



TACKLING THE 'GOVERNANCE DEFICIT' TO REINVIGORATE PARTICIPATORY LOCAL GOVERNANCE

By Mirjam van Donk, GGLN Secretariat / Isandla Institute

The 2011 municipal elections saw the highest voter participation rate in municipal elections since the establishment of democratic local government in 2000. This is a positive sign for a sphere of government that has traditionally attracted the lowest interest of voters in elections and simultaneously has felt the brunt of popular discontent. But local democracy is not merely defined by voter turnout.

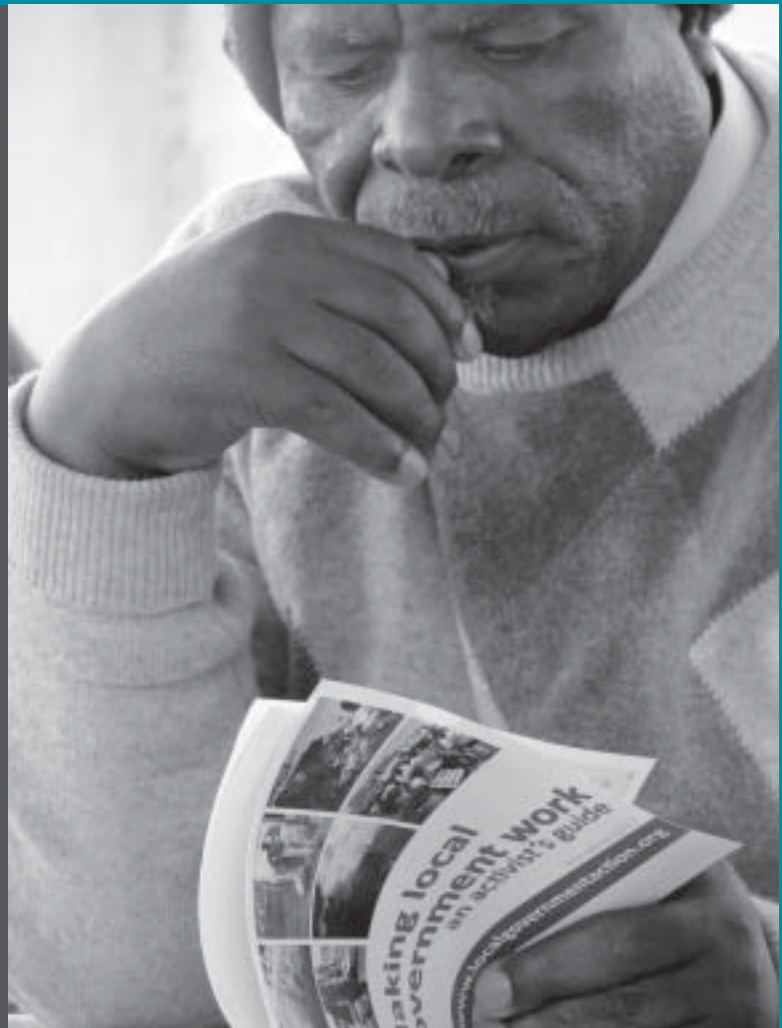


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THERE IS widespread consensus that local governance in South Africa is not particularly healthy or vibrant and is most certainly not living up to the ideal expressed in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government. Recurring community-based protests are a key indicator of this state of affairs. Official reports and civil society perspectives agree that local government, in parts at least, is in 'distress' and that the solution lies in a combination of institutional, political and community-focused interventions, primarily aimed at addressing the underlying governance challenge.

This paper reviews the key factors contributing to what can be termed the 'governance deficit'. While corruption and patronage politics are recognised as critical factors, a core argument of this paper is that, in many instances at least, participatory local governance is devoid of substantive meaning and lacks influence on planning, resource allocation and implementation. Instead, 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). At the same time, decisions about the nature, pace, sequencing and location of development are taken in ‘closed spaces’ (Gaventa 2006), which are impermeable to local citizens and communities. As a result, participatory processes seem to be, and in many instances are, delinked from developmental outcomes. Thus, a call is made to ‘put participation at the heart of development // put development at the heart of participation’.¹

PARTICIPATORY LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A DISTANT REALITY

South Africa arguably has one of the most progressive policies on participatory local governance in the world. This progressive intent is articulated in a sophisticated edifice of public participation, as outlined in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000).

However, South Africa’s much heralded and progressive policy framework for democratic, development-oriented and inherently participatory and inclusive local government institutions stands in stark contrast to recent, and rather sobering, assessments of the state of local government. In 2009, the Department for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) concluded that the sphere of local government is ‘in distress’ and that many municipalities are poorly governed or dysfunctional. The dysfunctionality has its root causes in a host of factors, including institutional design and intergovernmental relations, political culture and social values, socio-economic context, weak leadership and/or capacity, and poor internal systems for performance management and accountability (COGTA 2009:9).

