FINAL REPORT

The Depth and Quality of Public Participation in the Integrated Development Planning process in Gauteng

**Researched and written for the
Gauteng Provincial Department of Local Government**

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Table of contents

1. Executive Summary

Purpose

The Gauteng Provincial Department of Local Government commissioned Strategy & Tactics to assess the depth and quality of public participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process; and its impact on decision-making by officials involved in the IDP process. The project comprised a critical review of published literature on participation internationally; and a qualitative primary study in 5 sampled sites in Gauteng. Rather than try to provide a province-wide listing of participation activities, the project scratched beneath the surface in 5 locales to understand the dynamics of participation in context; and then to follow that through to assess the impact (if any) of officials working in those municipalities.

What is the purpose of public participation?

According to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), participation in development is critical for the post-apartheid project because

> *"Development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment".* [1]

In the RDP and in this report, participation is not about consultation, or legitimating decisions taken elsewhere: it is about *empowerment*. This is important because to analyse the depth of participation and its resultant impact – our terms of reference - we need to know the *purpose* of participation.

Participation in society takes multiple forms, and is far broader than those associated with the IDP or with formal avenues for participation. To move towards participation as empowerment requires a re-thinking of the ways in which state and citizen engage one another, and the transfer of decision-making power and resource allocation decisions from state to citizens. That way lies empowerment – for the bureaucracy as much as for citizens – remembering that participation is primarily about better serving the needs of the public, not those of the public service.

A critical review of key published literature regarding participation in development is attached at Annexure A. That text serves as a conceptual and analytical basis for this report. It traces the emergence of public participation as a central feature of local governance and development internationally, describes its legislative and ideological anchor points in South Africa (with specific reference to the IDP), and examines in some detail the many formal and contextual factors that decide the extent, depth and quality of public participation in local-level development.

Drawing on critical analyses of key Southern participatory development experiments, the text then sketches some of the cardinal features of those initiatives, outlining procedural and institutional elements while highlighting also the political and political-economic contexts and conditions in which they were undertaken. A distinctive feature of those experiments, it proposes, was that they did not simply draw citizens into existing development processes; instead, participation transformed the processes in ways that boosted people's opportunities and capacities generally to claim their rights. Consequently, it is argued that models of participation should be grounded in coherent theories of social change, and underlines the fundamental question of power, the terms

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[1] African National Congress (Ravan Press, 1994) *Reconstruction and Development Programme* pp.4-5.

of its distribution and contestation, and the ways by which it establishes the undertow of participatory development processes.

Finally, the text reviews analyses of public participation in the IDP to date, and argues that conditions in South Africa both favour and undercut the potential for extensive, transformatory public participation in local development – providing the conceptual launch-pad point for this report.

Discourse disconnect
Many public servants argue that the IDP must be understood at a strategic level; they also viewed participation as a legal requirement or obligation, and one that would add little or no value to the IDP. Citizens tended to see participation in very instrumental terms: as a mechanism for raising demands or complaints, and hoping to get services or infrastructure delivered in response. The two groups of respondents tended to speak past each other, in clearly disconnected discourses.

Process not event
Both participation and IDPs are emerging, developing processes, and need to be understood as such. No 'definitive' or final conclusions can be reached about either, which should be closely monitored as they morph and change over time. The study nonetheless proposes 3 levels of recommendation for improving public participation within its current parameters; and then for raising it to a higher, more emancipatory level.

Knowledge to action
Survey data re-analysed for this study strongly indicate that where people know about the IDP and public participation, they are highly likely to participate. But knowledge of IDPs is very low. If basic knowledge can be better transmitted, participation – even if measured simply by numbers – will increase significantly.

Communication and language
Where respondents did know about IDP participation, they tended to hear about it via ward councillors, CDWs, or local branches of political parties. But communication is poor, notice for meetings often very short, meetings are held at inconvenient times and locations, facilitation often poor, and report-backs inadequate. In particular, the language of the IDP is widely regarded as far too technical – and almost never translated into languages beyond English. These can all be remedied fairly easily.

Civil society
One obvious remedy is to draw in civil society organisations (CSOs) as partners. In the study, non-government (NGO) and community-based (CBO) organisations were striking in their absence from the IDP participation processes.

Politics
Participation is embedded in a highly politicised local context. People on all sides are quick to point fingers and blame others for non-delivery. Institutional tensions further cloud the waters, with Speaker's Offices, Community Development Workers (CDWs), Ward Councillors, ward committees and others often seeing each other in competitive rather than collaborative terms.

Participation broad and narrow

To be properly understood, participation should be seen in far broader terms than IDP-related participation. Multiple avenues exist for citizens, from IDP fora to personal and organisational networks, various forms of indirect and direct action. To better understand the health of participation, all these forms of engagement should be monitored and analysed.

De-linked decision-making

Among the key disincentives for participation is the fact that the public's needs and priorities are canvassed but that information enters a remote process controlled by external agents who devise plans and make decisions that may or may not address those priorities. It is extremely difficult for most participants to equate participation with delivery – the reason they participated in the first place. Ultimately, *power doesn't shift* – it remains firmly in the hands of the state – and participation remains instrumental.

Recommendations

The study offers 3 sets of recommendations:

- A set of basic logistical repairs that will quickly improve the extent of participation
- Some sticker matters of substance relating to powers, functions and accountability to improve the quality of participation; and
- A suggested pilot project to push the current boundaries of participation and explore participation as empowerment.

Room for improvement (1): Some obvious remedies

Poor publicising of meetings and issues

➔ Use info vans and loudhailers to publicise meetings.

➔ Arrange talk shows, call-in shows and interviews on local radio stations (including community radio). Do not pitch IDP as the subject – it does not resonate enough yet with the public. Talk about the IDP process rather in terms of key priorities you know the public are concerned about.

➔ Publish notices, briefing articles and report-back summaries in the newsletters of local religious organisations, local 'knock & drops'. Post them on local notice boards.

People don't understand the process

➔ In areas where CSOs exist, they should be drawn on more systematically.

➔ Beyond that, other improvements are called for. For example, easy-to-digest material outlining the IDP and setting the stage for upcoming participatory activities are seldom available.

➔ IDP meetings and events should be preceded by awareness- and understanding-building activities, including information stalls and circulating easy-to-read pamphlets outlining the process, its importance and relevance to residents.

➔ Municipalities and provincial government should invest more resources in a combination of quality IDP outreach activities and accessible information in appropriate languages and idioms.

➔ Produce reader-friendly IDP pamphlets.

➔ Distribute pamphlets by striking a deal with the Post Office (a vital national resource that is systematically under-utilised by government) so the pamphlets are delivered with the mail, dropped into post boxes, available at counters, and so on. Use volunteers to deliver them door-to-door (and answer questions).

Circulate them at local state facilities (library, council offices, on pension and grant pay-out days at pay-out sites), stores and CBOs.

➔ Set up information stalls on Saturdays and Sundays at popular congregation points (commercial, religious etc.). Councillors and/or ward committee members should staff the stalls.

➔ Use community volunteers to publicise and build awareness of the IDP.[2]

IDP documents are "inaccessible", "too high-flowing".

➔ Simpler versions or summaries of documents should be produced and disseminated.

Language can be a barrier

➔ Use appropriate languages for the pamphlets and publicity. In Yeoville, for instance, material would need to be in English, Zulu, Sotho and French. In Ekangala, it would need to be in Sotho, Zulu and possibly also Tsonga and Ndebele (currently it is only in English).

Inconvenient meeting times

➔ Find the time that best suits specific local communities are arrange meetings accordingly (e.g. urban vs rural areas, travelling distance and time, safety at night and so on all need to be accounted for).

Travelling to meeting venues is difficult and costly

➔ Staging more than one meeting (on different days of the week, and at different times) for each IDP phase is an option. Currently, each phase tend to be marked by a single meeting or event. Miss it, and you've missed your chance to 'participate'.

➔ In geographically dispersed wards, bus participants to meetings.

➔ Provide refreshments, food and facilities.

Meetings are poorly run and facilitated

➔ Meetings should be run by persons with facilitation skills/ training.

➔ The briefings and report-backs by officials should not be entirely verbal. Visual presentations (whether on newsprint or with slide presentations) can be used. At the least, short handouts in an appropriate variety of languages should be available at the door.

Report-backs are inadequate

➔ Report-backs should be regular and well-informed. They should also not be limited to public meetings, important as those are. Radio call-in shows, interviews with reporters from local newspapers, pamphlets and posters are other useful media for communicating with residents.

➔ Controversies should be dealt with in earnest, and not in the haughty, dismissive manner that appears to be the habit of some councillors.

➔ Cell-phone communication should be explored. Given the massive penetration of cell-phones even among the poorest citizens, it offers possibilities for informing masses of people about the when and where of IDP meetings in their areas.[3]

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[2] Oddly, in Yeoville a volunteer corps, attached mainly to the ANC, has been used in a door-to-door ecological drive, but was not used to build awareness around the IDP.

[3] Thanks to Alison Todes for the suggestion.

➔ All forms of participation, including those that fall outside formal processes of participation, should be monitored and analysed by the local sphere, to provide a more nuanced picture of levels (and forms) of public participation in development and the IDP.

Room for improvement (2): Dealing with stickier problems

Many interviewees who have experienced low participation rates, attribute it to 'deeper' problems that seem resistant to logistical improvements and innovations. Some feel that communities don't 'see the importance of participation any more', others worry that bonds of trust between residents and the state are frayed, while a good few are concerned about the prevalence of disharmony and distrust between actors and structures that are meant to be collaborating closely.

"People do not trust government"

➔ A survey, using community volunteers, soliciting residents' opinions and ideas about local issues and priorities, council's performance etc. and probing understandings of processes like the IDP is an option that can double as a form of public education.

➔ Communication between the local state and communities must be improved, especially around service delivery matters. It's often a matter of establishing or properly servicing channels of communication (especially with external basic service providers), and using more effective media to communicate with the public.

Perceptions of incompetence or indifference

Councillors and municipal officialdom (as well as ward committee members) attract a good deal of criticism, and their commitment to serve the public is called into question. Desk-bound officials who don't "get out into the community" and "don't understanding the problems" come in for special criticism.

➔ Municipalities (perhaps also provincial government) could assist in arranging outreach visits in neighbouring wards for councillors – especially wards with demographic and sociological profiles different to their own. The advantages? Boosting understandings, widening perspectives, identifying previously hidden common interests and mutual solutions.

Low participation among 'privileged' residents

White people widely criticised for not attending IDP meetings, yet many choose instead to air their concerns, complaints or suggestions via telephone conversations directly with councillors. Exclusive and rarefied as this is, it's still public participation. But it is participation on the back of privilege (having a telephone, having the councillor's phone numbers, having the councillor take your call) – and such inequality is at odds with the ethos that underlies the push towards stronger public participation at local level.

The 'pay-off' or outcome of participation is not clear

People need to see tangible evidence of the value of their participation. Attending meetings carries opportunity and other costs for many people; the value of those investments and efforts needs to be made clear.

➔ At the very least, this requires regular, detailed report-backs that speak to the issues and concerns raised at earlier meetings.

Participation is haphazard and sometimes ill-informed

A cognitive hitch is at play. The IDP is not an operational plan, but a strategic plan. Yet service delivery issues predominate among the inputs from the public, whose needs, after all, tend to be local and 'operational'.

➔ *Ward plans emanating from Community Based Planning* might be an opportunity to develop more systematic public participation in IDPs, in conjunction with ward-based planning. Thematic teams or subcommittees would be set up, each identifying key priorities and then drafting IDP inputs accordingly.

Councillors need capacity-building

Sometimes the quality and commitment of individual councillors is questionable.

➔ It is incumbent on political parties to deploy suitable persons to council posts. The possibility of shifting to directly elected councillors deserves stronger consideration – and should begin by opening space for debate.

➔ Councillors' powers should not be overestimated, either – so much so that some councillors seem to find it difficult to pursue their concerns and views (and those of their constituencies) effectively in ultimately decisive forums such as municipal councils, party caucuses and the like.

➔ The real power lies at the Metro, municipal and provincial levels; officials there can drive councillors 'into submission', in the words of one Johannesburg Metro official.

➔ Training that can build basic capacities is needed. Top of the list should be meeting facilitation, and methods for quickly identifying, contacting and eliciting the desired information from within municipal and provincial state bureaucracies.

➔ Integration and co-ordination across departments and spheres – a key government goal anyway – must be fast-tracked. And with it must come an inversion of the current hierarchy: the ward should be at the apex of the power pyramid, not squashed at its base, as is currently the situation.

Whom do councillors serve?

Councillors are adamant that they are accountable to the residents in their ward – their constituency. The sentiment is admirable, but it can also undermine strong public participation. It is neither democratic nor sensible to simply by-pass or ignore the experience, expertise and often authentic representation that distinguish many civil society organisations.

➔ Organised civil society is one of the main missing elements and catalysts for stronger public participation.

➔ Initiate frank debate about the efficacy of proportional representation councillors.

Ward Committee complications

Other studies have indicated that ward committees' status often is ill-defined, that they operate in clumsy and unpredictable manner, and are prone to becoming embroiled in conflicts and standoffs with councillors. Confrontations with councillors are said to be commonplace, with allegations of corruption or misconduct sometimes used to stoke community protests. Overall, their effectiveness seems to vary not only between but also within municipalities.

Countervailing platforms have been created

Countervailing platforms of power have been created – councillors on one hand, ward committees on the other – each elected in a different manner (which then also affects

perceptions of loyalty, legitimacy and accountability). They might be meant to work smoothly together toward the same objectives, but the reality is turning out to be messier. The automatic functionality of ward committees as neutral conveyors of public interests and 'voices' is highly questionable. Added to this are perceptions of divided loyalties among some ward committee members. Our research encountered allegations that ward committees are sometimes 'captured' and used to advance the material and/or political ambitions of specific individuals or interest groups. In one of the wards studied, ward committee members were accused of promoting or undermining proposals and projects on the basis of whether they and their social networks stood to gain from them.

➔ Establish firmer and more exacting guidelines for the election of ward committee members. (Currently, the procedures and guidelines are left to municipalities to decide.) At the very least, quorums must be stipulated.

➔ More representative and transparent election procedures might build greater public trust in ward committees. But the basic challenge of dual power needs to be better understood, and appropriate solutions developed.

Participation without power?

The most successful experiments in participatory development and governance have devolved significant financial and political powers to local level (Kerala and Porto Alegre, for example). In South Africa, though, the decisive powers in relation to local development remain concentrated higher up in the chain of government, to large extent impenetrably so. The right to *participate* in processes is, to a certain degree, being devolved to ward level, but the *power* to genuinely shape the content of those processes, and to contest and oversee their outcomes is held elsewhere.

➔ Even within the current framework, there is room to experiment, especially in relatively compact wards. Wards currently access grants that should be used experimentally to try and deepen public participation.

Stronger collaboration and support is needed between various actors

➔ An institutional re-arrangement is required; which in turn must flow from on-going dialogue, monitoring and evaluation, and learning by doing. Currently, there are multiple points at which participation can be short-circuited, by any of a range of actors who have the power or influence – or access to the system – to do so. The range of players and institutions at local level need to be better stream-lined around core functions and outcomes. And community participation needs to be insulated from manipulation by any agency that begins to act as 'the' voice of that community.

Room for improvement (3): A possible pilot

A pilot project should seek to open decision-making to the citizenry. International experiments give important guidance regarding practicalities including the importance of outreach and inclusivity; skills development and capacity building across the board (for officials as well as citizens); allowing the public to set local priorities as well as monitor them; and transferred power away from the state to the citizens. In addition,

(i) All citizens (not only those belonging to community organisations) can participate;

(ii) Participation would be governed by a combination of direct and representative democracy procedures (and would occur via regularly functioning institutions); and

(iii) The allocation of resources would be determined by general criteria (decided by the participatory institutions) and technical criteria (relating to

technical or economic viability, as defined by the executive and according to various legal norms).

Turning to a possible local pilot, parameters and requirements include the following:
- ➔ a strong monitoring and evaluation system
- ➔ robust indicator development – the value of robust indicators to the broader national development project is self-evident
- ➔ decide where to locate the pilot – at a municipality or ward
- ➔ the pilot site needs to be geographically compact in order to ensure that the pilot is 'do-able' and affordable
- ➔ it also needs to include communities with tangible infrastructure and service needs around which to organise and mobilise
- ➔ a comparable control site should be selected - only by being able to compare pilot with control site will we see the pilot successes and failures in a comparative lens that allows them to stand out.

Above all, the pilot must be designed for success so that participation stands out, not problems located with the site or locale.
- ➔ The pilot locale needs to have an effective and respected councillor
- ➔ a functional and efficient ward committee
- ➔ be without suspicions or allegations of corruption
- ➔ a good institutional framework should be in place, including Speaker's Office, good communications network, and (ideally) little or no inter-institutional hostility
- ➔ have in place a strong, or at least well organised, set of civil society organisations and to partner them in the pilot
- ➔ consider partnerships with community-based organisations in delivering services
- ➔ gender needs to be carefully considered – not reduced to equal numbers of men and women, but understood in broader terms regarding the outcomes of the pilot
- ➔ undertake a needs analysis of local public servants, ward committees and the rest of the individuals that populate the institutional terrain. Opening decision-making to citizens requires a new kind of public servant, with a new set of skills

Participation involves more than drawing people into existing political and/or development processes; it transforms those processes in ways that boost people's opportunities and capacities *generally* to claim their rights. It therefore becomes an *aspect* of a wider transformative and redistributive project. It is not enough to redesign or adjust processes beforehand in order to facilitate greater participation; they must amenable to being reshaped by participation. And that invites us onto the terrain of risk and experimentation.

2. Part 1: Introduction and overview

This report was commissioned to examine the depth f public participation in the IDP process and its impact if any on decision-making within the IDP process. The study was not an audit or even an evaluation of all IDP-related public participation in Gauteng. Rather, we used qualitative methods and a small sample of wards and municipalities (selected with the Gauteng Provincial Department of local Government) to get under the skin of specific local areas, in order to better understand the dynamics that facilitate or hinder participation; and then trace the impact (if any) of that participation on the IDP as it makes its way through the bureaucracy.

Readers need therefore to be as clear about what the report is as is not: it is a qualitative study of participation and its impact on officials in a set of sampled sites, but is not a provincial audit of best practice in participation. Readers should also be very clear that a great deal of work – good and bad, creative and mundane – has been undertaken since 1994, by all spheres of government, to try and realise in practice the fact that the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), by focusing on people's "most immediate needs" therefore

> *"relies … on their energies to drive the process of meeting those needs…. Development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment".[4]*

In the following pages and in the attached critical review of literature, many of the participation experiments are examined, as is the literature that has subjected them to critical review. There is a further (substantial) body of literature that documents participation, though without critical review.

But what matters is the latter part of the quotation from the RDP; it is critical to the approach adopted in this study. Participation, in the RDP (which in turn informed the *White Paper on Local Government* and other legislation including *Municipal Systems Act* and *Municipal Structures Act*), is not about getting a local stamp of approval for decisions taken 'on high'. Nor is it merely about generating a wish-list of local needs, despite the fact that the RDP itself adopted a basic needs approach to the post-apartheid development project. Participation is about *empowerment*.

This is critical because to meet our ToR – to analyse the depth of participation and its resultant impact – we need to know the *purpose* of participation. And as we show below, this is far from clear within the Gauteng bureaucracy, or among Gauteng's citizens. But if we take 'empowerment' as the ultimate goal of participation – thin this, the RDP drew on Arnstein's seminal work on participation, that placed citizen power (a 1960s linguistic proxy for our later empowerment) at the apex[5] - then we have criteria against which we can judge the situation today.

Full participation is broader than IDP-related activities. As we argue below, participation requires a re-thinking of the ways in which state and citizen engage one another, and the transfer of decision-making power and resource allocation decisions from state to

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[4] African National Congress (Ravan Press, 1994) *Reconstruction and Development Programme* pp.4-5.
[5] Arnstein SR (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *JAIP*, 35(4): 216-224. Available at http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html

citizens. That way lies empowerment – for the bureaucracy as much as for citizens – and many of the participation opportunities already in existence would be vastly re-energised if re-positioned with this understanding of empowerment as their goal. We should also recall that participation is about better serving the needs of the public, not those of the public service. This is the perspective needed to engage with participation as emancipation rather than serving up legitimation for state procedures.

Since 1994, the responsibilities and expectations vested in local government have multiplied. Among the key changes has been a widening of the focus from service delivery to include long-term strategic objectives such as poverty reduction, social and economic development, and the greater importance accorded to citizen participation in those activities. Informed by the *Constitution*, the *White Paper on Local Government* (1998) laid a strong foundation for the establishment of pro-poor developmental local government, with strong citizen participation a central element. That framework and a subsequent legislative package has ushered in a system of local government that is intended to turn on an interactive relationship with communities.

The cornerstone for much of the current national development project is *demand-driven development*, which – properly facilitated – should engender greater local ownership and on-going maintenance of development delivery. In other words, it is fundamental to sustainability – not merely of this or that asset, such as a water scheme or a housing development or park, but of the local development strategy itself. As the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) noted,

> *"No political democracy can survive and flourish if the mass of our people remain in poverty…. Development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment. In taking this approach [i.e. 'A People-Driven Process'] we are building on the many forums, peace structures and negotiations that our people are involved in throughout the land".[6]*

As we noted above, a great deal of work has been done to try and find ways of harnessing local energy via public participation. Some are analysed here, others in the critical review of literature, and the latter's bibliography provides the reader with guidance for further reading. The Integrated Development Plan (IDP) has a critical place in government's on-going attempt to realise this vision in practice, as a key mechanism for hearing local voices, engaging local energies, and – ideally – aligning budgets and delivery decisions with local needs, rather than the other way round.

But this takes place in the context of on-going poverty for many and an inevitable clash of understandings and expectations, where demand and expectations are high, budgets limited, and IDPs subject to the normal rules and processes of resource allocation and decision-making. Local officials talk of IDPs as a strategy rather than a document - as a strategic approach to policy-making in a local area – but many IDPs are 'wish-lists' that annually reiterate the basic services needed by poor communities. There is a discourse disconnect between what many (but not all) officials want in terms of inputs to the IDP as a local governance strategy, and what local citizens see as the point of participating, namely to ensure service delivery in their locale. The disconnect needs repairing to maintain and grow participation; and the repair kit takes the form of a shared

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[6] *Ibid.*

understanding of the *why* of participation (empowerment) rather than on-going experimentation and tinkering with the *how*.

So while local communities – either as individuals or (less commonly) via locally representative organisations – approach IDP meetings to ask for the street-lights or housing or sewerage system they need, and often leave expecting delivery to follow naturally (and speedily) as a result, planners complain that no strategic value add is occurring through participation in IDPs. As one IDP co-ordinator noted,

> *I think through experience I have seen that every year you get similar needs that are just actually more of the same thing. And they're just on the side unaffordability, that the municipality can only afford so much, capital and operational expenses in order to be sustainable in a medium to long term. The municipalities cannot keep up with the rate at which new needs are being registered each year. The second problem is the fact that proper needs can only be addressed after two or three years after being registered. So it's not possible that in most cases the needs of the communities are addressed immediately. I think the fact that there's no immediate response from the municipality may have caused disillusion.*
> (IDP co-ordinator)

We should be clear from the outset that facilitating public participation in IDPs is an on-going process, but one that needs to be better understood than perhaps is the case at the moment, both in the public service and in communities. Expectations differ, understandings of both the purpose of both participation and IDPs differ, snap judgements (of what constitute 'proper' needs, of uncaring officials, and so on) are common, political analyses (of who does what for whom and why) abound – these cannot be pared away from public participation in the IDP process, but are fundamental to it. They make participation messy and complex – but remind us of the centrality of context to participation.

Moreover, these relationships and interactions occur in a situation where the state and civil society have a mutually ambivalent attitude to and relationship with one another. South Africa entered democracy with an enviable civil society that was organised, energetic, skilled, and supportive of the post-apartheid project. The brief consensus over the RDP inevitably broke, as is so many transitional societies; but from the perspective of this study, it is worrying that civil society – in non-governmental (NGO) or community-based (CBO) form - is so absent from the IDP process, a point we return to below.

This is compounded by local political hostilities. It is made more complex by the fact that public participation takes many forms, and has many options – of which the IDP is but one. The fact that the IDP is valorised in legislation and in the development project of the state does not mean that this is automatically accepted by local residents or their organisations. Participation has various avenues open to it - ranging from a protest march to organising a petition to phoning or visiting councillors to organising via civics, resident's associations and so on. Moreover, many local residents know full well (as officials frequently admitted to us off the record) that direct action today will be followed up by MECs or Mayors tomorrow, and can produce results faster than the slow processes around IDP development. This is a fact of life, not a judgement of one as more efficacious than another.

The political tensions noted earlier also spill over into the institutional mix that surrounds and supports IDPs, including ward committees, councillors, community development workers (CDWs), Speaker and Mayoral offices, and the like. As we show below, political tensions morph and adapt to suit local contexts, and can be variously party political, racial, and so on. And the limits of IDP participation are most evident from the perspective of councillors. It is they who are frequently held accountable for non-delivery by IDPs – even though they may have had no say whatsoever in the attendant decisions.

So any attempt to understand both public participation and its relationship with the Integrated Development Plan process must be sensitive to very different processes and discourses in which they are embedded. This is not a technical process of planning and budgeting; and it is not about mobilisation, or lobbying and advocacy; nor is it about a clash between a particular growth path and the needs of the poor. It is about all of these, and more. Analysing local participation in IDPs is less a technical or evaluative action and more like taking a dip-stick measurement of local dynamics and contexts and the health of a range of social and political players at local level.

Finally, drawing this overview together, we end the report by suggesting the parameters for piloting new approaches to participation. At the heart of the recommendation is the need to move beyond the current situation, where participation is predominantly about legitimating state decisions reflected in IDPs, and allowing those decisions to be taken by citizens themselves. This will require a new kind of public servant – one with many of the attributes of civic activists of the 1980s, who could organise communities around key local concerns, explain their various interconnections, and mobilise participation across widely different constituencies. It will also require a more constructive engagement from CSOs, and above all will rely on risk-taking – on being prepared to make mistakes and learn by doing.

2.1.   Approach and methodology

The *Municipal Systems Act* requires that all municipalities develop an IDP in a manner that actively engages citizens, and emphasises the importance of building capacity and allocating resources for community participation. Methods for helping achieve strong participation include IDP forums, ward committee and public meetings, budget consultations, and so on. Some municipalities have gone further in using road shows, local theatre groups and other creative mechanisms.

The purpose of this study is to examine "the depth and quality of public participation in the IDP". To that end, we have produced a document that situates the expectations and realities of public participation in local governance and development critically within an international, historical and theoretical context. The critical review of the literature that forms part of the overall report is critical in situating and explaining many of the concepts and criteria used in this part of the report that analyses our primary data. Building on that exercise, we conducted in-depth interviews with officials, stakeholders and residents in the wards of five diverse Gauteng municipalities (see Appendix B) selected with the approval of GPDEV:

- West Rand   (Randfontein)
- Johannesburg Metro   (Yeoville)
- Bantubonke   (Midvaal)
- Ekangala   (Kungwini)
- Emfuleni   (Sharpeville & Boipatong)

Focus groups were held with different stakeholders from the same communities – women who had participated in IDP meetings in Ekangala, community activists from Yeoville, CDWs from across the province, IDP co-ordinators, migrants who knew of IDP processes but stayed away from them, local Sebokeng residents some of whom had participated and some who had not – in order to better understand how people think and talk about IDPs and participation; where they see the two coming together; and how they judge the value of participation in IDPs.

This is not an evaluation of public participation, or of IDPs. This report does not systematically record or describe all IDP-related activities across Gauteng. Nor does the critical review of the literature, although it's coverage is broader. It should be noted that while government may document much of its work, it is not very good at publishing the results of subjecting that work to critical scrutiny and review. Many innovative approaches do exist, in all spheres, but are often neither written up nor shared widely; nor are they critically appraised' and many remain 'under the radar'. By design, we have visited a small sample of locale in order to better understand broader constraining and facilitating dynamics, processes and actors. This text presents our findings, based on the research and field interviews. It reflects the limits of the data emanating from both officials and citizens. It includes a description and analysis of the current state of affairs, and recommendations for improving public participation in the IDP process (and beyond it).

Future work could take other approaches. Most obviously, a longitudinal study using participant observation, possibly using a panel approach (where a sample of residents and officials are followed over time and interviewed at regular intervals to understand how their understanding and appreciation of participation change (if at all) over time, could produce fascinating results. Until the number of participants increases, the costs of quantitative clearly outweigh the return on the (considerable) investment required.

Finally, public participation in IDPs is an evolving, fluid, changing set of processes. It would be extremely difficult to 'evaluate' such a fluid context at this early stage in its growth and development and draw conclusions, particularly if such an evaluation were to be regarded as a technical exercise that disregarded local context and focused on particular mechanisms or the IDPs themselves. We do make broad recommendations that can be applied across the board: but we do so with a simultaneous warning that local context cannot be ignored; that participation (the who, what and why) is heavily influenced by context; and that solutions need to be locally grounded.

- **Box 1: Key findings from the critical review of literature**

Attached at Annexure A (and which we urge readers to regard as an integral part of the report), is a critical review of key literature on public participation in local development. That text serves as a conceptual and analytical basis for this report. It traces the emergence of public participation as a central feature of local governance and development internationally, describes its legislative and ideological anchor points in South Africa (with specific reference to the IDP), and examines in some detail the many formal and contextual factors that decide the extent, depth and quality of public participation in local-level development.

In doing so, the text questions several common assumptions surrounding public participation (including the notion of 'participation fatigue'), critically maps the many

attributes and roles assigned to it, and highlights the highly political and politicized dynamics of participatory approaches. Importantly, it emphasises that both the concept and practice of public participation are intrinsically neither conservative nor progressive. The social and political content of such initiatives depend substantially on the nature of the political project, the kind of state (and state-civil society relations) and the political-economic context in which they are pushed into service.

The review presents a typology that distinguishes between various types of public participation, ranging from instrumentalising, ceremonial forms to the more idealistic experiments that involve redistributions of power and tend to function as aspects of expansive transformative projects. The text also outlines a schema for gauging (the 'breadth' and 'depth' of) public participation.

Drawing on critical analyses of key Southern participatory development experiments, the text then sketches some of the cardinal features of those initiatives, outlining procedural and institutional elements while highlighting also the political and political-economic contexts and conditions in which they were undertaken. A distinctive feature of those experiments, it proposes, was that they did not simply draw citizens into existing development processes; instead, participation transformed the processes in ways that boosted people's opportunities and capacities generally to claim their rights. Consequently, it is argued that models of participation should be grounded in coherent theories of social change, and underlines the fundamental question of power, the terms of its distribution and contestation, and the ways by which it establishes the undertow of participatory development processes.

