Champions of Participation:

Engaging Citizens in Local Governance

International learning event report
31 May - 4 June 2007 UK












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Contents

Acronyms

[Department for] Communities and Local Government	CLG
Department for International Development	DFID
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	DEFRA
European Union	EU
Improvement and Development Agency	IDeA
International non-governmental organisation	INGO
Institute of Development Studies	IDS
Local Government Association	LGA
Local Strategic Partnership	LSP
Local Area Authority	LAA
Member of Parliament	MP
Non-governmental organisation	NGO
The East London Communities Organisation	TELCO
United Kingdom	UK
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP
Voluntary and community organisations	VCO

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the work of:
the event facilitators John Gaventa, Rose Nierras, Aaron Schneider, Joanna Wheeler, Fiona Wilson and Tricia Zipfel;
the event administrative organiser Birte Bromby;
the team documenting the proceedings Jane Foot with Sunita Abraham-Talks, Josaine Chin-Aleong, Claudia D'Abreu, Alison Dunn, and Edward Griffiths-Jones;
the authors of the report Alison Dunn, Jane Foot, John Gaventa and Tricia Zipfel;
the sponsors IDS (LogoLink and the Citizenship DRC), CLG, DFID and IDeA;
the planning and liaising with local authorities the Local Government Association;
the participants and resource people listed in Annex 3.

Executive summary

What happens when you bring together 'champions of participation' from countries in every continent to explore the problems and the potential for strengthening citizen participation in local government? What do their experiences, drawn from such different contexts, have in common? What are the lessons and how can sharing this experience inform and shape policy and practice in the UK and elsewhere?

The **Champions of Participation** event in May 2007 brought together 44 people (24 from the UK and 20 from 14 other countries[1]) involved in local government to discuss these questions. They comprised elected officials, including mayors from the Philippines and Brazil; city councillors from New Orleans and UK authorities; local government officials and other service providers; community activists; workers from local and national NGOs; academics and representatives of central government in the UK and in India.

The aim was to look at the challenges local governments face in responding to growing demands for citizen engagement and more participatory forms of governance.

This report summarises the discussions and debates held over a five-day period which included a two-day workshop, two days of visiting sites in the UK of particular interest, and one day of policy dialogue with UK policymakers in the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Department for International Development (DFID).

It is impossible to do justice to the broad range of experience that was brought together by the participants in this workshop. Broadly speaking the experiences and innovative approaches included:

- **Participatory approaches to budgeting** which provide more transparent methods for allocating public resources, involving citizens, elected representatives and local government officials, such as in Porto Alegre in Brazil, Malaga in Spain and Bradford, Newcastle and Salford in the UK.
- Processes of **participatory planning**, which range from public involvement in the construction of small community-based projects, to larger neighbourhood action plans, to strategic area planning and the rebuilding of an entire city as in the case of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, or in human rights participatory planning in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- New forms of **partnerships** between citizens, the government and other stakeholders, as in the UK Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and at neighbourhood level through local agreements, or in places like Brazil and the Philippines where citizens and officials sit as 'co-governors' on key decision-making bodies.
- New forms of **public scrutiny** to hold elected representatives and government officials to account, ranging from local scrutiny groups in Shropshire, citizen-led organisations holding independent public forums with politicians in East London, and citizen monitoring of public tenders in Chile.
- New methods of **consultation and inclusion**, such as community study circles in Wisconsin, USA, and community radio and mobile phone feedback in Nigeria.
- Opportunities for citizen **participation in service delivery**, such as housing, employment and community safety service through neighbourhood renewal and tenant management programmes in the UK; delivery of healthcare in Brazil and education in the Philippines.

'To hear what is happening outside of the UK context in India, Bosnia, Norway, etc. has helped me think outside the box. In other countries power is often more equally shared between national and local/reigonal government. This can create both a healthy tension and places for discussion – which is good for participation.' Vince Howe, Neighbourhood Renewal Officer, Newcastle City Council, UK

'Letting people know they can make a difference is key to making participation work. Showing that they can affect change really makes a difference to participation.' Angela Smith MP, Department for Communities and Local Government, UK

'Participating in the budget is not the only way for citizens to participate, but I think without it, it would be impossible for citizens to feel empowered... I will leave with a strong care and respect for the participatory process which enables the individual to build solidarity and enables communities to strengthen and deepen democracy.' Olivio Dutra, former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil, the birthplace of participatory budgeting

Participants learnt about each others' contexts (**Chaper 1**) before debating the main challenges they face when championing citizen participation in local governance. These include negative entrenched views, inclusion, representation, equity, navigating complexity, sustainability, and flexibilty (**Chapter 2**). Workshop participants then discussed potential solutions to these challenges based on their own experiences of approaches that had, and sometimes had not, worked. In sharing these ideas, the emphasis was on adaptation rather than adoption (**Chapter 3**). The site visits allowed overseas participants to see the reality of the UK context, increased shared understanding internationally and explored issues in more depth (**Chapter 4**). The final day focused on implications for different actors: the UK government, community groups and civil society and local elected representatives (**Chapter 5**). During the last session Angela Smith MP, then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and Mark Robinson, Head of Profession, Governance and Conflict at the UK Department for International Development (DFID), joined participants for a policy debate and dialogue at this particularly pertinent time in the UK (**Chapter 6**). Finally, a summary of overall learning from the event is presented in **Chapter 7**, an abridged version of which is given below.

The event was sponsored by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) (Logolink and the Development Research Centre for Citizenship, Participation and Accountability), the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

1. Countries were: China, Philippines, India, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Bosnia, Spain, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway, USA, plus 20 participants from the UK.

Summary Learning

Participation and empowerment

1. Community involvement is at the heart of sustainable change and is central to the task of revitalising democracy, improving service delivery, tackling poverty and building strong, resourceful communities. It is not an optional extra, but is essential if we are to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes for people and society.

2. Citizens should have the right, not just an invitation, to participate which is enshrined in some form of enabling legislation, rather than simply being invited to respond to the government. They should be encouraged and have the right to become active participants in their own development and self governance.

3. Citizens should be 'makers and shapers' of policy and practice rather than merely 'users and choosers' of public services. They should also be encouraged to speak and act as part of a community, as well as exercise the freedom to make their voices heard as individuals.

4. Empowerment should be seen as an outcome in its own right, instigating a fundamental change in the way a community sees itself and relates to others. More work is needed to identify measures that enable us to monitor and assess this kind of change in order to reinforce its importance and value.

Citizens and communities

5. The stakes for participation can be very high, especially in former authoritarian regimes where speaking out could mean a person risking their freedom or their life. Even in the UK, participation demands a lot, especially of community leaders and other volunteers. It depends on 'champions' who need to be supported, whether they operate inside the government or within local communities.

6. Community participation can take a variety of forms, such as through involvement in self-help projects, working in partnership and the development of independent civil society organisations. It is helpful to recognise that community leaders are expected to play different roles and meet different expectations in each context.

7. Partnerships make tough demands on community representatives where the rules of engagement mean that they can feel marginalised and lack the resources they need to operate as equal partners. They are expected to become 'expert citizens', reflecting community views to partners and taking partnership decisions back to their communities.

8. Civil society needs to engage 'politically' beyond the government and make their views heard and seek solutions through advocacy, protest and direct action, in relation not only to the government but also to large employers, trade unions and global corporate institutions. In a healthy democracy, the government should support the right of communities to organise, set their own agenda and take action on the issues that most affect them, and non-government funding bodies should support this activity in order to protect the independence of such organisations.

9. Resources should be targeted to reduce inequality and focus on the poorest neighbourhoods and most marginalised communities where the fight against poverty and the need to build strong, vibrant and cohesive communities is most urgent.

Central and local government

10. The role of local government is changing and has become a key agent of social change. It is expected to work closely with citizens in delivering a complex agenda which includes tackling poverty, delivering area regeneration, stimulating economic development and supporting community empowerment.

11. Participation should be part of mainstream local government practice and integral to the way it works, not something done occasionally in an ad hoc and partial way. But there are resource implications as those involved will need new skills. New management styles are also needed to reflect a more participatory approach to public leadership that is more open, enquiring and responsive – less 'top-down' and more accountable.

12. Changing political culture and entrenched views is difficult. It involves challenging entrenched and negative attitudes, whether they are held by people in the government who exercise power or by local communities who have very little. It involves building new relationships between citizens, elected politicians and service providers, based on mutual respect, a more equal balance of power and greater local accountability.

13. Local politicians need to 'go deeper' into their communities and reconnect with the people they represent. This will demand new skills to broker different views and potentially conflicting demands, and to build alliances with local communities. It will also mean respecting other community champions and, rather than feeling threatened, recognising their role as legitimate leaders and spokespeople.

14. Participation takes time and resources to really understand the issues; to create new spaces for engagement; to demonstrate political will and the leadership necessary to drive the process; to be prepared to act so that participation leads to results that make a difference; and to support and sustain participation over the long term.

15. There needs to be something real on the table so people can see that their input will make a difference, that they will be listened to and that those with power will include them in making decisions. This often means involvement in budgets and spending decisions. Without a sense of real benefits, there is a high chance of 'consultation overload and fatigue'.

16. Central government needs to provide appropriate leadership by setting out a clear policy for participation and establishing systems for public scrutiny and evaluation – possibly including minimum standards. But it should also step back and allow local government and local communities to work out how best to implement policy at the local level, while maintaining close scrutiny to ensure progress is made. In the UK this will involve removing centrally driven requirements that work against participation, such as those linked to targets, timescales and frequently changing policy priorities.

(These lessons are expanded on in Chapter 7, page 43).

Introduction
Champions of Participation: The event

What happens when you bring together 'champions of participation' from a range of countries[2] around the world to explore the problems and the potential for strengthening citizen participation in local government? What do their experiences, drawn from such different contexts, have in common? What are the lessons and how can sharing this experience inform and shape policy and practice in the UK and overseas?

