Stories of innovative democracy at local level: enhancing participation, activism and social change across the world

October 2014

Coordinated by Dorothée Guénéheux, Clara Bosco, Agnès Chamayou and Henri Rouillé d’Orfeuil
This special issue of FACTS Reports is a collaboration between INSTITUT VEOLIA and CIVICUS with contributions from independent authors.
About FACTS Reports

Aim and scope
FACTS Reports is an international, free access for both readers and authors, peer-reviewed journal devoted to promoting field-based activities in developing and developed countries. Since 2007, FACTS is a forum that publishes manuscripts and opinion pieces in the areas of economy and development, health, education, agriculture, and the environment.

Articles are submitted to peer review with a requirement that peers work in the field themselves. The main criterion for publication is that the articles describe actions that are useful and can be reproduced. Editorials and Commentaries are also published. This process ensures critical input from world experts, allows for cooperation among authors, and promotes a high level of science.

Objectives
The major objective of FACTS Reports is to assist field actors, International Organisations and National Agencies in their various missions in their goals to communicate, to exchange and to disseminate good practices and lessons learned from the implementation of some programmes. Many field actors implement projects in developing countries to address issues related to economics, health, the environment, agriculture, education and development in general. There are many opportunities to learn from the outcomes of these projects.

The journal is a unique international instrument and, moreover, the first Initiative of this type in the world. It provides to key international development actors, a neutral and independent platform for spreading good practices. In addition, it allows them to express freely their views and opinions, to exchange experiences and cooperate with other international development actors across the world.

About CIVICUS

CIVICUS is a global network of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world.

We strive to promote marginalised voices, especially from the Global South, and have members in more than 140 countries throughout the world.

Founded in 1993, we are internationally recognised as a credible, trusted voice on civil society issues.

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Foreword

Georges Valentis,
Publication Director, FACTS Reports
Managing Director, Veolia Institute

This issue of FACTS Reports on local democratic innovations is an outstanding and unique achievement, because for the first time it brings together this key subject for humanity, and the peer review process for papers on this subject. Indeed, the goal of the FACTS Reports is to provide a platform for communication and exchange between those involved with development directly in the field, encouraging them to publish their achievements as scientific papers (with a specific format and peer review process).

This special issue presents many and varied field actions, such as the promotion of the rights of young people, the resolution of the conflicts of agropastoral activities, or the process of participatory decision-making on community budgetary allocations, among many others. It addresses projects developed all over the world, on five continents, and covering both the northern and southern hemispheres. The legitimate initial queries and doubts that assailed those who started this publication as regards its feasibility, have been swept away by the enthusiasm and the large number of papers that have been sent in.

This issue on local democratic innovations has produced high quality results, and readers can now enjoy them on the FACTS Reports website. The outcome is the result of the collective work, carried out with as much conviction as generosity, of the various participants:

- firstly, the authors of the papers, who invested their time and effort and trusted in the methods applied by FACTS Reports,
- the members of CIVICUS, who have made this publication possible with their hard work and commitment,
- the Institut de Recherche et débat sur la Gouvernance (IRG, institute for research and debate on governance), for its valuable contribution,
- Henri Rouillé d’Orfeuil, Member of the Academy of Agriculture of France and Henri Valot, Former Outreach Director of Civicus, the principal investigators of this publication,
- the RESOLIS Observatory and its Director Agnes Chamayou, who coordinated the editorial validation (peer review) with considerable care and professionalism.

I cannot thank them enough for their contribution.
Stories of innovative democracy at local level: enhancing participation, activism and social change across the world

Dr Danny Sriskandarajah
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I am very pleased to present to you the FACTS Reports special issue on local democratic innovations. I am proud that CIVICUS is involved in such an innovative initiative, supporting our core beliefs. At CIVICUS, we believe that in a healthy society people have multiple opportunities to come together, discuss and deliberate, and act for the common good.

This collection of essays is both welcome and timely. It highlights the creativity and necessity of civil society as the heart of healthy, just and inclusive communities. Despite the well documented deteriorating conditions in which civil society operates all over the world, democratic innovations are still happening, with ingenious and creative solutions facilitated by civil society.

It was the desire to showcase and celebrate this vibrancy of civil society that became the motivation for CIVICUS and FACTS Reports to join forces and collaborate on this special issue of the Journal. It is our hope that this work will spark interest and further development of innovative practices around citizen engagement, citizen participation and active citizenship on the ground.

Through publications like this and our activities more generally, CIVICUS will continue to explore the role of civil society, through the dual lens of local experiences and global perspectives. Since 2006, our Participatory Governance project has also been compiling and sharing good practice around inclusive governance processes; more resources can been found at www.pgexchange.org.

CIVICUS is the only global network of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society. We speak out when civic space is threatened, and we try to find new ways of helping civil society around the world do its job better. If you are not already part of the CIVICUS family, I urge you to join us.

I would like to warmly thank all of the authors for sharing their inspiring stories and for all the collaboration over the last year. Many thanks to Henri Rouillé d’Orfeuil for his determination in developing a vision into such an enlightening and useful publication. Thanks to our partners and the Institut de recherche et débat sur la gouvernance who took time to peer-review the following articles. Finally, thanks to the CIVICUS and FACTS Reports teams, which produced this insightful publication with enthusiasm and energy.

For all CIVICUS members and those engaged in democratic governance, this FACTS Reports will provide great examples of ways to govern ourselves with processes that are inclusive, transparent, accountable, and citizen powered. May the innovation and inspiration continue.
Democratic innovations: reshaping public governance?

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From Europe to Latin America, from Asia to Africa, and across the Arab world, the news is full of examples of disconnect between governments and citizens. Public institutions are not meeting—or are no longer meeting—the needs and expectations of the population. At the same time, the increase in social demands echoes a desire among citizens to take control of their own destiny, to have their say, and to be given their due. But it also reflects a new aspiration: to go beyond representative democracy alone, punctuated by periodic elections, towards a democracy of “content”, seen as a continuous process, with the aim of bringing public policies more into line with social demands. That requires a change in the way public policies are devised, implemented, and monitored, and a reshaping of public governance to make it more democratic and more legitimate.

Numerous initiatives have been developed around the world, over the last 10 years and more, to meet these goals and build a more participatory democracy, more receptive to people’s demands. This special issue of FACTS Reports—compiled in partnership with CIVICUS, World Alliance for Citizen Participation—sets out to identify these “democratic innovations”, to understand them better, to learn actionable lessons from them and, above all, to share them. The objective of FACTS is to test these ideas rigorously, and to facilitate their dissemination on a larger scale.

The initiatives presented here, taken from a very wide range of sectors and geographies, focus on transparency, on consultation and deliberation, and on control over public policy. They all seek to reinforce responsibility for public action, a founding principle of democracy, which entails that governments should be accountable to the governed for the actions they take.

Several of the salient features of these innovative democratic experiences emerge from reading the papers in this issue.

Democratic innovation implies greater participation. Making that participation a reality, beyond a purely rhetorical mobilization, means giving a louder voice to citizens and to the organizations of civil society and enhancing their capacity for engagement in public affairs. As the various papers stress, participation demands preparation: to be credible and effective, it has to be thought through in advance. Depending on the situation, this may mean citizen education, or it may mean the development of the necessary expertise to act as a credible interlocutor with the authorities.

Democratic innovation seeks to resolve a particular public problem. It is not an end in itself. This issue underlines the effects and impacts that democratic innovations have on public policy and on the distribution of public services. Participatory mechanisms enable greater responsiveness to popular demands, such as in Madagascar, for example, where they have improved the water supply in certain districts. Participation helps to reinforce the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of public policy, by gaining community buy-in.

Democratic innovation flows from the synergies generated between different types of actor (public institutions, civil society organizations, private sector, citizens, the media). It is by getting these diverse actors to work together that the greatest leverage is obtained on public policy. In Niger, the establishment of a partnership between different local actors facilitates the peaceful settlement of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. This multi-actor dimension of governance underlines the importance of building collective intelligence and collaboration in public action. In this respect, the innovative democratic mechanisms presented here are factors for reinforcing social bonds and social cohesion.

Democratic innovations have to be won, step by step. The road that leads to democratic innovations is neither short nor easy: they are embedded in power struggles between the different stakeholders of public action. While they may, in some cases—such as in the state of Oregon or the Atelier Climat
Democratic innovations are, above all, contextual. They result from collective dynamics specific to a particular place and time. The innovative character of these local initiatives derives primarily from their ability to drive social change in a particular context.

Though it develops in a specific context, innovation is also the result of exchange and cross-fertilization. In the field of democracy, especially, it often grows from a local adaptation of practices observed elsewhere, which is why disseminating and sharing these experiences is so important. That is the purpose of this issue, which consciously adopts this particular dynamic of democratic innovations.

Faithful to the FACTS Reports methodology, the papers that follow begin with the accounts provided by the field-workers. This they have done without pretense, without embellishment, with the sole aim of sharing their experience. The scientific rigor of their reasoning, and the relevance of their reports, have been validated and confirmed by peer review. Therein lies the purpose and usefulness of the FACTS approach: helping to create a “science of field action” and giving these concrete experiences their rightful place in our knowledge.

The themes addressed in this issue are central to the work and the philosophy of the Institute for Research and Debate on Governance (IRG) on democratic governance and the co-production of public action. We are delighted, therefore, to have been associated with this issue, which illustrates the diversity of governance practices around the world, their constant evolution, and the lessons they can teach us in terms of public policy-making. We believe it is essential to compare these innovative experiences, to share them, and to draw conclusions from them that have truly universal application.
The Lisbon Participatory Budget: results and perspectives on an experience in slow but continuous transformation

Giovanni Allegretti and Sofia Antunes

Abstract. Since 2008, Lisbon has been the first European capital to adopt a Participatory Budget (PB) process at a municipal scale to involve its inhabitants in the elaboration and ranking of the proposals to be included in a predetermined slice of the city council’s budget. Lisbon’s process has become a benchmark for various similar experiences, both in Portugal and abroad. It brought innovative elements into the international debate, such as the use of new technologies to present and rank proposals, and therefore it sought to focus on the construction of a more “European” model of PB.

One of the innovative features of the Lisbon PB (Lx-PB) process - among the first to be more than merely advisory, unlike most previous experiences in Portugal - is its evolutional nature. It allowed to capitalize and increase, over its various editions, a more inclusive matrix through enhanced dialogue with citizens and a gradual improvement of the deliberative quality, derived from various learning experiences related to errors and limits observed throughout the participatory path. This article - paying special attention to the incremental and evolutional nature of the experiment - aims to highlight some peculiarities of the first five years of life of the Lx-PB, stressing the limits and changes over time.

Keywords. Participatory budget, Participatory democracy, Municipal innovation, Local government, Participatory methodologies, Lisbon Portugal

1. Introduction

Today, when more than 2,700 municipalities around the world have experimented with the Participatory Budget (PB), it is worth reflecting on the experience of Lisbon, a country that first adapted to a European capital a participatory path originally developed in Latin America at a time when other capitals (Rome, Paris and London) only had pilot experiences at parish level, i.e. sub-municipal institutions (UN-Habitat, 2009). Currently, PB processes are ongoing in other European capitals (such as Bratislava, Reykjavik and Helsinki); however, the case of Lisbon remains an interesting one, especially because it had a broad impact in Portugal. In fact, the Lisbon PB (Lx-PB) granted nation-wide visibility and media projection to the participatory budget, thus triggering debates in various municipalities and some parties (especially the Portuguese Socialist Party and, within in, at the highest level of its Youth Organisation, Juventude Socialista). In that way, it focused on the transformation of the panorama of the Portuguese experience. Likewise, it has become an important reference in the lusophone world, affecting the debate about PBs in Cape Verde and the restructuring of the PB of Maputo, capital of Mozambique. Also, Lisbon is today one of the cities actively involved in the so-called “Iberian Network of Participatory Budgets” which its annual event was held in Spain for the exchange of good practices, in March 2014.

Now in its sixth edition, the Lisbon Participatory Budget (Lx-PB) was one of the first in Portugal to be more than merely advisory, seeking to confer an effective decision-making power to the citizens in defining part of the public policies of their municipality. In this sense, the experience of the Lx-PB tried to recover a central aspect (the co-decision aspect) of the original model that characterized the first
Participatory Budgets in Brazil, such as Porto Alegre, that since 1989 (Fedozzi, 2013; Baiocchi, 2005; Santos, 2003; Allegretti, 2003; Abers, 2000) represented the “icon” of the most internationally acknowledged processes of this type. This recognition is not so much for being the first experience, but rather because they have been implemented in a large state capital and in a quite radical form. It should also be noted that, as happened with many European experiences (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2009), Lisbon PB distinguished itself from most of the original Brazilians processes not only for being a pilot project (limited to small slices of the municipal budget) but also because it did not place special emphasis on issues related to social inclusion and redistributive justice on behalf of the most disadvantaged social groups.

Despite these structural limitations, it managed to differentiate itself from the consultative model that prevailed in Portugal up until then. At the time there was a tendency to view the Portuguese PBs as experiences merely limited to the construction of a “proximity democracy” (Sintomer et alii, 2013): that is, capable of narrowing the internal bonds of the social fabric and the relationships between local communities and municipal institutions but not capable of developing a bold reform of the political culture in terms of redistribution of power balances, namely in what pertains to the choice of the investments to fund with municipal resources each year.

It should be noted that the first implementation of the Lisbon PB coincided not only with the worsening of the economic and financial crisis in the country but also with the territorial and operational reorganization of the Portuguese municipalities. In that period Portugal experienced a visible territorial and operational reorganization of the Portuguese municipalities. That period Portugal experienced a visible increase in the diffusion of innovative practices in municipal management, previously not very common (Mota, 2005).

This article seeks to analyze some peculiar features and striking transformations of the Lisbon Participatory Budget over its first five years of existence, based on the intermediate results of a comparative academic research project. These data were collected by different quantitative, qualitative and participatory observation methodologies over two annual cycles of operation in 10 Portuguese Participatory Budget experiences between 2010 and the end of 2012.

2. Peculiarities and evolution of the Lisbon PB.

Participatory budgets - as defined by PB-UNIT (UK institution that supports municipalities in the implementation of this type of participatory practices) - are processes that “trust decisions on a portion of a municipal budget or of another budget that concerns them to the citizens of a given territory”. The literature includes them in the scope of “invitation to participate” practices (Ibarra, 2007), ranking them among the most advanced municipal innovations (Pateman 2012, Smith, 2009; Fung and Wright, 2002) for two main reasons: (1) for daring to intervene in a strategic scope of the power of the representative institutions that is seldom brought into public discussion - the distribution of public resources, and (2) for achieving focus, at the same time, on the perception of the “democratic deficit” (Norris, 2011), on the transformation of the political culture, on the reorganization of public services and on the induction of new methods of collective action.

As highlighted in the academic debate on participatory budgets (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2009; Wampler, 2007; Santos, 2003; Avritzer and Navarro, 2003), the success of these new innovations greatly depends on the balance of four factors: (1) political will, (2) organizational capacity of the social fabric of a territory, (3) autonomy and financial capacity of the promoter political entity and (4) organizational architecture (or “design”) of the participatory process.

In Lisbon, the first two elements were strengthened in 2006 due to a political crisis that hit the city, forcing the resignation of the Mayor and the new mid-term elections (with a high abstention rate). The new municipal government of minority coalition, led by the Socialist António Costa, felt in 2007 the need to create consensus that went beyond the election results. Thus, it organized thematic public participation sessions and several open Decentralised Meetings in some of the 53 parishes of the municipality to collect input from citizens and associations about plans, projects and priorities of city council intervention for the following years.

Following the encouraging results of the first timid openings that targeted the creation of spaces for dialogue with the citizens, the Lisbon City Council (CML) adopted, on 9th July 2008, the “Charter of Principles” of the Participatory Budget, acknowledging the need to “proceed towards a comprehensive model of citizen participation, (...) emblematic of a new way of governing the city.” Afterwards, Proposal 833/P/2008b structured a co-decision path for a portion of the investments, up to an amount of 5 million Euros, the highest so far in Portugal and corresponding to 5.4% of the investment capacity of the municipality as it is stated by the official documents of the City Council.

In Lisbon, an experience with participatory budgeting was already in place, albeit only of an advisory nature. Located in the Parishes of Carnide, it was run by a coalition of opposition parties. Thus, the two processes were developed separately (without establishing an open dialogue) and with few methodological affinities. In this context, the Carnide PB came to be extinct in 2009, since the parish decided to contribute more actively within the City Council’s participatory path, endowed with a bigger budget and more comprehensive powers.

Today, the Lisbon PB operates in an annual cycle, which begins in the spring and continues to the summer, with several decentralized assemblies being held in the territory: these are intended for proposals for investment by the citizens, who later become the object of evaluation and technical analysis by municipal services. Then, the Provisional list of Projects to be submitted to vote is published and a period of complaints regarding the proposals analyzed is opened.

In the last quarter of the year the voting stage takes place (in October) and the public presentation of the winning projects (November/December) that close the annual cycle. To promote participation the municipality created an internet portal operated by the City Council, www.lisboa.participa.pt; through this tool, citizens can receive information, submit proposals and vote, and - since 2013 - votes can also be submitted via SMS. The annual process culminates with the integration of the winning projects in the City Council’s Plan of Activities and Budget.
It should be noted that many of the design elements of the Lx-PB, which started in late 2008, derived from a shared reflection with other municipalities within the project “OP Portugal [PB Portugal]”, an initiative supported by the “Equal” European funding line and coordinated by the In-Loco Association for Local Development, in cooperation with the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra and the Centre for Municipal Studies and Training and even some other Municipalities and Parishes that, since 2002, have experimented with merely advisory PB models.

In 2008, the direct influence of the “OP Portugal” project - which offered free training and consulting to build innovative experiences in shared management of public policies - had limited results, as the first edition of the Lx-PB was confined to the last quarter of the year and the interaction with the citizens was limited to the submission of proposals through a web portal not yet very user-friendly.

In the first edition there was a waste of energy and social capital of the citizens who presented investment proposals, to the extent that they could only vote a maximum of three priority thematic areas to receive funding. The ideas proposed for the other 11 areas of competence of the City Council were not evaluated from the technical point of view nor put to the public vote. These limits clearly emerged as a result of an innovative aspect of Lisbon’s pioneering experience (not present in the other Portuguese PBs): a service for the monitoring and evaluation of the PB through questionnaires to the participants to record their satisfaction and open suggestions for transformation.

The more than 1,730 participants who voted in Lx-BP 2008 represented a tiny fraction of the population residing in the capital (564,650 inhabitants, according to INE) but their activism and commitment to the process helped improve it. The 599 questionnaires answered that year revealed that the population became aware of the process mainly through “word of mouth” (42.7% through friends and family), which triggered dynamics of self-organization of citizens and created a high demand (72.6%) to allow for future on-site participation in territorial or thematic meetings favouring the reduction of the exclusion of people with difficulties in the use and/or access to computer technologies.

The structure of the first two editions of Lx-PB was marked by two main innovative aspects. The first relates to universal participation, since - from the beginning - the Lx-PB aimed to cover all individuals over 18 years old living and/or working in the municipality of Lisbon, whether they were representatives of associations and the corporate world or persons not affiliated with any organisation. The second was the flexibility of the organizational architecture, with a view to the gradual improvement of the deliberative quality of the process. Since its conception, the PB has remained as an open process, continually evolving and improving, as stated in the eighth article of the Charter of Principles.

Comparing the 2008 and 2009 cycles, we observe three significant changes: 1) the enrichment of the preparatory phase focused on building the knowledge of the different agents intervening in the PB, 2) the methodological change that put an end to the limit of three thematic areas of priority intervention that acted as an unwanted “filter” on the autonomy of the proposals submitted by citizens; 3) the definition of clear rules of participation (simple and few in number).

By the third year (2010), the Lx-PB began to consolidate itself, using its evolutionary flexibility to balance the institutional formalism and its ability to change in accordance with the learning experiences gained. The biggest novelty of the 2012 Lx-PB was the creation of Participatory Assemblies (PAs - spaces to answer questions and formulate and discuss proposals) and Polling Stations (PSs - support spaces for those who want to cast their vote, for example those who do not have direct Internet access at home or at their work place) as well as the increase of the temporal span of the participatory cycle.

The annual cycle of participation - initially limited to the fall and early winter - gradually came to occupy the entire calendar year, integrating the phases shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1. Budget process and civil society engagement**

The new articulation of the participatory cycle has multiplied the opportunities for debate and discussion and given participants the opportunity to submit proposals through several channels simultaneously, thereby rewarding them for the intensity of their participatory effort.

In fact, the rules provide that those only involved through the PB web portal can submit only one proposal on their own name. In contrast, at Participatory Assemblies, each participant is entitled to submit two proposals to be put to public vote.

In the Participatory Assemblies the physical space is organized into several tables (each with a moderator belonging to the staff of the Lisbon City Council and/or external collaborators) in order to facilitate the dialogue on the quality of proposals. Then, in order to foster cooperation, only the valid proposals meeting the consensus of the participants in each of the tables at which they were presented are considered. In fact, since a maximum number of proposals that can be submitted at each table is not specified, all proposals tend to be accepted by the group. This demonstrates that the tables do not work as “filters”, leading to a high risk of redundancy of proposals. Moreover, all proposals submitted by citizens at the Assemblies or electronically through the Internet Portal,
are entered in the general list and later filtered, analyzed and merged (when similar or complementary) by the City Council’s PB team that then turns them into “projects”. These will go to public vote in early fall of each year.

The analysis phase of the proposals (during Summer months) is the most delicate moment of the PB, since “filtering” is performed by an institutional entity and the choices made by the technicians can be perceived by citizens as “discretionary”, ill-founded and – ultimately – meant to “steer” the instructions of the participants towards projects already predetermined or formatted to fit specific interests of the political institutions (Allegretti, 2013).

Over time, the rate of mergers and rejections of projects by the municipal technical staff has remained more or less unchanged: for example, in 2010 31.39% (2911) of the 927 original proposals were incorporated in the final list, while in 2013 the rate was 37.56% (207 projects resulting from the 551 original proposals). There were, however, two significant procedural changes throughout the various editions pertaining to the filtering phase, meant to reduce the distrust that this phase could generate in participants. The first refers to the fact that technical services, from 2012 onwards, contact the citizens responsible for the proposals before performing any merger of different (or differently located) proposals that could be perceived as “arbitrary”. The second concerns the complaints period, part of the PB cycle since 2009 (with the release of a provisional list of projects in the second half of September, in order for citizens to comment on the result of the merger/integration/rejection of their proposals). Undoubtedly, the period of review of projects based on complaints has a short duration (less than a week), not allowing a space for further dialogue and clarification of doubts on the technical analysis and the mergers to be performed.

To offer a brief historical summary of changes to the Lx-PB model over time, it is worth mentioning that the outcome of the municipal elections in 2009 (with the victory of the Socialist Party and the integration of two aldermen from other political forces previously involved in the process cycle in 2008/2009) favoured the institutional support to the PB.

Table 1. The Lisbon PB in numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory Budget Cycle</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Votes</td>
<td>2809</td>
<td>4719</td>
<td>11570</td>
<td>17887</td>
<td>29911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects put to vote</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants registered in the website</td>
<td>1732</td>
<td>6958</td>
<td>12738</td>
<td>26815</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals submitted</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa 2013

* PAs are the on-site Participatory Assemblies of the PB. ** Data missing in the 2012 PB report. The number of registered people is accumulated from year to year (while in other cities the registration is performed each year).

Table 2 – Characterisation of the participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Characteristics*</th>
<th>2008 PB Participants via web portal (Lisboa Participa)</th>
<th>2009 PB Participants via web portal (Lisboa Participa)</th>
<th>2010 PB Participants via web portal (Lisboa Participa)</th>
<th>Participants in PAs</th>
<th>Participants in PSs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Range of the dominant group</td>
<td>35-55 years old</td>
<td>26-35 years old</td>
<td>26-35 years old</td>
<td>56-65 and &gt; 65 years old</td>
<td>&gt; 65 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Education Level</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>1st Cycle of Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant relationship with the Municipality</td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Each characteristic pertains only to the dominant group. Source: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2011 – www.lisboaparticipa.pt

1 In “Relatório de Avaliação e Propostas da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa para o OP 2010-2011”, page 28.
Thus, in 2010, a bet was made in strengthening internal human resources, partially open to citizens also; moreover, the “PB bus” was created which – by circling the city - allowed a better divulging and support during the presentation and voting of projects stages. These efforts were rewarded by a dynamics of significant growth in the number of participants, proposals and projects, as evidenced by Table 1.

The new on-site participatory spaces introduced in 2009 may have not contributed much to the increase of participants, but it doubtless reinforced the legitimacy of the PB, gradually seeking to reduce exclusion through measures of positive discrimination.

Table 2, comparing the dominant types of participants in the first three editions of Lx-PB, shows how the introduction of on-site assemblies (territorial and thematic) has diversified the public, integrating new social groups (with differentiated age, professional and literacy characteristics), formerly marginal in the process. The PAs also brought gains to the development of horizontal dialogue between citizens, reinforcing the quality of the proposals submitted to the City Council. In fact, in 2010, about 43% of the proponents formalized their participation through PAs and a significant percentage of the winning proposals were formulated and recorded there. The spaces for face-to-face interaction thus seem to trigger more solid ideas and encourage negotiations, creating convergences between players. The distribution of participants in tables (with the support of volunteer employees, coordinated since May 2011 by DIOP) allows a more open and horizontal dialogue. However, this organizational choice did not arrive at its natural consequences, since the PAs could act as a “filter” to the number of proposals, based on the level of participation created around them (as it happens in the city of Cascais). However, in Lisbon the number of ideas that can come from each table is not limited and those present are not required to enter selective negotiations; thus, the assemblies contribute to the redundancy of the overall number of proposals that proceed to the technical verification phase.

In fact, the CML continues today to encourage the presence of residents at PAs, allowing the submission of two proposals per person, while the web page only allows one per person. This clearly illustrates the general philosophy of the Lx-PB that, from the outset, maintained a strongly competitive nature, almost a “contest of ideas” (Dias, 2010), based on proposals submitted in individual name (although often developed in a group). This characteristic tends to favour the more organized groups and with the greater mobilization capacity, not ensuring the criteria of social solidarity and/or territorial redistribution in the allocation of the resources assigned to the process.

This line of evolution is not inevitable, as it could be countered if mechanisms for greater coordination between the participants were introduced in the proposal submission. The mobilization capacity seems to still be dependent on networks that pre-exist the PB. This fact is supported by the top rated projects in the first three editions: (1) bike lanes, (2) expansion of the Monsanto kennel/cattery and (3) construction of a municipal rugby field.15

Such dynamics have had heavy effects on the internal organization of CML’s “participatory machine”, given that such redundancy of proposals (and their frequent overlapping) required the creation of a team that, in the time limits established in each cycle, filters the suggestions submitted by the population, merging convergent ideas into coherent and articulated projects that can be submitted to public vote. The verification of the financial and legal viability of the projects also requires a “variable geometry” team, of an interdepartmental nature broader than the three technicians formally responsible for the general organization of the annual cycle of PB. Until today, such tasks may also have had a negative impact on the delivery dates of the projects approved in the different cycles of Lx-PB. The chronic delay is witnessed by the data provided by the Lisbon City Council16, where it can be seen that only 30% of the works of the last five years of PB were finalized by October 2013. Although the delays are, in some cases, attributable to factors that escape the powers of the City Council (bankruptcies, negative decisions of the Court of Auditors, etc.), it is clear that such a low rate of implementation of projects and the slow action of the City Council may trigger a loss of legitimacy of the process by generating too many expectations and frustrations on the citizens.

Given these inconsistencies, it is possible to conclude that there is an “instrumental” political view of the PB, that bets on the mechanism and in producing through it visible “presences” that are useful to the “benchmarking” of the Lisbon area (in terms of numbers of participants, the proposals submitted, etc.). However, the process displays – in subsequent stages - difficulties in “trusting” the inhabitants with a more active leading role in the control, filtering and merging of proposals.

The constant repetition of certain central elements in the initial model of the PB, six years later, suggests this interpretation which, incidentally, seems to correspond to the increasing perception of various social players involved in the process17.

3. The credibility of the PB in a context of crisis

As indicated by Avritzer (2009), the PB is simultaneously a very effective tool and a fragile one, as it depends of the political will to open it to a parity dialogue with the inhabitants and it is susceptible of being maintained under control through an “assisted” and partial opening. The fact that the PB is a voluntary policy and not an instrument provided for in regulatory frameworks makes it even more dependent on the political will of the moment, at the risk of undermining its sustainability and rooting in the territory and the trust of the population (Alves and Allegretti, 2012).

The various methodological changes of the Lx-PB over the years clearly reflect these risks of fragility. Between 2008 and 2009, the expansion of the proposals to 13 thematic areas originated difficulties in the uniformity of the analysis procedures is the different services. Proof of this was the incident in December 2009, motivated by the fact that about 40 proposals failed to be analyzed which, during the voting phase of the projects, resulted in a large number of complaints.
The political vision of the Mayor not only allowed the temporary suspension of the voting period and the revaluation of the proposals forgotten, but also introduced (for future PBs) a specific period to present and evaluate complaints. This measure avoided a boomerang effect for lack of transparency and trust in the process and assured the Lx-PB’s visibility in the press, which may have contributed to the significant increase of members registered in the process in the next cycle by about 69,58, having quadrupled the number of voters (from 1101 to 4719).

The experience served as an example for other processes taking place in the country. So today, almost every Portuguese PB includes procedural phases for filing claims after the stage of technical evaluation of the proposals submitted by the citizens.

However, the absence of a real debate (internal to the CML) on the need for a change in the “a posteriori selection/revision” of the ideas launched by the citizens may be indicative of a failure to understand a feature of the PB that other municipalities have explicitly addressed: the fact that it is a more general mechanism of “social construction of reality” (Allegretti, 2013) in which the perceptions of the citizens (in relation to the good intentions and professionalism of those who lead the process) count, often more than the actions that rule the operation of each participatory cycle. In this perspective, it would be important for the future that the organizers of the Lx-PB provided greater space to record and reflect on the assessments of the process made by the participants.

Such a reflection is even more important in the national context of economic and financial crisis, which has brought to the process a new challenge: to maintain credibility and the confidence of the citizens in the PB in a political context of financial restraint and political disbelief.

It is also worth mentioning that the fifth edition of the Lisbon PB was marked by a cut in global funds, which fell from EUR 5 million to 2.5 million. This cut caused ample controversy at the level of municipal policy, which echoed in the media (especially because in those same days the CML granted financial support to the Rock in Rio festival) but resulted in less criticism from society. In fact, such a “drastic” choice (as it defined by the political opposition at the time it was adopted) communicates a policy option that could have generated broad discontent. That did not happen because the CML - simultaneously - bet on a new methodology capable of valuing opportunities for collective growth. For example, in 2011 the Lx-PB allowed for the first time the vote on two different groups of projects: one with the assigned value of 1.5 million Euros (for projects up to 150,000 €) and another with the value of EUR 1 million (for projects from 500,000 € upwards). Citizens were thus entitled to two votes and allowed proposals and votes on works of greater and lesser structural and financial dimension. This subdivision of categories of projects allowed for greater diversity of areas to be covered, beyond the commonly requested ones (Public and Green Spaces and Infrastructures). Thus, in 2012, 73% of the larger projects concerning the areas of environmental quality, comfort and accessibility of public spaces. In smaller projects were also covered the areas of tourism, culture and economic promotion in 44%.

Also since 2012, the Lisbon City Council strengthened the commitment to meet the deadlines for the completion of projects, established in less than 2 years (12 months to complete the projects budgeted up to 150,000 € and 18 months for those of higher value). This commitment of the City Council is important in view of the low rate of implementation of approved projects. However, it should be noted that, aware of this aspect, the CML now offers on its Internet portal, all information on the development of projects (in which it also explains the reasons for the delays). This portal allows citizens to monitor the state of implementation of the winning projects. This online update proves to be crucial in terms of transparency, as it increases the proximity between citizens and institutions, ensuring greater legitimacy to the PB.

Since 2011, other improvements were also gradually introduced to the Internet portal level (with new features and user-friendlier graphics), allowing a more regular and diversified communication (with georeferenced maps of approved projects and videos on the different steps of the process). An effort was also made to improve the cycle of participation, expanding the complaints (including the entire month of September) and voting (from 30 to 45 days) phases of the proposals, preventing them from coinciding with the traditional holiday month and encouraging the participation of more citizens in the vote. The record of 29,911 votes achieved in the 2012 edition (see Table1) - which increased to 35,922 in 2013 - may be partially a result of these measures.

In the future, it may be useful to supplement the dominant qualitative evaluation made to date (centred in the number of participants /voters, proposals and projects) with more qualitative forms of assessment of the impacts of the Participatory Budget in the quality of life in Lisbon. The first opening in this direction occurred in the 2011-2012 biennium, as a result of a partnership with the “Optar” project, under which enquiries were distributed for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of Lx-PB. Some of the data thus collected helps analyse issues that may be central to the future sustainability of the PB. They mainly relate to the perceptions of the participants regarding their confidence in the implementation of the projects and meeting of deadlines, the transparency of the process, its intelligibility and its importance to city’s future.

It seems appropriate to highlight four main findings of this review, which question some striking fundamentals of Lx-PB and their consistency with the general objectives expressed in the 2008 “Charter of Principles”:

1. The confidence of the participants on the compliance with the promised deadlines for completion of the works approved in the Lx-PB was very low and tending to decrease over time.

2. The assessment of the political commitment of the City Council with the Lx-PB is not very positive, due to a lower presence of the Mayor in acts related to the PB and a general distrust in public institutions, with the exception of social institutions (such as fire departments and civil protection), perceived as being almost
the only representatives of the positive presence of the State next to citizen.

3. The online voting mechanism is criticized for excessive proposals and lack of clarity of the web portal (which does not clearly identify the theme category of the projects presented or their georeferenced location). During the voting phase, only a minimum proportion of PB participants claimed to have read all the projects put to vote, while most adopted individual strategies to make their choice, like following suggestions from friends or just looking at projects in their own area of residence.

4. The procedure for entry and registration of voters is accused of lacking a careful supervision to ensure equal access to inhabitants, which could reward organized lobbies and subscribers who have used false names or emails. The lack of controls could affect the credibility of the process later on and deviates from the liberal-competitive perspective of the Lx-PB, where what counts should be free enterprise of every citizen to propose ideas and build critical masses of adhesion and collective consensus around them.

In this context it seems logical that, when asked what the meaning of this PB model is, citizens tend to refer primarily (as shown in chart 2) that the PB “allows you to expose the problems that affect people” and “favors dialogue among citizens”. This view of the results is consistent with the interpretation that the participants make of other complementary PB which, since 2011, is emerging in some parishes of the capital (such as Benfica and S. João, for example). There, the main objective is to build good diagnoses of the territorial issues, to better articulate governance and land management. What does not seem to be acknowledged is the potential of the PB to change the political culture of the rulers. Although the Lisbon PB is judged by most participants as “useful” it is not yet considered to be very incisive, both in terms of autarchic transparency and in the changing of the priorities of public management. In this sense, a recurring criticism of the open questions analyzed by the “Optar” project concerns the fact that the participatory cycle does not quite extend to the detailing, implementation and monitoring phase of the works object of co-decision.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary that - for the near future - these aspects be the subject of further consideration by the CML. Indeed, the consolidation of the Lx-PB has coincided with the opening of other channels of participation, such as the Participatory School Budget (a similar process in 2011 for the youth of the Escola Básica 2,3 de Marvila school and that was extended to other schools in 2012), the local Agenda 21, the Priority Intervention Zones and Neighbourhoods Programme (BIP/ZIP), the revision of the Municipal Master Plan and the process of administrative reorganization of parishes and of the municipality. This is a significant transformation, based on a new image of the autarchy, named “Lisboa Participa”, which suggests that some of the limits identified in the PB are not necessarily addressed and resolved within it, but (at a time when CML seems to incorporate the principle of direct participation as a central element in the politics of municipal governance) taken into account in building better links between all these additional new participation tools.


Since its official recognition in 2008, the Lisbon PB has demonstrated optimal performance in terms of growth and rooting in the territory, valuing the ability to evolve progressively through the monitoring of both its effects and the perceptions of the participants. Despite this capacity to self-renew some methodologies and tools each year, the process has been losing part of its ability to impact, having reduced to half (since 2011) the amount available to citizens and having – as well – resized the resources assigned to communication and the efforts made to increase the number of assemblies.

Although having matured over time, the Lx-PB shares several typical limits with European participatory budgets, such as the high degree of experimentation, the small amount of investment for co-decision, the absence of redistributive justice goals and of true social inclusion, the relative timidity of the transformation and the lack of the ambition necessary to make the PB a boost capable of instilling greater transparency and accountability in the slices of the municipal budget not directly related to the participatory path (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2013).

Anyway, Lisbon has preserved the guiding principles contained in its founding “Charter”, seeing it almost as a “constitution”, able to guide some of the significant changes to be incorporated in annual regulations throughout its first six editions. Thus, the experience of the Lx-PB has become an important beacon for other Portuguese municipalities, being very stimulating because of its robustness and of the visibility given by the media to the capital city of a country described by the poet Eça de Queiroz as: “Portugal is Lisbon and the rest is landscape”.

Undoubtedly, both the initial amount of the PB (and later the School PB) and the innovative role of information technologies played a role in making Lisbon the centre of the change in the model of Portuguese Participatory Budgets (previously only advisory and raisers of specific funds). The creation of a team dedicated to participatory processes and of clear rules of operation were also very relevant, as well as the annual review of the process and the commitment to training.
The “evolutionary” nature of the participatory budget itself was an important element to articulate all these specific innovations and relate them to each other, added of the commitment to annually measure the degree of satisfaction of the participants to consequently improve the process. Undoubtedly, the fact that the Lisbon PB surpassed the classic consultative model, launched by the city of Palmela in 2002, helped forge a new DNA for Portuguese second generation PBs (Allegretti and Dias, 2009), centred on the decision aspect and on a greater organization of the city council as a result of the organisation and repeat of the process.

Despite this, and although faced with a public that seems to become, every year, more demanding, the Lx-PB has left some critical issues related to the model chosen unsolved. This, in fact, favours a formula similar to a “contest of ideas”, where the discussion of proposals has little space and what counts above all is receiving many proposals from individual initiatives of the proponents while the City Council plays a role of support and implementation of the top voted projects, without allowing the citizens to play a role in the co-planning of the implementation or even in the active control of the process.

Among the issues yet to be addressed are currently those related to (1) demand for higher deliberative quality in the stages of discussion of the proposals, (2) the need to reduce their redundancy through “filters” that are not technical, so that citizens perceive themselves as “core partners” in this phase, (3) and also the request for greater control over the identity of those enrolled in the participatory process, to ensure that everyone has equal access, preventing those who manipulate the process with ease from being rewarded when they try to circumvent the common rules to ensure greater success to their proposals.

In the process of emulation of the Lisbon experience, several Portuguese municipalities seem to have started to provide creative responses to these limitations. For example, Odemira and Condeixa (since 2010-2011) have faced the problem of the stricter control of registrations, creating for that purpose a password system that is linked to the one-stop services. Condeixa and Trofa have invested in a multiple vote system so that citizens are encouraged to read all the projects submitted before the final vote, rather than merely voting on their own project. The Guimarães PB scheduled over 48 meetings for 2013 to build a widespread network of spaces of dialogue about the content of the proposals (even in more remote villages). As for Cascais, this has been the municipality more capable of facing the unresolved problems of the Lisbon experience, particularly with regards to the good coordination of the PB with other instruments of planning and visioning. Since 2011, Cascais stimulated high quality debates on its citizen’s proposals, built ongoing training opportunities for technicians on participation techniques and involved citizens in the detailing and control of the completion of projects; most notably, it gave the participants in the PB an active role in reducing the redundancy of the proposals, without betting on “filters and bottlenecks” entrusted to administrative and institutional/political players, which could threaten public trust in the PB.

The hope is that, from this point forwards, Lisbon will not renounce to drawing on creative solutions positively experimented in other cities, thus benefiting from the many contacts that its centrality guarantees, not becoming a prisoner of a self-referentiality that runs the risk of wasting the benefits that networking has ensured in many examples of the second generation of Portuguese participatory budgets.

A first indicator that such a position may produce positive results not only for Lisbon but for experiences throughout the country comes from a novelty introduced in 2013 in the voting of the Lx-PB projects. Inspired by the Cascais PB, the Lisbon City Council adopted the use of SMS as the main voting tool; however, upon realising that it was impossible to reach an agreement with all telephone companies for sending free SMSs to vote, it avoided the repeat of Cascais’ mistake (which abolished other forms of voting) and preserved the possibility of voting via the Internet and through the “PB bus” that travels the city during the entire month of October. Also, the commitment of Lisbon’s administration in promoting and co-organising the 2nd Meeting of Iberian PBs reflects the will to play a more humble and reflective role in the scope of the experiences in the peninsula, capable of simultaneously being a “receiver” and a “multiplier” of the different innovations that will quickly change the landscape of European participatory budgets.

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Since its beginning in 1989, the Porto Alegre process assigned 100% of the urban budget to the proposal of the citizens. See the news report published by "Público" newspaper on 28/04/2013. Sintomer et alii, 2013.