The COGTA assessment has made an important contribution to the understanding of the weaknesses

and failings of local government by expanding the analysis to go beyond the often-heard refrain of ‘capacity and finances’. The underlying governance dimension is also picked up by National Treasury in its 2011 *Local Government Budget and Expenditure Review*, in which it notes: ‘To date, there has been a tendency to attribute all failings in municipal performance to a lack of capacity—whether it be individual or organisational capacity. However, when evaluating municipal performance failures, the reality is that many municipal failures can be directly attributed to failures in local political leadership’ (National Treasury 2011:24). Sharing this concern, the National Planning Commission (NPC) reiterates the importance of safeguarding the integrity of municipalities in general, and municipal administrations in particular, from political patronage and interference. It further raises the need to make working in local government a ‘career of choice’ (NPC 2011:365)—

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY PROTESTS BETTER

Recent research has highlighted useful insights about the geographical location, seasonality and driving forces of community protest.

Geographically speaking, the majority of protests have taken place in the highly urbanised provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape. In fact, community protests are primarily concentrated in urban areas, which suggests that relative deprivation and inequality are key drivers of these protests.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is also a seasonal factor, with more protests taking place in winter months (with the exception of 2010, when South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup which coincided with a prolonged holiday period). As Yunus Carrim, the Deputy Minister for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, noted in 2009, the cold winter weather undoubtedly makes poor living conditions even more intolerable, which deepens frustrations (in Karamoko 2011:10). Worryingly, since mid-2009 violence has become an increasingly commonplace part of these protests.

Sources: Jain 2010; Karamoko 2011; Municipal IQ 2012.

PUTTING PARTICIPATION AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT//
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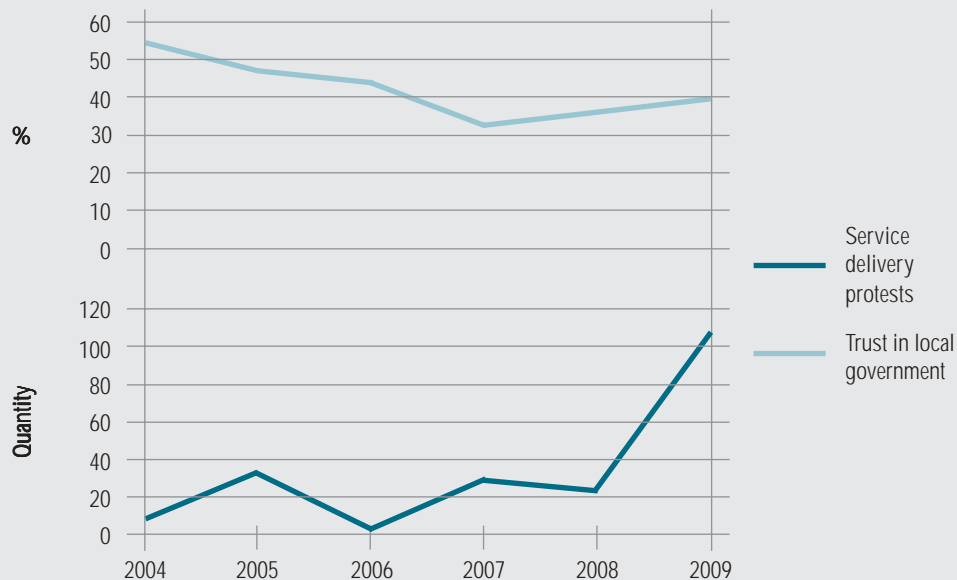
something that can only be achieved if the administrative structure is insulated from unjustified political interference and improper influences.

Governance failings in the sphere of local government have been put into stark focus through the phenomenon of community protests, which have become an enduring feature of local governance in South Africa in recent years (see text box). Data from Municipal IQ shows that the number of service delivery protests was highest in 2009 and 2010,² and declined in 2011 (Municipal IQ 2012). The decline is attributable to the municipal elections of May 2011, which, as noted above, attracted the highest voter turnout for municipal elections since 1994 (Independent Electoral Commission 2011). The run-up to the elections was volatile, not least as a result of the candidate nomination process pursued by the ANC (Ndletyana 2011). Service delivery issues also took centre stage in protests across the country, including in Ficksburg where the death of one of the protesters,

Andries Tatane, at the hands of the local police shocked the nation and the world.³ But in April and May a lull in community protests was recorded, leading Municipal IQ (2012) to conclude that ‘during local government elections...there can be mitigation of protest activity due to increased consultation with communities’. However, Municipal IQ hastens to add that it expects community protest to remain part of the socio-political landscape as the underlying demand for housing and basic services still remains.

