# Participation, Citizenship and Local Governance

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## Introduction

For the last twenty years, the concept of 'participation' has been widely used in the discourse of development. For much of this period, the concept has referred to participation in the social arena, in the 'community' or in development projects. Increasingly, however, the concept of participation is being related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. Nowhere is the intersection of concepts of community participation and citizenship seen more clearly than in the multitude of programmes for decentralised governance that are found in both southern and northern countries. Linking citizen participation to the state at this local or grassroots level raises fundamental and normative questions about the nature of democracy and about the skills and strategies for achieving it.

This paper will very briefly explore literature related to the dynamics and methods of strengthening community-based participation in the context of programmes for democratic decentralisation. In so doing, we will:

- discuss the differing concepts of participation, and their intersection;
- examine the evidence related to the barriers to participation in local governance;
- explore some new initiatives and strategies for overcoming those barriers; and
- suggest some research themes and questions for further consideration.

In general, our purpose is to suggest some broad concepts and parameters for discussion, rather than to explore any of them at this point in great depth. Our hope is that other presentations and the ensuing discussions of the workshop will provide further elaboration.

## Concepts of Participation

More specifically, we are interested in examining the intersection of four strands of work around participation, especially in the development context. On the one hand, we have those approaches to participation which have focused on community or social participation, usually in the civil society sphere or in which citizens have been 'beneficiaries' of government programmes. On the other hand, there is the tradition of political participation, through which citizens have engaged in traditional forms of political involvement e.g. voting, political parties, and lobbying. Increasingly, in the context of democratic decentralisation, these two traditions are being linked to a broader notion of participation as citizenship. Each of these approaches may draw upon a variety of participatory methodologies of planning, monitoring, research, education and action. See Figure 1.
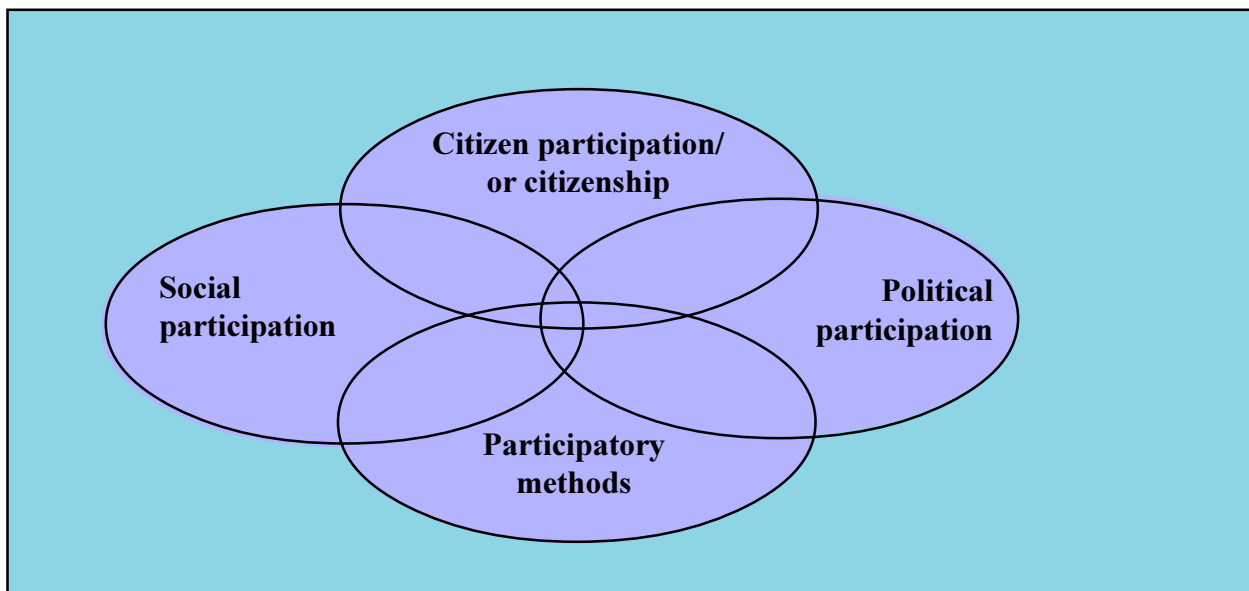
Fig. 1. Linking approaches to participation