Participants addressed these questions at a five-day workshop in May 2007, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University, working in collaboration with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for International Development (DFID), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). (See Annex 1 for a short description of each partner.)

The workshop brought together 44 people (24 from the UK and 20 from 14 other countries) involved in local government: elected officials, including mayors from the Philippines and Brazil, city councillors from New Orleans and UK authorities; local government officials and other service providers; community activists; workers from local and national NGOs; academics and representatives of central government in the UK and India.

The aim was to look at the challenges faced by local government in responding to the growing demand for more participatory forms of governance, where local communities are able to play a decisive part in shaping public policy and the services they need, alongside elected representatives and officials.

The workshop objectives were to:

- explore the benefits and incentives for greater citizen engagement in local governance processes
- consider the challenges and costs of promoting greater citizen engagement that local officials face
- identify practical and creative approaches to overcoming challenges to promoting greater citizen participation in local governance
- develop strategies, knowledge and support networks for 'champions of participation'.

Participants had plenty of space for sharing, learning and reflection on the benefits of, incentives for, and challenges to promoting greater citizen participation and engagements in local governance. The workshop included a mix of:

- **interactive sessions**, which combined presentations of key findings from current research; sharing and exchange of experiences; open and frank discussions on emerging research findings and the practical considerations for taking this agenda forward
- **study visits to three UK local authorities and one citizen-based organisation**, providing opportunities for direct interaction with various stakeholders and practitioners
- **policy dialogue with Angela Smith MP of the UK Department for Communities and Local Government and DFID officials**.

A unique collaboration

In a unique collaboration, the Champions of Participation event was sponsored by two UK government departments: the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Mark Robinson, Head of Profession, Governance and Conflict at DFID chaired the event's final session and noted the similarity between the DFID White Paper *Making Governance Work for the Poor* (2006) and CLG's Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (2006).[3]

Both White Papers focus on the value of civic participation in local governance for at least two reasons.

- The first is instrumental: to show that participation contributes to poverty reduction. Both DFID and CLG are interested in whether participation has an impact on the effectiveness of services and other interventions.
- The second is that participation produces greater accountability and deeper and more inclusive forms of democracy and is therefore an 'end in its own right'.

Why the workshop?

Around the world, in rich countries as well as poor, there has been an explosion of interest in more participatory forms of governance. This is both a response to the crisis of legitimacy between citizens and the institutions that affect their lives, and also a reflection of the growing recognition that community involvement is central to the major challenges of revitalising democracy, improving service delivery, tackling poverty and building strong communities.

In Northern democracies, political participation has been declining steadily. Despite real improvements in local authority performance, most UK citizens do not feel they have a voice or influence over key institutions that affect their day-to-day lives, though the majority would like to. Many are disillusioned with the political system and, especially in poor areas, very few even bother to vote. In other parts of the world with newer democracies, while the ability to vote is often more valued, confidence in local government is undermined by corruption and politicians' failure to connect with the lives of ordinary people and tackle widespread poverty.

Although these 'democratic deficits' are now widely recognised, responses have varied. In the UK there has tended to be a focus on building community capacity to participate as partners in specific government-led initiatives, and on strengthening citizen voice and influence as consumers of services, through varied forms of consultation and greater individual choice. On the other hand, growing attention has been paid to strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of institutions and to developing structures for better government.

Internationally, there is a growing consensus that a way forward is in 'working both sides of the equation' – focusing both on a more active and engaged citizenry and on a more responsive and effective state. Citizen capacity is clearly key, but effective leadership and political will as well as good institutional design is equally important. Citizens need to be able

2. Countries were: China, the Philippines, India, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Bosnia, Spain, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway and the USA, plus 24 participants from the UK.
3. Strong and Prosperous Communities, Local Government White Paper (DCLG 2006).

to move from being simply 'users and choosers' of public services to being 'makers and shapers' of policy, with shared power and responsibility for decision making and the allocation of resources, alongside elected members and officials.[4] In this view, representative democracy, which puts emphasis on the role of elected officials, is complemented by participatory democracy, which engages citizens in many ways beyond the ballot box.

Opportunities for UK learning

The workshop took place at a critical moment in UK policy development. With its emphasis on democratic renewal, localism and community empowerment, the *Strong and Prosperous Communities* White Paper[5] gave added importance to the discussions.

In the UK over the last decade there have been many new opportunities for citizen engagement. At least in principle, community involvement is now expected as consultation is almost taken for granted. Partnership working is routine in local government and the new legislation will make it a statutory duty for local authorities to inform and involve local people in the design and delivery of services. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was based on a commitment to put communities in the driving seat and at the heart of local improvements. The government is promoting the voluntary and community sector, it has initiated a programme of civil renewal to encourage and support greater citizen involvement, and 'community empowerment' is seen as essential for long-lasting change.

There is also a wealth of good practice emerging from newer democracies like Brazil, as well as from well-established democracies such as India, where a similar imperative to reconnect the government with local communities and citizens is driving change. Participatory budgeting is one of the most powerful examples, but many other initiatives are creating ways for citizens to have a voice and mobilise for better service delivery at the local level. For the 'champions of participation', this workshop was a rare opportunity to learn from each other, to 'think outside the box' and to take back new ideas and models to use in their own contexts.

Indian Minister opens the event

India's Minister of *Panchayati Raj* (Local Governance), Mani Shankar Aiyar, opened the Champions of Participation event at IDS, Brighton, UK on 31 May 2007. Mr Aiyar described India's democracy as being the world's largest and having one of the most visionary and far-reaching democratic systems. It sought to create a system of self governance through decentralised *Panchayati Raj* institutions, in which citizens at a local level are able to have a voice. He framed the event by describing India's transition to democracy as not simply adopting a British model, but evolving and adapting democratic principles according to the needs of its citizens. The Minister's introductory speech aptly highlighted the relevance of context and international experience in democratic practice.

The Minister described local government in India as being both very old and very new. Village *panchayats* were in operation during India's long history of centralised and sometimes chaotic government – including that of the Mughal and British empires. A panchayat was, in essence, a council of five people, chosen for their age and wisdom, who lead the community by applying traditional laws based on custom and usage.

At Independence, Mahatma Gandhi proposed that the 6000 villages in India should be the basic unit of government – self-governing villages which would elect the state assemblies, which in turn would elect the central government. Despite this, *panchayats* were not given a prominent and legally binding role in the first constitution.

In the last 15 years *panchayats* have been recognised as an essential unit of self government in rural areas and Mr Aiyar said, '*Without them development is unlikely to reach the grassroots*'. The nature of the *panchayats* has also changed from being mainly concerned with administering justice to enabling people to become active participants in their own development and self governance.

There are now 250,000 *panchayats* with 3.2 million elected representatives and they demonstrate a significant level of political and social empowerment. A quota of seats is reserved for women and people from lower castes providing opportunities for the most marginalised groups to be represented. Today these quotas are exceeded and 1.2 million women are elected representatives, while the women of the scheduled castes are amongst the most active in the panchayats. Aiyar pointed out, '*There are more women elected representatives in India than there are in the rest of the world*'.

The Minister also added a word of caution noting that although women and *dalit* (former outcastes) leaders may gain seats, they still remain marginalised. This raises a vital issue of how the capacity and confidence of people who are participating for the first time can be strengthened.

Panchayati Raj institutions are now the centre of democracy in both rural and urban governance and represent a fundamental change in society. While there are still challenges relating to fair elections and financial and social auditing, democracy in India is most concerned with development. Each district in each state of India has been empowered to aggregate district level plans which build on the democratic deliberations at the grassroots. Aiyar commented, '*Here we might manage to have grassroots development through grassroots democracy*'.

4 For further elaboration see A.Cornwall and J. Gaventa (2000), 'From users and choosers to makers and shapers: Repositioning participation in social policy', IDS Working Paper 127, available at www.ntd.co.uk/idsbookshop. Other studies and resources on citizen participation in local governance by LogoLink may be viewed at www.ids.ac.uk/logolink and research material by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability at, www.drc-citizenship.org

5. *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – the Local Government White Paper, DCLG (2006).

Chapter 1
Setting the UK and international context

How do different countries experience citizen participation in local governance? And what can we learn from different contexts? Participants at the workshop were from different backgrounds and countries with a wide range of experience of promoting citizen participation.

Key presentations from researchers, government officers and elected councillors helped frame the event and enhance the understanding of participants in each others' contexts.[6]

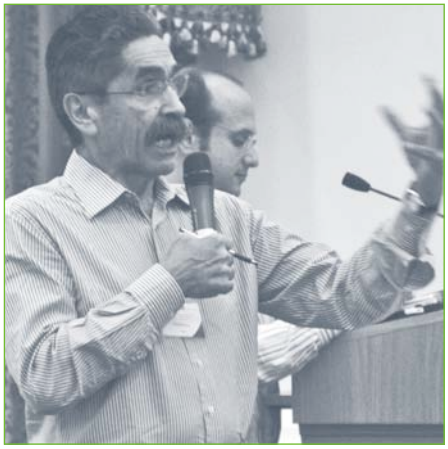
The presentations provided an overview of:

- participatory governance and key challenges for the workshop
- trends and innovations in participatory governance in developing and middle-income countries from a global perspective
- lessons from ten years of community engagement policy in the UK and current challenges for local communities and local government champions of participation
- key proposals in the UK government's White Paper and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill.

Participants also heard about two ground-breaking examples of citizen participation:

- Olivio Dutra, former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil, spoke about the development of participatory budgeting and its potential to transform the relationship between the people and the state.
- Cynthia Hedge-Morrell, a councillor in New Orleans, USA, described the participatory planning process used to plan the rebuilding of their city after Hurricane Katrina.

