Economic Commission for Africa

BEST PRACTICES IN
THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO
DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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August 2004

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
LDC	Local Development Council
LGC	Local Governance Code
LPP	Law of Popular Participation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NCCRW	National Campaign Committee for Rural Workers
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NSDF	National Slum Dwellers Federation
ODA	Official Development Aid
PARENT	Participatory Resource Network
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RIPS	Rural Integrated Project Support
SPARC	Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UPPAP	Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project

1. Introduction

With the growing appreciation that it is a fundamental prerequisite for the realization of development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed on by the world leaders at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit, good governance has become one of the main expectations of citizens around the world. Hitherto, the monopoly of the few and privileged, the globalization of technologies is progressively enabling an inexpensive, instantaneous and broad diffusion of information, affecting styles of politics, management, culture and social organization across the globe. The relative ease of accessing information has increased the ability of citizens to share views, experience and knowledge, as well as to become aware of their rights, to make their demands known, and to increase civil influence generally. Consequently, citizens are gradually joining together to demand improved levels of services and higher standards of behaviour from their governments, moving public opinion to the forefront as the basis of the legitimacy of government.

On the other hand, failures or ineffectiveness in governance, as witnessed across many contemporary African States, have not only caused slow, stagnating or even reverse development, they have also resulted in the denial of justice, the pervasive practices of nepotism and corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, and the breakdown of law and order. Moreover, there is little doubt today that poor governance has been a major contributing factor in the continued economic decline affecting many countries of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Denial of democratic rights, misguided public policies, mismanagement and misuse of scarce resources, inequitable distribution of resources, wealth and income, and limited foreign and domestic private investment have indeed been some of the more obvious manifestations or consequences of poor governance in much of Africa.

Over the last decade, as we have been witnessing an extraordinary expansion of democratic reforms across Africa, awareness of good governance has been growing, culminating in a continent-wide consensus on the need for more open, transparent and accountable political and economic systems, as embodied in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). As the Democracy and Political Governance initiative of NEPAD unequivocally recognizes, one of the fundamental requirements of good governance is that government moves closer to the people. Unlike former, essentially state-centered approaches to government-citizen interaction, today, public accountability and participation of people in governance and development are considered essential characteristics of good governance.

Development, concomitantly, is increasingly being conceptualized as the state of human well-being rather than being exclusively a matter of the state of the economy. That political freedom and participation are crucial to human development is still not always well understood. 'Human-centered' development nowadays is conceived and measured not only in economic terms such as reducing income poverty, but also in terms of social well-being, 'people-friendly' political structures, the quality of production or output of public services, and more concern with the general quality of human life.

This trend, initiated and conceptualized by such illustrious development researchers as Mahbub Ul-Haq and Amartya Sen, is reflected in the dissatisfaction with exclusively quantitative indicators such as per capita income or the rate of growth of national income as primary targets or measures of development, and the corresponding search for alternative or additional indicators, such as life expectancy, health and literacy levels, access to various social or public services, freedom of speech, and the degree of popular participation in policy planning, formulation and implementation.

Participation in particular is an important variable as it promotes collective and individual agency which, in turn, drives the progress for issues central to human development such as protecting the environment, promoting gender equality, fostering human rights, and claiming economic and social rights. This fundamental notion has been embodied in the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by General Assembly resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986, where the 'right to development' is defined as:

'… a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom.'

The reality, however, is that, more often than not, participation is neither active, nor free nor meaningful, resulting in a growing crisis of legitimacy in the relationship between citizens and the institutions that affect their lives. In both North and South, citizens speak of mounting disillusionment with government, based on concerns about corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor and the absence of a sense of connection with elected representatives and bureaucrats. Indeed, from the perspective of ordinary citizens in Africa, recent research at the World Bank[1] and at the Economic Commission for Africa[2] (ECA) has shown that the vast

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[1] World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/2001.*

[2] African Governance Project, internal ECA documentation, 2003.

majority of African countries suffer from a deep crisis in governance. State institutions, whether represented by central ministries or local government authorities are often neither responsive nor accountable to citizens in general, and the poor in particular. Indeed, most African citizens feel alienated from their government as they see little recourse to injustice, criminality, abuse and corruption by institutions and, therefore, not surprisingly, lack confidence in State institutions even though they still express their willingness to partner with them under appropriate conditions including more transparent and equitable rules.

Among the public institutions of most importance to ordinary citizens but especially to the poor, are those responsible for delivering basic social services in health, sanitation, education, policing, utilities, infrastructure and transport. In Africa, the people's general dissatisfaction with public-service institutions relates largely to issues of participation (or 'voice'[3]) and of accountability. The African Charter for Popular Development and Transformation, adopted by African leaders in 1990[4] recognized this, calling for governments to promote 'greater participation and consensus-building in the formulation and implementation of economic and social policies at all levels, including the identification and elimination of laws and bureaucratic procedures that pose obstacles to people's participation' (Preamble, 3. (iii)).

Indeed, whilst the concept of participation is certainly not a new one in the development discourse, the traditional distinction between 'community participation' (usually in the form of projects) and political participation (conventionally through voting, political parties and lobbying) is beginning to dissolve. As participatory approaches are scaled up from projects to policies, we witness a gradual convergence of concern with citizen engagement in policy formulation and implementation, and with good governance, broadening political participation to search for new, innovative, and more direct ways through which citizens may influence their governments and hold them accountable.

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[3] The terms 'voice', 'exit' and 'loyalty' are borrowed from Albert O. Hirschman (1970). 'Voice' covers a range of options including complaint, protest, lobbying and participation, available to citizens and civil society actors to demand better services. 'Exit' is a strategy in competitive market situations where alternative service providers exist from which citizens may choose. Where public-service providers operate monopolies some forms of passive 'loyalty' may evolve, where users become clients in patronage networks.

[4] International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa, Arusha, 12-16 February 1990.

How do ordinary people, especially poor people, affect the social policies that in turn affect their well-being? What should be the role of citizen participation in social policy formulation and implementation in this era of globalization, or, more specifically: How do constantly changing socio-economic and political contexts affect the entry points through which actors in civil society, especially the poor or those working with the poor, can exercise voice and influence in critical aspects of social care? How can government institutions become more accountable and more responsive to the demands of their citizens? Illustrated by international experience across the developing world whilst maintaining the overall focus on the African context, these are some of the critical questions to be addressed in this publication.

2. Participation, Democracy and Good Governance

The notions of participation and contestation are at the very core of the notion of democracy. Even though a near-tautology, the importance of participation to the theory and practice of democracy cannot be overstated. However, participation at the grassroots level is not sufficient by itself, as it needs to be met by reciprocal initiatives on the part of the central government for its effectiveness and sustainability. With respect to the delivery of services, effective citizen 'voice' – the 'demand side' of the equation – needs to be met by 'supply-side' State responsiveness, which in turn will reinforce and foster more citizen engagement in a virtuous cycle.

Institutional responsiveness is defined here as the achievement of congruence between community preferences and public policies, such that activities of the institution are valued by the public[5]. Most central governments in Africa need to accomplish deep structural public-sector reforms in terms of democratization, decentralization, devolution of responsibility, service-delivery improvement and local-government reform to enhance their responsiveness and make bottom-up participation effective by ensuring a seamless participatory process from the grassroots to the centre.

Expanding the political and civic space for popular social engagement is critical for deepening democracy and building democratic governance. The responsibility for expanding this space lies both with the State, which must protect political and civic freedoms, and with the members of society who seize and engage in this space so as to invigorate it. This process of institutionalizing democracy by vertically integrating upward grassroots pressures for participation with downward, central government-generated measures for integrating grassroots participation is probably one of the most challenging tasks that democracies worldwide, and especially young democracies in Africa and elsewhere, are currently facing.

This leads us to the question of what approach would be most conducive for having an effective citizen-voice initiative being met by an equally effective responsiveness of government? The first case study on the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) in India highlights some of the key principles involved, and illustrates how alternative approaches to the delivery of social services by civil society have, in some quarters, gained attention and begun

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[5] Richard C. Crook, "Decentralization and Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Politics of Local-Central Relations", in *Public Administration and Development*, Special Issue: Decentralization and Local Governance in Africa, February 2003, page 79.

to be adopted by State agencies. As such, they have contributed indirectly to policy change. Moreover, collective action through self-provisioning may facilitate the creation of identities of previously excluded groups as political actors, which then leads to greater engagement in the public sphere. Efforts to provide services can then become transformed into organized struggles of the otherwise excluded and provide a platform not only for articulating rights, but also for recasting responsibilities and obligations.

Case Study I
Sense and Sanitation: Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), India

Bombay is the financial capital of India with half of its 10 million population living in informal settlements and makeshift structures without sanitation. In response to this aberrant situation, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), a Non-governmental organization(NGO), was created in 1984 as groups of pavement dwellers created strategies for meeting their needs. Through an alliance with Mahila Milan – a national network of women's collectives – and the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), SPARC's approach of initiating community-driven interventions and exchanges for reflection and analysis, mobilization, capacity-building and cross-community support, addressed many issues, including land tenure, shelter, employment and credit in several large Indian cities. What distinguishes SPARC's methodology is its focus on finding pragmatic, precedent-setting and realistic solutions to basic sanitation problems, and on establishing partnerships between city authorities and communities.

Hence, rather than trying to replicate the outputs of its projects, SPARC's approach has been to replicate the processes which include utilizing existing strategies, adapting and refining them so as to use them to demonstrate to municipal officials that they are worth replicating. Furthermore, SPARC invests heavily in empowering the grassroots community voice through capacity-building, as well as in collecting and disseminating data and information to both urban authorities and affected citizens, regarding the sanitation situation in slums and similarly neglected poor urban areas. In 1985, for instance, SPARC conducted its first census of pavement dwellers in Bombay and circulated copies of it to every bureaucrat in the city at the municipal, state, and central levels. Many responded and were open to new ideas, as it emerged that there were vastly diverging attitudes towards slum dwellers and sanitation problems within the Government. As the movement grew in coverage and importance, now spanning 11 countries involving more than 650,000 people through an international network of alliances and exchanges with NGOs in Africa and Asia, SPARC also began to work with street children and drug abusers, playing a key role in the development of a new government abuse-control management plan for urban areas.

Source: www.sparcindia.org

From SPARC's experience, a few key lessons for effective citizen-voice initiatives in improving public-sector services can be learned:

- Citizen-voice initiatives should start small, limiting themselves at first to the 'basics'. Pilot projects should be used to test alternative solutions and their replicability.