*Social and project participation*

Within development, perhaps the dominant concern with participation has been related to the 'community' or social sectors. In a highly influential study in the late 1970's, participation was defined as 'the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control' (Stiefel and Wolfe: 1994:5). In this sense participation was located - at least initially - outside of the state, amongst those who had been excluded from existing institutions. It could take a variety of forms, ranging from social movements to self-help groups.

More recently, the definition of participation in development has often been located in development projects and programmes, as a means of strengthening their relevance, quality and sustainability. In an influential statement, the World Bank Learning Group on Participation defined participation as a 'process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them' (World Bank, 1995). From this perspective, participation could be seen in the level of consultation or decision making in all phases of a project cycle, from needs assessment, to appraisal, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. While these participation projects could be funded by the state, participation within them was seen not as related to broader issues of politics or governance, but as a way of encouraging action outside the public sphere. Moreover, the focus was often on direct participation of primary stakeholders, rather than indirect participation through elected representatives.

*Political participation*

Surprisingly within the development literature there has been less attention to notions of 'political participation' which involve the interactions of the individual or organised groups with the state, and which often focus more on mechanisms of indirect participation. Political participation has been defined in broad or narrow terms by different authors depending on the approach of inquiry. The classic study of political participation by Nie and Verba (1972:2) defines it as 'those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'. A broader definition is provided by Parry, Mosley and Day (1992: 16) who define it as 'taking part in the process of formulation,

passage and implementation of public policies'. The main concern is in action by citizens aimed at influencing decisions taken mainly by public representatives and officials. Political participation is more associated with representative democracy and indirect participation (Richardson, 1983; Cunill, 1991). It expresses itself in individual and collective actions that include mainly voting, campaigning, contacting, group action and protest – all oriented towards influencing the representatives in government, rather than active and direct participation in the process of governance itself.

*Participatory methods*

Each of the concepts of participation carries with them differing methods for strengthening or enhancing participation. Traditionally, in the field of political participation, such methods have included voter education, enhancing the awareness of rights and responsibilities of citizens, lobbying and advocacy, often aimed towards developing a more informed citizenry who could hold elected representatives more accountable. In the social and community spheres, however, we have seen the development of a number of broader participatory methods for appraisal, planning, monitoring large institutions, training and awareness building. Greater emphasis here has been on the importance of participation not only to hold others accountable, but also as a self-development process, starting with the articulation of grassroots needs and priorities, and building popular forms of organisation.   Participation has included the realm of knowledge and direct action, not only the realm of representation and accountability.

**Linking the Spheres: Strengthening Citizenship Participation in Governance**

Increasingly, both the traditions of social or project participation and of political participation are being re-defined and somewhat broadened, responding in part to renewed understandings of the importance of linking 'development' to the state.

For those concerned with participation at the project or community level, the 1990s have given rise to the rapid 'scaling up' of participatory approaches. Often responding to donor pressure, governments have been urged to adopt participatory approaches in their ministries (e.g. forestry, health or irrigation) as a means of influencing policy, and as a form of planning at multiple levels. (Holland et al., 1998). Inevitably, the scaling up of participation necessarily leads those involved in development projects and programmes to engage with the state, and with broader issues of governance, representation, transparency and accountability. At a November, 1998 workshop at the World Bank on 'Mainstreaming and Upscaling Participation of Primary Stakeholders', a key theme was around the need to engage with government to insure success and sustainability.  Rather than focus only on the participation of primary stakeholders, there was a high degree of consensus on the need to link participation to secondary and tertiary stakeholders as well, i.e. to donors and governments.  In this sense, understanding the dynamics of partnership and engagement between civil society, governments and donors becomes a critical concern.