Olivio Dutra



Presentations

The Rise of Participatory governance Professor John Gaventa, IDS, University of Sussex, UK

Crisis of legitimacy

Recent studies in the UK and internationally point to the gap that exists between citizens and the institutions that affect their lives. In Europe and the USA, political participation is declining while political processes are dominated by special interests. '*Citizens do not feel that the processes of formal democracy offer them enough influence over political decisions*.'[7] In other parts of the world, research by the Commonwealth Foundation[8] found a growing disillusionment of citizens with their governments because of concerns with corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor, and the disconnection from the lives of ordinary citizens.

While 'democratic deficits' are widely recognised, there is often disagreement about exactly how to respond. On the one hand, attention has been given to strengthening the processes of citizen participation, i.e. the ways in which ordinary citizens exercise voice through new forms of inclusion, consultation and/or mobilisation designed to inform and to influence larger institutions and policies. On the other hand, growing attention has been paid to how to strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of these institutions and policies through changes in institutional design, and a focus on the enabling structures for good government.

Emerging forms of participation

As a response to the democratic deficit, alongside the ballot box there are emerging forms of governance which link citizens and states in new ways and seek to rebuild the relationships between citizens and their governments. This is happening across the world, in very different circumstances. Common characteristics which underlie these initiatives include:

- a notion of citizenship that is active and participatory; it goes well beyond the 'citizen as consumer' to citizens who engage in policies and in the delivery of services, and to more empowered forms of involvement
- a commitment to inclusion, especially of poor people, racial and ethnic minorities, youth, older people, and others seen as previously excluded or marginalised
- a simultaneous concern with involvement of multiple stakeholders in new forms of partnership, which in turn enable wider 'ownership' of decisions and projects
- the use of deliberative methods of engagement, emphasising the use of knowledge and dialogue to support and legitimate policy decisions
- an emphasis on broader forms of accountability, which enable multiple partners to hold institutions and policymakers to account, and which involve social accountability as well as legal, fiscal and political forms.

New concepts and practices of participation represent a significant challenge for those who work in the government or are elected representatives. This agenda goes beyond using consultation or research methods to influence decisions taken in the traditional ways and in formal spaces. Decisions are put in the hands of citizens and communities, using participative processes and new forms of governance. The government's role is to sustain the legitimacy and accountability of these processes, and to put resources into implementing the changes they recommend.

Articulating the Challenges for Champions: The View from 'Abroad' Professor Peter Spink, Fundação Getulio Vargas São Paulo, Institutional Liaison Group for Innovations in Governance and Public Action, Brazil

The government as orchestrator or convenor

In different parts of the world, sub-national governments and especially local governments are increasingly recognising the importance of citizens' participation in many aspects of public services provision. At the same time mobilised citizens are recognising the importance of moving beyond pressure to engage actively with the government on social issues. People in the UK and elsewhere want their governments to deal with complex social issues, not solely administration or law and order. This is bringing about a change in the

6. Powerpoints of these presentations can be found online at the Champions Group at http://community.eldis.org/indexhome.html or on the CD Rom of the *Champions of Participation* resource pack.
7. *Power to the People* (2006), p7. Available from www.powerinquiry.org.
8. *Citizens and Governance: Civil Society in the new Millennium* (Commonwealth Foundation 1999).

role of local governments, which are becoming 'orchestrators' (or in UK terms 'the convenors') of public action.

'*The term "public action" means the action of the different public institutions and, more broadly, includes any activity that is articulated in the public sphere and carried out in reference to a common good. It includes those activities which are directly linked to the exercise of public power and those that result from the activities of citizens. Public action is both necessary to, and an outcome of, participatory governance.*'

Trends in innovation

Many governments with common concerns have an interest in innovation. They are:

- looking for technical and organisational innovation in order to be more effective, often involving organisations outside the official public sector
- looking for holistic or system-wide change and coordination
- working on new social policies and programmes that will help deal with the challenges of today
- looking for political as well as administrative innovations, which will broaden and deepen democratic participation and empower staff, citizens and communities.

The conditions in which public sector innovation happens are critical. For business, innovation is one of the organisation's key objectives and the means to sustain and grow its market share: it does not necessarily result in an improved quality of life. In contrast, public sector managers are motivated by problem solving and the need to improve effectiveness and outcomes – and innovation is a by-product of that search.

'*We innovate when we need to. When our governance systems are lagging behind the complexity of the issues, then we innovate so that we can "catch up" with the demands on our organisations and resources.*'

What drives improved participation?

Drawing from recent research and experience in the USA and internationally, Peter Spink argued that the factors driving improved participation in the USA are different from those factors that operate in the less developed parts of the world.

In the USA, community participation in governance is parallel and complementary to formal governance. It happens:

- to make organisations work together to take public action
- when the public officials cannot overcome the gulfs in their experience with the social experiences of those they are trying to serve
- when resources or access are not adequate, and co-production is needed
- when decisions are deemed to be outside the limits of a particular governmental mandate
- to increase accountability on a day-by-day basis.

Here citizen participation is an 'add-on' to the formal institutions.

In developing and middle-income countries, there are different reasons for innovations in governance. Broadly, the current systems of government are not working well because:

- citizens are not able to hold representatives responsible
- representatives are not interested in holding government officials responsible
- government officials are not interested in holding bureaucrats and other public service workers responsible
- there is corruption, elite capture, and an absence of accountability
- the extreme disparities of income, inequality of race, gender and social status lead to marginalisation and quasi-exclusion.

Here citizen participation in governance is a way to improve the functioning of the formal institutions.

Lessons from ten years of commitment to community engagement from the UK New Labour government

Marilyn Taylor, Professor of Urban Governance and Regeneration, University of Western England

A watershed in UK policy

Over the past ten years, opportunities for citizen engagement in the UK have changed significantly. At least in principle, local government now routinely involves local communities in matters that affect them. Partnership working is now expected, with requirements for community consultation in the design of services and policy across the board. The government is promoting the role of the voluntary and community sector and has set standards that govern relationships between the state and the sector. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal – a ten-year programme to renew Britain's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods – was based on an unprecedented level of consultation, and a commitment to 'put communities in the driving seat'. And there has been a broader commitment to civil renewal, providing support for community activity across the country and encouraging local government to adopt innovative community engagement methods. As a result, many local councils are developing new deliberative and participatory approaches in the way they relate to citizens and local communities.

Community organisations have described changes over the last ten years as a 'watershed' or 'sea change'. The government has recognised the knowledge and expertise that citizens and communities can bring to the policy process. And the drive from central government has given a boost to champions of participation within the system and started to convince the sceptics that they need to change.

From rhetoric to reality

But translating policy intention into reality on the ground has not been straightforward. Despite new structures for engagement, many communities still feel marginalised. The rules of the game are still those of the public sector and professionals, and cultures of decision making in the public sphere are so deeply embedded that state actors and community participants themselves often take this way of working for granted. There is still a lot of resistance to the new agenda, especially from elected councillors who fear they are losing power.

There are also contradictory pressures from the centre, including:

- too many centrally imposed targets which drive out local dialogue and an inclusive search for solutions
- short deadlines for delivery and a constant stream of policy changes so that communities find themselves trying to catch up after key decisions have been made
- a hyperactive policy environment,

meaning that, just as trust is built between champions inside the system and with communities themselves, the most effective key players are swept away to implement the next big idea.

There are challenges for the community organisations too.

- Although more people are getting involved, these new governance spaces are not necessarily more inclusive. Alongside the inspiring community leaders who are firmly embedded in their communities, there are also one-man or one-woman bands, who find it very difficult to share what power they have.
- The demands of partnership working, learning the ropes and mastering the intricacies of policy mean that only those with time and resources can hope to engage at a level which is going to make a difference, as a result making them vulnerable to accusations of being unrepresentative.
- Many community organisations are fragile, especially outside the areas which have been the focus of government investment and initiatives.
- Some communities get stuck in opposition, to the frustration of their colleagues and public sector partners.

These issues are not insuperable. They can be addressed by capacity building not only within communities but also within the system and/or by the exercise of enlightened leadership and political will.

Issues for the workshop

Expert citizens

- How can a balance be struck between the kind of community leadership required for effective partnership working and the need to widen participation beyond the usual suspects? Working in this complex environment as an equal partner requires experience, expertise and not a little sophistication, especially in diverse and fragmented communities. But this lays these 'expert citizens' – the much maligned 'usual suspects' – open to constant challenge.

What is community engagement for?

- There is confusion about exactly why people are being engaged. While the White Paper refers to citizens and communities, some believe that the government is less interested in building people's capacity as collective actors than in individual consumer rights. Engaging with consumers is important, but it is not the same as engaging with citizens and communities.

Balancing representative, participatory and deliberative forms of democracy

- How can councillors stop seeing participatory democracy as a threat and start seeing it as something that could strengthen their ability to do their job? And what is the most effective balance between these different forms of democracy?

Balancing different roles: 'Pig in the middle?'

- A problem familiar to community organisations but now increasingly faced by front-line councillors, is that of managing different and potentially conflicting expectations – local communities expect their representatives to reflect their views to the partnership and partnerships expect them to sell their decisions back to the community. This can be a no-win situation.

Diversity and cohesion

- Knowing when to speak with a united voice and when to reflect diverse needs and preferences is a constant challenge for local community organisations.

Co-option and independence

- Partnerships depend on trust. But they can get very cosy. How do voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) maintain their independence? VCOs need to be the 'grit in the oyster' but in a heavily consensus-oriented partnership culture, this can be a difficult stance to maintain.

UK Citizen Engagement

Maryanne Kelly, Head of Local Government Citizen Engagement, Department for Communities and Local Government

The UK government has recognised that greater accountability and engagement of communities is paramount. Evidence suggests that involving communities is not only an effective way to improve service delivery and satisfaction, it also helps to rebuild trust in democratic institutions.

