

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the 2012 *The State of Local Governance* publication of the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN) is to explore alternative conceptions, approaches and methods for shaping a vibrant, pro-poor system of local governance and democracy in South Africa. It consciously seeks to depart from what has been a preoccupation, both in government and in the local governance civil society sector, with current legislation, policies and practice, and with how these can be better implemented or modified in minor ways. Anyone reading this publication in the hope of finding solutions on how to ‘fix’ the structures and mechanisms already in place will be disappointed unless they are open to exploring innovative approaches and models that aim to enhance participatory local governance. Ultimately, participatory governance needs to be substantive, both in terms of process and with respect to outcomes, hence the call underlying this publication: ‘put participation at the heart of development // put development at the heart of participation’.

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services has been the main driver of protests across the country, but increasingly governance-related factors have been brought to the fore. This is echoed in official reports, such as the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs’ (COGTA) *The State of Local Government Report*, National Treasury’s 2011 *Local Government Budget and Expenditure Review* and the *National Development Plan* of the National Planning Commission, which highlight the governance dimension underpinning the failings of local government. The underlying governance dimension has also been underscored in previous publications of the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN).

As Mirjam van Donk highlights in the Introduction, the ‘governance deficit’ has its roots in a number of factors, including political culture, leadership, mindsets and attitudes, and administrative practices. Conversely, interventions in each of these areas are required to overcome the governance deficit in local government. In particular, there is a need to reconceptualise state–civil society relations to one in which both groups see themselves and each other as development actors and co-producers of development. Furthermore, there is a need to translate the reconfiguration of state–civil society relationships into practice through the design and application of practical models and tools.

More especially, the apparent disconnect between public participation on the one hand and local development trajectories and outcomes on the other hand needs to be addressed. In many instances, participatory local governance has become devoid of substantive meaning and lacks influence on planning,

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resource allocation and implementation. The practice in many municipalities is seemingly one of 'going through the motions' and ensuring compliance with the legislative requirements which, ironically, were designed to facilitate substantive public participation in terms of both process and outcomes.

Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen, Van Donk emphasises the significance of enabling people to

exert agency in development processes. This implies that both the power and the responsibility to determine development trajectories and outcomes cannot be vested in the state alone, regardless of its democratic features. Thus, new ideas and practices to enliven local governance, enable agency, facilitate mediated development scenarios and enhance accountability need to be explored and, where appropriate, institutionalised. Equally important is the underlying value system and a commitment, not just to the letter, but especially to the spirit of participatory local democracy, which cannot be institutionalised beyond inculcating a public service ethos (Batho Pele).

This publication offers a number of insights and methodologies related to community-led initiatives for engagement with the local state and for local development, collaborative planning, social accountability tools and other models for community involvement in local development. It is by no means exhaustive in its analysis or in the tools and methods presented, but it is nonetheless a valuable offering for anyone open to exploring innovative approaches and models that aim to enhance participatory local governance. The contributions are based on existing practices and emerging areas of work of member organisations of the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN). Individually and collectively (including through the production of this *State of Local Governance* publication), member organisations of the GGLN seek to contribute to the advancement of participatory, democratic and developmental local governance in South Africa.

The first set of papers by Ngamlana and Mathoho (Afesis-corplan), Hollands (Mbumba Development Services) and Tissington (Socio-Economic Rights Institute, SERI) focus primarily on autonomous civil society initiatives for social mobilisation and engagement with the local state.

Social media has significant potential as a tool for enhancing accountability, communication and social mobilisation. Hollands reviews the use of social media by government, both globally and in South Africa, before turning his attention to the use of social media as tools of activism, to engage the state, by civil society organisations. While social media has been used effectively to facilitate communication and/or engage the state, there are also notable risks associated with it.

Ngamlana and Mathoho narrate a number of examples of community-led initiatives which offer citizens structured and innovative ways of engaging the local state and monitoring its performance, based on Afesis-corplan's work in the Eastern Cape. These spaces are designed to be co-operative rather than confrontational and aim to be viewed by local municipalities as development partnerships. This requires both political will and a paradigm shift on the part of local government, one that supports the

notion of a pro-active citizenry, actively and rightfully involved in decisions and development initiatives in their communities.