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Notes

1 Sintomer et alii, 2013.

2 See the news report published by “Público” newspaper on 28/04/2013 and several articles published in “Público”, “Diário de Noticias” and “I” between 2008 and 2012.

3 The Lisbon PB is not the first of decisorry nature in Portugal, but it is the largest. Since 2006, there was the case of Sesimbra (52,000 inhabitants, a successful experience discontinued in 2011) which already provided for - as in the Brazilian models - the election of neighbourhood delegates to co-decide on an amount between 300,000 and 500,000 Euros (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2013).

4 Since its beginning in 1989, the Porto Alegre process assigned 100% of the investments to the PB, so (compared to other major cities) it has always been considered a radical experience. Anyway, this value has changed over time, decreasing widely - especially after a policy change in 2005 (proven by Langelier’s 2013 thesis and anticipated in the article published by Le Monde Diplomatique - Langelier, 2011).

5 It’s the project “O Orçamento Participativo Como Instrumento Inovador Para Reinventar as Autarquias em Portugal e Cabo Verde: uma Análise Crítica da Performance e dos Transfers”, funded by FCT (PTDC/CS-SOC/099134/2008 - FCOMP-01-0124-FEDER-009295). These reflections also owe much to the Project “Cidade e Alteridade: Convivência Multicultural e Justiça Urbana”, co-financed by a FCT/ CNPQ partnership (4.4.1.00). The authors thank Robert Falanga and Nelson Dias for their suggestions and corrections.

6 See http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

7 The abstention rate was 62.2% (INE). Before the re-election in October 2009, the Government led by Costa had not secured a majority in the Municipal Assembly, for which the elections were not repeated in 2007.

8 After the Administrative Reform imposed by Law 56/2012 the city is divided in 24 parishes, decentralised political and administrative entities created according to the old medieval parishes.

9 The priority areas selected in 2008 by the participants were: “Road-works Infrastructures, Traffic and Parking” (123 proposals), “Public Spaces and Green Spaces” (122 proposals), “Urbanisation and Urban Rehabilitation” (62 proposals). Only proposals related to these areas were evaluated by the municipal services from a technical point of view. The remaining 273 proposals (in eleven other areas of competence of the CML) were automatically removed from the process.

10 Representing 34.5% of the participants.

11 “The results (...) are evaluated each year and the alterations necessary to the progressive improvement, deepening and widening of the process are introduced”.

12 “The results (...) are evaluated each year and the alterations necessary to the progressive improvement, deepening and widening of the process are introduced”.

13 Polling stations (spaces of “assisted participation” for those who do not have an internet connection or computer literacy to be able to vote) in 2010 collected about 2% of the total votes. The same happened with the PB bus.

14 The regional assemblies are developed in different parishes (grouping several areas); the so-called “thematic” assemblies are sectoral meetings which since 2010 allow the promotion of the PB with different social groups in the city, such as the elderly, children and university students. Between 2011 and 2012 meetings for foreigners, architects and designers, merchants and other target-categories were developed.

15 The first was supported by the Portuguese Cycling Federation, the second by animal protection movements and the third by athletes and family members with a connection to the sport (Dias in Sintomer and Allegretti, 2013).

16 Interview with the coordinator of the PB on 14th October 2013 (in the scope of the “OPtar Project”).

17 There are clear convergences in that direction between the questionnaires distributed in the scope of the “OPtar” Project on which this article was based and the PB Reports prepared by CML in 2009-2012.

18 The same ratio of cuts was applied to the School PB, a process for the participation of young students that, in the first pilot edition of 2010, included 50,000 Euros in investments.

19 Rock in Rio is a music festival originated in Brazil, designed by Brazilian entrepreneur Roberto Medina and first held in 1985; since its inception it is acknowledged as the biggest music festival of the Latin world. It was originally organized in Rio de Janeiro but has become a world level event and, in 2004, had its first edition abroad in Lisbon, where it has been held 5 times.

20 This is proven by surveys collected by the “OPtar” project, in which subjects reported their satisfaction with the value put to discussion. In 2011 (on a scale of 0-5), satisfaction declared by over 2,800 respondents reached the mean value of 3.05 (above the average of the sufficiency of 2.5), while in 2012 the satisfaction rose to an average of 3.24 (OPtar Reports, 2011 and 2012).


22 See CML’s 2012/2013 PB Report, page 18


24 A notable exception concerns the scheduling of PAs, which dates are divided in 24 parishes, decentralised political and administrative entities created according to the old medieval parishes.

25 See footnote 5.

26 On the question on general opinions regarding the PB, the “proposals approved in the PB are important and change the quality of life” collects an average of 3.93 (out of 5) for both years, while the option...
“the proposals approved will be implemented by the City Hall” collects an average of 3.93 in 2011 and down to 3.55 in 2012. The belief that the deadlines for the works will be respected gets a lower rating: 3.02 in 2011 and 2.99 in 2012 (Optar Reports 2011 and 2012). These averages are higher in questionnaires distributed in PAs, while the more educated public of the online questionnaires proves to be more hypercritical.

27 In the question pertaining to the level of confidence in the various political and social institutions, the participants in the 2012 PB mention a mean value of only 1.52 (out of 0 to 5) for the President of the Republic, 1.53 for the Government, 1.67 for political parties, 2.67 for city councils, 3.65 for Associations and 4.04 for fire departments and civil protection (Optar Report, 2012).

28 On a scale of 0 to 5, the satisfaction expressed with the assessment and merger procedures is, in average, of 2.98 (in 2011) and 3.02 (in 2012), while in 2012 only 14.8% of respondents declares having read all the projects before voting.

29 The Local Agenda XXI process (begun in 2012) is still incipient and aims to create a common interdisciplinary and cross-sectional (in the mid-term) area of debate on issues related to environmental sustainability. The BIP/ZIP Program - winner of the 2013 International Democracy Observatory Award - is supported by a special fund, which annually distributes resources to project proposals for problematic neighbourhoods of the city meant to boosting the economic, social and urban fabric through partnerships between different organizations active in the territory. A mandatory review of the Master Plan was required by law, to which the CML added a broad social debate which (in 2011) primarily involved organized and professional territorial planning groups. In the end, the path of social dialogue created for the administrative reform aimed to better support the reorganization of parishes, before the Government took rushed reform measures (based on the commitments of the Troika Memorandum concerning solutions for the crisis) ignoring the territorial and historical specificities of the local political and administrative division.
Local democratic government and
the promotion of rights for children and teenagers:
An experience in Argentina

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Abstract. This article reflects on the authors’ efforts and experience in projects aiming to develop local democratic government and promote rights in Argentina. It discusses ideas about the main aspects that influence cooperation between the State and civil society organisations (CSOs) when implementing public policy in Argentina, with a particular focus on processes that aim to build citizenship and promote rights at a local community level. Using this conceptual basis, and to demonstrate the focus on intervention, the article introduces the “Participar por los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes” Project which ran between 2010 and 2012 in Misiones Province in northeast Argentina. The project was organised in conjunction with the government of Misiones Province and with financial backing from the European Union. Its target was to strengthen the capacity of local governments in policy management, and the role and capacity of CSOs in disseminating information about children’s rights, monitoring and assessing public policy in this area, and generating methods for participating in and promoting the defence of rights. The article includes the main results and draws conclusions from this experience, with the hope of contributing to other initiatives in this field.

Keywords. Local democratic government, Promotion of rights, Local development, Community participation, Argentina

1. Introduction

The various political and institutional changes that Argentina has experienced during the past few decades have defined the framework for cooperation between the State and civil society organisations (CSOs) on public policy. On one hand, policies exist that aim to reform the structure, functions and management of the State. On the other, is the development and consolidation of civil society’s practical, leading role, through its contributions to a return to democracy, and its remarkable participation in the fields of the promotion and defence of human rights, reform of the justice system, and initiatives that encourage citizens’ control.

These transformations have increased interest in and debate around democratic government (understood as a society’s capacity to define and establish policies and peacefully resolve its conflicts within an existing legal system1) in Argentina, in relation to a growing demand to be involved in decision-making and a heightened questioning of traditional governmental structures, given their limitations when providing a suitable response to new and complex social requirements.

Despite the developments described above, CSOs still have a limited role in debating and guiding public policy in Argentina. In general, the role of CSOs, as acknowledged by governments, is usually one of operating on the ground to organise programmes and projects within specific subject areas whose orientation and methods are defined by these governments themselves, and financial backers. The ability of CSOs to influence these aspects is limited or non-existent, meaning they are often ushered into the role of critical actors in a fait accompli, addressing problems in policies that have already been implemented.

CSOs appreciate that available resources are increasingly scarce and understand that their faulty or inefficient distribution is unacceptable in view of the severity and urgency of the problems that must be resolved.

Through being interlinked with the basis of society

1 Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), Gobernabilidad Democrática, www.regionalcentrelac-undp.org/es/gobernabilidad-democratica
and having a practical understanding of its problems, CSOs can make significant contributions during the public policy design stage, contributing to more accurate appraisals and the selection of the best alternatives and strategies. They also achieve correct prioritization and effective actions, while also obtaining commitments and satisfying communities. It is necessary to review the public management model and analyse different schemes for the decentralisation of decision-making and government coordination with other social actors in greater depth, encouraging their involvement in every stage of the public policy cycle, starting with its gestation. As was published in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, this contributes to raising the level of consensus, effectiveness and social legitimacy in public policy.

As has been discussed in different forums (for example, CIVICUS3), this raises two issues. First, the State has a centralist concept of the public policy process and an absence of civil servants who are trained as spokespersons for civil society. In turn, CSOs lack knowledge about how public policy is generated and implemented, and about the public sector’s operating procedures in general, combined with a wariness of being co-opted by the governing parties which tend to marginalize them from political dialogue.

CSOs face the challenge of acting, as far and as effectively as possible, as actors in their own right that can orientate and control development processes, and explore new ways of coordinating with governments and other social actors to generate and maintain cooperative networks over time. They must also accept responsibility for strengthening their skills to be able to perform the duties established by these demands, as established in the Istanbul Principles4. The experience described in this article, in which a CSO generated and led a local development process with a multi-actor strategy, linking and promoting synergies between key areas of the Misiones Province government and 39 local authorities, tries to set a course along these lines.

2. The local development perspective

EyP, the Asociación Civil Estudios y Proyectos (Studies and Projects Civil Association) is a CSO with twenty-two years of experience in local development projects. One of the foundations of its work is influencing public policy to promote participative government and protect citizens’ rights (in education, health, environmental protection and environmental risk management, employment and income generation), in particular the rights of children, adolescents, women and indigenous peoples. For this purpose, EyP collaborates in coordinating social actors, strengthening institutions and capacity development.

One of the most important aspects of debate on State reform in Latin American countries during the 1980s and 1990s was decentralisation and the strengthening of local government, leading to a new vision and profile of local authorities, particularly in countries with less of a local government tradition, such as Argentina.

Government naturally plays a crucial role in the area of local development. A local authority is in direct contact with citizens and it is both responsible for and has the opportunity to solve many of their daily problems, representing inalienable political capital. But local authorities have seen new challenges added to their traditional problems in recent years: polarisation and social exclusion, unemployment, extreme poverty and its feminisation, gender violence, insecurity, the growth of slums and, crucially, the need to ensure that citizens participate in fully exercising their rights.

However, at a local level, the capacity required to face these new challenges has not always been developed, nor has the capacity necessary to face the new responsibilities emerging from the institutional processes of decentralisation and social change. It is not merely the case that many local authorities suffer from a lack of technical and material resources, but that institutional and cultural resources, the social connections that build cooperative networks, have not been strengthened at a community level. It therefore becomes necessary to promote local capacities for effective participation in their own development process.

The United Nations Development Programme refers to the deep-rooted level of processes that contributes to strengthening local communities’ capacity for their own development when it defines “capacity development” as “the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their skills/abilities to: 1) perform key functions, resolve problems, define and achieve objectives, and 2) understand and take responsibility for their developmental needs in a broad context applying a sustainable approach”.

This implies a set of vital skills that assist
endogenous development: a) the sense of civic responsibility, b) the existence of an active citizenry with an awareness of the rights it can exercise and demand, but also the commitments it must undertake. This is the path to true “empowerment”.

Naturally, the existence and strength of a civic culture is the result of a series of social processes and history. It cannot spring up from one day to the next; strengthening it is a task that must be accepted by all actors committed to sustainable development through active participation.

In this sense, local government includes the set of processes, institutions and mechanisms that can be used by citizens and their organisations to express their needs and interests, negotiate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations at a local level.

Therefore, constructing citizenship, with its variety of rights and duties, is a complex social and cultural process that involves dedicated work on the social fabric towards empowering people to recognise their economic, social and cultural needs, and to find solutions to these issues.

In this way, a key goal in development processes is for the communities involved to be capable of shaping their own processes and development projects and to be active in their promotion. This is not achieved by simply declaring and acknowledging citizens’ rights; it is necessary to generate enforceability procedures and spaces for proposals through which all of society, not just the government, commits to guaranteeing basic rights. This is the path towards empowering society through participation, where development strategies acquire social sustainability and over time, as they are appropriated by people, they become part of everyday life.

The conceptual guidelines summarised above have guided EyP’s participation in interventions that aimed to promote rights in different regions of Argentina, and they also influenced the design and implementation of the project described in this article as an experience at a local level.

3. The Misiones Province « Participar por los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes » Project

3.1 Origin and foundation

The origins of the project lie in an agreement established between EyP and the government of Misiones Province, stating that they would collaborate on disseminating and effectively implementing National Law 26.061 on the Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, and Provincial Law II/16 on the Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, which are equivalent to the International Convention on Children’s Rights in Argentina. The initiative received financial support from the European Union within the framework of the “European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR): Argentinean support scheme” programme.

The northeast region of Argentina has one of the country’s highest vulnerable population rates, and the level of poverty and destitution severely restricts the probability of these people having children and adolescents who know and fully exercise their rights. In Misiones Province, 37.1% of inhabitants live below the poverty line; almost 40% of the population is comprised of children under 14 years old and of these 60% are in poverty. A further 10% are between 15 and 19 years old, and there is a high rate of recorded teenage pregnancies.

Towns on the so-called “Triple Frontier”, essentially the cities of Foz de Iguaçu (Brazil), Ciudad del Este (Paraguay) and Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) have become the backdrop to frequent violations of the rights of children and adolescents. In particular, child domestic labour, child trafficking (transporting children within the country or overseas in order to exploit them) and child prostitution are three closely related issues. Journalists and local social organisations often find themselves in an uneven battle against criminal networks that profit from these crimes, and that usually act in collusion with levels of authority and even partly with the complicity of society itself. Failings in the control of border crossings, a lack of specific public policies, poverty and complicity have meant that, for a long time, the area has been conducive to this type of crime.

Figure 2. Banner of the project Participar

Effectively enforcing the legal instruments currently in place to fight these crimes requires a significant commitment from local authorities and communities, with active participation from CSOs that operate in the area. Therefore, the project aimed, first, to strengthen the capacities of local
governments in this matter. Second, it aimed to strengthen the role of CSOs and their capacity to disseminate information about children’s rights, monitor and assess public policy related to this issue, and generate ways for children to participate at a community level, with collaboration between children and those adults who play an important role in the defence of their rights.

Figure 3. Map of Misiones Province

At first, fifteen local authorities from among the most vulnerable were selected because a) they have few resources of their own, b) they have a weak social fabric, c) they are located in border areas, e) together they have the highest concentration of a population with a high rate of basic unmet needs (BUN) in the province, f) they have the highest proportion of indigenous peoples, and g) they have a high ratio of children in comparison with the total population. However, during the course of the activities new local authorities became interested and joined the project, until it totalled 39 across the province.

3.2 The intervention

Project Participar lasted for two years and included joint, simultaneous action by the Provincial State, local authorities and civil society organisations on:

a) Training local actors (civil servants, social actors and workers, teachers, etc.);

b) Inter-institutional cooperation and the development of networks;

c) Community mobilisation and participation.

A participative analysis was performed that was used to determine, with the communities, the starting point for the project and the situation in terms of rights in the participating local authorities. Information was gathered on local resources, IT systems and the status of local protection systems.

Training took place in various face-to-face workshops held in every region where the project was implemented. However, another key aspect was the organisation of a Virtual Course used for teaching due to the fact that many people with responsibilities in this subject matter were unable to travel.

This course was designed to offer actors in government bodies and CSOs introductory training on the meaning and scope of applicable laws, review the roles required for their full effectiveness, provide tools for reviewing objectives, institutional practices and the performance of organisations, analyse ideas about the enforceability of rights and tools that create an impact in the face of omissions or violations committed by public services, and encourage the interest and mobilisation of social organisations that support adequate provincial laws and public policies that are in accordance with the principles of the Convention on Children’s Rights and the National Law on Comprehensive Protection of Rights.

The training network was supported by issuing calls and specific training, while all the actors participated in working to design maps of local resources and construct tools for obtaining knowledge about the actual situation in the areas.

Monitoring and assessing the project took place under direct supervision with visits to each area, continuous remote monitoring, interim and final assessment workshops, meetings with provincial civil servants, the monthly and final application of assessment tools by participants and 34 local leaders, an analysis of the information gathered by the whole project team, and the production of photographic and video records.
In general quantitative terms, the scope of activities can be summarised as follows:

- Direct beneficiaries affected by the project’s actions: 16,623 children, 308 CSOs, 54 governmental bodies, 1,951 adults (including 802 teachers, civil servants and families).
- Approximately 500 workshops that worked on training, murals, dance groups and children’s theatre to promote their rights.
- 547 activities were held in towns as a result of participation by actors in activities related to the 32 Planes de Acción Local (PAL) (32 Local Action Plans Project) and the Plan de Acción Regional (PAR) (Regional Action Plan), both of which aimed to promote rights in the 39 municipalities, with involvement from all local actors.

The main obstacles to obtaining thorough knowledge about situations and their evolution are that a) information systems do not exist in all the local authorities, nor are they present at a provincial level where information is centralised, b) not all local authorities have administrative bodies for protection at a local level. However, by applying the information-gathering procedures established by the project, qualitative information was obtained from the actors and this made it possible to detect progress in the dissemination of (and access to) services, and an increase in the number of complaints regarding rights violations, particularly those related to violence and sexual abuse.

The actions taken during the project made it possible to bring to light cases of infringement (documentation, child labour, violence, abandonment) that were then channelled into and addressed by the respective areas of government at a local and provincial level by professionals and experts available to meet emerging demands. This means that during the course of the project, it had a direct impact on improving the situation of children and adolescents.

Procedures related to restoring rights or repairing the consequences of their violation were determined and applied, and maps of resources, strategies and tools were produced to organise the use of local, existing resources via inter-institutional agreements for the prevention and restoration of violated rights. The participants received firm support from the project’s technical team when designing and assessing their PAL and PAR projects.

The intervention encouraged an understanding between regional actors, between both the State and civil society, and the CSOs themselves. Governmental and political actors with greater awareness of the need to drive forward efficient public policies on this matter, and civil society representatives who were ready to commit to and collaborate on achieving this aim, started this process by structuring and setting up the Municipal Councils for Guaranteeing the Rights of Children and Adolescents and other coordination mechanisms (planned by legislation but still non-existent at a local level). They also promoted regulations and procedures, such as the construction of instruments for the protection of rights, many of which are already in operation. This was a direct impact on local government planning and action in this subject matter.

The concept of “beginning with what we have”, i.e. drawing up an inventory of local resources (used in every local development project by EyP), was also valuable for actors, as they could better understand and value their own assets, take actions from a more objective position and allocate the project’s resources more efficiently. Examples of this included taking advantage of the capacities of institutional networks of organisations that already had experience in the field (but had not previously worked on this specific subject) and recovering knowledge (and incorporating it into the project’s activities) from people who were trained on other projects previously run in the area.

Training was provided to public agents and to leaders in civil society and the organisational networks that were established in the towns, so that these people could be more effective in promoting and protecting rights, and repairing and restoring rights in detected cases of violation. The immediate impact was the identification and management of specific cases related to identity, child labour and violence, and the development of local resource banks that could become a highly valuable and effective instrument for their work in the future.

The project developed a large number of tools related to gathering and systematising information (files, working guidelines, protocols, instructions and manuals, reporting procedures and reports for assisting and monitoring activities, registration forms, participant activity satisfaction forms, etc.) which were used in the different stages of the project and sent to operators and local governments, and the governments of other provinces neighbouring the northeast region.

The final assessment of the project included: new knowledge and capacities learned, the creation of new mechanisms at a local authority level, the satisfaction level of participants in terms of the methods applied and results obtained. Comments on all these points were highly positive.

91% of local authority representatives felt that through the PALs they had progressed in their protection of the rights of children and adolescents during the course of the project. This was evident, according to 23% of these representatives, in the creation or reactivation of, or drive to create, the Municipal Councils for Guaranteeing the Rights of Children and Adolescents. According to comments by the provincial authorities today, since the project, they are now asked by the municipal authorities to establish or strengthen these Councils, reversing the previous situation. Another noteworthy point is that the subject earned a significant place in the public agenda at a local level, together with the active participation of civil society organisations, the government and/or community leaders and teachers.

In terms of future projections, 53% of these representatives stated their intention to continue the actions performed under the PAL by including new schools and neighbourhoods, and seeking support from the community. As explained above, although it was not possible to carry out thorough research into the impact, it has been
confirmed by the provincial sources responsible for this subject matter.

The project demonstrated to provincial authorities the benefits of having more effective indicators and monitoring systems in place to assess the current situation and the progress made, and to monitor and assess interventions. Work also focused on the need to optimise recording systems, identifying and linking sources with information requirements. Project activity sought to deepen the relationships between operational areas (Under-Secretary for Women and Families, Multi-lateral Body for Social Policy and Internal Development, Ministry of Social Development, etc.). The Office for the Defence of the Rights of Children and Adolescents proposed to the project team that the creation of an assessment team should be analysed, that could monitor all actions (programmes, projects, application of laws, etc.) that are performed in the province.

In accordance with the Misiones Project experience, it also proposed to the governments of the remaining three provinces in the region (Corrientes, Formosa and Chaco) that each province should develop, in collaboration with the relevant civil servants, actions that would include a) the preliminary survey of current systems and information sources in relation to issues regarding the protection of rights, and the degree to which these are being used in decision-making processes on this subject, b) the identification of the areas with the greatest limitations, in relation to existing demands at a local level, and the action paths that could be adopted in this area, c) the preparation of an initial table of indicators for managing and monitoring the protection of rights, that can be used with available, reliable and valid information, and that can be completed and expanded in later stages by these bodies themselves.

According to the new legal framework, the State is responsible for structuring and driving forwards rights protection systems, which are established by policies, procedures, institutions or bodies that act and interact in a complementary fashion to promote and protect the rights of children and adolescents. Given this legal responsibility, the State must create an organisational system and measure its adequacy and performance according to a set of criteria. In general, three overall assessment criteria are applied:

- Creation (formal): specific existence and duration of parts of the system;
- Effective coordination (rationality): design and efficiency of the system;
- Effectiveness (operation): the system achieves its planned aims to the benefit of the receivers.

The proposal aimed to cover these aspects, was widely accepted and is at an analysis and implementation stage.

The points stated above indicate that, regardless of policy changes by respective governments, public policy on the protection of rights of children and adolescents in Misiones Province will continue to be strengthened, as has been recorded in the numerous statements gathered during the course of the project.

4. Main results

- During the course of the project, many cases of rights violation were identified and directed towards their management.
- In the 44 local authorities where work took place, at the start of the project only 8 had a Municipal Council for Guaranteeing the Rights of Children and Adolescents. By the end, 22 local authorities had regularised their legal situation in this area.
- Actions were performed with the collaboration, at a local and provincial level of governments run by different political parties; this was not an obstacle to achieving objectives.
- The “bottom-upwards” approach meant that local actors could take control of the development process and participate in every stage of the public policy generation and implementation cycle. This is currently demonstrated by the level of participation that is still seen in the Councils for Guaranteeing the Rights of Children and Adolescents.
- According to the responsible authorities, the project strengthened the provincial body specifically dedicated to this subject matter (Ministry of Social Development - Department for Children) so that it could offer technical assistance, from a central level, to help drive the structuring, reorganisation and updating of the Councils. The project also assisted in drawing together different participating social actors, and helped the Department for Children to establish contact with professionals, experts, and municipal leaders, and to obtain specific data about cases of rights violations, aiding their intervention and accompanying local authorities to restore violated rights.
- The project strengthened the existing social capital, generating synergies between local and provincial organisations, in addition to efforts by organisations that had not previously been involved and people who had participated in earlier projects. This strengthened local networks that work in the area of rights, developing mutual trust and knowledge.
- The 33 Planes de Acción Local (PAL) project was designed within the framework of the Virtual Classroom Project and was implemented in 39 local authorities thanks to the training received from the classroom and specific workshops. This benefited children and adolescents, for example, in issues related to sexual and reproductive health, following the creation of Departments in which they are involved.
- In the case of the experience described in this article, the following strategy (which could be reproduced in other contexts) proved effective:
  - Creating and/or strengthening local protection services.
• Creating community alliances and/or networks for the protection of the rights of children and adolescents.

• Local initiatives that involve children and adolescents in the defence of their rights.

• Participation, promotion and support of local actors and organisations.

• Dissemination of local protection services at a local and/or regional level.

• Training of local human resources.

• Generating information and analyses for appraisals that determine the situation in terms of the rights of children and adolescents at a local level.

Figure 5. Provincial Fair project closure

It seems apposite to conclude the discussion by quoting F. Barreiro: “Community learning actions are social interactions that create social capital. This is why projects put into action cooperatively generate and accumulate learning processes, in addition to their specific results. The signs of this learning are the results of projects carried out jointly, through social interaction”.

This teaching is of great value to the activities that EyP continues to run with other projects on the same theme, in the same northeast region of Argentina, with the support of UNICEF.

The Nigerian Budget: Using Creative Technology to Intersect Civic Engagement and Institutional Reform

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Abstract. This study analyses the efforts of BudgIT, Nigeria’s creative start-up, in making the Nigerian budget simple and accessible to every citizen. This includes its classification of citizens according to their understanding of public finance and its personalised approach in reaching out to them. In its 53 years of independence, Nigeria, which has an oil-driven economy, has had more than thirty-three years of military rule, which guarded the detailed budget as a state secret. Current efforts in the democratic regime have made both the proposed and enacted budget available to citizens as enabled by law. However, the budget is officially released in a non-readable format. In addition, most citizens have no clear understanding of government finances. BudgIT uses an array of technology tools to simplify the budget for citizens and also works with the civil society and media in data analysis and representation. BudgIT believes that the amplified voices of citizens based on better access to budgetary data can lead to institutional reform. It also works to improve the capacity of congressional budget offices to enhance budget performance. BudgIT methodology will use refined data mining skill sets to creatively present data and empower citizens to use the information that is available in demanding improved delivery of services.

Keywords. Technology, Budget, Government, Institutions, Transparency, Accountability, Nigeria

1. Introduction

1.1 The Nigerian Budget in Context

The advent of democracy in a developing and natural resources-driven economy, such as Nigeria’s, carried scars of the military regime. A common tactic of autocratic regimes and dysfunctional democracies is to keep the populace ignorant of data and acts of public governance, thus causing democracy to be the ideal disinfectant of such ignoble practices.

Information inequity, the restrictions on the distribution of information, which rapidly inhibit debate, was a characteristic of Nigerian military regimes. When information asymmetry thrives in governance, especially around public finance, it draws a thick opaque curtain around public funds. This gives an opportunity for corruption to thrive. Although Nigeria now practices democracy, the appropriate structures are still evolving. Therefore, of greatest importance is the efficient and transparent management of its key resources – taxes, extractive revenue, grants and other sources of revenue.

Opening up a resource-driven economy such as Nigeria’s, where oil and gas revenues account for 74% of the actual receipts, is a herculean task. With the easy profits of oil disproportionately shared across the society, oil has become as symptom for a dysfunctional society creating a rentier state, strife among ethnicities and also a state-assisted oligarchy. The allocative efficiency of the revenues is reduced as revealed in the poor service delivery and socioeconomic indicators, particularly in the Northern region.

A key practice of such a corrupt class is to wrap a thick curtain around government finances, especially the budget. A system of budget opaqueness breeds exclusion in the society through a closure of informed debate by the citizens, denying them their inalienable right to actively participate in the allocation of communal resources. This subtle system of weakening the institutions makes the budget a confidential document that is shared between the legislature and the executive arms of government. Such a
lack of discrete information about the budget allows a sitting executive to appropriate funds on a discretionary basis and without coherent planning.

1.2 Status of Budget Availability

The continuing establishment of key institutions as enabled by laws such as The Fiscal and Responsibility Act 2007, The Public Procurement Act 2007 and The Debt Management Office Act 2003 redefined access to the Nigerian budget. The key government budget institution, The Budget Office of the Federation, is mandated by law to provide medium-term estimates, proposed and final budgets, as well as budget implementation documents, by means of an online portal. However, these documents are provided to the citizens in a non-readable format.

According to the 2012 Open Budget Index, Nigeria scores 16 out of a possible 100. A proper citizens’ budget, which is necessary for inclusive understanding of the planned spending, is not published. The mid-year review and audit report of the budget also are not publicly available. In the absence of the above documents, it is difficult for citizens to track and understand the government’s financial performance. Although the enacted budget is fairly detailed at the national level, information at the sub-national level is overly protected. It is also difficult to obtain details of the expenditures approved for capital projects, limiting the ability of citizens to track projects in real time.

1.3 Financial Literacy and the Nigerian Budget

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation, has an estimated population of 168.8 million people. Early reforms through liberalization of the telecommunication industry led to a sharp growth in the number of mobile subscribers. Although it has 119.5m active mobile subscribers as at April 2013, Nigeria ranks low on the financial inclusion index with 34.9 people, who represent 39.7% of the population, lacking access to banking services.

With such a huge segment of the adult population without access to the financial industry, there is a staggering number of citizens who cannot interpret and understand the budget. The persistent gap in interpretation of data concerning the key budget items, the specific allocation to the local environment, and performance metrics has not improved public awareness of the budget. Excluding citizens from the budget, which is adjudged to be the most important legal provision after the Constitution, through its arcane presentation and opaque structure has not fostered the civic participation needed for a functional democracy.

2. The Project

2.1 Defining the Goal

The lack of budget transparency and accessibility to the Nigerian citizen led to the emergence of a creative start-up named BudgIT. BudgIT initially conceptualised and then developed Nigeria’s foremost technology hub, Co-Creation Hub. Making the Nigerian budget simpler and accessible to the average citizen is a core goal of BudgIT. The availability of budgets in non-readable pdf formats by the government website provided an initial opportunity for BudgIT to implement its innovative idea by simplifying the budgets using infographics and interactive applications. BudgIT, with more than three million web views and 275,000 unique users, believes that active participation in government finance is essential to a functional society. Citizens need to know in a clear, timely and transparent manner how government revenues are used in delivery of public infrastructure, meeting debt obligations or funding the recurrent components of the budget.

BudgIT (yourbudgit.com) operates on the principles of open data, which stimulate transparency, accountability and better outcomes in the private and public sectors. Open access to data has been acknowledged to possess huge potential for illuminating issues and expanding the inclusion of citizens in informed debates. However, the mishandling of data in open formats can relegate facts to a context that wrongly informs or communicates nothing. BudgIT’s goal of innovation is concerned with making public data a social object and building an extensive network of active citizens who demand institutional change.

To go beyond budget access through the use of infographics and interactive applications, BudgIT developed a new platform known as Tracka (http://tracka.ng). This website allows the citizens to track service delivery and report that to relevant institutions. These are the next steps based on users feedback and BudgIT intends to see that projects as stated in the budget come to reality and fulfil societal needs.

3. Segmenting Users for Proper Engagement

With poor literacy on the contextual understanding of the budget standing as a limiting factor to demand transparency and service delivery, BudgIT uses creative methods that include data mining, visual intelligence, info-graphic display and online interface expertise to deliver budgets to citizens. Starting with a baseline analysis of the level of public literacy and level of interest in matters of governance, an approach is adapted for each defined class in the society. BudgIT describes the society’s citizens and their literacy by the four categories that follow:

1. Public Finance Experts & Researchers: are less than 2% of the entire population, this persons in this class, by virtue of their profession, are interested in a technical aspects of the budget, such as an analysis of the inflationary trends and macro-economic projections. Persons in this class have less interest than others in using the budget as an advocacy tool to demand better governance. They are interested primarily in the superlatives and not the granular citizen-centred data that foster institutional reform.
2. **Active and Literate Citizens**: are those who are most easily converted to the organisational cause of using data transparency to demand institutional reform as they are interested in the state of governance. Most importantly, these citizens need greater understanding of the budget framework and data to validate their concerns of poor service delivery. Members of this set are graduates of colleges and universities and it is not difficult to explain the structure of the budget and how efficient service delivery can be guaranteed by proper implementation. Members of this class frequent social media and offline networks and are early adopters of the BudgIT approach to simplify data for improved advocacy.

3. **The Inactive Literate Citizens**: these potential users have a negative approach to governance, classifying government as a bureaucratic entity that provides no tangible benefits to the citizen. Although they have a basic level of education that is sufficient to understand the budget, they need a compelling reason, possibly provided by extensive data simulation, to appreciate public data.

4. **The Grassroots**: these citizens represent more than one half of the voting block and have little or no access to basic education. For the most part, the citizens in this class have no access to formal education and, hence, literacy or even access to the banking infrastructure. Consequently, they cannot understand core terms in the budget. A compelling approach is to shown them referenced data to explain exactly how the budget affects them.

The above classification of budget literacy classes was crucial to the development of the BudgIT’s engagement strategy. It contributed to an understanding the data simulation approach and the best communication tool for each citizen. BudgIT’s strategy was to map the array of tools, such as desktop web, mobile web, sms, apps, infographics, interactive applications, print, radio, television, games and community groups, for each specific access class. The BudgIT’s continuous core effort is to creatively apply each tool to a budget access class for a clearer understanding of the budget process and relevant data and, in particular, to amplify the voices that demand institutional reform.

4. **Methodology**

4.1 **Data Presentation Techniques**

In driving the data to citizens, our core concern is how to attract maximum attention from our users and derive useful actions from them. BudgIT has found the following guides to be necessary:

1. **Data must be Actionable**: essential to our data presentation is simplicity and an ability to encourage action. BudgIT’s presentations in their info-
graphics, interactive application or data access have been designed to initiate action. This approach is about making data analysis self-revealing to a stage at which citizens and civil society can confidently ask questions.

2. **Educate the Citizens**: Based on the developing society in which BudgIT operates, the literacy of society is of the utmost concern. Citizens need background information to clearly ask questions. This necessitates clearer definition of terms surrounding the data published in creative formats. Based on research, becoming granular in the context of the data is most critical to building a body of followers that understands the subject of discussion. For example, public finance items, such as recurring or capital expenditures represent definitions that have been to encourage core understanding by users.

3. **An Incentive for Citizens**: Open Data needs to be citizen-centred. There is a need to focus on building open data on basic things that matter to the individual. If open data and its visualisations remain at the macro level and are not created to focus on a citizen, it may communicate too little. At BudgIT, public finance data is processed to such an extent that the citizen becomes aware of capital projects and revenue allocations within his/her neighbourhood. A citizen is more likely to harness the power of data, properly ask questions or trigger a debate by access to such personalized information.

4. **Tell A Story**: Data Access in our literary class must tell a story to stimulate larger interests within the community. With visualizations built around it, data access must shine light on winding corners. It must bring forth human angle stories by converting a stack of information to a moving narrative that creates a sense of ownership in the user. For example, BudgIT goes beyond telling our users of Nigeria’s oil revenue, which equals billions of US Dollars. For such data to be meaningful to citizens who earn less than $5,000 annually, BudgIT describes the purchasing power of such huge amounts (oil revenue) in terms that relate to pressing community needs.

5. **Provide Feedback to Institutions**: Public Data is linked to a feedback system that allows citizens or users to contact elected officials, public servants and other stakeholders on the supply side. Debate, discussions and comments that arise on the basis of interactions with open data and its visualizations must reach the institution that is responsible for data. As a creative open data start-up, BudgIT has a system that provides feedback to the head of implementing agency, the legislator representing the area in which the project is located and the finance ministry that is expected to disburse the funds. Such is the power of open data and citizens who believe that someone on the supply side attends to their concerns.

### 4.2 Work Methodology

BudgIT work methodology to fulfil its goals is provided below sequentially:

1. **Data Mining** – BudgIT sources data from government or high level research organizations that handle public data. BudgIT data analysts use technology tools to mine the data to a simpler level where the finer details that citizens need are aggregated. Our data is not crowd-sourced and must be perceived as accurate when released by public ministries and agencies.

2. **Data Verification**: Mined public data is verified by an independent person within the organisation to ensure that there are no errors, especially in situations when there are format conversions.

3. **Creative Display**: After data analysis, the best creative pattern in which to represent data is chosen. It may be by the use of an interactive platform or infographics.

4. **Sharing**: Using our web footprint, BudgIT shares our products by means of social media network, mainstream media and other online tools. BudgIT has also provided data to citizens who have no access to the internet by printed text.

5. **Feedback**: BudgIT uses its feedback systems to improve its engagement with citizens. Feedback from citizens is aggregated in reports and sent to government institutions to request that the latter act on the citizens' concerns.

### 5. Results

#### 5.1 Driving Information to Citizens

At the core of BudgIT’s goals is to amplify the voices of the electorate. This is to get citizens to understand the budget and use it as a tool for institutional improvement. Currently, the organisation’s sphere of influence has been strong in the social media with a focus on social-urban young people. Its current plan is to reach out to the grassroots of the electorate using communication tools adapted to them, including radio, sms and print documents. This approach has been adopted using Ekiti State as a pilot project. Working with other civic minded organisations, BudgIT distributed more than 35,000 copies of simplified budget documents to citizens in Ekiti and Osun states. Citizens, including grassroots leaders and traditional leaders, were shocked to see huge budget allocations for their communities. BudgIT’s website has been visited by more than 275,000 unique visitors and also has processed more than 4,000 data requests from online visitors.

The growth of the online platform has been due largely to the budget cut application during the Occupy Nigeria
Movement – a protest against the removal of fuel subsidies and corruption in government. It has helped to communicate the importance of the budget. It has intensified the discussion of the importance of the budget and how its implementation affects citizens directly. BudgIT’s engagement with government and civil society is also being used to press for an open budget that clearly specifies all items for citizens’ understanding in the near term. Monthly allocations for communities and sub-national budgets are available on the BudgIT website, enabling citizens to see the public funds allocated to their local environment. Citizens have been able to request the refined 2012, 2013 & 2014 budget data analysis for personal use.

BudgIT’s Twitter stream with more than 14,000 followers is a hive of daily commentary on the budget by active followers. It represents the first level of engagement on creative presentation of the budget. This stimulates discussion, demands more transparency and ensures government accountability. It also causes data to be more open and understandable and to ignite citizen participation.

With the advocacy project that is undertaken to provide budget access by printed text to citizens who have no internet access, robust discussions are initiated throughout individual and community groups that prompt effective government monitoring. BudgIT has used customized data representation tools to revolutionize engagement with Nigerians. This is also appreciated by international transparency and accountability groups. Organisations such as Open Knowledge Foundation, ONE and the International Budget Partnership have appraised BudgIT’s approach to driving public literacy about budgets. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Nigerian Minister of Finance and a former World Bank Managing Director, also supports the idea as evidenced by her opinion piece that was published in the Financial Times. Citizens are asking the right questions from government officials on specific projects that are assigned in the budget to their areas.

5.2 Providing Institutional Support

Beyond social media, BudgIT is using the right approach to intersect institutional reform and civic engagement. Understanding the weakness of the Nigerian’s legislative budget office, BudgIT’s co-founders are consultants to the National Assembly Budget and Research Office through a DFID-funded project, which is intended to strengthen the bond between legislators (Federal and State) and citizens. Understanding the legislature is a core component of governance. BudgIT works with legislative committees (appropriation and finance) in shaping public policy in regard to linking the budget to resource-based planning.

The organisation also made three presentations to the National Assembly to explain how to use ICT effectively to monitor and evaluate budget performance. This was requested by the Office of the Senate President and supported by the DFID. It was anchored on the best ways to track budgets using constituency offices. BudgIT is part of the stakeholder discussion of Nigeria’s membership in the Open Government Partnership, which is necessary to remove the bottlenecks that limit effective use of the budget.

5.3 Civil Society Support

BudgIT has worked with the 33 civil society organisations and hosted a community of transparency-focused NGOs on November 15th 2011 at Co-Creation Hub. This was intended to inform them of its goal of strengthening budget access in Nigeria and the critical role of a civil society towards its grassroots. BudgIT has also participated in and made presentations at more than fifteen civil society sessions about the Nigerian Budget. It has been recognised as a data mining organisation, having provided support in data analysis for several civil society organisations. The latter include State Accountability and Transparency Initiative, Centre for Social Justice, Beacons, EiENigeria, Project Watch, iWatch Nigeria and Community Life Project.

Beyond social media, BudgIT uses a creative approach to connect institutional reform and civic engagement. Understanding the weakness of the Nigerian legislative budget office, the organisation’s leaders have been consultants to The National Assembly Budget and Research Office through a DFID-funded project, which is intended to strengthen the bond between legislators (Federal and State) and citizens. Understanding the legislature is a core component of governance, BudgIT has made representations to legislative committees (appropriation and finance) in shaping public policy in regard to linking the budget to resource-based planning.

