clean water and basic health; right to basic education (including on rights and obligations); 'good' corporate governance and business regulation in the public interest.

II. **Representative and Accountable Government:** *(a) free and fair elections* (regular competitive popular elections plus open and just registration of voters, candidates, parties and voting procedures plus competitor's fair chances to communicate and participate) and *(b) democratic political parties (equivalents)*: freedom of parties to form, mobilise and campaign for office; parties' reflection of vital opinions, issues and interests

among people; party independence of ethnic, religious and language interests; party-independence of money politics and powerful special interests; members' control of parties and parties' accountability to their constituencies; parties' ability to form and run government; *(c) open and accountable government:* government's openness and accountability to the people and representatives; central and local administrations' openness and accountability to the public and representatives; democratic decentralisation to the level that is most appropriate to people affected; subordination, openness, accountability of military and police to elected government and public scrutiny; government and administration's freedom from and struggle against militias, warlordism, and mafias; governments and administration's freedom from external sub-ordination (minus the UN and international law); separation of office from party advantage, special business interests and office holders' family interests and other forms of corruption and abuse of office and power;

III. Democratically Oriented Civil Society: *(a) media, culture and academia in a democracy:* freedom of media, culture, and universities to investigate government and powerful interests, including freedom of journalists, cultural workers and academia from restrictive law, harassment and intimidation; reflection of different views in and wide accessibility to media, culture and universities plus their abstention from harassing private citizens; *(b) additional political participation:* the existence of and citizen participation in extensive independent civic associations, movements and trade unions; transparent, accountable and democratic government of civil society organisations; extensive women participation in public life; equal access for all social groups to public office; and *(c) citizen-government co-operation:* accessibility of elected representatives to constituencies and public service deliverers to users; when possible direct democracy through public consultation on policy, legislation and service delivery and government support of and co-operation with democratic parts of civil society.

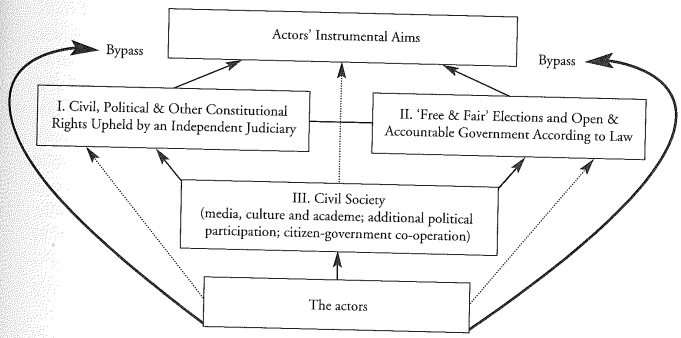
2. Actors' relations to democracy

This, however, only generates a rather static picture of the quality and scope of democratic rights and institutions, even if we add restudies to account for changes over time. One also needs to examine the dynamics of the actually existing democracy as well as democratisation as a process of change. The key issue, then, is the extent to which the rights and institutions at stake really make

sense to people. Do the actors use and even improve or rather ignore them? For instance, many actors tend to only 'consume' and not also 'produce' (promote) democracy. And quite a few powerful as well as vulnerable actors may find that vital rights and institutions are simply not meaningful – wherefore they may prefer to take actual decisions in Rotary Clubs or make their voices heard by burning down a police station.

No less important: when the actors do use democracy, what cluster(s) of rights and institutions do they then give priority to: law and rights, representative and accountable government, and/or civil society? Comparative studies indicate, for instance, that new pro-democrats often focus on civil society plus law and rights but overlook elections and governance, while much of the elite either combines constitutionalism and elections or focuses on one of them but often neglects civil society. [9]

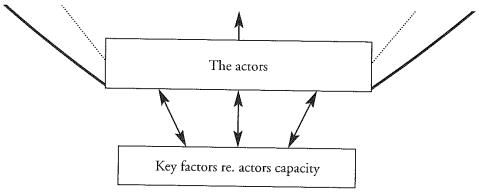
The two basic questions (about bypassing or using the system and if so how) may be illustrated by the following figure, within which the lines and arrows indicate how the actors may relate to the system in order to reach their instrumental aims.