At the same time as the participatory development tradition is moving towards the necessity of engagement with the state, so too is a concern of 'good governance' opening space within governments for new relationships with their citizens. Governance has been described by some authors as *'both a broad reform strategy, and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objective of making government more accountable, more open and transparent, and more democratic'* (Minogue, 1997:4). For others it represents *'a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed'* (Rhodes, 1996:652-

3). Participation, legitimacy, transparency, accountability, competence, and respect for law and human rights are its key elements (Edralin 1997; Schneider, 1999).

Essential to this concept of governance is a broader interaction of public and private social actors, especially at the local level. Local governance calls for an increased participation of civil society in activities that traditionally formed part of the public sphere. It is argued that it will improve the efficiency of public services, that it will make local government more accountable, and that it will deepen democracy - complementing representative forms with more participatory forms.
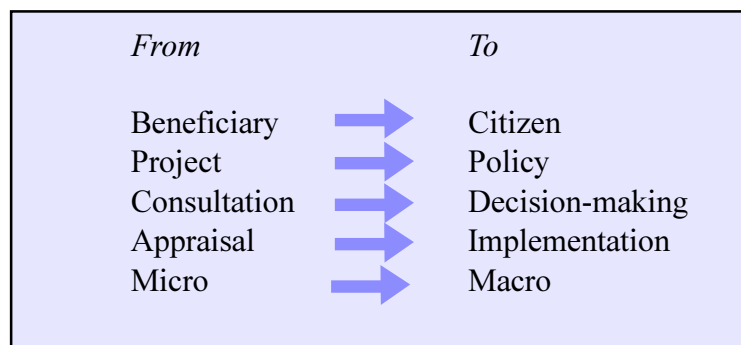
**'Citizenship' Participation**

The moves from government towards civil society, and from social and project participation towards governance offer new spaces in which the concept of participation may also be expanded to one of 'citizenship' – one which involves linking participation in the political, community and social spheres. It also offers new opportunities to share the methods for strengthening participation across boundaries – so that, for instance, those who have been promoting participatory planning can learn lessons about advocacy or human rights education, and those who have developed participatory methods for consultation, planning and monitoring are able to link them to the new governance agenda.

The concept of citizenship has long been a disputed and value-laden one in democratic theory. To some, citizenship has implied a set of individual rights, while to others it is seen as a broader set of social and 'civic' responsibilities. More recently, some have argued for linking these two traditions, such that the 'right of participation in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life should be included in the nexus of basic human rights…Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents' (Lister 1998:228).

In her work in Latin America Cunill refers to citizen participation as the intervention of private citizens with determined social interests in public activities. As noted by Cunill (1997:76-77) "Citizen participation… refers to political participation but distances from it at least in two ways: it abstracts both participation mediated by political parties, as well as the one exercised by citizens when they elect political authorities. It expresses instead - although with multiple meanings - the direct intervention of social agents in public activities". Citizen participation in this sense involves direct ways in which citizen's influence and exercise control in governance, not only through the more traditional forms of indirect representation.

In sum, within the discussions on mainstreaming participation, governance and citizenship, we begin to see a redefinition of the concept of participation, such that it moves from only being concerned with 'beneficiaries' or 'the excluded' to a concern with broad forms of engagement by citizens in policy formulation and decision making in key arenas which affect their lives. (See Figure 2). Perhaps the best place to see and understand these new interactions is at the local level, where the concerns of the 'grassroots' or locality intersect most directly with those of governance and the state.