5.4 Media Partnership

Media organizations that target young urban people, such as YNaija, CP-Africa and TechLoy, have constantly appreciated BudgIT’s initiatives. BudgIT has provided infographics for online digital new outlets, such as ScoopNG, YNaija and BusinessDay for simplified budget access. It has been recognised by Forbes Magazine as one of the top five African startups to watch. It also leads a Data Journalism Initiative that will help to improve newsrooms to properly represent data.

5.5 The Global Community

BudgIT is a member of the Open Spending Group in the United Kingdom and has contributed Nigeria’s budget from 2009 to 2012 to the data hub. It has also been part of the discussions about developing a global structure for participatory budgeting. Its Team Leader has also contributed to Data Journalism Handbook based on BudgIT’s visualization tool for the Nigerian Budget and the fact that public data is now within the social sphere.

6. Challenges

Key challenges for BudgIT include obtaining actual expenditure data from government and also meeting the expectations of excited citizens about government data, especially at the sub-national level where data is highly protected. With the
budget also provided in non-readable formats by government agencies, BudgIT must contend with putting data through several format conversions and still ensuring its accuracy.

On the demand side, apathy to governance is a very strong factor, especially among citizens at the bottom of the pyramid of society and who are most prone to populism and hand-outs by elected officials. Poor citizens who live primarily in rural neighbourhood idolize politicians and usually scuttle the efforts of citizens to demand accountability. Serial abdication of government responsibilities, difficulty in reading the budget and non-performance of the budget have increased the lack of interest among citizens in the semi-urban environment. This is an obstacle hurdle to overcome as citizens must be convinced that BudgIT’s efforts will improve service delivery.

On the supply side, there is clearly a weak institutional framework, especially at the legislative end, which is meant to be an external accountability body. The legislature’s budget office is weak and has not helped to foster data transparency and civic action. This has empowered the executive to present budget metrics almost unilaterally. This weakens the ability of citizens to have empirical and independent information with which to demand accountability or the provision of basic infrastructure in their neighbourhood.

7. Sustainability

In the short term, BudgIT’s focus is on the mixed income of grants and paid revenues. It plans to run a sustainable organisation with a core focus of providing customised software solutions and the construction of creative communication capacity for Nigerian corporate and governmental organisations.

Higher revenues in the future will be created by building infographics for corporate organisations to interpret data for their shareholders, public community and other stakeholders. BudgIT is currently developing a customised software version of Tracka for Westminster Foundation for Democracy that facilitates the social tracking of gender projects. It is expected that the provision of such support to various organisations will generate considerable income.

8. Team

Three individuals lead the data analysis, technology development and creative design departments that manage the core of the BudgIT team.

Oluseun Onigbinde is the Co-founder/Team Leader of BudgIT. He graduated from the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, in Electrical/Electronics Engineering. He gained valued experience in public finance while working with the Access Bank and First Bank of Nigeria as a Strategy and Business Intelligence Officer. In recognition of BudgIT’s drive to make Nigeria’s budget and public data more open, he was awarded the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship for Social Entrepreneurs and World Summit Youth Award.

Joseph Agunbiade is a Co-Founder and the Head of Technology of BudgIT. He is the leader on matters of technical expertise and product development. He is a graduate in physics from the Federal University of Technology, Minna. He possesses specialized skills in Java, Javascript, PHP and other customised technology tools, such as Wordpress and Joomla.

Segun Adeniyi is an economics graduate from Obafemi Awolowo University. He is the organisation’s Creative Leader and has sound analytical skills as a result of his background. He also possesses design skills that he acquired through training. He designs infographics intended to make budgets and public data more interesting.

9. Looking Forward

BudgIT has discovered the depth of apathy by citizens toward efforts to date to communicate the Nigerian budget. This has been of help in refining BudgIT’s engagement strategy for different classes of citizens. The organisation also understands the lack of interest in public discussion of the Nigerian budget. It believes that certain legislation, such as the Fiscal Responsibility Act that anchor public finance, must be improved to ensure greater transparency and accountability. BudgIT has begun to engage the National Assembly committees on the sections of the law that inhibit transparency.

The BudgIT team is committed to making the organisation the trusted hub of public data for commercial and social interests. Providing data for corporations in the medium term is a key aspect of our sustainability strategy. BudgIT sees a larger role in fostering an open data culture in the country. It wants to strengthen its technical capacity to deliver Nigeria’s first civic-led open data platform, which is sorely needed for developers, journalists, researchers and the open data community. With limited reach based on available resources, BudgIT wishes to put the Nigerian budgets into the hands of every Nigerian across all segments of society.

For institutions that require improved capacity building and refined policy formulation, BudgIT wishes to deliver budget analyses, public finance data and an open governance policy. These documents are meant to drive institutional reform in matters of service delivery, accountability and civic engagement.

As an organisation, BudgIT intends to go further along the value chain by moving from budget access to crowd-sourced civic tracking of public projects. Tracka, a product of BudgIT, is a social platform for active citizens who are interested in tracking budgets and public projects in their community. Layered on open data and integrated with existing social media tools, this platform will bring people of common interests together to share photos, videos, and documents and to post comments about existing projects. The platform is available on http://tracka.ng

BudgIT’s short term plan is to develop solutions that can be replicated easily across Africa. This include smart visualisations that aid data-driven journalism, an African budget curation portal and an easy-to-deploy budget platform.

References

Entrepreneurs and World Summit Youth Award.

Three individuals lead the data analysis, technology development and creative design departments that manage the core of BudgIT. A team of 15 people is assembled that includes designers, developers, journalists, researchers and the open data community. A Business Intelligence Officer is also hired to oversee the collection and analysis of data. The team is committed to making the organisation transparent and refocused policy formulation, BudgIT wishes to deliver capacity for Nigerian corporate and governmental solutions and the construction of creative communication capability for the Nigerian public. In the short term, BudgIT's focus is on the mixed income of developing creative communication tools, infographics for corporate organisations to interpret data for businesses, and a platform for active citizens to interpret data for themselves.

On the demand side, apathy to governance is a very strong driver to make Nigeria's budget and public data more open, he was awarded the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship for Social Entrepreneur, and the team is working on a customised software version of BudgIT for Westminster Foundation for Democracy. BudgIT is currently developing a customised software version of BudgIT for Westminster Foundation for Democracy. This will drive institutional reform and strategy for different classes of citizens. The organisation also understands the lack of interest in public discussion of the budget, and the need for improved public participation. BudgIT has begun to engage the National Assembly committees on the sections of the law that inhibit transparency. The BudgIT team is committed to making the organisation an external accountability body. The legislature's budget framework, especially at the legislative end, is meant to drive institutional reform and refocused policy formulation, BudgIT wishes to deliver budget capacity for Nigerian corporate and governmental solutions and the construction of creative communication capability for the Nigerian public. In the short term, BudgIT's focus is on the mixed income of developing creative communication tools, infographics for corporate organisations to interpret data for businesses, and a platform for active citizens to interpret data for themselves.

BudgIT's short term plan is to develop solutions that aid data-driven journalism, an African budget curriculum. These documents are meant to drive institutional reform and refocused policy formulation, BudgIT wishes to deliver capacity for Nigerian corporate and governmental solutions and the construction of creative communication capability for the Nigerian public. In the short term, BudgIT's focus is on the mixed income of developing creative communication tools, infographics for corporate organisations to interpret data for businesses, and a platform for active citizens to interpret data for themselves.

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New forms of democratic local governance:  
The case of the Citizen’s Committee for Decentralise 
Cooperation of the City of Rome

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Abstract. The economic, political and social changes that have characterised the beginning of the 21st century have been accompanied by a proliferation of new forms of relationships between governments and citizens that are more inclusive, transparent and accountable. These numerous new and varied democratic practices represent a search for greater and differentiated civic participation that aims to offer a response to a crisis that is corroding democracy in various geopolitical areas. Present in both the north and south of the globe, they demonstrate a greater capacity for innovation at a local level.

The focus of this article is an analysis, at the local level, of international development cooperation, meaning the set of policies that aim to change the imbalance that continues to characterise North-South relationships. It studies an example of democratic innovation in the international aid activity of a Municipality, specifically the case of the Citizen’s Committee for Decentralised Cooperation of the City of Rome, which has been operating for twenty years. This resource method was chosen to verify hypotheses and suggest path that may contribute to overall reflections on the processes of constructing new forms of governance, today at the very heart of democracy.

Keywords. Governance, Democracy, Participation, Deliberation, Local government, International Cooperation, Citizen’s Committee, Italy

1. Governance in a changing world

At the beginning of the 21st century, economic globalisation, the Nation-State crisis, the processes of “opening” and “closing” evident in different cultures (Habermas, 1999), are accompanied by a deep crisis of democracy that is structural, rather than temporary, in nature. As previously dominant social relationships break down (Touraine, 2005), removing the attractiveness and effectiveness of related modes of action and organisation (firstly syndicates and parties), unprecedented social movements and forms of political action appear. They demonstrate the presence of a wide-spread desire to participate in public life; however, this is characterised by interactions that are more horizontal and mobile, more ‘liquid’ in Bauman’s words (2007), appearing as fluid networks rather than formal structures (Kaldor y Selchow, 2012; della Porta, 2011). The alternatives that separate economics, society, politics and culture (Appadurai, 1996), in a more integrated and, at the same time, more fragmented (in 2003 Rosenau introduces fragmegration) world, add the task of rebuilding “bridges” and re-establishing lost links to the processes of constructing a democratic governance.
Markets “freed” from state regulations show the progress of formerly peripheral countries, completely redesigning North-South relationships. However, the economic growth seen in emerging economies in the last decade, particularly in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) also brings with it increased inequality, with the odd exception. This inequality increases in different geopolitical areas (OECD, 2011), revealing a different profile depending on the focus point, stimulating a search for a new measurement system (see the recent proposal by Cobham and Sumner, 2013). Global inequality demonstrates an increase in polarization between the wealthiest 5% and the poorest 5% of the world’s population, while the status of the intermediary quintiles varies substantially. In fact, as the income of the lower middle class increases, i.e. the income of the emerging countries (+80/70%), there is a corresponding downturn in that of the highest middle class, i.e. the income of the most industrialised countries (Milanovic, 2012). In turn, if the relationship between countries is examined, taking into account the demographic weight of each, it is evident that there is a significant increase in participation by countries such as China, India and Brazil in the gross global product while the poverty map is transformed, with a reduction in the number of low income countries (Sumner, 2010). The neoliberal framework, which has guided the latest stages of globalisation and shows itself to be increasingly incapable of overcoming its self-generated crises, tends to position the growth of inequality at a world level and within countries, rather than between countries. The profile of inequality is new and differentiated, and the methodological approaches in use until recently have consequently lost their capacity for analysis.

In other aspects, globalisation has an impact on the local, drastically transforming it. G-local is the term that was invented to qualify the phenomena of de-territorialisation and, at the same time, simultaneous re-territorialisation on record. The global breaks down hierarchies, relations, values, it de-materialises limits, however, at the same time it also needs to “materialize”, to agglomerate the structures that support it in defined locations (Sassen, 2007). The local, in terms of the g.local, is freed from its old subordination to the State and takes on an economic and political centrality. In recent decades and on different continents, decentralisation, one of the main indicators of the new strength of the local, has accompanied processes of democratization and the spirals of growth concentrated in specific areas, creating pockets of wealth and impoverished slums (World Bank, 2009; Sumner, 2010). Temporary or continuous over time? This is debatable.

Under the new framework, and in response to different trends, local governments are beginning to experiment with innovative forms of micro-democracy, of “governing with the people”, and are open to greater, different civic participation (Schmidt, 2006). In both the North and South these unprecedented methods of local governance, differentiated by country and subject (civic courts, consensus conferences, forums, neighbourhood councils, participative budgets, community boards, social budgets etc.), have similarly varied levels of inclusiveness, democracy and decision-making power (della Porta, 2011). Untying the knot in each that binds the search for legitimacy, desire for control, demands for effectiveness and efficiency, hope for inclusion, recognition among equals and social justice, unveils a decisive step towards escaping rhetoric and making the strengths and directions of these new practices transparent.

Change has also reached the international scene where, for the first time, records show that local government and civil society have entered into a world that was previously closed to them (Hocking, 1999; Beck, 2005). It is significant that development cooperation, an important area in international relations, has also registered similar changes that are seen, among other ways, in the appearance of a new form of action: decentralised cooperation. This is a true break as it represents not just the entry of new actors into aid politics, i.e. local governments and territorial actors (non-governmental development organisations, cooperatives, non-profit associations, syndicates, universities) but also, and above all, the assertion of an unprecedented logic of action. This new logic is seen in a wide and varied web consisting of methods of dialogue, agreement and participative management between partners and regions and, at the same time, between the multiple economic, social and institutional actors present in each (Ianni, 2004). More generally, a deep and complex process of change is running through development cooperation. The multiplication of objectives, of actors and instruments (the triple revolution discussed by Severino and Ray - 2009) drives changes that combine continuity and significant breaks with the past. In the second decade of the 21st century, the large part of the international community that united around the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) platform, established at the start of the century, with concern for the effectiveness and efficiency of action (central theme of the 4 High Level Forums organised between 2003 and 2011 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD), increasingly has to face the challenge of achieving greater convergence in the area of new donors (firstly from the emerging countries), opening up to participation from civil society and local governments, entirely redefining (not just updating) aims, strategies and the very vision of development. In this context, decentralised cooperation presents itself as a response to the issues on the agenda and, at the same time, as a space capable of intercepting new democratic practices that emerge at a local level, offering suggestions and contributions that go beyond aid.

These are the reasons behind the decision to study democratic governance for aid, specifically, the Citizen’s Committee for Decentralised Cooperation (CCDC) of the City of Rome. The aim is to verify advanced hypotheses about the basis of other local practices, identify paths that could contribute to better defining the characteristics and strengths of the democratic innovations of the new century, the focus points for a new democratic perspective.

1 Global inequality takes into account individuals and their incomes, putting membership of a country afterwards in brackets. It therefore surpasses the framework of States and takes on a global perspective (Milanovic, 2012).
2. Methodological note

It was only possible to produce this study thanks to the continuous availability of the CCDC, the associations that comprise it and Rome City Council; they gave the author access to their files and made time for discussion and dialogue. This availability made it possible to apply various tools as part of the chosen methodology:

- Bibliographic review of the main works on the analysed subjects;
- Document analysis, including documents produced by the CCDC and administrative documents belonging to the City Council;
- Semi-structured interviews with different members of the CCDC, civil servants and City Council politicians;
- Repeated, in-depth interviews with the City Council civil servant responsible for supporting the CCDC;
- Participation in different events organised by the Committee, whether as an observer or as a rapporteur-actor;
- Focus group with 15 members of the Assembly where the initial draft of research results was presented and discussed.

In terms of the conceptual scaffolding applied, it is important to clarify that the main concepts are defined as follows:  
- Deliberation: identified with dialogue characterised by the freedom and equality of all participants, argument-based interaction and changes to initially held positions (Elster, 1998; Manin, 2005; Bobbio, 2007). – Participation: has different forms, from the most limited and purely nominal participation to participation that represents a real change in the balance of existing power, taking the works of S. White (1996) and Arnstein (1969) as a main reference point. A dynamic, two-tier focus was used that aimed to highlight the conditions that make it possible to move up or down from one step to the next on the participative ladder. – Governance: mainly refers to three aspects of action, in the specific case of the relationship between Rome City Council and its citizens: decision-making processes and management, the effectiveness of established policies and the regulatory and organisational principles adopted (Kooiman, 2008).

3. The Citizen’s Committee for Decentralised Cooperation of the City of Rome. Different areas for more democratic governance

The Citizen’s Committee for decentralised cooperation in Rome was established in 1996, during a period in which similar ideas flourished in a number of other Italian cities: Bergamo, Naples, Catania, Palermo, Genoa, Arezzo, Viareggio (Ianni, 2011). Its aim was to create a space for dialogue between city administration and regional actors in order to “promote, coordinate, assess and programme initiatives” on development cooperation implemented by the city. This was how the purpose of the CCDC was defined in the Regulations that later formalised its foundation in 2003.

This type of committee had different roots; in some, the city council’s desire to extend consensus dominated, others were influenced by demands for participation from the region (Ianni, 2011) and therefore, taken as a whole, the new spaces tended to lie between poles that consisted of “offered” and “claimed” spaces (Gaventa, 2004). However, common to all was the heavy weight of external requests represented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) multi-lateral programmes, which were partly financed at this time by Italian governmental cooperation. These incorporated an element of decentralised cooperation, and the various Italian cities that started international cooperation activity at this time registered their initiatives under their framework (Ianni, 1999). In other areas, it is important to highlight that the social space of these committees was a mixed space on the borderline between being social and institutional, in line with similar experiments in the area of local development. It was therefore different from the space of citizen’s committees that are exclusively comprised of social actors and are mobilised, now as then, around specific themes, without any formal structure and with “elements typical to social movements” (della Porta, 2004: 14); it also differed from the participative experiences of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, committees of decentralised cooperation do not claim to represent established interests; in contrast they aim to establish common interests, to build shared plans.

However, in the second decade of the 21st century, all the committees described above appear, for different reasons, to have been dissolved; besides the CCDC in Rome only the Committees of Arezzo and Modena province remain and these differ slightly because, since the beginning, the former was a Local Committee and not a Citizen’s Committee², and the latter has a provincial aspect. Changes in the political climate and the evolution of interaction between the willingness of local government to “cede power” and the strength and wealth of local practices present in the territory, as well as the dominant type of political culture (agonic or antagonist, ready to confront adversaries or determined to fight with enemies it is necessary to remove - Mouffe, 2003) proved to be decisive. The CCDC in Rome, due to its remarkable durability, represents a unique case for studying these factors and the innovative strength of these new practices.

4. The City Council relationship: a “claimed” and yet “offered” space

The CCDC in Rome was established on the Mayor’s initiative, however, from the beginning, international solidarity and cooperation associations in the city supported its creation to the degree that its institutional formalisation was the result of a specific demand submitted by these organisations to the

² Local Committees, in contrast to Citizen’s Committees, unite active or interested actors around a specific programme, reducing their capacity to create an impact on the life of a city, although they are more specific and have greater functionality (Ianni, 2004).
centre-left candidate in the 2002 municipal elections, an issue he then made his own. Once declared the winner, he found himself committed to making it a reality, On 17 October 2002, the Municipal Council debated the establishment of the Committee; on 18 March 2003 the Assembly of the CCDC, following a lengthy process of analysis and debate, approved the Regulations that govern its structure and activity (Luzzatto, 2004).

The local authority charter issued by the Council established that “The Committee is established, in addition to local authority representatives, by non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, volunteer societies and related associations operating in the civic sphere and that have been committed to working for at least a year in the development cooperation sector”. The Regulation structures the CCDC into three areas (Assembly, Commission, Round Tables) that are differentiated by “access rules”, forms of representation, functions and operating dynamics, the number of actors and decision-making powers, and these interact with one other to create one sole area, a space governed by defined rules and purposes. Placing the institution-social actor relationship inside the participative deliberative space, combined with the presence of second level actors (associations) as an almost exclusive expression of citizenship, represent the specific aspects of the chosen organisational form.

Access to the Assembly is open, but the right to vote is limited to the associations that belong to the Committee, which participate through a representative with written authority or by delegating authority to another association (only one delegation is permitted). The permanent Commission is composed of a set number of members with mixed representation: 14 members are chosen by the Assembly to represent the different types of association and 5 (7 in the most recent period) are appointed by the Mayor: directors of different technical/administrative areas and political representatives, including a Deputy Councillor and the Councillor for relations with European institutions and neo-EU citizens. Coordinators from the Round Tables and other Deputy Councillors, representing overseas communities, also participate but do not have the right to vote. The Round Tables include members of CCDC associations that have not been formally appointed, non-affiliated associations and other interested people. The Tables were established by theme4 Peace (now inactive), Fight against poverty, Interculture, Sustainable development, today, Commons, Decentralisation (now inactive) and represent a fluid area without set external limits, open to new additions (Ianni, 2012).

Dialogue as a method of interaction dominates each of the three areas. However, while the dynamic of the Round Tables is based on deliberation, meaning they are characterised by argument, equality in debate and the freedom to introduce new subjects (Benhabib, 1996), in the Assembly, and particularly the Commission, the opposite is true; they are based on strategic negotiation, i.e. the search for agreement between established, differing and sometimes conflicting interests. The latter two bodies therefore represent a space that is more participative than deliberative, that “balances” interests rather than converting them into shared positions (Habermas, 1999; Benhabib, 1996; della Porta, 2011). In these dynamics, the prompt verbalisation of work by the Tables, Assembly and Commission and its dissemination on the internet (when CCDC creates its own website), will guarantee the transparency of debate and decision-making and encourage significant forms of collective learning.

In summary, the CCDC in Rome shows itself to be an interesting combination of deliberation and strategic action, characterised by different levels of participation (from symbolic participation to embryonic forms of civic power - Arnstein, 1969). It is an area subject to fluctuating fortunes but, to date, resistant to being affected by them thanks to a weak yet constant force of integration.

5. Weaknesses of the experience in Rome

The dynamics of the CCDC face different types of obstacles in terms of expansion; some stem from the City Council, while others have their roots in the very heterogeneity and self-referential nature of the city’s association-related fabric.

Following the formal creation of the CCDC, the City Council continues to undertake a large part of its development cooperation initiatives without the Committee. Those with the greatest media impact (the first Italy-Africa sessions, activity in Rwanda and Mozambique, G-local Forums in the first half of the 2000s) were initiatives directly assumed by the Mayor; others, including EU programmes, were allocated to members of the governing board and borough authorities. The most negative aspect is the fact that, by 2013, the Municipality still had neither a strategic nor annual programme (Ianni, 2012). This weakens the CCDC’s capacity for dialogue and the performance of its acknowledged functions.

In turn, Rome has a very particular profile, with a clear universalist focus strengthened by the presence of the Vatican State and a notable leading role at a national level. It is home to the strongest Italian associations, international organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and numerous national and international universities. Social networks demonstrate equally significant strengths and weaknesses; they are open to the world but have fragile roots, and great problems in finding common ground and methods of coordination with one another (Rhi Sausi, Coletti, Conato, Rufini, 2004). These characteristics of the association-related fabric of Rome are reflected in the world of the Committee, with internal differences in terms of aims, tasks and responsibilities.

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3 Created in 2003, the purpose of the Deputy Councillors chosen by foreign, non-EU citizens is to represent these citizens in the City Council and the Borough Councils. The Regulations of the City Council state that Deputy Councillors do not have the right to vote, may not sign any motions of no confidence and are not included in the official count of those present.

4 In the 1990s, the Tables were geographic in nature; the change that took place in the following decade in this respect was in response to the decision to prioritise coordination over territorial specifics.

5 The borough authorities represent “districts of decentralisation from the Municipality”; according to the Rome Municipality statute. Created in 2001 with responsibility for governing the region and expenditure services, by 2013 15 had been established.
associated cultures, experiences, resources, leanings towards movements or more institutional positions, and the choice of international solidarity or social change (Ianni, 2012). In 2013, the Committee was formed by 140 associations. In previous years this number had risen to 180, highlighting a further issue: a reduction in the CCDC’s force of attraction, added to the weakness of participation by its associations. This participation, in more than one case, is purely formal and evolving towards withdrawal, and exit; this has its roots in the absence of incentives to become members of the Committee (particularly important in stronger associations), and the demands on time required by an active presence (a limiting factor for less structured associations). Since 2005 the CCDC has addressed this issue by introducing successive changes to its Regulations (lowering of the attendance quorum, option of delegation by Commission members, discontinuation if not present at three consecutive meetings of the Assembly), revealing a predominantly defensive action rather than a strategy. In contrast, the Municipality does not appear to have raised this matter.

In addition, there is reduced coordination between the Municipality, Province and Region (the three levels of decentralisation in Italy), meaning there is no territorial system of cooperation, which also contributes to creating the context that feeds these weaknesses.

6. CCDC presence in the city and the national sphere

Despite the weaknesses described above, the CCDC in Rome has managed to maintain a notable presence in the city, varying between periods of great visibility, which occur at specific times and also create an impact at a national level, to moments of withdrawal and minimal, almost underground activity. The fact that it is a space that is closed yet, at the same time, partly open, has helped the Committee to build networks of associations that last over time.

The CCDC achieved particular visibility in 2000, in relation to the Jubilee 2000 movement, with its commitment to civic awareness and mobilisation around the issue of debt. This commitment was in line with the national “Sdebitarsi” campaign (in turn linked to the global Jubilee 2000 campaign) which won approval for a national law to cancel third world debt (Law 209 of 2000).

Equally important was the Committee’s participation in and contribution to activities that were regularly run in the first half of the 2000s and focused on African problems (Italy-Africa) and the promotion of dialogue between peoples (Intermundia).

However, in terms of all these CCDC initiatives the most noteworthy was issuing a call and organising the “General states of cooperation”. The initial proposal, in March 2006, was to create a space for reflection and progress capable of influencing and re-defining national cooperation policies. The decision to compare civic reality and the national scene, highlighting the actively diverging trends in each (expansion in the former and withdrawal in the latter) contributed to helping this process achieve greater weight and, thanks to the change of political party in the national government (May 2006), dialogue and support from the recently appointed Deputy Minister for International Cooperation. The initiative therefore demonstrated a great capacity for creating an impact and, for three consecutive years (2006-2008), it encouraged unprecedented reflection and debate in Italy, with conferences and work groups that proved to have great rallying power. In 2008 numerous Forums were held in different Italian regions in preparation for the National Forum that revealed the breadth and strength of the mobilisation and influence achieved by the process (Ianni, 2012). A little later, however, political changes in the national and citizens’ governments signified the end of the initiative and led to a period of retreat.

This ability to achieve a national presence was once again seen in 2009 with participation by the CCDC in the processes of re-writing the principles guiding Italian cooperation in health, organised by the General-Directorate for Development Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy. On this occasion, links and a positive circle were again made between democratic local practices and the democratic nature of national policy, proving that a “concertina-like” path (intermittent and marked by phases of expansion and long periods of contraction), can have a lasting impact.

7. Democratising democracy: Final comments

The CCDC in Rome represents an interesting and innovative space for civic participation, with varying yet lasting intensity. Its history illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of an experience of participative local government based on a particular theme, in this case development cooperation.

The unprecedented duration of the CCDC, which has existed for almost 20 years, shows that it has roots, among others, in the unstable balance between the willingness of the Municipality to share powers and claims for participation from citizens associations. Over the years and under different Administrations, the Municipality, backed by the Department for International Relations attached to the Mayor’s Office, has given limited support to the Committee, making available a physical space for coordinating activities, linking it to its European programmes offices. In turn, the associations, although reduced in number and with varying attendance, demonstrate a core capable of remaining active over time. In particular, the CCDC has redesigned its configuration, its “deliberative setting”, more than once to adapt itself to circumstances. Its action has seen a series of expansions and contractions that help it to overcome the severest situations to be able to form, in better times, a public/private partnership characterised by co-participation dynamics, meaning with a certain level of power redistribution between the institution and social actors.

The Rome example confirms that, even in the case of a space mainly defined by the institution/civic associations
V. Ianni: New forms of democratic local governance: The case of the Citizen’s Committee for Decentralise Cooperation of the City of Rome

relationship, preserving the respective autonomy of each is a decisive component in the sustainability of the democratic innovation process, as indicated by the experiences of the Porte Alegre participative budget and the democratic decentralisation of Kerala (Heller, 2001, 2002; Thomas Isaac y Heller, 2003; Ianni, 2008). At the same time, participation as the capacity to redefine and expand the public space is conditioned, as in other cases (Avritzer 2006), by the effectiveness of the results achieved. The withdrawal in recent years of the strongest associations with the greatest visibility and, in contrast, greater commitment from the weaker associations exemplifies how the results are not measured in the abstract, but rather are differentiated in relation to the characteristics and interests of the different actors. In fact, while limitations in the capacity to agree on significant management issues lead the more structured organisations to withdraw, these same limits do not have an effect on the smaller associations that find reasons to maintain their presence, valuing the possibility of exchanging experiences and building networks.

In turn, the particular democratic governance of aid represented by the CCDC clearly indicates how the local dimension is strengthened or weakened under the impact of what is occurring at a national and international level. The capacity of the CCDC in Rome to develop actions with a national impact will guarantee its durability. The General convention of cooperation initiative, and the links with initiatives by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, demonstrate the virtuous circle that can be generated. They suggest that constructing democratic governance, in an increasingly globalised and multi-polar world, requires multi-level actions and focuses; the starting point of the process is not pre-established or decided, but reveals the links that this process manages to establish with the other levels. Different studies highlight the negative effects of any imbalances that may exist in this regard. In Italy, for example, academics such as Bobbio (2005) demonstrate that in recent decades a fairly clear divergence separates the national level, where a vertical and controlled vision of democracy dominates, and the local level where, in contrast, there are numerous participative and deliberative practices, producing paralysing effects on the dynamics of each. The disconnection between local democratic innovations and the national level often transform these innovations into isolated niches and also, on some occasions, into functional practices for vertical and authoritative centralisation processes.

In terms of development cooperation in particular, the forms and durability of aid governance by the CCDC suggests that an on-the-record redefinition of North-South relations requires not merely political and strategic changes, but also a new vision of development. In other words, it requires taking steps towards co-development, to a win-win circular relationship between actors and different levels of economic growth, social well-being and political liberty. The “development agreement” typical to decentralised cooperation, common to both North and South territories in a joint, differentiated search for fair and long-lasting changes (Ianni, 2009), represents a form of response to this demand for “global action” which is increasingly present in international debate on the future of aid.

Last, but not least, study of the CCDC shows that the deliberation-participation relationship is fluid and changing, also indicating the importance of finding common ground for the purposes of democratic governance. It suggests that participation and deliberation represent processes that interact with one another yet remain different, providing empirical confirmation of the main theories of deliberation (first Habermas) which highlight that deliberation is not necessarily identified with the decision-making moment while this, in contrast, represents the basic foundation of participation. The dynamics that characterise the sub-areas that constitute the CCDC are representative in this respect. At a more general level, the case of the CCDC confirms the teachings related, in a large part, to democratic local governance practices carried out in recent years, i.e. the current crisis of democracy can find paths to resolution not in juxtaposition between democratic forms (direct, delegates, representatives) but rather in the search for links, articulation and common ground between them. It also confirms the decisive nature of both political and institutional frameworks and the culture that inspire social and political forces when constructing a democratic government. In this way it offers, from its perspective, input and contributions to the debate on how to “democratize democracy” in a world in which the Nation-State has lost its centrality, integration and fragmentation progress together and increasingly numerous and heterogeneous actors demand new forms of expression and participation in the definition of common good.

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Smart Policy Making: 
Citizens’ Voice, Sustainable Choice

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Abstract. The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI), which was implemented by Counterpart International in Armenia in 2008 found that civil society organizations (CSOs) are reactive in the policy process and should implement proactive strategies in this arena. To address this key issue, Counterpart designed the Legislative Agenda Advocacy Days (LAAD) initiative, which focuses on expanding the footprint of Armenian CSOs’ in the formation of a national legislative agenda. Working to build advocacy capacity, Counterpart has facilitated grassroots consultations and policy discussions for a wide array of CSOs and citizens throughout Armenia. Based on these consultations, national working groups develop sets of legislative recommendations for each of the standing committees of the National Assembly (NA) and lobby for their inclusion in the national legislature’s agenda. Since 2011, two rounds of LAAD have brought together more than 300 individuals, 200 CSOs and representatives from 70 communities, who collectively have submitted 198 legislative recommendations. The ultimate objective of LAAD is to strengthen the role and impact of CSOs’ in decision-making processes at the national and local levels in a sustainable manner.

This article provides an overview of the design and implementation of LAAD. It highlights practical lessons in fostering dialogue at a local level and linking the results to efforts for reform at the national level.

Keywords. Democratic governance, CSO support, Local advocacy, Armenia, Legislative process

1. Background

Since it gained independence from the Soviet Union, the Republic of Armenia has been transitioning structurally, albeit incrementally, into a participatory society, particularly in matters of governance and decision making. Citizen engagement and input have been encouraged during the last two decades in policy making at the national and municipal levels by a variety of mechanisms. These include ministry-affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGO) advisory boards, municipal working groups, networks that are affiliated with parliament and national platforms. However, in most instances, citizen input, whether direct or through organized methods (i.e., NGOs, working groups), has been in reaction to existing, proposed or newly approved legislation and policies. Furthermore, citizen engagement generally has been defined and facilitated by the ability and desire of policymakers to solicit input from constituents. It has been driven less frequently by constituents and their representative NGOs and CSOs in pursuit of reforms and change from their elected political figures.
Although a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded sector assessment noted in 2004 that "... advocacy is still mainly based on personal access and influence of well-known NGO leaders to legislators and Ministers," the landscape has progressed since then to a more structured and organized approach to policy development. Nevertheless, citizen engagement has remained largely reactionary. Non-governmental opinion makers have failed to effectively create a policy agenda that reflects the interests of broad constituencies. From 2007 to 2009, USAID NGO Sustainability Index publications accorded higher marks to Armenian NGOs’ advocacy capacity and impact than in the preceding three years. At the same time, the Index concluded that, although NGOs are more formal in their interactions in most cases, they still were reactive to legislation and policies.

Against this backdrop, the National Assembly (NA), the largest representative policy-making institution in the country, initiated its own second generation reform process. This occurred after the 2005 constitutional amendments, which took effect after the 2007 parliamentary elections with the swearing in of the Fourth Convocation of the NA. These amendments to the constitution laid the groundwork for greater parliamentary authority, formally weakening the presidency. Simultaneously, the number of standing committees in the NA doubled from six to twelve. This provided greater depth and organized debate on a variety of issues, including human rights, European integration and financial oversight. The NA also continued efforts to create greater transparency through its website and other information channels. Despite these reforms, the NA continued to be a largely reactive policy-making body in contrast to the executive branch. Essentially, the legislature was taking its cues from a coalition government’s executive branch, as it passed 80-85% of the legislation that was proposed by government ministries.

The recommendations of The 2010 CIVICUS CSI Index Policy Action Brief focused on a range of issues surrounding the lopsided policy process in regards to the relationships among the various branches of government, and between the government and the non-governmental sector. A core recommendation was that CSOs should engage in "... proactive, rather than reactive, measures [which] will help to render the whole process of change more strategic. CSOs should not only attempt to redress dangerous policies and practices, but also anticipate their initiations, engaging in all stages of the policy process and development arena."

With this in mind, Counterpart International in Armenia as part of its Civil Society and Local Government Support Program (CSLGSP) designed the Legislative Agenda Advocacy Days (LAAD) initiative in mid-2010. It is intended to address three key factors in the policy process and focusses especially on stakeholder input:

- Facilitate timely and diverse input for the public policy agenda from communities across Armenia,
- Strengthen a proactive process by which the non-government sector can shape the public policy agenda and;
- Provide sufficient advance notice to experts and policy makers they can prepare and deploy policy initiatives that will address so the long-term needs of social reform.

The LAAD’s cornerstone is to continue the policy process by ongoing monitoring, feedback, and modifying policies in their implementation phase (see Figure 1). Its high degree of participation and organization is intended to ensure that it is inclusive, but structured, while maintaining the primary objective of formulating a public policy agenda that responds to citizens’ needs rather than reacting to government initiatives.

2. Legislative Agenda Advocacy Days: From Reactive to Proactive—A Shift In Smart Policy Making

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2.1 Working Groups: The Clearinghouse Methodology

In 2011, Counterpart began to construct the initiative’s support skeleton by forming national Working Groups (WGs),


each of which would complement a corresponding NA standing committee. With the strengthening of the external stakeholder aspect of policy making (e.g., the third sector), the WGs would also serve as absorption mechanisms for community-level input. Most importantly, they would function as filters and communication nodes for the decision making bodies. Therefore, the function of the WGs was not only to provide forums for broader discussion of policy matters, but also to develop and present policy recommendations for inclusion in the NA agenda.

Given their participatory character, the next step for each WG was to identify a lead facilitator for the following tasks:

- Arrange, moderate and administer WG meetings,
- Document the process and issues raised by participants,
- Serve as the point of contact with the NA standing committees and;
- Finalize the legislative products to submit to the NA.

With sustainability in mind, the LAAD concept initially included volunteer facilitators who were genuinely interested in influencing the legislative agenda in line with their organization’s goals. Interested candidates were selected on the basis of their experience in policy advocacy in the given thematic areas.

However, the selection process highlighted challenges encountered during implementation. A number of experts, who were chosen to assume the role of facilitator, cited a lack of CSO financial resources, as well as the demanding nature of the work, as reasons for not participating. At the same time, several applicants who expressed interest demonstrated key weaknesses, particularly in facilitating and drafting of legislation. In addition to these obstacles, an unexpected trend arose in the preparation process when some key CSO representatives made their participation and engagement conditional on becoming the lead in the WGs. This clashed with the LAAD design, whereby facilitating consultations in a participatory manner was intended to be a cornerstone for broad ownership of the process and related actions by a broad group of CSOs.

Counterpart addressed these initial challenges by mobilizing international NGOs and those operating throughout Armenia, such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Open Society Foundation (OSF), to support financially the WGs as facilitator organizations. In cooperation with other international organizations and CSOs, Counterpart organized CSOs into WGs, mirroring the twelve NA standing committees. Supporting three of these twelve committees into fruition was a challenge for several reasons. Finding a local or international facilitator organization for the WG on Finance and Budgetary Affairs proved to be difficult. Therefore, Counterpart secured an independent expert. In addition, neither the WG on External Relations, nor the WG on European Integration, was established. Consequently, ten WGs were established.

### 2.2 LAAD 2011: Piloting the Unknown

As a result of the lengthy ramp up of the WGs, discussions launched in July 2011, later than initially anticipated. Against this background, the WG members were challenged right from the start by having only one month in which to develop their legislative recommendations. Throughout this process, Counterpart assisted the WGs closely during the discussion process to ensure a successful implementation that conformed to the LAAD design concept. Additionally, Counterpart assisted each WG to ensure uniformity in format and legislative language of all recommendations that were formulated.

Despite initial challenges, all ten established WGs successfully drafted a legislative agenda list by the end of September, including all issues and recommendations that had been provided by WG members. In total, 52 recommendations from the ten WGs were mostly focused on amending existing laws and legal acts. To gain access to the NA standing committees, Counterpart cooperated with the Public Network (PN) - an umbrella organization for a variety of CSOs. PN signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the NA to facilitate the participation of CSOs in the legislative process. Counterpart and PN approached ten NA standing committees to arrange LAAD meetings. Seven of these committees agreed to a meeting, but three requested written recommendations in place of a meeting. Overall, 85 people participated in the meetings and presented 38 legislative initiatives. Another 14 recommendations were submitted in written form. Surprisingly, only the Chair of the committee participated in most of the meetings. The lack of participation by members of parliament was justified by a high workload and the Chairman’s key role in the decision making process. Nevertheless, the first series of meetings with the seven NA standing committees generated a positive opinion of the WGs. The committees not only expressed interest in conducting regularly meetings with CSOs, but also agreed to consider their suggestions and recommendations. Moreover, three CSO representatives were invited separately

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4 Many of the experts were representatives of leading CSOs.
5 During extensive negotiations with these international development partners most of the latter expressed doubts that LAAD would have much of an impact on policy making and citizen engagement.
6 In regards to the WG on external relations, CSOs involved were not interested in addressing any issues to this committee. Due to disagreements between CSOs that were focused on the EU’s Eastern Partnership project, the WG on European Integration also was not formed.
7 All numbers have been obtained from Counterpart International’s internal Management Information System. The same applies to other numbers that appear below.
8 These seven NA standing committees were as follows: Social Affairs; Finance and Budgetary Affairs; Health, Maternity and Child Issues; Human Rights and Public Affairs; Defense and National Security; Environment and Agricultural Issues and Local Self Government and Territorial Administration.
9 This includes the WGs on Economic Affairs, on Education and Science and State and Legal Affairs. The NA standing committees on Economic Affairs and Education and Sciences both declined to meet in 2012, making it clear that they were not interested in CSO cooperation.
to the NA to participate in more in-depth discussions on the initiatives that they had presented.

2.3 Back to the Drawing Board: Lessons from 2011

During the meetings, Counterpart urged all WG facilitators and members to monitor the progress of the recommendations that they submitted and to continue to lobby for their adoption by the NA. This continued to be a challenge primarily because of the weakness of CSOs in targeted and effective lobbying. Also, the CSOs lacked tracking mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the process and impact. In Counterpart’s own evaluation of the process, a surprisingly high number of stakeholder responses revealed their limited expectations of the process. They believed that the objective of submitting recommendations, rather than securing their actual passage/approval was misdirected.

Addressing these and other challenges, Counterpart facilitated a follow-up meeting with all WG members and facilitators by the end of 2011 to reflect on the first cycle and determine what had been learned that was applicable to the upcoming, second LAAD cycle. The first cycle highlighted the importance of including Armenian Voices Regional Forums - LAAD’s grassroots component that promotes a culture of participation in policymaking that requires a high degree of ownership and participation. This also was influenced by the fact that the vast majority of CSOs are based in Armenia’s capital of Yerevan and do not have a broadly-based membership. Taking this into account, the regional forums were designed to connect the issues and voices of communities across Armenia with these CSOs and to promote their joint participation in policy making. With this in mind, Counterpart refined the initial LAAD concept and decided to select WG facilitators for the second cycle from local CSOs.