Finally, the text reviews analyses of public participation in the IDP to date, and argues that conditions in South Africa both favour and undercut the potential for extensive, transformatory public participation in local development – providing the conceptual launch-pad point for this report.

2.2. Why is public participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process important?

There is such consensus around the need for greater public participation in local development that it seems silly to ask the question, why is it important? In relation to the IDP, participation is expected to deepen local democracy, boost legitimacy, enhance longer-term planning and strengthen development initiatives.

While other studies[7] have made much of the allegedly strong commitment among officials for public participation, it is noteworthy that many of our respondents prefaced their responses by recalling that public participation is "a legal requirement". Asked what came to mind when hearing 'public participation', an IDP co-ordinator replied: "Endless public meetings", with an apparent absence of relish. This seeming sense of obligation perhaps reflects a sense of frustration or disappointment at the state of public participation, since respondents then went on to make strong cases for the importance of participation "in theory".

> *We have a culture of consultation in South Africa. We consult when sometimes we shouldn't really have to consult.*
> *(Johannesburg Metro official)*

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[7] See, for example, LK John Consulting (2006). *Enhancing citizenship in the City of Johannesburg: An evaluation of current public participation initiatives*. April. Johannesburg.

Or, as an IDP co-ordinator put it when asked about participation in IDPs,

> *It's necessary. It's a requirement. A critical one from a legislative [point of view]. It's being done because the legislation requires it. From a government's point of view in terms of making sure that there's legitimacy to the plans the city puts on the table, the budgets put on the table. And making sure that the communities as stakeholders are happy with what the city's doing... I think it's important for us because we need to enforce the things we bring on the table. In fact in some cases the communities do raise very similar issues every year, because we do it on a regular basis. The variation in terms of what people say is very minimal.*
> *(IDP Co-ordinator)*

Some seemed to set the bar low, and emphasised the political utility of participation. Special emphasis was placed on the legitimacy which participation could bestow on a development process or initiative. This focus on the value of having some form of "agreement" or even "consensus" underpin local development efforts of course sits within the corporatist model of participation (developed in the accompanying critical review of the literature). This fits the findings of other studies and analyses in South Africa and elsewhere, where participatory processes that transcend consultative and corporatist forms were not common at local government level. Particularly striking is the fact that these responses were not merely describing current realities but spoke to a desired 'level' of public participation, as earlier we heard of 'proper' demands made by communities (and by definition, improper demands exist).

> *It means there's legitimacy to what we're doing. (IDP coordinator)*

Still emphasising the utilitarian value of strong participation, but in a more developmental manner, other interviewees went a little further and argued that participation could enrich development planning by investing it with communities' knowledge of local realities. Projects and programmes are then more likely to fit match local needs.

> *Without public participation you might get the needs wrong and deliver white elephants. (Community development worker)*

For most local residents, the instrumental approach was what participation in IDPs is all about – attend, raise issues, make requests (or 'demands'), and trust that the state will deliver – frequently to be disappointed as the latter fails to materialise. Asked why they had participated in IDP meetings, the following exchange between some residents in a focus group is illustrative:

> R: *I did because people in my community want a business centre. I keep on going back because I know it's in the IDP and I know that we wanted a training centre from the IDP and we got it. So I know that something might come up in the end.*
> R: *The reason why I go there is that I don't want to get misinformation. I know that when I get there I'm going to get new information. Also to make sure that if I have some complaints or anything that's bothering me I want to go there and talk about them. Personally I will hold the IDP responsible if I*

> *voice out my community's needs and they are not done at the end of the day.*
>
> *R: To tell the truth there isn't much difference I just go there to get information as we in Yeoville are far from everybody else so you are hardly in touch with any other person. So when you go to the meeting you get to know what's been happening in your surroundings.*
>
> *R: What makes me go to the IDP meeting is that I know that the needs of the community will be addressed. There are processes in place. So when I talk there I know I'm not wasting my time. Needs of the community are fulfilled when promised.*
>
> *(Yeoville residents)*

For other officials we interviewed, though, the democratising potential of participation held the most attraction. It is notable that this was not raised by community members, whether they had participated in IDPs or not: only among state officials did we detect this discourse. In other words, the public sector is already exhibiting the capacity to think beyond the utilitarian reins currently steering participation and stretch it into a more democratising and empowering exercise for state and citizen. This bodes well for any possible future pilot project in this area. Although any public officials will require support if they are to move down such a path, the same is as true – if not more so – of the citizenry, who have no experience of a state throwing open decision-making doors and inviting them inside.

Participation entailed being an integral part of a process that – through omission or commission – will affect one's life. Some interviewees saw this in modest terms and described public participation as "the only opportunity citizens have for influencing the IDP process". For them it at least presents the opportunity to funnel the voices of the public into development planning, programming and budgeting. They seemed philosophical about the weight of that influence, and whether it would decisively affect outcomes. But the act and the fact of participation carries value in its own right.

For most respondents, however, participation potentially went considerably further. Ideally, it should involve a depth of involvement that lays the basis for ongoing roles (including later oversight and monitoring) that enable communities to take "ownership" of development projects.

> *"Without the community, there can be no IDP."*

Yet, when asked to reflect on the reality of public participation in IDPs, most officials we interviewed felt that participation seldom brought to light issues, concerns and proposals that they were not already aware of.

> *Communities raise similar things every year. (IDP coordinator)*

> *A lot of councillors would probably be able to draw up about the same IDPs even without the IDP meetings. (Ward councillor)*

Partly this is because many of the priority issues in the more impoverished wards tend to be perennial: employment, crime, basic services (water, electricity, sanitation) and housing. The predictability, in other words, signals the persistence of important but unmet needs community needs and claims – reminding us of our earlier point, that

local context is critical in understanding participation in IDPs. Meanwhile, in the more privileged (sections of) wards, the predictability emerges from another layer of public participation that occurs, with residents using other channels to alert councillors and officials to matters.

This is critical. IDPs are but one form of participation and engagement with the state and its development project, available to citizens. The fact that it is valorised in legislation and state discourse means less to citizens than finding the most efficacious method of getting what they need from their local authority. For some, this may mean personal contact with officials; for others, it may mean marching and protesting; and so on. And we should be frank: many of the other forms of participation produce faster and more concrete results that participating in IDP fora. But the point at issue is this: a measurement of participation (as a sign of the 'health' of local communities) must cast its net far wider than IDPs. Engagement with the state takes place in many ways, often simultaneously, and all taken together amount to 'participation'. IDP participation is but one (small but important) slice of this broader picture. All forms should be monitored by government if we are to have a true picture of 'how much' participation is really occurring, and in what forms.

At play among officials tasked with supporting or overseeing public participation in the IDP, it seems, are conflicting sentiments. Participation tends to be praised in the abstract and is equated with stronger democracy and "ownership" of development. But in practice it acquires a sense of obligation, its content diminished by repeated demands, and its value tends to be viewed in more prosaic terms, as we see in the next section. Among citizens, IDP participation is about securing basic needs from the state. For some it succeeds, for others it seems to be an on-going series of requests without reply.

2.3.   Community-based planning

One suggested mechanism for filling the gap between community and 'government' (however understood) is community based planning (CBP). Community-based planning is one among a number of methodologies proposed to enhance both public participation and (hopefully, thereby) IDPs. It has been proposed by a number of municipalities for the forthcoming round of IDPs and should be monitored by the Department as one possible mechanism for enhanced participation – though, as with so much about participation, it has yet to be subject to representative critical scrutiny.

According to the **dplg**, CBP aims to "empower the community to plan for itself" while helping community and local government better understand each others needs and capacities, and help municipalities become more responsive to communities.[8] The Ward Committee Resource Book, however, while clear on the purpose of CBP, is silent on the processes or mechanisms by which its goals may be achieved; and equally silent on the extent to which community planning will be able to *direct* resource allocation decisions.

John notes rather tartly that CBP "is largely seen as ward-level planning" and that its popularity is unsurprising if not entirely appropriate: "Many municipalities seem to think that capturing the needs and priorities of a relatively small grouping (e.g. a ward or a

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[8] **Dplg** (Pretoria, 2005) *Ward Committee resource book: Making ward committees function.*

community) is a useful technique…" as a means of establishing a long-standing relationship with whatever group is selected.[9]

Community based planning (CBP), in brief, takes as its starting point the need for community action and is a precursor to participation in the IDP as such. Organised around ward plans, CBP seeks to plan towards outcomes not from problems, and relies on a rigorous understanding of the make-up of communities, including levels and types of poverty, marginalisation, assets and energies available, and so on.[10] CBP relies on linkages between government and non-government sectors – a key concern in this study – but pilots have noted that "even among municipalities that prioritised participation, community and stakeholder attendance often dropped off significantly as the process continued".[11] We would suggest that this will continue to be the case while the purpose of participation – what we want it for and what we want out of it - is blurred or confused. What is the value of ward plans, for example, while capital budgets continue to reflect programme costs but not specify where they will be implemented?

CBP seeks to link the micro level – where communities and individuals want to manage their own development – and the meso level, where local government services have to be well-managed and realise in practice the principles of *Batho Pele*. Many champions of CBP have noted that the IDP faces particular problems including sphere and silo effects of government's way of working and "the envisaged IDP processes have not catered sufficiently for active and sustained community involvement in planning processes"[12], as noted earlier. CBP costs money – it inserts a layer of facilitators that cost money[13] – but that should not be a deterrent. What may be the problem, as we repeat towards the end of this study, is that CBP, like any form of participation, ultimately rests on the ability – and, crucially, willingness - of government to commit itself to full participation, deepening local democracy, and releasing a degree of autonomy to allow local residents to direct where and how resources will be invested.

> **Box 2: A brief overview of recent public participation in local development in South Africa**[14]
> Attempts to democratize local governance and development mark have the potential of becoming defining features of the post-apartheid transition. These innovations did not, however, emerge on a blank slate. Radical precedents were set during the 1970s and especially the 1980s by local organizations engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle. One echo of this was the clarion call for "people-centred development" that characterised development discourse in the early 1990s, and which found expression in various public policies. Emphasized in such an orientation were principles of equity, accountability, transparency and democracy (Williams, 2005).
>
> Introduced steadily in the past 13 years has been a system of democratic local government that allows and enables citizens to participate in local governance and development. Those opportunities are embedded in a battery of legislation, underpinned by the South African Constitution, and range from municipal elections to participation in development forums, ward and other local committees, public petitions and public protests (discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this text). There can be

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[9] L K John Consulting (Johannesburg, 2006): 'Enhancing citizenship in the City of Johannesburg: An evaluation of current public participation initiatives', p.38.

[10] See for example Goldman I (Khanya, 2004) 'Community-Based Planning in South Africa'.

[11] *Ibid.*, piv.

[12] *Ibid.*, p.ii.

[13] The Khanya report (in 2004 costs) recommends 'process funds' of R25 000 to R50 000 per ward; and R375 000 CBP implementation costs for a 40-ward municipality.

[14] For more, please refer to the critical review of literature at Appendix A.

little doubt that a strong commitment to participatory governance exists, even if the realization of that commitment remains uneven.

Municipalities generally have been using similar instruments to enable participation at the local level, with regular public meetings (including on the IDP process), ward committees, mayoral "road shows" and "listening campaigns" among the most-common. Participation in the IDP process was hesitant and haphazard at first, but nevertheless by the early 2000s constituted, according to one assessment, the most intensive citizens' involvement in municipal planning in South Africa's history (Davids, 2005). While documentation of such efforts has grown, very few participatory development initiatives in South Africa have been subjected to critical scrutiny and analysis. But when such assessment has occurred, the conclusions have tended to be less than sanguine.

Thus, a review of public participation in the Western Cape, for example, found that *de facto* obstacles continued to limit effective participation, and concluded that "the constitutional and legislative requirements for participation that have been instituted are a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful participation in the South African socio-economic context" (Davids, 2006). Similarly, when assessed, the use of "area coordinating teams" to foster public participation in neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats[15] was adjudged to be "good policy – on paper" but in practice "a structural failure". Mandated actions were non-binding and the process incidental to the "regular business" of the city council (Williams, 2003 & 2004). Mackay's (2004) review of community participation on development forums in Cape Town also contrasted enthusiastic and well-organized participation (especially in the sub-councils of Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plan) with the institutional torpor proposals encountered in the city's Planning Department.

Mayoral "listening campaigns" were introduced in Cape Town to open "space" for community participation in budgeting processes, but a lack of structural and logistical support within the City undermined the desired outcomes. Many of the obstacles were institutional, with moribund or inappropriate council structures often entrusted with facilitating public participation in the IDP (Williams, 2006). Indeed, the City of Cape Town's recent review of public participation in the IDP highlighted a need for a more structured system and process for participation, and deemed it necessary to reiterate the fact that participation should amount to more than consultation (City of Cape Town, 2006).

In KwaZulu-Natal, the establishment of the unified eThekwini municipality provided an opportunity to strengthen and entrench public participation across the metropolitan area (Moodley, 2007). While some progress was made, participation (particularly stakeholder participation) was, on assessment, found to have been "erratic and event-dependent". Engagement around strategic planning was deemed uneven (Moodley, 2007:6). Various formats of participation have been attempted, ranging from the "blue sky" approach (which was found to be time-consuming and generally unrewarding), to a more focused approach in which strategy teams develop strategic proposals for various sectors. Those proposals are then examined, debated and revised by citizens and stakeholders. When combined with mass communication and publicity drives, and spearheaded by a dedicated team, this approach appears to bring results (Moodley, 2007). However, further afield, a review of local HIV/AIDS initiatives in the Umzinyathi municipality (in the centre-north of the province) concluded that public participation was "at a very low level" (Mantzaris & Ngcobo, 2007).

Public participation also seems largely concentrated around the initial, needs-assessment phase of the IDP (LK John Consulting, 2006). Again, this runs the risk of ceremonializing participation, since it is in later phases that explicit choices are made, and budgetary decisions are taken. This underscores a further, major challenge that

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[15] Specifically, in Gugulethu, Hanover Park, Heideveld, Langa and Manenberg.

remains largely unmet – enabling citizens' engagement in budgetary decision-making. Attempts have been made in Buffalo City and Stellenbosch, for example, but community inputs were found to be minor and ineffectual (partly because they were funneled into the capital budget, which has little leeway for discretionary spending). Despite such efforts, "it is not clear whether communities are able to influence municipal spending in a meaningful way", according to one recent analysis (LK John Consulting, 2006).

Other assessments have highlighted several practical shortcomings in efforts to involve citizens in the IDP process. In Vosloorus and Thembelihle, for example, public IDP meetings have been criticized for being too large, too brief or too regimented to allow for meaningful input and discussion. There, as well as in Diepsloot, officials were accused of using the meetings to push home their own agenda. In Ivory Park, public participation appears to be relatively hale, but it does not extend to the integration and approval phases of the IDP (Planact, 2007).

Generally, then, it appears that spaces and events are being fashioned for community input into development processes such as the IDP, but that these often remain formalistic and consultative, and lack the substantive weight and authority needed to influence processes in a sustained and meaningful way.

Other observers have claimed also that participation generally has been dominated by relatively privileged minorities, and that poorer, less-organised citizens often feel disempowered when trying to participate (Buccus & Hicks, 2005). Analysis of the SASAS survey seems to support such views, and shows that levels of participation in local government generally are not high, although poor South Africans seem to stake considerable hope in local structures (Hemson, 2007).

2.4. How should we measure 'good' public participation?

Public participation in local governance and development currently occurs in a variety of forms that range from the opportunity to vote in local government elections to participating in ward or municipal public meetings, organising petitions, staging public protests, or using call and drop-in centres, or in project committees, community-based monitoring, a host of local CSOs, and so on.

Councillors from disparate wards were open in their interpretations of public participation. According to them it ranged, at one end of the spectrum, from a telephone call or letter from a resident to, at the other end, public marches and protests. The momentary or intermittent nature of these forms of participation is striking. Hardly anyone envisaged public participation in terms of sustained involvement that entails shared powers and responsibilities. However participation was abstracted, it of course rotates on a basic access – getting what you want from the system.

Several respondents – and much official literature – also referred to the 'road shows' of mayors, MECs and speakers as examples of participation. *Izimbizo* were often highlighted as important forms of participation. Again, the irregular and isolated nature of these engagements catches the eye. *Izimbizo*, for example, usually occur once every several years in any given area, and the issues highlighted during them (and the activities they might spark) are not necessarily integrated into existing or pending policies and plans. Moreover, there is a 'wild card' aspect to them. A complaint or proposal that catches the attention of a minister or mayor can become a priority irrespective of its wider developmental merits or existing planning and implementation processes and considerations.

Moreover, what makes IDP meetings different – better, according to citizens who have attended IDP and *imbizo* meetings – is 'voice'. The Yeoville focus group participants explained:

> R: *With the IDP you get a report back about what you said in the last meeting and what has been done about it. What has happened or not, but with "Imbizo" it's just a meeting and nothing else.*
>
> R: *Yes, there is a slight difference. She is right. I think the IDP comes straight to us as people on the round level. Sometimes I go there (imbizo) with a burning issue and I'm not able to say it at the imbizo. People go there with issues that are different and don't even concern your community.*
>
> R: *I think an imbizo is a platform for political rallies. They will promise to do things for you as a government. With IDP it is more in the community level.*
>
> *(Yeoville residents focus group)*

Most respondents used turn-out at public IDP meetings as their main (usually only) yardstick for gauging the strength of public participation. At some level, it is perhaps inevitable that participation measurement is a numbers game. Indeed, as we show below, several of the more practical, relatively easy-to-accomplish improvements that can boost public participation are geared at multiplying the occasions on which people participate and increasing the numbers of people participating. There is nothing wrong – and a lot right – with placing emphasis on numbers, but it is not a game that can be won – participation in processes such as IDP development will always be limited, and who decides what a good or bad number of participants is? The issue should be addressed, but should not be regarded as central to assessing the value and impact of participation in the IDP process, not its impact on decision-making.

Although some interviewees stressed that the quality of participation is vital, none argued that flimsy turnouts – no matter the quality of inputs or the stakeholder representation – counted for "good" or "strong" participation. However, several respondents were adamant that large numbers of participants could not adequately compensate for the absence of relevant stakeholders from the participation process. Some community development workers (CDWs), for instance, were adamant that strong public participation required the involvement of community *structures* in community affairs. For them, participation requires *organised* stakeholders.

This seems important for at least three reasons, some of which go beyond the more obvious matter of involving as diverse and representative a range of interests as possible.

Firstly, the involvement of organised structures holds the potential of deeper and more sustained participation in the IDP than is currently occurring. Conventional, organised entities bring the potential advantage of structured, predictable and ongoing (and relatively representative) engagement in a process like the IDP.

In this perspective, Yeoville, for example, with its well-established and -represented Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum (YSF), seems in a good position to deepen public participation.[16] This does not mean the YSF becomes the sole or predominant agent for

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[16] The YSF comprises 23 local organisations, including some with mainly expatriate memberships.

participation, but it offers a solid starting point. Its member organisations can feed into and support other, new bodies for participation – thematic sub-committees, for instance – that might include representatives from existing organisations, as well as draft members from the "general public". What was striking in this research was the general absence of organised CSOs such as the YSF, and of community based organisations (CBOs) as well.

Importantly the absence of organised structures (manifest, for example, in Randfontein and Ekangala) does not rule out such, deeper participation. In one of Randfontein's wards, for instance, residents of an informal settlement attended recent IDP meetings en masse, not as a formal representative structure, but having caucused their inputs and conduct carefully beforehand. A kind of proto-structure was at work that could provide the basis for closer, more hands-on participation that bridges the intermittent contact-points that currently constitute public participation in their area.

> *We must start by organising people. People must have structures, then we educate them more easily about the IDP through the ward committees. (Official, Speaker's Office, Ekangala)*

Secondly, the absence of organised structures tends to drastically dilute the "weight" of participation. A host of basic, unmet needs (and several ongoing controversies) regularly spur 400 or more people into attending public meetings (IDP and otherwise) called by Ekangala's councillor, for instance. There are also frequent protests, often about issues discussed at the meetings, and sometimes aimed at the councillor. The same was true of Sebokeng while the research process was underway (though not directed at the councillor concerned). There is palpable frustration on all sides. Conspicuously absent in the area, though, are local organisations. The issues and concerns are serious, but the purchase points and vehicles for pursuing them in a more systematic and sustained manner are not in place.[17]

In instances such as these, the issue at stake is how flexible and supportive is government willing and able to be? How can it respond to communities organised at community level but not channelled into and by formal organisations? This is the popular energy and commitment we want to harness into the process – a deep-seated local concern with delivery and the state of the community – but how can government harness that energy? What partnerships need to be contemplated to do so, and to harness energy not to co-opt, mute and silence local voices? State structures (generally) do not have a good track record in this area, but that should not stop experimentation and learning by doing.

It seems clear from the critical review of the literature that strong CSOs are vital for the transformative participation that sits on the higher rungs of Arnstein's ladder. But the environment is intensely political, and we should be aware of (and unafraid of) that. In this area, it relates to the ability of CSOs to exploit the arbitrage that exists in settings that are politically contested by striking tactical alliances, and/or to forge a "synergistic relation" with a dominant political party from a position of autonomous strength, as occurred in Kerala, India[18], and other points along the spectrum.

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[17] Some of the issues are longstanding but appear no closer to being resolved, partly because of cross-boundary complications (previously deemed to be a part of Mpumalanga, Ekangala is now part of Gauteng).

[18] For elaboration of the latter point, see Williams M (2007). *Generative politics: Participatory development in South Africa and Kerala*. Submitted for publication. University of Witwatersrand. Johannesburg.

The third reason is best examined from a bird's-eye perspective. As we argue in the accompanying critical review of the literature, the destiny of particular proposals and inputs into the IDP ultimately is determined by factors, forces and contexts (financial or budgetary, technical, strategic, legal or even unabashedly political and economic) elsewhere in the system and the process. A *transformative* participatory process requires the means and the ability to press home demands and recommendations along a variety of channels, and to sustain those efforts independently of any formal, official process. In other words, it is evident that if citizens want to extract maximal gains from avenues open to them, they need multiple parallel strategies and points of engagement – and IDP officials should both be aware of this and assess their own processes accordingly. IDP participation is an important avenue – but is far from being the only show in town as far as influencing decision-making and resource allocation by the local state is concerned.

Any such developmental engagement therefore is also inherently political, insofar as its outcomes ultimately are shaped not so much by "neutral" technical considerations but by prevailing balances of power.[19] The weight of organised civil society (usually in concert with significant political formations) determines to what extent and in what respects that balance of power can be altered. That weight establishes the potential for a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic politics – which is part and parcel of a medium-term, strategic planning process like the IDP.

But a note of caution as well: there is an ineluctable process that seems to move organisations from facilitators to gate-keepers, as they ossify around resource-decision making structures. While we see lots of space for organisational involvement, it comes with health warnings attached. This is also true of the fact that many CSOs are hostile to the state and its policy choices. Working with them is neither easy nor straightforward; and many will presumably be deeply suspicious of any opportunity made available as an attempt to 'capture' them or their constituents. We are not recommending a greater role for organised civil society because it will be easy; but because if properly managed, it could have a profound and positive impact on participation as we seek to move it from consultation to empowerment.

2.5.   Are protests and marches public participation?

Most interviewees agreed that protests are an acceptable form of public participation, some quite strongly. Others felt it was a "negative" form of participation, since people have ample other opportunities to air their grievances or put forward proposals. Most officials said they would accept petitions and take the matter further. Others felt that marches and protests sometimes can serve as a measure of the "health of public participation" in a community.

However, those who disagreed argued equally strongly that protests were "not constructive" because other adequate channels and forums exist for taking up the issues and grievances.

> *It can be mob psychology. When you look, you can see that in the front are people who just want me out of this job. (Ward councillor)*

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[19] "Up close", this might not always be evident. But to residents of informal settlements seeking land tenure security around Randfontein, for example, it is very obvious.

Even officials who professed sympathy for protestors, remarked that the protests themselves often were instigated by individuals or political factions with ulterior motives (to embarrass or even, eventually, depose the councillor and/or council).

> *Political factions often use delivery issues to mobilise or contest power.*
> *(IDP co-ordinator)*

Direct action (within the bounds of the law) is a legitimate course of action for citizens, and should be regarded as healthy participation. As we argued above, participation takes multiple forms, and all should be monitoring by the state as expressions of the participatory impulses of the citizenry.

3. Gauging public participation in the IDP

We now turn to ways of assessing public participation, and readers are urged to review the typology developed in the critical review of the literature. Later we make recommendations about improving the process, but many of those look at fairly basic issues and basic forms of participation. The real challenge is moving towards participation as transformation and empowerment – where decision-making and resource allocation is devolved to citizens – and in that area, both state and citizens have to move together.

In Gauteng province, specifically, the quality of IDPs (in terms of strategic and operational content) appears to have improved in recent years. An official review of the 2006 IDP in the province praised the "great strides … made in terms of popular participation in development planning" but added tellingly that "community-based planning needs to be more broadly factored into IDPs".[20]

But measuring participation requires firstly agreement on the purpose – the But measuring participation requires firstly agreement on the purpose – the *why?* – of participation. Is the criterion whether opportunities exist; or whether they were taken up; by how many; or some deeper criteria than these? Where participation is an end in itself, the numbers game is paramount. Where it is a means to an end, the quality of participation, its impact on citizens, and on the IDPs, become central variables.
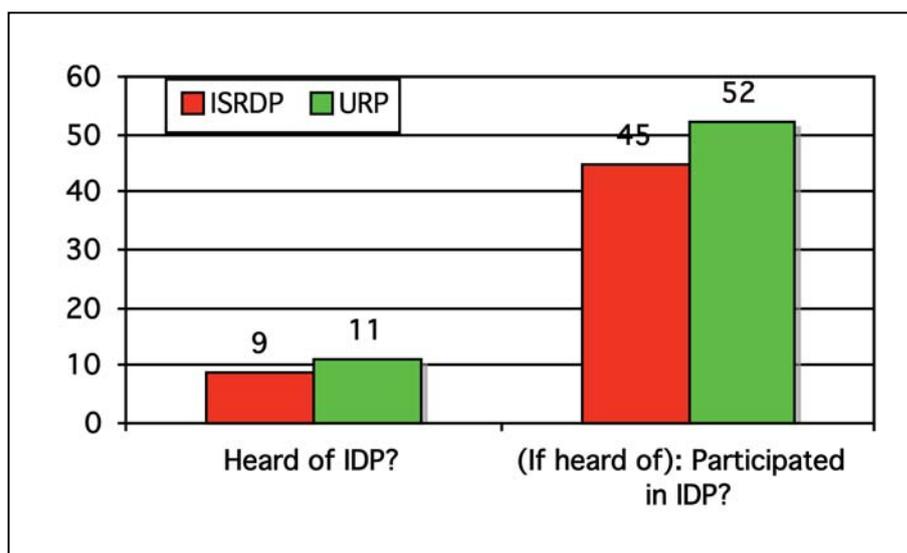
Figure 1: Awareness of and participation in IDPs (Source: Everatt D., Smith MJ & Solanki G.: *Baseline survey of the 21 ISRDP and URP nodes***, commissioned by the National Department of Social Development, 2007.)**

Public participation in formal IDP meetings varies dramatically across wards and municipalities. By one estimate, 1-3% of persons in any given area nationally participate in the IDP process, though this may be optimistic.[21] In a recent survey commissioned by the Department of Social Development in the 21 poorest nodes of the country – those where the Urban Renewal and Integrated Sustainable Rural

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[20] However, this is virtually the only substantive reference to public participation in the 14-page review document. Department of Local Government (2006). *Review of the 2006 municipal IDP engagement and commenting process in Gauteng Province*. Growth and Development subcommittee, p.5.
[21] Interview, Director – PIMS, Department of Provincial and Local Government. 19 April 2007.

Development programmes are being implemented – a direct correlation was found between knowledge and participation. As the report stated:

> *What we can see from the left-hand set of columns (in the preceding graphic) is that awareness of IDPs is extremely low in both ISRDP and URP nodes, where an average of 1 in 10 respondents had heard of IDPs. This is slightly higher among men (13%) than women (9%). It may be argued that this is fact a fairly high recognition rate, given the fact that these are very poor nodes with relatively low educated residents. On the other hand, the nodes have also been at the centre of development since being identified as nodes for either URP and ISRDP, and it is not unreasonable to assume that IDPs should have been heavily backed by the local authorities as a key mechanism for unlocking the potential of both communities and government resources via the IDP. Nonetheless, awareness remains low.*
>
> ***Crucially, however, awareness seems to lead to action.*** *Although just 1 in 10 respondents had heard of IDPs, around half of those who had heard of IDPs also participated in their local IDP process, true of 45% of ISRDP respondents and 52% of URP respondents. It is also important to note that participation – among those who know of IDPs – is high in rural nodes, suggesting that if IDPs were properly communicated to citizens and embedded in a process that facilitated participation, IDPs could indeed take up the prominent local developmental role designed for them. At the moment, the survey suggests that IDPs are more potential than actual.[22]*

Using the same survey data but focusing on Gauteng's only node – Alexandra – we find a fascinating set of results.
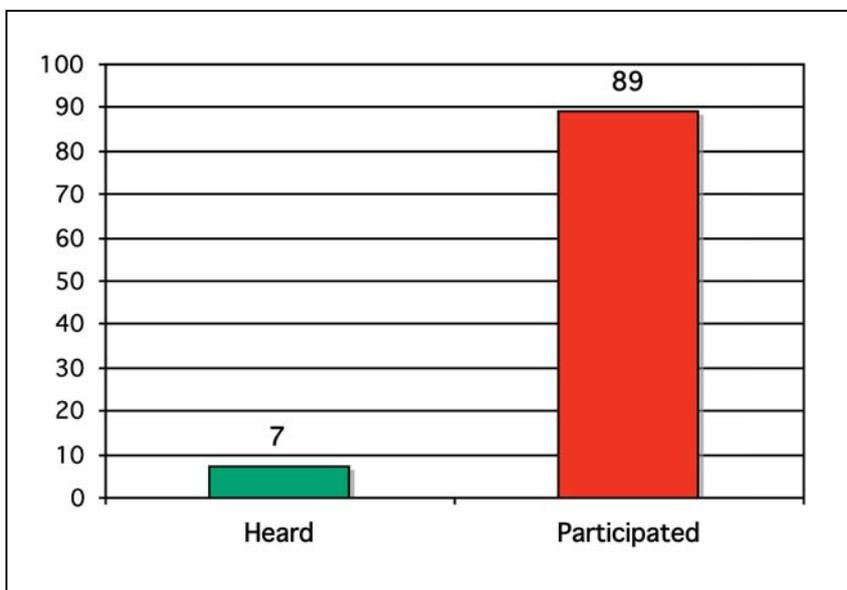

Figure 2: Awareness of and participation in IDPs in Alexandra (Source: Everatt D., Smith MJ & Solanki G.: *Baseline survey of the 21 ISRDP and URP nodes*, commissioned by the National Department of Social Development, 2007.)

