

Development,  
complexity  
&  
evolution

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[www.owen.org](http://www.owen.org)  
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# Development is complex

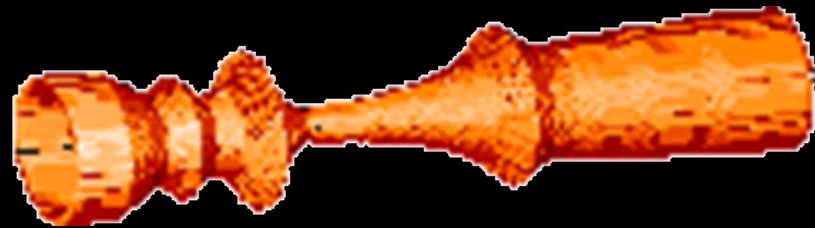
Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.

*Laurence J. Peter*

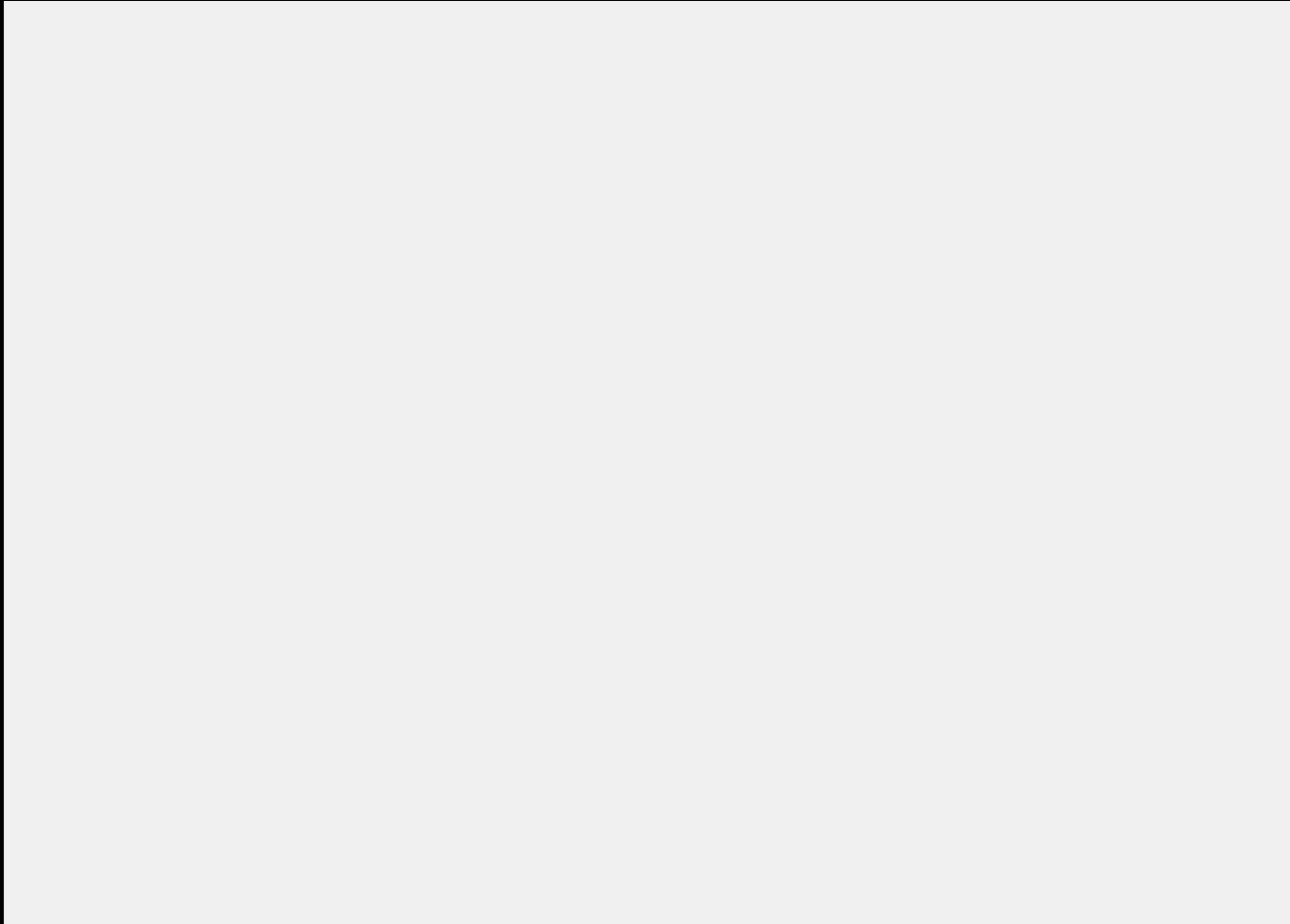
# Definition of “wicked problems”

- Difficult to define clearly.
- Many interdependencies, multi-causal.
- Unforeseen consequences.
- Often not stable.
- No clear solution.
- Socially complex.
- Not the responsibility of any single organization.
- Involve changing behaviour.