- Horizontal alliances with other, national or international, civil society groups can play a significant role in gaining further know-how, geographic reach and, perhaps most importantly, political clout in negotiating with government authorities.

- Rather than adopting a confrontational position vis-à-vis the government by making unreasonable demands and antagonizing officials, dialogue should be sought in order to better understand the limits and constraints that public-service institutions are facing, and to reach a jointly supported consensus.

- Building a substantive knowledge base at the grassroots, at both technical and official policy levels, is critical in gaining credibility and making citizen voice truly effective.

- Where mutual support is growing, confidence and recognition is built to form social capital in the communities, which is critical for the sustainability of citizen-voice initiatives whilst creating the base and momentum for further ventures.

- The media should become involved wherever possible in mobilizing and informing the population of public-service problems and possible solutions.

- Ideally, 'street-level' local government officials should be mobilized and involved at an early stage since they tend to be most familiar with the local situation and its problems whilst being more open-minded to finding practical solutions to them.

Politics is in fact the intervening variable between citizen voice and public-sector response. A civil society group may be equipped with all the preconditions for effectively pressing its demands on the State – a united, informed and well-organized constituency, a non-confrontational and pro-compromise approach to government officials, effective alliances with other civil society actors, broad social support, and even a 'crisis event' to galvanize the media and attract public concern on the group's needs. However, the political environment may undercut its impact if the group does not contribute to the predominant political agenda or prevailing patronage systems. Indeed,

policy and programmatic changes can only occur if people at many levels believe that there are real benefits to be gained, and it is dangerous to 'romanticize' the notion of participation and forget that policy change is a highly complex process, involving many actors, each with their own agendas and interests.

Political systems have a critical impact on the calculations civil society groups make about the value of engaging with the State. Formal democracy and the existence of basic civil and political rights is a crucial precondition for virtually any kind of civil society activism that engages critically with the State. Beyond this, certain characteristics of party systems are relevant in creating an enabling environment for civil society intervention, including the number and diversity of registered political parties at both national and local level, the extent to which they are institutionalized, and the level of ideological polarization within and between them.

Where the party system has become the major organizing principle, and where there is lively and constructive multi-party competition, with stable, institutionalized and ideologically diverse parties, civil society groups may afford to pursue confrontational, high-visibility strategies to promote specific group interests or challenge State behaviour, in the hope of interesting opposition parties in taking up their concerns in the legislature or other relevant political forums. If, on the other hand, parties are weakly institutionalized or based on personalism and clientelism, lack coherent programmatic platforms and rely on appeals to populist or identity politics, civil society groups will not have effective access to the policy-making forums controlled by parties.

Perversely, clientelist relationships of political subordination in exchange for material or other rewards may actually engage clients in a relationship of 'reverse vertical accountability', requiring clients to be accountable to corrupt State patrons. This poses tremendous challenges for civil society groups in terms of 'reorientating' such clients away from individually beneficial patronage systems and into collective efforts to press for service improvements in the broader public interest.

3. Strengthening Participation in Social Policy and Social Provisioning

### 3.1. Trends in Strategies and Approaches

Contrary to common belief, the making and shaping of policy is less a set of organized, predictable and rational choices than a complex, often unpredictable and above all, political process. As new roles, strategic relationships and partnerships among government, citizens and business emerge, citizens are gradually achieving greater input into government decision-making, central governments are decentralizing to local government levels, and partnering with civil society and the private sector in the delivery of programmes and services.

Efforts by officials to foster citizen participation in policy-making and in monitoring policy implementation will vary in depth of engagement permitted to citizens. For instance, most officials find it more acceptable to cultivate arms-length, consultative types of relationships with citizens than to assign them automatic and enforceable rights to information about government decision-making, or rights of redress where there are legitimate grievances. Moreover, where consultation occurs, it is often what policy makers want to know that tends to determine how information is going to be used. This is shaped, in turn, not only by their political orientation and policy networks, but by the frames of reference within which a particular policy issue is interpreted.

Even in the existence of an enabling policy that facilitates citizen participation in policy planning and formulation, much will actually depend on those who are charged with its implementation. Initial commitment is itself no guarantee that policies will be effectively implemented; the discretion that individual bureaucrats exercise and their commitment is a crucial factor in determining whether citizen preference and policy change will become a reality.

Similarly, citizen efforts to voice concerns over government behaviour will vary according to whether they adopt a 'barking dog' position on the periphery, protesting about poor policy implementation without offering pragmatic and constructive alternatives, or whether they try to insinuate themselves to horizontal accountability functions, asserting their rights to monitor government functions and demanding redress for poor performance. These differences in intensity of engagement can be expressed in the distinctions between initiatives that organize opportunities for consultation, access and exchange of information and dialogue with officials; for formal representation in public decision-making forums; and for more direct response and accountability to citizens. These three processes – consultation, representation, and impact – represent the progressive broad steps that the State may take in engaging with its citizens.

Figure I.
Participation and the Policy Process
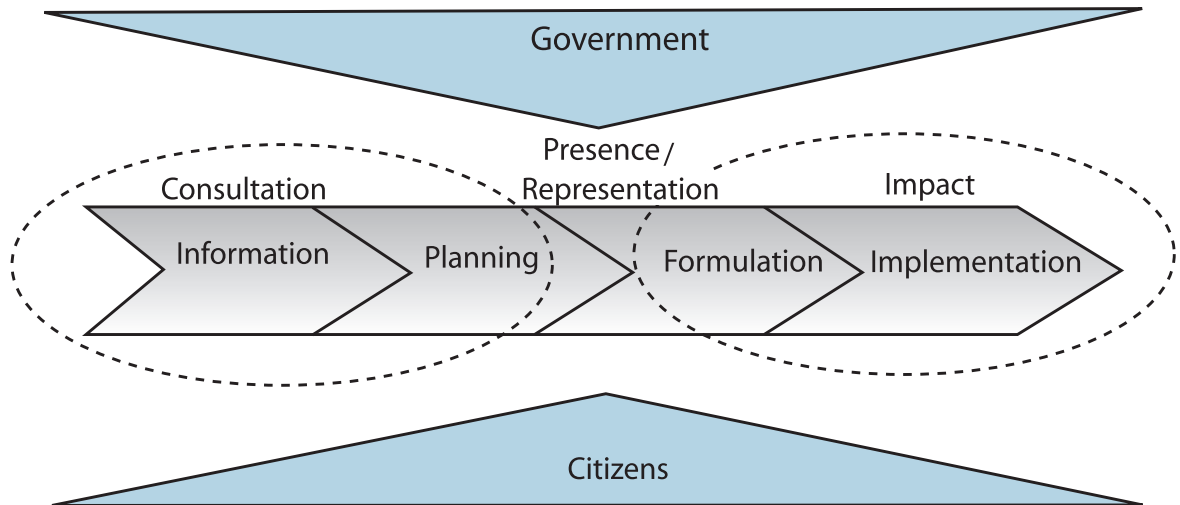
Source: Author (ECA 2003)

Consultation involves opening space for dialogue and information sharing. It can vary from one-off consultative exercises or surveys, or on-going participatory poverty assessments as practiced in Uganda (see Case Study II below). As seen before, however, processes geared at simply asking people for their opinions on social policy issues can serve to produce 'echoes' of dominant discourses, rather than alternative framings of policy issues. The role of deliberative and critically reflective knowledge and information-generation processes becomes critical in enabling citizens to analyse and articulate their own concerns, which may lie beyond the frames of reference of pervasive policy discourses.

Case Study II
Participatory Poverty Assessment in Uganda

Traditional modes of poverty analysis operate on the basis of a number of indicators including income, consumption, health and education levels, usually derived from household surveys. Growing dissatisfaction with those exclusively quantitative poverty measurement and analysis tools, combined with the belief that the poor should become more involved in the diagnosis of their situation, has led to the creation of the Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) process, eliciting quantitative and qualitative data from the poor on broader indicators, such as vulnerability, physical and social isolation, self-respect, security and powerlessness.

In 1998-1999, the Government of Uganda implemented the first Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP) for which the poor in seven rural and two urban districts were directly consulted. UPPAP's primary objective was to understand the nature and causes of poverty and to integrate poor people's perspectives into the policy-making process at the national and district-planning levels. The results of the UPPAP influenced budget allocation decisions such as the provision of clean water supply which was given a higher weighting as a result of poor communities identifying access to clean water as a priority. Similarly, security issues were given increased attention since these had emerged as central to many people's experience of poverty. The UPPAP findings also revealed major differences in the poverty profiles among districts, resulting in policy-makers recognizing the need for the flexible allocation of central government grants to the districts and to further devolve the provision of services to district and urban authorities. Through a broad-based partnership between the government, bilateral donors, and civil society organizations, UPPAP has also been a key influence on the Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) revised in 2000.

Source: Caroline Robb, Can the Poor Influence Policy? 2nd edition (2002).

Moving from the level of consultation to the level of presence and representation involves institutionalizing regular decision-making access for certain social groups, for instance, through quotas in local government for socially excluded groups, or through structured access for a wide variety of neighbourhood associations to municipal planning and budgeting debates, as illustrated by the hugely successful 'Porto Alegre experiment', which has been replicated in over 70 Brazilian cities, including Sao Paulo, Santos and Belo Horizonte (see Case Study III below). There is also abundant evidence that quotas make a difference to women's political participation. Currently, women account for less than 14 per cent of the lower houses of parliaments worldwide [6]. In the 11 countries, however, ranging from the Nordic countries in

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[6] Data from UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002*.

Europe, to Argentina in Latin America, and Mozambique in Africa, where quotas have been introduced, women have achieved more than 30 per cent representation. Similar results could be achieved for quotas in local government elections in France and India, as well as within political parties in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

Case Study III
Participatory Budgeting and the Gender-Budget Initiative in Porto Alegre/Brazil

First initiated in Australia, gender-responsive budgets are an innovative tool that empower civil society to hold public spending accountable to international and national commitments for promoting gender equality. Rather than being separate, gender-responsive budgets are part of the global government budget and actually provide an analysis of the impact of fiscal spending on gender equality. With some 40 countries already applying them to their budgetary processes, including South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, they are gradually gaining currency around the world. In Porto Alegre/Brazil, the largest industrial city in Rio Grande do Sul with 1.3 million inhabitants, the gender-budget initiative is part of a broader process of municipal participatory budgeting involving NGOs, delegates, council members, community leaders and citizens. The number of citizens participating in this process actually multiplied by five since 1991 through their representational role in two annual assemblies organized by local governments. A first assembly of the 16 regions assesses the budget of the previous year and elects representatives to work out the region's spending priorities of the next year.