3.Actors' capacity

A key aspect of substantial democratisation, moreover, is the degree to which people really have sufficient capacity to make use of the rights and institutions. To take a parallel, no matter how fair the rules of ice-hockey, you also need to be a member of a team, learn some basic skills on how to play, and get access to

the necessary equipment. In relation to figure 1 above, we thus add a series of questions about the actors' real capacity to do something.



What, then, would be the most important indicators of the key factors that are involved in actors' capacity building? This is where we have to go beyond the studies of both political institutions and the way actors relate to them by also adding insights from political sociology and economy and, for instance, inquiries into social movements.

(a) An initial set of questions relates to how the actors try to increase their capacity. Firstly, where are different groups active in the political terrain of state, business, self- managed units and, in between them, the public sphere (where people can meet, communicate, organise and do things together)? And what of central as against local levels plus the linkages between the various spheres and levels? Earlier comparative results indicate, for instance, that new pro-democrats are often weak within the state and at workplaces but comparatively strong within self-managed units (such as NGOs and co-operatives) and the public sphere. [10] It is also clear that fragmentation and the lack of links between sectors and geographical levels have been a frequent and serious problem. Secondly, what policies do the actors go for and on what level? What and what kinds of issues, interests and ideas do they give priority to? One reason for asking is that pro-democrats often seem to focus on single issues and specific group interests and rarely have been able to transform this into broader interests, perspectives and ideologies – thus being vulnerable to fragmentation and 'alternative' ethnic and religious unity. Thirdly, how and at what level(s) do the actors mobilise support for their policies? In the relevant literature there are five major alternatives that, of course, may be combined: populism, clientelism, alternative patronage, networking and integrated organisations with common perspectives and leadership. Interestingly, for instance, earlier studies indicate that it is not just powerful elites that apply populism and clientelism but also

that pro-democrats often resort to alternative patronage and that integrated democratic organising is set aside in favour of loose networking.

(b) The other set of questions, then, relates to the background for such attempts by the actors to increase their capacity. The fundamental question in this regard is about what social movement analysts call the political opportunity structure in terms of opportunities and hindrances, such as the degree of openness of the system, the presence of allies and the risk of repression. However, one also needs to consider what sources of power that the actors can draw on and where. In addition to the three categories of economic resources (which may also include the ability to go on strike) introduced by Pierre Bourdieu[11], social strength in terms of favourable contacts and networks and cultural resources in terms of privileged skill and knowledge, we have added the capacity to apply non-economic force, such as violence or demonstration of power. Preliminary results indicate, for instance, that the importance of networks and favourable contacts via socio-religious organisations or the educational system should be given more attention. Further, Bourdieu, among others, also highlights actors' capacity to transform such powers into legitimate authority, prestige and/or honour and thus increase their ability to gain political power. Pro-democrats often seem to fall short of this as compared to the dominating actors. Finally, this may well relate to what Bourdieu calls 'habitus' in terms of the values or ideological or cultural perspectives, as well as good or bad experiences, which consciously or unconsciously tend to guide actors' decisions in addition to rational calculations.

The best and critical informants

The next step, then, is to gain the best possible information on these three major factors of substantial democratisation. In the Scandinavian countries or Britain, for instance, there are huge amounts of comparatively reliable sources and earlier research that may be consulted. In most developing countries this is not the case. Various assessments are usually made by metropolitan experts who at times are more knowledgeable of the international discourse than of the local conditions and closer to the foreign donors than the local forces of change.