All successful  
complex systems are  
the result of evolution.



# Steve Jones, evolutionary biologist



# 1

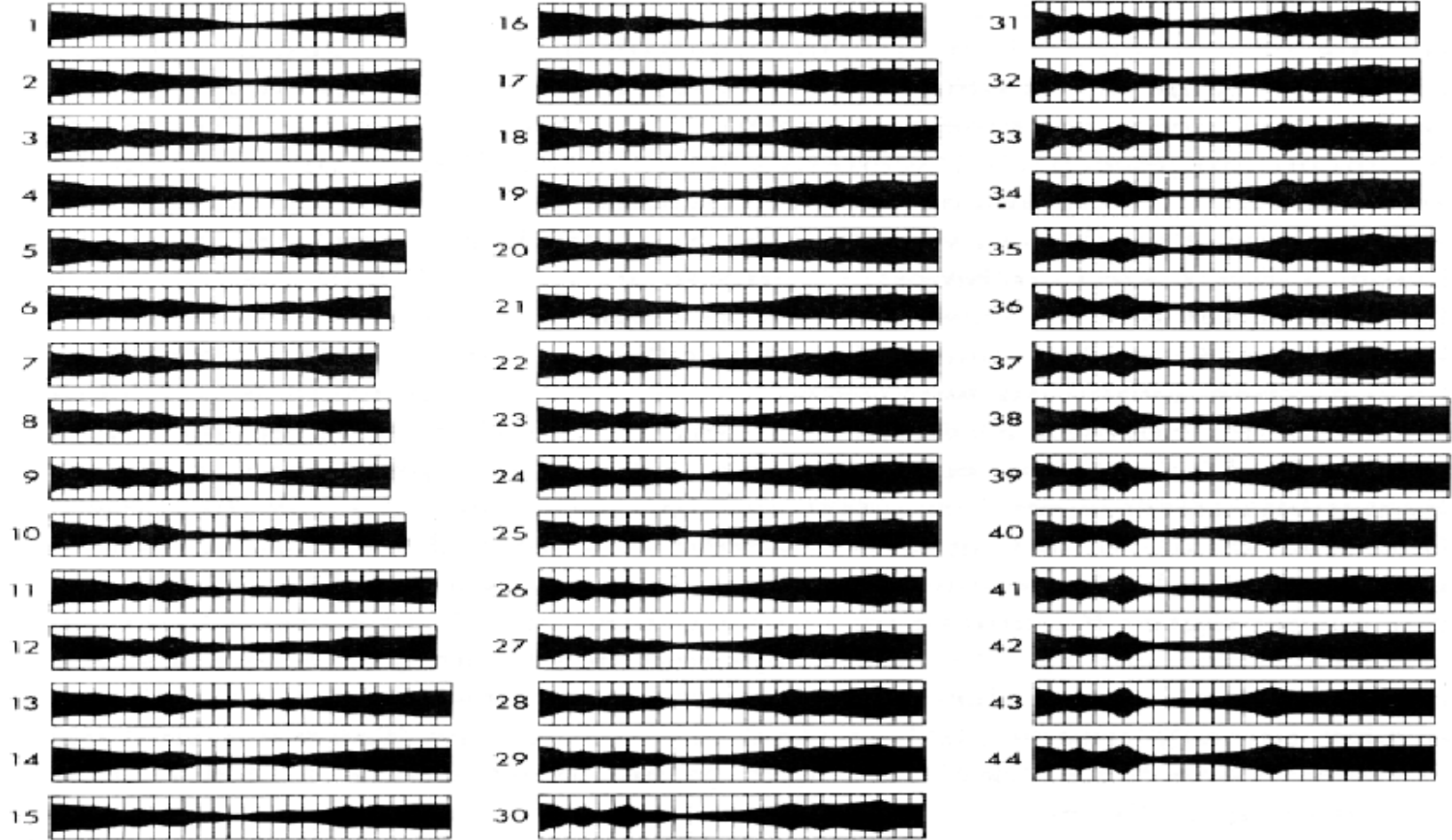
“Almost impossible problems” are solved by evolution not design