**Figure 2: A shift in participation**

| From | | To |
|------|---|-----|
| Beneficiary | → | Citizen |
| Project | → | Policy |
| Consultation | → | Decision-making |
| Appraisal | → | Implementation |
| Micro | → | Macro |

*Democratic Decentralisation*

One of the most popular state reforms that has opened spaces for a wider and deeper participation of citizens at the local level has been the decentralisation process. All but 12 of the 75 developing countries with more than five million inhabitants have implemented some form of decentralisation, with varying degrees of financial and political power (World Bank, vii). Parallel to these developments, enabling legal frameworks and institutional channels for citizen participation at the local level have been developed in many of these countries.

For the purpose of this paper we are interested in democratic decentralisation understood as 'the transfer of resources and power (and often of tasks) to lower-level authorities which are largely or wholly independent of higher levels of government and which are 'democratic' in some way and to some degree' (Manor, 1998: 6-7) and where 'persons in authority within institutions at intermediate and/or local levels are elected directly or indirectly by secret ballots'. However, as has been noted by different authors, administrative as well as fiscal decentralisation seem to be necessary conditions for its success.

BOX 1: Selected legal frameworks and institutional channels for citizen participation

*Legal enabling environments for citizen participation*

**Philippines**: Local Government Code (1991).
**India**: 73$^{rd}$ Constitutional Amendment (1993).
**Honduras**: Municipal Law (1990).
**Bolivia**: Popular Participation Law (1992).
**Namibia**: Local Authority Act (1992).
**Uganda**: Local government act (1997).
**Tanzania**: Local authorities laws (1992)

*Selected examples of institutional channels for citizen participation:*
**Tanzania:** Ward development Committee
**Zimbabwe**: Ward Development Committees (WDC)
**Uganda**: Resistance Councils and Committees
**India**: Gram Sabhas
**Colombia**: Overseeing committees
**Bolivia**: Vigilance committees

Democratic decentralisation may be promoted for a number of reasons – administrative, fiscal, political or others. However, among the reasons often given is to bring government closer to people and enhance their participation and interaction with local government officers in the affairs of the locality. It entails a new form of relationship between civil society and the local government. For instance, as Blair (1998:16) argues,

> …the signal promise of decentralising government authority is enhancing democratic participation by encouraging more people to get involved in the politics that affect them, and making government more accountable by introducing citizen oversight and control through elections. If democracy lies in rule by the people, the promise of democratic decentralisation is to make that rule more immediate, direct, and productive.

While the promise is great, a number of studies point to the gap that exists between the legal and institutional mechanisms for enhancing participation, and what actually occurs on the ground. For instance Nickson (1998: 10) observes that 'since the mid-1980s, a wide gulf has emerged between the rhetoric and reality of citizen participation in Latin American local government, and the real level of participation is usually no higher than that found in other regions of comparable living standards.' (Similar concerns are expressed by Porio (1996:81) when examining the current status of local governance in South East Asia: 'the challenge for research in urban governance lies in the examination of the intersecting agendas of key actors and the ways in which these are expressed in the practice of negotiated participatory politics'.

**The barriers to citizen participation in local governance**

The apparent gap between the promise of enhanced participation through democratic decentralisation on the one hand, and the everyday realities of participatory politics on the other, suggests the need to understand more fully the barriers and dynamics to participation in local governance, as well as the enabling factors and methods that can be used to overcome them. While a number of studies have now been done on decentralisation, we have found few studies which have focussed on understanding the nature, dynamics and methods of participation in this new context.

We have reviewed several recent studies on citizen participation and local governance. These include:

- A descriptive study focussing on the legal frameworks and forms through which citizen participation has been institutionalised from the official perspective in Latin American countries (Cunill, 1991).
- A descriptive study reviewing the legal bases and forms of participation in local governments in six Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador and Peru (Rosemberg, 1994).
- A research project describing volunteer contributions and examples of social integration at the local level carried out by UNRISD (1996) with socially marginalised and excluded people living in slums and squatters settlements of 16 cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- An assessment of Democratic Local Governance based on studies conducted in two Asian countries (Philippines and the Indian State of Kerala); two in Latin America (Bolivia and Honduras); one in Europe (Ukraine) and one in Africa (Mali) (Blair 1998).
- Field studies on democracy and decentralisation in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Bangladesh and Karankata State in India (Crook and Manor, 1994).