Three months are thus spent involving consultations with civil society groups and neighbourhood associations, before a report covering issues ranging from transportation, sanitation, education to health care, is submitted to the second assembly. The latter then ranks five priority sectors from a list of fourteen, revising regional or thematic demands and budget allocations in five thematic areas including transportation, education and culture, health and social welfare, economic development and taxation, and urban development. This process of civic organizing has been particularly important for disempowered social groups such as the poor who were able to lobby for environmental sanitation and street lighting to be added to the list in 2000/1 through this participatory process. Moreover, between 1989 and 1996 the number of households with access to water services rose from 49 per cent to 98 per cent, and the number of children enrolled in public schools doubled. Although, not targeting gender issues in particular, this process has proven to be a useful vehicle for highlighting gender-related concerns and providing new insights for other gender-sensitive budget initiatives through the accompanying research and advocacy work.

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 2002 and 2003.

The example of participatory budgeting shows that, beyond playing a monitoring role, citizens can actually exert influence in the decision-making process affecting the delivery of services to them. Such influence brings citizen engagement to the point where groups can translate access and presence into a tangible impact on policy-making and the organization of service delivery. This can happen when accountability mechanisms incorporate citizen concerns and preferences, by, for instance, engaging citizens in financial audits at local levels, or incorporating client-satisfaction measures into new performance indicators for public servants, or even providing citizens with formal rights to litigate in the event of non-delivery of services. Pioneered in the United Kingdom, Citizen Charters, for instance, are increasingly proving to be useful instruments for reaching the stage where improved responsiveness and client focus are being achieved in service delivery, or where improved accountability to the poor is being realized in official institutions for horizontal accountability oversight.

Box 1
Citizen Charters

Initiated in 1991 by the British Government, Citizen Charters have become an increasingly popular tool to give citizens limited statutory rights, thereby taking accountability to consumers of public services from the administrative and political realm into the legal one. Where charters do not in themselves create new legal rights, they help users claim existing ones or make new rights enforceable through non-legal means such as complaint procedures or independent adjudication. Citizen Charters may be produced at the national and/or at the local level, and where the former exist, they should set the minimum standards for the local charters. Whether at national or local level, their main purpose is to improve access to public services and promote quality. The key features of a charter should include:

- Setting specific, measurable and realistic standards of service that users may expect;
- Monitoring and reviewing performance of the service provided;
- Providing full information on the use of resources;
- Encouraging equitable access and promoting choice;
- Providing simple and accessible complaint and feedback mechanisms resulting in rapid redress procedures; and
- Encouraging partnerships among public service organizations, their users and other service providers.

Taking the concept of a public service charter to the continental level – the first of its kind – a 'Charter for the Public Service in Africa' was adopted at the Third Pan-African Conference of the Ministers of Civil Service in Windhoek/Namibia on 5 February 2001. The charter highlights the 'need to adapt the different public services in Africa to the new requirements of public service, so as to be able to anticipate or accompany the profound changes that African countries are experiencing', including the need to modernize administrative structures, to adapt to the increasing globalization, and to promote social development and reduce the existing disparities in income and opportunities. Defining a framework to guide public services in Africa, the Charter lists a number of principles and rules of conduct for public services and state employees, including the principle of equality of treatment, of neutrality, of legality, and of continuity in the provision of public services to African citizens. The Charter further seeks to promote the proximity and accessibility of services, participation, consultation and mediation, quality, effectiveness and efficiency, evaluation of services, transparency and information, speed and responsiveness, reliability and confidentiality of information.

Source: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index.asp.

3.2. Conditions for Popular Participation

The simultaneous processes of globalization and localization are constantly reconfiguring relations and opportunities for participation. New alliances transcend older boundaries, in networks of resistance as well as of power that stretch into new spaces within, as well as beyond the nation state. As demands from below for recognition and voice meet the proliferation of spaces into which publics of various kinds are invited, many questions arise about the nature of these spaces and the dynamics of participation within them.

The kinds of 'spaces' in which participation may occur must indeed be understood in the context in which they are created. 'Political space' is not only something taken up, assumed or filled, but something that can be created, opened, and reshaped. The notion of 'policy spaces' evokes sites in which different actors, knowledges and interests interact, and in which room can be made for alternatives, but from which some people and ideas usually remain excluded. Contrary to the somewhat idealized notions of democratic practice, such spaces are never neutral as they are shaped by the power relations which enter and surround them. Being constructed, for example, as 'beneficiaries', 'customers', 'users' or 'citizens' tends to determine what people are perceived to be able to contribute or are entitled to know or decide, as well as the perceived obligations of those who seek to involve them.

Rather than focusing exclusively on the mechanisms of participation, more attention should therefore be paid to who is creating the participatory space – is it an 'invited space' created from above through donor or governmental intervention, or is it demanded through collective action from below, why was it created in the first place, and who fills it? Another important factor in understanding participation relates to the fact that new spaces carry within them 'tracks and traces' of previous social relationships, resources and knowledge. Hence, each space is socially and politically located, with dynamics of participation varying across differing levels and arenas of citizen engagement, and across differing types of policy spaces. It follows that similar mechanisms used in different places may produce quite different kinds of spaces, raising important questions as to the replicability of (best) practices and experiences across cultures and contexts.

As mentioned before, the range of actions open to citizens, and even the forms of associational life the citizens choose, are primarily shaped by the nature of the political regime, variation in the enjoyment of citizenship rights between different categories of citizen, and the institutional capacity of the bureaucracy to make any kind of response to citizen demands at all. In many parts of the developing world, de facto there is no welfare state to place demands on or to reform. The extent to which citizens influence design, delivery, and assessment of public services, and the extent to which States are capable of making response will largely depend upon the nature of the political system.

The latter refers to the depth of procedural and substantive democracy, the configuration of executive/legislative/judicial power, and the level of political participation. Also important are the organization of political competition (the number and types of parties, their ideologies and memberships, the relative importance of high finance or crime in political contests), and the nature and power of the State and its bureaucracies (whether it is a developmental State, whether it has the will and capacity to enforce change in the culture and practice of bureaucracies, whether there is a professional civil service, and whether the public service has internalized a commitment to poverty reduction.

Indeed, perhaps the most important organizational change needed in the transformation of the State is to replace the current underhandedly anti-participatory 'bureaucratic' culture with its strong focus on central planning, with one that is really interested in participation and is willing to promote it through facilitation and negotiation with stakeholders. This is not simply a problem of form, as change will not be achieved through decrees or regulations: it is something more profound and more time-consuming, as demonstrated in the case of Tanzania (see Case Study IV below). Indeed, across much of the developing world, and notably in Africa, there is an entire organizational culture based on hierarchy and verticality, with a strong authoritarian stamp, that clashes with the call for a consultative, shared and democratic management, implicit in the notion of participation.

Case Study IV
Training for Behaviour Change, Tanzania

In Tanzania, people-centered development and popular participation have been key themes in the Government's development strategy for a number of years, notably since the introduction of the Local Government Reform Agenda initiated in July 1996. However, the reality has been that popular participation has remained largely rhetorical as government institutions have continued to operate in a top-down, hierarchical and centralized fashion. The leadership quickly realized that there are significant sociocultural constraints to changing attitudes, behaviour and organizational culture of government staff to make them more participatory as traditional bureaucratic practices do not allow for the lowest-level civil servants to pass on significant knowledge to their superiors unless asked to, and even when invited, junior officers often feel too afraid to express their opinions. This makes it very difficult for policy makers to learn from those whom they are supposed to be assisting and a command culture emerges as lower officials expect innovation to come from their superiors.

First initiated in 1993, the Central Government in cooperation with the Finnish Government, have been running a Rural Integrated Project Support (RIPS) Programme which is now operating in six regions, covering 11 districts and 850 villages. The objective of the Programme is to facilitate development through participatory and community-based initiatives in a wide range of sectors including agriculture, natural resource management, education, health and income generation. One of the core mechanisms applied to achieve this objective has been to train government officials in attitude and behavioural change, and to promote dialogue between government officials and communities so as to bridge the gap between macro-level policy-making and micro-level realities on the ground.

To this end, participatory learning forums for top bureaucrats were held, and training programmes in collaborative planning, negotiation, conflict resolution and implementation were designed to promote partnerships between local rural communities and government bureaucrats. Gradually, local officials learned to value local knowledge and resources as they became aware of the fact that the villagers have strong analytical, planning, organizational, leadership and management capabilities. They also realized the complexity and diversity of local situations and economic relations, running counter to previous perceptions within the Government, which tended to apply standardized solutions across the board. The success of the Programme has resulted in a number of follow-up activities including South-South exchanges and the creation of the Participatory Resource Network (PARENT) with the aim of exchanging information and acting as a sounding board for grassroots initiatives and priorities.

Source: Institute for Development Studies, Working Paper 138 (2001)

Whilst most studies on popular participation tend to focus on the role of the center, i.e. the government and its leadership, in promoting participation, it is often overseen that appropriate conditions at the periphery or 'grassroots' level may be just as important. Little effort has been made to coordinate the activities of the diverse groups operating at the local level whilst the 'mobilization' activities of some groups (e.g. the ethnic advocacy groups) sometimes constitute an obstacle to the unity of purpose needed to tackle urgent community problems.

Expanded participation is associated with particular conditions and circumstances which may largely be independent of government structures or interventions. The existence of local associations rooted in a social milieu and upon which new and broader development tasks can be grafted, for instance, is an advantage. This circumstance, however, may be fairly limited in many African societies today because social cohesion, or 'social capital' – the experience and trust in associating together – has been so depleted that few if any existing local-level associations can be found to become partners in governance.

As convincingly argued by Robert Putnam[7] in his analysis of civic traditions in Italy, the growth of social capital and civil society takes a long time – a very long time – and where 'development projects' attempt to create or initiate local associational partnerships these organizations initially have little social capital and typically function as means through which individual villagers or village factions can obtain external resources. It is rare for such associations to have any real impact on project design or implementation, however well intentioned the goals of the project sponsors may be, and however participatory their methods.

Accountability issues within civil society groups often constitute another problem. Where civil society associations claim to represent the voice of the poor, attention must be paid to the actual process in which the poor engage in articulating, aggregating, and representing their interests. Questions of internal democracy and of organization, its grassroots structure and internal culture, and the nature of its leadership are critical for establishing whose voice is really being promoted.