What should be done? The first decision to be made is whether one is interested in the general public opinion or wants to have as much knowledge as possible about the real situation and dynamics. No doubt, the latter is most crucial. It is indeed vital what people think, but the basics of democratisation is about actual institutions, capacities and power relations. The latter, however,

is much more difficult to gain information about. While public opinion polls may be carried out with rather conventional techniques (and generate interesting results given that sufficient efforts are made to reach out beyond the easily accessible middle class and to consider complicated ethnic, religious, socio-economic and other clusters of people), better knowledge of the actual dynamics calls for innovative approaches and reliable and contextual experts.

How could one realistically go about that? We propose that one should identify the best possible informants within the grounded democracy movement. Firstly, because they tend to be the most well-informed and trustworthy local experts. Secondly, because they as leading pro-democrats are absolutely basic and necessary (though not sufficient) driving forces in any process of substantial democratisation. If leading pro-democrats do not feel that the state of democracy makes sense, and that they do not have (or are able to build) sufficient capacity to use democracy, then there are fundamental problems that have to be given priority to. Inversely: if pro-democrats can indicate what options exist and what could be done to strengthen the forces of democracy, then there are good reasons to consider support.

Yet, of course, the very selection of researchers and advisors, cases and localities, local assistants and experts/respondents is delicate and crucial. The local experts-cum-respondents must have sufficient experience, knowledge, integrity and ability to reflect critically plus be available for possible follow-up interviews. Further, it is not meaningful to assess the process of democratisation in general. Rather one has to focus on certain key issues and localities. These issues must be selected on the basis of actual and potential importance, and the localities need to be significant and good testing grounds for the relevant general arguments on how democratisation should be carried out and supported. Finally, the kinds of questions formulated above on the key aspects involved must all be properly specified and contextualised with regard to all the issues and localities that one focuses on. Otherwise the abstract questions will not make sense even to the most knowledgeable local experts, and their replies will be accordingly. Still, the researchers and their advisors can only make those choices among informants, experts and localities that they know well and have trustful relations with. So in reality, the whole approach and operation presupposes a joint venture between concerned scholars and reflective local experts-cum-activists. And that co-operation, of course, must extend beyond the collection of data to include also deliberation, dissemination, and active promotion of the results – the generation of a fresh agenda for democratisation.

Possible in practice?

This may all be very good. So far colleagues and experts have been quite positive. But does it work in practice? This can only be found out in reality, and right now we make a try. By early March 2003, the task force that I mentioned earlier (which was appointed in conjunction with a conference in Jakarta in January 2002, where tentative results on the problems of the post-Suharto democracy movement were discussed between activists and researchers) had set up the research team and together with it developed a concise approach, format, questionnaire, and selected the key concerns of democratisation which shall be covered during two one-year assessment studies (the third year is for re-studies to capture some of the changes over time). These concerns have been identified in our earlier research about the post-Suharto democracy movement.[12] They are, 1st year: land struggles, labour conflicts, the urban poor situation, human rights abuses, corruption, undemocratic parties and party system, religious conflicts, and 2nd year: the freedom and abuse of press and journalism, gender based discrimination, marginalisation of indigenous people, the freedom and quality of the academic and cultural discourse, the freedom and quality and work-conditions within the educational sector, the issue of professionalism, work ethics and meritocracy in the public and private sectors, and consumers' subordinate and weak position in often monopolised markets.

The democratisation assessment programme is quite a substantial operation, involving some 30 consultant key-informants on 7 plus 8 issues in some 20 localities, the selection of about 100 local assistants and more than 500 respondents. There are many possible problems and seemingly hopeless deadlines. As this text is revised in late May 2003, some 60% of the funding has been secured (from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NORAD, and Ford Foundation) and discussions are going on with additional sponsors.[13] The final work on the basic questionnaire has been done and the specifications and contextualisations are about to be concluded. Also, the central key-informants-cum-consultants have been recruited, the selection of cases and localities is almost done, and the identification and training of assistants and the selection of respondents is going on. We expect being able to start the massive interviewing by June 20, 2003, followed by the consolidation of the data, the analyses, the deliberations and check-ups at regional assessment seminars, the production of a final report on the first round and a high profile national assessment council in January 2004 – in due time before the dominating forces entirely control the media and the discussions in face of the elections in May 2004. Meanwhile our second round of assessment studies should be well under way.