Alexandra is an older, more established and more organised area than many more recent urban nodes in the Urban Renewal programme. Nonetheless, knowledge of IDPs – the most basic stepping stone – was lower (at 7%) than the programme average

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[22] Source: Everatt D., Smith MJ and Solanki G (2006) Baseline survey of the 21 ISRDP and URP nodes: survey report and data tables, Department of Social Development.

(11%). This suggests that our first set of recommendations (below), that focuses on basic logistical matters to boost participation, will be very important in areas such as Alexandra. But what really matters in the graph is the massive leap once people were armed with knowledge – 9 in 10 of those who know about IDPs had participated in some form or other in the IDP. That is a remarkable result, and suggests that a massive potential (and reservoir of local energy) exists for participation in IDPs, if only people can be given the right knowledge tools to act on.

In the wards we studied, turnout at IDP meetings ranged from 4-6 to around 500. Most officials judged participation on the basis of attendance and, to a lesser extent, on the quality of inputs and discussions at those meetings. Judging participation by numbers is a lot easier than by making judgement calls about depth, impact, quality outcomes, transformation and the like. And this will remain the situation until a government agency takes the lead in piloting qualitative indicators that worry about the impact of participation. We strongly recommend that the Gauteng Provincial Government take the lead in doing so.

But the question remains, to what extent should turnout serve as a yardstick of strong participation? No doubt, there is a difference between an IDP meeting attended by 4 members of the public (Ward 6, Randfontein, for example), and meetings where 400-500 people attend (Ekangala, for example). But does the Ekangala experience automatically entail stronger participation – stronger than a meeting of, say, 50 people, all of whom represent community organisations (as in a meeting of the Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum, to discuss IDP inputs, for instance), or of 200 individuals with common interests and who have caucused beforehand (as in ward 4, Randfontein)? And does that in turn give rise to better inputs and generate better impact on officials?

In Yeoville, formal participation is stronger, mainly due to the work of Stakeholders' Forum, although the "general public" has reportedly remained largely apathetic toward participating in the IDP. In this densely-populated area, only about 60-80 members of the public attend the councillor's meetings, including those featuring the IDP on the agenda. The Forum's input into the IDP process potentially constitutes strong public participation given the relatively broad representivity of the structure. The ward councillor sits on the YSF as an ex-officio member and, in theory, is abreast of discussions that occur there. However, the Forum is required to bring its IDP inputs to the public IDP meeting and participate there effectively as merely one more member of the public. With 23 member organisations, the Forum cannot be equated with an individual attending and speaking up at an IDP meeting.

Such an arrangement squanders potentially important assets for deepening and enriching public participation in the IDP. Firstly, the representative weight of inputs emerging from local organisations is discounted. Proposals that reflect layers of consultation and discussion (which lend *depth* to participation) among a diversity of local interest groups reflect processes which, arguably, are much more substantive than an IDP public meeting. As one sceptical respondent noted,

> *This is the weakness of the IDP process, it's a seasonal thing … all of a sudden, 'Now it's IDP time again!' …*

In addition, the IDP process extends over 8-10 months but in truth public participation occurs at a few discrete points in that period. One of the advantages of strong participation by organised structures such as the Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum is that it

can facilitate more sustained participation and make more regular feedback and reporting possible. That potential is not being exploited in Yeoville or in the other wards studied, and is impossible where random local residents participate.

On the ground, officials judged public participation in the IDP mainly in terms of turn-out at public events. Secondary considerations included the appropriateness of discussions and inputs, and to a lesser extent people's awareness of the process. We have already argued that basic knowledge is critical in unlocking much potential in this regard.

Participation is sporadic and momentary, occurring at discrete points within a process from which the public is generally absent and of which it appears to be largely ignorant. Participation is concentrated around public meetings and events that are marked by mixed turn-outs, variable facilitation and sometimes rushed discussion, and that are preceded by often-skimpy preparation. The surprise perhaps is that hundreds of residents in fact do attend these meetings in some wards.

3.1. Ladder of Participation

Where would public participation in the IDP in the wards studied sit on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation?[23] The special appeal of Arenstein's ladder lies in the criteria it uses (and implies) to distinguish between different degrees of public participation, and the normative ranking of PP activities this allows for. Basically, those criteria relate to the degree to which public participation is an ongoing process, the extent to which participation also reshapes the "rules" and terms of that process, constitutes a redistribution of power between the state and citizens, and involves decision-making on matters of substance. In other words, the appeal is not so much the precise ranking of participatory activities, but the features that distinguish those at the top of the ladder from those at the bottom of the ladder. Other models have been proposed, but Arnstein's remains a useful tool precisely because it is so widely used internationally to understand and measure participation, allowing comparisons across studies (for example, the just-completed mid-term review of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) uses the Arnstein ladder to assess participation in the ISRDP).[24]

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[23] Arnstein SR (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *JAIP*, 35(4):216-224. Available at http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html

[24] See Umhlaba Rural Services: 'Mid-term review of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme' (forthcoming, Independent Development Trust, Pretoria).

Citizen power

Delegated power

Partnership

Placation

Consultation

Informing

Therapy

Manipulation

Degrees of citizen power

Degrees of tokenism

Non-participation

By Arnstein 1969
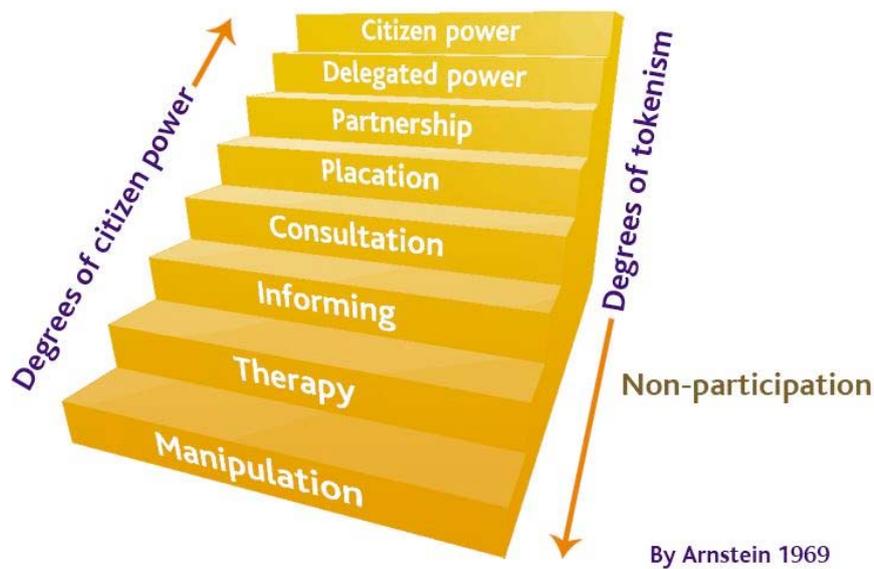
On the lower rungs are forms of participation in which external structures involve the public in approving or informing decisions which, in broad outline at least, are *fait accompli*. Public involvement tends to be momentary (occurring at particular points in predetermined processes) and is sometimes merely "ceremonial". At best, such participation amounts to a kind of harvesting of legitimacy. It can garner support for development plans and activities, and perhaps temporarily insulate them against criticism or sabotage. It is a highly *political* intervention which, whatever the initial intentions, ends up instrumentalising the "public" or the "community".[25]

At the higher, more idealistic rungs we find forms of participation that are potentially liberatory in process (in so far as they entail and trigger empowerment and self-mobilisation) and transformatory in content (in that they redistribute access to resources and services). Fundamentally, they involve redistributions of power.

Public participation in the IDP in Gauteng currently fits among lower rungs and is best described as *consultative* or *legitimating participation* (please refer to the critical review of the literature for more detailed discussion of the different variants of participation).

Participation is intermittent and often does not involve organised constituencies. The public's needs and priorities are canvassed, and those inputs then enter a remote process controlled by external agents who devise plans that may or may not address those priorities. Public meetings feature prominently. People are informed of the outcomes, and their opinions are again solicited again, but there is no guarantee that these will be taken into account. Meanwhile, officials complain of low turnouts, with many speaking of "participation fatigue" and of growing public apathy.

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[25] "[W]here there is poor service delivery amidst broad participation – although this configuration is unlikely – there may be low levels of disgruntlement with the system", according to Mathekga & Buccus (2006:15). Participation then functions also a hegemonic tool that is used to build or reinforce popular consent.

> *Participation must become a habit again. We must build a culture of participation. (Community development worker)*

This seems odd. Compared with many middle-income countries, South Africa boasts a large and diverse array of non-profit organisations. These range from burial societies and stokvels, to issue- or project-specific neighbourhood committees (overseeing water projects, crime watches etc.), co-operatives of many types, service delivery organisations, faith-based organisations and trade unions. In the early 2000s, surveys tallied more than 100 000 non-profit organisations (NPOs) in South Africa, with nearly 1.5m volunteers actively contributing time and labour to their activities.[26]

This suggests that South Africa does not suffer a dearth of organising, least of all in poor communities, and that the popular image of passivity might be inaccurate. If so, the apparent paucity and thinness of public participation in IDPs poses intriguing questions and problems.

Public apathy, when it occurs, is context-specific. Public participation is often said to be especially poor among more privileged residents; in their context of relative comfort and material security, IDP participation seems not to hold relevance. But that apathy might be an illusion to some extent. Rather than attend general public meetings, residents might 'participate' by contacting officials directly (as in Randfontein and Midvaal) or as members of ratepayers' associations or local business structures that engage directly with the local state. Many networks exist beyond formal participation in IDPs. Wittingly or not, those engagements are likely to leave a mark on the IDP even if they were not intended as 'inputs'. As we have already noted, parallel and different strategies need parallel and different measurement. Attendance at IDP public meetings is not necessarily the best measure of public participation – it reflects taking up one option offered by the state, even if the state valorises that option.

But even in the more impoverished wards, IDP processes do not tap adequately into the associational life that constitutes the various 'communities' in an area. The blame seems unfairly laid at the feet of 'the people'.

The predominant forms of organised community life in much of South Africa – faith-based organisations and burial societies – are largely absent from the process. Nor do those structures and networks seem to be acting as 'agents' for the kinds of interests that might draw people into the IDP process. These structures – in the areas where our research was located, anyway – are not being targeted by the local state as partners in the IDP process, a situation we recommend be changed urgently.

In some places networking and organising is designed partly to serve various communal interests *without* having to engage with the state. Yeoville and other areas with significant migrant and refugee populations are cases in point. There, complex networks link persons (on the basis of nationality, language, kinship, religion etc.) across vast areas (in the city, the country, the continent and beyond). But the insecure legal status of the individuals (and the sometimes 'compromising' nature of activities) mean that these networks are meant to achieve a degree of security and sustenance by avoiding, as much as possible, engaging with the state. Here, the challenge is elemental: achieving any kind of participation becomes difficult.

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[26] Swilling M & Russell B (2002). The Size and Scope of the Non-profit Sector in South Africa. University of the Witwatersrand and University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In Yeoville, for example, migrant and immigrant persons pointedly avoid public meetings called by the ward councillor, no matter the efforts to encourage their participation. The main reason appears to be a fear of exposing themselves to possible harassment, arrest or deportation. Yet, these persons and their communities are integral parts of the social and commercial life of Yeoville. How can they be drawn deeper into participating in the structured channels of local governance and development? A handful of expatriate-based community organisations do belong to the Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum, which liaises with the ward councillor and other local officials.[27] In addition, the Zimbabwean community appears to be well-represented on the local Community Policing Forum, including on the executive. In other words, at least two formal and representative channels or platforms for engagement exist.[28] But their potential value in the IDP process is not being tapped adequately.

This raises the further question whether formal public meetings – the medium of choice for IDP participation – are always the most appropriate vehicle for public participation.

Instead of the public being expected to 'come to the state' in order to participate in the IDP, why not invest effort in the reverse? Councillors and/or ward committee members and community development workers can, for example, arrange to 'piggy-back' IDP discussions onto regular meetings of existing organisations in the area, including those of faith-based organisations.

Many other factors and conditions can be hampering and discouraging public participation. Poor commitment among officials, or a lack of skills and resources seem likely candidates. Ward committees might not be living up their potential. The IDP process might be seen as too abstract, complicated and distant. Or the pay-off, the value of participation might seem too obscure. Or the sense of trust in the local state (or individual representatives) might be too corroded.

In fact, the refrain that the public is 'apathetic' tended to be contradicted in the course of our interviewees. For example, virtually all respondents felt that the public does not know enough about IDPs and IDP processes, and that more public education was needed. Everyone complained that IDP materials were either too long, difficult to understand, or not available. And many pointed out that, in semi-rural areas, meeting times and transport difficulties hindered participation. In other words, at least part of the reason for low turnout or poor quality inputs seems to rest with, and can be addressed by the state, and at a fairly basic level of logistics.

Our research suggests that all these factors – and then some – are at play. We might divide them into 3 categories:

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[27] Congolese, Ivorian and Senegalese organisations participate in the YSF, unlike, interestingly, their Mozambican and Zimbabwean counterparts. The Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum comprises 23 organisations, including NGOs, CBOS, faith-based organisations, statutory bodies, political and cultural organisations. Although it engages with all issues affecting Yeoville, much of its work focuses on service delivery (via liaison with the ward councillor) and safety and security (via the Community Policing Forum).

[28] Yet, this apparent marginality should not be overstated. At recent inner city (Johannesburg Metro) summit workshops, 'foreigners' are said to have been highly active and outspoken (including individuals from Yeoville).

(1) Factors that lend themselves to relatively 'simple' redress – with 'technical' or 'logistical' changes, which we discuss below. These measures can help increase the numbers of people participating and improve the quality of that participation. However, they are unlikely to qualitatively deepen participation, which would remain largely consultative.

(2) Factors that involve matters of substance, including powers and functions. These changes hold the promise of deepening participation if they occur in concert with the improvements in (1). They relate especially to matters of power and accountability

(3) Contextual factors that will prove more intransigent because they express wider, powerful dynamics that cannot be changed by mere fiat. Discussed at length in the Critical review of the literature that accompanies this report, these factors establish the limits of boundaries of participatory local governance and development in South African currently.

For now, let's focus on the first 2 categories, and set ourselves a modest target:

How can we involve more residents in a more sustained manner in the drafting and monitoring the implementation of IDPs that address development priorities in their areas?

But before we try to answer this question, let's review what was happening on the ground in the various sites researched for this study.

4. A snapshot of what's happening on the ground

Before we turn to suggesting ways of improving public participation, we briefly provide a snapshot of what was happening in some of the wards we worked in, which fleshes out the broader points argued elsewhere in this report, as well as (in one particular instance) highlighting an innovative new approach that GPDEV and others should monitor over time. This summary is in addition to examples from the various sites used throughout the report to illustrate points made in different sections.

4.1.   Randfontein, Randgate, Ward 4

Ward 4 in Randgate falls under the Randfontein municipality, which contains 19 wards. The area comprises (mostly white) home-owners and small-holders, (black African) domestic workers living on the premises of their employers, and informal housing, much of it grouped within one settlement. There is some agricultural activity, which the councillor believes holds some development potential. Demographically disparate, the ward therefore brings together divergent (and sometimes conflicting) needs and priorities. For black residents, the priorities are employment and housing (including tenure security), as well as basic infrastructure provision (electricity, water, sanitation), social security (grants and pensions) and indigent support, and crime. White residents tend to emphasize infrastructure and service maintenance (roads and streetlights e.g.), and marginal improvements to existing infrastructure (speed humps, etc.), and crime.

Ward meetings are held every second month, and ward committee meetings occur every month. The discrepancies are reflected also in the manner of public participation in local affairs. As in other wards in this municipality (Ward 6 being a case in point), the divergent needs and priorities dovetailed with distinct forms of public participation in local development and governance. The privileged residents tend to shun public meetings (except when they address safety and security issues), and prefer to raise matters directly with council and other local officials via telephone calls or personal visits. By contrast, black residents participate in public (including IDP) meetings in considerable numbers. Access to officialdom therefore appears to be unequal. (Indeed, the council offices themselves are quite intimidating; the entrance hall lacks an information desk or signboards, and navigating the building is a daunting and confusing undertaking.)

The hope or prospect that the IDP offers an avenue for realizing basic needs appears to be the main motivating factor for participation. Thus attendance at IDP meetings in Ward 4 has been high, with as many as 200 people attending. Local civil society organizations appear not to be prominent in the process, but residents from the informal settlement instead caucus before IDP meetings in order to present a relatively united front at the meetings. A handful of whites also attend IDP meetings.

Underlying all this is considerable bigotry, with some white residents defending their lack of participation in formal IDP processes by claiming that the state "does not care" about them. Nevertheless, they do not seem averse to engaging the state along other avenues. By some accounts, it is not uncommon for white home-owners and plot-holders to deny council officials contact with workers on their premises or even to refuse to accept pamphlets and other council information. (During a 'walkabout' of officials in Ward 6 about 18 months ago, for example, the vast majority of residents, most of them white, refused even to speak to officials.)

Several practical difficulties were pointed out (not only for Ward 4 but also for Ward 6), some of which can be rectified relatively easily.

Publicizing of IDP meetings is uneven. Ads are sometimes taken out in a local newspaper (The Herald), or pamphlets are sometimes used. Plans were afoot to start distributing a quarterly newsletter on council affairs (including the IDP process). Draft IDP inputs are also publicized in local libraries, and provision is made for comments.

IDP 'road shows' have been staged, but the feeling was that these should not be one-off, one-day events. Generally, more days should be allocated to IDP consultation and participation.

Meeting days and times, it was pointed out, should take account of the working patterns of residents. Weekday meetings, for example, tend not to work well in semi-rural areas (where travel to the venue is an issue), or where many residents have to commute long distances to and from work (arriving home too late to attend), and often discourage women from attending (since the meetings are held after dark). Although Ward 4 appears to be an exception in this respect (with meetings both well-attended and well-facilitated), public meeting facilitation has proved to be a recurring problem in some wards, with basic procedures sometimes not heeded. Efforts at simultaneous translation during meetings have been well-received and were said to boost active participation at those gatherings. But officials were adamant that lessons were being learnt – e.g. regarding the importance of regular report-backs.

Still, a lack of understanding about the IDP process and how citizen's participation can shape that process remains a serious problem, according to officials from Ward 4 and other wards.

Several officials remarked that a lack of trust was a major problem in most wards (including Ward 4), partly due to poor communication between the council and communities. Projects had been planned without adequate consultation; residents often were not kept abreast of when service delivery problems (especially relating to electricity and water supply) would be resolved. (For example, the municipality failed to set up a procedure notifying residents of developments in an electricity black-out that lasted almost two weeks in one area.) "The quality of service and levels of responsiveness are directly correlated to public participation in council affairs", according to one official.

4.2. Midvaal municipality – Ward 1

Ward 1 is an area situated in the Vaal and is largely rural and made up of plots and farms. The ward councillor in this ward is female and an ANC councillor. In Midvaal, Ward 1, interviews were held with the Community Liaison Officer (CLO); the CDW for Ward 1 was part of a focus groups held with other CDWs. We also briefly interviewed an official from the IDP coordinating team. We, however, could not get hold of the other respondents such as the ward councillor or her ward committee members.

We interviewed the community liaison officer (CLO) who is in charge of public participation in the municipality. Like the other wards we visited, the CLO indicated that they also view public participation as important particularly because it is a legislative requirement. For Midvaal the process starts quite early, before the budgets is tabled. The CLO indicated that it is important that the community is consulted during the IDP process otherwise the process would not be legitimate, stating memorably:

> *"the wearer of the shoes knows where it pinches most"*[29]

The Midvaal municipality uses different types of media to advertise the IDP process. For example, we were told that they use local newspapers as well as a community radio station. Over and above that they print flyers and distribute them throughout the area.

The CLO at Midvaal municipality mentioned that since the process began, turn-out (their key measure) at IDP meetings has varied. There are challenges that the municipality is faced with. For example, because the area is rural, a number of people work for farmers in the area and because the area is vast and scattered it is a challenge for people to get to meetings.

In Ward 1, in particular, it was particularly difficult to hold meetings in the area because of its size. The CLO mentioned "all you can do is send flyers, publish it on radio and publish it in the local newspaper informing people about the meeting, time and venue"[30]. The municipality arranges transport for those that can make it to meetings to be picked up along the farm route and bussed to the venue.

For the 2007/2008 IDP, three quarters of the community showed up at the meeting and as the municipality they feel that the message will be carried through to other community members. When asked about the quality of participation at the IDP meeting, the CLO mentioned that quality was quite shallow and as in other wards we visited, communities raised issues relating to service delivery at the meetings. The desire of officials for the IDP to be understood as a strategy rather than a list of demands is far removed from participants.

The ward does not have any CBO/NGOs representing communities in the process and although the youth are seen as highly politicised they are not seen to add richness to the IDP process – at least among the people we spoke to.

When asked about what could be done to enrich the process of public participation, the CLO mentioned that it would be good for the community to hold a pre-IDP meeting where issues that affect the communities are discussed and then select a couple of people to present these in the official IDP process. A frustration raised by the CLO is that people mistake the IDP meeting "as a political meeting and they sometimes go off on a tangent and get involved in political discussion, which is not the main aim of the IDP"[31]. The IDP co-ordinator indicated that most of what was generated was a wish list. In the CLO's view, councillors needed to embark on a serious educational campaign and hold workshops with community members. The CLO felt that councillors needed to educate people as to what the IDP is, what is political and what is a civic matter, and so on.

But a core underlying challenge is the fact that citizens attend to get results – to influence decisions about resource allocation – but "they go off on a tangent"[32] when doing so, in the eyes of officials.

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[29] Interview with a community liaison officer, 30 May 2007
[30] Interview with a community liaison officer, 30 May 2007
[31] Interview with a community liaison officer, 30 May 2007.
[32] Interview with a community liaison officer, 30 May 2007.

A framework to improve participation already exists. For example, the ward councillors, the community development workers and so on are familiar structures within communities and can be utilised to educate communities. It is imperative that these structures are used to maximise benefits and assist in engaging communities on issues of governance.

4.3. CDWs and resources

In all the fieldwork, the role and position of CDWs was an important (and sometimes emotive) issue. An interview with the CDW coordinator in Gauteng indicated that where relationships are smooth amongst all the structures (councillors, ward committees and community development workers) this leads to the community better understanding of a number of governance issues including the IDP.

As indicated elsewhere, in some areas there is distrust of officials by communities, especially of councillors, because they are viewed as pushing a particular political agenda. Tensions also exist amongst ward councillors, ward committee members as well as CDWs and a number of respondents acknowledged this. An example of such tensions was offered by respondents interviewed in Ekangala. During interviews with ward committee members, the councillor and the community development workers indicated that in the past (prior to Ekangala being incorporated into Gauteng) tenders had been awarded for the building of houses, but the project never took place.

The councillor lacked information about the state of the project or the impact on housing waiting lists, and his attempts to get answers from both Mpumalanga and Gauteng Provincial Departments were to no avail. The community was now worried that they would not qualify a second time to get housing. The councillor was in a difficult position as he could not shed any light on the matter. As noted earlier in the report large participation in IDP meetings in this ward has been because the community needs answers. Over three hundred people, mostly women, attend the meetings. It is important to note – here and in the various sites we visited – that decisions taken elsewhere in the IDP process often place the councillor at the centre of subsequent community frustration or anger if, for example, projects do not occur, or other areas get services first.

Our ToR asked about the impact of participation on decision-making, which we discuss in the report – but it may be as important to assess the impact of decision-making on participation, and on local political tensions, where the councillor 'takes the heat' for decisions s/he is not responsible for, and which themselves had no relation to local participation, and which over time can only lead to a diminution of local energy for participation. It is for this reason (among others) that we recommend piloting approaches that place communities in the decision-making seat, and allow councillors to play their ascribed role rather than putting out local fires caused by unhappiness over slow delivery and the like.

In other wards, for example, ward 67 in Yeoville some of the stakeholders interviewed raised concerns that the CDW in their ward has not utilised any of the forums on the ground to report on her activities. For example, the Yeoville Stakeholder Forum was one of the platforms she could use to provide reports on activities but she had failed to so. The same was said about the ward committee members in the area.

A community development worker observed that in some instances Speakers Offices made it difficult for them to operate effectively.

> *"Concerning the kind of work that we are doing they think we are there to take their work. The speaker is in the office most of the time and my work is outside the office as our work makes us to move around. So, he must let me have the book and whilst around the community I can see what's happening and what's not. When you raise these points they take them personally"*

The same CDW indicated that sometimes basic logistical hiccoughs made things worse for them, such as calling meetings are short notice making it impossible for them to attend. This is sometimes the result of oversight, at others the result of tensions within the bureaucracy. These are very context-specific and localised, and suggest the municipalities have a key role to play in monitoring activities and relations on the ground.

Other CDWs indicated that in their ward there good relationships amongst stakeholders. The City of Johannesburg was cited as an example. Again, local context is paramount. It is extremely difficult to generalise meaningfully across the sample sites, however tempting; differences are stark at both ward and municipality level. These local dynamics also dictate and shape communication and relations amongst the various stakeholders on the ground.

> *"You see, in the city of Johannesburg there is openness about this unnecessary competition between politicians and CDWs. It has been clarified. That there needs to be no competition. So there is transparency in as far as the speaker's office is concerned. You can go there anytime".*

But in other areas, there is far less transparency, and far greater inter-institutional tension and competitiveness.

One of the reasons for these tensions is because CDWs are seen as better resourced than ward committee members, for example. What matters is that these tensions – where they exist – are acknowledged and dealt with, not wished away because such tensions are deemed 'inappropriate'.

CDWs go through a yearlong learnership developed by the local government SETA, SAMDI, DBSA and DPLG. Completing the learnership does not necessarily guarantee that one automatically qualifies as a CDW. The CDWs are required to go through a 'probation period'. They also receive a monthly stipend from government. We were informed that there are five hundred and twelve CDWs throughout Gauteng and each ward has at least one CDW. CDWs are meant to be conversant with services offered by all spheres of government and assist communities access services such as grants, identity document applications, how to register on the indigent roster, and so on. CDWs also identify matters of service delivery and refer them to the different government departments. CDWs are a key resource for the future deepening of participation.

The CDW coordinator indicated that Gauteng was currently engaged on a number of initiatives to support CDWs. This included *inter alia* a drive to rent space from the local authorities where supervisors for CDWs can be based. DLG has also created a unit called the training and support unit headed by a Director as well as some assistant

directors and administration staff. All these efforts are seen as efforts to improve CDWs work.

The initiatives also indicate the level of commitment from government to create resources for the CDWs so that they are able to perform well. The CDW co-ordinator explained that mobilising communities around the IDP process is not a primary function of the CDWs; the CDWs are a support structure to both the councillors and the ward committees. The co-ordinator indicated that legislation required that all these bodies work together and avoid competition. There are, however, feelings of overlap between the ward committee and the CDWs. It is also difficult for communities to understand the differences between these structures because they are viewed as government representatives by communities. The reality on the ground is that at ward level, CDWs are viewed as better resourced, particularly by ward committees and sometimes by personnel from Speaker's Offices. This is creating resentment.

In all the wards that were studied, individuals spoken to indicated that the speaker's office could assist in facilitating good relationships amongst the councillors, the CDWs as well as the ward committee members.

4.4.   Consultation week

The consultation week is a legislative requirement. Prior to consultation week, municipalities are required to issue an advert inviting comments from all stakeholders or interested parties within the municipality. The consultation process is divided into sessions for the business people, NGO & CBO and Sector Departments on the one hand and a separate session for the different wards in a municipality.

During the consultation week the draft IDP and budget documents are made available for public scrutiny, usually at public places such as in the case of Emfuleni libraries. The documents are placed for 21 consecutive days, a legal requirement[33]. There is no indication, however, on whether people are able to access the documents, or doing so, or in what numbers. This is a fairly obvious way of improving knowledge of participation, by keeping a simple roster of who accesses documents in public places.

During the week municipalities are required to hold consultation processes with stakeholders and communities. The research team attended such an event for the Emfuleni municipality. The stakeholder meeting took place in the morning whilst the community meeting was held in the evening on the same day. At both meetings a budget was presented as well as a report back on progress projects that the municipality might have undertaken during the previous IDP.

Observation by the research team is that meetings attended by stakeholders such as business people seemed to go faster, and they understood the processes better. There is also a feeling that stakeholders come to these meetings because they want to identify business opportunities. This is natural – citizens attend to influence resource allocation decisions as well – but, as we discuss later, there is a clear need to balance the access points available to often poor, illiterate and under-resourced citizens, and those of the private sector. The playing is not level and we should not pretend it is; and the IDP processes need to be reviewed accordingly.

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[33] Section 3 of the Municipal Planning and Performance Regulations, 2001.

4.5.   Accountability

We noted that the meetings attended by the community are held in the evenings and people in some instances are transported to the venue. For women in particular, providing safe transportation is critical. At some meetings we noted that officials are taken to task on a range of issues. During question time community members wanted to know things ranging from why projects were not implemented to why councillors were not present at the meeting. Some of the questions were:

- Why is the clinic still not finished and does not appear in the IDP plans?
- How much money has been spent thus far and what for?
- Why are trees growing wild and left unattended?
- Why is the councillor not present at the meeting?

Our observation, however, is that people raised questions relating to their own wards and specific areas of interest, as we have noted throughout – and which seems to drive some officials to despair. At the stakeholders session sector departments explained in detail how their departments had spent their budgets. Almost every department present during analysis week had to explain what projects were earmarked for the future and what was spent in the previous period. Some stakeholders voiced dissatisfaction about slowness or lack of projects in their areas or wards. But so do communities and individuals. It is very positive to note that the community was able to question the officials on past and future development plans as well as on budgets, and engage with officials from different departments.

4.6.   Emfuleni Municipality, Ward 12

Ward 12 is in Emfuleni municipality made up of Phelandaba, Phomolong and Kensington, a hostel that is in the process of being into turned into family units.

Interviews in Emfuleni municipality were held with the councillor and some of her ward committee members. We also had interviews with the public participation and petitions coordinator from the Speaker's office. As in the other wards, those interviewed mentioned that they thought it was important for the community to know about the IDP process, since the IDP should reflect their needs. This reinforces the point made elsewhere about the very narrow approach to and understanding of IDPs among some officials – contrasting of course with other officials, who insist on a broad, strategic approach. This heterogeneity is likely to cause confusion among citizens who engage different officials at different points in the process.

In ward 12, for the 2007/2008 period public meetings were called by the councillor to inform them about the IDP process and the speaker's office sent out a car with loudhailers to announce the IDP meeting. The councillor viewed this positively. The councillor mentioned that in these meetings communities were given a chance to indicate "what they would like to see in the Ward"[34]. The councillor mentioned that during these meetings they stress to the community that "things we want in the ward would not be done immediately, it is a five year process until maybe funding is finished"[35].

Participants in the focus group from Ward 12 indicated that they attended IDP meetings because they want to hear about development in the ward.