The changes in the White Paper are intended to tackle the paradox at the heart of local government. Seventy-nine per cent of local authorities are judged to have good or very good performance, and an increasing proportion of service users are satisfied with the service they receive. But at the same time, citizen satisfaction with councils is declining. Only a third of people feel they can influence decision making. And the number of people who vote in local elections is at a very low mark.

The White Paper hopes that requiring local councillors to engage more with their local communities will help overcome the concern that councillors are not representative of their areas: only 29 per cent are women, the majority are over 55, and only 3.5 per cent are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds

The key reforms that it will bring in are:

- a new duty to 'inform, involve and consult' communities in the design, delivery and assessment of services
- a stronger voice for citizens and communities to shape the places where they live and the services they receive
- encouragement to local councils to provide stronger and more strategic leadership in the locality, especially through partnership working and more joined up services
- strengthening the role of local councillors to consult with their communities and hold the executive to account
- central government will reduce the amount of central prescription so that councils and their partners can make decisions about local priorities in response to local demands and circumstances and make it easier to set up elected parish, town or neighbourhood councils, and to delegate powers to them
- future inspections will put greater emphasis on citizen satisfaction and community engagement
- devolution of service management to local neighbourhoods and new participatory methods such as participatory budgeting and community planning will be encouraged.

Participatory budgeting – the democratisation of everyday life

Olivio Dutra, former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil

Olivio Dutra, the popular Goucho regional leader of the Brazilian Workers Party who was governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and mayor of Porto Alegre has a long history of organising in trade unions and neighbourhood associations. As former mayor of Porto Alegre, he is credited with being the architect of participatory budgeting.

In 1988, following the end of military rule in Brazil, the Workers Party won the local elections in Porto Alegre with a commitment to democratise power through citizen participation. The newly elected mayor inherited severe financial problems and decided to open up discussion about budget priorities to the people of the city – rich, poor, private sector and public sector. Participatory budgeting engaged people in difficult decisions and helped to challenge powerful local interests. As a result, the city priorities were reversed. Money was spent in areas of the city that had been neglected, and on issues that would benefit poor people, such as sanitation, transport and incentives for small businesses.

Since then organised citizens have participated every year in setting overall budget priorities and determining local spending. Forty thousand people regularly take part in the process, allocating around 17 per cent of the municipal budget. As a result, poor communities have benefited and participation has increased.

'*Democratising the state means making people the subjects rather than the objects of policy. In the past the poor had no voice, but their input is needed to create government not just to receive it. This is not only a better way to meet the needs of the people, but it is about inclusion, respect and a new political culture – the democratisation of everyday life*.'

In Brazil, participatory budgeting has not only produced better decisions, it has helped to create a new political culture. Through active participation people gain respect and inclusion. Participatory budgeting is part of a project of 'democratising everyday life'.

Participatory planning – rebuilding a city after Hurricane Katrina: 'We are coming back strong'

Cynthia Hedge-Morrell, a councillor in New Orleans, USA

Cynthia Hedge-Morrell was elected councillor in New Orleans just two months before Hurricane Katrina hit and the Levee Breaches flooded New Orleans in August 2005. Eighty per cent of the city was devastated and under water, and the remaining 20 per cent had no electricity or drinking water. One hundred and fifty thousand people were involuntarily evacuated and many more left of their own accord; some have still not returned to their city. Like many others, her family lost everything. She has since led the fight for those who were evacuated to have the right to return, and to rebuild the city for its people.

Rejecting an initial recovery plan drawn up by the city which paid little attention to the needs of low-income communities, some local councillors and officials undertook a participatory planning process, involving displaced people all over the USA as well as many thousands of residents still in the city.

While the city was still under water, the residents of Pontchartrain Park – a historic community built for professional African Americans – met to plan the rebuilding of their city and community. Over the next months an informational summit was held to exchange information about what was happening and what was needed, including electricity, safety, housing trailers, removal of debris, and soil, air and water quality. Following a meeting of 500 displaced residents, the 'Charrette' model of participatory planning was embraced, involving meetings open to everyone with all ideas considered. They identified $2.9m from the city budget to support this process and to bring in nationally renowned facilitators – through the America Speaks organisation[9].

Three large-scale public meetings, called Community Congresses, were called to develop and review a city-wide plan for recovery. Two Congresses were held simultaneously in New Orleans and 21 other US cities with the largest number of Katrina evacuees. A third Community Congress focused on updating the residents on recovery efforts, creating a public dialogue to identify rebuilding priorities, and strengthening public awareness for continued recovery and rebuilding efforts. More than 3000 citizens were involved in this extraordinary neighbourhood planning process. They used keypad polling – balanced to take account of the demographics of the city – satellite meetings, web-casting, interactive television, as well as bussing displaced people for face-to-face meetings. In January 2007, nearly 1300 New Orleanians gathered to review and give final input on the draft Unified New Orleans Plan before it was sent to city leaders.

The experience of Katrina and of the participatory planning process has affected people's values. Neighbourhoods and neighbours are working together and caring for each other; they are consciously rebuilding their communities. Working in this way has led to many innovative design ideas, for example combined schools, libraries and clinics. In order to rebuild neighbourhoods and keep communities together they have pioneered the idea of 'clustering' which helps communities to trade or swap properties in areas that cannot be rebuilt and move together into new areas. Neighbours with an empty site next door get first option to build or buy, putting the interests of communities and citizens before those of developers.

'*From now on neighbourhoods and neighbours will work together and look out for each other*.'

9. www.americaspeaks.org/spotlight/?p=33

Chapter 2
Challenges for champions

The Champions of Participation participants shared what they saw as the critical challenges in their own work. There was a great deal of commonality in these responses and seven main 'challenges' for how local governments support citizen engagement emerged. These seven challenges set the framework for discussion throughout the workshop.

Challenges for champions

1. Changing mindsets and culture
How can negative entrenched views on all sides be changed? How can elected representatives and officials be encouraged to share power? How can local communities be supported to take on more responsibility?

2. Inclusion
How do we create democratic processes that respect not simply the majority view, but also recognise and respond to the views and needs of minority and more vulnerable people?

3. Representation and representativeness
Who speaks for whom? How can community representatives gain legitimacy and practise new and more participatory forms of public leadership?

4. Equity in partnerships
How can partnerships between citizen groups and service providers be equitable and built on trust, providing a space where community representatives feel listened to and officials can balance the needs both of the government and of communities?

5. Managing and navigating complexity
How can citizens and communities navigate the complexity of multi-tier governance with multiple actors, competing programmes and differing perspectives?

6. Sustainability
How can innovative forms of governance and projects to engage citizens be mainstreamed into decision-making structures and sustained with secure funds without killing the creativity of initiatives?

7. One size doesn't fit all
How can local governments and citizens learn to adapt strategies to fit their own context?

1. Changing mindsets and culture

How can negative entrenched views be changed? How can elected representatives and officials be encouraged to share power? How can local communities be supported to take on more responsibility?

Elected and unelected officials are ultimately responsible for the delivery of public services. Yet increasingly, citizens want to have more of a say in the policies that affect public service delivery, as well as in *how* they are delivered. This involves changing the relationship between communities and local government.

The way that citizen participation is perceived and experienced by elected councillors, local officials, civil servants, donors, citizens and communities affects their attitudes and behaviour. Those with leadership and more powerful roles in the government and other institutions face the challenge of handing over some of their power. Citizens and communities may feel disillusioned and distrustful of participatory processes; they face the challenge of shifting from an adversarial role towards local responsibility and ownership.

Perceptions of participation

- Many agencies still see citizens as passive beneficiaries of top-down change.
- Officials must decide how far to support genuine citizen participation and give up their power to make decisions on behalf of others.
- The language of participation can be open to interpretation and lip-service. There is rhetoric around participation that, in many cases, has not matched reality.
- Within local government there is often a deep-seated belief that professionals know best. Officials are reluctant to be open to bottom-up experience and views and to give up some of their power.
- Some councillors see participatory democracy as a threat rather than as something that could strengthen their ability to do their job.
- Participation is often treated as utilitarian and extractive in order to inform and support local government.

Changing cultures

- A 'command-and-control' management style cannot work within the local complexities that citizens and local governments are concerned with.
- Officials have to cope with pressures from the changing governance culture within their organisations, and also negative perceptions from citizens.
- Citizen and community groups often perceive officialdom as 'corrupt, arrogant, indifferent and abusive of power'. Overcoming these negative perceptions is difficult.
- Community engagement requires skills that are not always evident in the public sector: listening and facilitating, cultural awareness and understanding, mediation and brokerage skills.
- There are not enough strong leaders who can encourage positive change.

Citizens and communities

- Although there are many examples where communities seize the opportunity to bring issues to the table and engage in discussion rather than simply making demands, many are still disillusioned with participation and do not trust that things will change as a result of their involvement.
- Findings ways for communities to move from adversarial relationships to a position where there is greater trust, a willingness to cooperate, more local responsibility and ownership is difficult.


Amina Salihu


Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar with Shah Newaz


Elaine Appelbee


Gerry Bulatao

Participants said:

'In post-1990 Central Eastern Europe, the cooperation rhetoric has developed faster than the genuine recognition of a need for public participation.'

Masha Djordevic
Project Manager, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary

'In Kenya, all local areas were compelled to consult about funding proposals. But the local leaders think they speak for the people, and there was no programme to change those attitudes. And there was no support to communities to engage and push for changes.'

Emmy Alividza M'Mbwanga
Local Government Reform Programme, Ministry of Local Government, Kenya

'From my perspective [as an officer] our organisation demands a lot of changes in our community but we have not changed within ourselves – we are too often not prepared to change within ourselves.'