The first cycle provided an ideal opportunity to identify ways to improve the LAAD initiative. Counterpart presented the idea of LAAD as a process aimed at changing the culture of participation in Armenia and as an opportunity for interested citizens and CSOs to proactively engage in policy making.

3. Armenian Voices Regional Forums: Truth-Grounding Policies in Communities

With one cycle of LAAD under its belt, Counterpart embarked on the 2012 LAAD initiative and invited CSO and community-level participation at a much earlier stage. Counterpart brought to bear its extensive network of community development participants in all of Armenia’s provinces, as well as informal citizen groups such as Youth/Community Action Centers (Y/CACs). For the second round of LAAD, Counterpart’s outreach to individual citizens and particularly to informal citizen groups was an important departure from the first round. Intending to implement a truly nationwide process that is based on the participation of regional groups (i.e., outside of Yerevan, the capital), Counterpart launched the Armenian Voices Regional Forums (see Figure 2).

3.1 From Grassroots to Grassstips: Guiding Each Voice Through the Process

To maximize resources, while covering as much of the country as possible, Counterpart created the following three geographic zones (see the political map in Figure 2):

- Northern, covering the three most northern provinces,
- Central, covering Yerevan and four other provinces, and;
- Southern, covering southern provinces, which have a complex topography.

The regional forums were designed as engines of the larger LAAD process and as a training opportunity. Each forum included a training component that covered the legislative process to create an understanding of the policy cycle. It also provided extensive maps of access points within the process.

Participants were then separated into groups according to the focus area of each WG. Facilitators led structured and focused discussions of key topics, leading the participants toward creation of a vetted list of issues suggested for policy response. Although the lists of topics were not exhaustive, they were extensive. The facilitator was then tasked with maintaining contact and providing on-going feedback to all WG members (see Figure 3).

After discussing the thematic issues raised at the local level in each of the three regions, facilitators fed this information into the Yerevan based WGs. This generated further discussion. The Yerevan-based WGs outlined the problems of greatest concern in their regions and recommended solutions. In addition, each WG member was able to raise additional thematic issues. After reviewing the list of issues and recommendations, the WG filtered them according to their importance and urgency (see Figures 4 and 5). Each WG created a list of the recommended legislative solutions for each issue.

<Figure 2. Armenian voices 2012.>

<Figure 3. Working groups 2012.>

In the following sections referred to as regional forums.
Each WG received interim feedback from the facilitators before presenting its issues and recommendations to the NA standing committees. This enabled the participants to see which issues were selected for presentation at committees and to provide them with another opportunity for input/comments. Then, facilitators prepared brief (up to three minutes) video presentations for the regional participants that outlined the major issues that their WG members had identified. These videos, which were designed as cost-efficient feedback tools, were posted on a dedicated YouTube channel and sent to participants who could provide their last minute comments. By substituting face-to-face meetings with virtual ones, Counterpart laid the building blocks for an alternative and innovative approach Yerevan-based NGOs and regional groups can engage with each other.

### 3.2 Redesign: Lessons from 2012

Meetings with NA standing committees took place at the start of the legislative cycle in late September of 2012. In contrast to 2011, NA standing committee representatives demonstrated greater receptivity, but also were more astute in holding meetings on dates more in keeping with their own schedules and legislation-specific agendas.

Against this backdrop, the overall effort produced a number of noteworthy successes (see Figures 5 and 6). One of the most justifiably shielded standing committees - the standing committee on Defense and National Security, considered three recommendations from the LAAD process (see Figure 6). This committee was interested in a recommendation to amend the procedure for granting disability status and allowance to soldiers who were injured during their military service. In addition, the committee expressed great interest in working with CSO representatives and, since the meeting in October, has invited the WG members to all committee sessions. To follow up, WG members presented two more recommendations, one of which was discussed during a committee sitting and was incorporated into the NA Agenda. The WG members were also invited to report at a public hearing that was organized by the committee on Traffic Regulation. The standing committee on Territorial Administration and Local Self-Governance took an unprecedented ten recommendations under consideration. Two of the ten are being actively considered for inclusion on the NA’s agenda. Also, following the initial meeting with the committee, WG members participated in a public discussion that was initiated by the committee on the Concept on Strategic Approaches for the Further Development of Local Self-Government and Decentralization of Power. The concept was jointly developed by WG members and will be circulated further for comments and recommendations (see Figure 6).
Other committees used the LAAD engagement process as a starting point for outreach on broader policy processes. The NA standing committee on Social Affairs used the six recommendations from the WG to reform the Law on Social Protection, began exercising its parliamentary oversight function and making inquiries to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to initiate a multi-stakeholder approach in early 2013. Although the standing committee of State and Legal Affairs took under consideration 74 recommendations on the Electoral Code of Armenia, it informed the WG that the Electoral Code would remain unchanged until after Presidential Elections that were scheduled for February 18, 2013. Finally, the standing committee on Health began to discuss six LAAD recommendations. One such recommendation, which was related to legal protection for people who have mental disabilities that is provided in the Republic of Armenia Law on Psychiatric Care, was confirmed by the members and sent to the Ministry of Health for review. Also, an updated draft of the Law on Encouraging Breast Feeding and Children’s Food Circulation was prepared, incorporating new recommendations, and sent to the Government (see Figure 6).

To summarize, the 2012 LAAD process brought together 76 organizations in ten thematic working groups. This resulted in 56 legislative recommendations to the NA standing committees. Furthermore, 35 of these recommendations received commitments to action, of which 12 are currently in the process of becoming legislation (see Figure 6).

3.3 Moving Forward: Planning for 2013 LAAD

Examining the group evaluation/feedback on conducted activities is one of the most effective elements of the 2011 LAAD cycle. Counterpart held a session to evaluate feedback in December of 2012. All stakeholders were invited to participate and to reflect on their role and the structural design of LAAD, and also to understand collectively the progress status of the recommended initiatives. The latter includes the actual legislative status of the policy initiatives. However, the session was most useful in planning the 2013 LAAD cycle:11

- Recalibrating the time frame: In order to meet the legislative calendar time frame (and perhaps to even influence it), recommendations were made to begin the regional forums in April-May. They would be followed up by WG discussions and activities in June-July and meetings with NA standing committees at the end of July or in early September. Based on the previous cycles, August was to remain a month of preparation for the WG, due primarily to the NA’s scheduled vacation in August.

- Increasing legislative literacy: A one-time attempt to increase knowledge of the legislative process has not proved to be ideal, particularly for regional participants in the Armenian Voices, as well as the WG processes. There must be more attempts and, perhaps, ongoing legislative literacy must be delivered to ensure a higher quality of exchanges and policy discussions.

- Developing alternative policy advocacy: Counterpart initiated an internal mechanism and process to review alternative access points for rejected or objectionable WG recommendations, which may prove to be unacceptable to a standing committee.

- Broadening access: In order for the WG products to be understood and truly promoted by larger constituencies, they must be publicized and distributed widely by a variety of outlets and media.

4. Conclusion

Counterpart designed the LAAD process with two very specific objectives in mind. The first objective was to strengthen the participatory decision-making process for better comprehension by decision makers (NA) and opinion makers (civil society) as one that includes a variety of voices, particularly those whose lives are affected by decisions and policies. The second objective was to change actionable concepts of advocacy within Armenia’s non-governmental sector from being reactive to government action to become proactive, value-added policy undertakings. More specifically, LAAD intended to ground CSO initiatives in constituent need and demand, and to begin to change and form public opinion organically and integrate it in the advocacy process.

In line with its own development and programming philosophy, Counterpart led the initial design and start-up. However, it quickly began to relinquish implementation to Armenian CSOs. This included:

- Formation of the WGs;
- Outreach to the legislature and media partners and;
- Recruitment of facilitators and expert participants.

At every turn, the implementation cycle focused on facilitating greater ownership by Armenian CSOs not only of the action items of the process, but also effecting the change in the culture of participation. In other words, Counterpart’s objective soon after the initial start of LAAD in 2011 was for the initiative to create a system of incentives for CSOs and the NA to change from incidental participation to intentional and broad inclusion of ideas, voices, and resources.

As explained in this text, CSOs and communities have had greater input with each year of implementation in the planned process and also in the planning itself.

In the course of this initiative, it is important to note that LAAD or similar efforts and approaches do not replace necessary and urgent watchdog advocacy or, in some cases, reactive stop-gap measures from civil society. They only complement and strengthen the ability of CSOs to better anticipate - and ideally reset- the policy agenda. Additionally, such efforts may not blur the distinction between government and

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11 According to one of these comments, the LAAD 2013 started earlier - in the spring of 2013 - to request that meetings with the NA standing committees be held early in the summer. The chance to influence the legislative agenda would be greater by submitting the issues prior to the beginning of the legislative cycle.
non-government, but they work to highlight each sector’s value in creating a counter-balance that is necessary for smart policies and fair balance of power.

The common element in each year’s LAAD process has been the need to ensure that participants never rely on and think of LAAD as being a project, organization, or as an end in itself. It is a living, breathing process that ideally would not have a formal name, but could be known simply as citizen-centered policy making. That is the sustainability quotient of LAAD.

5. Acknowledgements

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Empowering Citizen Deliberation in Direct Democratic Elections: A Field Study of the 2012 Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review

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Abstract. Initiatives and referenda permit citizens to vote directly on legislation, but voters often lack essential policy information when deciding whether to support the measures on their ballots. Since citizens often do not trust policy experts and political elites to provide trustworthy information, the State of Oregon (USA) created an institution to address that problem. After an initial test in 2010, Oregon’s governor signed into law the Citizens’ Initiative Review Commission, which convened two stratified random samples of twenty-four Oregon voters. The first panel spent a week examining a tax reform measure, and the second reviewed a measure that would establish private casinos. At the end of their deliberations, each panel produced a one-page Citizens’ Statement that was included in a Voters’ Pamphlet, which the Secretary of State mailed to every registered Oregon voter. Using direct observation, panelist interviews, and large-sample, statewide surveys, researchers studied the deliberative quality and statewide impact of this unique process. They discovered that the panels met a high standard for deliberation, both from the researchers’ perspective as observers and from the point of view of the participants themselves. A majority of Oregon voters became aware of the process, which produced relevant and factually accurate statements. Roughly two-thirds of those who read the statements found them to be helpful when deciding how to vote. Finally, an online survey experiment shows that reading the statements increased voter knowledge substantially. Thus, the Citizens’ Initiative Review appears to provide a viable model for using citizen-centered deliberation to inform the judgments of the voting public.

Keywords. Civic education, Deliberative democracy, Initiative, Referendum, Civic engagement, Political knowledge, USA

1. History of the Citizens’ Initiative Review

First established in 2009, the Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review (CIR) is a unique democratic reform—still without any comparable reform elsewhere in the world. Although similar processes, such as the Citizens Jury and Deliberative Polling have existed for several decades, the CIR is the first state-sanctioned government reform to bring together a randomly selected and demographically stratified group of voters to engage in public decision making. (For an overview of deliberative methods, see Gastil & Levine, 2005; Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, & Leighninger, 2012.) The CIR aims to improve the quality of public participation and political deliberation in modern democracy.1 As Yale democratic theorist Robert Dahl wrote in 1998, “One of the imperative needs of democratic countries is to improve citizens’ capacities to engage intelligently in political life,” and the CIR aims to do just that (pp. 187-88). As social and political reforms began to flourish in the early 1900s during the Progressive Era, many states in the United States of America created the initiative process to allow voters to

1 A very accessible account of this approach is provided in Gutmann and Thompson (2004) and Leighninger (2006).
decide on the passage of state laws or amendments to their state constitutions.\(^2\) Ballot initiatives and referenda (often called “ballot measures”) were intended to make the government more accountable by circumventing the corrupting powers of entrenched parties and special interest groups.\(^3\) Ballot initiatives, however, can be very complex and burden-some on the public. There can be numerous measures on one ballot that cover anything from tax law to bear trapping, and it may require hours of research to understand and decide how to vote. Many voters lack the time, resources, and in-depth knowledge about each proposition and may instead rely on interest group campaigns and political elites to aid their decision-making (Gerber, 1999; Gerber & Lupia, 1999).

This results in initiative proponents or opponents attempting to outspend their competitors on advertising campaigns that are often highly misleading and that undermine the progressive ideals under which the initiative process was adopted (Broder, 2000).

The CIR was developed with these problems in mind. Its designers sought to improve the quality of information readily available to voters regarding statewide initiatives.\(^4\) The CIR is a form of the Citizens Jury—a method of public deliberation by citizens about candidates for office (Crosby & Nethercutt, 2005)—applied to ballot initiatives. The CIR differs from other deliberative methods in its sample size, duration, and decision-making procedure. For example, the CIR differs from the Deliberative Poll (DP) (Fishkin, 2009) in that the CIR employs a much smaller sample (twenty-four participants rather than one hundred or more), involves more extensive deliberations (lasting five days rather than the DP’s two days), and requires participants to make a final decision consisting of a vote accompanied by a written explanation, rather than merely completion of a questionnaire.

Introduced by John Gastil (2000) as a way to adapt Citizens Juries for initiative elections, the CIR was proposed in the 1990s in the U.S. state of Washington by Michael Lowry and Ned Crosby, developer of the Citizens Jury. After the state of Washington failed to adopt the CIR, Tyrone Reitman and Elliot Shuford founded Healthy Democracy Oregon (HDO), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to strengthening the integrity of the ballot initiative process, and worked with Crosby to introduce the CIR in the U.S. state of Oregon (Crosby & Hottinger, 2011). These three proponents organized an unofficial CIR trial in 2008, which persuaded the Oregon legislature to authorize a state-sanctioned implementation in 2010. The success of the pilot process led the Oregon legislature to pass a law in 2011 that made the CIR an official part of the state’s initiative process (Knobloch, Gastil, Reedy, & Walsh, 2013).

To summarize the process, CIR organizers convene representative groups of twenty-four registered Oregon voters, selected by stratified random sampling to match the Oregon electorate in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, education, place of residence, voting history, and party affiliation,\(^2\) to learn about, analyze and deliberate on statewide initiatives for five days. During the five days, the panelists hear testimony from advocates both in favor and opposition to the bill (generally including those who initially proposed the initiative and those who are involved in organized campaigns opposing the initiative) as well as witnesses who serve as subject-matter experts on either specific aspects of the initiative or related issues (Knobloch et al., 2013). Advocates are selected by HDO, which, in concert with the advocates prepares a list of potential witnesses. Panelists then select the witnesses to call from the list of potential witnesses based on their specific information needs.

At the end of deliberations, each panel writes a page-long analysis of their assigned initiative for the official Oregon State Voters’ Pamphlet—a governmentally published booklet summarizing the initiatives that is distributed to voters before an election (Magleby, 1984). The Secretary of State delivers it along with a mail-in ballot to each registered voter in the state. The CIR Statements are meant to improve the information that is available to voters, eighty percent of whom report that they use the Voters’ Pamphlet when making their voting decisions (Gastil & Knobloch, 2010). In short, the CIR connects small-scale deliberation to electoral decision-making.

### 2. Description of the 2012 CIR

After reviewing the results of the initial CIR panels in 2010, the Oregon legislature created the CIR Commission. To implement the 2012 panels, the Commission turned to HDO, which had designed and piloted the CIR process. HDO again arranged two separate demographically stratified random samples of twenty-four Oregon voters. Each CIR panel studied a specific ballot measure for five days and then produced a one-page Citizens’ Statement that detailed the key findings, policy considerations, and arguments for and against the initiative that the panelists identified.\(^6\) The Secretary of State then included these Statements in the Voters’ Pamphlet that was mailed to each household with voters who were registered to vote in the 2012 general election.

Two panels were convened for five days each in August, 2012. The first panel reviewed Measure 85, which proposed allocating corporate tax “kicker” refunds for K-12 public education. The second panel reviewed Measure 82, which proposed authorizing privately-owned casinos in Oregon.

Each CIR panel followed the same general five-day process design, which is summarized below:

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3 In this article, “initiative” means a proposed law written by citizens and placed on a ballot for approval by voters (Matsusaka, 2008), and “initiative process” means the procedures by which an initiative is drafted, placed on the ballot, and voted upon.


5 The model underlying the Oregon CIR is the Citizens’ Jury that was designed by Ned Crosby and various collaborators (Crosby & Hottinger, 2011; Crosby & Nethercutt, 2005). Crosby (2003) laid out the initial conception of the CIR.

6 While this article does not explore how these demographic factors relate to deliberative participation in the CIR, other members of the CIR research team are closely analyzing the transcripts for evidence of variation, specifically related to participant sex.

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5 To learn about and analyze the CIR process, visit www.oregon.gov/circ/Pages/index.aspx.

- Monday: Orientation to CIR and the ballot measure
- Tuesday: Proponent and opponent presentations and rebuttals
- Wednesday: Witnesses called by panel and ongoing small group discussions
- Thursday: Final proponent and opponent presentations and drafting of Key Findings/Policy Considerations
- Friday: Draft Pro and Con Arguments, review Citizens’ Statement, and hold a press conference

To get a sense of what a CIR Citizens’ Statement looks like, consider the case of the panel on private casinos. The neutral Key Findings helped voters to understand the context of the proposal. The first finding read, “Economists disagree on the long term economic impact of private casinos in Oregon.” In spite of that initial equivocation, a later finding noted that “private casinos could negatively affect the gaming revenues of the tribal casinos and the communities they support.” A section on Additional Policy Considerations noted, “If Measure 83 passes, approximately 2,000 full-time jobs with benefits may be created; however, jobs could be lost at tribal casinos and small businesses as well.”

The Statement also included a “Majority Statement in Opposition to the Measure,” a “position taken by 17 of 24 panelists.” The opponents’ first reason read, “Measure 82 changes the Oregon constitution. If this measure passes it will allow more outside influence on gambling within the state. The backers who wrote this measure stand to gain significant profits by changing the Oregon constitution.” The leading argument of the “Minority Statement in Support of the Measure” read, “Measure 82 changes the Oregon constitution to allow the people of Oregon to decide whether they want private casinos and allows the local communities to vote for or against the measure even if voters approve a casino in a statewide election.”

The remainder of this article analyzes the overall performance of the Oregon CIR relative to its two primary goals. Its first goal was to convene a democratic and deliberative process, whereby a small sample of Oregon voters could come to understand and provide a succinct, written analysis of the measure put before them. The second goal was for the Citizens’ Statement produced by the CIR to reach the wider Oregon public, thereby making the electorate more informed in their judgments on these ballot measures. Each question is considered in turn.

### 3. Evaluation of the Deliberative Quality of the 2012 CIR Panels

Each day of the CIR, the research team distributed brief questionnaires to panelists. This section provides a simple summary of that assessment and the panelists’ self-evaluations.

#### 3.1 CIR Report Card and Overall Satisfaction

A summary report card for the CIR is shown in Table 1.

This presents the overall evaluation of the process in terms of the quality of its analytic rigor, democratic discussion, and production of a well-reasoned statement.

#### Table 1. Summary assessments of the quality of deliberation in the August, 2012 Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review panels (on a grading scale from A to F)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Evaluating Deliberation</th>
<th>Measure 85 (Corporate Kicker)</th>
<th>Measure 82 (Non-tribal Casinos)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote analytic rigor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning basic issue information</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining of underlying values</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering a range of alternatives</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighing pros/cons of measure</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate a democratic process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality of opportunity to participate</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension of information</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of different views</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce a well-reasoned statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed decision making</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-coercive process</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scores for the 2012 process were higher than those for the 2010 process in many areas, as assessed in Knobloch et al. (2013). Improvements resulted from better inclusion of values in the panelist discussions and in the ability of advocates and panelists to provide more feedback on draft versions of the Citizens’ Statements. The latter process improvement was especially important to protect the CIR process against insularity, or drifting into groupthink (Street, 1997) during panel deliberations.

In the following sections, more detailed results are provided using the panelist evaluations to discuss the CIR’s performance on each of the three main criteria shown in Table 1, but this report first looks at the overall process ratings given by the panelists themselves. At the conclusion of the five-day review, panelists assessed their overall level of satisfaction with the CIR. Figure 1 presents these results. They indicate that overall satisfaction was generally “high” or “very high.”

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7 For more on this approach to evaluation, see Gastil, Knobloch, and Kelly (2012). This conception of democratic deliberation comes from Gastil (2008).
3.2 Analytic Rigor

One indication of the CIR processes’ analytic rigor was the extent to which the panelists believed that they had learned enough to make good decisions. Figure 2 summarizes their responses, and shows that panelists were quite certain that they had learned enough to make informed judgments.

Panelists also rated the CIR’s performance in considering the underlying values at stake with each measure. Figure 5 shows that they thought that they did a “good” or “excellent” job at this.

Panelists were also asked to “rate the performance of the CIR process” on “weighing the most important arguments and evidence” in favor of and opposing the measures. Figures 3 and 4 present these assessments and show that the CIR panelists were confident that they weighed both pro and con arguments.

3.3 Democratic Discussion

To assess whether panelists had equal opportunities to speak, panelists were asked at the end of each day whether they “had sufficient opportunity to express [their] views today.” The results indicate that a very large majority of panelists perceived that they had equal opportunity to speak during the process: Across ten days of deliberation, the average number of people who reported lacking opportunities to speak was less than one (0.7). The maximum was two.

To assess whether the advocates had equal time, panelists were asked “how equal was the time given to the advocates” on the four days in which the advocates had an opportunity to address the panelists, in person or by written statements. Most participants said that both sides received equal time each day, except on Tuesday, when four of the twenty-four panelists each week thought that the proponents of the measures had more time than the critics. This appears to reflect the actual use of time by the advocates and critics of the ballot measures. For instance, on Measure 85, the opponents chose to waive their rebuttal time to spend more time on their presentation. No panelists mentioned this in their open-ended comments, and the research team perceived that neither side had been given more time than the other.

Because the panelists were required to sift through a large amount of complex information, they were asked at the end of each day how often they had “trouble understanding or following the discussion today.” Table 2 shows that a majority of panelists indicated that on every day of both weeks they “never” or “rarely” had trouble following the conversation.
Table 2. Frequency of reported difficulty understanding information each day of the CIR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MEASURE 85</th>
<th></th>
<th>MEASURE 82</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further understand if the panelists adequately considered the information and arguments raised during the process, particularly those stemming from opposing viewpoints, the research team asked panelists the following question at the end of each day: “When other CIR participants or Advocate Team members expressed views different from your own today, how often did you consider carefully what they had to say?” Table 3 shows that the majority of panelists reported that they either “often” or “almost always” considered opposing viewpoints.

The CIR panels used a pair of facilitators or “moderators,” and at the end of each day, CIR panelists were asked if “the CIR Moderators demonstrated a preference for one side or the other today.” The modal result was that all twenty-four panelists reported no favoritism, except during the second day of Measure 82, during which three panelists perceived that the proponents were being favored, although two perceived the opposite. In no case was the bias sufficiently important to warrant a mention in the open-ended comments given at the end of each day.

Panelists were also asked to assess the neutrality of the staff using the following question on the end-of-week evaluation: “One of the aims of this process is to have the staff conduct the Citizens’ Initiative Review in an unbiased way. How satisfied are you in this regard?” Figure 6 shows that panelists were generally very satisfied.
3.4 Non-Coercive and Informed Decision Making

To ensure that the panelists’ decisions were free from coercion, they were asked at the end of each day how often they felt “pressure to agree with something that [they] weren’t sure about.” Table 5 shows that most panelists during both weeks reported “never” or “rarely” feeling such pressure.

Table 5. Frequency of feeling pressured to make a decision for each day of the CIR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASURE 82</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For some, the ultimate question concerning the value of deliberation is whether it changes one’s opinion. This, after all, is the basic idea of the Deliberative Poll, which compares pre- and post-deliberation attitudes (Fishkin, 2009). To avoid influencing panelists’ positions by pre-discussion surveys, however, the panelists were asked about this only on the end-of-week evaluation. They reported their position on the measure both “before [they] participated in the CIR” and “at the end of the CIR process.” As indicated in Figure 7, at least half of the panelists of both groups entered the deliberations undecided on the measure on which they would be deliberating.

Finally, panelists were asked to rate their satisfaction with each piece of the Citizens’ Statements that they produced. Figure 8 shows their assessment of the quality of the Key Findings portion of their final statement. Similar responses were given for each of the other elements of their statement. In each case, a large majority (at least 17 out of 24) was “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with these components.

Figure 7. Panelists’ self-report of position on measure before and after deliberation.

Figure 8. Panelists’ satisfaction with Key Findings.

3.5 Evaluation of the 2012 Oregon CIR Citizens’ Statements

In addition to the evaluation of the deliberative quality of the process, an analysis of the products of those deliberations—the Citizens’ Statements—was conducted. The conclusions are summarized below.

- All of the Key Findings and the Additional Policy Considerations in the 2012 Citizens’ Review Statements appear to be supported by testimonial or documentary evidence presented during the 2012 CIR, or by the text of ballot measures.
- The Key Findings, Additional Policy Considerations, as well as the pro and con statements are generally written in straightforward language that is likely to be accessible to ordinary voters.
- The few assertions in the pro and con statements that do not appear to have originated in evidence or in the text of ballot measures seem to be based on values-based conclusions that could reasonably have been drawn from that evidence or the ballot-

8 The full statements are available online at www.la1.psu.edu/cas/jgas-til/CIR/ReportToCIRCommission2012.pdf.
measure texts.°

- One assertion in the pro and con statements in the 2012 Citizens’ Review Statements may be troublesome. In the Measure 82 “con statement,” the assertion about social impact is both grammatically incorrect (the verb does not agree in number with the subject) and logically faulty, since it claims that an “impact” is “at risk” (which arguably has no meaning). Whether the phrasing of this sentence proved to be confusing to voters is uncertain.

In the researchers’ view, this amounts to a favorable assessment of the accuracy of the statements. They contained considerable useful factual information. The only error appears to be one of grammatical ambiguity.

4. Evaluating the Impact of the 2012 CIR

Even if the Oregon CIR was a democratic and deliberative process, a question remains of whether it had a significant impact on the wider electorate. If it failed in this regard, all its effort would have accomplished little. Thus, in the final two weeks of the 2012 general election, a statewide telephone survey of 800 likely Oregon voters was commissioned. Though the survey had a low overall response rate, it was representative of the Oregon electorate in partisanship, demographics, and voting choices.

Before examining these results, it is important to note that the proponents of Measure 82 (casinos) opted to halt their campaign after the CIR but before Election Day (Esteve, 2012). Why this occurred has not been determined, but the decision likely affected voters’ responses to some of the questions. The fact that a CIR-analyzed measure was effectively abandoned likely reduced the importance of the CIR analysis for many voters. (Sixty-four percent of those surveyed were aware that the campaign had ended, though 80% claimed that it made no difference to them.)

4.1 CIR Awareness

The survey asked voters how aware they were of the Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review panels. Figure 9 shows that CIR awareness was higher in 2012 than in 2010. Also, voters became more aware of the CIR as the election grew closer to an end.

4.2 CIR Statement Use and Helpfulness

In the 2012 survey, 53% of people who voted read the CIR Statement on Measure 82, whereas only 44% had read the CIR Statement on Measure 85. CIR users were asked, “How helpful was it to read the Citizens’ Initiative Review statement?” Figure 10 summarizes these results graphically (rounding accounts for the 1% discrepancies in totals). Roughly two-thirds of voters who read the statements found them to be helpful, which suggests that a critical mass of voters may be finding the statements to be essential reference material.

Along with the newly instituted CIR Statements, the Oregon Voters’ Pamphlet traditionally contains other pieces of information related to each initiative. Oregon allows citizens and organizations to publish, for a fee, arguments for or against initiatives in the official Voters’ Pamphlet, for the purpose of informing voters (Bassett, 2009; Josslin, 1943). In addition, the Voters’ Pamphlet contains information about the measure and its fiscal impact, produced by two advocates who favor the measure, two who oppose it, and a neutral fifth party.

Another set of questions in the phone survey asked voters who had read the Voters’ Pamphlet how much “trust” they had in each of four different sections: the CIR Statement, the paid pro/con arguments, the Fiscal Statement, and the Explanatory Statement. Figure 11 shows that they placed “a little” trust in each section. However, this means that Oregon voters placed approximately the same amount of trust in the
CIR Statement as in the Fiscal and Explanatory Statements,\(^ {10}\) which is noteworthy because the CIR Statement contains qualitatively different information than either of those.\(^ {11}\)

Did, in fact, the CIR increase voter knowledge and voters’ confidence in the accuracy of the beliefs they held? To answer this question, an online experiment of Measure 85 was conducted in the final weeks before the election using a sample of 400 Oregon voters who had not yet voted nor read the CIR Statement. These voters were distributed evenly across the following four experimental groups: \(^ {13}\)

- A group that was shown the full paid pro and con statements;
- A group that was shown the Explanatory and Fiscal statements;
- A group that was shown the CIR Statement; and
- A control group that received no additional statement.

Respondents then answered a series of factual questions about Measure 85. Figure 12 summarizes the main result. Those assigned to the group that read the CIR Statement outperformed the control group on nine of ten knowledge items. In addition, CIR Statement readers answered correctly, on average, twice as many knowledge items.

Figure 11. Levels of trust Oregonians placed in different sections of the Voters’ Pamphlet.

### 4.3 Online Experimental Survey of CIR Citizens’ Statements

The CIR Commission views its process as “an innovative way of publicly evaluating ballot measures so voters have clear, useful, and trustworthy information at election time.”\(^ {12}\) Did, in fact, the CIR increase voter knowledge and voters’ confidence in the accuracy of the beliefs they held? To answer this question, an online experiment of Measure 85 was conducted in the final weeks before the election using a sample of 400 Oregon voters who had not yet voted nor read the CIR Statement. These voters were distributed evenly across the following four experimental groups: \(^ {13}\)

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- A control group that received no additional statement.

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\(^{10}\) Paired t-test comparisons of means showed that the pro/con statements were considered to be less trustworthy than other sections (p < .001). Whereas Figure 11 shows that roughly the same proportion of Oregon voters have at least “a little” trust in both the CIR Statement and Explanatory Statement, the same mean comparison statistic shows the latter to have a higher average level of trust (p = .001).

\(^{11}\) Report co-author Robert Richards has produced a systematic comparison of CIR Statement content and Voters’ Pamphlet contents produced by public officials (Gastil, Richards, & Knobloch, 2014).

\(^{12}\) www.oregon.gov/circ/Pages/index.aspx

\(^{13}\) The survey had a very low response rate (fewer than 2% of those emailed returned complete surveys), but like the telephone survey, the sample was broadly representative of the general Oregon electorate demographically and in terms of its voting preferences.

Figure 12. Average number of correct answers on a ten-item knowledge battery regarding Measure 85 for each of four experimental conditions in the online survey.

Reading the CIR Statements not only increased voters’ knowledge about Measure 85, it also increased voters’ confidence in that knowledge, more than any other type of information in this study. Respondents were asked whether each statement was “probably” or “definitely” true or false. A second analysis was conducted that took into account the respondent’s confidence in answering such questions correctly. Figure 13 shows that confidence in their accuracy for those assigned to the CIR Statement condition is more than double that of all other participants in the online experiment.\(^ {14}\)

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

As this analysis makes clear, the Oregon CIR appears to have achieved its two principal objectives in 2012: It conducted panel deliberations of a very high quality and effectively transmitted the findings of those citizen panels to the wider electorate, which became much better informed about the important and complicated issues placed on the ballot in the general election. In effect, the CIR helped to address one of the greatest problems of direct democracy by finding a way to inform the judgments of the mass public in a way that keeps citizens at the center of the deliberations, both large and small.

These findings are presented with an eye toward potential replication of the CIR beyond Oregon. Readers may judge for themselves whether this would be possible in their own cultural and political contexts, but for those who may wish to adopt—or adapt—the CIR, the following recommendations for improving the process are offered.

First, the CIR Statement page in the Voters’ Pamphlet should have a more visually engaging layout, and the CIR needs a more robust public information campaign. Awareness of the CIR is expected to increase again in 2014. Nevertheless, to reach more than a bare majority of voters, the CIR needs...
greater prominence online, in broadcast media, and in the pamphlet itself.

Second, the CIR orientation should provide more precise training to panelists on how to evaluate evidence, the key terms for each aspect of the process, and the importance of values in relation to evidence and arguments. These three suggestions aim to use the CIR panelists’ time more efficiently to identify key arguments and evidence.

Third, CIR organizers should continue to explore ways to effectively prepare proponents, opponents, and neutral witnesses for their appearance before citizen panelists. If the advocates and witnesses have a clearer idea of the importance of having clearly documented evidence, well-structured arguments, etc., all advocates will be prepared for the distinctive deliberative environment of the CIR.

Any reader of this report who wishes to learn more about this research or to contribute to the analyses of these data can contact the report’s authors or visit the project website at www.la1.psu.edu/cas/jgastil/CIR/cir.html. From its outset, this process has been open to scrutiny and given researchers unfettered access to observing the process and interviewing the panelists. It is only through the interplay of practical innovation and rigorous research that scholars and practitioners can understand and improve deliberative processes like the CIR.

6. Acknowledgements

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This full report is available online at: www.la1.psu.edu/cas/jgastil/CIR/cirReportToCIRCommission2012.pdf

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The Atelier Climat, a French citizen consultation process set up to promote sustainable development: a local democratic innovation?

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Abstract. Climate change is a global challenge that demands coordination at every level of action, raising new issues around the importance of the effective involvement of local populations who, in taking action, are no longer seen as being disconnected from politicians and academics. Citizens’ juries known as “citizen workshops” or “citizen conferences”—drawing on the principle of community information and discussion—are mushrooming in France. But what are public institutions seeking to achieve by setting up participatory processes of this kind, which take the form of democratic innovations?

Study of the Atelier Climat (literally, “climate workshop”)—a French participatory democracy mechanism focusing on environmental issues—highlights the need for community validation in order to ensure the legitimacy of actions undertaken at the local level. This process can be viewed as a form of local democratic innovation, in its form, in its duration, and in the consultation that takes place between citizens and representatives, but one that nonetheless calls for geographical decentering and for collaboration between all actors in society in order to spread and be effective. It is a step-by-step innovation, conducive to the adoption of new practices—providing it is reappropriated, disseminated and imitated by everyone involved.

Keywords. Citizen workshops, Citizens’ juries, Citizen consultation, Democratic innovation, Participatory democracy, Changing behaviors, Environment, Efficient consumption, Waste, France

1. Introduction

Climate change is a global challenge that demands coordination at every level of action, raising new issues around the importance of the effective involvement of local populations who, in taking action, are no longer seen as being disconnected from politicians and academics. The international context, moreover, is markedly characterized by a resurgence of food crises: food shortages for poor countries, and food safety issues for emerging and developed countries. On either side, we are seeing rising competition for access to raw materials and energy between the developed countries and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). This context of risk, of crisis—and even of ecological and climatic catastrophe—has brought the topic of sustainable development to political and media prominence in France and around the world. Faced with the difficulty of the situation, and of implementing the solutions, new questions have come to the fore about the limits of representative democracy and about whether we should create alternative structures for delegating power to citizens in order to recognize the emergence of these new societal issues.

“Citizen workshops” or “citizen conferences”—drawing on the principle of community information and discussion—are mushrooming in France (D. Bourg & K. Whiteside, 2010). But what are public institutions seeking to achieve by setting up participatory processes of this kind, which take the form of democratic innovations? Our research chose to focus on the Atelier Climat, a series of climate-change workshops originally anchored in the Plan Climat adopted in 2007 by the Urban Community of Nantes (Nantes Métropole) in western France with the aim of halving the city’s greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. Nantes Métropole piloted an experimental approach—the first in France with such a scope and duration—monitoring 150 local households over the course of one year. The workshops set out to measure the barriers and limitations preventing changes in people’s habits, as well as the factors encouraging change; they also sought to test public
policies designed to support people in changing or adapting their habits. The first meeting between the selected households that agreed to take part was on June 26, 2010. Two types of involvement were proposed: the F3 formula (three climate-change meetings) and the F7 formula (the same, plus four meetings on other themes).

The goal of the Atelier Climat initiative was to shed light on people’s practices in terms of consumption, waste, and travel—as well as in terms of energy and habitat—in order to see what could be done, in Nantes Météropole, to promote participation and integrate these practices into sustainable development. It was also expected to shed light on the main mechanisms of change, identifying the associated perceptions and margins for maneuver. For the participants, the end goal was to produce a citizens’ response to four key questions: 1) What did participants plan to do, individually and collectively, towards achieving Nantes Météropole’s climate objective? 2) What were the main obstacles they encountered for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions? 3) What would enable them to do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and how could Nantes Météropole help them in that? 4) How could the 600,000 inhabitants of Nantes Météropole, as a whole, be made to play an active part in cutting greenhouse gas emissions significantly?

In order to study this process, we needed to understand in what way the question of sustainable development might change, or not, people’s everyday practices, and if so, how. Our objective was to assess the impact of the Atelier Climat initiative on participants, not only in terms of changing behaviors, but also to understand to what extent participants felt socially or ideologically empowered by their participation in this instrument of participatory democracy. We therefore started out from the postulate that we were, in the specific context of sustainable development, dealing with a democratic “innovation”¹. And if innovation was there, the question remained as to how it might be disseminated, and what goals the various actors were trying to achieve through it. It was necessary to analyze the innovation’s impact on the behavior of the participants and, indeed, on how the different stakeholders viewed the joint policy-making process.

2. Methodology

Our investigative work followed an inductive method, developing the principles of “grounded theory” as advocated by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm A. Strauss (1967, repr. 2010). In other words, we were seeking to explore the “reality” in the field without strong initial hypotheses and without presupposing the results. The aim of our approach was to understand how the actors themselves (workshop participants, local authority sponsors, and consultants involved in the project) framed the issue of the articulation between sustainable development and participatory democracy. We investigated the object presented by the actors and on how it could be interpreted sociologically. Our inquiries therefore focused on the three main instances that structure social life and model behaviors, namely the material instance (the place of objects, spaces and time), the social instance (notably power relations) and the imaginary instance (the symbols and representations that give meaning to everyday practices) (S. Alami, D. Desjeux & I. Garabaud-Moussau). The objective was to distinguish practices from representations: it was important, in our investigations, to differentiate effective practices (what people actually did), from their representations (value judgments and opinions), and indeed from their imaginary constructs (the meaning they gave to their practices and representations).

The Atelier Climat households were recruited by the survey institute TMO from a representative panel of 2,500 inhabitants of the Nantes conurbation. The panel was created at the start of the initiative. A second selection was then made, to bring the total down to 150 households (based on climate-related questions, awareness of environmental issues, motivations for joining the Atelier Climat, and refinement of the representation criteria), under the guidance of the consulting firm Missions Publiques². We then interviewed 44 of these 150 households by means of direct semi-structured interviews. They were selected on six criteria: age, geographical situation (central Nantes versus outlying areas of the conurbation), number of children, residential status (owner or tenant), place of residence (collective or individual housing) and, finally, socio-economic category.

A number of observations were also carried out at Atelier Climat workshop sessions, using an analysis grid divided up into four sections, corresponding to the questions listed above. This was accompanied by an analysis of the discourse of Nantes Météropole representatives (mayors, deputy mayors, and “technical” managers of the Atelier Climat project), and a study of the actions initiated after the representatives had read the Citizens’ Opinion, in order to understand which visions and challenges were or were not shared with regard to the citizen participation process.

3. The Atelier Climat, a new form of citizen consultation, aimed at making public environmental policies more “effective”? In the 1960s and 70s, Western democracy came to be seen in a new light, notably when Pierre Mendès France, in 1962, defined his view of democracy as “continual citizen action” (L. Blondiaux, 2008). The social unrest of the 1970s, echoing the American protest movements, and the economic crisis (particularly the oil shortages of 1973 and 1979) marked the end of the “Trente Glorieuses”, France’s post-war boom. Economic difficulties brought successive governments into doubt and disrepute, and the popularity of the political class began to decline. This went hand-in-hand, over the following years—especially the 1990s—with a growing disinterest in modes of expression based on representative democracy. But other forms of expression have gradually gained in popularity; citizen participation is being considered anew.

¹ Recognized by the presentation of the innovation prize—at the Victoires award ceremony organized by the magazine Acteurs Publics—to Jean-Marc Ayrault, then deputy-mayor of Nantes Météropole, on July 6, 2011, for the Atelier Climat.

² Missions Publiques, a consulting firm that specializes in assisting people involved in public life, was tasked with organizing and facilitating the Atelier Climat.
The aptitude of “ordinary” citizens to question traditional forms of expertise by drawing on their own original forms of knowledge are seen as potentially “useful” to public action (U. Beck, 1986, repr. 2008). An injection of citizen knowledge would, in this view, revitalize the existing public institutions. “Conventional” representative democracy, despite the name, is no longer seen as a way of ensuring that the citizen’s voice is heard. And it is from this particular context, linked to the outbreak of health and environmental scandals (the “mad cow” crisis and the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, the GMO debate in the early 1990s), that the idea emerged of a “participatory imperative” that would put flesh back on the bones of the system, and would again give “ordinary” citizens the opportunity for debate; this alternative being “participatory democracy” (L. Blondiaux, 2008). Moreover, to address the current environmental problems, the “ecological challenge” calls for us to “rethink democracy itself”, in order to guarantee its “effectiveness” (D. Bourg, 2010).