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[34] Interview with a Ward Councillor, Emfuleni Municipality.

[35] Interview with a Ward Councillor, Emfuleni Municipality.

> *"I knew about the IDP from making a proposal for the municipality to repair vandalised old structures. They said they would not do it if not in the IDP".*

The respondents mentioned that that the culture of participation is something that communities are used to but, perhaps tellingly, used election turn-out as an indicator of this fact. The ward has created sectors that deal with different issues such as housing, transport, health who feed back to communities at different levels. No figures were available regarding numbers of participants. The CDW however mentioned:

> *"It's not that we get everybody in the area when we hold the meetings. We get that smaller number of people who come to attend, but it's much better than nothing because the very small number of people can integrate and disseminate information to their neighbours".*

Officials mentioned that at present they were happy with the level of participation in their ward.

The respondent from the Speaker's Office indicated that to deepen public participation and involve the community, the municipality has ward based IDPs where as a municipality they have allocated funds earmarked for the development of the ward. The ward based IDPs were described as a new initiative from the Emfuleni municipality. We were also informed that the Emfuleni municipality for the first time has put aside 60 million rand, which would be sliced equally amongst all the wards. Each ward has been allocated funding amounting to about R1, 2 million and the community has to decide the areas in which the money has to be used. The initiative is also seen by the municipal official as an opportunity to involve the community to debate about the budget and what they need to use it for.

Participants in the focus group mentioned that they were aware of projects which had been mentioned in the previous IDP and were taking place in their ward.

> *"Yes, like in the first meeting we talked about the Apollo lights and now we have them. In the second meeting we talked about roads. I see the tractors around and I thing we re going to have tarred roads".*

> *"Every year we register our needs but as the year goes another challenge that we need to register with the IDP emerges. For instance the local government installed paving here in Sharpeville but they only went as far as Phelandaba. They couldn't do it any further and left it just like that. So it's one of the reasons I go back because I'd like to see the installation of the paving being finished off and not just be left off just like that".*

Officials from Emfuleni indicated that the initiatives were paying off. The CDW indicated that in her opinion more people seemed interested in what was going on in their ward:

> *"I will also say that when the community asks questions and enquire more, not only in the meeting but even when they meet you in the street. If they ask you about something that was discussed in the meeting, I take it they are interested and to me it means the meeting was successful".*

Projects in the area are also viewed as an opportunity for getting jobs. Participants in the focus group indicated that when projects take place in the ward it provides them with jobs.

> *"To me the most important thing is the creation of jobs. Though the jobs take something like three to six months but still people do get work and they are satisfied".*

Participants mentioned that it would be better if the IDP meetings were held during early evenings on week days and in the morning if on weekends. Participants mentioned that it was difficult especially for those that are working to attend meetings as currently organised. Transport to the meetings was also raised as a concern since the meetings were held late. Ward based IDPs seem to be providing a better participation platform and could be adapted to areas like Midvaal where participation levels are lower.

4.7. Yeoville, Ward 67

Ward 67 covers areas such as Yeoville, Bellevue, Bellevue East, Houghton, and Killarney. Like in other wards, interviews were held with the councillor, some of the ward committees and some members of the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF). Focus groups were held with South African citizens as well as migrants residing in the area.[36] Yeoville is the only ward which had a network of organisations organised in a longstanding structure of this type. The YSF is made up of twenty-three different organisations including migrant and immigrant organisations alongside faith-based organisations, cultural organisations, political bodies and so on.

The dynamics in this ward are different in that Yeoville has a high number of both migrants and immigrants living in the ward. Participants in the focus groups indicated that the challenges facing the ward related to overcrowding, lack of housing, littering and other issues of service delivery. Some felt that Yeoville had past its best, and that affluent people had moved away from Yeoville and as a result the area has deteriorated.

> *"Another thing is that Yeoville is no longer the inner city it was before. Now people who live in Yeoville are very poor".*

This only reflects one part of the ward, and one part of the story, of course.

Participants in the focus group and some of the stakeholders interviewed indicated that housing was a particularly thorny issue in the area – coupled with tensions between South Africans and 'foreigners'. It was felt that immigrants are able to buy houses and rent them out and a number of these houses are allegedly used for illegal activities. The South African group mentioned that on the other hand, South African citizens were struggling and were not able to afford housing in the area.

> *"If there could be ownership of houses we might know what's happening in every house".*

Participation in the IDP in Yeoville started slowly and has not grown terribly fast. Knowledge is low, and the "high-flowing language" of the IDP was cited by respondents

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[36] See section 'How should we measure 'good' participation?'

as a particular problem. Relations with the CDW seem to be a challenge, as she reports 'upwards' to the provincial department, not to the community or its structures. There is little co-operation around the IDP between YSF, CDW and Ward Committee, a critical gap.

Participants from Yeoville indicated that they had attended IDP meetings because they wanted to hear about developments in the area. Participation in IDP meetings mainly takes the form of questions and complaints – about street lights, potholes, leaking water pipes and so on. They indicated that they had known about the IDP meeting from the councillor and ward committee meetings – and from the local ANC branch, an important site for communication in the area. However, they indicated that IDP meetings need better publicity as attendance averaged sixty to eighty people – and the same people attended each time. This, it should be noted, seems to be Yeoville-specific – elsewhere we were told of extremely high turn-over of participants.

Officials interviewed indicated that there was a concern around the number of those who attended meetings called by the councillor. Immigrants on the other hand were interested but not willing to attend these meetings, as they were suspicious that the police may pick them up because they may not have identification, some are illegal in the country, or merely because they are 'foreign'. The councillor mentioned that she had tried to engage with them but was making little progress.

The language used by in advertising the IDP meetings was also a deterrent to the immigrants, since it invited 'citizens' to attend IDP meetings. For non-citizens, the use of the word was seen as a deliberate indication that they were not welcome – and they responded by not attending. Given that many are legal, local residents, locally employed and so on, their non-attendance (despite being well-organised) is a significant loss to the IDP.

The research team attended the YSF annual general meeting as observers. The AGM was largely attended by representatives of the different migrant organisations. The meeting was also attended by the councillor who sits as an ex-officio member. At the annual general meeting report backs were provided to those in attendance about projects that government is embarking on such as the 'Litterfree Gauteng Campaign' and the Inner City Summit that was held in Johannesburg.

Other issues discussed ranged from poor policing in the area, the housing problem and so on. The ward councillor was urged to encourage committee members and the community development workers to report back on activities that are taking place in the area to the YSF.

Earlier on in the report we noted that organised structures are in a good position to deepen public participation, and the YSF is such a structure. The advantage is that those present are able to 'spread the word' about programmes or initiatives taking place. The YSF was originally formed to interact with the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA; it gave the JDA a 'one stop shop' to reach a wide spectrum of community organisations, precisely what should be benefiting the IDP process.

5. Part 2: Room for improvement (1): Some obvious remedies

A host of logistical and practical constraints are hampering public participation. Many of these can be overcome relatively 'easily'.

5.1.   Poor publicising of meetings and issues

There are widespread complaints that IDP meetings are called at late notice, and that potential participants (including CDWs) receive too little information beforehand. Not enough preparation is done to prime participation. In Yeoville, for instance, at the beginning of the year, residents receive from the councillor a pamphlet listing the dates of all public meetings, but IDPs are not mentioned in it. Lesedi, for instance, publicises IDP meetings in *The Herald*, but like many areas appears not to use radio as a publicity medium, nor the loud-hailers that CSOs commonly use.[37] Newsletters and notice boards of churches, mosques and other local organisations are seldom used. As a result, the complaints about poor turn-outs, ill-informed participants and inappropriate discussions are almost self-fulfilling.

➔ Use info vans and loudhailers to publicise meetings.

➔ Arrange talk shows, call-in shows and interviews on local radio stations (including community radio). Do not pitch IDP as the subject – it does not resonate enough yet with the public. Talk about the IDP process rather in terms of key priorities you know the public are concerned about.

➔ Publish notices, briefing articles and report-back summaries in the newsletters of local religious organisations, local 'knock & drops'. Post them on local notice boards.

5.2.   People don't understand the process

Some officials claimed that the public was beginning to understand the IDP process better, and was discovering how best to ensure IDP drafts reflect their inputs. But when asked whether an average resident out on the street would know what the IDP was, everyone agreed that the answer was 'probably not'. And everyone complained that the public doesn't understand the planning process – which hinders not only their desire to participate in the IDP but also the quality of that participation and their understanding of what may eventuate as a result.

In the past, service NGOs played vital roles in these respects, by supporting the knowledge, analytical and advocacy capacities in communities around specific issues of concern (especially around land tenure and housing).

➔ In areas where those resources exist, they should be drawn on more systematically.

Beyond that, other improvements are called for. For example, easy-to-digest material outlining the IDP and setting the stage for upcoming participatory activities are seldom available.

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[37] Presentation at National IDP Review week, 16 April 2007, Hartesbeespoortdam.

➔ IDP meetings and events should be preceded by awareness- and understanding-building activities, including information stalls and circulating easy-to-read pamphlets outlining the process, its importance and relevance to residents.

➔ Municipalities and provincial government should invest more resources in a combination of quality IDP outreach activities and accessible information in appropriate languages and idioms.

➔ Produce reader-friendly IDP pamphlets.

➔ Distribute pamphlets by striking a deal with the Post Office (a vital national resource that is systematically under-utilised by government) so the pamphlets are delivered with the mail, dropped into post boxes, available at counters, and so on. Use volunteers to deliver them door-to-door (and answer questions). Circulate them at local state facilities (library, council offices, on pension and grant pay-out days at pay-out sites), stores and CBOs.

➔ Set up information stalls on Saturdays and Sundays at popular congregation points (commercial, religious etc.). Councillors and/or ward committee members should staff the stalls.

➔ Use community volunteers to publicise and build awareness of the IDP.[38]

5.3. IDP documents are "inaccessible", "too high-flowing".

IDP documentation was routinely criticised for being too difficult to read, let alone understand, and too long. This effectively alienates many people who take the trouble to try and engage with the process.

> *Have you seen the IDP document? I have. It's gathering dust. It's intimidating. If it's intimidating to an activist like me, then imagine how intimidating it is to 'ordinary' people. (Community activist)*

➔ Simpler versions or summaries of documents should be produced and disseminated.

5.4. Language can be a barrier

English tends to predominate in IDP publicity, documentation and meetings. Almost all interviewees cited this as a barrier to understanding and participation.

➔ Use appropriate languages for the pamphlets and publicity. In Yeoville, for instance, material would need to be in English, Zulu, Sotho and French. In Ekangala, it would need to be in Sotho, Zulu and possibly also Tsonga and Ndebele (currently it is only in English).

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[38] Oddly, in Yeoville a volunteer corps, attached mainly to the ANC, has been used in a door-to-door ecological drive, but was not used to build awareness around the IDP.

5.5. Inconvenient meeting times

When to stage meetings is a frequent dilemma. Many respondents said turnouts on weekends are poor, and that most public meetings are held on weekday evenings, usually around 19h00 or 19h30. However, in semi-rural areas, weekends tend to work better (long commutes between work and home during the week mean many people arrive home too late to attend meetings).

5.6. Travelling to meeting venues is difficult and costly

Especially in large areas with dispersed residents, meeting attendance can be difficult and involve significant financial and opportunity costs. Getting to meetings is practically impossible for workers on farms and plots outside the local CBD, unless special transport is provided. In areas like Randfontein and Midvaal, transport problems acquire a racial dimension.

> *In rural areas … only whites can participate because they have cars. This creates an imbalance. (Community development worker)*

➔ Staging more than one meeting (on different days of the week, and at different times) for each IDP phase is an option. Currently, each phase tend to be marked by a single meeting or event. Miss it, and you've missed your chance to 'participate'.

➔ In geographically dispersed wards, bus participants to meetings.

➔ Provide refreshments, food and facilities.

5.7. Meetings are poorly run and facilitated

In a group setting poor facilitating can be intimidating and discourage people from engaging for fear of sounding 'ignorant' or 'ill-informed'. Women's attendance at meetings varies, but in several of the wards they seem to attend at least in equal numbers with men. With the exception of Ekangala and some wards in Randfontein, though, they tend not to participate equally, leaving the proceedings to be dominated by men. Beyond this, the floor is often monopolised by a few confident individuals.

Some individuals dominate proceedings, or discussions become side-tracked and bogged down, or participants are not afforded enough time or opportunity to for thorough discussion. All this weakens participation.

➔ Meetings should be run by persons with facilitation skills/ training.

➔ The briefings and report-backs by officials should not be entirely verbal. Visual presentations (whether on newsprint or with slide presentations) can be used. At the least, short handouts in an appropriate variety of languages should be available at the door.

5.8. Report-backs are inadequate

Public participation probably will only gather momentum when it is seen to influence or add impetus to desired outcomes. For example, when projects involve capital expenditure they usually can only be addressed demonstrably two years after being

expressed. The processes (which often include feasibility studies, environmental impact studies, as well as securing additional external funding) can be time-consuming.

Moreover, there are challenges emanating from the regulatory environment. For example, capital expenditure (CAPEX) is listed by programme and budget – but not by site. Scanning a budget may tell the reader how much CAPAX is available in the municipality as a whole – but will not give any guide as to *where* it will be spent. This directly frustrates the inputs of communities, who focus closely on areas where CAPEX predominates (to meet basic needs), but can get no answers as to when or where they may see the requested infrastructure actually delivered. This further compounds concerns around the accountability of the state

While the project inches its way through the system, perceptions 'on the ground' might be that nothing is being done – unless informed, regular feedback reaches the public.

> *Communication with the public is very important to explain what's happening, or why certain things cannot be done or cannot be done right now. People need to understand the process and have a sense that things are moving. (IDP coordinator)*

Regular, well-informed report-backs are essential for demonstrating value. Too often, report-backs are skimpy and formalistic, evasive, or simply avoided.

➔ Report-backs should be regular and well-informed. They should also not be limited to public meetings, important as those are. Radio call-in shows, interviews with reporters from local newspapers, pamphlets and posters are other useful media for communicating with residents.

➔ Controversies should be dealt with in earnest, and not in the haughty, dismissive manner that appears to be the habit of some councillors.

➔ Cell-phone communication should be explored. Given the massive penetration of cell-phones even among the poorest citizens, it offers possibilities for informing masses of people about the when and where of IDP meetings in their areas.[39]

➔ All forms of participation, including those that fall outside formal processes of participation, should be monitored and analysed by the local sphere, to provide a more nuanced picture of levels (and forms) of public participation in development and the IDP.

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[39] Thanks to Alison Todes for the suggestion.

6. Room for improvement (2): Dealing with stickier problems

Many interviewees who have experienced low participation rates, attribute it to 'deeper' problems that seem resistant to logistical improvements and innovations. Some feel that communities don't 'see the importance of participation any more', others worry that bonds of trust between residents and the state are frayed, while a good few are concerned about the prevalence of disharmony and distrust between actors and structures that are meant to be collaborating closely.

All this points to underlying problems which, although resistant to quick fixes, are hardly beyond redress. Some, though, will require innovative responses that go beyond merely grafting onto existing arrangements and structures (new) participatory elements. Thoroughgoing adjustments might need to be considered, as we indicate below – these are starting points for discussion rather than easy 'answers' or solutions.

6.1.   "People do not trust government"

There are 'issues of trust' between communities and local officialdom, including councillors. These are being aggravated by inconsistent and poor communication (including report-backs) as a matter of course (not only in relation to the IDP). This reminds that participation in the IDP is to some degree also an index of the ongoing conduct and perceived reliability, accessibility, trustworthiness and efficiency of the local state.

> *Poor communication from the council, poor quality of service and levels of responsiveness to people's needs - all this is directly correlated to public participation … quality service can enhance participation. (Manager, Speaker's Office)*

Such distrust often stems from systemic problems and organisational dysfunction. Generally, this materialises in the form of poor communication with the public and the failure or inability to provide it with necessary information. Damage is done all around: public distrust builds, while local officials feel disempowered and frustrated.

> *People, the public, are committed to changing things but they're demoralised. (Community development worker)*

Demonstrable efforts to improve communication with the public, including canvassing opinions and assessments, would be a step toward repairing some of the perceptions.

➔ A survey, using community volunteers, soliciting residents' opinions and ideas about local issues and priorities, council's performance etc. and probing understandings of processes like the IDP is an option that can double as a form of public education.

➔ Communication between the local state and communities must be improved, especially around service delivery matters. It's often a matter of establishing or properly servicing channels of communication (especially with external basic service providers), and using more effective media to communicate with the public.

6.2.   Perceptions of incompetence or indifference

Councillors and municipal officialdom (as well as ward committee members) attract a good deal of criticism, and their commitment to serve the public is called into question. It cannot (and should not) be taken for granted that sufficient political will to promote public participation exists at the municipal level or among ward councillors.

> *They come with proposals and priorities, but they ignore the really important things for us (like electricity problems). So people say they're not taking us seriously'. (Johannesburg CBD CDW).*

Administration and coordination is said to be poor, resulting in unnecessary delays in implementation and poor communications with communities. Budget administration seems a common problem, with delays typically giving way to frantic panics to spend budgets as the end of the financial year approaches.

Desk-bound officials who don't "get out into the community" and "don't understanding the problems" come in for special criticism.

➔ Municipalities (perhaps also provincial government) could assist in arranging outreach visits in neighbouring wards for councillors – especially wards with demographic and sociological profiles different to their own.[40] The advantages? Boosting understandings, widening perspectives, identifying previously hidden common interests and mutual solutions.

Some community development workers complained that basic facilities and resources (including work spaces, stationery and access to a telephone) are not always available.

6.3.   Low participation among 'privileged' residents

> *Whites don't support the IDP processes; it's not important to them. (Community development worker)*

In Randfontein or Midvaal, for instance, where some wards group together white plot holders with black workers (many of who live on the premises of their employers) and informal settlements, participation by white residents in the IDP can be very low. According to councillors, many white residents are openly distrustful of the state, generally, and processes like the IDP, specifically.

> *They say they feel left out. They say things like, 'You're only interested in what matters to black people. Now you want us to participate. Why should we get interested in (this IDP) now?' (ward councillor, Randfontein)*

Disturbingly, some of these residents are also preventing workers in their employ from participating in local government events and processes. Officials and community development workers complained, for example, that they and volunteers frequently are

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[40] This was done in Witzenberg (Western Cape), for example, where councillors and officials were taken on a door-to-door "caravan", meeting residents and discussing issues of concern with them. It seemed to trigger a sea-change in many officials' attitudes, especially toward poorer citizens in their constituencies. On the other hand, similar efforts in Randfontein (Gauteng) are said to have run aground on the aggressive isolationism of (mainly white) plot-owners, many of who reportedly refused to even speak to officials.

refused permission to talk or hand pamphlets to workers (when doing door-to-door publicising).

And yet many people choose instead to air their concerns, complaints or suggestions via telephone conversations directly with councillors. Exclusive and rarefied as this is, it's still public participation. But it is participation on the back of privilege (having a telephone, having the councillor's phone numbers, having the councillor take your call) – and such inequality is at odds with the ethos that underlies the push towards stronger public participation at local level.

> *They have totally different issues and concerns than we (blacks) have, and they're used to working directly with councillors – that's how they used to it in the 'old days'. (Community development worker)*

6.4.   "Participation fatigue"

This is analogous to the 'apathy' attributed to residents who are relatively 'better-off' and whose basic needs have been met.

Many respondents spoke of "*participation fatigue*", and claimed that the heady days of community-based organising and activism were at an end. Explaining this apparent phenomenon, respondents said that where people's basic needs were already been satisfied, participation tended to be poor.[41]

> *People are getting on with their lives; now they shout only when things go wrong.*

> *Basic needs is the biggest driver for public participation.*

As we suggested earlier, such apparent 'apathy' likely expresses other underlying matters that can be addressed, such as the following …

6.5.   The 'pay-off' or outcome of participation is not clear

People need to see tangible evidence of the value of their participation. Attending meetings carries opportunity and other costs for many people; the value of those investments and efforts needs to be made clear.

> *There's a perception that the IDP doesn't really matter because people don't see it deliver. (IDP coordinator)*

➔ At the very least, this requires regular, detailed report-backs that speak to the issues and concerns raised at earlier meetings.

6.6.   Participation is haphazard and sometimes ill-informed

A cognitive hitch is at play. The IDP is not an operational plan, but a strategic plan. Yet service delivery issues predominate among the inputs from the public, whose needs, after all, tend to be local and 'operational'.

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[41] To underscore that point, one interviewee shared an anecdote (possibly apocryphal) about a councillor who, faced with dwindling attendance at public meetings, called a meeting on electricity-related issues, then arranged that the electricity provider in the ward cut the power a few hours before the scheduled meeting. Attendance rocketed.

> *'It's proving very difficult to get communities to engage and focus at this strategic level … communities tend to engage at every level.' (IDP coordinator)*

In trying to deal with this, IDP coordinators in the Johannesburg Metro have begun collating comments from the public participation processes, grouping them into themes, and then integrating them at Metro level into IDP sector plans. That, however, seems to reproduce one of the underlying problems in the process: the sense, hardly without merit, that people can make inputs but the real power lies elsewhere and that's where the decisions are made. At the moment, from the perspective of residents, IDP inputs enter an opaque process and system that intermittently transmits information back at them. The participation is sporadic (it does not entail a process, even if it ostensibly is *part* of a process) and it occurs at considerable remove from the process itself.

> *'We underestimated public participation. It's not just about meetings. It should be much more than that.' (IDP coordinator)*

There is a clear need to develop public participation into more direct and sustained involvement in local government's operations

> *'We should rather have a more systematic approach to this: small groups of people from communities who participate more closely in planning, and we then cascade that up through the system.' (IDP coordinator)*

➔ *Ward plans* might be an opportunity to develop more systematic public participation in IDPs, in conjunction with ward-based planning. Thematic teams or subcommittees would be set up, each identifying key priorities and then drafting IDP inputs accordingly. The default arrangement might be that ward committee members provide stewardship or guidance to each team or subcommittee, perhaps with the assistance of other residents with expertise and/or experience on the theme. Each thematic set of inputs can be the subject of public discussion, via meetings. Adjustments are then made, a ward plan is drawn up and is channelled upward into the IDP process, etc.

The danger, of course, is an even more sprawling process than we have now. This would require investing considerably more resources at the ward level, and considerable capacity-building for councillors and ward committee members. Training in facilitation skills is especially important. Some IDP coordinators felt this would be prohibitively expensive in large metros, such as Tshwane, which has 76 wards. They also questioned the wisdom of such investments given the relatively high turnover of officials. The idea may not work – but then government and communities need jointly to come up with workable alternatives.

6.7.   Councillors need capacity-building

Some interviewees complained that ward councillors often don't understand the processes they are meant to participate in and guide. In our research, some councillors indeed show insufficient knowledge and understanding of the processes they're supposed to be managing. Sometimes the quality and commitment of individual councillors is questionable.

> *'They don't understand the processes. Some of them can't read or count, it seems … (The political parties) must deploy people who know what they're doing.' (Community development worker)*

➔ It is incumbent on political parties to deploy suitable persons to council posts. The possibility of shifting to directly elected councillors deserves stronger consideration – and should begin by opening space for debate.

Councillors' powers should not be overestimated, either – so much so that some councillors seem to find it difficult to pursue their concerns and views (and those of their constituencies) effectively in ultimately decisive forums such as municipal councils, party caucuses and the like. The real power, in their experience, lies at the Metro, municipal and provincial levels; officials there can drive councillors 'into submission', in the words of one Johannesburg Metro official. Unable to 'make things happen', some councillors might prefer to retreat from substantive engagement with the public. As we noted above, councillors 'take the heat' for decisions taken elsewhere, where these are de-linked from the IDP process. At least one councillor in our research appeared virtually immobilised by his inability to wrest information and resources from other, higher echelons of the state.

> *When I was elected, I had all these big dreams and ideas about what I was going to be able to do. But look at me now. My hands are tied. Sometimes, I can't even give the community basic information. (ward councillor, who has felt the brunt of several community protests)*

Ekangala is a case in point. Community resentment about the lack of progress with IDP projects is perforce directed at the local councillor, whose ability even to answer basic queries is undermined by a failure to elicit the information from provincial departments. There no doubt is more to the story, with cross-border sites now in Gauteng, their previous issues still unresolved, hints of corruption and so on making a messy story even more opaque. Some projects were given the go-ahead while it was part of Mpumalanga. Now it's part of Gauteng. At least 2 projects (housing and a primary school) have remained unfinished for several years, although the contracts allegedly have been paid out.

The councillor (who seems not to have been involved in either project's approval or management) is unable to extract information from provincial departments about the status of the projects, what's happened to the funds etc. The community, meanwhile, demands that he provide them with that information. It is an abject example of the powerlessness of some councillors; and of the institutional problems that can bedevil the process and over time turn councillors, communities and the local state more broadly into antagonists rather than partners.

➔ Training that can build basic capacities is needed. Top of the list should be meeting facilitation, and methods for quickly identifying, contacting and eliciting the desired information from within municipal and provincial state bureaucracies.

➔ Integration and co-ordination across departments and spheres – a key government goal anyway – must be fast-tracked. And with it must come an

inversion of the current hierarchy: the ward should be at the apex of the power pyramid, not squashed at its base, as is currently the situation.

6.8.   Whom do councillors serve?

Councillors are adamant that they are accountable to the residents in their ward – their constituency.

> *As a councillor, I don't deal with organisations, I deal with my constituency. (Ward councillor)*

The sentiment is admirable, but paradoxically it can also undermine strong public participation. It is neither democratic nor sensible to simply by-pass or ignore the experience, expertise and often authentic representation that distinguish many civil society organisations.

Take the example of Yeoville, which features a strong array of local organisations, some of them grouped into the local Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum. They represent a valuable set of structured interests, competencies, expertise and logistical strengths that can be enlisted in efforts to extend and deepen public participation in the IDP (and beyond). They amount to much more than a single 'factor' or 'actor' in the ward.

➔ Organised civil society is one of the main missing elements and catalysts for stronger public participation.

Interestingly, some interviewees cautioned against taking for granted councillors' status as 'servants of the public'. Some councillors are surrounded by rumours that they are involved in commercial ventures in their wards. There is ample room, in other words, for conflicting loyalties and aspirations.

➔ This concern can be addressed with closely policed and widely publicised transparency requirements, that go beyond the measures introduced by political parties (such as the pledge signed by ANC councillors). This is not ideal, since business interests can be disguised with proxies – but it should be a minimal requirement for limiting conflicts of interests and thereby strengthening accountability to residents.

Proportional representation councillors are seen to owe their loyalties in the final instance to their respective political party apparatuses, and not necessarily to the constituency they are meant to serve. In closely contested wards, this fuels distrust in the councillor and his/her office.[42]

➔ Initiate frank debate about the efficacy of proportional representation councillors.

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[42] Especially in wards that group together disparate groups with different political affinities in significant numbers.

6.9.   Ward Committee complications

Without [ward committees] our system of democratic government and developmental local government cannot be said to be rooted among the people. (FS Mufamadi, Minister for Provincial and Local Government)[43]

Ward committees are widely seen as a cornerstone of the IDP process. As advisory bodies, they are convened by ward councillors and comprise roughly 10 people elected from and by ward residents. The ward councillor represents the committee in the municipal council and is required to report back regularly to the committee. The committee is meant to act as a link and channel between communities and municipalities, ensuring that local government works in partnership with the public around service delivery and development. Generally, there is agreement that the effectiveness of ward committee members boils down to the nature of their relationship with the ward councillor. Many councillors do claim to work closely with ward committees, and describe them and as 'part and parcel' of the IDP process at ward level.

Other studies have indicated, however, that ward committees' status often is ill-defined, that they operate in clumsy and unpredictable manner, and are prone to becoming embroiled in conflicts and standoffs with councillors.[44] Confrontations with councillors are said to be commonplace, with allegations of corruption or misconduct sometimes used to stoke community protests. Overall, their effectiveness seems to vary not only between but also within municipalities.[45]

Entangled in such observations are some fundamental problems in the functions and roles assigned to ward committees and councillors, respectively.

6.10.   Countervailing platforms have been created

One problem is that countervailing platforms of power have been created – councillors on one hand, ward committees on the other – each elected in a different manner (which then also affects perceptions of loyalty, legitimacy and accountability). They might be meant to work smoothly together toward the same objectives, but the reality is turning out to be messier.

Strictly speaking, ward committees do not possess formal, autonomous power. They cannot take decisions in their own right; their power is mediated by their respective councillors. They are institutionally subordinated to ward councillors, who are the vehicles through which committees take up issues and interact with council or beyond. It is the councillors who represent ward residents.

In the phrasing of one Johannesburg Metro document, for example,

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[43] Foreword to *Making Ward Committees Work Resource Book: Best Practices & Lessons Learnt.* DPLG. Pretoria.

[44] These studies are examined in more detail in the accompanying critical review of literature. Hemson D (2007). Can participation make a difference? Prospects for people's participation in planning. *Critical Dialogue*, 3(1):9-15; Hicks J (2006). Assessing the effectiveness of community-based involvement. Background paper. Centre for Public Participation. Durban. Available at http://www.cpp.org.za/main.php?include=docs/community.html&menu=_menu/pubs.html&title=Documents

[45] LK John Consulting (2006). *Enhancing citizenship in the City of Johannesburg: An evaluation of current public participation initiatives.* April. Johannesburg.

> "…*a ward committee is not a structure with a mandate to govern in the ward. This duty rests solely with the ward councillor. Members of the ward committee do not carry any mandate from a constituency … Ward committee members are merely people within a community, that know sectors of the community well, and are thus able to assist the ward councillor around certain issues of governance*".[46]

Such constraints seem to mark deliberate attempts to avoid creating 'dual power' scenarios pitting councillors against ward committees. Unfortunately they do not seem to be achieving that objective.

In theory independent advisory bodies, ward committees are meant to act as interlocutors, as neutral conduits of concerns, demands and ideas emanating from the public. Members are expected to represent the interests of the ward as a whole, and the Municipal Structures Act, for example, assigns to them the 'right' to make recommendations on any matters affecting the ward (albeit via the ward councillor to the metro or local council, or to the ward councillor). Hence ward committees are sometimes positioned politically as 'voices of the people', as Minister Mufamadi's remark, cited earlier, seems to do.

Ward committees therefore are also potentially powerful actors that are positioned as lynchpins of democratic local governance and development, and that can influence and mobilise communities around particular issues. The hopes vested in ward committees as quasi 'silver bullets' of democratic governance and development, mixed in with their usefulness for advancing all manner of (official and other) agenda carries the risk of creating alternative or contending sites of power and influence in wards. The automatic functionality of ward committees as neutral conveyors of public interests and 'voices' is highly questionable.

Added to this are perceptions of divided loyalties among some ward committee members. Our research encountered allegations that ward committees are sometimes 'captured' and used to advance the material and/or political ambitions of specific individuals or interest groups. In one of the wards studied, ward committee members were accused of promoting or undermining proposals and projects on the basis of whether they and their social networks stood to gain from them.