Other preconditions for the expression of voice by individuals or collectives of service users include a minimum level of awareness of their entitlements and rights and the ways these are or are not being met through State services, as well as some degree of social or political power. Citizen awareness of civic and political rights may be acquired through capacity-building

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[7] Robert Putnam (1993).

measures, as illustrated with the Citizen Education Programmes in Zambia (see Case Study V below), whilst social or political power tends to be ascribed by non-earned individual or group characteristics (such as gender, caste, class, race). Where social power is acquired through social mobilization, its degree of effectiveness depends on, among other things, social capital and the capacity to attract allies from other and more powerful social groups.

Case Study V
Citizen Education Programmes, Zambia

The surprisingly low voter turnout in the historic 1991 Zambian elections, marking the transition from Kenneth Kaunda's regime to a multiparty democratic Zambian State, highlighted the difficulties of democratic consolidation witnessed among such fragile transition States. In anticipation of the 1996 elections, and to prevent a further decline in voter turnout, three agencies, including two NGOs and a group of officials and teachers from within the Ministry of Education, launched a variety of civic education programmes in the early 1990s with the objective of raising political awareness and stimulating civic action among Zambia's citizens. The programmes included workshops on civil and political rights that provided training to trainers who would then facilitate grassroot workshops, the creation of a new course syllabus for junior secondary level civic education schools, as well as innovative, unconventional civic education awareness-raising programmes such as drama, public discussions, media spots, walks, talks, concerts and video shows.

National surveys and other follow-ups to the programmes subsequently revealed that the civic education activities had a significant impact on civic knowledge, the promotion of civic values and skills, the expression of political preferences, and civic action, notably voting. For the 1996 elections, 86 per cent of the programme participants had registered to vote, against a national average of 60 per cent. Participants were also more likely to attend and speak publicly at community meetings, to organize such meetings, or to join community organizations and act as community leaders. On the other hand, the programmes only had limited success with the poor and marginalized sections of the population, who, through a combination of low education/illiteracy and lack of access to the media seemed to be less receptive to the methods used in the programme. Inducing the principles of democratic citizenship among this doubly marginalized population may require that alternative and more targeted methods are devised, possibly along the lines of the popular theatres and streetplays performed in local languages rather than in English, used by one of the NGOs.

Source: Bratto, M. & Aldfelder, P. (1999)

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4. New Roles and Responsibilities in the Age of Globalization

Efforts to enhance participation in development are increasingly focused on reconfiguring the space between citizens and the institutions that affect their lives. They are about positioning citizens in newly emergent political and policy arenas, and repositioning them with regard to older institutions of 'traditional' governance as well as of the 'modern' State. As the space for citizen participation changes and increases through citizen demands to become involved in the social policy decision-making process, the traditional boundaries between the State, civil society and the private sector are becoming blurred, requiring a rethinking of their roles and relationships with citizens. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, many countries have pursued new mechanisms to promote more direct citizen engagement in the processes of governance, ranging from the creation of decentralized institutions, to a wide variety of participatory and consultative processes in national and global policy deliberations.

Rhetorically, there has been increasing emphasis on using such mechanisms to support inclusion of the poorest groups, those who do not usually have sufficient economic, educational and political resources to influence the outcomes of traditional policy processes. Signaling at once the perceived inefficacy of formal representative mechanisms and a growing concern with means of enabling otherwise excluded groups to engage in shaping the institutions that affect their lives, these strategies seek to create and make use of new political spaces.

In terms of social policy, the role of government is to secure for its citizens affordable access to high-quality education, health care, information and communication technologies, social-safety nets, and infrastructure. This is especially true for achieving the MDGs and in the face of new challenges posed to developing countries in the age of globalization. Only if the quality and access to education and health are ensured, if physical infrastructure, including transport and communication networks, hospitals and water systems are built or improved, if poverty amidst plenty is reduced, and if the technology gap between rich and poor, North and South, is narrowed – in short, if people have greater opportunities to make *choices* – can the negative externalities of globalization be avoided, and its opportunities seized by the people.

Expanding personal freedoms implies that people have greater opportunities to make choices in every field, and to participate in every sphere of public life. To enjoy such freedoms, people must be free from avoidable illness, free from ignorance, and have reasonably adequate living conditions. In short, rather than perceiving social expenditures as a *cost,* compensating the effects of economic logic, States should begin to understand them as being an *investment* and consistently earmark resources over time for the development of a functioning social infrastructure.

Figure II
Active, Free and Meaningful Participation as a Catalyst for Enhanced Human Development
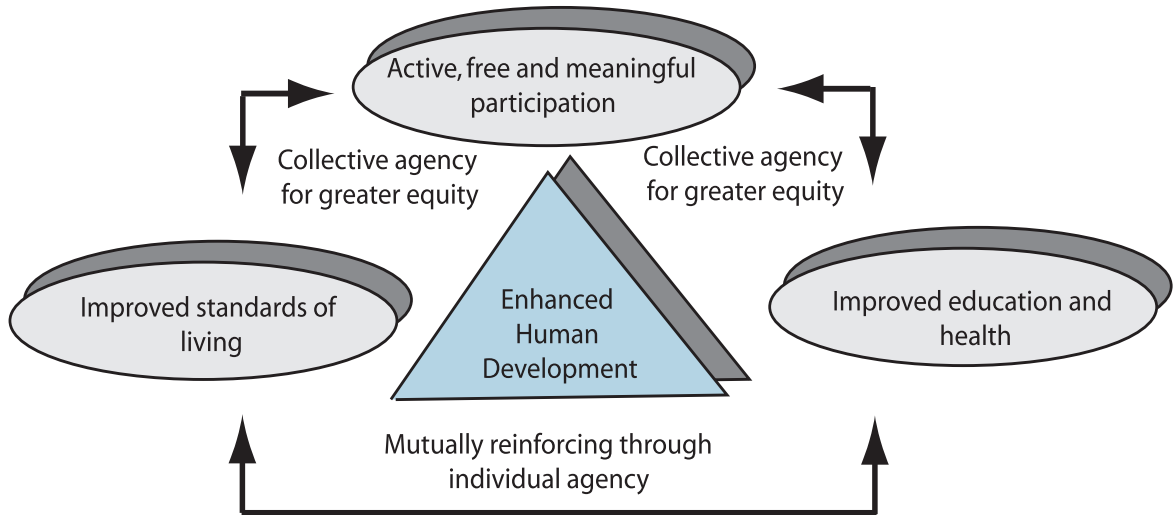
Source: adapted from UNDP, Human Development Report 2002

At the same time, there is growing recognition for the need to engage local non-state institutions including civil society and the private sector in service delivery and development activities. With structural adjustment and the roll-back of the State, non-statutory and private providers of social sector services have burgeoned over the last two decades, with important implications for social policy. The problem that confronts many developing countries is that until now macroeconomic policies, deregulation and privatization have not been coupled with equally pervasive reforms in political and social areas. Thus, it is still often the case that pro-poor priorities such as improving health care, education and public infrastructure receive relatively low political consideration. This, in turn, has made it difficult for many countries to elude the social costs of globalization, including the repercussions of economic and financial instability and volatility.

The ensuing de facto privatization of the social sector in many parts of the world and the increasing recognition of the institutional importance of NGOs and CSOs in the governance process in general, and in social provisioning in particular, imply not only a different role for the State, but also an increasing emphasis on mechanisms for ensuring quality, access, accountability, efficiency and equity.

Finally, although each of the actors will be viewed separately below, the emphasis should really be on the cooperation and coordination between those actors. It has been common practice in

developing countries to see important problems, among them social problems, as an exclusive undertaking from the organizational point of view. In line with this logic, these problems would correspond to either the State, civil society or the market, but only to one of the aforementioned. Consequently, the weak points of each of the actors are emphasized in a culture of 'false competition' and the stress is inevitably placed on historical and potential conflicts. Today's social reality, however, is so difficult and complex that it unequivocally demands responsibility from all social actors, capitalizing on what each party can contribute to complement each other.

4.1. The State: The Need to Increase Responsiveness and Strengthen Accountability

States create the environment for citizen voice – and to a great extent determine the effectiveness of citizen voice – by virtue of the rights they extend to citizens and the access to participation opportunities they create. State services, and the range of rights these accord clients, are part of the constitution of client identities. State services also construct some of the social and political spaces in which interests are debated and aggregated. Participatory processes can then provide a means by which this policy space can be levered opened for the emergence of alternative interpretation of 'needs', and with this, alternative policy solutions.

A classic example of this is the role of the 1977 Employment Guarantee Act in Maharashtra/India in organizing the poor and establishing new rights and an identity for rural workers. Studies of the scheme suggest that its delivery structure, which required work-seekers to organize in groups to demand employment from State officials, encouraged rural workers' associations and NGOs to organize poor labourers to demand their employment rights in ways which have over time accelerated into cooperation with state-level and national trade unions to demand minimum wage laws for rural workers. As a result, the state government has increased the minimum wages four times since 1977.

Moreover, the guaranteed funding and the statutory right to employment guaranteed by the scheme equipped activists with the right to litigate in cases of non-implementation or of corruption – a right which is not automatic in cases of poor delivery of services of most State services. Finally, together with organizations from other states, a National Campaign Committee for Rural Workers (NCCRW) was created to lobby around four central demands: the right to minimum wages, the right to information, the right to natural resources and the right to work. The central government has indeed adopted a limited form of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in the form of the Employment Assurance Scheme, which assures rural labour employment up to one hundred days in a year.

State responsiveness implies and requires efficiency and thus a concern with responsiveness in the public administration overlaps with many current efforts to build managerial, administrative and accounting capacity in the public sector. Indeed, a very basic precondition for State responsiveness is a functioning public administration. Incompetent, clientelist and utterly kleptocratic States will neither initiate nor respond to responsiveness initiatives, nor will or can collapsed States, which have disintegrated due to civil war. Certain basics have to be in place and are an integral part of many civil service reforms and anti-corruption efforts: a bureaucracy which is protected from political interference and which subscribes, at least notionally, to publicly legislated rules and procedures, notions of merit-based recruitment and promotion, and a mission to work in the public's best interests, in relative autonomy from powerful social groups. Few public administrations – north or south – meet all of these conditions. However, constitutional commitments to such conditions give citizens an essential lever with which to press for public sector probity, equity in service delivery, and accountability to the public.