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processes. The Slovo Park example provides clear proof of community action and agency with respect to community planning, enumeration and, ultimately, litigation. This is by no means a passive community, waiting for development. In reality there is very little evidence of the apathy often blamed on communities who are seen as waiting for development to be delivered to them. Despite this, the Slovo Park community has been frustrated in its efforts to engage the state and be recognised as a credible development partner. The paper highlights several fault lines around planning and participation in upgrading which affect many 'Slovo Park communities', which may well be less organised, across the country.

Collaborative planning provides an important way out of the current impasse. The three papers by Bolnick (CORC/Ikhayalami), Masiko-Kambala, Gørgens and Van Donk (Isandla Institute), and Makwela (Planact) highlight how collaborative planning in its various forms and manifestations can (and does) take root in South African municipalities.

Bolnick narrates the case of Ruimsig, where organised networks of the poor and the state work collaboratively to co-produce solutions for the upgrading of thousands of well-located households, improving service delivery and incremental tenure security options. In this model, capacitated networks of the poor are linked to grassroots collectives who provide the necessary skills, depth and breadth to make it possible to replicate these innovative models at scale. The case study is an insightful example of how collaboration between

communities, the state and other stakeholders can transform mindsets, relationships and development outcomes.

Masiko-Kambala, Görgens and Van Donk argue that ‘networked spaces’ are a critical addition to the participatory governance repertoire. They contend that existing spaces for engagement have a number of limitations that prevent genuine deliberation and knowledge sharing to inform pragmatic solutions supported by government officials and community members alike. This suggests the need for the creation of networked spaces that are explicitly designed to navigate these tensions and contradictions in order to build communities of practice which produce novel and co-produced solutions to specific problems facing communities. The authors argue that such spaces are crucial to ensure that participation leads to tangible developmental outcomes as they enable mediated processes of contestation, negotiation, priority setting and tradeoffs.

Participatory budgeting is an underexplored tool in the South African context, yet it has the potential to transform socio-economic and development conditions within a municipality in a manner that realistically prioritises local needs in the context of limited resources. As Makwela maintains in his contribution, it is both a technical and political tool which involves issues of power, accountability and empowerment. Participatory budgeting denotes a significant paradigm shift, away from a technocratic approach to budget preparation and monitoring to a participatory process involving local communities. Drawing lessons from international experiences, Makwela describes a recent pilot initiative in Makhado municipality, Limpopo, to explore how

participatory budgeting can be institutionalised as a tool for enhanced accountability and citizen engagement in South African municipalities.

Social accountability mechanisms, such as citizen report cards, service-level benchmarking, citizen charters and social audits can play an important role in deepening local democracy and improving service delivery. The papers by Thompson (African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy,

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ACCEDE) and Paulus and Samuels (Black Sash) provide examples of social accountability tools in the South African context.

Thompson describes how a perception-based survey can be a valuable tool to assess the views and experiences of local residents and communities on the quality of participatory processes and municipal service delivery. She further presents the findings of a perception-based survey that was developed and used by the ACCEDE. In Cape Town, these surveys have informed the development of citizen scorecards rating local government performance in a range of areas.

Another example of a tool to facilitate social accountability is the Black Sash Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project, a community-driven initiative to monitor public services in South Africa. Paulus and Samuels present the rationale and emerging lessons and findings of the project. The intention of the initiative is to put in place a system that enhances government accountability for the quality of services it provides. By virtue of its locus and scope, it also holds the promise of enhancing an active citizenry.

In the final paper, Chivingwe and Moodley (Eastern Cape NGO Coalition) reflect on the Household Food Security Model piloted in the Eastern Cape as an example of active citizen involvement in meeting basic needs. They demonstrate that the direct involvement of communities in development processes can result in better socio-economic outcomes, such as improvements in household food security and income as well as enhanced community health and wellbeing.

The contributions in this edited volume, in some way or other, all point to the need for reconceptualising the relationship between the local state and communities in overcoming the 'governance deficit'. While some offer practical tools and methodologies that can be further explored and replicated in the South African context, others emphasise the need to shift/transform paradigms, mindsets and attitudes. Ultimately, this publication reinforces the imperative to fundamentally rethink what is meant by public participation based on an appreciation of the notion of active citizenship.