Sarah Tighe-Ford
Equalities Manager, East Brighton NDC, Brighton, UK

'Citizen participation in development brings new roles ,responsibilities and accountabilies to previously desk bound bureaucrats! It means being accountable to the community on a daily basis – (stand up and answer for your actions!) as well as being accountable to their employers through systems of bureaucratic rules (contract of employment,Council standing orders etc).'

Keith Black
Development Manager, Merseyside Network for Change, UK

'Before changing minds you have to have leadership. If the leader doesn't push you can't change minds. My mayor was the one who said "I want to take on participation policies directly". It was his responsibility. He believed that the real change of mind needed is the mind of the civil servant as they are the ones that stay in post. The civil servant needs to go to the street, talk to the citizens to know what they really want.'
'...The idea of participation as a form of governing is one of humility, dedication, transparency and providing a reason for each answer given.'

Julio Andrade Ruiz
Director of Participation and Citizen Relations Department, Malaga City Council, Spain

'Participative decision making is used to democratise the state but the structures do not support it sometimes. The citizens live in the municipalities and we want to transform from the base to the top and to change the relationship between the different levels.'

Olivio Dutra
Former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil

'We had to work hard to convince them [community members] we were serious.'

Nuala Conlan
Participation Lead Officer, Community Involvement and Development Unit, London Borough of Southwark, UK

2. Inclusion

How do we create democratic processes that respect not simply the majority view, but also recognise and respond to the views and needs of minority and more vulnerable people?

One of the main challenges for local government is to ensure that the most marginalised and excluded groups are given the opportunity to participate in both formal and informal processes for community involvement. For many champions of participation, their main motivation is to strengthen opportunities for the voices of vulnerable and marginalised people to be heard. It is a matter of equity and social justice, as well as a government requirement, but it is not easy to gain the trust and cooperation of some groups or to balancepotentially conflicting needs and priorities.

Participation is not neutral

One of the main rationales for participation is to redress the power imbalances in society – to enable the most disadvantaged and most excluded groups and communities to have a voice and be heard. Tackling poverty and reducing inequalities is the focus of participation in all the countries represented at the workshop. Participants felt it was also important to put gender and class inequalities on the agenda.

Identifying the most disenfranchised group

Workshop members did not accept that there really were 'difficult-to-reach' groups. But the identity of the most disenfranchised groups does differ from place to place and a careful analysis is required in order to be sure who to target and involve. Sometimes there will be a number of groups whose needs may be different or even in conflict. Brokering between groups in a community can be important, especially if they need to act together in order to exert influence on those in power.

Building cohesion

Participation is therefore central to community cohesion. It is about helping diverse communities to understand and respect each other, to celebrate differences and get beyond them in order to speak and act together for the benefit of the whole community. For citizens and civil society organisations, knowing when to speak with a united voice and when to reflect diverse needs and preferences is a constant challenge.

Circles of Change

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, USA, the local government organised Circles of Change, a series of community roundtable discussions on racism and human rights. The focus was to provide ways for diverse groups of citizens to engage in public conversations about perspectives and experiences of racism and to develop a list of suggestions for community action. The planning group included the city manager and assistant manager, staff from the local university and schools, leaders of the Hmong Mutual Aid Association, college students, and interested citizens (recruited through public advertisements.) The Circles of Change initiative trained 35 volunteer facilitators, recruited 135 economically and racially diverse citizen participants, organised 15 separate discussion groups, prepared booklets to guide the discussions, and organised community-wide events to focus public attention on racism and discrimination concerns in the community.

Mike Huggins, City Manager of Eau Claire, reflected on the outcomes: *'Citizens needed safe public spaces where they could share personal and sometimes searing experiences and perspectives in the context of public policies and issues. The initiative was very successful in promoting dialogue and awareness. The 15 Circles of Change groups identified over 100 specific recommendations for actions to address discrimination... For me, the key learning outcome was the recognition of the power and impact of citizens participating in small group settings where everyone speaks. Traditional government public hearings in large audiences cannot achieve this.'*

Participants said:

'Participation mechanisms at municipality level tend to be disempowering and inaccessible to marginalised communities.'

Janine Hicks
Centre for Public Participation, South Africa

'One of the objectives of participation was to overcome the ethnic divide and help develop allegiances to the community, not just to their ethnic group.'

Reuf Bajrovic
independent consultant, Bosnia

In Kenya, the mobilisation of local groups is 'aimed at creating the spirit of togetherness at ward, village or neighbourhood level'.

Emmy Alividza M'Mbwanga
Local Government Reform Programme, Ministry of Local Government, Kenya

Mike Huggins

3. Representation and representativeness

Who speaks for whom? How can community representatives gain legitimacy and practice new and more participatory forms of public leadership?

A persistent challenge is about representation. Who gets to the table? How representative are they? How do they gain legitimacy? How can they be held accountable? How can they represent the enormous diversity of views, some of which will be in conflict? And how do the representatives – elected or appointed – not act as gatekeepers to wider involvement? These questions were posed in relation to citizen groups, local governments and NGOs with influence and power. The issues are important in terms of the quality of the participation process, and are fundamental to building trust in democracy and democratic institutions.

Community representatives

- 'Expert citizens' who participate and exercise leadership are open to constant challenge. The implications for them in terms of skills, resources and capacity are significant. It is not always clear how they get recognition and support for the roles they are expected to take on.
- Citizen representatives have to be able to listen to their communities and encourage wider involvement. They need to develop new and more participatory forms of public leadership which do not necessarily simply mirror the more 'top-down' or unaccountable forms of deciding and speaking for others.
- It is difficult to find a balance between the leadership that is required for communities to operate effectively in partnership with local government and the need to widen participation to the people who are usually heard less often.
- A real dilemma for citizens who become community representatives is that they can lose touch with their communities and become professionalised. But if they do not gain specialised knowledge and skills, and build relationships with those in authority, community representatives are disempowered in meetings and decision-making forums.
- Conflicting expectations can be hard to resolve – local leaders may be expected to stand up to politicians and officials while at the same time having a duty to broker partnership decisions with local people. Sometimes this can be a no-win situation.
- Working in this complex environment requires experience, expertise and not a little sophistication, especially in diverse and fragmented communities.

The councillors' perspective

- Elected councillors are also confronted with questions of role, representation and legitimacy, especially in areas where the electoral turnout is very low.
- Like community leaders, councillors can find themselves caught, 'pig in the middle', between the expectations of their communities and the need to reflect back to local people the views of the partnerships on which they sit. For councillors too, this can feel like a no-win situation.
- However many local councillors are starting to see how working closely with communities and civil organisations can strengthen their ability to do their job, rather than undermine it.

International organisations

- International organisations such as NGOs also face challenges of representation and accountability. They can be instrumental in driving the adoption of participation policies – yet they are sometimes distrustful of governments rather than working for change through greater participation in local government and local leadership.
- One challenge facing international organisations relates to whether they are playing their role as intermediaries as well as they might. Are they themselves legitimate, representative and accountable to the people they are claiming to represent?
- In the UK the role of NGOs or third sector organisations is changing as they become better established within partnership structures. But in other countries the problem remains.

The danger of parallel systems

Participation can be challenged when external projects set up parallel organisations or processes as alternatives to participation in local government. In an example from India, international donors set up parallel institutions to the Panchayati Raj for health, water and other services. These came with preconceived ideas about the Panchayats' capacity and encompassed ways of working, familiar to donors from other contexts. The result undermined work to make the Panchayats more accountable and effective.

In Bosnia, aid agencies tried to impose their own agenda and social welfare system because they viewed Bosnian local governments as outmoded. However, in many ways they were more legitimate than the aid agency structures imposed from the outside. The aid agency approach did not work and now local government is again playing a stronger role.

Participants said:

'Every time you keep hearing: "Oh we want the real people to be involved in this". So we say, "OK we'll help you get the real people". We get the real people; then they tell the real people they have to be organised... so they become a group and then they say: "Oh no, we don't want groups, we want the real people".'

Marilyn Taylor
Professor of Urban Governance and Regeneration, University of Western England

'I work as a volunteer but end up being expected to be an "expert citizen". This makes me wonder, why do we need to do this? Why does government want us to do it? What happens when you go

through these doors? Whose agenda are you working for? And what are you hoping to achieve?

There is a lot of talk about performance management frameworks and I am struggling to keep up – how do I influence the performance management framework? I am "only a volunteer" but the workload is actually suitable for a day job.

The other problem is being situated in the middle, being accountable to both sides – my community and the partnership – and having to speak for both sides.'

Rose Ardron
Community representative and Chair of the Burngreave New Deal for Communities Partnership Board; member of the LSP Board, Sheffield, UK

Janine Hicks

4. Equity in partnerships

How can partnerships between citizen groups and service providers be equitable and built on trust, where community representatives feel listened to and officials can balance the needs both of the government and communities?

Partnership working is one of the most common ways in which community and civil organisations participate in decision making alongside elected representatives and officials. Many participants felt that they were at the start of a long learning curve to work out how to build more effective and equitable partnerships, in which community and citizen representatives sit round the table on an equal basis with politicians, officials and business representatives.

There are continuing challenges to overcome before many local communities experience partnerships as equitable.

- Community representatives often do not feel listened to and are intimidated by officials and formal processes.
- Officials find it difficult to balance the demands of the government with the needs of communities.
- Genuine partnership depends on trust and in this context building trust usually means overcoming a history of mistrust between local communities and those with power. Trust established between citizens groups and service providers is often fragile and easily damaged.
- There is sometimes a danger that partnerships can get very 'cosy' where community organisations become co-opted and lose their independence. Citizen groups want to be the 'grit in the oyster' but in a heavily consensus-oriented partnership culture this can be a difficult stance to maintain.

There are also different expectations about working together in a partnership.