While housing and basic services are often cited as key motivations driving protests, issues related to trust, and concerns about the integrity and professionalism of municipal institutions (related to corruption, incompetence, unresponsiveness and broken promises), also feature prominently in the list of grievances (Karamoko 2011). As the NPC (2011:383) notes: ‘The spate of service delivery protests stems partly from citizens’ frustration that the state is not responsive’.

Figure 1: Major service delivery protests compared to Trust in local government institutions, South Africa, 2004–2009

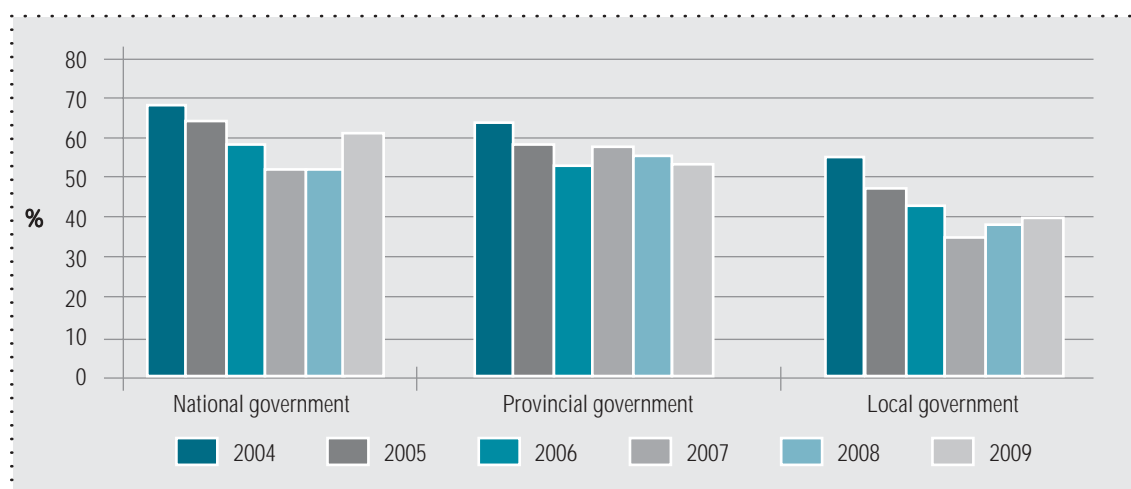


Sources: Municipal IQ (2012), Roberts (2010)

Data from the South African Social Attitudes Surveys (SASAS) shown in Figure 1 suggest that there is a correlation between declining levels of trust in local government and an increase in community protests. It would be interesting to see whether the 2011 municipal elections have served to instil greater levels of trust in local government, although there was clearly no direct correlation when the previous municipal elections were held in 2006. SASAS data

further shows that levels of trust in local government are generally lower compared to trust in national and provincial government, which have also both fluctuated in the period 2004 to 2009 (see Figure 2). A careful review of these trends further show that trust in local government has declined more rapidly as compared to the other spheres of government, especially in the period between 2004 and 2007.

Figure 2: Trust in government institutions, South Africa, 2004–2009



Sources: Roberts (2010), National Treasury (2011)

Clearly, this does not bode well for the realisation of participatory local governance. On the one hand, relatively low levels of trust in local government suggest that there is insufficient fertile ground for constructive engagement between the local state, local communities and citizens. On the other hand, citizens' dissatisfaction with local government stems, in part at least, from the lack of accountability on the part of local representatives and a dearth of meaningful opportunities to engage with municipal representatives and influence local decision making. Thus, improvements in these areas will presumably serve to bolster trust in local government.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE 'GOVERNANCE DEFICIT'

It is helpful to further unpack specific factors that contribute to the 'governance deficit'.⁴ This deficit has been the core concern underpinning the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN)'s previous publications in 2008, 2010(a) and 2011, often referred to as 'the state of local governance'. In this paper four factors are highlighted and discussed below (although these are by no means as the only ones) namely: political culture, leadership, mindsets and attitudes, and administrative practices.

POLITICAL CULTURE

The issue of political culture is increasingly recognised as a critical factor impacting on municipal functioning. In addition to rent-seeking, COGTA's assessment highlights corruption and patronage, corrosive party politics, factionalism and interference in administrative appointments as worrying realities that serve to undermine the legitimacy of local government (COGTA 2009:9). Outside interference by political-party structures and caucuses or factions negatively affects the political-administrative interface and undermines the integrity of municipalities (De Visser 2010). This also has dire consequences for service delivery and on prospects for local economic development (NPC 2011; Isandla Institute 2011).