# 2

Evolution requires  
variation and selection



“Almost impossible problem”  
solved by evolution not design



Evolution requires  
variation and selection



1

Development is a  
“wicked problem”

2

Wicked problems are solved  
by evolution not design

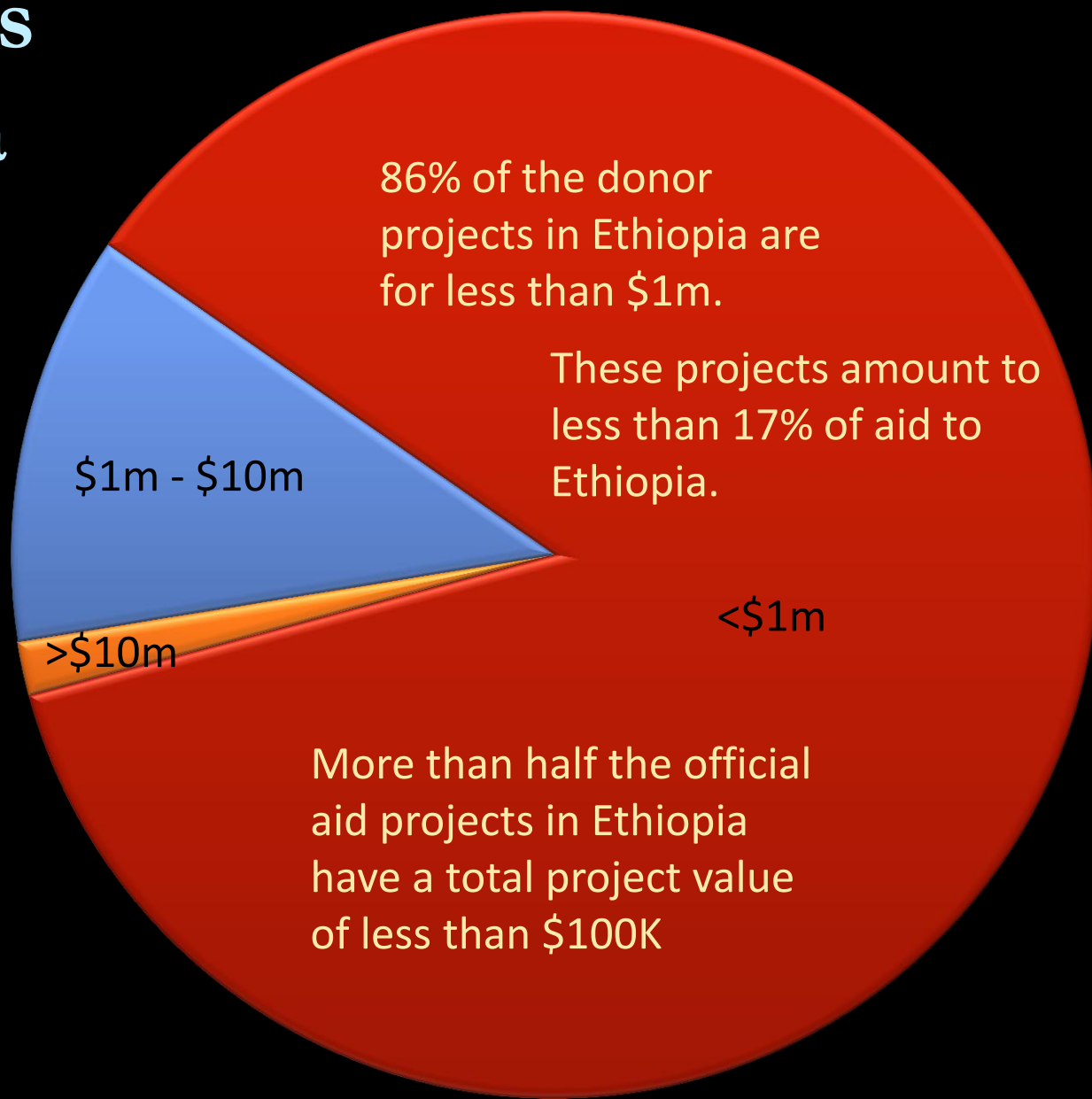
3

Evolution requires  
variation and selection

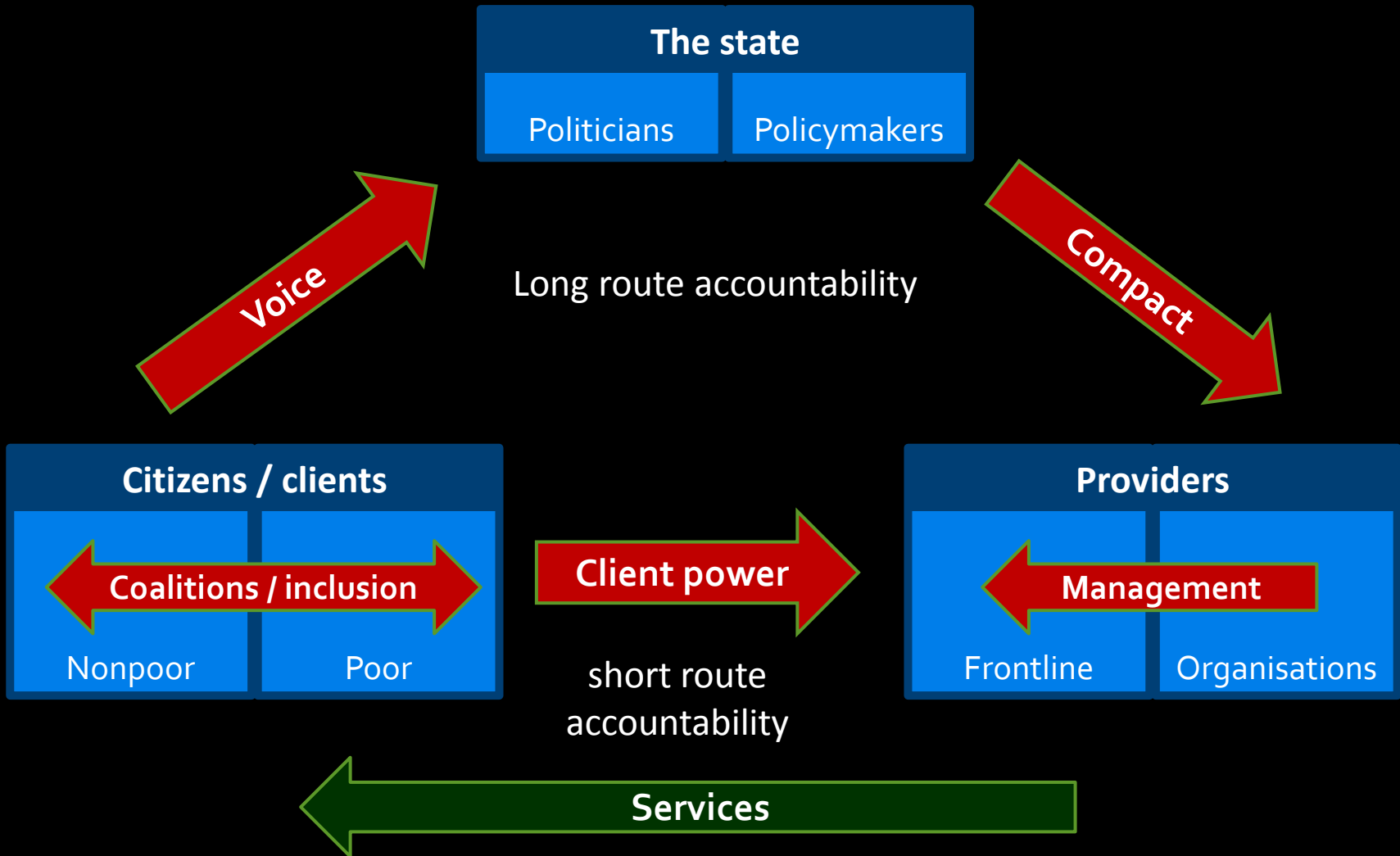
# Aid projects in Ethiopia

About 12% of the projects are for between \$1m and \$10m. These make up 41% of aid to Ethiopia