Case Study VI
Local Governance Code, Philippines

In an effort to curb the central government's excessive powers, and following the 1986 uprising, the Local Governance Code (LGC), enacted in 1991 by the Philippine Government, set up local government units and regulatory frameworks through which people and private organizations were vested with control over elected officials and public policy implementation. By formally accrediting them and providing political space for the articulation of their interests through various local government bodies and committees, the LGC has prioritized the interests of local cooperatives and people's organizations. In fact, the LGC requires that at least one quarter of the voting members on local development councils be from NGO's. With the institutionalization of the role of civil society groups in the local governance process, the LGC went a decisive step further than most local governance legislations found around the world, empowering citizens, NGOs and private sector entities with effective accountability tools to check local government activities and public service delivery at the levels of planning, decision-making and implementation.

Hence, public consultations in the form of local referenda are held, through which people can amend, revoke and enact local ordinances. In terms of representation, Local Development Councils provide for equitable membership, with at least a quarter of members coming from civil society or the private sector. Provisions also exist for the representation of women, labourers, indigenous people, and the elderly. Government responsiveness seems to have improved as a result of the LGC, especially in areas where a 'new breed' of government officials, who generally tend to be more open to new systems of operation and partnership, is replacing the old, more 'centralist' types of political leaders.

Source: Institute for Development Studies, Working Paper 138 (2001)

As the example of the Local Governance Code in Philippines illustrates, responsiveness involves re-engineering hierarchical relationships of command and reporting (administrative accountability mechanisms) to accommodate a more abundant information flow from the implementation levels upwards, and delegation of powers downwards. It involves greater transparency, changed staff attitudes, and the introduction or reinforcement of a service culture within the administration. Responsiveness to the poor in particular – or to other socially excluded categories of people – must go beyond changes in the nature of services offered and involve physical changes to delivery practices which improve accessibility.

This is because the nature of access opportunities and redress mechanisms inevitably empower some citizens over others. For instance, redress mechanisms that oblige citizens to take action in legally literate ways will mean that mainly empowered and socially elite citizens will engage with the State. Making access and redress mechanisms more poverty-sensitive might involve, for instance, establishing offices in rural areas or outreach programmes to remote users, disabled access facilities, and publishing materials on the service entitlements of citizens in the vernacular or in minority languages.

In patronage-based States, accountability mechanisms are weak, and citizen voice is normally channeled to civil servants through patron-client relationships, where citizens receive services as a matter of favour, not of right. For most citizens, this favouritism in service delivery is something that is risky to challenge, and it is often far safer to enter into dependency relationships with providers, whether by invoking ascriptive status commonalities (tribe, caste, etc.) and asserting mutual (but asymmetric) obligations, or by offering more tangible incentives (bribes). In such systems, the individual and collective influence of service clients when they attempt to demand better performance is exceptionally weak. This makes setting up alternative or parallel information accountability functions (such as people's audits of local spending), or alternative civil society-managed forms of service delivery the only options.

4.2. Civil Society: Competitor and Collaborator, but Not a Substitute

With the widely documented 'decline of the State' affecting many countries, especially in Africa, and guided by assumptions about their comparative advantage in terms of experience, cost and flexibility in service delivery over government, there have been high expectations of the role that civil society[8] can play in basic social service delivery. Conceived of both as a check on the State and an extension of it, and for fulfilling many of its functions in service delivery more effectively, NGOs in particular have played an increasingly significant role in delivering development assistance since the early 1990s. An enhanced role for NGOs in service provisioning has often been justified on the grounds that they are perceived to be more participatory, less bureaucratic, more flexible, more cost effective, with an ability to reach the poor and disadvantaged people more effectively than the government.

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[8] The term 'civil society' or 'civil society organizations' comprehends a vast array of actors, including both formal and informal, community-based associations, religious and cultural groups, trade unions, and NGOs.

With the development policy focus on good governance increasingly promoted by donors throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the presence and importance of 'secondary institutions', as they are sometimes called, cannot be denied. Especially in Africa, where the contraction of the State has profoundly affected its ability to deliver social services, NGOs – sponsored mostly by foreign donors – have emerged as major service providers in competition or collaboration with central and local government agencies. As competitors to government, the voluntary sector provides citizens with alternative service facilities. As collaborators, they plug resource gaps and improve citizens' access to services, as in Rufisque/Senegal (see Case Study VII). Indeed, whilst Official Development Aid (ODA) declined throughout the 1990s, funding to CSOs increased significantly during this period, and recent studies have shown that most of those funds are increasingly spent on service provision rather than other, 'traditional' CSO activities such as advocacy or the promotion of human rights[9].

Case Study VII
Community Management of Urban Environment, Senegal

Rufisque is a small township outside the Senegalese capital, Dakar. Most people live in village-type, low-income districts without infrastructure for water supply or sanitation resulting in a high incidence of water-borne diseases including diarrhea, dysentery and skin diseases. Following discussions with local communities of Rufisque, the international NGO ENDA-Third World created a new, low-tech sanitation project in 1991 with the aim of solving the local waste water and refuse problems. After a few years, the scheme became a success story, being selected as one of the Best Practices during the UN Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996. By then, the scheme involved about one third of the population covering nine low-income communities in the district, with most of the active participants being women who tend to be more involved in the decision-making process than men. The youths of the district have also been involved as they operate the water purification and household waste treatment plants and are also responsible for the maintenance of the sewer networks.

Whilst the NGO acts as a project manager and retains overall responsibility for most of the aspects of the scheme, it is democratically elected local management committees who control the planning, monitoring and evaluation processes of the scheme. ENDA-Third World also managed to build strong links to the government at all levels through partnerships with local authorities, which recognized that an alternative and local system created for delivering public services can be highly effective. Moreover, through a revolving fund, which mobilizes and manages local savings, the scheme has become sustainable and requires little, if any, external assistance.

Source: Institute for Development Studies, Working Paper 138 (2001)

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9 See UNRISD, Civil Society Organizations and Service Provision, (2000).

However, much of the discussion of the role of NGOs in social policy may have overshadowed the importance of other more informal and indigenous forms of civil society that may be especially important to marginalized groups. In many parts of the world, informal popular and community associations, self-help groups and networks are actively involved in bridging the service provision gap. These include religious bodies, traditional healers, midwives, parents' groups, squatters groups, and welfare associations. The failure to consider them in discussions on social policy contributes and reinforces their marginalization as some suggest that the growth of NGOs in the policy and delivery process may in fact have had a negative impact on the strength of local associations. As NGOs are under increasing pressure to efficiently implement contracts, some may indeed have lost their ability to spend time and resources on developing close relationships with the grassroots communities and marginalized groups they are supposed to serve.

In fact, the mistake lies in the fact that citizen action and NGO action are often equated. In some contexts, the focus on NGOs as mechanisms for social provisioning has resulted in the 'projectization' of social policy, and perhaps in the weakening of direct State accountability to its citizens. In fact, a far more nuanced understanding is needed – one which recognizes NGOs as one of actors within civil society rather than an actor for civil society. It should also explore the role that NGOs can play within a policy framework provided by the government as intermediaries for strengthening more participatory and inclusive forms of social policy formation and provisioning.

The NGOs are also faced with numerous credibility problems. As a diverse set of actors, the impact of NGOs depends as much on the socio-political context and relations with other actors, including the government and donors, as on their organizational characteristics. This has implications not only for accountability, but also for sustainability and equity in service delivery. NGOs may be upwardly, downwardly or horizontally accountable within certain legal and moral bounds, but it is generally the members who determine their objectives – not the public as a whole.

In other words, their opinions and positions regarding different social and political issues are not representative of the people's will, as they have not received a mandate to represent them. With enlistment of civil society actors as proxies for the poor in consultation over national poverty policies and the appropriation of the 'voices of the poor' to imbue globalizing policy narratives with moral authenticity, come a growing need to ask hard questions about representation and accountability in 'participatory' processes. Increased access of members to information and networking creates a pressure for increased relevance and improved internal governance of NGOs.

Unlike some multinational NGOs, the indigenous ones tend to be financially weak and lacking in the research, coordination and planning capacity needed to proffer solutions to complex contemporary problems. The impact of NGOs both foreign and indigenous, also tends to be limited in both coverage and impact. This is because instead of pooling their resources, they prefer to act independently, following their own often ad hoc approaches in trying to solve problems beyond their reach and capacity. Indeed, if inequality and geographic imbalance are to be avoided, and if the true potential of service provisioning by civil society is to be harnessed, NGO interventions have to be significantly scaled up through improved coordination between NGOs as well as with governments.

These dangers and shortcomings facing CSOs are avoidable, but only through the establishment of unequivocal legislative and regulatory frameworks that enforce accountability and oblige CSOs to prove their worth and democratic credentials and raise a substantial part of their revenue from sources other than the government in a transparent way. Paradoxically, the virtue, utility and credibility of CSOs are traits largely predicated on the presence and affirmative action of a strong State capable of reintroducing the redistributive element that the market approach tends to remove. Until they prove to have the ability to escape many present risks, and until they broaden their base of financial support, civil society will remain a poor substitute for democratically accountable governance, and, at best, be a useful adjunct to State-to-State cooperation through international organizations.

4.3. The Private Sector: Putting the 'Exit' Option into Operation

With 'New Public Management' emerging as the new dominant paradigm for public sector reform throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there has been considerable movement in all countries to expand the role of the private sector in the provision of goods and services. In reducing the role of the State in the production of goods and non-social services, governments are responding to a perception that citizens, as consumers, should have greater choice regarding what is produced and that the profit motive and accompanying hard-budget constraints can work to expand the quality and quantity of goods and services available to citizens. Indeed, where the State makes decisions that, in a competitive market environment, would be left to a multitude of individual economic actors, the total volume of goods and services supplied is likely to be smaller as, on the

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[10]   In an attempt to increase the efficiency and performance in the provision of public services, the main thrust of New Public Management is the application of private sector management techniques such as customer focus, performance management, outsourcing and decentralization, total quality management, and benchmarking to public sector management.

whole, State-run enterprises tend to use greater amounts of inputs to produce the same output as privately run concerns, which constitutes a waste of society's resources.

However, State involvement in the production of goods and services is not just a matter of efficiency in the production of a particular good. The composition of what is supplied is also likely to be different from what individual economic actors would provide. This is because individual actors are more sensitive to what consumers demand and so avoid the mismatch of demand and supply that characterized the former centrally planned economies and which led to inefficient outcomes on a national scale.

Indeed, where public service providers operate monopolies, 'exit' is not necessarily a viable option for service users since there is no alternative source of supply. In such contexts, some forms of 'loyalty' – for instance where users become clients in patronage networks – may be the only means for individual clients to secure better services for themselves. While many public sector reforms prescribe exit options through the privatization of services, thereby empowering consumers to chose alternatives, these do not always work, particularly for citizens with limited power as consumers since choice actually depends on the ability of people to have access to the necessary resources to benefit from it.