The Municipal Systems Amendment Act of 2012 was passed to address some of these problems as it aims to enhance the professionalisation of local government, but it is insufficient to address all these problems effectively (GGLN 2010b). There are also question marks about the extent to which the Act will be effectively implemented and enforced, as highlighted at a roundtable discussion organised by the Community Law Centre in November 2011 (Ntliziywana 2011).

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a critical factor in governance and, more especially, what the GGLN (2010a) has referred to as 'ethical leadership', and a strong public ethos guiding the decision making and behaviour of both elected and appointed senior municipal officials. Public leadership involves

'goal-orientated action, undertaken through a dynamic and transparent process, involving the leader with relevant others, in an inclusive setting,

and effective realization of legitimate, legal and useful goals and objectives. This process requires continuous democratic and organizational mandating and learning to progressively enhance effective and proper policy making and policy implementation for service delivery aimed at improving the quality of lives of citizens.' (Schwella 2008:27)

Seen from this perspective, public leadership suggests high levels of transparency and accountability, where decisions and behaviour are open to public scrutiny and can be assessed against agreed norms and standards. The 'governance deficit' is often a result of weak public accountability⁵ or leaders who put personal and/or party interests before the public interest, and, in particular, before the interests of poor and marginalised sections of society.

Leadership in public institutions needs to be matched with leadership at community level that is able to advance inclusive local development and hold local government institutions to account. Unfortunately, it cannot be assumed that community leadership is inherently more democratic, more accountable or more inclusive (Cornwall 2008). Rather, leadership at community level is sometimes weak and/or divided and divisive, with the fragmented structure of local government contributing to community fragmentation, division and disempowerment (Bénil-Gbaffou 2008). It is therefore important to consider how best to cultivate and support non-partisan leaders and leadership structures at community level.

MINDSETS AND ATTITUDES

A critical factor in the 'governance deficit' is the dominant mindset that the state will act as a provider

of services and deliverer of development, making communities passive recipients and beneficiaries of the development process. In communities, this mindset comes with a sense of entitlement.⁶ In the state, this mindset often comes with a need to control the course of development processes to achieve preconceived outcomes. Where this mindset dominates, there is little appreciation of the intrinsic value of engaging communities in planning, implementation and monitoring of local development and of the notion of active citizenship, as espoused in the *National Development Plan* (NPC 2011).

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

One particularly unfortunate result of the progressive edifice of public participation in local government is that it seems to have stifled further creativity in designing models, structures and processes to facilitate inclusive participatory governance. With the emphasis on compliance across a host of municipal roles and functions, it is perhaps not surprising that a compliance-oriented mentality also seems to manifest towards the dynamic and unpredictable imperative of public participation. As the NPC (2011:366) notes,

'Initiatives aimed at preventing malfeasance often focus on restricting the scope for discretion, but this has the unintended consequence of limiting the scope for innovation. The danger is that the principal objectives of public servants becomes following rules, whereas it should be about getting things done.'

The preceding discussion brings to the fore a number of imperatives to overcome the 'governance deficit'. First, there is a need to address the value

system that permits certain behaviours and practices, such as corruption and undue political interference, and to put in place the necessary mechanisms of routine accountability. Measures such as the Municipal Systems Amendment Act are a step in the right direction, but much more is required to shift the political culture of the day to a more democratic, accountable and service-oriented one. Among others, political parties have an important role to play in this regard (Isandla Institute 2011).

Related to this, and this is the second imperative, is the need to strengthen leadership, in particular, leadership that is motivated by a public-service ethos and is intent on improving the quality of lives of people through collaborative approaches.

Third, there is a need to shift the relationship between state and communities/citizens from provider and recipients to one in which both groups see themselves as co-producers of development (Mitlin 2008) or, as the title of a paper by Cornwall and Gaventa (2000) suggests with reference to communities, 'from users and choosers to makers and shapers'. Finally, and linked the previous point, there is a need to translate the reconfiguration of state-civil society relationships practice through the design and application of practical models and tools. The emphasis is on simultaneously enhancing and expanding current structures and processes to allow for more inclusive and meaningful community engagement in local planning and decision making. Here it is instructive to look beyond the procedural tools and structures provided for in the Municipal Systems Act and learn from community-based collaborative planning in other sectors, such as primary health care, water and human settlements. Ultimately, by bringing these experiences into view, the scope of local governance will be broadened beyond what is currently provided for in local government legislation.

For the purposes of this paper, the last two imperatives are focused on: the next section makes the case for reconceptualising state–civil society relations, drawing particularly on Amartya Sen's work; and this is followed by a section on approaches, tools and models to reinvigorate participatory local governance in South Africa. The final part of this paper provides a brief roadmap to the contributions in this volume.