These are formidable difficulties. One way of starting to address them would require setting more demanding criteria and procedures for the election of committee members. This of course goes well beyond the remit of the Department, but if we are to deepen the quality and impact of participation, it needs to be acknowledged that many of the key challenges are systemic. These need to be openly debated, not regarded as taboo subjects.

Although democratically elected, ward committees are a mixed bag. Typically, they are elected at public meetings, but the legislation does not stipulate quorums for those meetings. Councillors and/or their political parties can, should they wish, stack such meetings with favoured candidates, under-publicise the meetings or call them on an inconvenient date. Committees supposedly representing the community at large therefore can in fact comprise *de facto* appointees. And there *is* a strong sense that

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[46] Anon (2006). *Policy on public participation in the city of Johannesburg.* Johannesburg Metro. Johannesburg, p.8.

ward committees are often dominated by political forces, even stacked with the cronies of councillors or other interest groups in the ward (as Hemson has noted).

➔ Establish firmer and more exacting guidelines for the election of ward committee members. (Currently, the procedures and guidelines are left to municipalities to decide.) At the very least, quorums must be stipulated.

More representative and transparent election procedures might build greater public trust in ward committees. But the basic challenge of dual power needs to be better understood, and appropriate solutions developed.

Also unresolved are potential tensions with civil society organisations – partly because relations between them and ward committees are poorly defined at present. In fact, the current stipulation that ward committee members should not represent *specific interests* in wards (but rather the constituency as a whole) probably is feeding such tension.

There must be a balance struck between CSO and ward committee roles and representativeness. The **dplg** strategic plan states that ward committees will increasingly be regarded as the organised voice of civil society[47] - even though by definition ward committees are themselves created by legislation and thus not 'non' governmental at all.

Elevating ward committees above other CSOs risks stoking tension and conflict between committee (members) and existing or emergent civil society organisations over who gets to pronounce on issues in the name of the 'community'. And secondly because ward committees' status as presumed neutral servants of the public in fact is open to question. In reality, they are both the subjects and objects of considerable contestation and intrigue, and therefore are not necessarily elevated above the fray of aspirations and ambitions.

6.11.   Participation without power?

The tensions around the respective powers and functions of councillors and ward committees hint also at a larger, fundamental issue affecting public participation and local development: the extent to which devolution of democratic involvement is accompanied by the *devolution of power* and responsibilities.

The most successful experiments in participatory development and governance have devolved significant financial and political powers to local level (Kerala and Porto Alegre, for example). In South Africa, though, the decisive powers in relation to local development remain concentrated higher up in the chain of government, to large extent impenetrably so. The right to *participate* in processes is, to a certain degree, being devolved to ward level, but the *power* to genuinely shape the content of those processes, and to contest and oversee their outcomes is held elsewhere.

> *To get things done in Yeoville, we tried to go through the channels, the councillor, the ward committee, and so on, and it got us nowhere. Eventually we worked directly through the municipal line departments, and that's how we got things done. (Yeoville resident, on trying to take up slum-lording and other housing issues).*

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[47] Department of Provincial and Local Government (2006) 5 Year Local Government Strategic Agenda. V6.5

The challenge is to bring together community-based planning with devolved financial resources and dynamic, directly elected councillors who have strong political will.

> *Because there aren't really resources at local level, councillors can't really do all that much. There has to be financial devolution, and people can then engage, discuss, contest for those funds for projects and activities, and participate in implementing those. (Yeoville, resident)*

➔ Even within the current framework, there is room to experiment along such lines, especially in relatively compact wards. Wards currently access grants that should be used experimentally to try and deepen public participation.

A process stewarded by the councillor and ward committee, for example, could involve the public in structured, ongoing and detailed discussion (not just the identification of 'wish lists' and priorities) of key projects for the ward over the next 3 or 5 years. The detailed proposals would be flighted for wider discussion in the ward. Participants, grouped in subcommittees, would then engage with issues of project design and the costing process (assisted by technical consultants provided by the municipality or metro). The project proposals would then go to municipal or metro level so that annual funding can be set aside.

6.12. Stronger collaboration and support is needed between various actors

The Speaker's Office is an important point of support for public participation process, but experiences vary. A good deal of the funding to support public participation, for example, is controlled by the Speaker's Office. Some community development workers complain that they are unable to establish good relationships with their Speaker's Office, while others (Midvaal, for example) have had the opposite experience. In Randfontein, representatives from the Speaker's Office were integrally involved in IDP meetings and publicising work (including facilitating meetings and preparing materials).

Yeoville, as mentioned earlier, seems especially well-placed to achieve strong synergy between the councillor, community development workers, ward committee members and local stakeholders. In formal terms, they attend each other's meetings – yet, "they don't cooperate or work together smoothly". Attendance seems to be seen as a formal requirement, and lacks substantive interaction. As a result, the entities do not actively participate in each others' activities.

There was apparently "no co-operation" around the IDP between the ward committee, the Stakeholders' Forum and the community development worker. (Wearing his ANC hat, however, an official in the Forum has helped the councillor mobilise participation for IDP events.) The community development worker does not liaise formally with the Forum, and there are no regular, formal report-backs between her and the councillor on issues of mutual concern and interest. Instead, the community development workers report upward, to the provincial department, according to informants.

Relationships between ward committee members and councillors, on one hand, and community development workers, on the other, seem especially fraught. There are two chief reasons for this. Firstly, lines of responsibility and accountability run in different directions. Community development workers are provincial department appointees and, ultimately, have to account accordingly.

In some wards, you'll find that councillors are very strong gatekeeper and not that keen on community development workers. They say they're were democratically elected (unlike the community development workers). (Johannesburg Metro official, Speaker's Office).

Meanwhile, ward committee members and councillors, to varying degrees, are elected by residents in the area. Secondly, community development workers are remunerated for their toil, unlike ward committee members – a cause of some resentment.

➔ This calls for an institutional re-arrangement; which in turn must flow from on-going dialogue, monitoring and evaluation, and learning by doing. We said at the outset that we regard this as an unfolding process, not a completed or cemented edifice, and as such the model that has been developed over the last few years should be revised as required. Currently, there are multiple points at which participation can be short-circuited, by any of a range of actors who have the power or influence – or access to the system – to do so. The range of players and institutions at local level need to be better stream-lined around core functions and outcomes. And community participation needs to be insulated from manipulation by any agency that begins to act as 'the' voice of that community.

7. The way forward

Before we tentatively suggest a possible way forward, we take a slight detour to look at (or remind those readers who have already read the critical review of literature) the extent to which the more famous public participation projects worldwide may be replicated in South Africa. They are treated in considerably greater detail in the critical review; here we look at whether or not they are replicable in South African conditions. The point is fairly straightforward, namely to outline some of the parameters for any pilot project that may eventuate; and to underscore our basic argument, which is that participation should have higher aims than mere legitimation or consensus-building; and that for it to do so, government and citizens need a new way of seeing and working with each other, accompanied by changed power relations and decision-making authority.

7.1. How easily could South Africa replicate the kinds of experiments in radical participatory development seen, for example, in Kerala and Porto Alegre?

Those experiences have shared a number of cardinal features. They place great emphasis on inclusiveness and accountability; they rely on extensive outreach and have created institutional arrangements to enable consistent, widespread and intensive public participation; they have taken special steps to impart skills and build capacity (both among citizens and officials); and they entail *and* enable sustained popular involvement in the prioritising, planning and monitoring of public projects and investments (Mohan & Stokke, 2005; Abers, 2003; Heller, 2001;).

But additionally, they emerged in particular political and political-economic contexts and conditions, factors that cannot be recreated or introduced by acts of will or institutional design.

In South Africa, political organisations, social movements and trade unions in combination formed a powerful counter-hegemonic movement that was key in bringing about the political settlement of the early 1990s. This inaugurated a transition marked by radical changes in citizenship rights and in the opportunities for democratic practice (Mohan & Stokke, 2005). Among the signal political-institutional reforms were the transformed and expanded roles assigned to local government – in terms of governance, (economic) development and rights realisation.

However, a series of countervailing factors have also operated. An economic adjustment programme restricted infrastructure investment and allowed for limited growth in social spending until the early 2000s. Dozens of civic associations, popular structures and service organisations were either 'absorbed' into the post-apartheid state, collapsed for want of funding or were instrumentalised within technocratic development strategies (Adler & Steinberg, 2000; INTERFUND, 2001; Marais, 2001). A resurgence of social mobilisation has occurred since the turn of the century, in the context of decentralised delivery of development and social services. However, this activism and mobilisation has tended to be issue-specific and highly localized (Ballard et al., 2006). Moreover, partly because they symbolise (and sometimes explicitly broadcast) dismay about government's commitment to prioritise the rights of the poor, their relationships with both government and the African National Congress have tended to be marked by distrust and antagonism. As a result, the activist energies

invested in such local struggles have seldom been harnessed productively by the local state. Put differently, popular democracy has not been institutionalised effectively.

Kerala and Porto Alegre, in contrast, did manage to institutionalise popular democracy. They succeeded in channelling civil society activism productively within the political spaces of the local state (Mohan & Stokke, 2005). In Kerala, this occurred in the course of decentralised planning, while in Porto Alegre it famously occurred in the context of participatory budgeting (Isaac & Frank, 2000; Abers, 2003; Törnquist, 2002; Wainwright, 2003; Williams, 2007).

New forms of local democracy were created through combined action in both civil and political society – within the context of devolved state paper *and* resources (Mohan & Stokke, 2005).

Those experiences shared three, key characteristics, according to Fung & Wright (2003):
- Focused on concrete socioeconomic needs,
- Extensive popular participation made possible by creating new arenas for participation,
- Policy-making emerged from deliberative processes, with an emphasis on achieving consensus.

Importantly, the experiments were not launched by political edict – in the sense of a 'good idea' encountering a 'willing sponsor' and 'enforcer'. Rather, they emerged out of larger, 'organic' political processes. Although important, institutional design details therefore illuminate only one facet of such experiments. Vital, too, are 'the political interests, strategies and relative strengths of state, elite and popular forces' (Mohan & Stokke, 2005:22), the balance of forces between them, and the kinds of relationships that take root among them. Williams' (2007) research in Kerala has led her to emphasise, additionally, the importance of the relative strength of capital (and capitalist development) – which, in the case of Kerala, was weak and unable to achieve hegemony for its interests nor exert significant pressure on the Communist Party.[48]

This questions, in other words, the notion that popular democratic impulses can be transferred into the political arena merely by 'opening spaces' and establishing appropriate institutional arrangements – the idea of transferring 'democratic potentials that emerge at the societal level to the political arena through participatory designs', in Avritzer's (2002:23) phrasing. For such an approach overlooks or devalues the vital matters of power and its contestation. In Mohan & Stokke's (2005:24) summary, the experiments in local popular democracy in Kerala and Porto Alegre are best 'understood as the outcome of changing constellations of political forces, and especially the close links between polycentric activities in civil society and mass-based political parties'.

Thus, central in Kerala was an extensive history of supportive relations between the Communist Party and popular organisations, which had helped launch the land reforms of the 1970s, and which later made possible the decentralised participatory planning of the mid-1990s (Tharakan, 2004).

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[48] 'Instead of strong links to capital,' Williams notes, 'the CPI(M) developed strong relations to the urban and rural working classes' which it later expanded to 'other subaltern classes' (2007:24). See Williams M (2007). *Generative politics: Participatory development in South Africa and Kerala.* In Press.

One of the key factors that made Porto Alegre possible, as Abers (2003) has pointed out, was the pursuit by the Workers' Party (or PT, *Partido dos Trabalhadores*) of an alternative political strategy that challenged the entrenched system of populist-clientist arrangements, and which centred on the achievement of state power at the local government level. The Porto Alegre experience became an aspect of that strategy, while its appeal and eventual success in turn functioned as an asset of the strategy.

While noting that the most successful experiments in participatory development have arisen within particular political contexts and conditions, and historical settings (IDS, 2006)[49], it's nevertheless instructive to review an example of some institutional and procedural arrangements – in this case Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting process.

In terms of *institutional* arrangements, the PT drew initially on earlier experiments mounted by the Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Porto Alegre in its bids to 'popularise' the decision-making around public projects and investments, and monitor their implementation. Eventually, the participatory budgeting system came to rest on three basic principles and three sets of institutions, as described by De Sousa Santos in considerable detail (1998:468-474).[50]

The principles are that:

(i) All citizens (not only those belonging to community organisations) could participate;
(ii) Participation would be governed by a combination of direct and representative democracy procedures (and would occur via regularly functioning institutions); and
(iii) The allocation of resources would be determined by general criteria (decided by the participatory institutions) and technical criteria (relating to technical or economic viability, as defined by the executive and according to various legal norms).

Three sets of institutions form the cornerstones of participatory budgeting:

(i) The first comprises administrative units of the executive that are charged with managing the budgetary debate with citizens, and include the Planning Office and various advisory and coordinating forums. The Planning Office is responsible for converting citizens' demands into technically and economically viable action plans;
(ii) Community organisations (autonomous from municipal government) constitute the second set of institutions (popular councils, township unions, and so-called regional articulations);
(iii) The third set of institutions connects and mediates the activities of the other two sets, and comprises regularly functioning institutions of community participation (including the Council of the Government Plan and Budget, the Participatory Budgeting Council, Regional Plenary Assemblies, the Budgeting Regional Forum, Thematic Plenary Assemblies, and the Budgeting Thematic Forum).

The participatory process is depicted in graphic form, below. In very brief summary, it pivots on the regional and thematic plenary assemblies, the Participatory Budgeting Council and the Fora of Delegates. Because the latter two institutions are bound to a network of grassroots institutions (the regional assemblies and thematic plenaries),

[49] Institute of Development Studies (2006). Making space for citizens: Broadening the 'new democratic spaces' for citizen participation. *IDS Policy Briefing*. Issue 27, March. IDS. Brighton.
[50] De Sousa Santo B (1998). Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a redistributive democracy. *Politics & Society*, 26(4): 461-510.

they are invested with considerable accountability. (Citizens can participate in those assemblies and plenaries as individuals or as members of collectives.)

Evidently, one of the crucial challenges was how to resolve conflict – especially between the Participatory Budgeting Council (which initially pushed for unconditional deliberative authority) and the Executive (essentially the Mayor's Office). Eventually, through trial and error, the following formula was adopted:

- The Participatory Budgeting Council takes its decisions by simple majority;
- Those decisions are forwarded to the Executive, which reviews them;
- If the Mayor vetoes a decision, the matter returns to the Participatory Budgeting Council for evaluation;
- If the Council accepts the Mayor's decision, the particular matter is resolved at this point;
- The Council, however, can also reject the Mayor's decision – if it musters a two-thirds majority vote. In that case the matter returns to the Mayor for evaluation and final decision. It is in the interests of the Executive (and the overall participatory system) not to take such rejection lightly;
- Importantly, the Mayor can only veto on the basis of technical or financial criteria. The veto has seldom been exercised, with the Executive preferring to consult and explain to community structures the reservations and difficulties surrounding a particular proposal.

In terms of implementation, committees (created within the Fora of Delegates) are tasked with supervising projects, and have direct access to the Mayor's Office if they wish to discuss delays or alterations.

Achieved ultimately is a system of co-government, in which political power is shared via a network of democratic institutions that are tailored for achieving decisions based on deliberation, compromise and consensus.

JULY / AUGUST
The new Participatory Budget Council is inaugurated; meetings begin
* The agenda is decided; internal rules, election of Partiary Committee, etc.;
* Courses on public budgeting for the COP;
* Seminars on the same topic for the regions.

AUGUST
Government renders compatible community and institutional demands and priorities
* Proposal is analysed by the financial board of the Mayor, the Government Coordination, and the secretariats
* GAPLAN drafts budget proposal.

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER
Council discusses and votes budget proposal. COP discusses criteria for resource allocation:
* Agenda of meetings with secretariats established;
* Allocation of resources programed for every region.

SEPTEMBER
Budget proposal sent to the Mayor:
* COP and government submit budget proposal to legislative body Deadline: September 30.

OCTOBER THROUGH DECEMBER
Council meets with secretariats to discuss their investment plans
* COP offers investment plan and councillors sign the document concerning investment plan for their regions, thematic areas, and the city as a whole;

NOVEMBER
Legislative body votes budget proposal by November 30
* Council supervises voting process

DECEMBER THROUGH JULY 1997
Council meets for special discussions until the new council is inaugurated.

FEBRUARY
Participatory Budget Council (COP) in recess

MARCH
Preparations for the first regional and thematic round
* Councillors and delegates mobilize communities and sectors

MARCH / APRIL
First round (rodada): regional and thematic plenaries
* (Municipal) government reports on previous year's investment plan and presents current year's;
* Government presents budgeting criteria and methodology agreed upon by COP for following year;
* Community assesses previous year's investment plan;
* Partial election of delegates in proportion to the number of individuals attending the round.

MARCH THROUGH JUNE
Intermediate meetings and plenaries (Regional and Thematic)
* Selection of priority demands and themes in regional and thematic meetings;
* Election of remaining delegates in proportion to the number of individuals attending the intermediate meeting with largest quorum;
* Organs of (municipal) government give information for the debate on the community and present proposals;
* Creation of the committees to supervise works-in-progress;
* Regional forums reactivated;
* COP discusses and votes the Law of Budgetary Directives to be sent to the Municipal Legislative body by June 1.

JUNE / JULY
Second round; Regional and thematic plenaries; demands presented
* Government gives account of expenses and expected income;
* The 16 regions and 5 thematic areas hand in priorities and demands;
* Election of PB councillors: two councillors and two substitutes for every region and thematic area

## 7.2.	Context is (almost) everything

Understandably, practitioners want to know, in practical terms, how to achieve effective real participation that is also realistic and do-able. That is more the task of evaluators and programme designers than this kind of research project; nonetheless we do sketch the parameters of a pilot project that could take us closer to the participation as empowerment that we believe to be the goal for which all should aim. Offering practical advice is important, and we have covered many of the key issues; but this is only one dimension of a transformative model of participation – the crafting of methods, mechanisms, structures and processes that can incorporate stronger participation into a more or less existing field of development practice. The most conservative variants of this approach look (longingly) back to notions that development basically requires the correct mixture of institutional responses that can be planned and administered by technocratic expertise – an approach that effectively purges development of its political content.[51] We have deliberately situated participation around IDPs in the messy political-cum-institutional milieu that it occupies in reality.

The problems and possible solutions outlined above involve what we might describe as 'matters of form'. Fairly basic improvements can address some of those flaws: making materials more user-friendly, providing them in appropriate languages and in formats that are more easily digestible, disseminating them more widely, better training for officials (especially in meeting facilitation), devising more effective ways for publicising events and processes, devising ways to attract more representative participation in meetings and processes, better report-backs are some of the options. These improvements can enhance public participation. But they would not necessarily invest it with deep-reaching transformative power.

This requires an act of will by those managing the state machinery, matched by the preparedness to devolve decision-making about budgets. That is the real litmus test for participation as it is for the IDP process itself.

'Matters of content' are equally important, and can involve more obdurate barriers that become visible only when we step back and survey wider the political, political-economic, ideological and historical contexts in which we are operating. In other words, they draw into the frame the political and political-economic contexts and the conditions in which participatory initiatives occur.

Other analysts have observed, for example, that although proposed projects might reflect real needs, they rarely challenge or alter "the underlying patterns of

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[51] Ferguson J (1994). *The anti-politics machine: 'Development', depoliticization and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. University of Minnesota Press. Minnesota; Mohan G & Stokke K (2005): The Politics of Localization: From Depoliticizing Development to Politicizing Democracy. In: K. Cox, M. Low and J. Robinson (Eds.). *The Handbook in Political Geography*. London. Sage; Hickey S & Mohan G (2003). Relocating participation within a radical politics of development: citizenship and a critical modernism. Working paper for conference on Participation: From tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development. 27-28 February. University of Manchester; Abers RN (2003). Reflections on What Makes Empowered Participatory Governance Happen. In Fung A & Wright EO (eds.). *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*. London. Verso; Heller P (2001). Moving the State: The Politics of Democratic Decentralization in Kerala, South Africa, and Porto Alegre. *Politics & Society*, 29(1): 1-28;

development".[52] Instead they explore narrow or conservative options that fit the within perceived parameters of 'feasible' or 'realistic' possibilities. Many of those options can benefit (parts of) communities, improve living conditions and more. But they tend to do so without challenging the formative terms on which power and resources are distributed.

Such a perspective situates public participation within a longer-term, overarching pursuit of social transformation. It helps us see participation as a core element of projects of transformation that transcend material change. It is in this respect that the Kerala, West Bengal and Porto Alegre experiences are especially instructive (as discussed in the critical review of the literature).

Context, of course, is multi-dimensional. But two dimensions are especially pertinent for this discussion.

Firstly, the political dimension, which includes the character of the dominant political force, its political culture and prevailing conception of state-society relations, and the strategic path it has adopted.

Secondly, the wider structural dynamics, that establish and reproduce the terms on which power, resources and opportunities are distributed, and which create the boundaries of what is 'feasible'.

Requiring closer attention, therefore, is the fundamental question of *power*, the terms of its distribution and contestation, and the ways by which it establishes the undertow of participatory development processes.

While being alert to the power of context, the idea of the 'local' as a discrete site of participation also becomes problematic. More spaces and channels might be created for democratic participation, but their potency is questionable when decisive economic decisions remain off-limits, shielded from democratic input. In the context of scarce resources, the demands of fiscal restraint and global competitiveness can interact with local power dynamics in profoundly anti-poor (or at least non-pro-poor) ways. Who will the state listen to? Who will be able to find the avenues to reach and engage with the state?

A further paradox emerges. Enthusiasm for public participation is likely to grow in contexts where the need to meet certain demands is felt acutely – and, therefore, where the pressure 'to deliver' is especially strong. But robust participation is likely also to bristle with the contestation, power struggles and intrigues that might surround particular demands and projects, especially when new resources are channelled into poor areas populated by poor communities. This carries obvious dangers of being side-tracked or stopped, coupled with mutual suspicion.

This can be seen in Ekangala, for instance, where the installation of sewage infrastructure is surrounded by intense controversy over which sections of the ward are to be hooked into the system first. This has fuelled allegations of favouritism and a

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[52] Harrison P (2003). *Towards integrated intergovernmental planning in South Africa: The IDP as a building block*. A Report for the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the Municipal Demarcations Board. January. University of Witwatersrand, p.13.

sense of distrust in the councillor and other officials.[53] Participation in public meetings is strong, but with it comes underlying distrust. Similarly, some decisions taken higher up in the chain can spur strong but resentful public participation. An example are cases where persons in line for receiving RDP houses are pushed back in the queue due to the urgent need to prioritise persons living on flood lines. The overall effect is to risk undermining the credibility of state development processes. The upshot is that where the pressure to act is strongest, there also will tend to be a strong underlying trend toward co-optative (hence 'disciplined') participation that focuses on the 'correct' issues and stays in 'appropriate' (i.e. non-political) areas. In such cases, participation might still be functional, even useful, to the development process - but it does not fulfil its political and social functions (of empowerment, mobilisation, democratic deepening etc.). This is the ultimate choice facing the state – to decide *why* it wants participation, and only then to worry about how to measure it.

Worse, in such settings the local state's status as a 'neutral' dispenser of 'public goods' is questionable – not because it is neatly 'captured' and put at the service of any one set of interests, but because its institutions and resources are the subject of such heated contests. A result, the state apparatus in fact is put at the service of many contending interests, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

Also typically overlooked when examining the state and local development is the powerful presence – direct or vicarious – of corporate capital, and the channels of engagement it has fashioned with state institutions and, in some instances, with politically dominant political parties. This goes far beyond the issue of relative privilege and 'voice'. The structural weight of corporate capital enables it to exert decisive influence around developmental issues without being subject to the same, often messy jostle of participation out study encountered. Capital is invited to monthly meetings, to stakeholder sessions (as we saw earlier) and the like, and has special access to the system and the people in the system. These issues need to be confronted; and appropriate checks and balances are needed to balance the needs of citizens against the special interests of capital.

> *The powerful people tend to have more access than ordinary people. It's the tendency of politicians to listen to those people and their issues - that's where their bread is buttered. (Johannesburg Metro official).*

The Kerala, West Bengal and Porto Alegre experiences have shared a number of cardinal features:

- They lay great emphasis on inclusiveness and accountability;
- They used extensive outreach and created institutional arrangements to enable widespread and intensive public participation;
- They took special steps to impart skills and build capacity (both among citizens and officials);
- They entailed *and* enabled sustained popular involvement in the prioritising, planning and monitoring of public projects and investments; and
- They involved the transference of substantive powers.

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[53] The starting and end points of the infrastructure, and the sequence of installation, is governed by the simple reality of gravity. But it so happens that newer sections of the ward (and therefore more recently arrived households) are to be connected first – hence the complaints about a lack of fairness.

Fundamentally, they ventured onto uncharted terrain, experimented and crafted mechanisms that suited their respective conditions and legacies.

Some of the practical steps we have outlined above potentially can improve public participation in many basic but important respects – increasing the numbers of participants, the quality of their contributions, and perhaps even the depth of their participation. This might satisfy those who do not regard the practice of democratic participation *as part* of and a stimulus for deeper processes of social change. The value, rather, is seen in instrumental terms – does it improve the quality, appropriateness, pace and sustainability of development interventions? The participatory engagements will likely remain largely consultative and, to some extent, decorative. Within those limits, a good deal of development delivery could nonetheless still occur.

But participation would not be transformative and it would not involve the ceding of power – not only to the official 'foot soldiers' of local development and governance, but also to the participating public. If the prevailing balances of power are to be challenged, participation has to entail more than a 'special' set of gestures and deeds, but would occur as part of "a broader range of socio-political practices … through which people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities, and thus increase their control over socioeconomic resources".[54] Viewed in this light, participatory development is about empowering and boosting the competencies of people beyond the specific plans or programmes they are encouraged to help shape.

7.3.   A possible pilot

Our ToR did not extend to proposing or designing a pilot project to take forward our conclusions. We do nonetheless briefly sketch the parameters of such a pilot; fleshing it out, deciding on locale and content, identifying a champion and so on are anyway the functions of government, not external consultants.

The point – as we noted immediately above – is to open decision-making to the citizenry, rather than keeping it as the closed preserve of the state. The preceding section on the international experiments in this area give important guidance regarding practicalities including the importance of outreach and inclusivity; skills development and capacity building across the board (i.e. for officials as well as citizens); allowing the public to set local priorities as well as monitor them; and transferred power away from the state to the citizens. It is worth repeating the central points:

(i) All citizens (not only those belonging to community organisations) could participate; (ii) Participation would be governed by a combination of direct and representative democracy procedures (and would occur via regularly functioning institutions); and (iii) The allocation of resources would be determined by general criteria (decided by the participatory institutions) and technical criteria (relating to technical or economic viability, as defined by the executive and according to various legal norms).

Turning to a possible local pilot, an *a priori* requirement is the need for a very good design and equally strong monitoring and evaluation system. Monitoring can be undertaken in house, given that it is essentially a management function; but the evaluator should be an external service provider. The latter should be identified from the outset (not just at the end of the process), so that they are able to do formative work (in assessing the proposed pilot), being on hand to understand why key policy

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[54] Hickey & Mohan, 2003, p.11.

decisions are taken during the lifespan of the project, and then available for a summative evaluation when the pilot lifespan draws to a close.

Effective M&E in turn relies on robust indicator development – in other words, we need to know what we want to measure, before trying to do either M or E. The basis of many of the indicators can be found in this report; once the scale and duration of the pilot have been agreed, they can be quantified and deployed within a monitoring system. But we should not downplay the challenge of developing robust and replicable indicators to measure the *quality* of participation – these may themselves need to be qualitative rather than quantitative indicators. The value of robust indicators of quality public participation to the broader national development project is self-evident.[55]

The first question is at what level should the pilot be located, municipality or ward? If the pilot wishes to incorporate community-based planning, the unit will have to be a ward. But a municipal-level pilot may give the pilot more weight and zest by bringing in more actors, more layers of state agency and actor, and being more representative than a ward. The pilot site needs also to be geographically compact in order to ensure that the pilot is 'do-able' without expending large amounts of money on basic logistics of travel and communication; and, obviously, it needs to be under-resourced – it needs communities with tangible infrastructure and service needs around which to organise and mobilise. This is a decision left to GPDEV and other stakeholders.

Once the level has been selected, a comparable control site should be selected. While forms of participation are deliberately piloted to see if we can move up Arnstein's ladder, it is critical that the same questions are asked of 'normal' participation in a comparable (i.e. broadly similar) area and locale. It is important to know what leads to better quality participation – it may be experience over time, for example, not anything specific to the pilot. Only by being able to compare pilot with control site will we see the pilot successes and failures in a comparative lens and thus allow them to stand out.

Above all, the pilot must be *designed for success*. There is no point finding Gauteng's poorest ward or municipality and locating it there, if that municipality/ward is unable to function adequately, without the added burden of a pilot. The pilot locale needs to have an effective and respected councillor; a functional and efficient ward committee; be without suspicions or allegations of corruption; and a good institutional framework in place, including Speaker's Office, good communications network, and (ideally) little or no inter-institutional hostility. The reason is not to find an anodyne locale where nothing can go wrong – quite the reverse, it is to find a situation where what goes right and wrong is the pilot itself, not some extraneous set of dynamics intervening to impact on the pilot and distort what is happening with regard to participation itself.

It is also important to have in place a strong, or at least well organised, set of civil society organisations – and to partner them in the pilot. But this in turn must cross the spectrum from service NGOs to faith-based organisation and CBOs close to the people on the ground. Survey data consistently show that faith-based organisations and burial societies are by a long way the most popular CSO in the country, and mapping organisations in the local area will be important to ensure that the right partnerships are forged. We noted earlier that it may be useful to 'piggy-back' on the agendas and meetings of existing local CSOs, so that IDP issues can be raised at their meetings, rather than expecting people only to discuss the IDP at IDP meetings.

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[55] See the section on measuring public participation in the critical review of literature.

Gender also needs to be carefully considered, given our findings above about the ways in which (particularly older) men tend to dominate participation. Women need at least to be equally represented in all decision-making structures – as do youth – but it will also be important to monitor and evaluate the gendered implications of the process, the services and infrastructure provided, the logistics of participation, and so on. In other words, gender should not be reduced to equal numbers of men and women, but understood in broader terms regarding the outcomes of the pilot.

The pilot should also consider partnerships with community-based organisations in delivering services. This would be a key mechanism for enhancing local buy-in.

International experience strongly indicates the need to invest time and money in hard- and software. Financial and human investments are needed to ensure the pilot is sufficiently resourced to let us learn what can work – and what can't – in terms of participation at the higher end of Arnstein's ladder. This would include *inter alia* trained facilitators for meetings and for mobilisation; robust communication; a cadre of community workers trained in outreach to publicise the process, facilitate mobilisation – of individuals, not just organisations, remembering that marginalisation and alienation happen at the individual level, while mobilisation commonly occurs at the organisational level, thus by-passing those arguably most in need; and so on.