The Atelier Climat follows in the participatory footsteps of the citizens’ jury, although with its own specificities. The Atelier Climat differs from other citizen workshops by its size (150 participants) and duration (one year). It nonetheless follows the ternary rhythm peculiar to the mechanisms of participatory democracy. The original “citizens conference” method provided for the process to be divided up into three successive and clearly delimited phases: the “preparatory training” phase, the “holding of the debate and writing of the debate report” and its “public presentation” (J. Ferrando y Puig, 2007). However, these three different phases are not as strictly delimited as might appear, as each work session contains moments of training, but also of debate, and “capitalization” with a view to drafting the final version of the “Citizens’ Opinion”. While these three phases do indeed interlace in the Atelier Climat, the fact remains that one can distinguish different forms of work, and different types of interaction, operating alternately and in a complementary manner throughout the collective reflection process. We therefore adopt the time phases described above—using a “three-stroke engine” model—but restricting the final phase to the drafting of the opinion.

To stimulate participants’ thinking about their own practices, but also to fulfill Nantes Métropole’s promise to “provide participants with a range of tools enabling them to obtain information or take action on climate change issues throughout the duration of the workshop”4, the workshop sessions were punctuated by discussions with outside speakers, who can be grouped into three main categories: elected representatives, inhabitants of Nantes Métropole, and voluntary groups or professionals.

Each Atelier Climat session was structured into timed discussion periods, with participants working in sub-groups. The debate was sparked by questions, defined in advance by the Nantes Métropole organizers and the consultants from Missions Publiques, which were put to the participants. The purpose of these questions was to prepare the ground for a “citizen debate” by inviting participants to think about their practices, about the changes they thought they might be able to undertake, and about the actions that Nantes Métropole could implement, or encourage, to facilitate those changes. Participants could record their ideas on a specially provided response sheet. Each group was asked to appoint a “rapporleur”, tasked with noting down the fruit of the group’s joint reflection. Their brief, however, was not to arrive at a general consensus at any price, but rather to reflect faithfully the different opinions and tensions that the questions might elicit.

After the second climate meeting (in the middle of the process), which was common to the different participation formulas, the Missions Publiques consultants, with the support of the Nantes Métropole organizers, turned their attention to the drafting of the Citizens’ Opinion. The two remaining ‘thematic’ sessions were supposed to be focused primarily on the writing stage. Accordingly, at thematic meetings 3 and 4, in February and April, the formula 7 participants were asked to reflect, in sub-groups, on the main questions posed by the elected representatives around the themes of travel and consumption, in February, followed by habitat/energy and waste, in April.

Another specific feature of the Atelier Climat was the differentiation of participants into two distinct formulas. At the start of the Atelier Climat, participants were given the choice between two formulas, corresponding to different levels of involvement in the workshop. Formula 3 (F3) required participation in the three climate meetings (June 2010, January 2011 and June 2011). Formula 7 (F7) required more active participation and greater investment, with a total of seven meetings throughout the year (the three climate meetings plus four thematic meetings, in September, November, February, and April).

This differentiation into two levels of involvement stemmed from Nantes Métropole’s wish to test the hypothesis that more sustained “accompaniment” of certain households would lead to a more significant change of behavior in those households. With regard to the group dynamics, there was, it should be said, a degree of “difficulty”5 involved in maintaining the two groups for the duration of the project: the F3s had the feeling of being a “sub-group”, while the F7s felt that the climate meetings served only as “catch-up sessions”5 for the participants who did not attend the thematic meetings.

This notion of “catching up” strikes us as problematic. How could the F3 participants be expected to catch up with the discussions of the F7s, which were informed by the presentations of the various speakers? How can one ensure the same degree of “maturity” (L. Blondiaux, 2008) from participants when responding to the questions posed by Nantes Métropole? From an organizational viewpoint, the consultant-facilitators were pulled in two directions when putting together the general climate meetings. Each formula, it transpired, needed to have its own type of emulation. The formula 7 participants needed to have access to information following on from what they had previously learned at the thematic meetings, while the formula 3 participants needed to adhere to the process.

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1 From the mutual commitment document between the participants and Nantes Métropole, dated April 15, 2010
2 Term used in the final analysis report submitted to Nantes Métropole
3 Comments made by participants

www.factsreports.org

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4. The impacts of the Atelier Climat: effective awareness-raising, but easy backsliding

Our results focused, initially, on the citizen-participants’ representations of current society, to understand what criticisms (if any) they had about it, and how the lifestyles that it conveyed might conflict with their values. It emerged that there is a clear link between an openly asserted environmental awareness and the decision to adopt a lifestyle that generates less greenhouse gas.

Society’s current mode of consumption is fiercely criticized, as encouraging unbridled consumption. The consumer, disconnected from the real value of products, is described as constantly assailed by temptation in temples of consumption such as supermarkets, subjected to “alluring” offers by advertising, overwhelmed by an overabundance of goods, spurred on by low prices and easy credit, and forced to keep buying more and more stuff, due to planned obsolescence. The current consumption system is seen as a spiral, in which the possessor—the consumer—is in fact possessed: “[This is] an ultra-consumer society. Just take a look at any supermarket at the moment: it’s all over the place, it’s dripping from the ceiling. Lights everywhere, toys everywhere, food everywhere. (…) It’s the same every year, it’s gross overproduction.” (E2, female, 37).

Standing in opposition to the current society of overconsumption, the sustainable city—as defined by our interviewees—is one that develops a different way of relating to consumption, to the environment, to social interaction and to governance. Purchases are planned, reasoned; lifestyles are slower, less subject to the “dictatorship” of “whatever I want, when I want it”, or the “shazamization” that drives impulse buying (O. Badot & J.-F. Lemoine, 2011). Modes of production are more environmentally friendly. In this view, the society of overconsumption has reached its limits, notably in the exploitation of resources and raw materials, and needs to be rethought, or even redesigned. To do so requires prompt and firm measures by leaders, jointly decreed with the citizen initiatives that will bring about the relevant changes.

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The survey observed a shared environmental awareness that drives citizen-participants to act in order to preserve the planet at different levels of action (from buying local, in-season produce, to joining voluntary groups, or participating in citizen consultation forums) to address the issue of climate change and put in place a society more conducive to the requirements of sustainable development. For the participants, their engagement with the Atelier Climat would enable them to adopt still more environmentally responsible behavior, in harmony with their own values. Their patterns of consumption are laden with symbolic implications. Their ethical, social, and above all ecological concerns seem to constantly refer back to the question of meaning in current consumption practices (N. Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2009). It would also seem that the public authorities, through the notion of sustainable development, encourage and institutionalize a form of consumption that aims to be more “sustainable”, open to the interplay between economic, ecological and social considerations. Such an institutionalization could also be achieved via the Atelier Climat, with incentives to adopt certain, more environmentally responsible, behaviors and the transmission of information about “good” and “bad” practices. This transmission is only seen as legitimate and effective, however, through the collaboration between inhabitants and representatives: “They [politicians and representatives] have information available to them […] that they don’t share… democratically!” (E15, male, 60).

The inhabitants’ involvement in actions implemented at the scale of the conurbation seems to be a quasi-intrinsic necessity; participants can no longer conceive of an effective environmental action being dictated and imposed by representatives without prior citizen consultation: “Unity is strength; everyone should make their own small contribution, and it produces a big idea… Otherwise, it’s always the politicians that decide, which isn’t very good either: you feel cheated, and you get the impression you’re not being listened to” (E9, female, 63). And the current crisis in attitudes toward the political class is seen as being rooted in a growing awareness of the global dimension of issues, which calls for a reconciliation between citizens and political elites by setting up forms of international regulation deemed “credible” and “effective”, in order to address global challenges collectively (R. Rochefort, 1995, repr. 2005). The participants in the Atelier Climat saw their action in this light: useful, necessary, effective and innovative, on the absolute condition that they are listened to, and that their action is broadened out, to be reproduced in other cities and regions.

From the viewpoint of political actors and local authorities, moreover, citizen participation plays an important role in ensuring appropriation, by individuals, of the actions implemented and services put in place. Three main expectations about citizen-participants were voiced at the start of the workshop, and confirmed afterwards: a critical and constructive education; genuine citizen involvement to jointly initiate behavioral changes; and mobilization by citizens and politicians alike to follow through on actions. The main idea resulting from the Atelier Climat is that the citizen, as a user of services (for example, water and waste), also has a role—a determining role—to play in designing public policy, notably by bringing simple or facilitative solutions to precise problems: “(…) we really count on the citizens engaged in this approach to help us better adapt public policy, and to take citizen initiatives that will bring about the relevant changes of behavior” (Fabrice Roussel, Mayor of Chapelle-sur-Erdre, at climate meeting 2 on January 22, 2011).

Finally, it is equally important to prolong the process of reflection by examining the choice made by the citizens of Nantes Métropole—who agreed to participate for a year in this innovative citizen participation process (with no remuneration or financial consideration)—and their experience of
the project. In deciding to reconnect with the “freedom of the Ancients”, by participating in joint public decision-making, they also demonstrated a “collective ethic of citizen experience” (R. Barbier et al., 2009). This took the form of a time-investment, assiduous attendance of meetings (for the most committed), and great care taken in the wording of each opinion, to make sure that it reflected as closely as possible their own requests and demands. One of the core demands of these deeply committed citizen-participants, moreover, was that the representatives of Nantes Métropole lead by example and listen to what they had to say, so that the workshop was not looked upon as the “hobby horse” of a few randomly chosen citizens, in an attempt at political “manipulation”.

Conscious of their role, and of its implications for the city’s other inhabitants, the participants experienced the initiative as a new way of taking back local political power from representatives whom they saw as too removed from citizens’ concerns. However, without seeking to minimize the value and importance of the work involved in the citizen opinion, it is worth asking to what extent the participants’ recommendations (sometimes influenced by the representatives’ expectations) were always relevant. We must also address the question of the possible dissemination of the Atelier Climat as a process of innovation.


The Atelier Climat is certainly an innovative workshop in its form and duration relative to the usual citizen workshop or jury format (D. Bourg & D. Boy, 2005); but can we really describe it as an innovative process? Creativity may indeed be an “inseparable component of the innovation process”, in the definition given by N. Alter (2001) and G. Gaglio (2011), but creativity does not subsume innovation process. Bundling creativity and innovation together would restrict the process of innovation to the phase of generating new ideas, and, moreover, runs the risk of individualizing it. In the academic literature and in institutional reports, multiple criteria are used to define innovation. The first is usually that we are looking at an innovation whenever a design process gives birth to an “artifact” or a “system”. The second is about bringing a novelty to market, or “integrating” it into production.

Following N. Alter, G. Gaglio prefers to opt for a “more open criterion”: for him, innovation supposes “the emergence of new social practices”. He starts out from the question: “What usages are there?” since “novelty becomes innovation through the intermediacy of usage”. It is also, in his view, through the emergence of new social practices that “appropriation” occurs. It is this “appropriation”, then, that puts the seal of durability on a novelty, by transforming it, de facto, into an innovation. By granting it a place in daily life, “appropriation” implies “becoming more familiar”; it is, in Gaglio’s words, “the pivotal stage” of any innovation process.

In the case of the Atelier Climat, it would be fair to say that local terrain was “conducive” to the emergence of a new form of citizen workshop, given the many participatory democracy workshops and other mechanisms already in place across the city. But although the process was hailed and appreciated, notably for its scope, its impacts remained limited. While there were indeed some changes in participants’ daily practices, thanks to the Atelier Climat experiment, they tended to be modest, even marginal. There were no major turnarounds leading to drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, through the adoption of a “zero carbon” lifestyle. Admittedly, the aim of the workshop was not to create anti-growth militants, but simply to initiate meaningful changes. However, in the two areas studied and analyzed most closely—consumption and waste management—the main changes observed concern the purchase of fresh, local, seasonal produce, and the introduction of selective waste sorting, which are nonetheless quite limited.

Although the results are difficult to analyze quantitatively, it would nonetheless seem that the F7 households made greater changes to their behaviors in certain areas of action. However, the stronger commitment of the F7s, and their involvement in the initiative, could account for their tendency to adopt lower-carbon behaviors, without the Atelier Climat being a determining factor. The more sustainable practices adopted by the participants are therefore reflected essentially by a form of day-to-day commitment, but one that fluctuates over the long term and is, in reality, revocable. While the levers presented during the sessions did enable some participants to adopt new practices, the constraints (mainly financial, temporal, and spatial) are still, for most, simply too strong for them to make significant changes.

Finally, the question of the process’s duration is also a key point. It seems that the main difficulty of the Atelier Climat was its ability to mobilize people for a citizen workshop over a long period (one year), leading to “weakness of bonds” (J. Ferrando y Puig, 2012). This “weakness” of bonds is echoed in the lack of exchanges between participants since the end of the workshop, and the paucity of feedback, by the representatives, on the proposals set out in the Citizens’ Opinion. The prevailing sense was that the workshop had been useful and necessary, but that it had not followed through on its actions.

This would place the Atelier Climat upstream of “the epidemiological curve” of innovation, after H. Mendras and F. Forsé (1983), between the “pioneers” and the “innovators”, or, in the curve as reinterpreted by D. Desjeux (2007), between the “innovators” and the “early adopters”. While the results of this innovation may seem minimal, they are far from being insignificant. The process of innovating participatory democracy, as implemented in the Atelier Climat experiment, needs to be adopted and assimilated into practices and usages, but it also needs time to be disseminated and (re)appropriated. It also attests to a particularly strong desire for collaboration between politicians and citizens/inhabitants in an innovative citizen consultation process; one that calls out
to be extended beyond the local setting, for greater engagement with the wider world.

6. Conclusion

The individual (inhabitant-citizen-user) is now placed at the center of a new relationship between politicians and scientists. This new position seems to signal a determination to refocus environmental issues on the actions of individuals, henceforth seen as key actors in the development of a more sustainable society. They are also seen as participating in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and in the protection of the environment in general, through their adoption of more frugal practices. Inviting inhabitants to take part in local citizens’ juries therefore recognizes, to a degree, a form of expertise specific to them. This expertise may manifest itself, as we saw during the Atelier Climat, in a willingness to co-design environmental action plans.

Following our study of the Atelier Climat, several determining factors can be highlighted regarding the design, implementation and monitoring of the process. Firstly, the question of time was a central point for the workshop. It seems that the main constraint of the Atelier Climat as the difficulty of mobilizing people over a long period (one year). From an organizational angle, the participants had to set aside Saturdays for the workshop sessions; while relatively simple in autumn and winter, this became much more difficult in spring and summer, outside of school term time. And while interest, from a theoretical viewpoint, in the Atelier Climat was sustained throughout the process, it tended to dissipate when faced with day-to-day obligations. Finally, it seems that the “weakness of bonds”, to quote Judith Ferrando y Puig—or the “strength of constraints”, as we have called it—is due to the lack of appropriation of the tools set up to generate a group dynamic, such as the workshop extranet on the Nantes Métropole website, or the various visits proposed to sites around Nantes (notably waste processing sites). Being unable to maintain a shared dynamic, especially for formula participants, the Atelier Climat lost in intensity. The “strength of constraints” is also evident in the lack of exchanges between participants since the end of June 2011.

The interviewees also underline a lack of action by elected representatives of Nantes Métropole, when it comes to implementing the proposals contained in the Citizens’ Opinion: “There were no really concrete actions following the Citizens’ Opinion, just a string of well-meaning statements. The development of public transport, which has intensified, was in the Opinion... but that had been planned long before!” (Interview in January 2013 n4, male, 53). This lack of action is shrouded in a sense of uncertainty, due to an absence of precise information as to which proposals had or had not been followed up: “(…) it’s very hard for us to know what concrete actions were taken following the Opinion… There’s no denying that many projects have come into being since, and on the whole we are satisfied with the actions carried out… But we have the feeling that many of those actions were decided on beforehand, or in response to other, more detailed, consultations conducted just before the workshop” (Interview in January 2013 n7, female, 35).

So, despite the feedback on the actions initiated at the meeting on October 22, 2011, regarding certain proposals in the Citizens’ Opinion (principally, introducing new sorting instructions backed up by “sorting ambassadors”, a twenty-euro subsidy for buying a composter, and a personalized nutrition guide for all inhabitants), the prevailing sense was that the workshop had been useful and necessary, but that it had not followed through on its actions. In light of that, annual general meetings, following up on the Atelier Climat, but expanded and opened up to all inhabitants of Nantes Métropole—and punctuated by participant interventions and representative responses on the actions resulting from the workshop—would give the process some continuity. Such meetings would also provide a detailed update on the actions undertaken following the citizen consultation, thereby demonstrating the value of the work done by the participants.

The fact that the citizen panel was made up of households that had already shown an interest in the topic could be construed as a limitation on the initiative. As it happens, in 2011, the Rhône-Alpes regional authority also organized a citizens’ “Climate” jury, made up of 35 citizen-participants who had no special sensitivity to environmental issues. They were selected at random, and agreed to take part in the jury—meeting three times, in April, May and July 2011—for a payment of 200 euros. Their discussions were designed to “inform” the content of the various regional climate plans. Also in France, in Franche-Comté, four citizens’ juries met twice (on September 29 and October 20, 2012) to discuss “key issues” in the regional planning and sustainable development scheme. Again, the citizen-participants were selected at random; each jury consisted of 15 to 16 citizens, who were not informed about, or sensitized to, the questions discussed. Finally, they were also paid for their time. It seems that some financial reward, even if only symbolic, makes it easier to reach out to individuals with no special inclination for environmental issues and participatory democracy, enabling them to discover new forms of citizen debate. A payment, based on attendance of sessions, might also offer a solution to the logistical problems encountered by participants, and encourage them to be more constant in their commitment.

On the innovative character of the process, it is worth underlining the innovative adaptations in the form of the citizens’ jury by the Atelier Climat. These adaptations concerned the total participant headcount (150 at start, versus 25 to 30 for most citizens’ juries (A. Vergne, 2013)), the creation of two participant groups, F3 and F7 (which is innovative for the “conventional” format of citizen consultation processes), and the overall duration (one year, as opposed to a few days or a few months for other citizens’ juries and programs). Additionally, the changes in usage are real, even if limited to a fraction of the population. Consequently, the process works, but there are heavy constraints on citizens in their daily lives. It is these constraints that need to be lifted, in order to ensure stronger and more continuous participant involvement.

In conclusion, our study of the Atelier Climat raises questions about the end objectives of setting up new participatory democracy processes on a local scale. If, as we saw, such processes are organized and called upon to ensure...
“effectiveness” and legitimacy for public policy, then doubts may be expressed as to their “effectiveness” in driving the uptake of low-carbon practices, notably due to the constraints under which the participants operate.

There is a gap between the ideal models of participatory democracy, which see it as the most “effective” way to respond to our current environmental challenges, and the realities of putting these models into practice. On the one hand, the question remains as to how to generalize these mechanisms. Citizens’ juries, anchored at the local scale, should be amenable to being generalized or rolled out on a larger scale, in order to have a wider impact, and to lead to the implementation of decisive, meaningful, and consistent solutions and action plans. On the other hand, at the citizen workshop sessions, participants are placed at the center point of environmental challenges, investing them with a role and a scope of action that may be out of their reach. If behavioral changes are to be initiated at the individual scale, they must also be accompanied by new, more appropriate, infrastructures, with public authorities and manufacturers leading by example.

The Atelier Climat is indeed a form of local democratic innovation, in the numbers involved, its division into two groups, its duration, and its goal of collaboration between locals and representatives; but it is one that calls for a continuation, in the numbers involved, its division into two groups, its duration, and its goal of collaboration between local and representative, but it is one that calls for a continuation, in the numbers involved, its division into two groups, its duration, and its goal of collaboration between local and representative. If behavioral changes are to be initiated at the individual scale, they must also be accompanied by new, more appropriate, infrastructures, with public authorities and manufacturers leading by example.

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E.F. Galateau: The Atelier Climat, a French citizen consultation process set up to promote sustainable development: a local democratic innovation?

Citizens Participation in the budget making process of the State of Odisha (India): Opportunities, Learnings And Challenges

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Abstract. Annual Budget of a government – a public proclamation by the State of its projected and actual expenditures – provides vital evidence of where a State sets its priorities – whether on the poor and marginalised people or not. The state’s current budget processes reveal that citizens have no understanding of what the State is committing itself to in its policy declarations and what it actually does in its budgetary allocations. The extremely complicated, technical and esoteric nature of the budget-making process and documents does not allow citizens to participate, to have any say in it or to monitor the process. This paper presents what has been learned of civil society processes that have been undertaken to make the budget participatory and pro-poor. For nearly a decade, leading civil society players in Odisha (India) have made intensive efforts to engage with legislators, media and academics. This article seeks to show how the simplified analysis of public budgeting has helped civil society in Odisha to identify which sectors actually benefit the poor and which end up benefitting the urban rich; and how the citizenry came together to initiate concrete advocacy for pro-poor budgetary reforms; how the Media – could be stimulated to play the role of a conscience keeper on behalf of the poor and marginalized and engagement with the legislators during the budget discussions; how the community-based organisations were involved in sharing the budgetary requirements to the policy makers at the sub-state level.

Keywords. Budget monitoring, Civil society, Legislators, Participatory, Pro-poor, Transparency, Accountability, Governance, India

1. Introduction

The goal of the state’s development effort is to enhance the quality of its citizens’ lives through planning, designing appropriate programmes and budgets. Thus, a budget is not merely a financial statement of the state. It reflects the government’s intention to spend available resources to develop the state. It affects almost every sector of the economy and the population. The budget is also an important tool by which the government makes many commitments through the annual and five-year plans of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), which are translated into financial terms. It also indicates whether the manifestoes of the ruling political parties will be fulfilled. Monitoring the priorities of the public budget by civil society would enable the citizens to hold the government accountable.

2. Citizens and Public Budgeting: Missing links and Opportunities

In India, the process of budget preparation is not open to citizens. There is no such formal mechanism in the country or its states that invites citizens to participate in the budgeting process. Despite a number of acts and policies on decentralisation, the state budget-making process continues to remain a secret bureaucratic exercise. The esoteric language and presentation style of the budget documents prevents the public from understanding the real content and import of the documents. Even the legislators, who are supposed to influence the budget, do not possess the skills and information that would enable them to engage in a critical discourse of the matter. As a result, the Executive acts as the sole decision maker, deciding the expenditure priorities on its own. The role of civil society organisations is limited due to the lack...
of databases and information. The absence of any formal/informal space in which to participate, debate and discuss budget issues adds to the problem.

Examination of the government budget allocation and spending priorities of the state budget preparation should be a participatory process that would encompass critical needs of the poor and the marginalized. Opportunities for citizen engagement can be imagined, devised and applied in four functions of the government (Malena et al.; 2004):

- Policies and plans,
- Budgets and expenditures,
- Delivery of services and goods,
- Public oversight.

Although it is claimed that elected representatives play a role in a democratic system by discussing and deciding the priorities that are best suited to citizens’ needs, there is a lack of real participation by these peoples’ representatives. In the process of budgeting, including the citizens’ voice entails de-mystifying the budget and the budgeting process, responding to the basic needs of citizens at the grassroots level, improving budget allocations and facilitating fund distribution procedures, and preventing financial corruption and enhancing accountability (Boncodin 2007). In order to bridge the gap between the government and the country’s citizens, civil society must undertake a crucial role in the process of budget analysis. This will help to generate useful information on sectoral allocations and expenditures in simple terms. In turn, this will enable not just the intelligentsia, but also the citizens and the media to discuss the budget with the state to ensure more effective allocation and spending in key social sectors like health, education and agriculture. While the importance of the budget as a country’s principle economic policy document and its critical role in ensuring equity and justice are well appreciated, serious budget work by independent groups has been initiated primarily by certain contextual factors that followed the dramatic transformations in the Indian governmental systems since the 1990s. These factors include:

- increasing roles of, and opportunities for, non-governmental actors, especially CSOs, to actively engage in development and governance agendas;
- new public finance practices that supported greater transparency in budget systems and a larger role for the independent oversight offered by civil society and legislatures and;
- rapid proliferation of decentralisation and devolution that brought budgeting closer to communities and made it more real for them (IBP, 2001).

In some aspects, the genesis and spread of budget analysis represents a key factor in the rise of ‘empiricism’ within civil society, whereby consultation and negotiation with the State were premised on the facts and on advocacy that was influenced and informed by facts. There was an early realisation within budget groups that working through the instruments of the State rather than directly confronting the State could be a powerful means to initiate transformation within the State (Aiyar and Behar, 2005).

3. Process of Government Budget Preparation in Odisha

Odisha comprises 4.74 per cent of India’s land mass. Its 41.94 million people (2011 census) account for 3.46% of the country’s population. Approximately 83.32 percent of the country’s total population live in rural areas. Tribal communities from 62 ethnic groups account for 22.13 percent of India’s population. More than two thirds of these ethnic groups (16.53% of the country’s population) constitute scheduled castes. Odisha ranks 11 out of 15 major states in India (Value: 0.404) in HDI ranking. According to the Odisha planning commission’s latest estimate, 47.15 per cent of the total population live below the poverty line. The infant mortality rate of the state is 57(SRS 2011) per thousand compared to the national average of 44 (Census-2011). The government of Odisha prepares annual plans and budgets every year. It also participates in long term planning and budgeting by creating of a five-year plan every five years.

The budget of the government undergoes four different stages. They are:

- Formulation,
- Enactment,
- Implementation,
- Auditing.

During formulation, budget proposals from various departments are aggregated and merged by the Ministry/Department of Finance. As specified in the Odisha Budget Manual, the state’s budget preparation begins with the submission of budgets by the Drawing and Disbursement Officers (DDOs) who are based at district and sub-district levels. These budgets are submitted to the state’s Estimating Officer by the end of the August each year. The Estimating and Controlling Officers scrutinize the budgets prepared at the district level and, after separation by department, send them to the heads of the respective departments of the state by mid-November. The departmental budgets are sent to the Finance Department where they are finalized and compiled to create the state’s budget by the end of November. The budget so prepared is approved after discussion and debate in the legislative assembly. During this enactment phase in Odisha, the standing committee members hold detailed and intensive discussions concerning the specific departments assigned to them. Subsequently after the budget has been approved, policies and programmes are implemented by various departments. Lastly, the Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) of India audits the departments to determine the extent to which the budget has been respected by various budget headings.

Broadly, the role of civil society organisations and citizenry groups in each phase of the budget process can be visualised as the following:
4. Budget preparation in Odisha: Critical issues

4.1 Policy Declarations vs. Budget Allocation

Looking into past budgetary trends in Odisha, a wide gap is visible between the lofty policy declarations and the budget - that is, between actual budgetary allocations and the amount of resources that actually reach the poor. The resource gap becomes wider, if one takes into account the state’s responsibility to reduce poverty and to develop health and education in line with India’s commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). An examination of the commitments of the Millennium Development Goals in the fields of health and education shows that, although nine percent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) was required, only four percent of the state’s GSDP has been provided. There are also norms, which are defined under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, that have financial implications for fulfilment. Further, there is a norm for creating health infrastructures and facilities as in the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) that remains unfulfilled due to lack of adequate budgetary provisions for the health sector.

4.2 Regional Disparity in Fund Allocation

The government’s budget is prepared on a departmental basis. This does not reflect the priorities of regions and districts. Allocation of funds at the sub-state level would cause the citizens to claim more resources for backward areas. The current allocation patterns are far from judicious as they do not take into account the disparities in regional development indicators. No attempt has been made to engage in a rigorous analysis of the gaps between the real requirements of backward regions and their current allocations.

4.3 Absence of Civil Society Participation in the Budget Process

There is a lack of formally assigned space in which civil society organisations can participate and communicate the needs at a grassroots level to the state administration. The legislators do not possess the skills and information necessary to engage in a critical discourse of the matter. As a result, the government acts as the sole decision maker, with the executive deciding the expenditure priorities alone. The role of civil society organisations is limited by the unavailability of a database, the lack of access to information and the absence of formally or informally designated space for participation and discussing and debating budget issues. The educated masses, which are often ignorant of the intricacies of the process, are reluctant to question the functioning of the state’s governance. Even the media, a key civil society actor, does not possess the necessary expertise to delve deeply into budgetary implications. Crippled by a lack of timely and accurate information, the media fails to provide good, in-depth coverage on critical budget issues that affect the lives of the poor. As a result, any limited debate of issues that take place continues to be opaque and obscure in nature.

Against this background, the Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSYD), one of the leading organisations in participatory budgeting, assumed leadership in the state for the creation of an environment that would enable civil society organisations and groups of citizens to generate a discussion of the priorities of the social sector of Odisha’s budget.

5. CYSYD’S budget work in Odisha

With a desire to strengthen the citizen-led advocacy for a pro-poor budget in the state, the Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSYD) began its budget advocacy efforts as a modest experiment in 2003. This endeavour gradually led to the transformation of CYSYD to an exclusive outfit that is known today as Odisha Budget and Accountability Centre (OBAC). OBAC has become intensively involved in macro-analysis, micro-tracking and capacity building trainings on budget literacy and the use of budget as a tool to monitor development programmes both for state and provincial level stakeholders.

6. Strategies

The strategy of the centre has been principally to generate an advocacy dialogue with the policy makers on the issues of the state’s policies and budget priorities.

6.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Research

This strategy revealed a number of critical issues in the state budget and their implications on poor and marginalized people. Keeping abreast of state programme performance reports, including objectives and indicators, was of great help in sharpening the advocacy dialogues with the state. The government’s information, as well as the opinions of those in the target community, are used to assess the outputs and impact of budget allocations for the poor and marginalized. For instance, the state enacted the right to education act during 2010. There are a number of budgetary issues to address in order to meet the standards set out by the act. The need for additional budgetary allocations to fulfill specific standards was revealed by intensive analysis of the present status vs. commitments that were made by the state. This strategy has helped to sharpen the dialogue with the state at both macro and micro levels.

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1. Output means is a short term return from expenditure.
6.2 Dissemination of Information

Budget allocation and spending is not only information recorded on a financial statement. They have serious implications for the lives of common people. Those persons who prepare the state’s budget appear to have little understanding of this. Thus, in order to make them aware of the issues that are of particular importance to the state, in addition to the need for budget allocations, a large amount of analytical information was distributed to the officials in government departments, ministers, legislative members and standing committee members who did not fully understand the implications of the budget allocations. The analytical information is provided also to the media, academics and civil society organisations. The materials are published in local languages for better understanding by the citizens. Efforts are made to provide information during sessions of the assembly to ensure quality discussions of the state’s budget and policy issues. The Charter of Demand that is formed in consultations with the citizens is published and distributed widely for subsequent public discourse.

6.3 Strategic Alliance, Networking and Partnership Building

There is very little dialogue on the budget priorities among the state’s civil society players. In order to add value to the demands of civil society organisations, strategic alliances have been formed with academic and research institutions, political parties, media houses, civil society forums, various people’s movements and right based forums. They have been also involved while formulating demands on the budget making of the state. In the process, specific front line legislators who serve as catalysts for the budget are contacted continuously with research-based information. Regular bilateral discussions are held with legislators and media personnel to enhance the state’s quality of policy making.

7. The Integrated Model of Civil Society Budget Advocacy in Odisha

In order to provide community feedback on the state budget of Odisha, civil society groups under the leadership of CYSD followed an innovative model that includes the needs of the community’s grassroots in the advocacy process. Community feedback is gathered by community radio and small group discussions at ground level. These community aspirations are consolidated in the form of district Charters of Demand at the district level that are endorsed by the district budget watch groups. At the macro level, these demands are presented in the state pre-budget discussions for approval. The consolidated demands of the key budget priorities are presented to the state government for inclusion in the state’s budget allocations.

8. A Step towards Participatory Budgeting: Pre-budget Consultation

Pre-Budget Consultation is a platform where inputs from civil society organisations, media, academics and political activists can be heard by the architects of the budgetary process. It is an attempt to amplify people’s voice in the hope of winning a participatory and pro-poor budget by a discussion of the state’s promises versus its budget priorities. This process facilitates an engagement with the legislators, media and key budget makers of the state before the budget has been approved in the legislative assembly/parliament.

8.1 The process

OBAC designed the entire process of pre-budget consultation considering the state’s process of budget preparation. OBAC formed District Budget Watch Groups (DBWGs) in the six selected tribal districts of Odisha (Sundargarh, Koraput, Bolangir, Nuapada, Keonjhar and Kalahandi). It has also given them the means to track the budget at the district level and assemble the needs of the community in a District Charter of Demand, which they should then discuss with the district level policy makers. The DBWGs prepare the District Charter of Demands in August and submit it to the DDOs. The finalisation and approval of the District Charter of Demand in all districts are completed by the end November in District Pre-Budget Consultation with political and social activists, civil society representatives, media, government officials and professionals from respective fields.

The inputs from the district level and the macro analysis at the state level are combined to shape the State Charter of Demand. Before the departmental budget is set out for final compilation in Odisha’s government Finance Department, a State Pre-Budget Consultation is conducted with eminent professionals, such as officials of the Department of Finance and Planning and Coordination, MLAs and members of various legislative standing committees, academics, political and social activists, state and district civil society representatives, media representatives and students from prominent colleges and universities. A team of delegates from the state budget watch group hand over the propositions contained in the Charter of Demand to the Finance Minister later in a formal meeting. As originally planned, the main objective...
of the Pre-Budget Consultation is to involve all possible stakeholders and to facilitate a discussion with those who prepare the state’s budget on different aspects of it, particularly the social sector allocations and spending. After the Pre-Budget Consultation, a bilateral discussion is conducted with members of the Finance Department before they finalise the budget by the end of December. The Charters of Demand of the district and state are shared with the media to ensure that the public is aware of their contents. The substance of what transpired in the Pre-Budget Consultation is communicated to the government by members of the legislative and standing committees.

9. Articulating Community-Based Needs: Use of Community Radio

The Centre identified one district budget watch group that uses community radio. This group is located in the interior tribal region of Odisha. There was a request from the district budget watch group to share the information related to the state’s budget allocation and spending pattern. The objective of disseminating this information is to ensure that the community is informed on such matters. The community radio has developed a radio programme that presents information about the state budgetary processes and its social sector priorities in an easily understood format. This may involve interviews with officials at the grassroots level, interactive plays, poetry, news or commentaries, etc. The programme strives to educate communities so that they can engage in an informed and ongoing dialogue with their government representatives. An ongoing dialogue will likely foster a participatory and transparent budgetary process. In turn, this will result in state budgets, policies, and spending that reflect the needs and interests of the poor and rural communities in western Odisha. The Community Radio programme harnesses the region’s most widely used medium of mass communication and entertainment to reach listeners by both broadcasting and narrowcasting. With respect to broadcasting, All India Radio (AIR), India’s national public radio broadcaster, airs the programme to residents of the Kalahandi district and neighbouring districts of western Odisha, including Nuapara, Bolangir, and Sambalpur in the local Oriya language. With regard to narrowcasting, the district watch group, along with the OBAC team, regularly brings together community members at local community centers in 90 villages in western Odisha to listen to a recording of The Community Radio. Different members of the community are encouraged to attend, depending on the issues covered in the program. For instance, if a particular airing discusses textbooks for school children, parents are invited to listen, whereas women are encouraged to attend if the program focuses on women’s health issues. The fundamental difference between the broadcasting and the narrowcasting is that the former is aired by a national radio station to reach a geographically wide audience, whereas the latter is undertaken by OBAC and provides targeted groups with the specific budget information that is most relevant to them.

The OBAC’s narrowcasting initiatives have been effective in raising public awareness of the budgeting process and fostering the participation of citizens in it. During the state’s budget preparations in August, some communities that listen to the Community Radio programme expressed a desire for specific budgetary allocations for text books, scholarships, and doctors for primary health centres to the district-level Drawing and Disbursement Officers (DDOs), who are responsible for budget preparation and spending at the local level. As a result of the submission of the peoples’ Charter of Demand, there was an increase in the allocation of specific components of social sector. The allocation for free medicine was doubled at the state level with many changes to the mechanism for distribution of medicine to poor patients. OBAC’s two-fold approach to sharing the Community Radio programme, illustrates how important it is for civil society organisations that are engaged in budget work to identify and harness the mode(s) of communication that can most effectively reach their target audiences.

Advocacy efforts to engage citizens in the budgeting process have been widely recognized by the state. After repeated demands by civil society organisations, the government of Odisha adopted the proposed process in 2010 and invited citizens to participate in pre-budget consultations. The civil society budget advocacy groups hope for formation of a well-informed citizenry budget group that includes civil society actors who will act as a resource units in the state’s planning and budgeting. This group also will be involved in preparing alternative budgets for specific areas of the social sector based on a normative approach. All these efforts can feed the right-based development organisations and movement by a consistent flow of budgetary information to build a logical debate with the State.

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Local innovations and initiatives in the management of conflicts and health risks in agro-pastoral zones: the SAREL and PASEL projects in the Dakoro, department in Niger

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Abstract. This article examines two projects concerned with livestock production in the Dakoro region of Niger. It highlights the results obtained in the management of conflicts between livestock producers and crop farmers, and in the reduction of health risks by promoting the involvement and accountability of livestock producer associations in project activities. The collaboration of local stakeholders is an initiative and a local knowledge-sharing opportunity to promote peaceful conflict resolutions in the context of high land pressure and competing agro-pastoral land use. Such institutional, technical and social initiatives improve participatory governance and legitimise decisions at the grassroots level. They have made a significant contribution to prompting social change and to setting the scene for better security for mobile pastoral systems.

Keywords. Innovation, Governance, Initiatives, Conflicts, Agro-pastoral, Health risks, Dakoro, Niger

1. Introduction

Securing access to resources and land tenure systems is crucial to the management and resolution of land conflicts (Herrea et al, 2007). In Niger, where land pressure is aggravated by population growth, land conflicts have become a chronic issue, an ongoing reality (Gado, 2000). The plurality of standards and a variety of sources of law add to the complexity of land conflict cases between parties in the Dakoro and Guidan Roumdji regions (M, 2001). The Maradi region serves as a zone of contact for the pastoral North and the agricultural South. The overall dynamic of livestock production systems is determined by the complementarity of agro-pastoral areas. This is threatened by land pressures and leads to organisational changes in central South Niger communities (Yamba, 2000, 2004). This article examines the role of pastoralist associations in Dakoro in handling conflicts and health risks. Indeed, farmers’ organisations in Subsaharan Africa – and especially in Niger – play an important role in formulating agricultural policies and are undoubtedly a key element in the success of local initiative promotion (Mercoiret et al, 2004; Deveze & Courade, 2006; Mercoiret, 2006). Two development projects in Dakoro have highlighted the importance of joint initiatives between local stakeholders and projects in reducing the number of conflicts and managing health risks in agro-pastoral areas. This article will expose the significant progress achieved in research into solutions for mobile livestock farming systems through the implementation of participative processes within the PASEL (”Projet d’Appui au Secteur de l’ELevage”: livestock production sector support project) and SAREL (”Sécurité Alimentaire Renforcée par l’ELevage”: food security strengthened through livestock production) projects, and will analyse their
effects on improvements in livestock farmers’ access to health services and in conflict management.

2. Methodology

The methodology uses an ethnographic approach. The survey instruments used were questionnaires and open interviews with local actors on their perceptions of project activities and associations. The results are also drawn from project works and documents, from NGOs and state technical service reports. To ensure data reliability, meetings were held with community representatives from five territorial authorities to compare information from various sources. In total, twelve pastoral organisations, seventeen pastoral groups in the department, two pastoral group chiefs and four chiefs of sedentary cantons in the zone participated in the survey. The study also included land commission secretaries, prefects, project and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) agents and the presiding tribunal judge of the area.

3. Major challenges and issues in the Dakoro region

3.1 Localisation and natural potential of the area of study

The Dakoro department is located in the northern extremity of the Maradi region, and has a surface area of 17,670 km². It alone represents 42.28% of the Maradi regions territory. With a population of 606,862 (Institut national de la statistique du Niger, 2011), the area is home to a diverse mixture of communities - Hausas (83%), Peuls (6%), Tuaregs (11%) - combining crop farming and livestock farming. Three agro-ecological zones characterise the Dakoro department: the agricultural (crop farming) zone in the south (187,000 Ha), the agro-pastoral zone (978,000 Ha), and the pastoral zone in the north which covers an area of 460,000 Ha (SDDRM, 1997). The latter two represent strategic areas for the development of livestock production and regional and cross-border transhumance (55.8%) (KRB Ingénieurs Conseils, 2003). The agricultural zone stretching over the south and the north of the Goulbin Kaba valley is characterised by a land occupation rate of over 60%. The intermediary zone abounds with natural pastoral enclaves which are essential to mobile livestock production (Tarka Valley) and the pastoral area in the north representing 36% of the department is occupied by 5% of the population. Due to the progressive decrease in croplands and increasing land-grabbing in livestock farming zones, pastoral systems have become vulnerable and the state has failed to protect the northern crop farming boundary (law 61-5 of 26 May 1961) in Niger. To combat rangeland degradation (20%) and control animal disease (67.3% of animal species threatened by disease linked to transhumance; KBR Ingénieurs Conseils., 2003) in Dakoro, the PASEL I and VI projects intervened to protect the 64 pastoral enclaves (18,349 km²) and create transhumance corridors, to improve the natural resource governance and strengthen pastoral organisations.