In principle, when public service consumers have an opportunity to patronize alternative service producers, this competitive pressure serves as a threat to public service producers. Essential to the application of the exit principle is the possibility of separating producers from providers. Examples of exit mechanisms include production of public services such as basic education and health services by for-profit, non profit NGOs and public sector producers or when local governments give vouchers to citizens to purchase services from any producer. The advantages of such exit mechanisms are that they are impersonal, transparent and effective. The problem is that the exit principle cannot be applied to key local services with low differentiation and high product involvement such as police protection and environmental sanitation.

As seen under the previous section on civil society, the expansion of the role of the private sector in the provision of goods and services does not necessarily mean a contraction in the overall role of the State. On the contrary, the State will have a critical role in assuring, either directly, or indirectly, working with the private sector, and establishing minimum standards and levels of nutrition, education and health. Even in countries with a very small public productive sector, the reality is that the State is actually involved in the supply of almost all goods. It sets the legal framework whereby property rights, including intellectual property rights, are enforced and claims arising from the use of a product can be judged.

In deciding what services the private sector could provide more effectively and efficiently, confusion should be avoided between policy goals, set by the State, and methods of implementing such goals, which may be performed by the private sector. In other words, the role of the State becomes more one of an organizer, rather than a provider of services. There are certain policy areas, however, which cannot be guided by efficiency criteria alone but rather by considerations of the public interest. In what proportion public versus private sector involvement in the delivery of social services should be 'mixed' has to be decided by each society according to its own degree of development and needs.

This mix will also depend on the type of interaction between the State and the private sector. Interaction can range from full privatization of a productive enterprise to arrangements through which provision of a good or service is set out in the form of a contract between the public and private sectors. Such contracts would be 'build-operate-transfer' arrangements for infrastructure, a lease whereby the private sector pays the public sector for the use of one of its assets or a concession. For instance, a private supplier pays for the right to provide a service in a publicly owned facility. In drawing up these contracts the government should try to ensure the most efficient outcome through competitive bidding. In general, an aim of policy should be the promotion of competition as well as the construction of a regulatory framework that will protect the rights and interests of consumers.

The first step in deciding whether a particular public service should be privatized is to unbundle it into its various components. Unbundling can indeed help to determine which components of the service-delivery process can be privatized (either commercially or on a non-profit basis), which can be brought into the realm of community enterprise and which continue to require direct public sector responsibility. Moreover, technological developments have made it easier to unbundle complex sectors such as the electricity sector, separating the generation of power from its distribution and marketing to the final consumer and allowing different bodies to compete in the provision of these different services, which had previously been undertaken by a State monopoly.

As the delivery of social services is being outsourced the number of contractors and subcontractors increases and as more actors are getting involved and a greater array of goods and services are supplied, overseeing the system becomes more complex. Although, the public sector may have less direct participation in the actual production of goods and services, it needs to play a more active role in monitoring and regulation. The State always had these responsibilities but these are now situated in a different context. They require a technically skilled government, not

necessarily a smaller or larger one, and possibly different regulations rather than necessarily more regulations. Indeed, the success of efforts to attract private sector investments to public utilities partly depends on the establishment of simple, transparent and reliable contract legislation and a regulatory machinery that offers a minimum level of guarantee to private investment.


Box 2
Private Sector Health Provision in the Developing Countries

The private sector has played a larger role in providing health care in developing countries than in developed or transition economies: private expenditure on health is approximately 50 per cent of the total health expenditure in developing countries while its share in developed countries is about one quarter. In developing countries, the private sector plays a large role even in the provision of essential health care, which has traditionally been considered to be most properly undertaken by the public sector. The acknowledgment of the large role played by the private sector in health delivery in these States has combined with the realities of sharply depleted government resources and with dramatically growing pressures on health systems due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This has led States and health experts to reverse their almost four-decade history of underestimating the importance of private sector activities in health systems, and to embrace the potential of leveraging the private sector to improve the health of the population.

Previous generations of reforms tended to focus predominantly on supply-side issues such as the reduction of medical costs and the equitable allocation of health resources. Whilst delivering significant improvements in health outcomes in many countries, they proved relatively weak in providing affordable universal health care, particularly among the poor. In fact, many patients did not utilize the lower levels of the system (such as health posts and health centres). Funding was not adequate, leading to insufficient health training and a shortage of equipment. Health workers were not well motivated and the allocation of health resources continued to be inequitable, to the detriment of the poor particularly. Current health system reforms are addressing these shortcomings, by emphasizing the demand for health services.

The new approach not only probes factors that affect demand for health care services in response to medical fees, the quality and access to health services, but also tries to identify causes of mismatches between actual demand and perceived needs for health services. One demand aspect is inadequate access of the poor to primary health care or, more specifically, the inability of the poor to express their demand for publicly offered health care. Another aspect is that previous reforms tended to treat local health workers as 'passive' agents who obeyed a set of regulations and guidelines mandated by the health authorities. In reality, however, they are 'active' agents who respond and react to regulations and the responsiveness of health systems.

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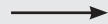
It is in these areas of organization and governance of health systems that the private sector has been making significant contributions. Where public-health systems were weak and underfunded, private health providers have emerged, complementing the public-health system and sometimes competing with it, creating incentives for improvement. The factors turning patients away from public and towards private-health providers include better and more flexible access to private facilities, shorter waiting periods, greater trust in private health workers, and the greater sensitivity of private workers to patients needs.

As a result, contracting out is gradually becoming a favourite mode for health services delivery in many developing countries. Improving access for the poor, however, remains perhaps the most challenging area for governments. The targeting of free health care to particular groups, including the poor, is difficult to implement. One method that has shown some success is the establishment of local committees that bring together local leaders and health workers to determine the eligibility for exemptions in terms of income or types of medical treatment. With clear guidelines, local committees can develop their capacity by learning through implementation. At the same time, the government needs to monitor and evaluate the impact of such programmes on the poor. While such programmes have not yet been widely attempted, this is one area in which greater participation of local communities and NGOs, with the leadership and stewardship of the government, can very likely expand public-health programmes to the poor.

Source: United Nations, World Economic and Social Survey (2002).

5. Democratic Decentralization, Participation and the Delivery of Social Services

Does decentralization, and particularly the creation of democratically elected local government, broaden mass political participation and make local government more effective and responsive? Are decentralized forms of government more responsive to the needs of the poor and hence more likely to conceive and implement pro-poor policies? Given that local government reforms in much of Africa have been relatively recent and, at times, limited, it will be difficult at this stage to provide a comprehensive and definitive answer to these critical questions. Preliminary observations of decentralization experiments around the world, seem to indicate that democratically elected local authorities endowed with appropriate jurisdiction and resources to deliver social services can make significant impact in providing better education, health, water and sanitation to communities and marginalized groups.

Resolution 50/225/1996 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, called for 'decentralization of public institutions and services', often as a condition of 'enhanced efficiency and productivity, accountability and responsiveness.' Decentralization advocates argue that, as decentralization brings government closer to the governed both spatially and institutionally, government will be more knowledgeable about and responsive to the needs of the people. This tendency to conflate decentralization with democratization and enhancement of participation at the community level underlies the belief that decentralization will also lead to greater responsiveness to the poor. Insofar as the majority of the population in developing countries are both poor and excluded from elite politics, any scheme that appears to offer greater political participation to ordinary citizens seems likely to increase their voice and the relevance and effectiveness of government's policy.

The key to effective decentralization is increased, broad-based participation in local public decision-making. Theorists believe that downwardly accountable or representative authorities with meaningful discretionary powers are the basic institutional elements of decentralization that should lead to local efficiency, equity and development. Decentralization is indeed thought to facilitate and increase local participation in political decision-making by linking local level actors horizontally and vertically to higher levels of the system, particularly to local administration and government. In practice, however, there is the danger that local elites can monopolize the participatory process. Questions of whether the reform of local government actually expands participation, and whether that participation produces accountability and responsiveness to a broader spectrum of rural people, remain empirical issues to be tested across much of Africa.

A fallacy of the 1980s and 1990s has been to equate decentralization with a retreat of the State, which would somehow be matched by corresponding advances by civil society and the private sector, who, between them, would be able to close the ensuing gap. This has not come about. Both, in quantitative and in qualitative terms, the lessons learnt from experience in the North and the South suggest a cautious approach. A partnership with government entails responsibilities, but, in the final analysis, the obligation to speak and to decide for the country as a whole belongs to elected governments and them alone.

In fact, in a typical African State, a large percentage of the people remain outside the formal structures of the State and rely on self-help for their survival. Many of the people operating outside the formal structures of government are in rural areas, and those people, despite much of the current 'rolling back of the State' discourse, need 'more' rather than 'less' government. There is a critical need for the devolution of power, which is a means of not only improving governance and enhancing the accountability of leaders, but also of making the State a participant in people's lives.

5.1. Accountability and Responsiveness

With greater recognition of civil society and increasing discussion of good governance, the concept of participation is shifting from beneficiary participation in State delivered programmes to an understanding of participation as a means of holding the State accountable through new forms of governance that involve more direct State-civil society relations. Participation is about the involvement of all stakeholders, the State and the non-State, through a process of communication and negotiation to influence the decisions that affect their lives. Participation leads to the creation and sustenance of accountability and a sense of the right to accountability provides the basis on which citizens can act, as illustrated by the creation of 'vigilance committees' in Bolivia (see Case Study VIII below). It leads to openness and transparency in policy-making and builds up social reciprocities characterized by equity, inter-group tolerance as well as inclusive, responsible and active citizenship.

Case Study VIII
Accountability through Vigilance Committees, Bolivia

In an effort to formalize and legitimize the interactions between municipal authorities and civil society as well as rural community groups, the Government of Bolivia, after a long history of confrontation with civil society organizations, introduced the Law of Popular Participation (LPP) in 1994. Renamed Law of Organization in 1997, this law reversed a historical trend by empowering registered community-based organizations (CBOs) in rural and urban areas to participate in the elaboration of the five-year municipal plans. Since then, some 15,000 local grassroots organizations including peasant communities, indigenous organizations and neighbourhood associations have become active in annual planning processes throughout the country. Beyond the aim of creating synergies between the efforts of local government and community groups, the law further envisioned a new architecture of popular participation, where elected municipal councils are kept in check by a semi-autonomous oversight committee (comité de vigilancia).