Finally, it will be important to undertake a needs analysis of local public servants, ward committees and the rest of the individuals that populate the institutional terrain. Opening decision-making to citizens requires a new kind of public servant, with a new set of skills that can accommodate the ebb and flow, the contestation, the politics and disputation that must inevitably attend such a pilot. They also need to be flexible, and willing to listen and hear, not inform or dictate to the public. These and other skills may require capacity building, training and mentoring; the pilot will test the public service as much as it will test the participative limits of state and citizen.

To conclude: Participation involves more than drawing people into existing political and/or development processes; it transforms those processes in ways that boost people's opportunities and capacities *generally* to claim their rights. It therefore becomes an *aspect* of a wider transformative and redistributive project. It is not enough to redesign or adjust processes beforehand in order to facilitate greater participation; they must amenable to being reshaped by participation. And that invites us onto the terrain of risk and experimentation. Do we have the nerve for it?

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Annexure A:

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Critical review of literature on public participation in local development

Hein Marais
June 2007

Preface

Drawing on a wide selection of what has become an abundance of published literature on participation and development, this critical review serves as a contextual and analytical backdrop for a study of the extent and quality of public participation in the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process in South Africa's Gauteng Province. It is deliberately international in scope and critical in approach.

Contents

Introduction

Internationally, public participation has moved centre-stage in the broad field of social development, and is now more or less endorsed as the default model for addressing and balancing injustices at the local level. Some theorists deem it an essential feature of *any* development initiative (Raniga & Simpson, 2002). Those views hold sway in South Africa, too, both within and beyond the state. A commitment to public participation in local development now features prominently in South Africa's efforts to address socioeconomic inequities. The overall endeavour has involved far-reaching changes to financial and intergovernmental systems and planning, and includes a significant devolution of responsibilities to municipalities. A key element has been the role assigned to the public, which is expected to participate actively in local governance and development on a variety of fronts – including the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process.

The approach is in step with a sweeping international trend (which we discuss in more detail below) that dates back to the 1980s. But it also seeks to draw on traditions of popular organizing fostered during the anti-apartheid struggle. Implicit in the highlighting of public participation in local development planning are the assumptions that a strong ethos of grassroots activism and organisation endures, that a rich and representative-enough range of organisations exist to channel popular aspirations and energies efficiently, and that the public (or 'the community') can easily be enlisted as partners in the development process (Pieterse, 2002a). Testing the accuracy of such assumptions requires a brief overview of the state of civil society organising (and, more specifically, the non-profit sector).

Somewhat contradictory pictures of civil society in post-apartheid South Africa have emerged over the past decade (Kraak, 2001; Swilling & Russel, 2002; INTERFUND, 2001; Pieterse, 1997), each of which has implications for the IDP. One depicts a sclerotic sector, "grappling with the new democratic dispensation" and "challenged on virtually all fronts" (INTERFUND, 2001:141). It is said to have sacrificed much of its strongest talent to the state and private sector, to be financially hobbled by declining and unsteady funding support, and to be struggling to repair its strained relations with Government (INTERFUND, 2001). The other image is more heartening and describes a sector confronted with somewhat novel challenges but which nonetheless remains large, vibrant and diverse. Both assessments are accurate to some extent – partly because neither fully captures the "complex patterning of everyday associational life" (Swilling, 2002) in South Africa.

Compared with many middle-income countries, South Africa boasts a large and diverse array of non-profit organisations. These range from burial societies and stokvels, to issue- or project-specific neighbourhood committees (crime watches etc.), co-operatives of many stripes and colours, service delivery organisations, faith-based organisations and trade unions. In the early 2000s, surveys tallied more than 100 000 non-profit organisations (NPOs) in South Africa – some 20,000 of which were active in development and housing, almost 21,000 in social services, 6,000 in health,

while more than 3,000 worked on environmental issues. Nearly 1.5m volunteers actively contributed to the activities of NPOs in 1999 (Swilling & Russel, 2002). Similarly, the countrywide emergence of "project-based" organising (water, health and electricity committees, for example) hardly validates the often-heard claim that communities are suffering from "participation fatigue".

South Africa therefore seems not to suffer a dearth of organising, least of all in poor communities. But do the forms and purposes of this organising neatly and automatically make for effective "public participation" in matters of governance and development? Initial indications from field research conducted for this study suggest that the answer might be "no".

Over the years, non-profit organisations in mainly poor and disenfranchised sections of society tended to focus on survivalist activities, largely because the apartheid state tolerated their existence only insofar as they remained "apolitical" (Swilling & Russel, 2002). Nevertheless, large proportions of this sector did adopt oppositional roles at various points in the past century (notably during two phases, from the mid-1940s to late 1950s and from the mid-1970s to early 1990s). And it was from those forays that the history-making social movements of the 1980s and early 1990s emerged (Swilling & Russel, 2002).

Subsequently, large parts of the non-profit sector have been enveloped in a corporatist pact with the new democratic state. The hopes staked on public participation in the IDP seem to rest heavily on such a consensual relationship between an organised public and the state. From the perspective of the state, the ideal civil society partners are organisations and formations capable of supporting and advancing the state's social development agenda in a stable and predictable manner and without imposing additional costs to the fiscus. "This," Swilling and Russell (2002:73) remind us, "is the political economics underlying the word 'governance'."

No doubt, many thousands of civil society organisations fit a conventional mould of fixed, relatively transparent and often democratic structures geared for advancing certain civic and social goals. But there exists also a rich and somewhat opaque assortment of associational life that takes the form of networking – loose, rhizomatic formations that connect individuals and households on a variety of terms and often across vast distances – and of community organising that focuses largely on survivalist and/or entrepreneurial goals (Everatt et al., 2004; Pieterse, 2003; Swilling, 2002). Fluid and contingent, this networking tends to connect poorly with the more static, rigid and formalised structures and processes that characterise state-led and state-led development (Gotz & Simone, 2001).

Given the official pro-poor stance of the democratic state, it's especially pertinent that the consensual embrace sought by that state often turns out to be weak, even absent, in many poorer communities. In many places ostensible "development partnerships" with the state appear to be the preserve of well-connected organisations and individuals. The case of Tladi-Moletsani is instructive, partly because of the vivid intra-community

inequalities, a pattern found in most municipalities (Everatt et al., 2004). Researchers found "virtually no evidence" of productive partnerships between civil society organisations and local government that benefited the poor. Their disheartening conclusion (Everatt et al., 2004:26) was that "politics and activism have come to be seen as avenues for the ambitious, not mechanisms for effecting change".

If it is true that civil society remains a terrain of vibrant, diverse activity – and the evidence suggests it does in South Africa – then the apparent paucity and thinness of public participation in IDPs prompts numerous questions. Does the problem lie with inappropriate or inadequate channels, mechanisms and methods for involving the public in local governance and development? Or is it a matter of poor commitment of officials? Or a lack of skills and capacity? Or a shortage of resources? Can structures such as ward committees be more effective if differently constituted? Are ward councilors sufficiently accountability to their constituencies under the current electoral model? Is the IDP itself too opaque and inhospitable – imprinted as it is with the idioms and logic of technocratic planning? Has the IDP become less of a tool (for achieving developmental goals) and more of an end in itself? Does part of the problem lie with the public "out there" – supposedly immobilised or alienated by a sense of thwarted entitlement or by the sheer remoteness of a state which, in popular sensibilities, seems to take the form of a distant, almost abstracted omnipotence? Or does it rest with the cleaved and oppositional state/civil society relationships forged during the apartheid era? Or perhaps it involves the allegedly absorptive and, at times, instrumentalist approach of the massively dominant ruling political party toward popular organisations? Or are the perceived stakes so high and margins for error so slim that social mobilisation and development has to be carefully choreographed and controlled?

The commitment to public participation in South Africa's development efforts

Since 1994, the responsibilities and expectations vested in local government have multiplied. Among the signal changes has been a widening of the focus from delivery to include long-term strategic endeavours such as poverty reduction, social and economic development, and the greater importance accorded to citizen participation (Beall et al., 2002). Since 2000, a range of adjustments have heralded speedier service and infrastructure delivery. Additional legislative provisions have been introduced, local government systems have been reorganised, the intergovernmental fiscal system has been rearranged, and an elaborate planning system has been devised (Gwagwa & Everatt, 2005). Surrounding and weighing in on this, however, is a wider context of fiscal policy (the rejection of deficit spending at the national level), financial planning regimes (principally the medium-term expenditure framework), strong political hegemony (the overwhelming dominance nationally and in most municipalities of the African National Congress, ANC, and the frequent absence of party political contestation at the local level), the prevalence of managerialist approaches and cost-recovery methods in social development, and the commodification of basic needs provision. In addition, the government's development ventures remain largely supply-driven, their pace and extent shaped largely by fiscal and institutional factors.

The insistence on popular mobilisation for, and active involvement in the planning, implementation and monitoring of development activities is rooted in the ethics and politics of many former anti-apartheid organisations and developmental good practice, learned over decades. Thus, the principle of "people-driven development" featured prominently in the Reconstruction and Development Plan, even though reality often did not match the rhetoric. Nevertheless, the need for public participation in local development is inscribed in several pieces of legislation, occurs in some policy processes, and features prominently in the Government's visions of governance and development.

Municipalities are obliged to develop mechanisms to consult and involve communities in the affairs and process of the municipality. More specifically, municipal authorities are legally required to involve community organisations in devising development priorities, crafting development plans and formulating budgets.

The Constitution of South Africa (Act no.108 of 1996) stipulates the need for democratic and accountable local government, and encourages the involvement of communities and community organisations in local government affairs. Section 152(1) calls for public involvement in local government, which is required to "provide democratic and accountable government for local communities". It specifically requires local government to "encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matter of local government", with "local authorities … provid[ing] strong leadership for their areas and their communities".

Informed by the *Constitution*, the *White Paper on Local Government* (1998) laid a firm foundation for the establishment of pro-poor developmental local government, strong citizen participation a central element (Pieterse, 2002). In the phrasing of the *White Paper*, "[d]evelopmental local government is committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives" (Government of South Africa, 1998). It also highlighted the importance of "democratising development, empowering and redistributing", while seeking a balance between regulation and facilitating community involvement (*ibid*). Incorporated into subsequent pieces of legislation, this policy framework provided a strong foundation for participatory local governance which, ideally, could enable the "full diversity and conflictual interests of the city" to be expressed (Pieterse, 2003:7). The framework and a subsequent legislative package ushered in a system of local government that is intended to pivot on an interactive relationship with communities.

Chapter 2 Section 19 of the *Municipal Structures Act* (1998) requires that municipalities, in performing their functions, develop mechanisms to consult with communities and community organisations. They are also expected to annually review the needs of communities along with the municipal strategies devised to meet those needs.

Meanwhile, the *Municipal Systems Act* (2000) stipulates that municipalities must involve local communities in the development, implementation and review of the municipalities' performance management systems. They must also allow communities to participate in setting appropriate key performances indicators and targets (Putu, 2005). The Act provides for community involvement in local development planning and budget processes, as well as in monitoring and performance review activities (in sections 2 and 5). Section 5 highlights the rights and duties of the public in relation to municipal functions. The public should be able to contribute to decision-making processes, and should be informed of pertinent council decisions. Chapter 4 requires that municipalities build the capacity of communities, stating in section 17(2) that "a municipality must establish appropriate mechanisms, processes and procedures to enable the local community to participate in the affairs of the Municipality". Section 33 requires that municipalities devise ways to consult the public on needs and priorities, and to involve them in the drafting and review of Integrated Development Plans (IDP). Chapter 3 of the same Act requires the creation of conditions that can enable participation by the disabled, illiterate and other especially disadvantaged sections of communities.

All this seems to merit the comment that although "the governance model in South Africa is still evolving … it is clear that South Africa is committed to local development and service delivery using a decentralised system of government with strong community involvement" (Gwagwa & Everatt, 2005). The challenge, it seems, is to set both those elements in harmonised motion.

Among the specific tools for bringing about a system of participatory governance development at the local level are Ward Committees (Houston, *et al* 2001). Chapter 4 (section 4) of the *Municipal Structures Act* requires that municipalities set up ward committees, which are to be chaired by ward councillors, and which are to serve as representative structures through which communities can participate in local governance and development activities, including planning and budgeting (Putu, 2005).

- **Ward Committees**

Ward committees are *advisory* bodies and are intended to make government "more responsive to the people's needs and aspirations" (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005:10). Ward councilors convene these committees, which can comprise up to 10 people drawn from the ward community.

The *Municipal Structures Act* requires that ward committees represent a "diversity of interests". Members are expected to represent the interests of the ward as a whole; they are not elected as representatives of specific local structures or interest groups. The ward councillor represents the committee in the municipal council and is required to report back regularly to the committee. In theory, then, the committee serves as an institutional channel of communication and interaction between communities and municipalities (Bolini & Ndlela 1998).

It is unclear to what extent ward committees indeed bring to bear community sentiments and proposals on local government decision-making. According to Hicks (2006), many municipalities have been struggling to put in place functioning ward committees. Hemson's (2007) review of survey data suggests that rural provinces have been most active in setting up ward committees, while their urban counterparts have lagged. Only about 40% of respondents in Gauteng knew of a ward committee in their area, for example. Notably, poor people have a better knowledge of ward committees than those who are better off: countrywide, 61% of residents in informal settlements were aware of ward committees, compared with 35% among those in formal areas and smallholdings. Half the persons who reported "no income" knew of ward committees, compared with less than one third of those in the highest income bracket.

Often when committees are in place, their status is ill-defined and they operate in clumsy and unpredictable manner (Hicks, 2006), or they appear to be paralysed by in-fighting or stand-offs with councilors (Hemson, 2007). Some are accused of serving as extensions of local councils, rather than as independent community structures (Hicks, 2006; Everatt and Gwagwa, 2005). In Hicks's caustic summary (2006:2),

> There is no clarity on the roles of ward councillors as opposed to proportional representation councillors, there are tensions between ward committee members and ward councillors, and limited resources available to enable ward committees to function.

Representation has proved to be a thorny matter, while capacity and resource constraints hamper overall effectiveness. Tensions between ward committees and (proportional representation) councillors add further

complications. Case studies suggest that councillors sometimes choose to service what they regard as their political mandates, which do not always conform with the interests and demands emanating from their committees (Putu, 2005). Conversely, there is a perception that ward committees are sometimes "captured" and used to advance the material and/or political ambitions of specific individuals or interest groups. There is evidence that councils dominated by a single political party sometimes constitute and "define the operation of committees in ways which mute potential opposition" (Everatt et al., 2004:7), while some committees appear to be stacked with cronies of councilors or interest groups in the ward (Hemson, 2007). Confrontations with councillors are said to be commonplace, with allegations of corruption or misconduct sometimes used to stoke community protests (Hicks, 2006). Thus an air of suspicion and distrust tends to cloak ward committees.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore to discover that knowledge of ward committees does not seem to lead to greater confidence in local government among community members. On the contrary, the data suggest that familiarity with ward committees seems to correlate with a slight decline in trust in local government, leading Hemson (2007:12) to state that "the ward committee system is not strengthening confidence in local government since these are not working as well as they should".

Moreover, in Gwagwa and Everatt's (2005) analysis, the lack of budgets for ward-level programme activities[56] (via, for instance, community funds and the like) means there is no tangible reward for communities with well-functioning ward committees. The fruits, if any, of the committees' efforts therefore tend to be vicarious and distant, and are unlikely to spark continued enthusiasm and sustained effort.

- **Integrated Development Planning**

Public participation is generally seen as a crucial element of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) (Gaventa & Valderama, 1999), not least because of the expectation that it strengthens their legitimacy and helps ensure that their content and strategic direction match local needs and realities. Public participation is therefore a legislative requirement in South Africa's IDP processes.

IDPs were introduced in 1996, but the process took root only after the local government elections in 2000 and after completion of the demarcation process that redrew the apartheid-era boundaries in the local sphere. IDPs are now regarded as the starting point of integrated government planning, and are seen as strategic tools for achieving greater alignment between the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and the National Spatial Development Perspective.[57] They are meant to align planning, budgeting, resource allocation and sequenced implementation management to ensure deeper development impact as well as co-ordination across departments and

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[56] The Municipal Finance Management Act (2004) stipulates that "(w)hen the annual budget has been tabled, the municipal council must consider any views of the community…." (23 [1] a).
[57] See, for example, Department of Local Government (2006). *Review of the 2006 municipal IDP engagement and commenting process in Gauteng Province.* Growth and Development subcommittee.

spheres. The plans not only inform municipal management but are also meant to guide the activities of agencies from other spheres of government, corporate service providers, NGOs and the private sector within the municipal area.

In all this, a central role is reserved for public participation – so much so that IDPs, in theory, should reflect, in some detail, needs and priorities identified by the public. The *Municipal Systems Act* requires that all municipalities develop an IDP in a manner that actively engages citizens. The Act emphasises the importance of building capacity and allocating resources for community participation. It furthermore provides for various mechanisms and procedures for taking into account the diversity of communities. Methods for helping achieve all this include IDP forums, ward committee and public meetings, "road shows", budget consultations, and more. In addition, councillors are required to engage with community members through stakeholder meetings, forums and individual consultations (Hicks, 2006).

In theory, public participation in the crafting of IDPs therefore has to ensure that pertinent local needs and priorities are reflected in the plans, and that the political and the ensuing development processes are invested with strong accountability and transparency.

But also shaping IDPs are a series of requirements and processes that emanate "higher up" in the system. For example, municipalities also have to ensure that their respective IDPs (and accompanying sector plans) fit with the Provincial Growth and Development Strategies. Municipalities then negotiate with both the provincial and national spheres in order to try and ensure that priorities identified at the local level survive the alignment and budget processes. Of course, it's conceivable that locally-identified priorities can also cascade up through the system and influence sector department submissions to the Medium Term Strategic Framework (which tries to achieve policy coherence) and even the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (which commands budgetary allocations). But the harmonisation process is more likely to see mould local agenda to the requirements of the overarching strategic, technical and financial frameworks. Public inputs into IDPs run the risk therefore of being eclipsed, perhaps even expunged, by those requirements.

Initial attempts to prepare IDPs occurred under difficult circumstances, as Harrisson has noted (2003:10). Nevertheless, he credits IDPs with, among other things, developing a more participatory form of local governance, with achieving a stronger focus on the basic needs of disadvantaged communities, and increasing municipal "ownership" of planning processes.

In Gauteng province, specifically, the quality of IDPs (in terms of strategic and operational content) appears to have improved in recent years. An official review of the 2006 IDP province praised the "great strides … made in terms of popular participation in development planning" but added tellingly that "community-based planning needs to be more broadly factored into

IDPs" (DLG, 2006:5).[58] Such planning, of course, requires substantial and substantive public participation.

Lineages of public participation & development

A broadening in the use of participatory approaches in development and local governance occurred in the 1990s. One important facet of this shift was the changing conception of the public and communities in development processes. Long regarded in mainstream development as "beneficiaries" (the more-or-less passive objects of undertakings), they came to be seen as "users" and "clients" (implying a more dynamic mix of rights and duties), and eventually as rights-bearing citizens.[59] Although belonging to profoundly different ideological traditions, those two conceptions share a strong emphasis on public participation, which is seen to extend beyond matters of consultation and evaluation, and implies active decision-making and involvement (Gaventa, 2004). In the more idealistic conceptions, citizens have evolved from being the users or, at best, choosers of public services to active participants who help craft plans and projects, and monitor their implementation (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000).

This conceptual evolution is complex but among the talismanic interventions were Amartya Sen's efforts to extend the focus of development from material well-being to boosting capabilities and empowering poor people (Sen, 1985). To some extent this drew on the radical participatory development and pedagogical practices propagated in the 1960s and early 1970s, with their emphasis on self-reliance and local empowerment.[60] Two other developments added to the resonance of perspectives such as Sen's. One was the disenchantment with so-called mega-development projects and the emergence of several withering critiques of development practice.[61] The other was the renewed emphasis on agency and subjectivity which spanned several academic disciplines and became ascendant in the 1980s. The upshot was to shift the conceptualisation of the poor from being objects (victims, beneficiaries, clients) to subjects.

But participatory development approaches emerged also amid other, formative changes. One was the turn toward decentralisation, an ambiguous trend that accompanied the neoliberal drive to adjust (or "rationalise", as some would prefer) the reach and capacities of the central state. That process has been described as a "double inversion" in development theory and practice,

> from a focus on developmentalist states to an emphasis on civil society, and, from a focus on centralised state-building to an emphasis on decentralisation and local participation (Mohan & Stokke, 2000).

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[58] It's notable, however, that this is virtually the only substantive reference to public participation in the 14-page review document.

[59] It is perhaps a little simplistic to picture these conceptual developments as neatly sequential, the one succeeding the other. The two notions have existed side-by-side (often as elements of wider political and ideological contests), and neither has yet decisively vanquished the other.

[60] See Hickey & Mohan (2003) for a pithy critique of the efforts of post-development theorists to refurbish those traditions.

[61] See, in particular, Hancock G (1989). *Lords of poverty: The power, prestige and corruption of the international aid business.* Atlantic Monthly Press. New York, and Escobar A (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World.* Princeton University Press. Princeton NJ.

Pliant and adaptable, decentralisation slotted comfortably into several ideological frameworks, and would do service both in left- and right-wing transformative projects. As such, it marked a curious compatibility between neoliberal and post-Marxist approaches to development and governance, as Mohan & Stokke (2005) have pointed out:

> According to neoliberals, civil society can exert organized pressure on autocratic and unresponsive states and thereby support democratic stability and good governance. It can also facilitate participation in development and thereby empower target groups of poor people. By contrast the post-Marxists see civil society as the expression of diverse forms of identity politics challenging the hegemony of global economic liberalism and its associated political institutions … So, what the neo-liberal right and the post-Marxist left share is a concern with the interests and agency of local 'people' and their participation in processes of empowerment.

The institutionalist turn

By the mid-1990s, as part of a wider so-called "institutionalist turn" in mainstream development establishment, the World Bank was infusing its larger-scale interventions with participatory elements. Soon after, it was declaring empowerment to be a fundamental priority for development policy (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).[62] Meanwhile, the failure of structural adjustment programmes had seen attention shift toward institutions and governance as key variables in reversing the implosive trends underway in many economies and societies of the South. Empowerment (and, by implication, participation) came to feature strongly in this discourse, too – though chiefly in an instrumental fashion, as MacLean (2003) has reminded.

Approaches that had emerged out of trenchant, sometimes militant critiques of development practice had now been appropriated (some might prefer "domesticated") by orthodoxy. An important aspect of the appeal of these new approaches lay in the expectation that a combination of decentralisation and local-level participation would help build legitimacy and improve the quality and flow of information about people's needs and desires – all of which is supposed to render resource allocation more efficient.[63] This, as we show below, is one of the driving motives for investing local development planning and processes with greater public participation.

Meanwhile, the changing status of cities, especially large metropolises, within national and global economies also encouraged a shift away from old-school development. By the 1990s, cities around the world were trying to catapult themselves into the global realm as economic powerhouses by positioning themselves a "basing points in the spatial organisation and articulation of production and markets" (Friedmann, 1986:315). Indeed, the idea of the "turbo-charged" city became a hallmark of the neoliberal phase

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[62] See, for example, World Bank (2001). *World Development Report 2000/2001*. World Bank. Washington.

[63] That much is clear in World Bank documents: "Although politics is the driving force behind decentralization in most countries, decentralization may be one of those happy instances in which good politics and good economics serve the same end. The political objectives of increased political responsiveness and participation at the local level can coincide with the economic objectives of better decisions about the use of public resources and increased willingness to pay for services". See Ford J (1999). Rationale for Decentralization?. In Litvack J & Seddon J (eds.). *Decentralization Briefing Notes*. World Bank Institute. The World Bank. Washington D.C.

of globalisation.[64] As such, it also drew into sharper focus the many imprints that both national and international dynamics leave on the realm of "the local" (Mohan & Stokke, 2000).

Johannesburg planners, for example, have harboured similar aspirations over the years (see box), although these have matured and incorporated a more developmentalist outlook that can benefit the city's poorer, disadvantaged residents. "Within the same city, as Robinson (2002:11), has noted, "quite different policy agendas and imagined futures circulate together".

A developmentalist world class city?

Johannesburg's world city aspirations are modulated with concerns about the effects of such a development path on poverty levels, spatial and other inequalities, and job creation. The lodestar is no longer the Euro-American model favoured in the final decades of the apartheid era, and has been replaced by the idea of an "African world class city" (Robinson, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999).[65] Nevertheless, a city seeking to grow as a factor in the global economy finds itself subject to a powerful structural undertow that connects it to other metropolitan economic nodes and thereby incorporates it deeper into the circuitry of global capitalism. The idea of becoming a staging post for flows of capital, goods and services, with the benefits being made to spill across the urban realm in line with various socioeconomic development objectives is attractive. The architects of the *iGoli 2010* plan, for example, have sought to draw in a "partnership" of key stakeholders while seeking a formula for transforming the city into a globally competitive metropolis:

> The primary object of this long-term plan is to deal with the ongoing development paradox that the city finds itself in. This refers to achieving a balance between addressing basic needs and service backlogs on the one hand and ensuring economic growth and competitiveness on the other. The council's approach addresses both elements simultaneously since improvements to one element contributes to the benefit of the other element.[66]

The perspective is laudable, but moot. There is a very strong likelihood of the urban economy becoming more firmly and functionally articulated to other nodes in the global economy – very likely at the expense of its functionality to those sectors of society and the economy deemed peripheral to the global economy. As James Ferguson (2006:47) has noted in the African context,

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[64] See, for example, Brenner N & Theodore N (2002). Cities and the Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism'. *Antipode*, 34(3): 349-379; Borja J & and Castells M (1997). *Local and Global: The Management of Cities in the Information Age*. Earthscan.

[65] Tomlinson R (1999). An economic strategy for the Johannesburg central city. Draft manuscript. Graduate School of Public Development Management, University of Witwatersrand. Johannesburg. Cited in Robinson J (2003). Johannesburg's futures: beyond developmentalism and global success. In Tomlinson R, Beauregard R, Bremner L & Mangcu, X. (Eds.) *Emerging Johannesburg*. Routledge. London. The phrasing is intriguing. Does it mean a world-class city that happens to be in Africa, or one that is invested with particular "African" characteristics? If the latter, the question arises what those characteristics might be and in what ways they might differ from a Latin American or Asian city?

[66] See iGoli Online, iGoli 2010 Partnership. Cited in Robinson (2002:13).

> the 'global' does not 'flow', thereby connecting and watering contiguous spaces; it hops instead, efficiently connecting the enclaved points in the network while excluding (with equal efficiency) the spaces that lie between the points.[67]

Planners have also recognised that the *dirigiste* approach of top-down, centralised development was ill-suited for such quests. But also unattractive, certainly to the elites of the market and state, was a radical democratic approach which potentially could shift initiative and power to citizens. Nonetheless, strategies for achieving such ambitions had to be "politically embedded amongst the diverse stakeholders in the city", as Pieterse (2003:9) has reminded, or else they risk being scuttled by popular reactions. Hence the now-customary practice of trying to shepherd "world-class" city development strategies along participatory processes of a sort. Those processes tend to be neo-corporatist in character, with stakeholder forums often serving as platforms for marshalling the requisite legitimacy to survive the churn of urban economic, political and social complexities.[68] Pieterse (2003:10) presents a useful summary of criticisms of this approach:

> (1) It legitimizes decisions that are taken by proxies of elite interests and consequently fulfils a function of cooptation through 'corporatist localism' (Ruppert 2000); (2) It potentially subverts the emergence of oppositional political discourses and practices by framing such actions as illegitimate and undemocratic, because these emanate from outside of the negotiation framework (Fainstein 2000); (3) It reinforces divisions within poor and marginalized communities because these forums tend to draw in relatively better-off community associations that crowd-out less organised and articulate associations (Cooke & Kothari, 2001); (4) It undermines informal and non-rational livelihood strategies of the poor through an insistence on working with formal planning frameworks and rationalities (Cleaver 2001).

Moreover, the approach tends to cater for better-organised, -resourced and –networked formations, at the risk of excluding and delegitimising others. It's in such contexts that direct action by groupings of the marginalised and poor become potentially important forms of public participation, according to Pieterse (2003:11):

> [U]nless business interests and the middle classes are publicly and incessantly compelled to ascribe to the importance of redistribution, it is virtually impossible to use local government service provision and taxation as effective tools to achieve greater equity in the city.

The circle has not yet been squared, though. Radical understandings of participation have survived among networks of social justice and community activism that regard "the local" as the realm most conducive to achieving thoroughgoing change. In this, once again insurgent conception, participation is still seen to hold the promise of deepening – in fact, authenticating – democracy and achieving social justice.

South Africa's transition to democracy occurred as these shifts in discourse and practice were taking hold globally. As in the realm of economic policy, South Africa chose to paddle with the tide of orthodoxy:

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[67] Ferguson J (2006). Global Shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order. Duke University Press. Durham.

[68] See Ruppert E (2000). Who governs the global city?. In Isin EF (ed.) *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City.* Routledge. London; Fainstein S (2000). New Directions in Planning Theory. *Urban Affairs Review*, 35(4): 451-478; Cooke B & Kothari U (eds.) (2001). *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London. Zed Books; Cleaver F (2001). Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development. In Cooke B & Kothari U (eds) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London. Zed Books.

> Now the municipality becomes the primary development champion, the major conduit for poverty alleviation, the guarantor of social and economic rights, the enabler of economic growth, the principal agent of spatial or physical planning and the watchdog for environmental justice … Although accountable to national and provincial government, the local authority assumes enormous responsibility both for defining and implementing development priorities. (Parnell & Pieterse 2002: 82-83)

For various reasons, then, participatory local governance and development has become thoroughly mainstreamed, if unevenly realised. Intrinsically neither conservative nor progressive, its definition has turned out to be pliable, while its social and political content depends largely on the nature of the political project and on the kind of *state* in which it is pushed into service.

What kind of state?

Embedded in the various notions and forms of public participation are different conceptions of the state and its relationship with society. Those understandings conjure pictures that range from a kind of Weberian Xanadu to Marxist caricature. At the one extreme, one encounters the idea of an autonomous state that can be insulated from social, political and economic interests, and in which civil servants exercise authority and allocate resources in rational, dispassionate ways. The world is approached as a technical puzzle that can be altered with cool-headed adjustments and calibrations. At the other extreme lies the notion of a fully instrumentalised state which operates at the behest of capital and therefore functions in ways that are fundamentally at odds with the interests of the poor.