- A review of the practice of decentralisation in Africa focusing in the experiences of three African countries: Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Nigeria (Mutizwa-Mangiza and Conyers, 1996)
- A comprehensive study on decentralisation and democratisation in five African countries (Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbawbe, Tanzania and Uganda) co-ordinated by the University of Iowa (1998).

While few of these studies focus specifically on the dynamics, barriers and methods for strengthening participation, they do provide some general findings on the obstacles to more participatory local governance. Among the key themes are the following:

*Power relations*

Citizen participation is about power and its exercise by different social actors in the spaces created for the interaction between citizens and local authorities. However, the control of the structure and processes for participation - defining spaces, actors, agendas, procedures - is usually in the hands governmental institutions and can become a barrier for effective involvement of citizens.

In Latin America, in examining the degree to which decentralisation offers a space for more democratic participation at the grassroots, Schönwalder (1997: 755) argues that not enough attention was paid to the question of power. In fact, 'local elites, local governments and other actors operating on the local scene, such as political parties and even some NGOs, have often been prone to co-opt popular movements in order to further their own agendas'.

In Tanzania, Mukandela (1998) has found that decisions over who should participate in the Ward Development Committees (WDC) - the lowest local level decision-making bodies which approve requests before being forwarded to higher levels in the district - hindered their effectiveness in achieving high levels of popular participation in decision-making. Although the norms state that the majority of the positions are for community representatives, in practice decisions on who to invite can and were taken in some of the districts by government officers at higher levels of the administration who invited influential people when important decisions were made.

Similarly, Manor and Crook (1998:29-30) in their case study in India illustrate how control over participatory procedures affect the opportunity of citizens to participate. According to legislation, local councils should hold twice yearly meetings (Gram Sabha) in each village. The purpose of such meetings was to ensure council's accountability to citizens and to identify priority target populations for assistance. However, 'councillors in most places abandoned Gram Sabha meetings after the first year or two. Some resorted to subterfuge – holding unannounced meetings at times when most villagers were away at work or at the market, or staging Gram Sabha "meetings" in the Mandal office.'

Control by the government over decisions about the nature and structure of participatory channels at the local level also restricts the influence of traditional decision-making bodies in the local affairs. As observed by Mutizwa-Mangiza et. al. (1996) in Zimbabwe, certain powers of traditional structures of decision-making were taken away and granted to village development and ward development committees. As a result frictions between traditional leaders and democratically elected leaders emerged.

*Level of citizen organisation*

Citizens are most able to counter existing power relations where there is some history of effective grassroots organisation or social movement. In Bolivia, for instance, Robinson found that in municipalities with strong union traditions people were able to influence decisions over municipal spending while in those areas where people lacked organisational capacity, political participation was generally low (Robinson, 1998). Similarly, drawing from experiences in Argentina, Peru and others in Latin America, Herzer and Pirez (1991) concluded that 'the existence of popular organisations with a certain presence at a local level and the occupation of political posts in the municipal government by parties or individuals who favour popular participation' seem to be fundamental conditions under which citizens can influence decisions at the local level (91).

*Participatory Skills*

As progress is made from lower to higher levels of participation (information, consultation, decision making, management) participatory processes become more complex and demand different types of skills, knowledge, experience, leadership and managerial capabilities. The problem of weak participatory skills at different levels runs as a common theme in several of the studies reviewed.

In Tanzania, for example, Mukandala (1998:46) found that '…[al]though populists clearly far outnumbered the technical- administrative groups, who also do not vote, many councillors had very poor educational qualifications. Many found it difficult to contribute meaningfully to the discussions. They had special difficulty countering the technical presentations of the departmental technical staff. Councillors were also overwhelmed by the social status of the nominated members of Parliament. These are invariably more educated, very well known, and more self-confident. These could take on the district executive secretary, who was secretary to the meeting, and his functional experts. Councillors elected on the basis of wards therefore found it difficult to push through their particular issues from the grassroots.'