RECONCEPTUALISING STATE– CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS

As argued before, the seeming disconnect between public participation on the one hand and development trajectories and outcomes on the other hand, is partly a result of how the relationship between the (local) state and civil society/ community/citizen is conceptualised.

While this was not envisaged in the design and policy formulation of the South African local governance system, in practice, public participation has more often than not been approached as an activity, an event, a regrettable legislative requirement perhaps, with little bearing on local priority setting and development. Local communities may be consulted, as legislation necessitates, but they are not routinely equipped with relevant information and insights to participate in a *negotiated* process of determining priorities and trade-offs (Friedman 2006; Ramjee and van Donk 2011). Also, there is a lack of feedback to communities once consultative processes have run their course, resulting in community discontent where it appears their views have been ignored or sidelined. Thus, public participation does not seem to yield significant substantive results.

The real issue at stake here is power and influence, that is, the extent to which local communities and residents have the power to

influence the development course of their municipality. As Cornwall (2000) has noted, to be meaningful, arguments for participation and institutional accountability must become grounded in a conception of rights which, in a development context, strengthens the status of citizens from being beneficiaries of development to becoming its rightful and legitimate claimants. Kothari (2001) suggests that participatory development programmes emphasising social inclusion draw previously marginalised individuals and groups into the development process, but do so in ways that bind them more tightly to structures of power that they are then able to question. The emphasis on making claims, as per Cornwall (above), and the ability to question, as Kothari highlights, is crucial to avoid situations in which the terms of the engagement and the possible outcomes are predetermined. Otherwise, 'what people are "empowered to do" is to take part in the modern sector of "developing" societies' (Henkel and Stirrat 2001:182). This implies foreclosing a range of debates about alternative futures and the political projects that might enable them to be realised. Williams (2004) refers to this as the spread of bureaucratic non-state power.

Ultimately, what is required is a recalibration of state–civil society relationships based on an appreciation of the notion of active citizenship, as foregrounded in the National Development Plan (NPC 2011).

Amartya Sen's work on justice, capabilities and public reason is instructive here (Sen 2005, 2009), and has seemingly informed the drafters of the *National Development Plan* (NPC 2011). Sen's notion of justice is premised on choice, agency, public reasoning and accountability. Thus, Sen discards the notion of a perfectly just society as an ideal that can be brought about when reasonable

persons agree on what the ideal is and make rational choices about public policy—including what the ideal institutional requirements of justice are. While other political philosophers, such as Rawls, have adopted the notion of a hypothetical social contract that reasonable people would ascribe to, Sen (2009:17) argues that ‘What is needed instead is an agreement, based on public reasoning, on rankings of alternatives that can be realized’. These alternatives, Sen maintains, need to be worked out in detail to allow for assessments of possible options or scenarios to be meaningful. Moreover, the process of how these alternatives or scenarios have come about is as important as the scenarios themselves. Sen therefore sees a direct relationship between the procedures of deliberation and accountability (referred to as ‘public reason’) and democracy, which in turn is closely connected to justice.

The emphasis on deliberation and reasoning strongly resonates in the literature on collaborative planning. Patsy Healy, a leading planning theorist, stresses the ‘significance of the micro-processes of governance practices and the role of ideas and discourses in structuring how these happen’ (Healy 2000:917). She further argues: ‘This moves the debate in planning theory from the crude opposition between “scientific–technical rationality” as a way of producing policies versus so-called “politics” to an analysis of the micro-political processes through which policy meanings are constructed, resources distributed and regulatory powers exercised.’

Indeed, differentiating between democratic government and the norms and features of public reason, Sen argues that what makes a society just is the existence of discursive characteristics that create a climate of open public discussion. These characteristics include freedom of information and speech, an independent media, basic civil rights,

opportunities to participate in politics, and the possibility of political dissent (Sen 2009:327). These discursive features provide citizens with opportunities to exercise freedoms (‘capabilities’—see below). As a result, better outcomes will be achieved and accountability will be enhanced. For Sen, discursive features that facilitate open public discussion are not merely procedurally just, but also advance substantive justice.

Put simply, *how* development options are developed and realised is as important, if not more so in Sen’s argument, than *whether* these options are realised. 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.

The ability to exercise freedoms ties in with Sen’s conceptualisation of capabilities. Capabilities denote a person’s opportunity and ability to generate outcomes that s/he has reason to value, taking into account relevant personal characteristics and external factors. This resonates with the notion of agency, that is, the capacity to make choices and engage in economic, social and political actions. This, in turn, links to the notion of accountability. In the words of Kelly (2011:5), ‘Accountability underscores the agency-focus of a capabilities approach’.