Concerning the animal health aspect of the SAREL project, the aim is to reinforce the defensive capacities of vulnerable households and to protect livestock operations in the region. The emergence of pastoral associations over the last two decades in the sociopolitical arena represents a decisive turning point in the management and prevention of conflicts and use of natural resources. They have imposed themselves as key players alongside other pre-existing institutions in the political arena. They work to justify forms of territorial anchorage and identity claims of pastoral territories. Thus these associations compensate for the disengagement of the state from these socioeconomic issues.

3.2 Issues and challenges of agro-pastoral systems

The socioeconomic and ecological changes of the last 40 years have resulted in land saturation and high pressure on uncultivated areas (Mortimore et al, 2001; Raynaud, 2001; Yamba, 2000; Genguant et al, 2003; Yamba, 2004).
Demographic growth and household vulnerability lead to land insecurity for small family farms and increases in land transactions (Lawali, 2011). Droughts and famines modify agricultural and pastoral practices in this part of Niger. Land saturation in the south of the department as a result of population growth (3.5%) and the expansion of the agricultural front towards the pastoral area 20 km north (law 61-5 of 26 May 1961) has led to land-grabbing and land cultivation by sedentary populations. In response to this agricultural encroachment in the area, livestock farmers anarchically create water sources for their herds in order to secure exclusive pastoral land tenure. These actions give rise to local conflicts which are often taken to the highest state level to ministries of agriculture and livestock. Certain dominant groups and politicians fuel these tensions for land and population control to strengthen their electorate in the light of decentralisation. They take over communal resources and impose new access systems and adaptation demands on transhumant livestock farmers (exclusive appropriation of public borewells, concrete wells, monetarised third-party access).

This dynamic has a significant effect on farmers and pastoralists seeking a land base, and increasing numbers of actors are being excluded from the system (i.e., deprived of land). There are, then, in the Dakoro region, problems of planning growth (3.5%) and the expansion of the agricultural front towards the pastoral area 20 km north (law 61-5 of 26 May 1961) has led to land-grabbing and land cultivation by sedentary populations. In response to this agricultural encroachment in the area, livestock farmers anarchically create water sources for their herds in order to secure exclusive pastoral land tenure. These actions give rise to local conflicts which are often taken to the highest state level to ministries of agriculture and livestock. Certain dominant groups and politicians fuel these tensions for land and population control to strengthen their electorate in the light of decentralisation. They take over communal resources and impose new access systems and adaptation demands on transhumant livestock farmers (exclusive appropriation of public borewells, concrete wells, monetarised third-party access).

### 3.3 Changes in agro-pastoral systems and conflicts

One cannot understand these practices and the conflicts arising from them without briefly describing the diversity of these agro-pastoral systems. At one extreme, livestock producers with herds of predominantly sheep travel great distances from Northern Niger to Nigeria and try to preserve family ties or exchange links with the areas they pass through to fulfill their water, fodder, or crop residue needs. At the other extreme, sedentary communities combine diversified livestock production with cereal crop farming, to adapt to changing climatic conditions. Nowadays they tend to store fodder and crop residues for periods of shortage. In between these two extremes, groups of livestock producers migrate short distances while others, particularly Tuaregs and Arabs, also migrate longer distances with their camel trains. Around the town areas, we also see the development of communities who lost large parts of their herds as a result of droughts and who are trying to combine small-scale livestock farming with paid jobs or commercial activities. These different groups compete for access to resources (fodder, crop residues, well water) and only gain access if they are able to assert their land rights or make exchanges with sedentary populations through family networks or by monetary offerings, or even via links with local authorities: all these factors enter into the notion of a fixed land base for the different populations. The complexity of these relationships, exacerbated by ethnic diversity (although this never exactly matches the diversity of systems), leads to intense and multifaceted conflict.

Conflicts related to access to natural resources arise between different actors in Dakoro. The majority (46%) of disputes between crop farmers listed by the land commission from 2000 to 2011 relate to land matters. Disagreements between crop farmers and livestock producers in the department account for 44.66% of disputes. Conflicts between different livestock producers over water sources and grazing areas account for 6.6%, and 2.2% of conflicts involving livestock farmers and other rural operators. Disputes are mainly related to land tenure claims, access to water sources, transhumance corridors, and grazing land (Commission foncière départementale de Dakoro, 2012). These conflicts can be severe:
13.33% of conflicts are fatal in Dakoro. Each year, conflicts between livestock producers and crop farmers result in death, reigniting tensions between communities. In 1991, “a conflict between livestock producers and crop farmers in Toda (Guidan Roundji) caused the death of 101 individuals which affected us greatly” (AM, 27/11/2011). Attempts at legal and institutional resolutions via land commissions have confirmed their inefficacy, and conciliation by traditional leaders has lost its legitimacy due to the coexistence of three legal systems (traditional, Islamic, and modern) (Gado, 2000; M, 2001; Lavigne Delville, 2006). This failing system of conflict prevention and management has encouraged local actors (NGOs, projects, local elected officials, traditional chiefs, livestock producer associations, decentralised state services) to launch an innovative participative process on a local scale to resolve conflicts and make decisions about pastoral developments and the protection of community spaces.

4. Animal health initiative

The vulnerability of pastoral systems and their protection are the core issues targeted by the SAREL and PASEL projects in the Dakoro department. This vulnerability in Dakoro is linked to weak defensive capacities and the lack of social opportunities for livestock producers (Vias Franck et al, 2004).

SAREL targets technical improvements to livestock production and works with pastoralist organisations. “The objectives assigned to these organisations are: to combat food insecurity, to protect animal health, to manage natural resources and land conflicts, to broker and mediate between projects, NGOs, and local authorities and administrations, to represent livestock producers during decision-making processes, to support the capacities of their representatives and local elected official” (Survey, 2011). These pastoral organisations are structured according to the scale of villages and pastoralist settlements, across female or male groups, comprising livestock producers and crop farmers. From 1993 to the present day, fifteen pastoralist associations and over 200 women’s or mixed pastoralist groups have been established (Surveys, 2012). They are now emerging actors on the local sociopolitical scene. Pastoralist organisations are “the keystone of the maintenance and protection of pastoral production and the livestock producer’s lifestyle” (Marty, 1990). The economic and political context of the 1990s enabled the emergence of these pastoral organisations. While these pastoral movements are recognised in Niger, their role takes on most significance in their manner of highlighting pastoral issues in light of the state’s disengagement from livestock production issues. Indeed, their struggle on local, national, and international scales brings us to examine the deeper meaning of their activity, the path they will take, their functions and their characteristics. They target the root causes of obstacles to the development of livestock production and producers: conflict prevention, resource management, as well as the issue of poor governance through the better integration of livestock producers in decision-making processes. Pastoral associations are the backbone of collaboration between all stakeholders (livestock producers, crop farmers, projects and NGOs, traditional authorities and administration, local elected officials and rural police forces, rural land commissions, and mixed - women and men’s- pastoralist groups). For projects and NGOs, pastoral associations and their base groups constitute the ideal gateway.

The figure above shows the deeply-rooted motivations for the founding of twelve pastoral organisations studied in Dakoro. The responses highlight how animal health, and in particular animal mortality resulting from health hazards, the struggle for literacy among livestock producers, the lack of communication between livestock producers and crop farmers, and the mounting number of conflicts are major concerns for pastoral organisations in Dakoro. Their main purpose is to compensate for the vulnerability of pastoral systems in central South Niger.

In the first phase of the SAREL project in 2003, an innovative system for the management of animal health was established in Dakoro in Niger. It comprises local veterinary services (LVS) and networks of community animal health workers according to gender (AE for men and AVAPR for women); “...focussing on local animal health, with the installation of veterinary surgeries built around networks of community animal health workers; these workers are livestock farmers and crop-livestock farmers scattered throughout the department who have been trained in basic animal health and who intervene directly at the request of livestock producers; there is currently a network of 60 workers; this year, to give an example, this veterinary surgery was entrusted by the state with running the vaccination campaign (BA 10/12/2011). The institutional bodies of pastoral organisations become local intermediaries for the community veterinary services. This innovative system establishes collaboration between the project supervisor, LVSs, livestock producer associations (AE and AVAPR), traditional authorities, local elected officials and livestock production services, working in synergy to improve health conditions for livestock producers. “The SAREL project works with livestock production services, private para-veterinary agents, and traditional authorities in monitoring, training and supervising livestock farmers in the organisation...”

Source: Our field survey, Dakoro 2012

Figure 4. The main reasons for creating pastoral organisations
that livestock farmers no longer need to travel dozens of kilometres to find an animal health worker; they have one at hand or in a neighbouring community. As I was saying, a lot of that is thanks to traditional chiefs and pastoral associations” (BA, 10/12/2011). These initiatives improve livestock yield, change habits among livestock farmers, and reduce the risk of spreading epizootic disease in the area. The health information system is developing and the sources of outbreaks are more rapidly identified. Furthermore, livestock farmers are learning to administer animal health treatments under the supervision of professionals and field technicians, and have access to community veterinary surgeries close at hand. “The introduction of village animal health workers is an effective way not only to extend preventive animal health services to less densely populated areas, but also to provide care and preventive measures for non-epidemic illnesses, on a cost recovery basis” (Rass, 2004). In order to curb other factors of livestock producer vulnerability, SAREL has set up zootechnical supply stores and grain banks in pastoral villages and settlements, of which the management is entrusted to committees established by the project.

5. Land tenure security initiatives

The PASEL initiative aims to improve security for communal land, to intensify agro-pastoral production and to strengthen pastoral organisations. Accordingly, the project works with structures created by pastoral associations (groups) and administrative and traditional authorities to install security and avoid conflict. The local system of land tenure regulation defines itself as “all public or private actors, individuals or groups, that play an effective role in decisions involving land tenure (allocation or confirmation of rights, registration, arbitration) without predicting their legal status in their relations of complementarity, competition or synergies” (Lavigne Delville, 2002). In the Dakoro department, a framework for cooperation has existed since 2005, born of the difficulties experienced by formal institutions in managing conflicts between crop farmers and livestock producers and in undertaking undisputed initiatives in matters of development and public decisions. Representatives of the different technical services, crop farmers, livestock farmers, traditional chiefs, mayors and pastoral associations work together to identify, create and manage water sources and transhumance routes on the basis of local knowledge and consensus between stakeholders. Traditional chiefs, key partners in the prevention and management of conflicts, work alongside the projects to install lasting peace (Sidikou, 2003). “Similarly, pastoral associations can play a role in perpetuating the actions of projects under local government supervision” (ML, 20/10/2012); “With PASEL, we have worked closely with the departmental land commission to mark out transhumance corridors along the north-south axis as far as Nigeria. I was the representative of these 10 canton chiefs in the Maradi region, on the west coast; we marked out transhumance corridors from the Tarka Valley to Nigeria” (LD, 26/11/2011). This network contributes to the regulation of pastoral uses and practices in management. It proceeds by defining the problem collectively, incorporating different skills, mobilising objects, actors,
negotiations and role definitions. Land tenure security relies on a participative process. On the basis of the discourse of the actors and their perceptions of the initiatives and innovations of the projects, our analysis brings to light the impact of these actions in the Dakoro department. This process has enabled the resolution of conflicts concerning access to and control of resources. The pastoral and institutional stakeholders are gradually taking account of social values in the definition of actions concerned with the preservation of territory and the consolidation of peace. In total, there have been 800 km of corridors created by PASEL and 47 pastoral enclaves demarcated out of the 64 existing in the department (Cofodep, 2012) and over 71 intercommunity forums and workshops and 128 committees to monitor transhumance corridor set up.

![Figure 6. Intercommunity forum in pastoral zone (breeders, customary chief, technical services, local elected officials, farmers associations, local NGOs and development projects)](image)

This work has contributed significantly to reducing conflicts between livestock producers and crop farmers. “Thank God and from 1998 to today 2012, there have been fewer conflicts over transhumance corridors and conflicts between crop farmers and livestock producers, with PASEL, we have conducted studies recently on the situation of conflicts over transhumance corridors, we have reached the result of zero conflict over demarcated transhumance corridors” (HM 25/09/2012)

Before the creation of these international and secondary corridors in the Dakoro department, transhumant livestock producers experienced many difficulties moving to the North in the pastoral zone during the wet season. The transhumance routes were being encroached upon by crop farmers and access to waterholes and pastoral enclaves was completely blocked.

These local conflict management initiatives in Dakoro, despite operational progress in the field, function in the Sahelian context of dwindling resources and multiple stakeholders with conflicting interests. Reconciling these outlooks and resolving the problem of pastoral resource management in the long term requires the mastering of methods of coordination and other strategies developed by actors during the process of implementing collective actions (Kebir and Crevoisier, 2002). Dakoro’s agro-pastoral zone is in the throes of environmental, social and political change. The interference of new stakeholders and the failure to conform to traditional or modern legislation lead on one hand to capitalist strategies (ranching) and on the other to the disorganisation of traditional control and management systems for these resources. Today we are witnessing a sort of duality in the resolution of conflicts from the highest to the lowest levels, between the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the chiefs of sedentary cantons and the chiefs of livestock producer groups; and between livestock producers and crop farmers. This serves to crystallise the social relations between the actors and reignite land tenure conflicts in Dakoro, where institutional and organisational innovations are striving to reduce the environmental risks and socio-economic uncertainties of the agro-pastoral populations.

![Figure 7. Map of the transhumance corridors demarcated by PASEL (Commission foncière departamento de Dakoro, 2011)](image)

6. Conclusion

The processes initiated by the two development projects in Dakoro promote the participation of local stakeholders and pastoral land tenure governance. They demonstrate how taking social values into consideration and making livestock farmer associations and traditional land management institutions accountable offer better chances of bringing development projects and consensual, negotiated local initiatives to a successful conclusion. The disengagement of the state and
privatisation of animal health services in recent years have encouraged the emergence of local initiatives operating in synergy with the actions of development projects and pastoral organisations. However, these initiatives remain dependent on local authorities. With little transparency in their choice of members, they are difficult to sustain beyond the completion of the projects, because their role is not firmly established and their functions are poorly institutionalised. These local innovations therefore deserve to be studied more closely to gain an understanding of the forms of engagement of pastoral organisations alongside these projects and their identity on a local scale for the sustainable governance of resources, representativeness and the accountability of all stakeholders. These emerging associations are now recognised as legitimate intermediaries by projects and NGOs in the implementation of operational actions in the field. Their authoritative position is indisputable proof of their ability to influence public decisions. Their importance also leads to conflicts of power between traditional and administrative authorities at the local level. Nevertheless, the discourse of pastoral associations must not conceal certain truths in their modes of operation, the internal organisation of livestock farmers and constitution of groups. On one hand, these associations do not appear to be wholly representative of stakeholders according to their ethnic makeup and are a reflection of social affinities. On the other hand, conflicts of interest between the pastoral associations themselves restrict the margins of manoeuvre and their scope of action given their limited capacities in terms of funding and social mobilisation. Will they become instruments of public policy alongside development projects or actual instigators of development themselves? This article does not claim to answer these questions but simply aims to highlight the dynamics of the actions between local stakeholders and local institutions in land tenure security and animal health.

References
Ibrahim et al: Local innovations and initiatives in the management of conflicts and health risks in agro-pastoral zones: the SAREL and PASEL projects in the Dakoro, department in Niger


Community participation and water supply in deprived areas of Madagascar

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Abstract. Madagascar’s water services were reformed in the late 1990s, with a focus on community participation in cost recovery and joint service management. This participatory approach was in response to economic imperatives, and addressed the paucity of services in many urban districts. In areas where the conventional network cannot meet demand, multiple projects were set up in support of the decentralisation and democratisation of local societies. The public sphere created space for the consultation of residents and enabled demand for services to be quantified. The management of the facilities that were then built was delegated to user associations (NGOs/local non-profit groups). After ten years of implementation, the participatory mechanism has helped resolve deadlock situations and deliver services to districts that were previously excluded from urban development plans. It has also changed the relationship between water services and urban spaces. The participatory process is, however, a long way from resolving all the problems of supplying deprived areas. This paper sets out to analyse its impacts through case studies of two cities in Madagascar—Antananarivo and Toamasina—using an approach that combines compiled project data with field surveys.

Keywords. Participation, Decentralization, Water supply, Deprived areas, Madagascar

1. Water supply and public management of services in deprived areas

Universal access to drinking water and basic infrastructure is one of the key millennium goals. It would reduce poverty, improve living standards, and reinforce the ability of local populations to take charge of their own development. In Madagascar, the rate of access to safe drinking water is generally low, covering just 45% of the population in 2010. The rate of access in urban areas has fluctuated: 73% in 1997, then 59% in 2000, 67% in 2005 and 70% in 2010 (INSTAT, 2011). The production and distribution of drinking water is managed by a semi-public utility, Jirama, which provides services to some sixty operating centers, which in turn deliver to individual consumers, administrative departments, and industrial customers (Jirama, 2007).

The first supply grids in Antananarivo (1) and Toamasina (2) date back to the colonial period, when the cities were fragmented by the service. The residential, administrative and commercial districts had the best service; they followed an urban development plan and thus benefitted from water supply facilities. The indigenous districts were equipped with
collective water points, but in insufficient numbers (3). The distribution networks were gradually extended, but were outpaced by urban expansion and population growth. The supply rates of the two cities remain unequal: 76% for Antananarivo, 47% for Toamasina. Households use various sources of water, sometimes even in combination. Home connections are still limited to a minority of households: 24% in Antananarivo and 21% in Toamasina. Those without connections get water from standpipes supplied by the network: 900 in Antananarivo and 171 in Toamasina. In the districts outside the network, a non-negligible proportion of the population use individual wells. Collecting water is an arduous activity. The distance from home to water point ranges from 5 meters to 200 meters and beyond. When the water pressure is low, it can be a long wait. And the carrying of water recipients, on the head or across the shoulders, is a daily chore for the men, women and children in deprived areas.

Even today, the shortcomings in the public water service still leave many districts under-supplied. The failure of state administration—as observed in several African countries—has slowed progress in extending the water networks to outerlying districts. This is attributed to institutional weakness and lack of investment in the sector. The renewal of the network calls for heavy investment, which only large projects can hope to attract. Moreover, the ageing equipment, combined with payment arrears, especially from public institutions (decentralised authorities, universities, hospitals) has resulted in serious physical network loss (waste, leakage, etc.). The standpipes, Jirama currently has unpaid bills amounting to 31 billion ariary for Toamasina and 1.88 billion ariary for Antananarivo (various sources, cited by Miakatra, 2012).

One of the causes often put forward to explain the failure of water supply projects is the non-participation of local populations in implementing development projects that concern them. The water supply networks were built at the sole initiative of the government: the beneficiary communities were not sufficiently involved in, or prepared for, their upkeep. It was consequently common for defective equipment to be abandoned, and for people to resort to using unprotected sources. To make matters worse, a loss of public confidence in the network operator began to set in during the 1990s.

Since then, there have been major changes in public policy in Madagascar. Reforms in public services since the 1990s have been accompanied by a current of economic liberalism and government reform. The redefinition of the role of the state is the pragmatic outcome of failures in centralized planning and of a mixed economy, amplified by increasing macro-economic constraints and a reduction in public-sector financing sources.

In the water sector, a new legislative framework is now in place. Madagascar’s “Water Code” (Law n° 98-029 enacted 20 January 1999) defines the fundamental principles of the public service for the supply of drinking water and sanitation (limited to domestic waste water) in all areas, urban and rural (4). The code sets out the value of water, introduces steps towards commercializing the service by recovering all or part of the costs, and specifies the place of the users of the service and of the private sector. More generally, the reforms call for technical and institutional innovations.

The participation of all involved, at different levels, thus emerges as a key factor for the success of anti-poverty programs, and greatly improves the quality of decision-making by making the process more effective and more productive. Madagascar has adopted a general strategy aimed at involving local communities in the process of appropriating their drinking water supply.

2. Forms of community participation

The public sphere has created space for the consultation of residents and enabled demand for services to be quantified. A participatory approach, combined with socio-economic studies of the intervention zones, provides an understanding of the structures and functioning of local societies. The population is involved in identifying problems, and is consulted about the proposed solutions. These participatory diagnostics often give expression to demands for socio-collective facilities such as for water (collective systems), health, education and the prioritization of women and young people (Olivier de Sardan, 2009).

2.1 Resident consultation

For the donors, the ministries concerned, and the public and private agencies, it was thought necessary to recover all or part of the costs in order to offset the deficiencies in public services. From the start of the 1990s, they introduced a policy of participation in several areas of the country’s social and economic life. In the health sector, financial participation of users, or fanome, consists of paying part of the (heavily-subsidized) cost of healthcare and medication to the urban or rural primary health center. Madagascar’s education system, meanwhile, is unable to meet its quality of service requirements, due to a shortage of teachers and a lack of infrastructure and equipment. Parents’ associations or FRAMs (fikambaran’ny raiamandrenina ny mpianatra) are expected to participate in paying the salaries of non-civil-service teachers, who account for some 40% of Madagascar’s teaching staff (5).

More tangibly, in the water sector, Antananarivo and Toamasina have benefited from Phase 2 of the Local Initiative
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Box 1: The organization of cost recovery in Madagascar

The law of Madagascar defines the principles that apply to water pricing:
“...The pricing and cost recovery policy for drinking water and sanitation services shall comply with the following principles:
- access to the public water service, whether at collective water points or via individual connections, must be paid for;
- for every water and sanitation system, the applicable tariffs must allow the system operators to achieve financial equilibrium and must tend toward the full recovery of costs;
- the costs of investment and operation shall be factored into the guidelines for setting water prices and sanitation charges, as shall the ability of users to pay;
- the proceeds received by the facility owners and operators in return for drinking water and sanitation services are revenues that shall be assigned to these services alone;
- pricing systems shall include provisions allowing domestic consumers with the lowest incomes to enjoy universal access to drinking water”.


Support Program (PAIQ 2) (6), which has funded district infrastructure projects, notably for water, sanitation, education, health, and culture (the Maisons de quartier).

The program also aimed to make local communities responsible for managing and developing their district, to support the structuring of national NGOs so that they could become effective actors and partners in urban development and management, and to set up a consultation process between local populations and institutions, especially municipal authorities, within a framework of participatory democracy and joint management of the district and its geographical area.

The residents of the districts concerned by the program were elicited, to identify what they saw as the priority projects. For every problem identified, a solution was proposed; this helped to define the actions required, and how the community could participate in their implementation. Subsequently, the residents are also responsible for the upkeep and management of the facilities. This devolution of responsibility is enshrined in an official transfer of ownership agreement (Republic of Madagascar, PAIQ, 2003).

This bottom-up participatory approach facilitated the transformation of the political and social landscape. The initiative was supported by the international donors for a variety of reasons: ensuring the longevity of the equipment, good service management and local, resident-led development.

2.2 Recovery of costs

In the early 2000s, Madagascar’s Water Code entered its active phase. Antananarivo and Toamasina were the first local authorities to introduce payment at public water points.

The Water Code stipulates that every standpipe user must contribute toward the real costs of drinking water. Its goals include the total recovery of costs, including investment, maintenance and management expenses, and the social cost of providing access for low-income populations.

The first paying standpipes appeared progressively, despite difficulties in applying the prevailing legislation. This was also the result of local authorities becoming increasingly aware of the payment shortfall induced by over-consumption and by losses due to defective conduits, etc.

This financial participation helped to recondition installations that had long been out of order or abandoned for lack of maintenance. The installation of new water points required a contribution from beneficiaries and local authorities in order to minimize investment costs.

Other local actors helped raise community awareness, both about the risks of consuming unsafe water—notably groundwater—and about using standpipes, even if there was a charge for access.

There are two modes of cost recovery: subscriptions for repairs, and payment per volume consumed (Repussard C., 2008). The first is used mainly with free standpipes. All of the households in a single district participate in the cost of repairing the defective equipment, the amount being determined on the basis of the cost of repair. The second mode (payment per volume consumed) currently concerns all of the standpipes in Toamasina: the consumer pays per unit of consumption (according to the volume of a bucket or can).

In several districts of Antananarivo, fixed monthly subscriptions are in widespread use. This gives residents a sense of being entitled to use the collective equipment, expressing a collective appropriation of the installations. Subscriptions are periodic (usually monthly) and are payable to a district collector. The money thus collected is used to pay for repairs and maintenance.

In the capital, the initial experiments with payment by volume proved to be a failure, due mainly to people’s lack of understanding and knowledge about the new system. In 2004, the population of the deprived areas protested against payment by volume, forcing the city’s mayor to restore free service in many districts.

This decision by the mayor of the capital—basically in contradiction with the new water policy—puts the ball firmly in the court of the City and of the fokontany, which need to be strict about checking standpipes in order to avoid the waste that has been pushing up Antananarivo’s spending for years, further aggravating the city’s debt to Jirama. Rational water management does require financial participation from standpipe users in all six of the city’s arrondissements.

The case of the capital underlines one of the difficulties involved in applying the law: it favors unequal treatment of
Madagascar’s cities. Overall, local financial participation for access to services can lead to the exclusion of certain underprivileged strata of the urban population.

2.3 Delegated standpipe management

The residents are therefore involved in the joint management of the service. This “coproduction” approach, as it is known, is a community partnership structure designed to encourage the emergence and consolidation of norms of cooperation between public (or public-private) authorities and citizens’ organizations, with the aim of securing some form of long-term service delivery in areas where conventional provision is inadequate. In more concrete terms, this socio-technical system is analysed by examining the way in which the standpipes are managed.

The user groups set up water point committees to oversee the management of the standpipes. These committees stem from a district association, the fokontany. The management body takes out a subscription directly with Jirama, collects daily payments for the resale of water, pays the monthly bill to Jirama, and maintains the installations. Part of the revenue is used to pay the standpipe assistant. The standpipes are equipped with individual meters to facilitate the measurement of consumption (Miakatra, 2012).

The committees are supervised by the municipal authority and by the network operator. The days and times when the standpipes are available are defined jointly with the district residents, to cater to their needs or habits. The opening times are displayed on the kiosk or standpipe and the assistant is responsible for adhering to this timetable in order to provide a water service that meets users’ expectations. The pricing schedule for standpipes is identical to the first bracket of the individual subscriber “low consumption” category (<10m³ a month).

Since 2000, “tariff 52”—360 ariary per cubic meter (7)—applies to standpipes on the same basis as decentralised authorities and municipal services. From there on, the price of the water redistributed at the pipe is defined in consultation with the users. The committees therefore call a general meeting to discuss any changes of tariff. The price includes the various expenses incurred by the committee. The person who keeps the equipment in working order is allowed a profit margin, but Jirama’s agents and municipal officials check that everything is above board.

3. General conclusion

The new Water Code (Law 98-029) advocates the diversification of operational and institutional models, the recovery of costs, and the participation of the private sector in infrastructure funding. It is through this legislation that community participation in water supply systems has taken root. Several districts of Antananarivo and Toamasina have consequently been integrated into the development plan of the two cities.

In other urban centers, the implementation of this new system is hotly debated, and has triggered a fundamental rethink about the way the water supply is organized. The impacts are numerous—especially in areas neglected by the conventional network—but despite all the efforts made, there are still many challenges, and only limited results.

In the two cities studied, inequalities were reinforced, and the principle of universal public service has been further undermined. The social unrest in the capital in 2004 changed the game, leading the authorities to restore free supply at the standpipes in several districts. Inevitably, this decision is seen as amounting to unequal treatment for the cities of Madagascar. On the local scale, reforms have spawned new issues, by multiplying deadweight effects and forms of exclusion in an already highly fragmented urban fabric.

Finally, the types of community participation that grew out of the reforms have neither ensured long-term service management nor reduced inequalities: if anything, the inequalities have been aggravated. The residents of deprived areas increasingly express a desire to obtain a household connection. Many requests have been submitted to Jirama, but their acceptance is conditional on proof of land title and the ability to pay for the connection cost and the monthly bills. Connection to the drinking water network is therefore constrained by income level and ownership status (Bousquet, 2006). Even when households are solvent, the illegal nature of their district frequently makes it impossible for the local authorities to grant their demands. The same observation is valid for most developing cities.

4. Notes

(1) Antananarivo is the capital of Madagascar. The “City of Thousands” is situated in the uplands. The municipality of Antananarivo currently numbers some 2 million residents, divided up into 192 districts or fokontany.

(2) The country’s second city, Toamasina, on the east coast, is Madagascar’s economic powerhouse, with the island’s main deep-water port. Its 210,000 residents live in the 138 fokontany that make up the municipality of Toamasina.

(3) At Tanambao, Toamasina, in the early 1940s, a single standpipe supplied 600 people.

(4) The sanitation aspect was somewhat overlooked in the 1999 legislation. A new national sanitation strategy document is currently being validated with the Ministry of Water and NGOs from the water and sanitation sectors.

(5) The effects on districts of this type of participation in the education sector are largely unknown, but it has been suggested that it may...
introduce inequalities between richer and poorer districts, in that non-civil-servant teachers will go where the pay is.

(6) PAIQ 2 covers Madagascar’s six main urban centers: Antananarivo, Toamasina, Mahajanga, Antsiranana, Fianarantsoa, and Toliara.

(7) Tariff 52 applies to Jirama. 1 euro = 2,800 ariary (Madagascar’s currency). A cubic meter of water therefore costs 13 euro centimes (about 18 USD cents)

References


Transparency in delivery of entitlements through empowered Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):
The Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC) model in Rajasthan, India

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Abstract. This paper presents an innovative model called “Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC) for the promotion of transparent and accountable government at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level in the Province of Rajasthan in India. Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), a Rajasthan based international organisation, has attempted to improve the functioning of government at the Gram Panchayat by means of this model. This model proved to be very successful in curbing corruption and creating transparency. The process of seeking information using the provisions of the Right to Information Act (hereafter termed RTI) not only brought several cases of corruption to light, but also increased citizens’ engagement. This further inhibited GP officials and other service providers from engaging in corrupt practices. In turn, this has mitigated instances of corruption. The intervention was implemented in a phased approach. Learning from each phase as it was implemented provided the groundwork for the intervention of the next phase. The CGCC was instrumental in all phases of intervention and worked as a sustainable model as people continue to approach it to seek its assistance.

Keywords. RTI, Transparency, Accountability, Governance, Corruption, MGNREGS, CGCC, India, Rajasthan

1. Background

Corruption lies at the core of poor governance. It is the most significant obstacle to efforts to overcome poverty in developing countries. Anecdotal and survey evidence suggest that corruption is rampant in the developing world and more prevalent in developing countries than in rich ones. Yet, there are remarkably few reliable estimates of the actual magnitude of corruption. Those that do exist reveal a high level of heterogeneity (for a summary of the survey evidence, see Olken & Pandey, 2012).

During a period of three consecutive financial years, the Indian government has allocated more than USD 15 billion for the delivery of entitlements, like employment, education, health, food etc., through its flagship programmes. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is one such schemes. Niehaus and Sukhtankar (2010) has estimated corruption to represent as much as 79% of the labour expenditures.

TII-CMS India Corruption Report 2007, which was released on June 28, 2008 by the Vice President of India, has estimated that one third of people who live below the poverty line in India paid bribes up in 2007 of up to USD 18.5 million to obtain their fundamental entitlements and basic services. These services included access to healthcare, education, water and even acquiring a ration card for PDS or being registered under the MGNREGS. In another global survey, Transparency International (TI) found that 54% Indians paid one or more bribes in 2009.

Corruption can have negative consequences on efficiency by its impact on government’s provision of goods and services. There is a loss in efficiency because projects that would be cost-effective at the true costs are no longer cost-effective after the costs of corruption have been included. Second, corruption can create additional inefficiencies, and thus costs, by distortions. Corrupt officials usually cannot steal cash directly, as that would be easily detected; instead, they need to go through a variety of more convoluted procedures to extract their loots. These convoluted procedures may induce inefficiencies that can be greater than the direct cost of corruption itself (Olken & Pandey, 2012).

1 2010-11, 2011-12 & 2012-13
Information is power. Thus, public officials who seek personal gains using their position often attempt to withhold information in order to increase the opportunity for corruption. In fact, this was usually legitimised by a colonial law, the Official Secrets Act (1923), under which the disclosure of official information by public servants is an offence. But the enactment of the RTI Act in India on October 12, 2005 transferred the power of information into the hands of ordinary people. It provided the power to access information about anything where public money is involved, except for a few items that are related to the nation’s security. The provision of proactive disclosure of all relevant information to the public was a very effective measure against corruption.

The enactment of RTI was possible after several long and deep-rooted grassroots struggles by civil society organisations (CSO) which began during the beginning of the 1990s. CSOs in Rajasthan have been in the forefront of these grassroots struggles and Mazdoor Kisaan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) led this movement. The movement for the right to information received a fresh impetus from a courageous and powerful grassroots struggle of the rural poor for the right to access information and to combat the rampant corruption in famine relief.

The reverberations during this struggle led to a nationwide demand for a law to guarantee the right to access information to every citizen. It received widespread support from social activists, professionals, lawyers, and persons within the bureaucracy, politics and the media, who are committed to transparent and accountable governance and to empowerment of the people. RTI caused a revolution in providing citizens with the right to demand information from government agencies and to see the official documents. As a result of this 15 year long struggle, differing state governments passed a law to guarantee the people’s right to access information and the state of Rajasthan was one of them. Later, in 2005, the same was enacted by the central government.

Although the movement to enact the RTI took root and grew in Rajasthan, the citizens’ low awareness of it led to underutilisation of the Act. The National Convention on One Year of RTI that was held in New Delhi from 13-15 October 2006 concluded with the warning that citizen awareness of RTI was very low, especially in rural areas. Civil society organisations knew that generating awareness of RTI provisions was one of the primary requirements for effective implementation of the RTI Act. It was a well-known fact that RTI would remain toothless, unless people learned of its power and potential.

In order to overcome this challenge, CUTS, together with the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), devised an intervention with the goal of combating corruption by means of the RTI Act. The plan was to create a cadre of people who were effective in using RTI at the grassroots level. The intention was to create a cadre of persons who were capable of performing three tasks: 1) generating awareness of the provisions of RTI among ordinary people, 2) providing support to ordinary citizens in using RTI, and 3) improving delivery of entitlements and services by reducing corruption in flagship schemes.3

2. The Intervention

The intervention that was piloted by CUTS and outlined in this article was a six-year endeavour that proved to be successful in promoting a ‘citizens against corruption’ movement. It was implemented in three phases, each of which was built upon what had been learned in previous phases. The first phase of the initiative included generating awareness of the provisions of the RTI Act. This helped ordinary people to realise what powers had been transferred to them as a result of the enactment of RTI and how to utilise them for their benefit.

This phase was executed during 2007-08 in nine administrative districts belonging to two divisions4 of Rajasthan, namely Jaipur and Ajmer. The second phase focused on applying the awareness and knowledge acquired through capacity building activities in the first phase. The CGCC members engaged in the processes of GP to improve the delivery of entitlements under three government programmes. These were the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)5, Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna (SGSY)6 and Indira Awaas Yojna (IAY),7 which were managed by rural development departments in two districts of Rajasthan. The CGCC members also assisted two village councils to develop as a model Gram panchayat8 with complete transparency and freedom from corruption.

![Figure 1. The three phases of the RTI Act](image-url)

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3. Schemes and programmes can be used interchangeably.

4. Rajasthan is divided into 7 regions (Ajmer, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Udaipur and Kota) and 33 Districts.

5. NREGA is a programme in which the adult members of any rural household, irrespective of caste, economic status, etc. who are willing to do unskilled manual work, are eligible for work for up to 100 days a year.

6. SGSY is a self-employment programme that provides assistance to the rural poor who live below the poverty line (BPL) to establish micro-enterprises through bank credit and government subsidy to create an income-generating asset.

7. Indira Awaas Yojna is a Government of India social welfare programme to provide housing for the rural poor in India.

8. Gram Panchayat is a constitutional body formed by elective procedure. They are important institutions that implement all kind of development and welfare activities at the level of village or cluster of villages. The size of Gram Panchayat communities can vary, but generally the community’s population is between 2000 and 3000.
In the third and concluding phase of intervention, the members of the CGCC in six selected blocks\(^9\) concentrated their efforts on increasing the use of RTI in only one programme (the MGNREGS one) with the goal of reducing corruption and also gaps in service delivery. CGCC remained pivotal in all three phases of intervention and was central in generating awareness, filing RTI applications and creating a model of a transparent and accountable Gram Panchayat.

CGCC engagement proved to be instrumental in curbing corruption and improving governance. It prepared the ground for community monitoring of services, lobbying of service providers and bringing cases of corruption to light. As a result of increased citizens’ awareness and engagement, the model deterred service providers from engaging in corrupt practices, which mitigated the instances of corruption.

### 3. Phase 1: Creating an environment to begin the battle against corruption

Initially, two CGCCs involving 42 CSOs were combined to run a mass campaign in all nine districts of two administrative divisions - Jaipur and Ajmer – that were selected under the intervention. The process started with an evaluation of the organisations present in the target area of the intervention. All organisations in the area were invited to a meeting to discuss the purpose of the intervention and to determine their interest in associating with the intervention. The 42 organisations were selected to serve as CGCC members. They were selected on the basis of three criteria – their capacity to educate and mobilise people, their capacity to reach out to people in rural areas and their interest in creating an enabling environment to begin the battle against corruption.

Two consortiums, each having 20 to 25 members, accepted responsibility for running a campaign in separate divisions. The members were unevenly distributed among the districts of these two divisions. To serve vigilantly and proactively in their respective divisions, the CGCCs constructed their knowledge base by holding a series of workshops and training sessions. The members were educated on provisions of RTI, the application process, various rural development departments and information available from them. The workshops were intended mainly to develop skill in formulating questions to use in RTI applications in order to get useful information. The members were also given an opportunity to meet and interact with government officials and elected representatives to help in building their confidence. The project management team continues to hold the hands of its members, if and when this is necessary.

In addition, a comprehensive questionnaire was developed for a field survey that was undertaken to obtain the perception of corruption and knowledge of the RTI Act of average citizens, CSOs, CBOs and others. The questionnaire contained a separate set of questions that were intended to gather perceptions of government authorities that were involved in curbing corruption, such as the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), Vigilance Commission etc. The information provided by the survey was used to establish an effective means to generate awareness. The data gathered also served to provide a baseline of awareness data and was used later for evaluation purposes. The members of the CGCCs were involved in data collection to acquaint them with the instances and types of corruption that were prevalent in the system. For the CGCC members who administered the questionnaires and provided hand-holding support to community members encountering instances of corruption, this process was also the opportunity to build their capacity related to corruption research and data collection and analysis.

In order to develop among a larger group of citizens an identification with the intervention, a series of Block Level Consultations (BLCs) were conducted in 17 blocks of two selected districts. The BLCs provided an opportunity for close interaction with rural citizens and to receive suggestions from them on matters of importance at a grass-roots level. The inputs from these BLCs added significantly to the survey’s findings.

In addition to the survey and other consultations, several activities were undertaken. These included holding meetings at various levels, conducting dialogues among various stakeholders, analysing prevailing legal accountability measures, disseminating the research findings, organising workshops and seminars, organising an RTI fair, and producing multilingual publications generate awareness and encourage common citizens to file RTI applications. Overall, an environment was created in which the battle against corruption could start.

While running awareness campaigns, CGCC members also began to file RTI applications and provide support to citizens as and when required. The level of awareness of RTI among citizens increased from 40 percent to 85 percent under the intervention as revealed by the baseline and end line survey. The evaluation report that was prepared by ‘Partnership for Transparency Fund (pTf),’ the granting organisation, stated that the CGCC members succeeded in helping 779 citizens to file RTI applications. The applications mainly sought

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\(^9\) Districts are further divided in to blocks which are intermediary administrative units between district and Gram panchayat.
information related to various social security services in case where entitlements had not reached the intended beneficiaries. The RTI application became a tool for obtaining fair services without the payment of bribes. The evaluation report stated that the request was satisfactorily resolved in 100% of the cases without payment of a bribe.

During this first phase of intervention, there were several signs that progress was being made. The popularisation and use of RTI increased and people began to realise how they can leverage this law to make the government become more accountable for the delivery of basic entitlements and access to corruption-free services. The CGCC members also acquired knowledge and experience. Finally, there was an enabling environment for the intervention with a clear agenda of fighting corruption by effective/maximum application of the RTI Act.

4. Phase 2: Applying RTI as a tool for combating corruption

The activities undertaken in the first phase of the initiative produced an outcome of enhanced awareness among people. Now became an appropriate time to sow the seeds in the soil that had been prepared. The target was to achieve the larger goal of utilizing RTI rigorously to curb corruption. It was decided that the area for intervention would be restricted to two selected districts and three selected schemes. The decision was part of a planned strategy to make the attempts to defeat corrupt practices more rigorous, comprehensive and penetrative. During the first phase, although the awareness level could be increased among citizens, the RTI applications filed through CGCCs were related to various issues and, hence, distributed to various departments at the level of Gram Panchayat, Blocks and districts. The area of intervention was also too great to intensify the intervention as the budget was limited. The idea was to confine the next phase of intervention to two districts within the same geographical area.