- Partnerships can be designed and framed in ways that exacerbate exclusion and suspicion.
- People in power often try to maintain control by controlling what gets onto the agenda.
- Partnerships may be designed to improve working relationships between different government departments, rather than to empower communities.

Participants said:

'In post-1990 Central Eastern Europe, consultation processes are designed to inform people and collect feedback. They concentrate on listing projects or showing images of new construction. They do not attempt to engage people in the reasoning or values behind the proposals.'

Masha Djordevic
Project Manager, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary

'Events coined as participation events are often PR events, seeking responses to formulated policies and decisions already made.

Public participation in municipalities in South Africa stops at communities identifying their needs. There are consultation mechanisms in place but people are not invited to participate through participatory budgeting, or monitoring or feedback.

Participatory mechanisms are only at the margin/periphery, and not connected with decision making… it couldn't be further removed from influencing decision making.

So there is a sense of frustration in the minds of the public – it's all window dressing, it's a done deal. People are tired of participating, they say, "come back when you have done something about it".'

Janine Hicks
Centre for Public Participation, South Africa

5. Managing and navigating complexity

How can citizens and communities navigate the complexity of multi-tier governance with multiple actors, competing programmes and differing perspectives?

Governance arrangements are extremely complex with intricate layers of decision making, and multiple actors with different sources of democratic mandate and power. This complexity is intrinsic to the managerial and target culture that characterises the relationship between central and local government. Those championing participation have to navigate this complex set of relations and structures to have an impact on decision making – a highly skilled task.

- **Understanding the system**
  The sheer complexity of the system can overwhelm both decision-makers and citizen participants alike. Community representatives have to work hard to understand how local governance works, as well as the relationships and constraints between central and local government. There is also 'hyperactivity' in policy making with constant changes of policy and little chance to implement and see what works.

- **Using the structures**
  It is a challenge to relax centralised structures enough to accommodate informal processes that encourage participation. However the sheer messiness of much partnership working also has its advantages. It creates cracks in the system that can be widened and exploited. It is also an opportunity for trying new ways of doing things – on both sides.

- **Building alliances**
  Both citizens and officers need to build alliances across the government and community layers and among different actors. Community representatives and officers need to make sure that their own professional and localised networks have influence.

- **Acting outside the government**
  Fragmented governance structures mean that communities need to be able to work both 'inside and outside' the state institutions. It is a challenge to communities to build their own local broad-based organisations and independent power bases, to give them credibility and authority in the formal structures. But there is also a recognition that many of the key decisions they want to influence are not the responsibility of local or even central governments; citizens have to find ways to influence landowners, developers, employers and others who impact on the quality of life in the community.

- **Challenging managerial culture**
  The managerial culture of local and central government often undermines meaningful participation. Managers tend to focus on centrally driven performance and tasks rather than listening to what people want locally. Top-down and narrowly defined targets do not encourage local flexibility or innovation and fail to take account of sensitive decisions that local service providers need to make in response to complex problems.

Participants said:

'If we remove rubbish from the bottom of Mrs Jones's garden, it removes rats; the surrounding area is cleaner, healthier; people can gather in that location and engage socially, so there is the reduction of antisocial behaviour. But how do you demonstrate this domino effect? How do you demonstrate how actions affect several other things?'

'…There are a lot of tensions in terms of government's ever-changing priorities, be it crime or health or education. These national priorities change the focus of the issues, for example mobile phone crimes have somehow replaced the race-hate crime agenda. Race crime cannot be solved immediately but the government wants quick wins within five years, which for some communities may be very fast. But they want to see results now and communities do not work that fast.'

Sarah Tighe Ford
Equalities Manager, East Brighton NDC, Brighton, UK

'South Somerset Council's [planning] development control was devolved to local area committees so that any planning decision was made very publicly. People could see how the decision was made and even if went against what they wanted, because they were part of the process they were satisfied, even if they didn't get what they wanted. When we were audited, we were told the process took too long and we had missed our targets, and so we were forced to do it quicker. The consultation process has been speeded up, and now far fewer decisions are made by the committee, and people often feel aggrieved if decisions go against their wishes'.

Angie Singleton
Councillor, South Somerset District Council, UK

6. Sustainability

How can innovative forms of governance and projects to engage citizens be mainstreamed into decision-making structures and sustained with secure funds without killing the creativity of these initiatives?

Sustaining participation is a virtuous circle: community engagement improves the sustainability of the decisions made and projects implemented, and because projects are successful people will stay involved and funders will continue to resource it. Yet finding ways to sustain genuine processes of citizen engagement and empowerment raises significant challenges:

- **Empowerment**
  Participation as an empowerment process can easily be overlooked. Many citizen engagement projects have come about through short-term funds for projects or area-based initiatives. While participation as a means to an end in tackling problems such as crime or poor health can be beneficial, the deeper process of empowerment is an important objective in its own right.

- **Mainstreaming**
  Often participation is treated as an 'add-on' rather than part of the 'day job'. Creating structures and processes that enable participation to be mainstreamed throughout local government is difficult. Organisational and political management structures are not flexible enough to institutionalise participatory principles. But it is worth noting that mainstreaming can be a mixed blessing. Locally run, informal community projects risk losing some of their freedom, influence and creative energy when they are absorbed into formal partnership structures.

- **Funding**
  Community groups have always had to bid for funds in competition with others. Increasingly they are being encouraged to behave like social entrepreneurs, taking on contracts and juggling with many funding streams and different reporting cycles. Projects to increase engagement and develop innovative forms of governance struggle to secure funds and become embedded in mainstream decision-making structures. Many funding streams are constrained by central requirements rather than local priorities and in some places there can be an over-reliance on international donors and NGOs.

- **Policy framework**
  Agreed principles, processes and policy frameworks on participation are vulnerable when there are changes of political leadership. In the UK, there are no legal rights which would protect policies enshrining citizen participation.

- **Time factors**
  Participation is not a quick-fix route. New projects need time and resources to make a difference. The scale of change envisaged is resource intensive and time hungry. Many of the problems that community engagement is now being called upon to help resolve are intractable and long standing. The effectiveness of participation is compromised by short-termism and the inherent difficulty of measuring tangible results. Maintaining momentum is another challenge.

- **Project design**
  Sustainability relies heavily on good initial project design, and those which are based on the wrong assumptions and done from the top down are less likely to work. Unless people are involved from the beginning – setting the agenda, diagnosing the issues, making the policies and strategies, planning the evaluation, and not just managing the end projects – then there is little impact. If a project does not work or is not seen to work, citizens, funders and local officials will not maintain their support.

- **Relationships**
  Sustained participation is just as much about relationships, alliances and building trust. Effective participation requires a long-term commitment and a degree of consistency among those involved. But people move on – officials and residents – and attracting new people and fresh ideas is also essential to long-term change.

- **Motivation**
  Participation and engagement arrangements have to be meaningful and worthwhile to citizens and 'not be a burden'. Too often the demands placed on a relatively small number of people can lead to exhaustion and 'burn-out'. One of the most challenging questions is how to stop community forums and other informal arrangements becoming bureaucratic and over-burdensome to community activists. But experienced community leaders also need to be able to move on and use their expertise in different, potentially more challenging, ways thus feeding their own motivation and also creating space for new people to take up the reins.


Janine Hicks and Anju Dwivedi


Subethri Naidoo


Cynthia Hedge-Morrell


Ming Zhuang

Participants said:

'Sustainability is key for me: how you actually mainstream the key principles of effective community participation within a process, rather than as an "add-on".'

Joe Micheli
Neighbourhood Management Participation Officer, Barnsley, UK

'How can we avoid turning energetic volunteers into overwhelmed and unpaid quasi-bureaucrats?'

Rose Ardron
Community representative and Chair of the Burngreave New Deal for Communities Partnership Board; member of the LSP Board, Sheffield, UK

'In South Africa, we are trying to assist municipalities with the "how". To their credit there have been some izimbizos (group talk and discussion) but it's a very random mass of people – anything from 500 to 5000 people. It is poorly organised, very seldom is an agenda set or linked to a policy problem, or minutes taken or responses given back. We applaud the effort that is made but we need to make the process more meaningful; the political will is there but there is an inherent fault with the design. There is no recognition that people can help in designing better policies. Well-designed empowered spaces are crucial for participation.'

Janine Hicks
Centre for Public Participation, South Africa

In New Orleans they 'planned and planned and planned and 18 months later we have planned a city – but only on paper. So now we have a plan and our challenge is to secure the resources to make it a reality.'

Cynthia Hedge-Morrell
City Councillor, New Orleans, USA

Malaga (Spain) has been working for ten years to create a true participative democracy in which 'institutions and people share problems and responsibilities without losing efficiency'.

Julio Andrade Ruiz
Director Participation and Citizen Relations Department, Malaga City Council, Spain

'Citizens have been participating for at least six years and now they are demoralised. They don't see changes... this is very disempowering... it causes conflict.'

Emmy Alividza M'Mbwanga
Local Government Reform Programme, Ministry of Local Government, Kenya

'In China, in the last 20 years many state-owned entities, which were once the overwhelming organisational units of society, have gone bankrupt. The law now requires a Committee of Local Residents with several people elected. But both in and after the election, there is still not wide participation. In some neighbourhoods, families contribute their money as they have to, but no repairs are done, and no one can really do anything about this.'

Zhuang Ming
China Participatory Governance Network, China

7. One size doesn't fit all

How can local governments and citizens learn to adapt strategies to fit their own context?

A familiar lesson and challenge is that 'one size doesn't fit all' and what works in one area will not necessarily work in another.

- There is a danger of replicating participatory processes that worked in one area without examining the specific context and the history of that area.
- Time and resources are needed to understand how and why something has worked in one situation and to adapt rather than simply adopt it.
- Adapting participatory methodologies creatively according to the local situation may mean experimenting and taking risks.