Composed of six CBO leaders, these Committees act as watchdog institutions over the municipal councils by monitoring the equitable distribution of fiscal resources in urban and rural areas, ensuring that municipal councils do not allocate more than 10 per cent of transferred resources to current expenditures, and by making a public procurement announcement over the annual budget programme and the execution of the previous year's budget programme. Hence, central government transfers of resources are not released without the Vigilance Committee's approval, and, in case of irregularities or frauds, the Committee can petition the National Senate to freeze funding transfers to the municipality until matters are resolved.

Source: George G. Molina, paper presented on 'Citizen Participation in the Context of Fiscal Decentralization: Best Practices in Municipal Administration', Tokyo and Kobe, Japan, 2-6 September 2002.

Traditionally, in democratic governance, accountability is thought to be maintained in a number of ways, including local elections, the presence of strong and active opposition parties, media, public meetings and formal redress procedures. Increasingly, however, discussions of governance and accountability focus on forms of broader interaction of public and private social actors, especially at the local level. Citizen participation in this sense involves direct ways in which citizens influence and exercise control in governance, not only through the more traditional forms of indirect representation. Such participation, it is argued, will improve efficiency of public services by making government more accountable and more democratic.

The problem with accountability in the context of public service delivery is that of 'task specificity'. Task specificity denotes the extent to which a given activity can be precisely defined, affects people

directly, impacts on them immediately after it occurs, and is traceable to its implementers. At the high end of the task specificity spectrum stand technically discrete and complex services such as jet-engine maintenance. A defective jet engine will have a direct, immediate effect on its consumers and those responsible can be readily identified. Most public services, however, are diffuse, difficult to define and have a long-term impact, which cannot be traced back to single individuals or even groups of individuals. The objective of rural primary education, for instance, is rather fuzzy and difficult to define, children should be prepared to become productive citizens but it has a delayed and diffused impact as other variables will affect its outcome (e.g. home environment, or social class). Even assuming that behaviour in later life could be attributed to early schooling, it would be difficult to trace this back to those responsible after so many years.

Furthermore, task specificity varies inversely with discretion. Most public services such as rural primary education, agricultural extension or health delivery demand a great deal of discretion or autonomy, precisely because they have a low task specificity. Yet, it is where discretion is at its highest that accountability is most needed, and decentralization could, if properly managed with provisions for competition and monitoring, provide this accountability.

Accountability is structured differently in various contexts depending on historical, cultural and other factors. In general, accountability strategies are most effective when they are both cumulative and combined in a multiple accountability system. Citizens can only legitimately authorize representatives and hold them accountable if there are many avenues and institutions through which they engage with each other and with their representatives. Most African countries have tried to resolve the problem of accountability of local governments by asserting central government hierarchical control over local governments.

Usually, a designated ministry or department in the Presidency or Cabinet will exert control mechanisms including, inter alia, inspectorates, approval processes for local government decisions, deployment of central level personnel to local governments and, in extreme cases, use powers of suspension and dissolution of local government councils. These arrangements are typically complemented with internal accountability mechanisms – codes of conduct, financial and establishment codes, budgetary and personnel control, internal audit mechanisms and disciplinary, supervisory and training arrangements.

The common failure of such accountability arrangements is one of the most important grounds for reform in Africa. Central governments often misuse their wide powers of control over local governments including using them to settle political scores. They may victimize councils controlled by opposition parties. Legislative controls play an important role but they can be abused and

are not sufficient to ensure good governance when they are not subject to appropriate central or citizen accountability mechanisms. Moreover, the capacity of most legislatures in Africa is seriously hampered by lack of resources, power and capabilities to fulfill their controlling role of the Executive.

Given the limits of internal accountability mechanisms, the thrust of new decentralization reforms should be to develop external accountability, using the principles of "exit" and "voice". The two principles are premised on the fact that delivery of services is contingent on the activities of three main stakeholders: the service beneficiaries (customers and citizens), political leaders and bureaucratic supervisors, and service providers. The effectiveness of accountability mechanisms depends on the influence exerted by each of the concerned stakeholders.

Voice mechanisms are particularly well suited for public services for which exit is not possible, but they require personal input from customers/citizens and can be messy as they tend to be ambiguous and unpredictable. Indeed, the application of voice mechanisms is dependent on knowledge (relevant production function information), low income and information barriers, and the ability to make those who exercise power listen and change their behaviour. When these conditions are not present, it is difficult to apply voice mechanisms effectively. Thus, it is necessary to involve a variety of institutional mechanisms to provide ordinary citizens with relevant information and power to ensure local government responsiveness. Where society is highly differentiated, as is the case in most African countries, marginal groups within society will be less able to take advantage of certain accountability mechanisms, thus skewing accountability toward more privileged groups. Because of this, there is always a need for multiple mechanisms so that marginalized or disadvantaged groups are included in the political process.

The most commonly cited means of accountability are elections. Elections can improve citizen participation, local government accountability and provision of information to electors. Unfortunately, money, violence and corruption often dominate both local and national elections in Africa and elsewhere. More importantly elections generally occur in widely spaced intervals of 2-5 years and only address broad issues, making them a comparatively blunt accountability instrument. Some countries have sought to supplement local elections with other mechanisms such as recall and referendum, which have been used at various stages in African countries, although sometimes in questionable form. Most countries that have local government elections use constituency-based systems, although a system of proportional representation is desirable for ensuring the participation and representation of non-territorial groups, associations and interests. Finally, many elected officials are not strictly accountable to their constituencies – even when the electoral system is well crafted.

Hence, most existing voice mechanisms can only perform imperfectly, largely because they are based primarily on indirect participation of citizens via their elected representatives. Many other legal, informational, social, economic and political mechanisms must therefore supplement the electoral accountability mechanism, to improve the downward accountability of elected or any other local actors. Non-electoral mechanisms for increasing downward accountability include third-party monitoring by media, NGOs or independently elected controllers; participatory auditing and evaluation; pressure and lobbying from political parties; citizen juries; media/ NGO provision of information on roles and obligations of government; public hearings and public local government reporting requirements; central oversight of local government; the degree of embeddedness of leaders in their community; the belief systems of leaders and their communities; performance awards; social movements, and, as a last resort, threats of social resistance and unrest.

These more direct voice accountability systems have been used in various combinations, and with various degrees of success across Africa. In fact, it is very difficult to assess what an ideal 'blend' of accountability instruments should consist of, but it appears that mechanisms involving elections, political parties, civil society and/or the media are more effective vehicles for accountability than, say, public hearings or opinion surveys. At the same time, the latter can play an important role in supplementing and fine-tuning the former mechanisms, as illustrated in the following examples taken from various African countries:

- Participatory budgeting is being used in the Entebbe and Jinja municipalities in Uganda to better link citizens to the resource allocation process.

- Service delivery surveys are being used to better understand consumer needs in Ghana, Senegal and Uganda, among others.

- User groups and contracts, such as social fund committees in Malawi and citizen service charters at regional and local levels in Namibia, are being used to ensure more sustainable service delivery.

- Increased transparency in revenue sharing allocation and use allows members of the public to better understand the volume and uses of resources which local governments receive from the centre. For example, allocations to local governments are published in Uganda. Tracer studies also reveal the extent to which funds transferred to local governments actually go to service production.

• Increased levels of local revenue autonomy provide clearer links between local revenues and expenditures for local citizens in some cases, although both central and local governments sometimes resist this.

• Ombudsman/complaints bodies, as used in Benin, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda, for example, are extending citizens' defenders to local government levels.

• Local judicial or conflict resolution agencies, including customary courts in many African countries, have proven to be one of the most effective forms of voice. Field surveys show that such bodies are amongst the most popular institutions that poor people trust for the inexpensive resolution of local conflict. Research in some selected Asian and African countries (e.g. Nepal, India, Senegal and Mali) on decentralization of forestry management underscores the potential of such developed adjudication powers.

• Traditional rulers and land boards can also provide means of community voice. Traditional rulers are a major general voice mechanism in Francophone Africa, while they tend to be given more ceremonial, cultural and land matters in Anglophone countries. A few countries, such as Botswana, have advisory boards on land matters. However, the involvement of traditional leaders has to be scrutinized carefully as local chiefs are (a) not necessarily representative, legitimate or even liked by local populations; (b) are often constructions of the central State and at times, even today, are administrative auxiliaries of central authorities; and (c) are not necessarily accountable to the local population.

• Community governments have evolved in some cases from CBOs with immense social capital. New and improved structures of local governance can build from the bottom up and integrate both indigenous and modern structures. CBOs are often self-financing, through membership contributions, harambee drives and powerful community unions whose reach extends beyond their communities and their nations. CBOs have been behind the successes of township associations and the survival of communities when the State breaks down, as in former Zaire or Somalia. Unfortunately, the potential for community governments is rarely tapped by the large-sized single structures of local government units in African countries.

Despite these encouraging examples, many institutions of local accountability in Africa do not yet seem to meet the two conditions required for effective voice mechanisms: citizens lack information and power to compel local politicians to render account. Moreover, both, central

and local government systems have weak incentives to make service providers responsive to citizen voices. In the absence of effective voice institutions, many local governments in Africa remain weak and corrupt, and citizens have often had to resort to violence or social resistance to be heard. Steps to develop voice mechanisms can be taken by higher levels, but there must be a political desire to do so. Bottom-up pressure can also come through the efforts of CBOs. Some progress has certainly been made in Africa but many challenges remain in mobilizing central political commitment to decentralization and formalizing informal governance mechanisms that emerge from local communities.

5.2. Democratic Decentralization, Participation and the Poor

Much of the attention given to democratic decentralization as a development strategy lies in its promise to include formerly excluded and marginalized groups in the local decision-and policy-making process. Increased participation, the logic goes, will result in enhanced access and representation of those groups, which will in turn empower them to distribute resources more equitably and improve their access to social services, thereby achieving poverty reduction. In practice, however, increased participation or representation of the poor and disadvantaged does not automatically imply policy responsiveness or empowerment of those groups. Empowerment is here defined as being 'organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements for those hitherto excluded from such control'[11].

For the former to happen, participation must be effective, which is a question of accountability and changes in organizational behaviour within relevant government bureaucracies. In other words, it is not enough to encourage 'citizen voice'; citizen voices must be heard by those who hold governmental power, as illustrated in Case Study XIX on the Assembly of the Poor in Thailand. As previously discussed, tracking the impact of participation involves assessing the operation of accountability mechanisms, both internally within local institutions and externally in relations between local institutions and the public.

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[11] Definition provided by United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, cited in Robert B. Charlick, *Public Administration and Development*, vol. 21 no.1, 2001.