On the other hand, when essential planning skills and experience of local authorities in the planning process are lacking, they also become another obstacle for more meaningful participation for disadvantaged groups (Manor and Crook 1998). The inability of local government officers to translate local needs into technical proposals of high quality standards provided an excuse for bureaucrats in higher levels of the administration to disregard district plan on those situations where local citizens have provided their input.

*Political will*

A fourth barrier to strengthening participation involves the absence of a strong and determined central authority in providing and enforcing opportunities for participation at the local level, as well as the lack of political will by local government officers in enforcing the legislation that has been created for this purpose (Velasquez, 1991, Herzer et al., 1991; Rosemberg; 1994; Bohme, 1997). This is more notorious in the case studies of countries with one-party democracies or weak opposition parties (Mukandala, 1998; Makumbe, 1998; Ddungu, 1998).

*The level of participation*

Strengthening of participation in local governance has to do with the strengthening of direct citizen involvement in decisions making by individuals or groups in public activities, often

through newly established institutional channels – e.g. monitoring committees, planning processes, etc. Two multi-country studies (Cunill, 1991; Rosemberg, 1994) examined this claim in the Latin American context. Their findings showed a wide variety of organs and modes of participation included in the legal frameworks of the countries studied. However, at the municipal level, the majority of these mechanisms had a consultative character, such that participation in even the best of cases was associated with the stages of plan formulation or execution of programs, but not with decision-making. Legislation exists in which organisations of civil society are recognised and have the right for information and to address demands and petitions but the formal spaces where these groups participate are not widely used.

*Insufficient financial resources at the local level*

Financial resources to implement development activities influenced or decided by local citizens come mainly from two sources: central allocations and local revenues. A common barrier for citizen participation in decision-making found in most of the studies was the control of financial resources by higher levels of authority and the meagre resources available for local activities (Mutizwa-Mangiza et al., 1996; Blair 1998). This was generally due to the inability of local authorities to realise their revenue for a various political and technical reasons, and, in some cases, due to insufficient allocation of central revenues. This has been compounded by the negative impacts of structural adjustment programmes promoted by the IMF, especially in African countries.

## Overcoming the barriers: Strategies and approaches

Despite these significant barriers, the message is not that efforts to strengthen popular participation in local governance should be abandoned. Indeed, around the world we can find a number of important innovations and interventions which show promise to make a significant impact in enhancing citizenship participation in democratic local governance. What is needed is to learn more about the potential of these strategies, and the conditions under which they might 'widen openings for greater political participation of the popular sectors at the local level, and under what conditions they are likely to serve the opposite purpose, namely, the integration and co-optation of the popular majorities into a political system that essentially remains unchanged' (Schönwalder, 1997:756).

Despite the fact that there are a number of innovations occurring around the globe, few of them seem to have been systematically documented or assessed. An important part of this workshop will be to learn about some of these interventions, and to understand more about the conditions and possibilities for their success.

In an earlier workshop in March 1999, IDS convened a workshop in co-ordination with SEARCH, OUTREACH, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and Dr. Kripa specifically to examine the use of participatory methods in strengthening participation in local governance. The workshop brought together practitioners and groups working on these issues from India, Bangladesh, Philippines and Nepal. The workshop pointed to the significant window of opportunity for strengthening grassroots participation brought by current initiatives for reforms in governance in the context of decentralisation. It also showed that different and multiple kind of strategies were being used to strengthen participation.