Both conceptions are somewhat burlesque. Sandwiched between them lie more nuanced understandings of the state (Johnson and Start, 2001). The *pluralist* model, for example, pictures the state as a more or less neutral arena in which a wide range of competing interests intersect and shape policy (Dahl, 1973). Meanwhile, the *corporatist* model envisages a state that actively draws in some and screens out other interest groups from policymaking processes. Access and involvement is rationed but decisive. For its part, the *institutionalist* model ascribes to the state and its personnel significant autonomy, but assigns to civil society a potentially powerful modulating influence on state decision-making. Significantly, it acknowledges that state personnel can develop and pursue interests of their own, to some extent irrespective of the pressures exerted by other social forces (Rueschemeyer, Skocpol & Evans, 1985). The *structuralist* model, which belongs in the Marxist tradition, pictures a state which *can* acquire certain degrees of relative autonomy from dominant class interests and therefore can service a variety of apparently conflicting needs over time. But in the final analysis, the state remains beholden to the overarching requirements of the capitalist system as a whole (Poulantzas, 1973). Its transformatory potential can seem significant but is ultimately, in the long-run, limited.

In vogue in South Africa, meanwhile, is the conviction that the post-apartheid state can aptly be termed *developmental*. Such a state is said to orient its activities around a clear set of economic and development goals, and is equipped with robust-enough autonomy to deploy its administrative

and political resources in pursuit of those goals (Evans, 1995; White, 1998; Mkandawire, 2001). Evans' (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy" has proved especially attractive in the South African context. As Edigheji (2005) has noted, this involves an arrangement where the autonomy of state institutions enables them to shape and pursue *strategic* developmental goals, while the state's "embeddedness" in society enables it to form alliances with key social groups in order to achieve those goals.[69] At play, in other words, is a mix of autonomy and connectedness between state and civil society. As we see below, the experiences of participatory development in Porto Alegre (Brazil) and Kerala (India) have involved state formations which seem to fit such a model. Whether or not the South African state in fact answers to such a description might be moot, but distinguishing the more democratic variants of this model is the centrality of a mobilised civil society that is capable of engaging the state as a critical – in both senses of the word – ally. Ideally, what is sought is, in Evans's (2002) phrasing, an "ecology of agents" – an "interdependent, interconnected set of complementary actors".

The many meanings of public participation

Calls for greater public participation in local development have become so commonplace that its benefits seem axiomatic. In Robert Chambers' (1997) estimation, the benefits are so attractive that, once institutions encounter them, participation would spread through them like a "benign virus". Indeed, the expectations heaped on public participation are such that its benefits sometimes are viewed in overwrought terms. Thus participation is said to boost self-reliance, constitute an "essential part of human growth" (Nampila, 2005), and have the potential to "reduce poverty and social injustice" (Taylor & Fransman 2004: 1). For their part, Midgeley et al. (1986) and Oakley et al. (1991) credit public participation with accelerating social and economic development, while Mathekga and Buccus (2006) position public participation at the heart of what makes local government "tick":

> For the local government system to live up to its potential, it depends not only on availability of skilled personnel and financial resources but also on the role played by communities in the structures.

However grand the ultimate hopes pinned on public participation, there is wide agreement that it is likely to improve governance, planning and project decision-making in a variety of ways. Blair (2000) credits public participation with ensuring better allocation of resources at local level and boosting poverty reduction, as does Osamani (2000). Nampila (2005) hails its role in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of projects, while Taylor

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[69]. Edigheji's paper forms part of an ongoing debate about the relevance for African states of "developmental state" models derived from the post-World War Two East Asian experiences. For more, see Chang H-J (1999). The economic theory of the developmental state. In Woo-Cuming M. *The developmental state*. Cornell University Press. New York; Herring R (1999). Embedded particularism: India's failed developmental state. In Woo-Cuming M. *The developmental state*. Cornell University Press. New York; Kevane M & Englebert P (1999). A developmental state without growth: Explaining the paradox of Burkina Faso in comparative perspective. In Karl W, Bass H & Messner F. *African Development Perspectives Yearbook 1997/98*. Lit Verlag. Munster; Leftwich A (1995). Bringing politics back. *Journal of Development Studies*, 31(3). February; Mkandawire T (1998). Thinking about developmental states in Africa. Paper presented at the UNU-AERC workshop on 'Institutions and Development in Africa', UNU Headquarters, Tokyo, Japan, October 14-15; Woo-Cuming M (ed.) (1999). *The Developmental State*. Cornell University Press. New York.

& Fransman (2004:1) welcome its usefulness in "strengthening citizen rights and voice, influencing policy-making, enhancing local governance, and improving the accountability and responsiveness of institutions". Overall then, public participation is expected to deepen local democracy and enhance local development initiatives. These expectations can broadly be grouped into two, overlapping camps. In one, participation carries great value in and of itself; in the other, it is a valuable means to a desired end.

A good in its own right

Arrayed at one end are appraisals that focus on the fundamental worth of public participation. It "broadens and deepens democracy by expanding the range of citizens engaged in making or influencing government decisions" (Friedman, 2006:4), making it "intrinsic to the core meaning of democracy" (Sisk, 2001:147). In doing so, it is expected to serve as a bulwark against the domination of local government and development by elites. Local government then becomes more sensitive to the full spectrum of needs and aspirations in a community and more accountable to it. Participation also is expected to suffuse a community with an authentic sense of involvement in local government decisions and actions. Many advocates headline the empowering dimension of public participation which is said to enable community members "to take responsibility for their own development and to improve their decision-making power" (Schurink, adapted in Raniga & Simpson, 2002).[70] Others emphasise its potential importance in increasing "the democratic oversight of active citizens, especially those whose human rights are systematically denied due to inadequate services and lack of opportunities" (Pieterse, 2003:7). The odds of success on those fronts are believed to strengthen when the dominant political force brings to bear supportive political values and practices (Pieterse, 2003).

A means to a desired end

The emphasis on legitimacy and sustainability features strongly among the "pragmatic" range of benefits proponents extol. Mainstream development discourse values public participation especially for its potential to boost the quality, relevance and sustainability of development processes – by widening influence and control over decisions and resources (World Bank, 1995). It's often assumed that once government moves closer to communities, a bountiful synergy is triggered between participation and good governance. As poor people get to exercise "voices", greater accountability and institutional responsiveness is expected to follow. Conversely, as concerns about good governance grow, the pressure increases to find new ways for citizens to engage the state (Gaventa, 2002). Eventually, participation and good governance combine in a mutually reinforcing and wholesome union. Expectations include boosted accountability, strengthened governance, and the enhanced legitimacy and sustainability of development initiatives – especially when participatory processes penetrate core state activities (Ackerman, 2004; Holmes & Scoones, 2000).

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[70] This perspective draws on Friedmann's (1992) disempowerment model of poverty. It holds that poor people lack both basic material needs and also access to basic zones of social power; the latter debility helps trap them in material poverty. See Friedmann J (1992). *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development.* Cambridge: Blackwell.

Also highlighted is the importance of more accurate information, which greater public participation is expected to bring to the surface. It is generally believed that community groups tend to have better information about local conditions than national (and even local) state officials (Heller, 2002). It would seem to follow, then, that the stronger the involvement and influence of those groups, the more appropriate and effective development initiatives will be. As government moves closer to communities, it's expected to become more knowledgeable about the communities and their needs, more likely to respond appropriately to those needs, and therefore more likely to function effectively and accountably (Johnson, 2001, Crook & Sverrisson 2001; Hutchcroft 2001). Such a set of assumptions seems to underpin the emphasis placed on public participation in the IDP.

Some evidence, however, casts doubt on such assumptions. In communities marked by significant inequalities, programmes seem not to target the poor very well even when local groups are involved. Conning and Kevane's (2002) review of community-based targeting, for example, suggests that the poor are targeted best in more *egalitarian* settings where decision-making is open and transparent. It is also questionable whether perfunctory forms of significantly improve the extent and quality of information available to planners.[71]

So public participation does not perforce bring about the anticipated close and efficient fit between the self-perceived needs of the poor and appropriate development activities. The key factors, it seems, are two-fold: firstly, the type and the depth of participation (see below) and, secondly, *who* in the community gets to frame needs and press home corresponding demands (and the extent to which those demands also reflect the needs of the most disadvantaged sections of the community). Participatory processes that transcend consultative and corporatist forms are uncommon at local government level; the ceding of significant powers and responsibilities to the public are rare. And it's often the better-educated and better-networked sections of communities who gain the projects that match their preferences (Mansuri & Rao, 2004; Friedman, 2006). Sometimes, those preferences can be widely beneficial (a new school, a paved road, a recreation centre, for example) or those comparatively privileged groupings can self-consciously set out to represent the interests of disenfranchised parts of the community. But such altruistic representation or inclusiveness of interests are not necessarily the norm.

Other, more opportunistic motives sometimes kindle official enthusiasm for public participation. According to Ackerman (2004), for example, state officials occasionally clamber aboard the bandwagon of participatory development partly because it holds the prospect of cost-reductions, especially if some service delivery and maintenance responsibilities can be offloaded onto communities in the guise of "ownership" and "community empowerment". Mansuri & Rao (2004:7) concur and warn that participation can become "an instrument for promoting pragmatic policy interests, such as cost-effective delivery or low-cost maintenance, rather than a vehicle for

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[71] This is evident from initial field research in 5 Gauteng municipal wards, conducted for this study.

radical social transformation".[72] However, it is generally accepted – and empirically evident – that strong public participation can improve the quality and sustainability of outcomes, even when projects do not undo community-level inequalities (Hicks, 2006).

In South African discourse, public participation is expected to help achieve any and all of the above. But special expectations, it seems, are staked on its role in "extending voices" and deepening democratic practices. Indeed the normative framework for enhancing participation underscores those aspects, as Friedman (2006) has pointed out. *Izimbiso* (community meetings involving the president, ministers and other high-ranking government officials), for example, are widely credited with exemplifying such "democratising" participation.

A brief overview of recent public participation in local development in South Africa[73]

Attempts to democratize local governance and development mark have the potential of becoming defining features of the post-apartheid transition. These innovations did not, however, emerge on a blank slate. Radical precedents were set during the 1970s and especially the 1980s by local organizations engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle. One echo of this was the clarion call for "people-centred development" that characterised development discourse in the early 1990s, and which found expression in various public policies. Emphasized in such an orientation were principles of equity, accountability, transparency and democracy (Williams, 2005).

Introduced steadily in the past 13 years has been a system of democratic local government that allows and enables citizens to participate in local governance and development. Those opportunities are embedded in a battery of legislation, underpinned by the South African Constitution, and range from municipal elections to participation in development forums, ward and other local committees, public petitions and public protests (discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this text). There can be little doubt that a strong commitment to participatory governance exists, even if the realization of that commitment remains uneven.

Municipalities generally have been using similar instruments to enable participation at the local level, with regular public meetings (including on the IDP process), ward committees, mayoral "road shows" and "listening campaigns" among the most-common. Participation in the IDP process was hesitant and haphazard at first, but nevertheless by the early 2000s constituted, according to one assessment, the most intensive citizens' involvement in municipal planning in South Africa's history (Davids, 2005). While documentation of such efforts has grown, very few participatory development initiatives in South Africa have been subjected to critical scrutiny and analysis. But when such assessment has occurred, the conclusions have tended to be less than sanguine.

Thus, a review of public participation in the Western Cape, for example, found that *de facto* obstacles continued to limit effective participation, and concluded that "the constitutional and legislative requirements for participation that have been instituted are a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful participation in the South African socio-economic context" (Davids, 2006). Similarly, when assessed, the use of "area coordinating teams" to foster public participation in neighbourhoods on the Cape

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[72] Mansuri & Rao cite as an example Ribot JC (1995). From exclusion to participation: Turning Senegal's forestry policy around. *World Development*, 23(9): 1587-99.
[73] For more, please refer to the critical review of literature at Appendix A.

Flats[74] was adjudged to be "good policy – on paper" but in practice "a structural failure". Mandated actions were non-binding and the process incidental to the "regular business" of the city council (Williams, 2003 & 2004). Mackay's (2004) review of community participation on development forums in Cape Town also contrasted enthusiastic and well-organized participation (especially in the sub-councils of Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plan) with the institutional torpor proposals encountered in the city's Planning Department.

Mayoral "listening campaigns" were introduced in Cape Town to open "space" for community participation in budgeting processes, but a lack of structural and logistical support within the City undermined the desired outcomes. Many of the obstacles were institutional, with moribund or inappropriate council structures often entrusted with facilitating public participation in the IDP (Williams, 2006). Indeed, the City of Cape Town's recent review of public participation in the IDP highlighted a need for a more structured system and process for participation, and deemed it necessary to reiterate the fact that participation should amount to more than consultation (City of Cape Town, 2006).

In KwaZulu-Natal, the establishment of the unified eThekwini municipality provided an opportunity to strengthen and entrench public participation across the metropolitan area (Moodley, 2007). While some progress was made, participation (particularly stakeholder participation) was, on assessment, found to have been "erratic and event-dependent". Engagement around strategic planning was deemed uneven (Moodley, 2007:6). Various formats of participation have been attempted, ranging from the "blue sky" approach (which was found to be time-consuming and generally unrewarding), to a more focused approach in which strategy teams develop strategic proposals for various sectors. Those proposals are then examined, debated and revised by citizens and stakeholders. When combined with mass communication and publicity drives, and spearheaded by a dedicated team, this approach appears to bring results (Moodley, 2007). However, further afield, a review of local HIV/AIDS initiatives in the Umzinyathi municipality (in the centre-north of the province) concluded that public participation was "at a very low level" (Mantzaris & Ngcobo, 2007).

Public participation also seems largely concentrated around the initial, needs-assessment phase of the IDP (LK John Consulting, 2006). Again, this runs the risk of ceremonializing participation, since it is in later phases that explicit choices are made, and budgetary decisions are taken. This underscores a further, major challenge that remains largely unmet – enabling citizens' engagement in budgetary decision-making. Attempts have been made in Buffalo City and Stellenbosch, for example, but community inputs were found to be minor and ineffectual (partly because they were funneled into the capital budget, which has little leeway for discretionary spending). Despite such efforts, "it is not clear whether communities are able to influence municipal spending in a meaningful way", according to one recent analysis (LK John Consulting, 2006).

Other assessments have highlighted several practical shortcomings in efforts to involve citizens in the IDP process. In Vosloorus and Thembelihle, for example, public IDP meetings have been criticized for being too large, too brief or too regimented to allow for meaningful input and discussion. There, as well as in Diepsloot, officials were accused of using the meetings to push home their own agenda. In Ivory Park, public participation appears to be relatively hale, but it does not extend to the integration and approval phases of the IDP (Planact, 2007).

Generally, then, it appears that spaces and events are being fashioned for community input into development processes such as the IDP, but that these often remain formalistic and consultative, and lack the substantive weight and authority needed to influence processes in a sustained and meaningful way.

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[74] Specifically, in Gugulethu, Hanover Park, Heideveld, Langa and Manenberg.

Other observers have claimed also that participation generally has been dominated by relatively privileged minorities, and that poorer, less-organised citizens often feel disempowered when trying to participate (Buccus & Hicks, 2005). Analysis of the SASAS survey seems to support such views, and shows that levels of participation in local government generally are not high, although poor South Africans seem to stake considerable hope in local structures (Hemson, 2007).

A typology of public participation

Public participation can refer to any number of activities or practices. It can include making submissions to a policy process, helping craft, implement and monitor initiatives (Friedman, 2006) or, more "mundanely", contacting council officials to alert them to a particular issue or organising a petition to drive home a demand. Or it can involve the "ownership of a development process, bottom-up planning, grassroots planning, public involvement, participatory planning, democratic planning, and collaborative planning", and the like (Putu, 2005:8). Accordingly, Harrison (2003:27-28) insists that participation be seen as part of "a process around which social groupings can organise to present their interests" within a conducive environment.

One can disentangle from such descriptions – and from practical experiences – several types of public participation in development processes. These range from *passive* to *interactive* participation, or as depicted in Arnstein's "ladder of participation" (1969), from tokenistic to empowering forms of participation. The various rungs or categories of participation can be classified in all manner of ways, Arnstein's being one example. But ultimately, the taxonomy would be based on a ranking of types participation – from, at one end, those types that are largely ceremonial, to those, at the other end, that involve redistributions of power in favour citizens (see below). Such ranking groups together, on one hand, types of participation such as these:

- ▪ *Passive participation*. People are informed about a completed or impending project, but are afforded no input into the project. This is an old-school approach, thoroughly discredited and typically associated with failure.

- ▪ *Participation through investment*. People participate by contributing labour or money to a pre-determined project. Financial contributions have been found to be useful for helping ensure the maintenance of projects after support and funds have been exhausted.

- ▪ *Consultative or legitimating participation*. People are consulted and presented with options about some aspects of projects which to a large extent already are finalised. Or people's needs and preferences are canvassed, and external agents then devise and plans which might or might not address those priorities. Public meetings feature prominently. People might be informed of the outcomes, and their opinions might even solicited again, but there is no guarantee that

these will be taken into account.[75] Although one of the motives is to win legitimacy, the approach tends to undermine itself. Suspicion that participation amounts to lip-service eventually undermines the process (OECD, 2001). Such participation tends to be momentary and short-lived, highly-selective and one-directional. One example would be a stand-alone community sample survey which includes no dialogue, where the information being gathered can be predetermined by the questions posed, and which includes no follow-up. The quality of information might be highly valuable, but the participatory content is minimal. Focus groups are a more probing and intensive variant of such consultation. In both cases, information is gathered and then removed into another domain of reflection, analysis and decision-making to which community members might or might not have access.

▪ **Stakeholder participation**. Here organised groupings are granted a stake or shared "ownership" of a project by involving them in the planning and implementation stages. The aim is to draw key interest groups into a process in order to boost legitimacy, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and sustainability. The limitations of this approach can be stretched but in practice it tends to be lodged in a neo-corporatist form that operates on exclusionary principles.

Public meetings are the most common methods for these types participation, and come in various guises. Regimented, information-sharing meetings run the risk of ritualising participation and stripping it of substance. But regular meetings that allow for dialogue with and questioning of officials, and that form part of wider ongoing processes related to a development initiative can be very valuable, especially if conducted in ways that enable women and young people to attend *and participate*.

Meanwhile, at the "higher", more idealistic end of such a ranking, one is likely to encounter forms of participation such as these:

▪ **Interactive participation**. People enlist the help of external professionals to help gather information, analyse situations, and draft projects and plans. The ongoing support of service NGOs are essential – not only in technical areas, but also for advocacy, engaging state apparatuses and tracking outcomes. Actual public participation varies. In some cases, NGOs act as surrogates, in others strong collaboration occurs. The NGOs, though, are the linchpin. (In the South African context, for example, community development workers (CDWs) and ward committees are intended to play an analogous liaison and channelling role in relation to the public.)

▪ **Rights-based participation**. Groups of people claim and exercise decision-making powers on issues affecting them, with participation both an entry-point and aspect of wider bids to realise rights (Eyben,

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[75] An example might be the *izimbizo* which see politicians and senior government officials visiting villages and townships to meet with and hear the concerns of "ordinary" citizens.

2003; Hickey & Mohan, 2003; Gaventa, 2002). The processes and arena for participation can be created and managed from within the state (as with the participatory budget processes of Porto Alegre, for example). Groups of citizens might also embark on their own initiatives, either entirely of their own accord or alongside and drawing on the assistance of other institutions (including those of the state). The initiatives sometimes occur beyond the perimeters of conventional development planning, and can straddle the realms of legality and illegality. In so far as it involves claiming and exercising certain powers usually regareded as the preserve of the state, rights-based participation addresses an enduring criticism of mainstream forms of public participation – which is that they ultimately leave the *status quo* untouched. Hence Arnstein's (1969: 216) rejoinder that "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process".[76]

Whatever the schema, at one end one encounters a variety of efforts (some perfunctory, others more elaborate and substantive) by external structures to coax communities into nominal and discrete involvement in an expansive decision-making and planning process. Public involvement tends to momentary (occurring at various points in predetermined processes) and "ceremonial". At best, such participation amounts to a kind of harvesting of legitimacy. It can garner political support and funding for a project or plan, and perhaps temporarily insulate it against criticism or challenge. It is a highly *political* intervention which, whatever the initial intentions, ends up instrumentalising the "public" or the "community".[77]

At the other end of the spectrum occur forms of participation that are potentially liberatory in process (in so far as they entail and spur empowerment and self-mobilisation) and transformatory in content (in that they redistribute access to resources and services). Fundamentally, they involve redistributions of power.

This suggests that attempts to measure public participation would need to explore two sets of questions: How *wide* is the reach of participation, and how *deep* is it? Any single participatory initiative therefore would be "narrow" or "wide", and "shallow" or "deep".

One might picture this as two axis on a graph – the Y axis tracking the depth of participation, and the X axis depicting the breadth of participation.

The *breadth* or *reach* of participation could be gauged in terms of *who* participates (inclusivity) and the *extent* of that participation (duration and sustainability). With respect to the IDP, for instance, participation that is intermittent, involves small and random selections of individual participants,

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[76] One poster produced by protesting French students in 1968 captured the view pithily. It read "je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent" (I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate, they profit). See Arnstein SR (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *JAIP*, 35(4):216-224. Available at http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html

[77] "[W]here there is poor service delivery amidst broad participation – although this configuration is unlikely – there may be low levels of disgruntlement with the system", according to Mathekga & Buccus (2006:15). Participation then functions also a hegemonic tool that is used to build or reinforce popular consent.

is restricted mainly to early planning stages, and includes little or monitoring of implementation would rank as "narrow participation".

Similarly, the depth of participation would be *shallow* if it is limited to expressing needs and demands (with little say over prioritisation), does not touch on budgeting (and other "higher-order") decisions, lacks clear and enforceable accountability elements, and does not affect the distribution of power and resources. In other words, a process in which the destiny of public demands is decided in "distant" and inaccessible zones of the state, with minimal accountability, would count as "shallow participation".

Measuring public participation

The next step would be to try and refine criteria for gauging "width" and "depth".

Nussbaum (1997) has proposed several *quantitative* and *qualitative* indicators of success, based on her research in Stutterheim (in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province), where sections of the community mobilised to press home an array of complaints and demands.

Quantitative indicators, for example, would track a decline in the number of protest marches and violent incidents, levels of participation, and several socio-economic indicators. Participation indicators could include petition signatures, the number of meetings held, attendances at meetings, submissions received, the number of people actively involved in an ongoing manner in a process, etc. Socio-economic indicators could measure gains and benefits to the community by way of job opportunities, their duration and distribution (in terms of gender, neighbourhoods, etc.), as well as households gaining access to specific services, the affordability and sustainability of such access, rates of hunger in a community (as reflected in surveys), etc. (Nussbaum, 1997:29-30).[78] That, of course, assumes a causal relationship between the participation and the socio-economic outcomes.

Qualitative indicators are more elusive. These tend to refer to the degree of community participation (Oakley *et al.*, 1991) and therefore are entangled in the phenomena of "voices" and "empowerment". Somehow, therefore, this set of indicators would need to measure whether and the extent to which people are able to take meaningful decisions that help shape a project or plan, and whether they have acquired and can use the skills and resources to act on those decisions (Everatt & Gwagwa, 2004). It implies that at least some power and responsibility is shared or ceded.

Ideally, *qualitative* indicators would also capture changes in g*roup behaviour*. According to Oakley et al. (1991), those would relate to the changing nature of involvement of project group members, an emerging sense of collective will and solidarity, involvement in group discussions, and the ability to analyse and resolve disputes and challenges. The indicators would also track trends in organisational growth – including the involvement

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[78] Negative quantitative indicators might include an increase in protest actions – though, paradoxically, such an increase could lead to demands being met and, hence, entail successful participation.

of group members, changes in the internal structure of projects, allocation of roles to members, decision-making processes, and more (Dube, 2007).

Although sensible at first glance, the qualitative/quantitative division seems too opaque and fuzzy an abstraction. More suggestive is Morrissey's (2000) grouping of criteria or indicators:

- *Process* indicators, which measure both the extent and quality of participation in an ongoing development process,
- *Developmental* indicators, which gauge the impact of participation on self-development and community capacity, and the extent to which it challenges existing imbalances and inequalities, and
- *Impact* indicators, which measure the impact of participation on policy or change.

By building on that categorisation and on several of the discrete indicators proposed by Nusbaum, and by drawing on other suggestions distilled from the reviewed literature, the following grouping emerges.

Capacities and processes

Are potential participants well-informed about the process and their roles in it? Do they understand the technicalities and idioms in which issues, processes and options are couched? Are they presented with the opportunities to achieve such understanding? Do the processes and mechanisms enable participants to influence and track outcomes?

The assumption that the poorest, most marginalised sections of a community, given some awareness and opportunity, shall participate in processes that potentially affect their wellbeing and prospects is questionable. At the very least, participation requires that the process is known, its implications are understood and its benefits are demonstrated.

Inclusivity

Vital, too, is the question whether participation diminishes or perpetuates existing inequalities between classes, social groupings, and men and women (Johnson & Start, 2001). There is a risk that participation processes favour those who already have the capacity and resources to access the circuits of decision-making – that the "new" channels for participation replicate existing lines of marginalisation and reinforce dominant discourses (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). La Ferrara's (2002) research in rural Tanzania, for example, revealed an inverse relationship between levels of inequality and levels of participation in villages: the more inequality, the lower the participation. In situations of greater inequality, proposals were less likely to be put to a vote, financial irregularities were more commonplace, and groups were more likely to split along ethnic or income lines (La Ferrara, 2002). Again, the extensive importance of *context* enters the frame.

Who gets to participate within communities, which seldom if ever "constitute a homogeneous economic and social unit" (Oakley et al, 1991:13)?[79] Oddly,

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[79] It's because of such ubiquitous difference and disparity within communities that it's more accurate to speak of "public" rather than "community" participation. The former phrasing tacitly acknowledges and accommodates the

there remains a residual attachment to images of communities as seamless social entities shaped by relations of solidarity (Cleaver, 2001). Often circulating amid calls for greater public participation is the unspoken assumption that participation will help erase or subsume economic, gender and other inequalities, bridge educational disparities and stifle political contestation (Schafft & Greenwood, 2000). In such views, differences within outwardly "homogenous" communities are seen as superficial – even artificial – and can be overcome or defused through collective processes that activate common interests. These tend to be fictions, however. Communities embody – and are shaped by – power imbalances, inequalities and complex circuits of contestation over resources, assets, opportunities and authority. Indeed, in Navarro's (1984) view, communities are better understood as sets of power relations within which people are grouped.

Do well-organised and -networked groups dominate? Which sets of interests do they represent, and to what extent are those interests generalisable (in the sense that they overlap with broader needs and aspirations)? Does the process limit the abilities of local powerbrokers or aspirants to act as gatekeepers and manage the outcomes?

Numerous factors discourage or prevent the more marginalised and disadvantaged sections of communities from participating in development processes. For one, the costs of participating in such processes in a sustained way are relatively high (Johnson & Start, 2001). Gender inequalities tend to be especially unrelenting and hard-edged at local level. Local political and social culture tends to be less supportive of women's rights and participation, and women tend to face more barriers than men when it comes to participating in local affairs (Agarwal, 2001; McLean, 2003). Deliberate exclusion is not uncommon.[80] At play, too, are varying degrees of internalised disempowerment – the sense that one is incapable of participation and/or that participation amounts to nothing anyway. Criteria would need to measure the extent such inhibiting or exclusionary factors are countered.

Impact

Morrissey (2000) argues that it is important to separate indicators of participation from impact indicators, since the latter usually are slow to materialise and become visible. On this front, any number of criteria present themselves. The challenge is to capture both material changes (infrastructure, services, employment opportunities etc.) *and* relational changes (the nature of nature, duration and scale of public involvement, changes in the distribution of opportunities, influence and resources, and changes in the ways decisions are taken and processes are managed).

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varieties of needs, interests and aspirations that shape communities. The latter phrasing implies homogeneity and common-mindedness that tends to be fictitious. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) have taken a step further to question whether local "communities" in the sense of homogenous, well-bounded and distinct entities with shared needs, values, sentiments and ideologies exist at all. "What is presumed to be a 'community", they observe, "is invariably found to be a very heterogeneous group of people with multiple interrelated axes of difference, including wealth, gender, age, religion, ethnicity and, by implication power" (1995:1673).
See Cornwall A & Jewkes R (1995). What is participatory research? *Social Science Medicine*, 41(12):1667-1676.
[80] See, for example, Agarwal B (2001). Participatory exclusions, community forestry and gender: An analysis for South Asia and a conceptual Framework. *World Development*, 29(10):1623-48.

Do participants (re)shape decisions and practices? Are they able to hold the local state and other actors accountable for (in)actions? Does participation limit the opportunities for resources and benefits to be captured by elites? Does it reduce exclusion? Does the process (potentially) reduce or reinforce existing patterns of marginalisation and deprivation? Does it help redistribute power or, Arnstein's (1969: 218) phrasing, does the process go beyond a "ritual of participation" to constitute "real power … to affect the outcome of the process"?

Boundaries of the possible

Progressive critiques of mainstream participatory development understandings tend to single out their alleged disregard of the inherently *political* nature of change and their neglect of overriding structural factors. Mohan and Stokke (2000), for example, point to a fixation on "the local" domain which pushes from view the structured character of injustice and inequality. The emphasis on civic and social aspects of development, in Putzel's (1997) view, occurs at the expense of an appreciation of the politics of development. Other critics (Cleaver, 1999; Lane, 1996; White, 1996) go a step further and argue that participatory development often is reduced to a technical method rather than as an empowering political practice. When those dimensions are neglected, participatory development runs up against a fundamental epistemological difficulty: the failure to ground models of participation within coherent theories of social change (Hickey & Mohan, 2003). As shown below, analysis of the experiences of popular participation in the Indian states of Kerala and West Bengal, and in the Brazilian municipality of Porto Alegre can provide important clues for avoiding that cul-de-sac.

This alerts us to two, decisive dimensions.

- Firstly, the political dimension – not least the character of the dominant political force, its political culture and prevailing conception of state-society relations, and the strategic path it has adopted, but also the inherently political character of interaction between the various players and interests in wards and municipalities.

- Secondly, the wider structural dynamics that establish and reproduce the terms on which power, resources and opportunities are distributed, and which erect the boundaries of the "feasible" (Hickey & Mohan, 2003; Kothari, 2001).

Requiring greater attention, therefore is the fundamental question of power, the terms of its distribution and contestation, and the ways in which it establishes the undertow of participatory development processes.

An elemental dynamic is the tension between the *technocratic* and *political* modes. Pieterse (2003:2), for example, fingers the "technocratic rationality" which governs municipal processes as one of the main reasons why the democracy-boosting aspirations of the new local government dispensation have been stronger in rhetoric than reality. Other analysts, including Harrison (2001) have passed similar judgments. In the former, development

challenges are apprehended chiefly as technical puzzles which have to be solved within relatively conservative notions of what is feasible. The technocratic approach pivots on certain principles: objectivity, expertise, efficiency, predictability and measurement (Postman, 1993). This mode, notwithstanding the dramaturgy of "inclusion" and "consultation", tends to reduce citizens to the status of objects, for it revolves around the notion that

> technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment […] subjectivity is an obstacle to clear thinking; that what cannot be measured either does not exist or is of no value; and that the affairs of citizens are best guided and conducted by experts (Postman, 1993).