Case Study IX
Demanding awareness: Assembly of the Poor, Thailand

With the build-up of NGOs, as well as a new awareness and appreciation for the changing political economy of rural Thailand, an unprecedented 'Assembly of Poor' consisting of a loose network of peasant-farmers, fishermen, industrial workers and slum groups, was formed in 1995 on the swell of various campaigns that marked the biggest assertion of Thai rural political voice since the brutal repression of the Peasants Federation twenty years earlier. With its loose, flat and networked organizational style, the Assembly lobbied the Government to gain better rights over local resources, including land, water and forest, so as to sustain their subsistence local economy. Their concerns were categorized into six distinct areas: forest and land disputes, impact of dam projects, alternative agriculture, impact of government development projects, occupational hazards, and eviction of slum communities.

With support from local NGO networks and gaining the coverage of the largely sympathetic media, the Assembly organized a highly publicized 99-day sit-in of some 20,000 farmers in front of the national Government House in Bangkok, in 1997. Concessions won at the end of the sit-in covered only a small portion of the 125 issues raised, but were unprecedented in Thailand. They included compensation of some 7,000 families affected by government dam schemes, cancellation or review of planned dam schemes, cancelled evictions from forest land and a statement supporting the principle that long-settled groups should be permitted to stay in forest zones. The movement and its strategies were seen as a precedent-setting means to demand awareness and open up space for negotiation and recognition of the situation of resource poor and less secure farmers in poorer areas of Thailand, particularly the Northeast. Campaigns are ongoing at the local level, as national level campaigns were pushed back by the Government which, following the Asian financial crisis, reasserted a more paternalistic control and found ways to counter the Assembly's gained legitimacy, thus forcing it back to the margins.

Source: Institute for Development Studies, Working Paper 138 (2001).

Although, there are examples of decentralized government in Africa enhancing participation, there is very little evidence to date that it has resulted in policies that are truly responsive to the needs of the poor – or to citizens generally. The expectation that local-level government will be more concerned with social equity has to confront deeply rooted popular expectations about local representation which, more often than not, continues to be dominated by local elites. Such interests tend to collude and may be even less likely to target resources to the poor than national elites.

Unlike South Asia and in some Latin American political systems, local government representation of disadvantaged groups in Africa is not yet part of popular political discourse, except perhaps in South Africa, even if it now figures in the official rhetoric of governments pressured to prepare their national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

Even though it has not yet yielded the expected benefits in terms of empowerment and poverty reduction on a significant scale, democratic decentralization is by no means a futile endeavour. Increased participation and representation of marginalized groups offers significant benefits in and by itself, as it contributes to a slow change of culture and attitudes towards those groups who are benefiting from the attendant leadership experience. Such changes take time, and in the longer term, the most likely outcome of democratic decentralization in terms of social development policy is a compromise between the aspirations of local elites and those of marginalized populations. Rather than serving particular group interests, one should expect pluralistic outcomes serving the population as a whole to come out of local government level negotiations.

Taking education, for example, elite groups within a community would be likely to lobby for higher quality at secondary schools, whereas a more poverty-focused policy would tend to provide special education for the poor and illiterate. A middle ground between those two positions could be to provide primary education for all. Realistically, it is these types of universalistic social policies appealing to a wider constituency that represent the optimal outcome of democratic decentralization.

6. Conclusion: a 'Right' to Participation?

In the diversified and highly complex societies in which we live, diffusion and dispersion of decision-making power are both inevitable and desirable, but only up to a point. Given the uneven distribution of power and wealth, with staggering inequalities in these regards, such diffusion and dispersion also carry dangers which cannot be overlooked. While the orderly devolution of power, through decentralization or other means, keeps people in control and has the added merit of leaving the decisions to those directly concerned (e.g. the local community or the end-users), appropriation of decision-making power, when it happens by default, inevitably entails surrender of the public space to special interest groups. Entitling all citizens to the same rights does not necessarily promote equitable outcomes. Paradoxically, rather than addressing inequalities, universalism can work to marginalize the already marginal and exacerbate social exclusion. Within existing inequities of resources and power, and for reasons of identity and difference, some will claim their rights more forcefully than – and often at the expense of – others.

This need not happen. Nationally and internationally, through experiments with partnerships involving public sector and private sector agencies or NGOs, both State and non-State actors have amply demonstrated that through performance contracting and other means, it is possible to ensure a win-win situation, one that accommodates the special interest groups, but also, and above all, safeguards accountability and the primacy of the public interest. The increased recognition of CSO capacity and networks has indeed focused attention on a new model of citizenship in which citizens work to demand greater accountability of the State through newer forms of direct democratic interaction and consultation on policy process. With greater recognition of civil society and increasing discussion of good governance, the concept of participation thus shifts from beneficiary participation in state delivered programmes to an understanding of participation as a means of holding the State accountable through new forms of governance that involve more direct state-civil society relations.

The structures to facilitate popular participation are still largely in the making and a culture of civic responsibility and of respect for diversity needs much nurturing and propitious conditions to grow. While declarations on rights and citizenship are increasingly abundant, the gap between rhetoric and reality remains large, and, to a considerable degree, this gap between democratic form and substance in the world is an institutional gap. An in-depth reform of the State in developing countries in particular is essential for development to occur. Such reforms should encompass a clear orientation towards basic public services for everyone, the creation of a strong and efficient institutional framework, the establishment of a participatory information system

to design and monitor social policies, safety nets, inter-organizational links, decentralization, broad community participation, inter-social networks between government, civil society and the private sector, transparency, and a social managerial approach.

Participatory conditions under a decentralized framework, its potential and also the risks and existing gaps, have been discussed at length in the previous chapter. The sheer complexity of the decentralization process and the number of actors involved make it generally difficult to predict the exact outcome of decentralization on the depth and effectiveness of participation and accountability. In simplified terms, this outcome will depend on the type and smoothness of interactions between what constitutes the customs and values of a particular society, the composition of social groups within that society and the power differential between them, the embeddedness and effectiveness of institutions, and the particular participatory and accountability processes selected to institutionalize or facilitate participation. The illustration below is by no means exhaustive, and only tries to give some examples of the elements that populate these different 'layers', whose dynamic interactions will ultimately shape what the individual citizen tends to expect, and what he or she would actually be likely to receive in terms of social services and other benefits of decentralization.

Figure III
From Citizen Expectation to Service Delivery: A Two-way Dynamic Process between Multiple Actors and Institutions
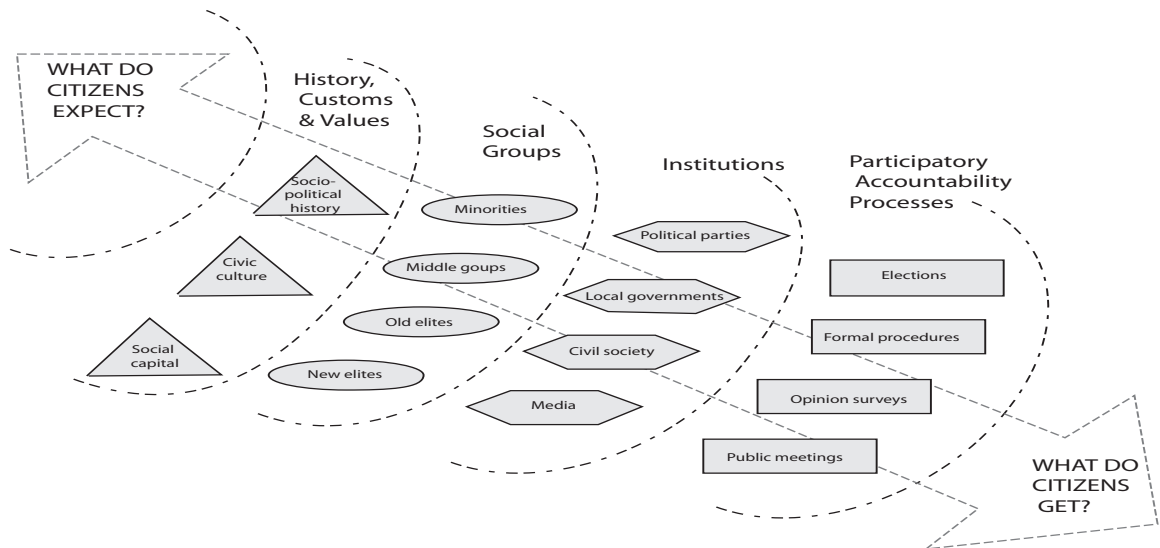
Source: Author (ECA 2003)

As was seen earlier, the right to development and the right to participation are closely linked. While rights to participate have long been central to liberal thought, these are largely seen as rights to political and civic participation, e.g. to vote in a representative democratic system, to form associations, and to exercise free speech. Extending the right to participate to encompass participation in social and economic life politicizes social rights, through re-casting citizens as their active creators. People cannot exercise their rights to health, for example, if they cannot exercise their democratic rights to participation in decision-making around health service provision. Thus, while social rights can be seen as positive freedoms in terms of enabling citizens to realize their civil and political rights, participation as a right can be seen as a positive freedom which enables them to realize their social rights.

Summarizing those trends in the participatory strategies and approaches witnessed over the last years in delivery of social services, a number of fundamental, conceptual shifts become apparent:

Figure IV
A Shift in Participation and the Delivery of Social Services

From	To
Passive beneficiary	Active Citizen/Agent
Project focus/involvement	Policy level engagement
Information/Consultation	Influence/decision-making
Appraisal	Monitoring implementation
Micro-level involvement	Macro-level engagement
Universality of needs	Diversity of needs
Social rights	Social accountability
Welfare state	Welfare pluralism
Needs	Rights

Re-positioning participation requires a continuous re-examination of the rapidly changing contexts and arenas in which social policy processes take place. To what extent do these changes, including globalization, decentralization, changing demographics and fiscal crises provide new spaces and entry points for citizen action and for articulating newer understandings of social citizenship? Driven by the new global agenda, including achievement of the MDGs, new global forms of citizen action around social policy arenas are emerging, perhaps even gradually

replacing the areas of environment and human rights which traditionally predominated the international social movement arena. The debate around global public goods such as universal access to essential medicines, shows how goods can be – and in the course of history have been – shifted from one side of the public-private continuum to the other. As we move into a more global era where the public domain is rapidly expanding into areas hitherto considered as private or pertaining to the exclusive domain of the State or the corporate sector, the challenge for citizen participation will be how to articulate and organize effectively around such new identities of global citizenship.

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