Silvana Lauzan and Vivien Lowndes

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting was developed in the context of Brazil and rooted in the political values of the Workers Party. The process allowed citizens to set priorities for major infrastructure budgets such as sanitation and transport. It has been adapted in many parts of the world to fit a range of circumstances. In Malaga, 14 million Euros are spent through the participatory budgeting programme, and the process is spreading in other parts of Europe. In the UK, pilot schemes in Bradford, Newcastle and Salford – as well as other parts of the UK – are using participatory budgeting to enable communities to allocate small amounts of money on environmental and youth projects.

Authoritarian and military regimes

One of the most difficult circumstances in which to champion participation is in (current and former) centralised, authoritarian and military regimes. At the extreme, participation can be very dangerous. But more generally, across Eastern Europe, China and some countries in the South, a legacy of 'attitudinal authoritarianism' and authoritarian bureaucracy holds firm. In these places politicians, officials and citizens do not have any experience or expectations of participatory democratic processes. There is no history of strong public democratic institutions, few civil society organisations and few community development skills. Local and international champions of participation play a crucial role in helping to transform the social system. In some countries that are emerging from conflict or post-authoritarian regimes, it is not safe to speak out publicly.

Participants said:

'How do countries like Argentina and Chile face the legacy of authoritarian practices? There are a number of challenges at different levels that need to be faced. For example, there is generally a lack of knowledge (and practice) of citizen rights... Only a few people or groups have access to the information and only a few use it to claim for other rights such as health or housing. This lack of access to public information is coupled with lack of enabling national legal provisions to ensure practice of such rights. It is important to reflect on what conditions are not enabling participation. The lack of knowledge of what our rights are and the lack of access to public information are some of them... Also, when authorities or civil servants are finally willing to engage in public participation, they don't know how to do it – how to organise, plan and discuss. There is a lack of capacity within the state to incorporate these practices.'

Silvana Lauzan
Corporacion Participia, Chile

Chapter 3
Searching for solutions

What are the enabling conditions for participation and how are they created from the beginning? How do we design inclusive and empowered participatory processes that deliver? And how do we sustain participation and engagement once it has emerged? These were a few of the questions participants discussed in searching for solutions.

Six themes emerged, aiming to address the challenges (as outlined in Chapter 2) to support the design and sustenance of participatory governance processes.

1. Getting started
What are the enabling conditions for participation and how are they created from the beginning?

2. Getting it right
How can inclusive and empowered participatory processes that deliver be designed?

3. Fixing the system
What are the public administration processes and organisational changes that enable and support participatory governance?

4. Keeping it right
How can participation and engagement be sustained once it has emerged?

5. Dealing with power
How do we overcome resistance and deal with power differences?

6. 'Mind the gap!'
What is the best way to devolve power that matches rhetoric and reality?

Six groups of participants each took one theme and explored the strategies and solutions for tackling the challenges.

Group discussion at Lewes

1. Getting started: What are the enabling conditions for participation and how are they created from the beginning?

This group discussed the importance of paying attention to the preconditions in communities and what was needed to lay the groundwork of involving people and designing the process from the beginning.

Key messages

Take time at the outset to listen to what local people have to say and really understand the issues from their perspective. This will provide the foundation for strong relationships, based on mutual respect and cooperation. It will build confidence and capacity within local communities, develop a sense of collective responsibility and ownership, establish realistic expectations and lead to effective action.

Take time to start at the beginning

Many participants were grappling with their context of authoritarian or centralised power relations and very little previous history of participation. In some senses, this was felt to be a shared issue across many parts of Europe as well as Latin America, for instance.

From the outset it is key to build confidence and trust in the integrity of the government and the value of participation. At the beginning the emphasis has to be on building relationships between different individuals, groups and associations. A means of engaging and participating needs to be designed, communications opened up, information made available, and officials and politicians trained. Madrid City Council has established multi-purpose youth centres and classes in order to encourage public involvement and stimulate community life and civic society.

In Bosnia it proved important to create safe places for people to meet. Officials went to places where people who were less likely to come to meetings and who had less power – often women-headed households – were likely to be.

'*I had to find safe places where I could meet them on their turf and on their terms,*' said Reuf Bajrovic, an independent consultant in Bosnia. In Abuja, Nigeria, the authorities have initiated ways to develop more trust:

- Quarterly neighbourhood-based meetings at the Town Hall provide an opportunity for a 'no holds barred' encounter between a government minister and residents, which are broadcast on radio and television.
- The mobile phone Helpline is run by young people who deal with complaints and refer them to the relevant people in the different government departments. They follow up each complaint by ringing back to check that action has been taken and report on a weekly basis to the local authority.
- Dateline Abuja is an interactive phone and text-in radio programme, broadcast nationally every fortnight.

In some countries, participation has been initiated from the top down – sometimes as a result of international or donor pressure. In these instances it is important to:

- **know the community**, which can be achieved by walking the streets, listening to people, going to places where people meet. Even though statistics and demographics are important, 'sometimes one does not fully understand unless one walks the streets' as well.
- **know the issues** by taking the time to listen to people's perspectives and issues rather than working from a top-down agenda. This preparatory work can build officials' and activists' awareness and encourage a more receptive climate within the community.

Design a good process from the outset

Experience has taught many valuable lessons about the factors that make for a good process:

- Right from the beginning develop a collective understanding and ownership of the participation process, its objectives, what it will require from everyone involved and how it will benefit each player. *'After two and half years and 30 meetings the Citizens Advisory*

Committee, comprised of people with polar opposite views about development and growth, voted unanimously to recommend the adoption of the draft plan they had discussed, debated and helped write.'
Mike Huggins
City Manager of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, USA.

- Take into account the importance of timing and make sure that policy work is aligned with the planning and budget cycle so impact happens at the right point and without wasting time.

- Make sure there is understanding about how decisions will be made, and that people are getting involved at the right point in the system.

- Don't create a parallel participation structure.
'The parallel structure has no money but has structure. And the government has money but no structure.'
Anju Dwifedi
State Coordinator of the Society for Participatory Research in India.

- Don't build up false hopes or expectations. The process has to be able to give people something tangible and be able to deliver on any promises, otherwise trust is lost.

- Don't go too fast... or too slowly! Getting the balance right is crucial. While time is important, there is also value in having some quick wins.
'Participation can only happen through purposeful, repeated and well-structured communication, not in ad hoc meetings where participants are asked to comment on the spot.'
Masha Djordjevic
Project Manager, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary

Preparing institutions [10]

Politicians and officials are also learning so it is important not to ignore the capacity needs of councillors and other agencies. Efforts should be made to bolster their enthusiasm, ensure they are represented, and also provide training for them.

'Collaborating on researching the issues can help build a receptive institutional environment.'
Janine Hicks
Centre for Public Participation, South Africa

- Taking stock of how prepared local governments are for participation can identify issues early on. The EU-sponsored CLEAR format (see below) gives weight to this exercise.

- Central government – civil servants and politicians – need to understand the methods and processes of engagement. They may try to overload a fragile organisation with money too early. They may not appreciate the need to invest up front in the skills and infrastructure and as a result underestimate the preparation work needed.
'In the first three years, we were so rushed to meet spending targets that in effect we threw away a lot... it was wrong to give us that much money so early on. The first two years should have been spent engaging with the community.'
Sarah Tighe-Ford
Equalities Manager, East Brighton NDC, UK

Communities also need to build their own engagement processes so that they can debate amongst themselves and develop a collective voice; this will make them stronger in relation to other partners.

'Communities need to get strategic about themselves.'
Elaine Applebee
Acting Chief Executive, Bradford Vision, UK

'Why Participate?'[10]

An EU project called 'Why Participate?' produced a diagnostic model for local government to use for planning its improvements in participation: the CLEAR model is positioned 'somewhere between prescription and laissez faire'.

The project found that people are more likely to participate when the CLEAR conditions are in place. When they researched people's attitudes to participation, there were three criteria:

1. Did it make a difference to impact or learning?
2. Was it worth the money spent on the exercise?
3. Will the initiative carry on?

	When do people participate ?	What could local government do to increase participation?
C	When they can	Provide the resources, skills, knowledge. Socioeconomic profile remains the best predictor of participation.
L	When they like to	Work to create a shared attachment to the decision-making body, e.g. a strong city identity. Community identity can grow through cohesion activities and place shaping dialogue. Councils and others can build and reinforce shared identity.
E	When they are enabled	Create a civic infrastructure of active groups in the community, new civic activities, and accessible processes and structures for decision-making. The local press is part of this infrastructure.
A	When they are asked	Have a range of different ways in which people are mobilised, e.g. through music, culture, etc. An area needs a range of opportunities for different tastes. It is not about codified standards and rule books.
R	When they are responded to	Political will and accountable leadership with clear links to decision making. The system provides for transparency, listening, assessing impacts and other legitimate inputs and giving feedback. It is not about populism or parochialism.

10. Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L. and Stoker G. (2006), 'Diagnosing and remedying the failings of official participation schemes: the CLEAR framework', *Social Policy and Society* 5:2 pp281–91, Cambridge University Press

2. Getting it right: How do we design inclusive and empowered participatory processes that deliver?

The design of the participation or regeneration process has an impact on the willingness of communities to engage. What are the critical factors in designing processes that are inclusive, empowering and deliver real benefits?

Key messages

Design a participative process that is 'fit for purpose', relevant to the particular situation and aims of the project and try to ensure that 'everyone benefits' – but be realistic about what is possible. Make sure that people not already 'at the table' are included and think ahead about the likely outcomes and how decisions might be implemented.

Open to all

Participation has to be open to all groups in a society or community – it cannot only work with poor, vulnerable or minority groups. The benefits of this were illustrated by Bradford's participatory budgeting exercise which included all socioeconomic groups in the city, in both wealthy and poor areas. The dialogue that took place helped different communities to understand each other's needs; to develop empathy with those who were poorer or who needed more support; to sort out their differences; and to build a consensus about resources and priorities. This is a key outcome of the deliberative forms of participation that many are now experimenting with.