The capabilities approach also reminds us that participation in formal processes relies on participants understanding the norms and rules that frame the dialogue, as well as the rationality that underpins the whole process. However, Watson (2003; 2009:2269) reminds us that there are deeply different rationalities ‘between, on the one hand, organisations, institutions and individuals shaped by the rationality of governing (and, in market economies, modernisation, marketisation and liberalisation), within a global context shaped by

historical inequalities and power relations (such as colonialism and imperialism) and, on the other hand, organisations, institutions and individuals shaped by (the rationality of) the need and desire to survive and thrive (broadly the “poors” and the “informals”). She argues that the construction of these ‘micro-political processes’ (see Healy above) is profoundly shaped by the worldviews and value systems people hold. In a highly divided context like South Africa, we cannot simply assume that public reasoning will lead to consensus; rather, we have to acknowledge the existence of fundamentally different and conflicting rationalities and develop appropriate intermediating spaces. She therefore urges us to recognise that potential of the ‘nature of the “interface” between those involved, where unpredictable encounter and contestation also open the possibility for exploring alternative approaches to planning’ (Watson 2009:2259).

It is clear that this conceptualisation serves to radically reframe the relationship between the democratic state and communities/citizens to one of partners in development, engaged in collaborative planning and, what the New Economics Foundation refers to as, ‘co-production’ (New Economics Foundation 2008). The prospect of this as a ‘radical’ alternative is likely to be brushed aside by militant social movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo and affiliated researchers (Pithouse 2006, for example). While there is always a risk that such processes could defuse and deflate popular struggles through co-option, this is not about depoliticising community struggles; rather, it’s about ensuring that the politics of the poor (further qualified as ‘constructed around a political and material commons’, Pithouse 2006:7)—which in itself is subject to contestation and negotiation—is at the heart of these approaches.

REINVIGORATING PARTICIPATORY LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Reconceptualising the relationship between the local state and communities is a critical step in overcoming the ‘governance deficit’. This is not merely an academic exercise, but needs to find expression in practical tools and models as well as in valued norms and standards of engagement. In other words, the intention is not simply to institutionalise public participation through a fixed repertoire of tools and models, thereby precluding any other forms of political (dis)engagement or disallowing political dissent. Rather, as Sen (2009) has argued, the possibility of political dissent is a key feature of a just society. Thus, respect for alternative modes of expressing voice and dissatisfaction, outside of formalised spaces of engagement, is important, as the GGLN argued in its 2011 publication *Recognising Community Voice and Dissatisfaction*. At the same time, though, there is undoubtedly a need to infuse new ideas and practices to enliven local governance, enable agency, facilitate mediated development scenarios and enhance accountability.

Fortunately, we don’t necessarily have to look far to find these models and approaches. In fact, some have already been implemented quite successfully in local communities. The issue is that they have not yet necessarily been recognised as being part of the ‘local governance repertoire’, because they are pursued in specific sectors such as water, health or human settlements. These initiatives can provide insightful examples of collaborative planning tools, either in the form of structural mechanisms (such as community water management structures, school governing bodies, or planning committees constituted to facilitate informal settlement upgrading in particular localities) or process methods (such as participatory action research and

community planning based on participatory learning and action, including community mapping and enumeration used in informal settlements or community asset mapping in health, etc).

Similarly, there are tried and tested models and methods used in other parts of the world that can be contextualised and adapted to the South African context. To date, participatory budgeting has not adequately been explored as a tool for democratic deliberation and decision making in South Africa, despite its widespread usage in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America (Shah 2007). Likewise, social accountability mechanisms, such as citizen report cards, service-level benchmarking, citizen charters and social audits remain underexplored in local governance.⁷ A similar observation can be made about social media as tools for enhancing accountability, communication and social mobilisation.

Bold approaches to building partnerships that are able to traverse scales of planning—from neighbourhood-level processes to city scale initiatives—have been experimented with in Latin America, the Philippines and Thailand. Describing the Baan Mankong programme in Thailand, Boonyabanha (2005:21) indicates that its distinctive nature was its willingness to provide support not only for community organisations formed by the urban poor, who were involved in neighbourhood level projects, but also for their networks, ‘to allow them to work with city authorities and other local actors and with national agencies on citywide upgrading programmes’. International experience with collaborative approaches to service delivery therefore can also be used to clarify how to further bring ‘participation into development’. For example, Kyessi (2005) has shown the value of an incremental approach to service provision using community-based and informal service providers, managed by

local committees, with technical advice from city administrations.