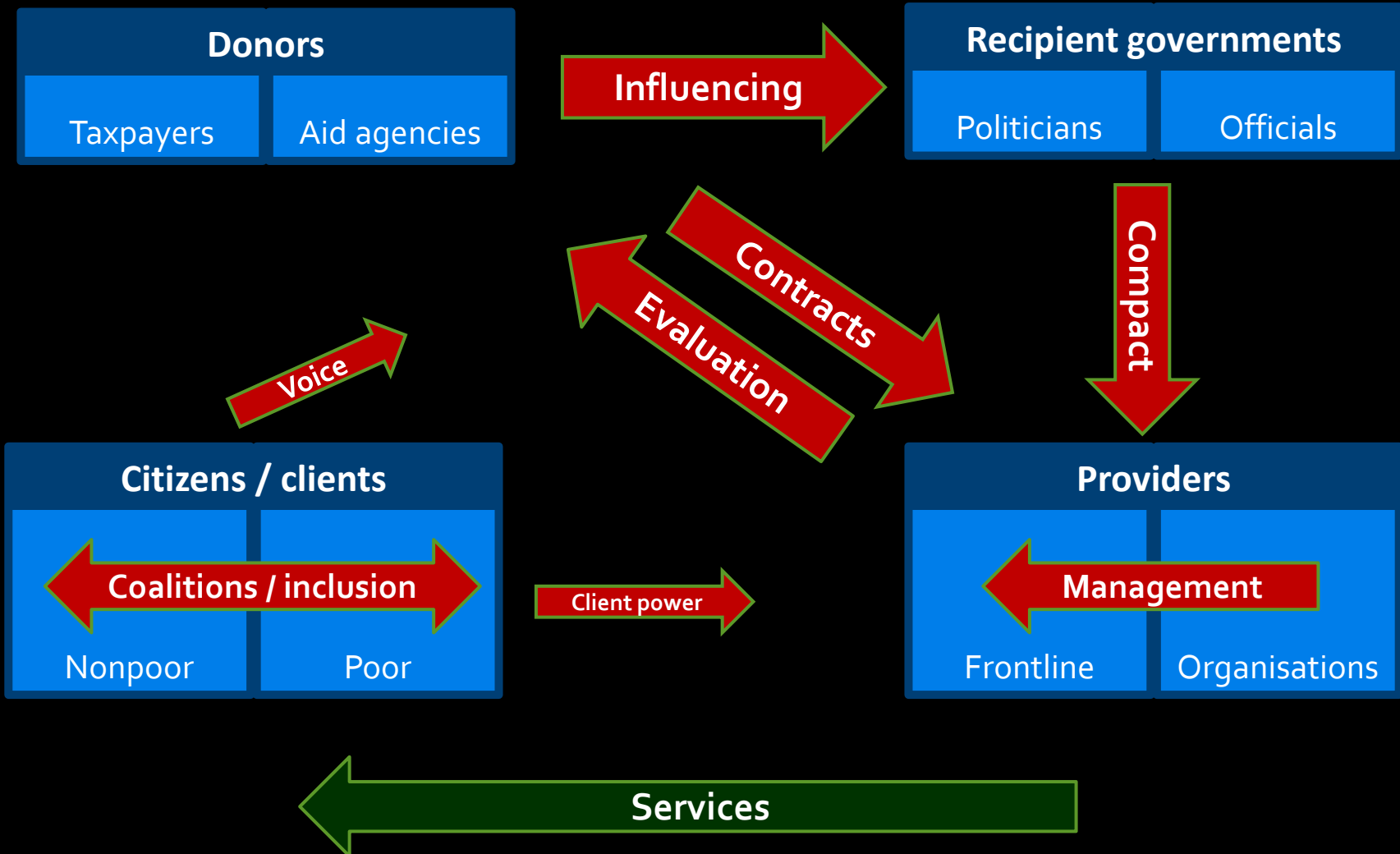
Less than 2% of the projects are for more than \$10m. These make up 42% of the aid to Ethiopia.



# Short and long route accountability



# Very long route of aid accountability



# The power of information



**Video Placeholder**  
Your video will display here.

# Power to the people

- Randomised trial
- NGO report cards & public meetings
- Good results:
  - Waiting time decreased
  - Doctor and nurse absenteeism plummeted
  - Clinics got cleaner; fewer drugs stolen
  - 40-50% more children vaccinated
  - 33% fewer children died under the age of five
  - Saved 550 lives (in area of 55,000 households).

As change-makers  
we should not try to  
design a better world.  
We should make better  
feedback loops.