*Participatory planning*

In a number of countries, perhaps most notably the Philippines, India and Bolivia, new legislation offers possibilities for new processes of participatory planning to influence the priorities of local governments. Perhaps the most extensive model for this is found in the Peoples Campaign for Decentralised Planning in Kerala, which has mobilised thousands of people at the panchayat level to 'prepare plans for economic development and social justice' (Bandyopahdhyay 1997:2450). Similarly, in the Philippines, the Batman project is using participatory planning in a large number of municipalities across the country, and in India the National Coalition of Resource Support Organisations associated with PRIA has promoted participatory micro-level planning in a number of states  (Oldenburg 1999). In many instances, participatory planning methodologies, such as PRA, are being used, and NGOs and others who have these skills are being called upon by local governments to provide such assistance.

*Citizen education and awareness building*

Another set of strategies has involved using popular education and communication methodologies to strengthen the awareness of local citizens of their rights and responsibilities under new local governance legislation. In the state of Karnataka, as we shall hear, Dr. Kripa and colleagues have pioneered the use of radio as an awareness building tool, while in both Bangladesh and India popular theatre is being used for similar purposes. Also in India, PRIA and the NCRSO have developed strategies for strengthening the 'Gram Sabha' or village meeting as the most basic unit of direct democracy. In Zimbabwe, the Community Publishing Process has developed popular education materials on citizenship and democracy which have been used widely across the country.

*Training and sensitising local officials*

While some participatory education strategies have focussed on building the awareness and capacity of local citizens, others have focussed on training of elected officials and government staff. These are largely of two types. In some places such as India, where reservations have been made for women and lower caste representatives, a great deal of work has gone into training these newly elected representatives, many of whom have no previous leadership experience in formal politics. In Karnataka, for instance, SEARCH, as well as others, have offered training and leadership development programmes for thousands of newly elected women representatives. As a result, these women have now held their own convention, formed their own network, and are using village-to-village peer education and support methods to strengthen their capacity.

In other settings, the focus has been on enabling existing government officials to engage with citizens in a more participatory manner. In Uganda and in Tanzania, for instance, large scale participatory poverty assessment projects have been used not only for helping to identify the priorities of the poor, and their perceptions of local governance, but also to strengthen capacity of local government staff in areas such as participatory planning. Similarly, in India, partly as a result of a national workshop on Attitude and Behaviour Change in Participatory Processes held at the LBS National Academy of Administration, work has begun by government training institutes to experiment with large scale methods of sensitising government staff to more participatory approaches.

*Advocacy, alliances and collaboration*

A fourth set of strategies discussed at the Karnataka workshop involve the need for learning new skills of advocacy, as well as how to build effective alliances and collaborative partnerships, especially those that cut across power differences. This involves new skills for both sides of the equation. Citizens, community-based organisations and NGOs previously excluded from decision-making in government need to learn skills of advocacy and effective policy influence, as well to guard against co-optation. Similarly, government officials and existing power holders need to learn new skills and to develop appropriate mechanisms for involving new stakeholders in policy formation and decision making. Reviewing possible strategies for popular participation in local governance, Schönwalder (1997:768) finds this approach potentially most promising: ' Multiples alliances with a variety of other actors appear to be a way of safeguarding the relative autonomy of popular movements operating at the local level and of maximising resources available to them…In the end, whether or not these movements will succeed in getting their voices heard, while at the same time weathering repression and fending off attempts at co-optation, will depend to a considerable extent on their skills at bargaining and negotiating with others.'

*Participatory Budgeting*

Presently one of the most successful experiences in citizen participation in decision-making at the local level is the experience of participatory budgets. In Brazil at least 70 cities have established a participatory budget system which allows citizen participation in decision-making over allocation of resources.

The participatory budget strategy was initiated in 1989 when the City Hall of Porto Alegre created participatory structures with decision-making power over the allocation of resources for the development of the municipality. The Municipal Council of Government Plan and Budget (MCGPB) is responsible for the co-ordination and organisation of the process of developing the investment plan, and checking the execution of the planned budget. It is constituted by elected citizens from the 16 regions in which the city is divided as well as by government representatives with no voting right. Through a participatory planning process involving people from all the regions, the investment plan of the previous year is reviewed, priorities are defined and councillors for the MCGPB are elected. An open and elaborate consultation process with the population follows, which ends when the investment plan is approved by the MCGBP and sent by the Executive Power to the Municipal town councillors. Subsequently a negotiation process takes place around the specific details.