The reason why I think we might be able to handle it all is that the team of concerned researchers and investigative journalists can draw on experiences since the mid-90s from similar projects. Their second book, a major analytical review of the post-Suharto democracy movement based on a series of case studies, is with the publishers. These case studies in turn are based on an extensive survey done in almost all the provinces of various actors. Furthermore, the joint venture between the researchers and the activists has improved over the years. So far we have mainly drawn on individual contacts plus the extensive network of the independent journalists working out of their leading institute "for the study of free flow of information", ISAI, (including their education of local journalists and the now separate largest free radio-network in the country, Radio 68-H), the most genuine and human rights organisation, KontraS, and the leading organisation for religious reconciliation, Interfidei. In planning the new project, moreover, the team and these organisations have proceeded by forming an independent, democratic and individual membership based organisation, Demos (the Indonesian Centre for Studies of Democracy and Human Rights). This is both to promote co-operation between researchers and democracy activists during the collection of data and to follow up by extensive deliberation in a series of assessment councils and further dissemination and discussions of the analyses.

Yet, of course, there will be mistakes and problems and delays. This is probably the most difficult task I have ever been involved in, not just with regard to theory but even more when it comes to specific operationalisations and the very implementation. Yet it is also the most challenging and exciting and, I think, meaningful project. To be on the safe side, the best thing would probably have been to somehow take full leave from my job in Oslo and continuously be present in Indonesia as a daily co-director of the operation. But this is not my project. I am only one of the leaders, the one in charge of the 'academic' design and quality. And if – aside from that contribution – the local concerned scholars and reflective democracy activists cannot carry out the project largely on their own, it is simply not good enough to learn from. Because the project is not 'just' meant to generate good enough knowledge about the problems and options of democratisation to improve the bargaining position of the Indonesian democracy movement and lay the foundation for a fresh agenda. It is also a pilot project from which we hope to gain methodological knowledge and together with others design improved versions that may be used elsewhere.

Notes

[1] I am drawing in this paragraph on joint work with Professors John Harriss (London School of Economics) and Kristian Stokke (University of Oslo) on the local politics of democratisation in developing countries.

[2] Melin, Mia (ed.), *Democracy, Power and Partnership: Implications for Development Cooperation*, Utsikt mot utveckling 17, Collegium for Development Studies at Uppsala University, 2002.

[3] Törnquist, Olle, *"Popular Development and Democracy: Case Studies with Rural Dimensions in the Philippines, Indonesia and Kerala"*, Geneva and Oslo, UNRISD and SUM/University of Oslo, 2002.

[4] Beetham, David, *Democracy and Human Rights*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999.

[5] UNDP: *Human Development Report: Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

[6] See the first two British audits; cf. also, for instance, the investigations by the Swedish Advisory Board on Democracy (*Demokratirådet*). For the IDEA report, see Beetham, D, Bracking, S, Kearton, I., and Weir, S *International IDEA Handbook and Democracy Assessment*. The Hague-London-New York, Kluwer, Law International, 2002. For the theoretical basis see at first hand Beetham, David, *Democracy and Human Rights*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999.

[7] Which in term may be disaggregated into seven basic values: participation, authorisation, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and solidarity.

[8] Gender equality and children's rights.

[9] Törnquist (2002) op. cit.

[10] For this and the following examples of results, see ibid.

[11] For a succinct and innovative review of the use of Bourdieu in social movement analysis, see Kristian Stokke's *Habitus, capital and fields. Conceptualising the capacity of actors in local politics*, Oslo, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, 2002.

[12] AE Priyono, Stanley Adi Prasetyo, and Olle Törnquist with contributors, *The Post Suharto Democracy Movement*, forthcoming, Jakarta, ISAI, 2003.

[13] Primarily with Sida, the Indonesian section 'TIFA' of the Soros foundation and the UNDP's so-called partnership programme in Jakarta.