Back in South Africa, there are moves afoot to revisit and redesign the ward committee system, which continues to serve as the corner stone of the system of participatory local governance in South Africa.⁸ While the debate on the benefits and drawbacks of ward committees is highly polarised, these efforts clearly stem from a recognition that the ward committee system in its current form is not living up to its potential of being an effective mechanism for improving public participation, representation and development at ward level.

In sum, municipalities in South Africa ought to have access to a wide-ranging menu of options and methodologies for deepening and expanding participatory democracy, and have the political will and courage to experiment with the tools and approaches deemed suitable for their specific localities. 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). 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’.

ABOUT THIS VOLUME

The purpose of this edited volume is to explore alternative conceptions, approaches and methods of 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. In other words, the emphasis has tended to be on how existing participation mechanisms and development-related policy can be strengthened within the boundaries of what already exists. Significant attention has been given, for example, to the failings of the ward committee system and how to make it work better (Smith and de Visser 2009). While there is value to this kind of approach, it is necessary to explore new methods of promoting participation and development and to ask: 'What's next?' 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.

In exploring innovative models for participatory local governance and pro-poor development, the contributors to this publication were advised to consider four dimensions of innovation: extent, locus, range of applicability, and the level at which innovation occurs (see text box). The resulting contributions do not all follow this characterisation exactly, but they do cover most of the dimensions in some or other respect.

The first set of papers focuses on community-led spaces for engagement with the local state and community-driven development. Nontando Ngamlana and Malachia Mathoho present a sample of Afesis-Corplan's work related to citizen-driven initiatives to engage the local state and monitor its performance, including the Good Governance Surveys, civil society action groups, ward key performance indicators and land access forums. The paper concludes that the spaces for engagement provided for by current legislation are inadequate and that municipalities need to recognise and appreciate citizens as partners in development, rather than seeing them as passive beneficiaries.

Glenn Hollands then reviews the role of social media in citizen-initiated forms of engagement with the state. He notes that social media has significant potential for effective service delivery, enhanced public participation and accountability, and for facilitating social mobilisation. His paper focuses primarily on the latter, that is, social media as tools of autonomous civil society activism, and its potential for enhanced communication, opportunity, responsibility, agency and accountability. The author concludes that this potential remains underutilised in South Africa.

INNOVATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The following four dimensions of innovation related to participatory local governance and pro-poor development were identified in the process of compiling this publication:

The extent of innovation: While the need for innovation is clear, it is not necessarily the case that current practices need to be abandoned. Innovation can occur within existing spaces by injecting new elements without fundamentally changing the nature and purpose of a particular structure. For example, the current ward committee system can be modified to make room for new approaches to ward governance so as to make it more inclusive and ensure that citizens can exert influence during key decision-making points, such as processes linked to the drawing up of integrated development plans. Similarly, new skills may be needed by community leaders to optimise the impact of citizen-led development initiatives already under way.

Alternatively, innovative approaches can mean entirely innovative approaches that introduce new methods, structures, or policy that have not yet been explored or implemented.

The locus of innovation: Innovative practices or approaches can be directed at municipalities and government structures, or at civil society. Because one of the core functions of civil society is to hold government accountable, the focus is often on offering critiques and feedback on governance matters from the perspective of the public. It is necessary, however, for civil society to also look inward and to determine what new methods and approaches can be harnessed into their own practices, such as innovative methods of engaging with the state or different ways of building networks and coalitions.

The range of applicability: Innovative approaches can be directed at broad conceptions of public participation or can be issue-based. For example, new methods of participation and consultation can be introduced into the policy drafting processes, such as new spaces for obtaining citizen feedback. This is a broader approach to innovation that tends to focus on overarching principles and structures, without addressing a particular socio-economic right. Alternatively, innovation can be introduced into a specific issue such as informal settlement upgrading or civil society's mobilisation around land rights.

The level at which innovation occurs: Innovation can be found at the level of policy and legislation, or practice which also has an impact on how far-reaching a particular shift may have. For example, changes in municipal-related legislation is likely to be nationally relevant which means that factors beyond any particular municipality need to be taken into account and country-wide distinctions should be considered (rural and urban; affluent and economically marginalised; levels of education; existing infrastructure). Similarly, innovation can occur at the level of practice which means that guidelines and practical consideration remains within the boundaries of existing policy and legislation.

In her paper, Kate Tissington of SERI focuses on community organising in the context of *in situ* upgrading of informal settlements. Her paper documents an example of unfulfilled development promises, and the tenacity of the local community (Slovo Park settlement in Johannesburg) to engage with community development processes. The paper highlights several fault lines around planning and participation in upgrading. It concludes by observing that the community of Slovo Park is by no means passive and in fact is a well-organised and cohesive community. Despite this, it has been frustrated in its efforts to engage the state and be recognised as a credible development partner.