The activities were designed to put emphasis on identifying vulnerable points and increasing the number of RTI applications filed. CGCC members were assigned the task of providing adequate support to victims of corruption. It was also decided to identify and support two Gram panchayats from two districts under phase II. Some additional activities for community mobilisation were planned for both citizens and front line service providers by RTI Advisory and Information Services (RTI AIS) within its premises to efficiently deal with the emerging need to educate and guide persons in the RTI application process and dealing with corruption in securing entitled services. This consisted of a few team members who rendered services to people coming for assistance or using information and communication technologies. The CGCC members also used the services of the cell, particularly when they were feeling trapped somewhere in the system. The information about the cell was circulated by various media so that a maximum number of people could benefit. A total of 210 phone calls were received. Most of these callers were persons who were facing a situation in which service providers were demanding bribes to render the entitled services. More than 43 callers/visitors who had been denied the services earlier or who had been asked previously for a bribe succeeded in obtaining services without paying a bribe. The RTI AIS provided all support and guidance in using RTI and other grievance redress mechanisms provided by the government to fight such cases. These were cases in which delivery of services had been delayed or entitlements helped to determine the means with which to move forward. The survey findings also provided the foundation for constructive and continued dialogue with high level officials of the concerned Rural Development Department in advocacy meetings.

Two advocacy meetings were organised at the state level in which policy makers and the media participated. These meetings were extremely useful in placing the grass-roots’ realities and corruption vulnerability survey findings before the policy makers. As a result of these meetings, official orders were given the opportunity of visiting the Gram Panchayat and also made familiar with ways in which to implement development programmes with transparency and to provide information as required. A set of recommendations for simplified and transparent service delivery for selected schemes was submitted to the government and policy makers for appropriate actions. The findings were also disseminated among villagers and front line service providers by RTI Chau upal so that people could understand the extent of their vulnerability to corruption in the delivery of various entitlements.

When members of CGCCs and citizens began to use RTI precisely and rigorously, various problems became evident. These included the citizens’ low understanding of the procedures of specific schemes and citizens not prepared to file applications due to a fear of retribution. To counter these challenges, more workshops were organised in the second phase. They concerned the practical aspects of filing RTI application and how to handle cases of corruption. Networking among members of CGCCs was also initiated. This resulted in the development of a network of a trained critical mass of persons within the community who had experienced the process of filing RTI applications. This network assisted in engaging more citizens and service providers for improved delivery of entitlements and service.

CUTS also established a cell for rendering RTI Advisory and Information Services (RTI AIS) within its premises to efficiently deal with the emerging need to educate and guide persons in the RTI application process and dealing with corruption in securing entitled services. This consisted of a few team members who rendered services to people coming for assistance or using information and communication technologies. The CGCC members also used the services of the cell, particularly when they were feeling trapped somewhere in the system. The information about the cell was circulated by various media so that a maximum number of people could benefit. A total of 210 phone calls were received. Most of these callers were persons who were facing a situation in which service providers were demanding bribes to render the entitled services. More than 43 callers/visitors who had been denied the services earlier or who had been asked previously for a bribe succeeded in obtaining services without paying a bribe. The RTI AIS provided all support and guidance in using RTI and other grievance redress mechanisms provided by the government to fight such cases. These were cases in which delivery of services had been delayed or entitlements

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10 Jaipur & Tonk
11 MGNREGS, SGSY and IAY
12 Harsulia & Munda
13 As per finding, the total bribes paid by the entitlement holders under MGNREGS were found to be Rupees 149 million. 21 percent of people reported that they had paid bribes to obtain jobs under the programme and 53 percent of them reported that they paid an average of 146 Rupees to register for the scheme. 43 percent of them paid an average of Rupees 40 to obtain payment of wages.
14 Chau pal is a community building or open space in the rural areas of North India where meetings take place and people generally visit there in the evening to meet people.
The Consortium of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC) model in Rajasthan, India

were not provided to citizens.

In line with the RTI Chaupal at Gram panchayat level, several block level RTI Chaupals15 were organised in all 17 blocks of both districts to discuss day-to-day issues related to cases of corruption and the filing of RTI applications as solutions for such incidents.

For an example, consider the registration of new job cards at MGNREGS. In the initial stage when MGNREGS became available for all of the rural population, rural families were registered and given free job cards, which were necessary to obtain employment under the scheme. The applications of those who missed their first opportunity to obtain a job card were deliberately held back by front level service providers as a means to extract extra gains. The corruption vulnerability survey had found that bribes were accepted in 56 percent of such cases. An RTI application that demanded to know the status of the application for a job card served as a warning to the public official to process the application quickly. As a result, a job card would be delivered.

There was special attention given and efforts made to cause the selected Gram panchayat to be completely transparent and free of corruption. The officials and elected representatives were given the opportunity of an exposure visit and also made familiar with ways in which to implement the development schemes with transparency and to provide information as required. They were also given support to keep records of the processes. Providing proactive disclosures under RTI was given special emphasis and documents of the Gram panchayat were made available to the villagers. The names of the beneficiaries under different programmes were published on the wall of Gram panchayat. In these MRGP’s, extensive activities were organised to address RTI awareness, the filing process, identifying areas of corruption and using RTI as a tool so that local residents could avail themselves of all services without paying bribes.

Along with generating a stir at the demand side of service delivery, CUTS put pressure on the supply side. The experiences gathered in various activities at the grassroots level were shared with champion policy makers in a constructive dialogue process. There were 11 high level events for dialogue among the CUTS team, CGCCs and policy makers, who included the minister, the principal secretary of the Rural Development Department, district collectors and chief executive officers of the two selected districts. Sharing ground experiences directly with policy makers provided them with an opportunity to understand policy implications and the need to make changes.

Overall, a total of 450 RTI applications were filed in the two districts. Many of them dealt with issues of corruption. Proactive disclosure of the rules and regulations of the identified programmes helped people to understand the process and thus better avail themselves of their entitlements. The networking among CGCC members helped in sharing of knowledge and in bolstering the battle against corruption. After having exposed several anti-corruption cases, the members of CGCCs were recognised as local leaders of anti-corruption activities and, as a result, gained power and stature. The establishment of two RTI model Gram panchayat enabled more than 90 people to learn to file applications under RTI and to fight corruption. As a result, the citizens acquired more confidence in their ability to tackle corruption. Several official orders were passed by the state government to strengthen transparency and accountability in the system. The outcome was transparent functioning of Gram panchayat and efficient service delivery for the people.

5. Phase 3 – Narrowing the scope and focus to increase the impact of the intervention

The model Gram panchayat that was developed in the second phase of the intervention was successful in exposing corruption and bringing systemic changes by frequently filing RTI applications. Learning from the outcomes of this pilot, the area of implementation was subsequently narrowed to six blocks (sub-district units of Jaipur and Tonk Districts) and the focus was restricted to MGNREGS. The reason for this decision was that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was the first major Act to institutionalize RTI and social audit16 (a social accountability tool)17 in all stages of its implementation. Thus, entitlements in the programme are explicitly linked to an existing system of accountability and transparency.

The four selected blocks in Jaipur had approximately 2,16,358 job card holders and two blocks that were selected from Tonk had approximately 93,000 job card holders who were entitled to guaranteed employment of 100 days under MGNREGS. In this phase, to intensify the process, more community volunteers were added. In total, 128 community volunteers from the six blocks were selected. They were taught the provisions of the NREGA, RTI Act and other complaint redress mechanisms issues related to delivery of entitlements in NREGS and corruption in the implementation process. CGCC members from the selected blocks mobilised the community volunteers and motivated them to fight corruption to ensure better delivery of entitlements.

This phase of intervention was focused on identifying the gaps in service delivery under MGNREGS. This was accomplished by the use of qualitative tools of assessment of the delivery of services. Several families were found to be not registered and excluded from the benefits. Many families had not obtained guaranteed jobs for 100 days, even after requesting them. In many cases the worksite facilities were not provided as required. The assessment process revealed frequent instances of corruption in wage payments and fudging of the muster rolls, etc. These were tackled by community volunteers using RTI and other transparency and accountability mechanisms existing under the NREGA.

Numerous meetings between service providers and service users were conducted to resolve issues related to poor delivery of entitlements. The project management team, along

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15 Social audit is an auditing process that involves various stakeholders including citizens.

16 Social accountability is an approach to governance by which citizens, civil society organisations and other non-state actors hold government and services providers responsible for their performance, using an array of mechanisms.
with CGCC members, facilitated these meetings in which community members jointly raised their grievances and put pressure on service providers for corrective action. Opportunities for higher level authorities to meet and listen to actual beneficiaries of the schemes are infrequent. These meetings which higher level officials attended increased the pressure on front-level, public officials.

Approximately 158 of such meetings were conducted at various levels. Around 1,050 grievances were put forward by the entitlement holders during these meetings and actions were taken to resolve 300 of them by the authorities concerned. The members of CGCCs maintained a record of all grievances discussed during these meetings for the necessary follow-up. The grievances were mainly related to the unavailability of work when requested, delayed wage payments, payment of lower wages than was due, misbehaviour of workmates, poor worksite facilities, corruption in wage payment, fake names on muster rolls, etc.

The approach adopted under Phase 3 enabled the following to be achieved:

- The inclusion of many eligible entitlement holders who previously were excluded from the delivery of entitlements.
- Old and new entitlement holders began to receive several entitlements provided in the NREGS programme, such as guaranteed days of employment, wages, allowances and facilities at the worksites.
- The effective participation of the targeted and identified entitlement holders in all stages of MGNREGS – identification, planning, monitoring and evaluation – in the six blocks selected in the Jaipur and Tonk districts.
- Enhanced power of the people, allowing them to demand information and better service delivery.
- Improvement in the quality of governance and reduction of corruption in the implementation of the MGNREGS in Rajasthan, especially in the six blocks of the Jaipur and Tonk districts.

6. CGCC Model

The CGCCs were envisaged as a group of empowered CSOs or individuals who were equipped with the knowledge, information and ability to provide support to ordinary citizens and have a deep outreach capacity into the communities. Hence, the CGCC had to perform the role of a “watchdog,” as well as a local resource centre for the application of RTI.

The members of CGCCs signed a memorandum of agreement with CUTS and were assigned certain tasks to perform. They operated under their individual identities and were paid a small honorarium each month for their involvement in the intervention. The CGCC approach, which is informal in nature, was used successfully during the intervention and proved to respond to a grassroots need.

In each phase, the intervention was implemented by CGCC members. They were central figures in the intervention, helping CUTS to obtain information from the grassroots to present to government and policy makers fight at the level of appellate authority to bring about changes. At the same time, they worked at the grassroots level with citizens, other CSOs, service providers and elected representatives, enhancing the clients’ power to demand information.

![Figure 3. Interactions between CUTS and CGGC](image)

The principal functions of CGCCs were the following:

- Working as a local ‘resource person-cum-centre’ for RTI & MGNREGS,
- Generating awareness among local citizens and motivating them to file RTI applications,
- Providing moral support to RTI applicants in their fight against corrupt service providers,
- Acting as a proactive watchdog against corruption and in support of good governance,
- Creating an enabling environment for good governance at the grassroots,
- Holding the hands of RTI users to ensure that the impact created is maintained and,
- Empowering grassroots CSOs/NGOs.

Developing CGCCs proved to be highly useful. It required considerable efforts to select credible CSOs and individuals, build their capacity and provide continuous handholding throughout the intervention. However, once CGCCs were formed and had become active, they created a great impact on the functioning of Gram panchayat and front level administrative offices. The wide and deep reach capacities of CGCC
members into the communities, bringing out grassroots issues from rural areas and presenting them to the policy makers, helped CUTS to bring policy level changes too.

However, in a few places, the members of CGCCs could not be retained as some did not understand initially that the fight against corruption could become intense and jeopardise their relationship with the service providers with whom they previously worked.

7. A few critical implementation issues

A few critical implementation issues arose during the intervention. The team, along with members of CGCCs and community volunteers, worked on solving the problems constructively and ended up with successful redesigns. We refer to these implementation issues as “critical” because planning how to deal with them can be the key to achieving success in redesigning intervention.

1. The attitude of policy makers and bureaucrats towards initiatives against corruption was not encouraging. Initially, a majority of the service providers avoided the discussions, meetings, etc. However, gradually champions within government departments were identified and approached. Later, others began to joining the intervention, especially after recognising the benefit of being known as a pro-RTI bureaucrat and receiving media coverage.

2. The problem of frequent transfers of bureaucrats and front level service providers at the Gram Panchayat level interrupted the rhythm of project progress. However, this also served as an opportunity to replicate the model in the new locations to which the officials were transferred. It was frequently quite difficult for the team to orient new officials to the project’s activities and, as a result, the process had to begin anew.

3. Most of the local CBOs in the project catchment area have small budgets and depend on government grants. As a result, it was difficult in some blocks and Gram Panchayat to identify adequate numbers of CGCC members to work on issues related to corruption.

4. There were several CBOs who initially joined the intervention to be part of the consortium without giving much thought to the future consequences and who withdrew from the activities later on. Some of the CBOs that also were involved in running government-sponsored activities under various programmes and involved in unfair practices in collusion with public officials, did not continue with the initiative. In those cases, other CBOs were identified and included in the consortium.

5. Advocacy with government regarding anti-corruption measures was very challenging. However, due to the reputation of CUTS as a trustworthy organisation among the senior ministers and bureaucrats, it was possible to secure the cooperation of line departments and to achieve changes.

6. Initially people were also afraid to file RTI applications and exercise their right to demand information about the delivery of entitlements. Hence, CUTS, as well as CGCC members, filed (and covered the cost of) many RTI applications on behalf of citizens. When people came to better understand the power and potential of RTI, they began to come forward to use RTI.

7. The lengthy election process of Panchayati Raj institutions also created problems in advocacy, the dialogue process and ensuring participation of service providers in several block Chaupals.

8. Setting up an RTI model Gram Panchayat to be fully transparent, accountable and free of corruption was very challenging as the government operates hundreds of schemes and programmes for people living in rural areas, each having the potential for corruption.

9. Since supply-side capacity was also very weak to deal with the RTI applications, the government was not sufficiently prepared to implement the Act when parliament enacted it. This also was the reason for poor performance of government officials in their dealing with RTI applications. The government had no established process with which to deal with cases in which information officers had failed to provide information for any reason.

8. Conclusion

Effective implementation of the RTI Act was not a priority of government officials, especially in rural areas. The earlier mind set of officials had not changed. The officials favoured concealing information, rather than providing it to ordinary people. The ability to implement the Act and to provide information was also an issue. In such a situation, the intervention proved to be very effective. It increased the ability of officials and of the clients both in a demand and supply side. The knowledge generated among the CGCCs, RTI applicants and other CSOs created a sustainable cadre of persons who were involved in providing support to people to fight corruption and to receive their entitlements.

The greatest success of the intervention enhanced the voice and power of poor and marginalised persons. In doing so, it enabled other stakeholders such as government officials, elected representatives and civil society organisations to advance the agenda of transparency and accountability in the implementation process of development programmes to improve development outcomes.

There are always some champions among the policy makers, implementing authorities, etc., in the system, who are serious about reforming the processes. They should be engaged constructively. The media also should be considered as a relevant stakeholder, particularly when fighting corruption. Developing a network of CGCC members and proactive
citizens is also very useful in lobbying against corruption. The development of model Gram panchayat suggested a framework for replication.

Although reforms rarely bring immediate improvements in service delivery, this intervention was able to bring a tangible improvement in the delivery of entitlements, bringing more people to the purview of entitlements, reducing corruption, solving grievances and, above all, bringing systemic changes. These changes are still visible in the areas where they were implemented and can be measured and witnessed.

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Why local realities matter for Citizens’ Voice and Accountability.
Lessons from Mwananchi Uganda pilot projects

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Abstract. This is about an action research study of the citizen voice and accountability implemented by the Mwananchi Governance and Transparency Fund Program in Uganda. The three piloted governance innovations, which include the Bataka informal justice model, child education monitors and the Village Budget Clubs, were tested for five years. As a result of these mechanisms, service delivery institutions have responded better to community priority needs in agriculture, education and justice thematic areas. Community participation has been enhanced and citizens have been empowered to use the given accountability spaces. In discussions, petitions, community radio and by means of their representatives, they now demand accountability. In Kibaale District, the panel of elders have made it possible for community members to litigate civil and referred criminal cases in formal courts. The process has eased the formal courts’ workload, delays and or a lack of justice. The three initiatives demonstrated that having a voice and accountability is possible if the initiative works within the local realities or locally-based processes that locals know and appreciate. In that way, the members of the community collectively participate in and direct their own development in what is referred to as a ‘best fit’.

Keywords. Accountability, Action Research, Mwananchi, Citizens’ Voice, Interlocutors, Innovation, Uganda

1. Introduction

For decades, good governance has meant mimicking ‘good policies’ and ‘good institutions’ prescribed by the capitalist democracies (Ha-Joon, 2003). Millions of dollars in aid have been spent, but with total failure as the result (Booth, 2011). The Mwananchi program sought to address this problem of misallocations by discovering what assistance really works for the poor. People look to government for solutions, but often are disappointed. In a search for peace, prosperity, better roads, food and security - to mention only a few - people will always look to government.

During the last two decades, the Government of Uganda has undertaken significant public sector reforms. In particular, the government has implemented a decentralized, liberalized, privatization and restructuring processes. Public service delivery is fully decentralized with national ministries playing a coordination, monitoring and policy making roles. The private sector also fulfills a complementary role.

Proponents of the decentralization process assumed that such system works better than the previous system because it is closer to the people and better understands the needs of the citizens. However, this is not always true. Even in a decentralized system, people still must deal with bureaucracies and service delivery gaps.

The following important question remains unanswered. What really works best for the poor? David Booth wrote that the right development approach is ‘best fit’ rather than ‘best practice’. No governance template is valid everywhere and at all times. Therefore, best fit is the only single approach that will be truly meaningful to the people. By best fit, Booth means working with the grain, building on existing institutional arrangement with recognizable benefits. In other words, building on existing and community based systems works better. This also means replacing direct support to facilitate local problem solving by empowering the people themselves to employ collective action.

It should be noted that good governance and institutional development is increasingly becoming a
fashionable concept for many developing institutions. However, the state need not be the sole provider of solutions. Ordinary citizens need not always look to government for answers. Although institutions are important, there is a need to transform them beyond the framework of the state to self-governance. Many developing countries face the dilemma of ‘free ride’ where people are reluctant to contribute to the delivery of public services. Community-based approaches, such as ‘bulungi bwansi,’ which refers to ‘collective action’ programs, in Buganda during the 1950s ended years ago.

Models of informal accountability, such as the one Mwananchi implemented in Uganda, address specific development problems in government’s provision of public goods or public services. These problems include the ‘free ride’ and government accountability (Tsai 2007). Solidarity groups, such as clans, tribes, religious institutions, self-help and public advocacy groups play significant roles in responding to the development problems. When democratically elected leaders fail to respond to the citizens’ needs, the latter turn to informal or semi-democratic systems. This paper provides case studies of the Lira, Kibaale and Masindi districts where these models have been tested.

2. The Mwananchi program

Mwananchi was a five year program that the Department for International Development (DFID) supported. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) coordinated the program. The program sought to increase the voice of citizens and accountability so that ‘citizens effectively express their views and interests and hold governments to account for their actions’. The program’s rationale was that ‘civil society, media, and elected representatives are better able to understand and support the use of evidence-based approaches to shape policies and practices that meet the interests of the citizens.’ The program focussed on promoting institutional capabilities, institutional accountability and improving the response of institutions to the needs of the poor. This program was implemented in five other countries namely Malawi, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Ethiopia. The program was implemented in Uganda with 10 partners and coordinated by the Development Research and Training (DRT) organization. The partners were Lira NGO Forum, Masindi district NGO Forum, Masindi District Education Network, Cross Culture Foundation of Uganda, Community Development and Child Welfare Initiative, Forum for Women in Democracy, Kalangala District NGO Forum, World Voices Uganda, Kibaale Civil Society Organizations Network and Kapchorwa Civil Society Organizations Alliance. Each partner piloted innovative governance model at a local level.

2.1 Program Approach and Methodology

The Mwananchi program was an action research that provided a response to the question what works for the poor? Outcome mapping (OM) was used to measure change. An explanation of the ‘game-changers’ and the context-dependent behavior and how they influenced citizen voice and accountability was obtained (Tembo, 2012). The changes involved in citizens’ voice and accountability are complex and dynamic, because they involve webs of relationships among citizens and state actors. The program sought to understand the behavioral changes of some key governance interlocutors or actors (namely civil society, media, elected representatives and traditional leaders) in bolstering the citizens’ demand for accountability. Ten organizations were provided with ‘small’ grants to implement innovative pilot good governance and accountability focused projects in the six Districts of Luwero, Kibaale, Kalangala, Masindi, Lira and Kapchorwa.

3. Findings

3.1 Bataka Court Innovation

The Government of Uganda follows a fully-fledged legal regime that was inherited from the British colonialist. Today, the Judiciary is the third arm of Government, under the doctrine of separation of powers. Exceptional matters that require constitutional interpretation are taken to Constitutional Court. A legal case can be registered at any of the three layered courts in the judicial structure. Uganda has a pyramidal judicial structure with a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeal and a High Court of Uganda. The decisions of the Supreme Court are binding. There are also three levels of magistrates. These are the Chief Magistrates, Magistrates, Grade 1 and Magistrates, Grade 2. Other subordinate courts include Family and Children Court and tribunals such as the land and tax appeals tribunals. Despite the ‘rich’ judicial structures, poor citizens cannot access justice due to the expense of facilitating legal officers, as well as the cost of transport. Complainants are required to provide financial facilitation to lawyers for them to handle their cases. Court cases are also handled in English which is prohibitive for some local speakers.

The Bataka court justice system is a community-based informal justice service delivery model that World Voices Uganda (WVU) initiated to enhance access to justice by means of informal community justice systems (Bataka achieving change. This approach allows partners to understand what happened, why it happened and how it happened. Action Research is a natural way of acting and learning at the same time. It occurs in a spiral manner (action and reflection).

Outcome Mapping (OM) is a participatory methodology that enables partners to understand change in the behavioral patterns of project actors. The approach helps partners to know the roles, relationships and performance of actors using matrices to fill particular changes achieved.

WVU was initiated in 2004 to respond to violations of human rights, rampant corruption, poor health and ethnic conflicts that were damaging the moral and sociopolitical fabric of Uganda’s society. WVU has for years developed recognition in enhancing access to justice for the poor, protection and promotion of human rights, good governance, accountability as well as conflict resolution and management.
Courts). It is in keeping with the strategy to empower ordinary citizens to establish their own justice agenda and to engage their elected leaders, duty bearers or service providers, media and civil society in dialogue and community debates.

The Bataka justice model was implemented in Kyaterekera and Ruteete sub-counties of Kibaale district. The concept ‘Bataka’ comes from “Omutaka,” which is a ‘Bantu’-speaking native term that means ‘a native or bonafide resident.’ Hence, Bataka is plural for bonafide residents. The Bataka court model is based on a historical judicial system in which communities and members of clans met to resolve their issues on a daily basis.

The Bataka courts adjudicate civil cases that include domestic and family issues and conflicts over land or succession. World Voices Uganda facilitated the election of the panel of elders, trained them in their roles and simple judicial systems and laws, created awareness of the system and encouraged communities to embrace it.

Unlike the formal courts, Bataka Courts are more accessible to the poor. The courts are established within the communities, matters are decided quickly and there are no legal or court costs. The community-based courts are acceptable to the communities given their historical perspective. The crimes are considered to be community problems and all citizens are concerned about them. Consequently, the decisions of the courts emphasize reconciliation and social harmony. The courts serve to prevent crime because everyone in the community will share their opinions which are used to decide the cases (judgment). This fosters greater respect for the law within the community.

The court consists of a panel of seven elders elected by the members of the community. The elders must be persons of moral standing and command respect within the community. They must also be middle aged, trustworthy and knowledgeable of the social and political aspects of the community. Cases are brought to any panel of elders who, in consultation with the other members, convene a community meeting or council. The meeting is held in an agreed, central space within the community. Such cases can be decided quickly or at a day-to-day basis. Judgment can be made within a day unlike the formal courts that may take months or even years. Cases are heard in an open space and with the participation of all community members. Community members assume the roles of prosecutor and judge. Witnesses are heard from both sides (plaintiff and defendant) before a decision is made. A judgment is rendered immediately after hearing all of the witnesses. Cases that involve confidential matters, such as conjugal issues, are heard in privacy by a few elders. An appeal to the mainstream systems is allowed, if a party is not satisfied with the judgment.

Table 1. Cases handled by Bataka courts (2011-13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cases recorded</th>
<th>Cases Resolved</th>
<th>Cases referred</th>
<th>Institutions referred to</th>
<th>Cases back to Bataka courts</th>
<th>Referred from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land matters</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sub county</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>LC2, LC3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Conflicts</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>LC1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>LC1, police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Debts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Police, LC 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation of property</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>withdrawn from court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Assault</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>LC1, Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child neglect</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Probation office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>BC did not have mandate to handle</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bataka court records 2011-13

A number of similar informal systems have existed and are still being practiced in many communities. In Malawi and Bangladesh, almost 80 and 60 percent of all disputes respectively are solved by customary justice fora. In Bangladesh, such systems are called Salish. In Sierra Leone, 85 percent of the population falls under the jurisdiction of customary law, defined under the constitution. In the same way, about 80% of Burundians take their cases to the ‘Bashingantahe.’ In Rwanda, ‘Gacaca’ courts were also established to assist in view of the case backlog. The Acholi in Uganda still practice ‘Matoput’ with councils of elders (See Ewa Wojkowska;2006)
The government’s cattle restocking project in Luweero District has been in limbo. Mismanagement, lack of supervision and unaccountability has brought the project to near collapse. Reports show that more than half of the animals that were offered to farmers of Kasaala parish in 2008 could not be traced. Ms Justine, Kivumbi, Kasaala Village Budget Club (VBC) secretary, says of the 21 cows-worth UGX 8.4 million, which were distributed in the parish, only eight managed to survive until giving birth. The calves produced by the cows were intended to be passed on to other beneficiaries. “The majority of the farmers reported that their animals died, but some sources disclosed to us that many of the animals disappeared during the festive season. This implies that some beneficiaries sold off the animals or slaughtered them to make quick money,” she adds. She explained that of the eight calves produced, only seven had been passed on to second line beneficiaries who were all men, - by June 2012. Basing on the period, it was anticipated that by now, the animals would have multiplied to about 42 heads of cattle and benefiting 42 households. Mr. Wilson Nsubuga, a resident of Kyevenza village, attributes the mess to lack of supervision, which offered people a chance to sell off or neglect the animals. Nsubuga says since the animals were distributed in July 2008, the Restocking Committee - a team that was set to oversee the project, never followed up those who received the animals. “It wasn’t until when VBCs started asking for accountability that the restocking committee woke up. It started following up on the cattle, but the damage that had already been done was significant,” he noted. The District Chief Administrative Officer, Mr. Christopher Ssande Kyomya, also blames the restocking committee for failing to fulfill their responsibilities. However, between April and June 2012, VBCs intensified their campaigns on the restocking project, mounting pressure to the restocking committee to change its practices. Due to pressure, the sub-county restocking committee called a meeting to assess the project on June 19th and June 22nd 2012 and resolved to visit everyone who had received a cow, in order to find out the status of the animal. “Those who lost the animals will be asked to explain and if their explanations are not substantial, they will be asked to refund the cost of the cow, or face Courts of law. Those who refused to pass on animals as per agreement will face the same fate,” Mr. Lwanga says. This new stance has already yielded gains, with one woman who had refused to pass on a calf being required to give it to another farmer.

3.2 Village Budget Clubs Influence Change at the Local Level

The Village Budget Clubs (VBCs) are community-based initiatives implemented by The Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) in Kasaala Parish, Luweero Sub County (Luweero District). The project seeks to enhance the capacity of grassroots communities to demand for accountability by monitoring the Community Development Driven Programme (CDD), National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), restocking Programme and public Health services delivery.

VBCs are community groups consisting of 20 members (12 women, 8 men). FOWODE has worked with four VBCs. The community selects the VBC members during a community meeting. Persons of high character who are respected members of the community are selected.

After receiving training in budget analysis, monitoring, advocacy, communication and documentation, VBCs use a community-based tool to monitor the delivery of agriculture and health services quarterly, to document emerging issues and to organize a consultation meeting to agree on issues of advocacy. VBCs then organize an interface meeting with the duty bearers and monitors progress in discharging their commitments.

Issues community members raised include lack of transparency and accountability in the delivery of agricultural services. Other issues include the failure to disclose budgets; the distribution of seeds at night to friends and relatives; and the distribution of sub-standard inputs and inadequate drugs at the public health center and failure to provide health outreach.

The VBC project increased transparency and accountability among the service providers at the community level. The project enhanced supervision and responsibility among actors. Community members followed up on the service delivery of health centers and the agricultural programs. As a result, better agricultural inputs are distributed. The project enhanced the capacity of the community members to engage with their duty bearers. For instance, the community of...
Kyevunze petitioned the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to rectify the lack of adequate drugs and immunization outreach. The CAO commissioned an audit, which eventually resulted in reinstating a health officers’ duty roster, recruitment of two security guards (to prevent drug leakage) and the termination of the health unit in-charge.

3.3 Child Monitors: Where children hold education leaders accountable

Universal Primary Education is a human right, a fundamental component of poverty eradication and one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG; Goal 2). The Government of Uganda, together with other commonwealth countries, is committed to providing quality and relevant education for all by 2015. Such commitments follow standards, such as classroom spaces to accommodate only 40 pupils and being instructed by fully trained teachers. In the same way, government are required to allocate at least 20% of their recurring budgets to education. Universal Primary Education (UPE) enrollment has increased from 2.5 million children to almost 8.8 million today. However, the gains in public primary education are being eroded by the deteriorating quality of delivery and the unchanging school dropout rate.

According to Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU 2011), only 23% of children who enroll in primary schools complete primary seven. In fact, 32% of primary one pupils drop out of school before primary two. The reasons for the dropout range from a lack of interest (by parents and pupils), early marriage, early pregnancies, unofficial costs, sickness, inadequate hygiene and poor sanitary facilities, sexual harassments and child labor.

The average classroom-to-pupil and textbook-to-pupil ratios are still 1:94 and 1:3 respectively. In Masindi, the pupil-to-desk ratio stands at 5:1 and the latrine-to-pupil ratio is 1:95. This facility gap affects the performance of pupils, especially in rural schools of Masindi and Lira districts. Of the 2,191 pupils that sat for the PLE in 2011 in Masindi only 9% passed in division one and 54% in division two. Of the 66 schools, 22 had no pupil passing in division one (according to Masindi district Local government development plan). The UWEZO Uganda report for 2011 reveals that 93% of the P.3 pupils tested could not correctly read a primary two level English story and that 87% of the same level could not solve numerical division sums of primary two level. Therefore children under UPE are not learning. The Education budget declined to 14 percent from 17 percent in the period of 2007/08 to 2012/13. The sector is also challenged by delays in releases of the funds. More than 1,374,000 children of school age do not attend school despite availability of a universal education program. Automatic promotion is another challenge to the delivery of the service. Politicians and parents also misinterpreted UPE as being free. In addition, absenteeism was high among teachers in the Lira and Masindi districts. In Lira, teachers’ lesson development and lesson plans were not being developed. Children are stakeholder in the education service delivery and, if properly involved, would identify and divulge the root causes of the problems of education.

The two local CSO platforms, Masindi District Education Network (MADEN) and Lira NGO forum (LNGF) attempt to address these education challenges by organizing child monitoring and child advocacy clubs to influence service delivery in both districts.

Both partners implemented a primary education engagement project in the Lira and Masindi districts. MADEN operated in six selected government-aided primary schools in Mirya and Kimengo sub-counties. LNGF operated in 10 schools of Lira sub-county and town council.

Child monitors are pupils who the project trained to track the teaching process in class. This monitoring process is based on a system of ‘class monitors’ who 40 years ago used to organize other pupils to collect exercise books for marking, reported stubborn pupils in class and those who spoke inappropriate language, particularly vernacular (local language). The model tested involved school monitors who were identified from Primary Five, Six and Seven in 16 primary schools. These were selected by other classmates and approved by the head teachers. The two organizations worked with a total of 288 monitors and advocacy club members.

One half (50%) of these monitors were girls. The monitors work for one year, but may be re-selected in the following year on the basis of merit. These children are trained in monitoring, reporting and advocacy.

Each week, lesson monitoring sheets are distributed to the schools where the monitor daily ticks off only the lessons taught and cross marks those lessons that are missed. The pupils then sign and submit these to the head teacher who may act upon some of the issues that arise with the respective teachers that missed lessons. The head teacher records the action that she took (where necessary), signs the form, retains a copy and forwards the original to LNGF, MADEN and the school’s inspector.

In addition, the monitors and club members utilize suggestion boxes by which other members communicate their issues of concern. The suggestion boxes, which have been provided to each school, are opened every week by the monitor or club members in the presence of a patron (who is a teacher) and a member of the school’s management committee.

5 Masindi District Education Network (MADEN) is a registered umbrella organization of all Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Masindi that operate in educational thematic area with the aim of ‘making education for all a reality’. MADEN was founded in 2005. Its core objective is “to harmonize, co-ordinate and to harness the educational policy and advocacy work by various education actors, such as learners, communities/children and local governance leadership”.

6 Lira NGO Forum is an umbrella body of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) operating in Lira District that was established in 1998. The organization was the first forum to be established in northern Uganda. The Forum is a membership organization that was formed to coordinate activities of CSOs, to mobilize resources, to advocate for the rights of the voiceless and to increase the capacity of CSOs and to promote networking and information sharing among organizations. According to the founders, the organisation is a ‘laboratory’ for democracy (membership based), is a ‘green house’ for civil society. It facilitates membership capacity-building), coordinates and enables civil society to stand together and to consolidate advocacy strength.
4. Some of the success of this model

Some level of policy reform and practice has been achieved. In Lira, the implementers influenced the District Council to enact an education ordinance to regulate the performance and delivery of the educational service. MADEN popularized the UPE policy and community members are responding by contributing to the education service (by feeding students and paying for educational materials). The Parents and Teachers’ Association of Barapwo Primary school (Lira) constructed a teacher’s house alongside the one that was delayed by the district under NUSAF 2. In Kinuuma Masindi, the parents’ committee mobilized the community members to construct the head teacher’s office.

The projects empowered parents and pupils to engage duty bearers or service providers. In Masindi, Kigulya primary school parents rejected a grinding mill that was being constructed poorly. As a result, the district terminated the contract. Children of the pilot schools can understand and interpret the work plan and the lesson plan, as well as the syllabus and timetable. Through suggestion boxes, debating clubs, drama and community dialogues, which are commonly termed ‘barazas,’ pupils are given a platform by which they can make known what affects them. One boy of Omito Primary school in Lira said, “I come to school very early every day, but I stay hungry the whole day. I must tell the headmaster this problem through a suggestion box today.”

5. Challenges to the models

The Bataka courts are appreciated by different interlocutors and boundary partners, such as the Kagadi district magistrate, the District local government, scholars, members of Parliament, media and even Justice Law and order sector (JLOS). However, they have no concrete formal legal procedures that link them to formal institutions of justice. The implementers have attempted to engage government through policy dialogues and by closely working with three champions in parliament to enact a policy on informal justice systems. There is no breakthrough yet, but efforts continue.

There are no measures with which to enforce decisions made by the Bataka courts. Compared to formal courts which have the police and other enforcement mechanisms, the informal courts have none. This implies that decisions are often not binding and so the system mainly relies on social pressure and social harmony. Nevertheless, citizens’ collective involvement in the civil case litigation matters considerably.

The village Budget Clubs faced resistance from the duty bearers who provide budget information reluctantly. Some duty bearers perceive the clubs to be monitors pushed to control their corrupt tendencies and so they keep on resisting. It is only through the community pressure that the leaders are able to divulge and act upon the information.

The child monitoring model created a special child in the school. This child is envied by other children and some teachers. In the beginning, some teachers resisted the process, but later embraced it after realizing the benefits. Although the monitoring process is simple, learning versus monitoring performance of teachers is another challenge that the children face. The time spent by monitors needs to be examined to ensure that they do not miss the benefit of lessons taught while monitoring performance.

6. What we learn from these small interventions

These pilot projects demonstrate the value of collective action as Naidoo (2010) and Babbington et al (2008) articulated. Collective action can be achieved if it is adapted to the local reality or builds on already accepted community based structures. Social networks and realities are rooted in the community. Mwananchi built on social realities that were already known and associated with in the community. The Mwananchi program reflects the understanding of Moser (1996), Krishna (2002) and Deepa et al (1999) that communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and a civic association will be in a stronger position to confront
Box 2. Mwananchi introduces new monitoring tool to track teachers’ performance

Teachers’ attendance registers are used to monitor their performance in class. But this monitoring system doesn’t guarantee their commitment to teach, as many sign the attendance book and disappear. According to Mr. Ely Achol, director of studies at Ojwina primary school, it is difficult to track teachers’ individual weaknesses or understand their problems under such a system, since it focuses more on monitoring whether the teacher reported in at school or not. “This monitors attendance, but doesn’t influence performance. It requires a system that addresses more than one challenge to increase the grades,” he says. Meanwhile, after realizing that performance of primary schools in Lira district was deteriorating, Lira NGO Forum, organized an interface meeting for all stakeholders in which it was suggested that a new teachers’ monitoring tool be introduced. Participants opted for a teachers’ lesson plan as a new monitoring tool to track teachers’ performance. The District Education Officer, Mr. George Obua and administrators of six schools, attended the meeting. After the meeting, LNGF, in partnership with Development Research and Training (DRT), introduced the teachers’ lesson plan in the four schools (Lira, Omito, Barapwo and Ojwina) where Mwananchi is being implemented. Within a short period, the method has started paying off. “Mwananchi programme has made curricula development, a long abandoned practice compulsory for all teachers. It has made administration very easy since it has controlled teacher’s absenteeism and late arrival,” said Ojwina Primary School Deputy Head Teacher Geoffrey Okello.

“If it was not for LNGF initiatives, Ojwina Primary School wouldn’t have completed its syllabus,” Mr. Anyii Nelson revealed in a community meeting held at the school. He said once the system is sustained, he expects the school to perform better in this year’s (2012) Primary Leaving Examinations. Similarly, Mr Godfrey Dila, Lira Primary school head teacher, says the programme has assisted in restoring order in the schools. “Teachers used to spend much of the time doing their own business, surrendering the classes to some pupils to lead others in singing. When you hear pupils singing, you may think that teachers are in class yet children are supporting themselves,” Mr. Dila says. He adds that, due to the absence of the teachers in class, some pupils used to absent themselves from school. Mr. Martin Echan, the Parents and Teachers’ Association (PTA) chairperson of Lira Primary School, confesses that while using old tools, it was difficult to achieve change even though teachers were always asked to change their attitude. Lango Koran (primary School Head teacher, Mr. Raymond Ayo (where practice was emulated) admits that he first resisted the approach, but he appreciated it after it saved him from running after teachers.”During the orientation process, I resisted the teachers’ lesson plan scheme. I thought it could not work. But within just a month, the scheme has simplified my supervising role. Currently, we complete our syllabus on time.”

Story by Rita Edwe (March 2012)

References


Development Research and Training (2012) Mwananchi significant change stories


Community development and participation in Togo: the case of AGAIB Plateaux

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Abstract. In order to reinforce the capacity for action of local African communities, international organisations support “participatory” projects that encourage greater local involvement in the implementation of actions. By adopting a well-designed approach, with realistic projects that address precise needs, local communities can be given the techniques and resources for their economic and social emancipation, thereby combating poverty.

This mainly qualitative and documentary research follows activities of an AGAIB, an Agence d’Appui aux Initiatives de Base (Grassroots Initiative Support Agency) in Togo’s Plateaux region. This organisation has opted for a form of participatory democracy, enabling communities to take control of their situation through income generating activities (IGAs) and to participate at every step in projects that they themselves have initiated. To secure the future of these programs, however, and extend them to all Togolese communities, greater participation is required from the authorities.

Keywords. Self-empowerment, Community, Local democracy, Community development, Togo

1. Introduction

The concept of development can be defined as a series of more or less linear changes, from traditional to more modern modes of production, from a daily life marked by suffering and privation to a more comfortable life, made possible by relatively recent progress. Development highlights the need to maintain or improve people’s quality of life, to guarantee the sustainability of resources, to reduce differences in standards of living, to promote community self-sufficiency, and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge or wealth.

In African countries, and in particular in Togo, there are many obstacles that impede the dynamics of development. The incapacity of the authorities to meet the basic vital needs of their populations, especially those in rural areas, is clearly evident: inadequate educational facilities, poor healthcare provision, and dismal levels of access to safe drinking water. In 2006, a national study revealed that only 17% of children aged 11 were enrolled in the last year of primary school, and that infant mortality was high, at 77 for 1000 births (DGCSN, 2006). Aware of this situation, the government and its international partners put in place action programs to improve standards of living. During the 1990s, however, and a large part of the following decade, these projects were doomed to failure by macroeconomic mismanagement, lack of transparency in the investment of public resources, democratic deficit, and incompatibility with local realities.

All partnership and development perspectives call for a new organisational ethic, founded on local community initiatives and participation. New approaches have emerged, with the goal of putting people at the heart of development and driving home the message that communities should be the artisans of their own development: self-empowerment for men and women through local organisations.