The political dimension, on the other hand, tends to be messier, less predictable and more inclined to violate or least test the bounds of the permissible. If extended beyond formalities, participatory development inevitably entails a highly political – and politicised – set of practices that can be restive, capricious and unpredictable. Its ducks don't always line up in rows. In Heller's reading, this is what transpired in the cases of Porto Alegre and Kerala (see below). State reform there was "messy, nonlinear, and driven by distinctly conflictual processes" and yet successful. It occurred – and matured – as part of a "continuous process of learning and feedback, made possible by policy networks that have blurred the boundaries between state and society" (Heller, 2001:157).

It bears reminding that the technical realm itself is not value-free, objective and insulated against political and ideological vagaries. It is value-laden and expresses a series of sometimes decisive contextual political and ideological assumptions and choices. Fiscal systems, priority-setting and financing decisions (e.g. cost-recovery, taxation patterns, cross-subsidisation mechanisms, etc.) are impregnated with ideological choices that tend to be sequestered far from the arenas of town-hall debate, yet decisively establish the horizons of what is possible. This threatens to reduce participation to a sort of shadow-play, a series of gestures that can be ticked off on a work plan but that are bereft of substance.

Once alert to the potentially formative weight of context, the idea of the "local" as a discrete zone of participation also becomes problematic. More spaces and channels might be created for democratic participation, but their potency is questionable when decisive economic decisions remain off-limits, cloistered from democratic input. In the context of scarce resources, the demands of fiscal restraint and global competitiveness can interact with local power dynamics in regressive ways. This conflation of the "local" with the "global" is especially evident in cities trying to insert themselves into the upper reaches of global production and consumption chains. There the likelihood is strong that public participation becomes reduced to a tame ritual that leaves untouched the contours of exclusion and inequality. The pressures of global competitiveness will tend to dwarf social equity impulses (Beall, 2002). Usually topping the agenda, instead, are infrastructure and service improvements that are deemed to enhance productivity, attract investment and boost wealth creation (Robinson, 2002). In democratic settings, this generates a strong temptation to seek legitimacy, co-opt key stakeholders and marginalise "idealistic" critics by resorting to neo-

corporatist forms of engagement. At the same time, as Pieterse (2003:2) has pointed out,

> the resoluteness of municipalities is stoked by conditionalities of the national treasury [and] the ideological commitment of the ruling party to public-private service delivery 'solutions'.

A further paradox emerges. Enthusiasm for public participation is likely to grow in contexts where the need to meet certain demands is felt acutely – and, therefore, where the pressure "to deliver" is especially strong. But robust participation is likely also to bristle with the contestation and power struggles that might surround a particular demand, which bring the dangers of derailment and delays. The upshot is that where the pressure to act is strongest, there also will tend to be a strong underlying trend toward co-optative (hence "disciplined") participation. In such cases, participation might still be functional, even useful, to the development process, but it does not fulfil its political and social functions (of empowerment, mobilisation, democratic deepening etc.).

Makings of success

Given the pitfalls and hurdles, it is no surprise to discover that, internationally, strong public participation in local development and governance is hardly the norm (Johnson 2001). Examples of success are few and come from a handful of countries: Brazil (Porto Alegre and, later, other parts of Rio Grande do Sul state), parts of India (mainly Kerala and West Bengal) and some countries of the North (Heller, 2001; Harriss, 2000; Crook & Sverrisson, 2001).

In the Brazil and Indian examples, demonstrable benefits have accrued to the poor (Heller, 2001; Crook & Manor, 1998). In Porto Alegre, for example, citizens achieved decision-making powers over public resources through a participatory budget process, which subsequently has been replicated in other parts of the country. Virtually all decisions regarding the types of services and upgrading that would occur in different parts of the city are made through that process, which forms part of a wider participatory governing system. Because the outcomes of engagements were evident and the benefits tangible, engagement in popular budgeting has grown and similar processes have spread across Rio Grande do Sul state (Navarro, 1998).

Understandably, practitioners desire practical counsel on how to achieve effective yet pragmatic participatory processes. Such guidance is important, but it addresses only one dimension of a transformative model of participation – the crafting of methods, mechanisms, structures and processes that can incorporate stronger participation into a more or less existing field of development practice. The most conservative variants of this approach hark back to notions that development ultimately requires a correct mixture of institutional responses that can be planned and administered by technocratic expertise – an approach that effectively purges development of its political content (Ferguson, 1994).[81]

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[81] As discussed above, the participatory development "turn" partly emerged in reaction, and sought to place local realities at the centre of development endeavours, with development "experts" shifting into the role of "facilitators" who animate and draw on local knowledge and experience (Hickey & Mohan, 2003).

The Kerala, West Bengal and Porto Alegre experiences have shared a number of cardinal features. They lay great emphasis on inclusiveness and accountability; they used extensive outreach and created institutional arrangements to enable widespread and intensive public participation; they took special steps to impart skills and build capacity (both among citizens and officials); and they entailed *and* enabled sustained popular involvement in the prioritising, planning and monitoring of public projects and investments (Mohan & Stokke, 2005; Heller, 2001; Abers, 2001).

When surveying such ingredients of potential success, we can distinguish between "matters of *form*", on one hand, and "matters of *content*", on the other.

Form and content

"Matters of *form*" would refer to procedural and institutional elements and adjustments. They would reflect the recognition, for example, that participatory development requires more than grafting onto existing systems and structures (new) participatory elements; thoroughgoing adjustments have to be made.

"Matters of *content*", meanwhile, draw into the frame the political and political-economic contexts and conditions in which the participatory initiatives are undertaken. They focus attention on "the importance of an ethical horizon" (Pieterse, 2003:5) in engagements and processes, of situating public participation within overarching quests for social justice and political change. From this angle, participation is understood as a constitutive element of long-term projects of transformation that include but also go beyond material change. In this respect, the Kerala, West Bengal and Porto Alegre experiences are especially instructive.

Key in all three cases was the combined activism in both civil and political society in the context of devolved state power. Decentralisation was an important factor, especially in the Indian cases (Mohan and Stokke, 2005). The devolution of certain powers, responsibilities and resources created the political space in which marginalised groups could mobilise and pursue pro-poor policies (Hickey & Mohan, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003; Webster, 2002; Heller, 2001).

In addition, as Mohan and Stokke (2005:9) highlight, the role of leftist political parties with "genuine commitment to social equality" and productive links with strong civil society networks was decisive. According to Heller (2001: 139), a defining feature of both democratic decentralisation in India and participatory budgeting in Brazil has been that of "a political project in which an organised political force – and specifically non-Leninist left-of-centre political parties that have strong social movement characteristics – champions decentralisation". Note, though, that in neither Porto Alegre nor Kerala was popular participation simply the outcome of a "happy" marriage between committed political elites and enthusiastic civil society activists (Mohan & Stokke, 2005). The realignment of political forces provided a decisive backdrop. In Porto Alegre, as Abers (2003) has noted, participatory

budgeting emerged as part of an alternative political strategy, spearheaded by the Worker's Party (*Partido dos Trabhalhadores*, PT), for undercutting the power of clientelist networks and for pursuing state power especially at the local level through elections.

In Kerala and Porto Alegre, decentralisation was conceived of as part of broader political projects of devolving and democratising state power in pursuit of social justice. Their the participatory development experiments formed part of wider political projects that sought to challenge existing power relations – as opposed to circumvent them in a bid to achieve technically efficient, ameliorating "delivery" (Hickey & Mohan, 2003). It's worth noting Heller's (2001) assessment that decentralisation in South Africa arguably has been pursued more as a technocratic restructuring process aimed at achieving quicker and more efficient "development".

Furthermore, the experiments all emphasised tangible socioeconomic needs, and formed part of resolute redistributive development strategies (Fung &Wright, 2003; Hickey & Mohan, 2003) that were driven by strong, leftist political parties. Hickey & Mohan (2003:16), for example, highlight the fact that in both West Bengal and Kerala, participatory processes occurred "within a wider political project of state transformation" that involved attempts to integrate "participatory forms of governance … within wider project[s] of redistributive politics and social justice".

The political parties spearheading those experiments belonged to different political traditions of the left. In Porto Alegre, several analysts have highlighted the role of a democratic socialist party – the Worker's Party, or PT – which was imbued with a political culture of tolerance, diversity and respect for civil liberties, and which comprised a variety of social groups (including, centrally, a powerful workers' movement) (Heller, 2001; Abers, 2001).[82] Indeed, there has been a clear correlation between successful cases of participatory budgeting and areas with high membership of the PT (Schneider & Goldfrank, 2002). Tharakan (2004), meanwhile, has underlined the history of productive political relations which the Communist Part in the Indian state of Kerala had nurtured with popular movements. Initially, this paved access to local state power and made possible the introduction of land reforms in the 1970s; later, it facilitated the experiments in decentralised participatory planning of the mid-1990s (Mohan & Stokke, 2005).

This points to the catalysing role of a dominant political force with access to local state power that is both inclined and able to engage productively with popular organisations and movements (Abers, 2001; Mohan & Stokke, 2005). In Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state, the rural-based Landless Movement, allied with trade unions and progressive churches, strongly backed supported participatory budgeting – to the point of helping shoulder some of the expenses when opposition parties have prevented the state government from financing participatory budget hearings (Schneider and Goldfrank 2002). Heller (2001) has attributed the failure of meaningful

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[82] Its official ideology, for example, centered on two mottos: grassroots participation (*participacao popular*) and "inverting priorities" (*invertendo prioridades*, moving government policies away from favouring elites).

popular participation to materialise in South Africa to an "instrumentalist understanding of state power" which tends toward domesticating or marginalising popular organisations (2001:134), a tendency noted by several other authors (Gumede, 2005; Marais, 2001; Fine & Davis, 1990). By contrast, social movements in Kerala and Porto Alegre succeeded in retaining their autonomy from the state (without yielding their influence) and were able to help shape and drive processes of democratic decentralisation.

Another important factor was the disentangling of political power from economic power. In both the Indian examples, the ascendant radical political elites were not entwined in the accumulatory circuits of the (landed) economic elites. This accorded them a structural distance that enabled them to avoid "capture" (Hickey & Mohan, 2003), and to pursue redistributive agenda on the basis of alliances with the subordinate classes.

The strategic ability and tactical acumen for achieving inclusivity was critical. Marshalling the support of the poor for interventions that demonstrably benefit them is relatively easy; doing so without inviting punishing backlashes from the privileged classes is demanding.

The Porto Alegre experience is especially instructive. In order to finance its redistributive strategy, the administration opted to increase the two sets of taxes it controlled: a tax on revenues in the service sector and urban property taxes. City revenues almost doubled within four years, with one-fifth of revenues held aside for "discretionary" spending on pro-poor policies. Simultaneously, the PT – and the city administration – managed to assemble a constituency of support that went beyond the poor and working class sectors, and included parts of the middle class, as Abers (2001 & 2003) has shown. The latter tolerated or supported participatory budgeting because they recognised in it a possible departure from a legacy of corruption and waste, and the advent of efficiency and transparency (Schneider and Goldfrank 2002). Progressive elements of the middle class were supportive of the democratising and social justice ambitions of the process. Meanwhile, those parts of the business elite that stood to benefit from some of the projects (particularly the construction industry) chose not to oppose the initiatives, thus splitting and undercutting the influence of conservative reaction. Careful political and discursive manoeuvring help bring that about.

The upshot, according to Abers (2001:37), was that "instead of being a political burden that brought on opposition, participatory, redistributive policies were actually an asset that helped generate political support". She ascribes that success in large part to the Porto Alegre administration's ability to:
- Implement its ideals in ways that incorporated the interests of a "critical mass" of poor, middle class and business groups;
- Engage certain business sectors in the implementation of participatory projects,
- Build a reputation as a competent, non-corrupt, transparent and socially responsible administration; and
- Exploit frustration with traditional forms of governance.

A win-win scenario was created – a reminder that strategies can be crafted in which elites and subordinate groups can pursue (or at least slipstream behind) the same radical agenda (Moore & Putzel 1999; Hickey & Mohan, 2003).

Expanding the meaning of participatory development

Some analysts question whether formal, institutionalised participatory mechanisms are the most effective ways for boosting participatory governance. Friedman (2006:3), for example, has claimed that the structures and channels in South Africa are "intrinsically hostile to effective participation by the poor" and mostly benefit affluent groups. Instead, he proposes that participatory governance be understood

> as a process in which citizens use rights, employing methods and channels of their choice (within the constraints imposed by democratic order) to compel governments to deal with them on their terms, not those convenient to power-holders. Citizen participation in government – and in particular that of the poor – is more likely, therefore, not when governments create formal mechanisms to ensure it but when they develop attitudes and institutions accessible to citizen action (ibid).

In such analysis, the combination of high-profile advocacy, legal challenges and social mobilisation (including direct action) employed by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa probably exemplifies potent citizen participation. The TAC used constitutional rights as a springboard for an array of tactical interventions that operated both within and alongside formal state structures and channels – but on terms and along timeframes set by the organisation, not by any one state-led process (De Waal, 2006; Heywood, 2005).[83]

That view chimes broadly with Hickey and Mohan's (2003) call for participatory approaches that are aimed at securing and extending citizenship rights. Heywood, for example, argues that the "challenge is to make the constitutional state fulfil its duties and work for the poor by pushing the limits of social reform" (2005:31), while Friedman (2006:19) concludes that "the key to effective participation lies in governments' willingness to make […] citizen activism more possible and in responding to it if citizens engage in it". Mahmud's (2002) research into citizen mobilisation in Bangladesh points toward similar conclusions, and pictures "inclusive citizenship as the exercise of agency and the recasting of rights by citizens themselves".

Hickey and Mohan (2003) insist on situating participation within a radical politics of development that orbits around the idea and practice of "citizenship".[84] Not "citizenship" as a legal status with attendant rights,

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[83] It bears noting that the ruling ANC (which otherwise expresses its support for participatory governance) routinely vilified the TAC and its methods. See, for example, "TAC court case: Constant legal threats don't help HIV and AIDS fight'. *ANC Today*, 4(4). 4 November.

[84] "Citizenship", of course, answers to several descriptions, not all of them progressive. The definition promoted by the New Right in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, associated "active citizenship" with the assumption by individuals of greater responsibility for their own welfare and security. It functioned, in other words, within a wider project of withdrawing the state from central responsibility for social equity. A modulated version would survive within post-welfarist politics of the so-called "third way" of the 1990s "new left" in Europe.

duties and obligations, but as socio-political practice that establishes a person as a competent member of society.

Once located in this context, participation becomes more than a "special" set of gestures and deeds; it occurs "within a broader range of socio-political practices … through which people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities, and thus increase their control over socioeconomic resources" (Hickey and Mohan, 2003:11). Participation then involves more than drawing people into existing political and/or development processes; it has to transform those processes in ways that boost people's opportunities and capacities *generally* to claim their rights. It therefore becomes an *aspect* of a wider transformative and redistributive project.

Viewed in this light, participatory development is about empowering and boosting the competencies of people beyond the specific plans or programmes they are encouraged to help shape.

Conclusion: How strong is public participation in development in South Africa?

Literature analysing (as opposed to merely describing) the growing number of recent South African experiences of participatory development is still scant, making it difficult to critically assess those experiences. But the available reviews suggest that, although still in their early days, participatory development planning systems and processes in South Africa generally seem to lack transformative qualities, and are marred by a mixture of neglect, lip-service and inexperience on the part of planners and officials, many of whom seem not to regard public participation as definitive elements of local development. Some of the weaknesses are procedural and can be overcoming with comparative ease. Access to information, for example, is said to be inadequate and uneven, as are the capacities of citizens (and officials) to understand the technical formats and idioms in which information is presented. The participation that does occur tends to momentary, in the shape of sporadic "inputs" that decorate particular stages of planning and programming cycles. When they do occur, report-backs are perfunctory (Hicks, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Mathekga & Buccus, 2006; Williams, 2005; Harrisson, 2003).

Municipal authorities tend to act as gate-keepers and controllers rather than as facilitative bodies that allow and enable communities greater voice and control over resources and resource allocation. Local authorities are accused of being either unwilling or unable to share decision-making control with communities, especially in relation to project identification. Mechanisms are geared mainly "to seek communities' input into already formulated policy responses, or to disseminate information on municipality processes" (Hicks, 2006:4). Rather than filter down, accountability tends to be angled upward and passes along established bureaucratic channels and requirements. Accountability is often seen as time-consuming, impractical and lacking in clear benefits (Friedman, 2006; Hicks, 2006; Gwagwa & Everatt, 2005; Williams, 2005).

Formative involvement by communities therefore appears to be a rarity, particularly with respect to project identification and control over resources. Rigid frameworks and built-in barriers rid public inputs of weight and influence, while community-level power imbalances and political tussles often shape processes and the framing of issues, options and priorities. In Gwagwa and Everatt's (2005:7) assessment, community participation generally is "wedged at the level of consultation during planning, and possibly also subsequent involvement in the running and maintenance of projects".

Summarising the findings of other research in KwaZulu-Natal, Hicks (2006:4-5) arrives at an even more dispiriting assessment. Public participation overall, she concludes, tends to be marginal and engagements are seldom influential. When community inputs are sought, facilitation is poor. The outcomes are largely perfunctory and fail to penetrate the zones where decisions are made. Participation often involves the presentation of already-decided projects and programmes – either for limited feedback or information-sharing. In some cases, participants do not even receive feedback on the inputs they had made.

Responsibility for such states of affairs extend beyond officialdom. Service organisations capable of providing valuable technical, strategic and advocacy support to communities have diminished in both number and capacity since the mid-1990s. As well, many nongovernmental organisations have chosen to focus on service delivery work, sometimes adopting modes of operation that potentially disempower the communities they claim to be serving (Gwagwa & Everatt, 2005).

Meanwhile, the participation that does occur seems to express predictable lines of exclusion, as Sithole et al. (2007) have shown in their three-year study of women's participation in IDP projects in three KwaZulu-Natal municipalities (eThekwini, Hibiscus Coast and Msinga). Women were found to attend project meetings in substantial numbers but for the most part they refrained from actively participating in those meetings, which tended to be dominated by a few dominant men (Sithole et al., 2007:33). Women's participation in project implementation was largely restricted to manual labour and menial roles; they were poorly represented among project contractors and sub-contractors, and "the higher up the project management ladder one goes, the fewer women can be found", especially when positions called for specialised skills (Sithole, 2007:34).

Elsewhere class-based differentiation appears rife, and stark marginalisation of the poorest households has been observed. In Tladi-Moletsani, for example, political and civic structures were found to be dominated by petit-bourgeois residents, and maintained scant contact with community structures in nearby informal settlements. So much so that residents in the informal settlement set up their own ward committee to tackle water, sanitation and electricity issues. According to Everatt et al. (2004:27), "the local councillor replicates these differences, having a warm relationship with local businesses, using a junior staff member to tour the formal areas, but bypassing the informal settlement".

General assessments of public participation at local governance and development in South Africa therefore are hardly glowing (Friedman, 2006; Hicks, 2006; Williams, 2005, Hemson, 2006) – so much so that processes have been declared "inadequate, inaccessible and disempowering" (Hicks, 2006:5). Some critics have questioned the earnestness with which public participation is being embraced in local government practice. The emphasis, they argue, is placed on meeting various performance targets and service delivery requirements, with public participation featuring as an adjunct to those priorities – an obligation that must be seen to be met, even if only in perfunctory respects (Mathekga & Buccus, 2006). Often on view, as result, is a formalistic and elementary compliance with a requirement to demonstrate public participation – measured, for example, by way of the number of public meetings held, attendance at those meetings, written submissions received and so forth. No doubt, these are all forms of public participation, but what are their transformative qualities? Do they alter, or even momentarily disrupt, the distribution of power and voice in a community? Do women and/or young people, for example, actively shape outcomes? Is the public able to challenge decisions or conduct they disapprove of? It is important therefore to bear in mind Harrisson's (2003:28) reminder that public participation in local planning can also become an "instrument for the *de-mobilisation* of civil society by institutionalising and formalising community action".

Radical critiques of public participation invariably broadcast the need to ensure the poor get to participate – and not only those sections of a community that are organised and have garnered "voice". But this is considerably easier said than done.

Customarily, organising is seen to bond individuals around common interests, purpose or aspirations, or around identities. Organised groups are thought to be characterised by varying degrees of cohesiveness, structured actions and hence predictability. But operating alongside (and often intersecting with) these "fixed" forms of organising are more elastic and ephemeral forms of organising by and among the poor. This "organic" circuitry of urban life is highly adaptable, agile and tensile, in contrast with the brittle rigidities that define conventional forms of organising. Its mechanisms are often "unclear", "murky and problematic" to outsiders and do not easily accede to the rules and customs of formal engagements (Gotz & Simone, 2001). They often do not adopt democratic forms, nor do they always exemplify principles of participation and accountability. Often dominated by strong leadership figures, their representativeness cannot be taken for granted. In addition, the persons participating in these webs of networking and organising often are be transient – in other words, the constituent elements of any one network are constantly in flux.

This creates a conundrum for governance and, quite obviously also, for the notion of public participation, since "conventional notions of governance emphasise the need for individuated, clearly identified units – be they individuals, households, associations or institutions" (Gotz & Simone, 2001:3). At the same time, one encounters zones of organised life that are highly structured but hermetic, and that are *designed* to skirt the formal circuits of the state. Relatively stable and predictable partnerships,

structures around identified interests, become virtually impossible (Everatt et al., 2004):

> [C]ommunity partnerships are hard to conceptualise. Most notably, intense competition for resources makes true 'public-space difficult to sustain, and opportunities for sustained dialogue and common action around shared development goals are reduced.

Beyond this, the comparative sidelining of their "constituencies" often is compounded by the patronage relationships that link their leaderships and party and/or state officials (Mitlin, 2001; Skinner, 2000).

An overlapping shift has been the emergence of entrepreneurial social organising – the overlap of enterprise and communal organising. Research in Johannesburg's inner city, for example, has revealed "increasingly prevalent … small social formations and 'projects' started by individuals or loose clusters of a few people, sometimes for patent self-interest, and often with short-term and very local motivations and goals" (Everatt et al., 2004):

> [M]uch 'voluntary action' is simply the disconnected attempts of individuals to establish a presence. Where voluntary social collaborations arise, these are often highly fragmented and transitory clan- or gang-based formations, subject to intense internal political contestation, and geared primarily towards competition with identified economic and social competitors … this suggests an institutional milieu which is increasingly more flexible, with specialised community formations taking advantage of momentary opportunities, and thereafter, like businesses having lost a temporary market niche, transforming into something else equally unstable but momentarily useful.

The upshot is that "greater public participation" also involves engagements with formations that are much more complex and fluid – in terms of both motives and structure -- than is commonly assumed. The state obviously prefers to deal with a less opaque and more crystallised, predictable set of "partners", and it can continue to gear itself for engagements with such entities. But in the urban realm at least, it should then abandon the pretence of formative public participation in governance and development.

To what extent have communities been shaping IDPs? In Gwagwa and Everatt's (2005) estimation, the legal, fiscal and policy environment for community-driven development has been created, but the opportunities for such forms of development are not being seized. Certainly, public participation in the initial rounds of IDPs in many areas appears to have been weak, and tended to involve better-organised, more affluent groups. According to the City of Johannesburg's 2003/2004 IDP document, for example, citizens were invited to comment on agenda and resource allocations that were "largely *fait accompli*", while "not even ward committees learned of the contents of the draft IDP". Ward councillors were tasked with feeding the details of what were basically "done deals" to their committees and communities.[85]

Assessments of IDPs have tended to underline the need to boost the knowledge, interest and participation of communities in the planning processes. Harrisson (2003:26) cites Theo Rauch's assessment that project proposals tended to reflect community needs and that the public did have

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[85] See Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (2003). Integrated Development Plan 2003/04, p 25-26. Cited in Friedman (2006:8).

"adequate opportunity to be informed and to comment on the contents of the plan". That, though, amounts to little more than consultation. Indeed, participation, in Rauch's view, "did not yet move much beyond assessment of prioritised needs." Subsequently, the IDPs of many municipalities have come to reflect at least some of the inputs solicited from the public (DPLG, 2006; Moodley, 2007).

Although there is broad agreement that both the processes and outcomes of IDPs have improved, many of the concerns highlighted by Harrisson (2003) appear not to have been displaced. Those most pertinent to this study are the strategic limits of planning, the distribution of fiscal powers, and the involvement of the public in IDPs.

Our current study's initial interviews with local government officials and community representatives in Gauteng indicate that many of the flaws identified by Harrisson four years ago still mark the process. Harrisson (2003:27) described a general pattern of public participation that included low participation by young people, transport difficulties (for attending meetings), in appropriate use of English in meetings and materials, impenetrable technical idioms used to describe plans and processes, a lack of representation from un-organised groups and interests, dominance of proceedings by the more organised and skilled groupings, lack of report-backs to communities, tight time-frames and limited opportunities for consultation, restricted roles of ward committees in the processes, and the debilitating effect of "participation fatigue". Hemson's (2007) analysis of the HSRC's (national) 2004 SASAS survey data confirms both the low rates of public participation in IDPs overall and low levels of awareness about IDPs. Tellingly, men were almost twice as likely to participate in IDP processes than women, according to those data.

Much of this involves what we described earlier as "matters of form". Fairly basic improvements can address some of those flaws: making materials more user-friendly and providing them in appropriate language and in formats that are more easily digestible, better training for officials (especially in meeting facilitation), devising more effective ways for publicising events and processes, devising ways to attract more representative participation in meetings and processes. The Porto Alegre experience offers suggestive pointers in all those respects, for example.

Equally important are the "matters of content". And here one encounters more obdurate barriers. Harrisson observed that alternatives tended to be ignored and that, as a result, "the *status quo* tends to be perpetuated" (2003:13), which brings to mind Hickey & Mohan's (2003) concern that development planning generally does not challenge the "immanent" patterns of development. Proposed projects might reflect real needs, but they do not challenge or alter "the underlying patterns of development" (Harrisson, op. cit.). Instead they explore options within perimeters of "feasible" or "realistic" possibilities. Many of those options can benefit (parts of) communities, improve living conditions and more. But they tend to do so without challenging the formative terms on which power and resources are distributed. Mabin (in Harrisson, 2003) cites as an example an IDP in Ehlanzeni District which attempted community betterment while leaving

unaddressed the fundamental and highly disputed matter of water and mineral rights in the area. Ultimately, over time, this is one of the basic measures of "empowerment": the ability to challenge the architecture of the status quo, the arrangements that fix "things as they are" in place. Without such "disruptive" thrust, participation cannot be transformative since it leaves the distribution of power unchallenged and unchanged.

Also shaping the extent of empowerment – and the horizons of possibly change – is the issue of control over financial resources, which goes beyond IDPs. At ward level, such control is minimal, and even at municipal level, capital budgets can be slight. So, while a series of responsibilities and capacities have been devolved to those levels, concomitant devolution of financial power has not occurred.

The stuttering experiences of participatory development – not only in South Africa, but globally – therefore are not simply matters of absent will or commitment, nor of congested channels, awkward tools or opaque processes. Making sense of these somewhat dispiriting assessments therefore requires a bird's-eye view that draws into focus the wider political-economic context. The brief review of the Kerala and Porto Alegre experiences, above, some of the key facets of that context.

The apartheid state's approach to civil society organisations of the poor was relatively simple. Those that shunned oppositional activities and focused on "betterment" and "upliftment" were deemed functional to the notion of "separate development" and the state's indifference or nominal aid. Those that sought to challenge its dominance were crushed. Fostered, in other words, was an utterly alienated relationship to the state. In the two decades prior to 1994, when the wave of oppositional, even revolutionary organising crested, many of the most powerful popular organisations of the poor in South Africa threw their weight behind the burgeoning struggle to capture state power.[86] The organisations of the poor therefore do not have the kind of heritage Keralites were able to draw on – what Heller (2002:148) has described as a

> long history of effective demand-making in general and of making representations (both through conventional parliamentary as well as extraparliamentary channels) that can now be fully exploited with more responsible and accountable local government.

The types of popular organising that emerged in South Africa, and the tactics they were forced and/or chose to adopt therefore appear to be less than appropriate for the kinds of engagements that now become possible in the realm of local governance and development. In addition, it is questionable to what extent the ANC's conception of power and its relationship with popular organisations allows for a mobilisation-centred form of development.
What all this suggests is that the flimsy and thin character of public participation in IDPs currently defies both simple explanations and easy fixes. A complex of factors – some the legacies of history, others embedded in organisational "cultures", still others the outcomes of conscious choices or inadvertent oversights – have created a terrain of pitfalls and opportunities.

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[86] See, for example, Friedman S (1992). Bonaparte at the Barricades: The Colonisation of Civil Society. *Theoria.* May.

Avoiding the former while grasping the latter will require innovative redress. The pending study, to which this paper serves as background, shall examine those options in more details.

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8. Appendix C: List of respondents

Oupa Bapela (Manager, Office of the Speaker, Ward 8, Ekangala)
Sizakele Bopape (Public Participation Officer, Ward 8, Ekangala)
Victor Mokhine (Manager, Office of the Speaker, Randfontein)
Sina Erasmus (Ward councillor, Ward 4, Randfontein)
Evert du Plessis (Ward councillor, Ward 6, Randfontein)
Precious Matshidiso (CDW, ward 6, Randfontein)
Frank Sekwale (Liaison Officer, Office of the Speaker, Randfontein)
George Lebone (Yeoville Stakeholders' Forum, ANC, Ward 67)
Nomaswazi Mahlala (Ward councillor, Ward 67)
Michelle Williams (resident, Yeoville)
Vishwas Satgar (resident, Yeoville)
Victor Mabelane (Ward councillor, Ward 8, Ekangala)
Hazel Ngomane (Ward 8, Ekangala)
Zodwa Mikhele (CDW, Ekangala)
Thembi Ntuli (Stakeholder, local NGO, Ward 8, Ekangala)
Pat Nhlapo (Speaker's Office, Johannesburg Metro)
Russel McGgregor (CDW coordinator, DLG)
Ike Bikitsha (Community liaison officer, Ward 1, Midvaal)
David Madurai (Director, PIMS, DPLG)
Community development workers from Sedibeng, Randfontein, Johannesburg Metro, Tshwane, Mfuleni.
IDP coordinators from Ekhureleni, Johannesburg Metro, Tshwane.
Councillor Nnuku (Sebokeng)
Joseph Mafoa (Ward committee, Sebokeng)
Maria Lebona (CDW, Sebokeng)
Teboho Morobe (Public Participation & Petitions Co-ordinator, Sebokeng)
Ike Bikitsha (Community Liaison Officer, Midvaal)