*Promoting accountability of elected officials to citizens*

While a number of participatory methods focus on enhancing direct participation of citizens in the governance process, others are focussing on maintaining accountability of elected officials and government agencies to the citizenry. Traditionally, in democratic governance, accountability is thought to be maintained in a number of ways, e.g. local elections, strong and active opposition parties, media, public meetings and formal redress procedures (Blair 1998).

In the newer and more active forms of citizenship, citizens are developing other accountability mechanisms. In Rajasthan, for instance, as the work by Goetz and Jenkins (1998) documents, the women's led right-to-information movement has demanded a minimal level of transparency by local governments, especially in the use of local funds. Other more professional advocacy organisations, such as the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore, have used a relatively sophisticated research processes to develop 'Report Cards' of local governments in the delivery of services.

In both Bolivia and India, legislation allows for local 'vigilance' committees to serve a monitoring and watchdog role. So far there is little evidence that these have developed the capacity and independence to do their job, but there may be great potential. In Kerala, for instance, local vigilance committees are empowered to sign off on local projects – inspecting both for quality and for proper use of funds – before final payments are made to contractors. An NGO coalition associated with Interaction is beginning to explore how to strengthen these citizen monitoring committees as a bottom-up device to insure accountability.

These, then, are just some of the strategies which are beginning to be used for strengthening citizenship participation in the potentially new spaces found in democratic decentralisation programmes. Clearly their potential for success will vary across context and will depend a great deal on broader enabling factors. And much more research is needed to learn about the impact these interventions can have in helping to overcome the barriers to participation which were discussed in the previous section, and in which contexts.

**Issues for further research**

The brief overview of literature suggests several potential areas for further inquiry and innovation. In general, our finding is that while there have been a number of recent studies on democratic decentralisation, few of them focus in depth on the nature and dynamics of citizen participation in these new political structures. To do so might provide important insights into new concepts and practice of participation, especially they involve new understandings of 'citizenship' participation, as linking the more traditional concepts of social or project participation and political participation. In doing so, we might also want to explore the following questions:

- What are the possibilities that programmes of democratic decentralisation offer new avenues for scaling up participation to allow stronger voice and policy influence by grassroots citizens?
- What is the nature of interaction between citizens and governments in processes of democratic decentralisation and increased citizen participation? What are the barriers to such participation?
- What are the kind of conflicts that emerge in this interaction and how are they negotiated and solved?
- What are the characteristics of the 'institutional spaces' in which such participatory interactions occur?
- Who are the key actors? Do they include the most vulnerable and marginalised? What are the consequences of increased participation, in terms of changes in policy, improved governance and service delivery?

To the degree that the academic literature on decentralisation has examined participation, it has largely pointed to the gap between the legislative frameworks, and the practices on the ground. At the same time, informal survey and contact with practitioners in government and civil society in a number of countries where there are decentralisation programmes have in fact pointed to a number of innovative interventions designed to strengthen participation in local governance, and to overcome, or at least, minimise the barriers which have been present in the past. A second important need therefore seems to be to examine the impact of these interventions, and the

enabling conditions for them to succeed.

- What strategies, approaches and innovations are being used to strengthen participation in the context of local governance?
- What are the enabling environments and conditions necessary for these to be effective?
- What impact do these interventions and innovations have over time?
- What are the synergies and linkages amongst the various strategies?
- What are the strategies for scaling-up successful experiences that have occurred in certain local levels?
- How can we document and disseminate best practice in this field?

These are some of the broad questions around which we hope to have discussion over the next few days. We are pleased to have such rich representation of practitioners and researchers from five continents and almost a dozen countries to help explore the themes.

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