The aim of this research is to propose, by starting out from the “AGAIB method”, a better match between the real socio-economic aspirations of local communities and public development policies. In terms of democracy and participation, the AGAIB has opted for transparency in the management of its activities, enabling communities to take control of their situation through income generating activities.
and to participate at every step in projects of which they are the main initiators.

Local democracy—based on the active participation of the beneficiaries and the fulfillment of the relevant conditions—is a pre-requisite for local community development.

2. Scoping the issues

From the economic perspective, when we speak of development, we refer to all of the technical, social, demographic and cultural transformations that accompany growth in production. It is therefore a concept that reflects the structural and qualitative aspects of growth. It can—indeed must—be associated with the idea of social and economic progress: improving living standards, educational levels, and well-being for the entire population (Rehim, 2007).

All of these theoretical proposals rely on factors that often ignore the real needs of populations and frequently lead to the failure of programs. Another cause of failure is corruption among some of the actors involved in these initiatives, a phenomenon that is found in the communities themselves, within peasant groups (Amouzou, 2005). “In practice, [...]” in Togo, the humanitarian cause has become something of a golden calf, sparking merciless competition. Demobilization, corruption, political blackmail, clientelism, nepotism, destabilization campaigns, secret deals and coalitions, anti-competitive agreements, embezzlement, poaching of staff... it’s all there” (Atchrimi, 2008: 266).

The country’s socio-economic situation is partly to blame for this state of affairs. But humanitarian practices are also a key factor. The procedures for selecting one NGO, to the detriment of another, force NGOs to establish their credentials. Once the calls for tenders have been sent out, each organization tries to respond by showcasing, in the context of their projects, anything that the donors might find persuasive. Since nothing can be done without their financial backing, the criteria on which these arguments are based are given very careful attention.

To win the brief, specialists, who are sometimes members of institutions, are called in. “The role attributed to them, by virtue of their knowledge, is not unlike that of a good sales technician tasked with closing a contract deal. Besides, there is nothing exaggerated about this comparison: at the end of the day, winning the call for tenders is synonymous with getting paid” (Atchrimi, ibid.). The competing organizations therefore stress the quality of their evaluation method, and the professionalism with which it will be applied, so much so that the figures and statistics—which might ordinarily be thought of as indicators of the results, no more—substitute for the actual results and even supersede them, becoming an end in their own right.

In Togo, the facts on the ground are that people are suffering, for example, from the lack of access to drinking water. The problem is more perceptible in rural areas, where hydraulic installations are few and far between, and most of them are inoperative. The visitor to the Plateaux region soon realizes that the main priorities for the poorest communities are of three kinds: access to education, access to healthcare, and access to drinking water. On top of which comes the need to have access to funding for income generating activities, a consideration made even more salient by the impact of the food crisis. What is more, these communities are trained and supervised by the Project so that they can participate more effectively in their own development. The poor track record of the actions attempted thus far gives even greater legitimacy to a community’s right to have a say in decisions that affect it.

Participatory development presupposes greater transparency, a larger role for local organisations, and respect for human rights, which includes efficient and accessible legal systems. It is about promoting the introduction of an alternative system of management, of expressing needs, and of implementing projects, by getting the beneficiaries of the programs to pool their efforts as part of a local dynamic built on the community-based management of their problems. These initiatives are considered to be innovative; they are the consequences of the political and economic democratization process on which Togo embarked in 2005. There are now an increasing number of forums of expression for local actors.

The approach we present here is founded on community participation, which is seen as the process by which people are empowered to get involved, actively and genuinely, in determining the questions that concern them, in making decisions about the factors that affect their lives, in formulating and implementing policies around the planning, design and delivery of services, and in pursuing the actions undertaken to make change happen.

The experience of the AGAIBs, (Agences d’Appui aux Initiatives de Base—Grassroots Initiative Support Agencies) offers a prism through which we can arrive at an intelligible analysis of the contribution made by participatory models to community development. After years of experience in the practice of participatory local development, it is important to understand in what way the AGAIB approach has contributed to reducing poverty in certain areas of Togo’s Plateaux region. This paper sets out to analyze the characteristics of the AGAIB approach by using the following questions as a starting-point: What are the components of the organisation’s approach? What is innovative about it, and how does it contribute to the issue of the sustainable development of local communities in Togo? How can the authorities appropriate it, with a view to rolling it out nationwide?

Our basic postulate is that the success of community development projects supported by the AGAIBs is due to the involvement and participation of the beneficiary communities.

3. Methodological and theoretical frameworks

3.1 Institutional framework

The institutional mechanism for the implementation of the projects is as follows:

3.1.1 Central level

The Project Orientation Committee (Comité d’Orientation du Projet, COP), made up of representatives from the government, the donors and civil society, is chaired by the Minister
of Grassroots Development, Crafts, Youth, and Youth Employment. The Minister of the Economy and Finance is the senior vice-president, and the Minister delegated to the Prime Minister with responsibility for Grassroots Development is the deputy vice-president. The Committee’s role is:

- To facilitate convergence between the micro-projects identified by communities and sector development plans elaborated at local and national level;
- To facilitate collaboration with all other poverty reduction projects and programs;
- **The Technical Secretariat**, made up of a coordinator, an administrative and financial manager, an internal auditor, a government contract specialist, a monitoring and evaluation specialist, and a support staffer. The Secretariat provides the AGAIB with technical assistance for contracting, financial management, and disbursements. It also acts as the secretariat for the COP.

### 3.1.2 Regional level

The AGAIB: made up of a Board of Directors (Conseil d’Administration, CA), a Coordinator, and a Regional Approval Committee (Comité Régional d’Approbation, CRA) to which the projects identified by the communities are submitted.

The Board comprises seven members, including three directors from the civil service (the Regional Director for Development and Planning acts as a statutory member, while the two others are elected from among the members of the Regional Technical Services), two directors representing the NGOs active in the region, and two directors representing the members of civil society and senior figures of moral authority. They elect a president from among their number.

The Board members are elected by the Annual General Meeting. The Board approves the program of activities and the provisional accounts drawn up by the Coordinator and monitors compliance with the project implementation guidelines.

The Coordinator is responsible for the attainment of the objectives and the results expected from the project at regional level. To this end, he organises coordinates, monitors and supervises all of the activities. He prepares the Regional Approval Committee meeting, finalizes contracts, and ensures the physical and financial oversight of the identified projects.

The Regional Approval Committee (CRA) is made up of five members appointed by the Board from among the members of the General Meeting. Its mandate is to organise the periodic monitoring of micro-projects. It meets at least once every two months, and is convened by the Coordinator.

### 3.1.3 Local level

The Village Development Committee (Comité Villageois de Développement, CVD), made up at grassroots level, identifies, executes and manages micro-projects for the community. It is therefore the main executive instrument of the Community Development Program (PDC). The Village Chief is the Honorary President of the CVD.

Togo has a total of five AGAIBs, covering the country’s different administrative regions. The first, in the Maritime region, was set up in 1998. The four others were officially created in 2001. AGAIB-Plateaux effectively became operational in 2008. It provides financial and technical support for projects in communities with few income-generating activities (IGAs) and for the construction of community infrastructures.

Its missions notably include the definition of activity policies and strategies; it is also tasked with monitoring compliance with the procedures manual, approving the work program, and examining and validating activity reports, as well as the annual accounts presented by the Coordinator. The AGAIBs also rely on intermediaries, namely the NGOs or independent consultants who bring their technical know-how to the beneficiary organisations and liaise with the Coordinator. The decision to study the AGAIB in the Plateaux region was based on the fact that this is the country’s biggest and most agricultural region, and the one with the largest number of micro-projects: 102 identified out of a total of 395 (DGCSN, 2006).

The total amount of the project is 17.2 millions dollars (approx. 7.2 billion CFA francs), divided up among the 5 AGAIBs on the basis of need. AGAIB-Plateaux’ share for the period 2008-2011 was 2 billion CFA francs (RT, 2008).

### 3.2 Protocol and methodology

This study focuses on five groupings supported by AGAIB-Plateaux: four CVDs (Village Development Committees) and the entire beneficiary population. It draws on the results of a project set up in 2008: the Community Development Program (Programme de Développement Communautaire, PDC). We met with the actors of the project between September and November 2012. The survey was conducted with two sociology degree students recruited for the purpose. We proceeded in stages:

- Definition of the issues, drafting of the protocol and assignment of tasks;
- The broadest possible documentary research, consulting books, specialist journals, and reports. The aim of this phase was to take stock of earlier studies and analyses and to gather any information that might be useful for the study. It involved compiling and inventory of the existing literature on the topic;
- Semi-structured interviews, with local communities (village and district chiefs, beneficiary associations and farmers’ groups) and with regional managers, elected representatives, and union leaders;
- Focus groups: this component takes account of all the local groupings and committees on the basis of their specificities: urban groups, rural groups, and
women’s groups, as well as groups of livestock farmers, crop growers and storage workers. Participants were selected by proportional stratified sampling. In this way, each organisation makes up one stratum. For the needs of the semi-structured interviews, we met with 52 individual members of beneficiary organisations: 37 women and 15 men. The women—more vulnerable and more affected by poverty—are also very active, and are more strongly represented in the groups.

The interviews were recorded. They were kept short, so that the respondents could quickly get back to what they were doing: this was one of the conditions for agreeing to the interviews. The recordings were transcribed afterwards;

- Processing of collected information, analysis of content;
- Synthesis and final write-up.

3.3 Limitations of the study

The viewpoint of the people involved in this study represents only one angle of analysis. For a more complete picture, it would be useful to consult all of the groups in the country that benefit from AGAIB support. Given the limited financial resources available, however, this paper will restrict itself to the perceptions of the actors in the region under study. The AGAIBs differ in size, in the importance of their projects, and in their length of existence. This data might suggest that the conclusions of the study of the Plateaux regions could be transposed to other development NGOs in Togo.

Another difficulty inherent in the study was that of meeting with the beneficiaries, who were often hostile to questioning, suspecting a political purpose behind the survey. As well as focusing solely on the beneficiaries’ utterances, the study takes account of certain variables to the detriment of others: political affiliations, for example, are not addressed. A political variable would enable us to assess the validity of certain answers in an environment strongly marked by the dead weight of politics and in which the actors very often follow the dictates of their ideology.

The methodology is based exclusively on interviews. Given the theme, it would have been pertinent to use the method of in situ observation for a more complete understanding and analysis of the influence of local cultures and values on new initiatives.

Finally, these limitations should be borne in mind with a view to further research.

At the theoretical level, the organisational approach described here draws its substance from the principles of the rationality of actors and of individualism.

The principle of rationality, derived from the work of Max Weber, states that the rational individual gives the reasons behind his or her action. Weber defines his approach, in *Economy and Society*, as a “comprehensive” science that seeks to analyze the meaning intended by an agent or agents in interaction with others and, consequently, sets out to understand the meaning of all social activity (Weber, M., 1995).

According to the principle of methodological individualism (Boudon, R. and Bourricaud, F., 1986), it is essential to reconstruct the motivations of the individuals concerned by the phenomenon in question. The phenomenon should, indeed, be seen as the result of the aggregation of individual behaviors dictated by these motivations. Methodological individualism considers the end purpose of individual action and the intentionality of the actor placed in conditions where he is forced to react to constraints that get in the way of his objectives.

From what was said earlier, it appears that the beneficiaries of support from AGAIB-Plateaux leveraged their rationality by weighing up the benefits of these projects, which take account of their realities and their conditions of existence.

4. Results

4.1 General considerations

From the information gathered on people’s knowledge of AGAIB projects, it emerges that a large majority of the population is aware of the organisation’s existence. This can be explained by the awareness-raising activities and frequent field visits by AGAIB agents. A key aspect of the AGAIB approach is the involvement of the beneficiary population at every stage in the project. It is they, indeed, who initiate the projects in response to their own needs.

“We’re the ones who asked for the well to be drilled, to lift us out of misery, so we are all responsible,” one woman¹ told us.

The financial participation of the communities is also a success factor, in that it encourages community involvement in, and appropriation of, projects.

“The school building wasn’t just the AGAIB’s doing: we also participated financially. We provided the land, the sand, the water, the volunteers. Money alone can do nothing; the local people did the lion’s share, and now we’re going to look after it properly.”²

On another level, the climate of trust that exists between the different program actors is worthy of note. It is due, among other things, to regular financial management updates.

4.2 Concrete actions

AGAIB-Plateaux organises training for beneficiaries. Courses focus on project management and bookkeeping. In the organisations it supports, AGAIB-Plateaux has put in place a system, backed up by training, to ensure transparent project management. The organisations have also been trained in contracting procedures.

To avoid corruption in the form of entrusting projects to a

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¹ A beneficiary of the project during our field visit.
² Interview with a district chief from Notsé (a town in the Plateaux region).
friend or relative, any task that requires the intervention of an outside technician has to go through a tender process. Bids are examined in the presence of a national coordination representative. All members are also informed of the start-up of an activity before any funds are disbursed and used. All groups are issued with account books. All managers report on their activities periodically.

The grassroots organizations do not possess the resources to fund their initiatives. The AGAIB finances the projects of group members living below the poverty line. As a result, it covers 95% of the budget. The allocated funds and activities are monitored through follow-up visits by intermediaries: “we placed the intermediaries so that they would be very close to the beneficiaries” and, as one beneficiary added: “the follow-up visits allow us to correct our mistakes, and make up lost time if we’re behind schedule. They motivate us.”

The project has contributed to an improvement in living conditions. Support from the AGAIB has created jobs. Many people were without fixed employment, but post-funding they have become workers, i.e. producers (13,774 new workers out of a planned 14,000: a fulfillment rate of 98%). Infrastructure rehabilitation or construction work employs local labor and injects significant resources into the local economies of the project zone. Likewise, IGAs have created jobs for direct and indirect beneficiaries, thereby helping to reduce rural exodus and prostitution: now that there is work to be done locally, young people are less tempted to migrate to the cities—notably to the capital, Lomé—in the belief that they will find a better life there.

The projects have facilitated the social integration of the beneficiaries. Work is not only an activity that generates production; it is an activity that creates social bonds. The project that involved, among other things, financing socioeconomic infrastructure micro-projects (schools, health centers, etc.), proposing income-generating activities implemented directly by communities in accordance with their priorities, and training their members in job creation had very significant positive social impacts, notably in the areas of education, health, employment and standards of living. On the health side, the hydraulic installation built by the project supplies the population with drinking water and helps reduce the prevalence of water-borne diseases.

In terms of community participation in the implementation of micro-projects, the results are, once again, edifying. The 5% contribution expected from the beneficiary communities resulted in a genuine involvement in the execution of the micro-projects. Though severely affected by several crises in the region (especially food crises), the local populations succeeded—thanks to their direct participation in decision-making, project implementation, and local governance—in improving their conditions. Local men and women participated effectively in every phase of the project, right from the initial expression and identification of needs. They worked on the project part-time, even full-time, often on an unpaid basis. Only a small group of laborers, notably the youngest, were paid. The Village Development Committees (CVD) were able, after receiving training, to play a major role in selecting firms and signing contracts with them, striving to prevent traditional practices of clientelism. They were also able to set up accounts and pay firms, allowing them to monitor the works and put in place a basic accounting system for financial oversight.

In the space of four years, the PDC project, by following this approach, has proved effective in a fragile institutional context, especially when it comes to rebuilding socio-economic infrastructures. More than 580 micro-projects have been completed since 2008: far more than the 395 planned. As things stand, in 2012, the quality of the micro-projects is satisfactory, and the IGAs are profitable, with positive financial results.

Another characteristic of the project is the creation of school canteens. This is a very new concept in Togo, where the usual practice is for schoolchildren, of all ages, to buy food from women vendors during the break. The food sold is subject to no health or hygiene controls. Under the AGAIB project, a number of women were recruited into the groups to work as cooks and to serve food to the schoolchildren. Meanwhile, food safety is monitored by specialist services. The food is distributed free of charge during this experimental phase. The advantage of this practice is to reduce outbreaks of cholera—a very frequent problem in this region—in the school environment. The “labor-intensive works” sub-component has also yielded satisfactory results. More than 25,000 temporary jobs have been created for women and young people between 18 and 35 years of age. The operation has enabled the reforestation of over 2,000 hectares and the rehabilitation of some one hundred engineering works such as water reservoirs and fishponds for agricultural production. In short, in terms of direct beneficiaries, the project has affected more than 200,000 people.

In total, with the PDC, hundreds of infrastructures have been created, and thousands of new employment possibilities will be made available under the labor-intensive works initiative. The project is an appropriate response to the technical and socioeconomic needs of the local populations.

4.3 Lessons learned

As initiators of the projects, the social actors are involved in their definition and planning, and in implementing the action plans. This approach consists in giving a voice to grassroots communities, enabling them to say what they hope for and expect in the way of change; it involves them in the design and definition of development projects, and in implementing the decisions to which they are committed by bringing in their local resources. It is, in other words, participatory development.

In this local mobilisation approach, the AGAIB motivates communities to “take control of their destiny”. Rather than supporting individuals, however, it assists groups and village development committees that are not in a position to create social infrastructures.

In drawing up the projects and action plans, the communities know best how to overcome internal constraints relating to differences of culture and religion between individuals. In

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1 An AGAIB/Plateaux agent.
2 A project beneficiary.
every site that we visited, the beneficiary actors—and especially the local dignitaries—particularly appreciated being brought in on every stage of the projects.

The question of gender is also addressed. As women are more exposed, female groups and those with a majority of women are given priority. Most of the women we met declared that the project had allowed them to create income-generating activities in order to earn a little money and help cover household expenses such as buying cooking condiments and contributing towards school fees, thereby reducing their dependence on their husbands.

"Without my wife, my family would no longer exist. She’s the one who pays for the children to go to school, for medical prescriptions, and for day-to-day household expenses".3

The reinforcement of the socio-economic capacities of local organisations could change the relationship with the local administration. Local structures weaken the authority of the powers that be. Since the “rule” is rather to weaken local populations in order better to dominate them, this economic independence will make it difficult for the political masters to keep the people “in line”. In the event of an election, attitudes will be harder to manipulate, leading to a decline in political clientelism. One potential consequence is the development of a sense of citizenship. The results of the elections will be the expression of the collective will.

4.4 Shortcomings to be addressed

The analysis of the AGAIB approach pointed to effective results, but there are certain shortcomings that should be noted.

In terms of training, it is noticeable that the area of health has been neglected. There are no awareness campaigns about issues such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, tuberculosis, or diarrheic disorders. The low level of public education is an impediment to the rapid assimilation of information. Basic literacy classes should be introduced, integrating health education information, to enable the beneficiaries to confront these problems. But the AGAIBs’ dependence on the World Bank makes it difficult to unblock funds in an emergency. Other sources of funding should be sought, to guarantee the sustainability of the programs. In this respect, government support will be a great advantage. The experience of these projects should enable the authorities to take over from the international bodies by integrating this approach into public policy and granting it a significant share of the budget.

There are a number of risks that might prevent the fulfillment of the project’s development goal. These include excessive control over the implementation of activities by the central authorities and the weakness of counterpart funding from the communities. Another difficulty for the project is the non-sustainability of initiatives due to poor coordination between the AGAIBs and the existing regional sector programs, and to all the red tape involved in unblocking funds. This situation means that the AGAIBs do not have adequate resources, at all times, for the funding of community micro-projects.

5. Conclusion

Development through self-empowerment emerges as a process by which a local community organises for better mobilisation and use of its material and human resources.

Self-empowerment, therefore, is above all the business of local actors. It is characterised by a collective awareness that takes root in a community faced with structural constraints. The ultimate goal of the approach is to give grassroots communities the capacity to become autonomous. It is the task of the external partners to create the right conditions to help local communities appropriate development values. Only by getting involved, only by taking on responsibility, can local populations be truly empowered: self-empowerment is a social practice, a process that begins when the first development action is undertaken. This principle implies a strict rule of conduct: the local community’s knowledge must be leveraged, and local potential fully harnessed, before any recourse to external partners. In this respect, the AGAIBs, through their practices, have created a new dynamic that deserves to be supported. It only remains for the authorities to get involved, for greater effectiveness and greater efficiency, in the interest of all of Togo’s rural populations.

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3 Quote from a civil servant whose wife is a beneficiary of an ongoing project in the canton of Amakpané.
Participatory Budgeting, Rural Public Services and Pilot Local Democracy Reform

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Abstract. 30 years of rapid economic development in China has brought about prosperity as well as enlarged disparity, among which is the dramatic cleavage between rural and urban, a challenge that many developing countries have to face. In order to achieve a more balanced and integrated development between rural and urban, since late 2008, the Chengdu Municipality has allocated budget for village level public services projects, and entitle local villagers the right to decide, monitor evaluate the projects.

Local villagers’ participation usually goes through 3 steps to choose their own village public services projects, that is, project proposals collecting, decision making, monitoring and evaluating. Village Council, Democratic Finance Management Group, and Democratic Monitoring Group composed of elected villagers are set up to make decision and supervise. This participatory budgeting program covers more than 2,700 villages, 6 million villagers; total annual budget is over 170 million USD, and still expanding and increasing.

This local pilot participatory budgeting and local democracy reform in China is significant, in the sense that it is exploring improving rural public services, filling rural-urban gap by means of direct villager participation in village-level public service budgets decision making, monitoring and evaluation, brings transparency and revitalizes rural community solidarity, though there are still many setbacks and challenges to face. This pilot reform has enriched international participatory budgeting practices, the loan innovation linked short-term and medium-term development with participatory budgeting.

Keywords. Participatory budgeting, Local democracy, Public services, Rural, China

1. Methodology

The article is a brief case study based on research on villager direct participation on rural village public service budgets in Chengdu, China, for the past 5 years. The author and research team had dozens of interviews with local villagers, village cadres, local government officials, observation on village council meeting and the process of how public services budgets were allocated. Besides interviews and observations, we have collected and reviewed more than a dozen village documents and records on PB projects decision making, monitoring and evaluation. Local Communist Party and government policy documents are also important sources of our data. And for the past 2 year, we’ve been collecting detailed village PB projects data, now we have more than 30,000 records gathered in more than 2,000 villages in Chengdu. All the facts are based on these data the author has collected, and opinions reflected disusing with researchers, officials.

2. Background

30 years of rapid economic development in China since the opening-up reform has brought about prosperity as well as enlarged disparity, especially the gap between rural and urban areas. To narrow the gap and finally address the development imbalance is a common challenge facing many developing countries. In order to achieve a more balanced and integrated development between rural and urban areas, in 2007, Chinese central government designated Chengdu Municipality as a pilot zone to explore a balanced and integrated rural-urban development.
Chengdu is the capital city of Sichuan Province, still largely rural in central Chinese Mainland. It is located approximately 2,000 km from Beijing and 2,300 km from Shanghai and is often considered as the gateway to Tibet. At the same time, Chengdu is one of the fastest growing cities in China in terms of both demography and economy. According to the sixth national population census, Chengdu had a population of slightly over 14 million in 2010. Including those who are not officially registered as permanent households or temporary residents, the total population is between 15 and 18 million.

China has four tiers of formal administration under the central government. The first level is officially made up of 34 provincial-level governments, in this paper Sichuan Province. The second level of administration includes more than 300 prefectural-level administrative units, including prefectures and prefectural-level cities, in this paper Chengdu. The third level of administration is districts in urban downtown, counties county-level cities in rural area, there are 20 of such in Chengdu, 6 of which are considered as urban districts, while the rest are rural districts. What is called Chengdu would be considered in western Standard as a Metropolitan Area or a City Region and covers an area of 12,390 sq km with some remote villages more than 100 kilometers away from the downtown.

The lowest tier of official administration is townships, towns in rural and sub-districts in urban. Below the formal bureaucratic administration tier are communities in urban and villages in rural, they are autonomous, local people elect their community or village committee for part of their public affair administration, but only in rural villages there is direct election for all adult villagers according to the laws. There are more than 2300 villages in Chengdu with a population varying around 1,000-5,000.

Within the framework of Chengdu municipal government pilot reform policy on integrated and balanced rural-urban development, one of the fundamental approaches is to invest heavily in rural infrastructure and rural public services. The most majority of rural investment is planned and implemented through local authorities. However, out of the 59 rural public services classified by local government, 8 would be delivered by local villages and local villages are required and encouraged to participate directly in their local public decisions and services.1

Since late 2008, Chengdu Municipality allocates a significant budget for improvement of village-level public services, called “Village Level Public Services and Social Administration Funding”, Hereafter named Chengdu Participatory Budgeting (PB). The budgets has covered nearly 40,000 projects decided by local people and implemented over the 2009 -2012 period in over 2300 villages and rural communities in Chengdu.

PB in China dates back to 2004 in Xinhe town in the city of Wenling in Zhejiang Province. Through deliberative discussion, the town incorporated public participation into the People’s Congress framework, establishing PB that influenced the inner mechanisms of the budgetary decision-making process. This created a precedent for engaging the grassroots in a public debate on the use of the public budget.2

Following this, PB experiments were carried out in various places in China and were a powerful demonstration of public budget reform and democratization processes in local governments. A range of PB initiatives were set up across China, including in Jiaozuo, Harbin and Wuxi (2005), Minhang and Shanghai (2007), Chengdu (2009) and Baimiao township in Sichuan Province (2010).3

Deepening local democracy is one of the features of pilot balanced rural-urban development experiments in Chengdu. Judging by official documents reviewed, it seems policy designers believe local democracy is accompanied with privatization and capitalization. Rural democracy reform is firmly imbedded into other reform measures in rural development, such as rural land ownership, collective village assets, village farming cooperatives, land leasing and scale farming, of all have to face collective decision making challenges brought along with privatization and capitalization. Take land leasing and scale farming for example, once landownership clarification reform is completed, as each rural household has very little pieces of land, it is a most efficient and cost least way for a farming cooperative/company to lease the land collectively with villagers’ council on behalf of all the villagers respectively. Among these reform measures, rural capital and productive capacity is the destination, and Chengdu PB is designed as an important democracy reform measure.

3. Origination of the PB and local democracy practices

The Chengdu PB and local democracy reform is a local innovation originated in rural land property rights reform. The pilot reform of rural property rights held in Chengdu was another major structural reform following the household contract responsibility system in rural areas since the three decades of reform and opening up.

Chengdu had an innovative reform on rural land ownership. The reform aims at confirming and verification for each rural household, the land property rights of homestead land, arable land and forest land. Then farmers could voluntarily transfer part of their homestead and arable land property to acquire land property benefits in the market.

The property right reform is to endow farmers the land right, and thus make it convenient to transfer the land into capital. In March 2008, Heming village in Chengdu conducted an experiment to award the land rights to villagers. The ambiguity and uncertainty of land property rights was a result of successive land reforms, land requisitions and redrawing the land boundaries for several times in Chinese history and had existed for several decades. This makes it extremely complicated to redefine the land boundaries. Yet the land property right is the major concern of the villagers for their economic interest lies in it and therefore, must be handled with extra care. The interest conflicts among villagers, between villagers and the collective, and between villagers and the government render the redefining work even more difficult to continue. The land ownership reform stagnated while disputes and conflicts lasted, and local government officials were facing enormous pressures to carry the reform through.
In order to push forward the reform of land property rights, Heming Village established a village convocation hosted by several elderly people of prestige in the village to help to redefine the property rights and regulate the existing disputes. When local officials found this approach effective in solving local conflicts, they duplicated it widely to other villages still stucked in land boundaries redefinition. Very soon, this village council consisting of respective villagers became an efficient tool both acknowledged by local officials and villagers in solving conflicts.

Shortly after land ownership reform, was the rural public service improvement reform. To avoid similar setbacks during the early phase of land ownership, and also because of the policy design that 8 categories of public services should be mainly delivered among and by local villages, with policy support from Municipal government, the practice in Heming Village and experiences borrowed from other regions of China has been spread in all the villages of Chengdu. The village convocation consisting of respected elders developed into a village council consisting of elected villagers; within the village council, there are democratic supervision group, democratic finance group established for villagers to supervise, make resolution and appraisal of the spending of village public service funds.

Since 2008, the Chengdu municipal government has issued a series of policies and regulations to establish and formalize a new pattern of village-level governance mechanism. These policies include:

1. Establishing a village council as a permanent decision-making body to deal with self-governing affairs, to exercise right to making decisions and supervising village affairs within scope of authority entrusted by villagers (representatives) meeting. Members of village sub-council are directly elected by and among local villagers.

2. Adjusting and standardizing functions of village committee. In the new pattern of village governance mechanism, duties of village committee has been standardized and limited. Its first duty is to be responsible for villagers assembly, report the work, execute the decisions of village council; second, to undertake the social management and public services commissioned and financed by the government; third, to carry out public welfare, mediate disputes, help maintain the social security and other autonomous affairs of the village.

3. Optimize supply of village-level public products. Since 2008, each village community has received at least ¥200,000 from the government to cover expenditures for village public services, and specific uses will be discussed and decided by village council.

4. Strengthen leadership of village Party branch over village council. Village party secretary also acts as convener of village council, and host of village council meetings. Village Party branch is responsible for receiving and reviewing agendas proposed by village council and sub-councils to ensure that all agendas are in framework of self-governance and related laws and policies, and to judge if all agendas are genuine intentions of proposers. As for major issues touching upon long-term development of village and common concerns of villagers, the Party branch will hold party meetings to discuss and offer recommendations before putting forward these issues at village council meeting. This is an important fact in the Chinese political contexts to discuss, whether and how the overwhelming Communist Party power will facilitate or undermine local democracy.

According to related polices and regulations announced by Chengdu Communist Party Committee and Municipality, feasible PB projects fall into four major categories that cover a wide range of options, which can be decided by villagers:

- Education and recreation facilities: such as village radio and cable TV, village library, entertainment and fitness arenas.
- Basic services & infrastructure for local economic development, including building and improvement of village roads, water drainage system, gardening, irrigation and water supply.
- Agricultural training, such as farming and business training for local villagers.
- Village and community social welfare, which includes, security patrol, sanitation, solid waste collection.

Among the 2,300 rural villages and communities, each village could get annually ¥200,000RMB (32,000USD) minimum for PB projects, and the amount is increasing each year. By 2012, the minimum amount for each village is more than 50,000USD and could be as much as 85,000USD. Over the 3 PB cycles during 2009 -2011 period, the total value of projects funded by PB process was approximately 365.5 million USD and is gradually increasing from year to year. And that means the amount for per villager / year is around 22 USD, a quite high figure when compared with renowned PB cities. During the project years 2009-2011, of all total amount of the four categories, basic services & infrastructure is the most heavily prioritized by local villagers, 67% of the total budget, 44% in terms of projects numbers; social welfare is the second largest, 27% of the total budget, 41% in terms of projects numbers; the rest budget for training, education, recreation is just around 5% in terms of amounts. The more remote, the more villages show tendency towards infrastructure projects, mostly projects like village roads pavement and irrigation system.

### 4. How does the Chengdu PB work

#### 4.1 PB Cycles in Chengdu

In Chengdu PB practices, each village establishes a village Council, usually consisting of a couple of dozen members...
elected by and among local villagers. Since its launching, PB has become the most important duty (or responsibility) of Village Councils. In addition, a specific Budget Oversight Group consisting of 5 to 7 elected local villagers will monitor and oversight implementation of PB budget. This is an innovation within the Chinese budgetary system that increases capacity of villagers to control spending of the funds and collective income.

Chengdu PB cycles are not strictly identical from one locality to the other. Basically, villagers go through a three steps cycle in order to identify, select and implement their public services projects.

The first step of Chengdu PB is to gather information among all village households as to what projects are needed. Usually, a questionnaire will be handed out to each household to solicit suggestions for what projects villagers would like to have this year. At the beginning of the PB projects opinions survey, the questionnaire is usually open, villagers could fill in any suggestions on how to allocate village PB funds; as the project proposals later became predictable and routine, some questionnaire are prepared with closed options to choose with some spaces for additional open proposals. The PB projects proposal gathering is usually done by village committee, with the assistance of village council members. Then these proposed projects are categorized and scrutinized, similar proposals will be categorized as one proposal, some proposals like “share the funds in cash evenly for every household”, as well as other proposals fall out of the 4 categories of village level public services will be eliminated out of the potential projects. Another round of proposals gathering is conducted if necessary when there is not enough feasible proposals to be voted.

The second step is decision making at Village Council level (which is composed of elected villagers) who votes for the projects that will be implemented this year, and the contractor who bid for the project will also be chosen. A list of the possible projects generated in the first step will be debated and voted. This is the phrase that heated debate and negotiation happened most, as village representatives are usually elected among their own village group constituency, the representatives usually have the pressure to win a vote for projects that will most benefit their own village group, like a village cement road paved into their village group lands, or an irrigation channel maintenance close to their fields. Sometimes a prioritize score will be applied to assist the negotiation procedure, all potential projects will be given a certain marks prioritize by each representative from most important to not important, those projects win highest scores will be chosen for implementation.

Once a compromise has been reached among village council representatives, the projects are reported by the Village Councils to their respective Township Government (next administrative and Political tier) where they are technically scrutinized to make sure all these chosen options fall into law and policy regulations, then eventually ratified. Budget information and budget process is made public through posters, flyers, slogan banners, village public information board and meetings. Villagers may call “local experts” to help them assess and evaluate PB proposals. For instance, a local construction worker might become a “local expert” to examine a village road proposal.

The third step is monitoring and evaluation. Within village council there is a Democratic Finance Management Group and Budget Oversight Group composed of elected villagers, together with the Village Council review and monitor PB projects. Once they are completed, the same groups will conduct an evaluation. PB results are usually disseminated through village public information board. If the project passed evaluation and assessment, project funding, or rest of the project funding will be transferred to the contractor as agreed when the contractors bid for the project.

In some of local villages, they had interesting innovation to ensure fair evaluation of PB projects. As PB project money is reserved in village bank account and administrated directed at township level, without an officially stamped documents issued by village council, the money would not be transferred to anyone. In Mayan village, they cut the official approval stamp into five pieces, each 5 important representative keeps one piece, only when all of the five representatives are convinced that the project are qualified after evaluation, could a whole stamp put together and valid to accredit official document that will be submitted to township government for money transferring.

In some cases this PB cycle can be more complex, the 3-steps cycle varies into 6-steps, 8-steps cycle in different district in Chengdu. For example, a 8-steps cycle usually includes, mobilizing maximum involvement of community members; collecting opinions, village council representatives visit every household to collect their opinions; summary and categorize proposed projects by village council; deliberation and vote by all village council members; preliminary approval by township government– the administrative level above villages – and once approved, a final vote at village council level; township final approval; drafting of guidelines by village council for contracts and handing over to supervising group; and project evaluation by all committees and village representatives.

5. Implication, Significance and Innovation

5.1 Responding directly to local needs

Unlike other rural investment in China, public services budget is not allocated through each level of government tiers and through many different bureaus, the budgets is directly entitled to villages, villagers are required and encouraged to participate directly in local public money decision making, monitoring and evaluation. It has made rural public services more efficiently respond to varies local village demands.

5.2 Transparency

Directly entitling budgets to villages is a way to make rural public investment much more transparent both in and above village level. Traditionally how much public investment a village could get depends on how capable village cadres could raise funds from upper level government and bureaus; this usually means rent-seeking opportunities among many
bureaucratic officials and inside the village.

5.3 Revitalize rural community solidarity

A traditional Chinese village is based on self-government and traditional customs. Squires, clans and religions combined villagers as a whole. Until the 1990s, most public services such as primary school education, seniors support, and infrastructures for farming in rural areas were provided collectively. Yet with decades’ of reforms and adjustment of rural policies, rural communities have gradually disintegrated, and the old-fashioned social relations to some extent undermined. Since the household contract responsibility system reform, farm plots have been allocated to each family, and village collective economic base has broken down. Traditional social base is damaged as central government increases direct investment in rural medical services, education, providing for aged, infrastructures of farming, and rural taxes abolishment. With the process of urbanization, many young farmers rush into large cities for employment and income increase, this makes the rural communities even more desolate.

In this sense, even more important, Chengdu PB appears as a powerful modernization instrument of Chinese rural communes inherited from the revolution. At the same time it seems a way to build a new balance between individual rights and collective cohesion and tradition, in front of a sweeping and exclusionary privatization. PB channels significant - even if largely insufficient - resources towards the village “commons” and increases their value as commons and indivisible social and economic spaces. PB funds actually helped to strengthen local people’s common social and economic interests. Besides village public services and infrastructures, it’s an investment on local solidarity, and a foster on rural local democracy evolution in the context of rapid social change in rural China.

5.4 Loan innovation linking short and medium term development

Another major innovation is that villagers can either select projects or use part or the totality of the PB resources to secure a medium term loan. Lets take a village of 2500 inhabitants that received 50 000 USD in 2012 for their PB process. Villagers can either choose to select projects up to this value or decide to use a portion or the total amount as an entry for obtaining a loan from Chengdu Small Town Investment Company, a Public Investment Fund. The maximum amount they can obtain is seven times the entry, therefore 350 000 USD if villagers choose to get a loan on the 50 000 resources. If they choose to fund projects for a value of 40 000 and save the rest 10 000 USD fund for the loan, they can get a loan of 70 000 USD. These loans are payable over 8 years, and will be reimbursed with the resources that they will receive over the next 8 years. In other words, if a village decides to use its 50 000 USD just for a loan of 350 000, there will not be any PB process during the next 8 years.

Usually remote and poor villages tend to commit their resources to apply for large loans for infrastructure such as roads, which is the most intended projects by villagers. Some play on both sides: annual projects with part of the resources, and 8 years loan for a heavy investment such as roads or a major irrigation system on the other.

These values are quite significant not only for a Chinese village, but for any village in most parts of the world. If well defined, well debated, as it is expected with the new governance model designed in Chengdu, such projects can certainly bring significant local changes. As they are basically public works, they can at the same time generate work and income for villagers.

However, the central innovation with this mechanism is that Chengdu has found quite a unique way to link short term and longer term planning, without loosing people’s participation. They are de facto bringing a real innovation to PB, and probably one of the major ones in the last 15 years. They give an answer to the frequent critique towards PB as a short term, immediate mechanism that has a weak capacity to bridge with long term or strategic planning. This is one more reason to analyse carefully what is happening on Chengdu villages and what is the impact on local development.

6. Setbacks and Challenges

6.1 Representative participation and social-political context

Like all other local democracy reform in China, the Communist Party will have to be insisted as a leading power whatsoever. As mentioned above, one of the local democracy reform principles is to strengthen leadership of village Party branch to the village council. Generally there are two governance institutions in Chinese rural villages, Party branch and village committee. According to the election law in China, Village committee members are elected among and by local villagers. However, elections, like other liberal institutions in an illiberal polity, part of a strategy designed to help one-party rule endure. Later, they may be legitimating the current regime rather than serving as a harbinger of systemic change.5

In China, the quality of democracy in much of the countryside remains stubbornly low, mainly because village committees, once an election is over, are situated in a socio-political environment that has changed surprisingly little.6 In case of the reform in Chengdu, a second representative institution, village council, is thus designed as elected among and by local villagers, to replace some democracy functions that fail with village committee. Unfortunately, though at the very beginning of the reform, possible drawbacks had been anticipated, and roles of village committee had been clearly defined, regulated. However, what has been observed for the past years is that, though at the early practices of village council operation, it is a decent channel for democracy powers, but some, or most, village councils later retrograde into the same destiny as village committee. Legitimacy of village council is inevitably ruined when a village council meeting/voting has to be convened by village Party branch; when project proposal gathering is filled out by village cadres without consulting; when detailed project information is not properly announced publicly; when local elite forms up their
6.2 Social & Policy Exclusion

Social inclusion remains one of the challenges, no serious attention has been given to disadvantaged people, primarily women, children and the elderly. The most frequently selected projects are productive infrastructure for increasing income opportunities. Few of them are specifically for women, children, or the handicapped, except for some recreational and social schemes, which are actually benefiting all villagers.

Further more, only native villagers are entitled to the funding, have the right to vote. Non-native migrants are excluded from the PB funding. There are as the city expands, part of the villages’ land that was classified as rural is acquired by government and real estate developers for urban expansion. However, villagers remain “rural” (as rural communities) and entitled to rural public service funding. In the township or the rural communities, there are still a huge number of migrants who are not registered as local residents, they are not entitled to local public services, not the right to the village level public services funding.

By 2013, annual PB budget for each village has increase to 30,000-50,000RMB (50,000-84,000USD), The coverage of PB has increased to more than 2,700 villages/communities, around 6 million citizens participation or even more all across Chengdu, more than 170 million USD total annual budget and still increasing, the Chengdu PB might be by far the largest Chinese PB in terms of scale and spread, it is important for exploring how local democracy could help narrowing urban-rural gap, and satisfying local people demands.

By end of 2013, some urban communities has also been entitled to such PB funds. The expansion of PB funds into urban communities make the practices even more complicated, as urban communities autonomy in China is quite different from that of rural villages. Furthermore, local policy designer have been trying to upgrade the local democracy to township levels in Chengdu.

The participatory budgeting practices in Chengdu is still at its early stages, many setbacks and challenges are still to be meet, and it offers an interesting opportunity to understand and compare how citizen participation could work in different social and political contexts. Now the pilot local democracy reform in Chengdu is still lest known, there is a lot of barren land for researchers and practioners to study and experiment.

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