The next set of papers focuses more explicitly on collaborative planning as an approach and on the types of processes, methods and structural mechanisms that ought to be explored.

Also focused on the theme of human settlements, Andrea Bolnick of CORC/Ikhalami narrates a case study of a community-led upgrading initiative in the informal settlement of Ruimsig in Roodepoort, Johannesburg. Various other stakeholders, including the local municipality and built environment professionals, have supported the initiative in various ways. The case study is an insightful example of how collaboration between communities, the state and other stakeholders can

transform mindsets, relationships and development outcomes.

The paper by Pamela Masiko-Kambala, Tristan Görgens and Mirjam van Donk of Isandla Institute elaborates on the notion of 'communities of practice' and argues for the establishment of 'networked spaces' that bring together multiple stakeholders. The paper argues 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 trade-offs.

Mike Makwela of Planact promotes participatory budgeting as an innovative model to enhance local governance and citizen participation. Participatory budgeting denotes a significant paradigm shift, away from a technocratic approach to budget preparation and monitoring, and towards a participatory process involving local communities. Drawing lessons from international experiences, the paper 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.

The last set of papers reflects on social accountability tools and other models to facilitate active citizen involvement in monitoring and development.

Lisa Thompson of the African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (ACCEDE) writes about

the use of a perception-based survey as a tool for assessing the views and experiences of local residents and communities about the quality of participatory processes and municipal service delivery. In Cape Town, these surveys have informed the development of citizen scorecards, which citizens and municipal employees can use to rate local government performance in a range of areas.

Elroy Paulus and Gouwah Samuels of Black Sash present the Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project, an innovative and ambitious community-driven initiative to monitor public services in South Africa. The intention of the initiative is to put in place a system that enhances government accountability in relation to the quality of services it provides. By virtue of its locus and scope, this initiative also holds the promise of enhancing citizen participation by training and deploying a cadre of active citizen monitors.

The final paper by Artwell Chivhinge and Rooks Moodley of the Eastern Cape NGO Coalition introduces the Household Food Security Model piloted in the Eastern Cape as an example of active citizen involvement in meeting basic needs. The paper shows that by virtue of the direct involvement of communities better socio-economic outcomes can be achieved. It specifically notes improvements in household food security and income as well as in community health and well-being.

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NOTES

- ¹ I am grateful to Ronald Mukanya and Tristan Görgens for allowing me an opportunity to share the emerging argument and for helpful comments and suggestions for improvement on an earlier draft.
- ² Municipal IQ Hotspots Monitor records major protests staged by community members against a municipality, as recorded by the media, concerning issues that are the (perceived) responsibility of local government. It excludes protests stemming from other issues, e.g. demarcation, provincial disputes, industrial relations disputes and clear party political issues.
- ³ Andries Tatane's beating and shooting was broadcast on YouTube and international stations such as CNN.
- ⁴ On 17 January 2011 a group of concerned Indian citizens published a letter in the Hindustan Times ('An Open Letter to our Leaders'), in which they used similar terminology to express their concerns with the state of governance in India. They coined the term 'governance deficit' to highlight undue political interference, corruption, political intolerance, and lack of meaningful public participation, all of which contributes to an erosion of confidence in national institutions. (See <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/An-Open-Letter-to-our-Leaders/Article1-651546.aspx>.) In a different context, the United Kingdom, the term 'democratic deficit' has been used to denote declining voter trends and reduced trust in political institutions (see Jamie Bartlett in Cornwall 2008:7).
- ⁵ This is contrasted to the notion of 'party accountability', where office bearers primarily (if not exclusively) account to relevant political party structures and party leaders. The current political culture reinforces this type of accountability above public accountability.

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- ⁶ This point was made by Bridgette Gasa, a member of the National Planning Commission, in a radio broadcast of *AM Live*, 26 March 2012.
- ⁷ Chicago provides a far-reaching example of how a municipality can institutionalise public accountability. Here, Mayor Rahm Emanuel forced the city to publish all 'no-bid contracts' on their website and instituted a system of 'reverse auctions' where bidders for city contracts have to post the details of their bids online—allowing other organisations to openly compete with them, and ensuring accountability to the public about the final outcome. (see http://m.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/04/meet-the-new-boss/8899/?single_page=true Retrieved 28 March 2012).
- ⁸ In 2011 the Department for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs started the process of revisiting the ward committee system, with the intention of publishing a discussion document for public engagement. The department's intention is to strengthen ward committees by granting them more powers and resources to engage in neighbourhood planning. While the discussion document has not yet seen the light of day, similar ideas have found their way into the ANC Policy Discussion Document on Legislature and Governance, released in March 2012.