Differences of scale or objective

Differences that affect process design can be ones of scale or of objectives. For instance local government in Porto Alegre, Brazil designed a bottom-up participatory budgetary process in order to prioritise the city budget and target services more effectively, but also in order to strengthen peoples' empowerment in their neighbourhoods. In South Africa, local governments are using an approach known as the Integrated Development Planning processes to try and redress structural inequalities, but the approach is often top-down with less commitment to empowerment. In South Africa, New Orleans and Kenya participation is being used for major decisions.

'We are talking from very different positions. Some of us are dealing with fundamental changes – roads,[i.e.] infrastructure which requires participation and needs interaction with governance bodies – the [communities] cannot do this on their own. This is the issue in most developing countries.'
Subethri Naidoo
Governance Adviser for DFID South Africa

In the UK, in contrast, while participatory budget principles from Porto Alegre in Brazil have been adopted in Salford and Bradford, only relatively small sums of money are available to spend on localised environmental changes.

Instrumental or intrinsic?

Many participation projects are instrumental, in the sense that the core purpose is to influence a decision or plan. For some workshop participants, and within the participation movement more generally, there are other equally important but less tangible purposes, such as building solidarity between communities.

'We need to realise the different structures and [that] there are different classes in the meeting... different problems... differences of interest, and people need to discuss priorities and necessities. The rich must participate as they have demands but the process needs to bring solidarity because the process of participation needs to transform this relationship; not conform to it.'
Olivio Dutra
former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil

'A group process can engage people in the active sifting of ideas and move them in the direction of informed balanced judgment about complex community issues.'
Mike Huggins
City Manager of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, USA

There were different opinions about the necessity of involving public sector agencies. One participant in the UK thought they needed to be involved, so that the changes can be mainstreamed: '*We need to engage the agencies, even if they say no [to what we want]: it is when they say nothing that I have a problem*'. For others, for instance in Latin America, '*If we waited until [we got] the support of agencies, nothing would have happened*'. Another UK participant (Angie Singleton, Councillor for South Somerset District Council) did not see the involvement of public agencies as being essential: '*I find that there are so many things that like-minded people can solve on their own*'.

- Information and communication are a significant element of the design. Access to knowledge and information, arrangements to provide feedback to people, and how to involve citizens in monitoring and review are all important features to get right from the start.

- Designing participation so that there are benefits on all sides is key. '*Cooperation has developed better in site-specific projects or policy projects, where citizens' demands and public agency needs come together,*' said Masha Djordjevic, Project Manager, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary

- The conception and design of the process needs to define the objectives and what would be success.
  'Our New Deal for Communities Board in Sheffield was deemed [by government] to be failing because we were slow to spend money and make decisions. But at the same time we had big turnouts at meetings and lively debate,'
  Rose Ardron
  A community worker and LSP Representative for Sheffield, UK

- Participation design should put low-income groups, class and caste back on the agenda. For example India has made the inclusion of marginalised groups a key outcome of their new democracy. In other countries, women, older people and young people were all considered important groups. In Eastern Europe, minority groups such as gypsies and travellers are the focus. All of these groups need targeted support if they are to engage with city authorities.

3. What are the public administration processes and organisational changes that enable and support participatory governance?

What kind of administrative and organisational changes would need to be implemented by governments at all levels in order to support and respond to participatory democracy?

Key messages

Participation is a two-way process. Participatory governance needs to be supported by politicians and officials, at every level, who are committed to working with communities in a different way and who have the necessary skills to do this well. Building their capacity is a priority and requires training and support for them, alongside the development of new structures and processes for involvement.

Changing structures

Participation takes place within an institutional landscape. Attempts to increase the level of participation will only be effective if the institutions of governance and service delivery also change the way they operate and relate to citizens.

'In Brazil, the health budget is given to locally based health councils so that local government has to work with them. But the potential is limited by the fact that the local government does not have sufficient discretionary powers to plan closely with the health councils.'
Claudio Duarte, Provincial Health Department, Pernambuco State Government, Brazil

- Participation and governance need to be designed together as different facets of the same 'whole system'.
- Implementing priorities is just as important as participation to identify priorities.
- An efficient design is needed for the systematic use of complaints and feedback mechanisms to ensure that citizens are able to express their views even after formal 'consultation' processes have ended.
- Communities' own resources and contributions need to be taken into account and support provided for them to be active citizens.
- Processes should be documented so they are transparent and learning can be shared.
- Take into account neighbourhoods which want to influence local services as well as issues that impact on whole towns or cities and where there are many tiers of government involved.

'It is a challenge for community representatives to deal with the complexities and flaws of a government programme.'
Rose Ardron, community worker and LSP Representative, Sheffield, UK

Supporting citizens to engage

It is not just a question of the nature of the 'spaces' in which people meet and engage. It is also how people behave in those spaces.

- Communication, training and information are vital.
- Train small groups of officers, local politicians and citizens together – in Norway this is called a 'citizens' academy' and is designed to change attitudes as well as working methods.
- Assess whether a specialist team is a good idea or whether it is better to spread the skills across all departments.
- Train people at the lowest level of elected governance, for example in the UK the parish councils, or village forums, in how to use the other tiers of government.

Malaga has made positive efforts to spread a 'culture of participation'. The city now has a Municipal Charter so that people know their rights and how they can get involved. It is not 'a matter to plea for'. The municipality runs courses in diverse subjects such as yoga for older people, computing and fundraising, which brings people – especially minority and excluded groups – into civil society. Civic offices combine with civil society offices, providing informal opportunities for people to get to know each other. The participatory budget exercise had an online element which got more people involved and spread the use of technology in poorer communities. Providing free access to the internet in public spaces and libraries meant people could join in and this appealed especially to young people.

Experience in Brazil also showed how community activities can have an impact on the way people participate. School children carried out a study of their community; they painted the municipal budget on the walls of schools, which attracted the attention of parents and got discussion going. '*It is not lack of skills that hinder [empowerment] but organisational structures*', according to Peter Spink of Fundação Getulio Vargas São Paulo, Institutional Liaison Group for Innovations in Governance and Public Action, Brazil.

Zena Brabazon, a neighbourhood management officer in the UK, contrasted two participatory regeneration projects very near each other in the London Borough of Haringey. One was a government-led neighbourhood renewal project which demonstrated that poorer areas do get worse services and that the process should be driven by the community. However the project had to cope with a legacy of difficult internal community politics and it would be naïve to assume that the community was homogenous – and of course tensions and conflict were very dispiriting for everyone. In the nearby area of Green Lanes, a neighbourhood that received very little government funding, a murder on the main shopping street brought the community, police and traders together and they were able to develop their own way of working without central government constraints. The involvement of local councillors was pivotal in the process.

4. Keeping it right: How do we sustain participation and engagement once it has emerged?

Many projects and innovatory participatory initiatives are set up, only to wither away when the funds run out or when interest dies because there are no quick and visible tangible benefits. How is it possible to balance the long haul of fundamental change with the quick wins to maintain popular trust?

Key messages

The right to participate needs to be enshrined within a legal and policy framework, so that citizen involvement becomes integral to the way in which government 'does business' at every level, and to ensure that resources are provided to support it. But there are risks in 'mainstreaming' – and a

balance is needed so that community groups do not lose their local roots, or compromise their independence and capacity to challenge.

Policy commitment

The participants agreed that participation needs to be enshrined in a clear policy commitment and framework for implementation. This is essential for sustainability. It helps promote the principles, embed participation processes, facilitate organisational changes and protect funding. Clarity about the legal right of people to participate may also mean that participatory processes are less vulnerable to changes in political leadership.

Mainstreaming

In the UK, local authorities and partnerships are encouraged to have community development strategies and to work closely with the community and voluntary sector. Making participation part of core local government strategy is important in order to avoid it being treated as a peripheral activity. However there is a danger that mainstreaming might dilute the dynamism of community engagement and distance it from the grassroots. Sustaining popular participatory culture inside governance structures, while at the same time retaining the ability to challenge the government when necessary, can be a difficult juggling act to pull off. But getting the balance right would seem to be essential if participation is to be taken seriously and placed on a secure footing.

Being aware of funding contexts

- In the UK some community groups feared they would lose funding when national programmes were mainstreamed to local government, arguing they needed the local independence that came from national funding.
- Partnerships which promote participation are very important for developing and middle-income countries. NGOs play an important role in supporting champions in difficult and dangerous situations. However their involvement tends to be short term and even when they want local government bodies to take over it is often not realistic.
- Large external funders such as the World Bank or INGOs rarely have roots in or make long-term commitments to local communities. In many places, fundamental social change is necessary to establish democratic values and practice and to underpin participation and cope with the consequences of citizen engagement.
- Many funding streams are constrained by central government requirements rather than responding to local priorities. Clare Greener, Rural Policy Manager with Shropshire City Council in the UK, spoke about the rare experience of open-ended funding from DEFRA.[11] This led to '*fantastic value and learning*' because people were able to design and try out different approaches locally. This led to innovative ideas such as using video conferencing to provide advisory services in rural areas.

Sustaining community action

- Make best use of local people's own resources by involving them in designing projects and processes that they can sustain in the long term. Ownership over the process and projects leads to greater sustainability.
  'The community must own the "design, delivery and the evaluation". In setting up the processes, go door to door to find out about the local resources; what are the skills? There has to be a core group that is representative and accepted. And you have to design in implementation and evaluation from the start.'
  Mike Huggins
  City Manager, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, USA

  'Everyone has to have an active role – in Nigeria we call this "sweat equity": what you bring to the table. The government brings money and land. You bring your labour or your time to monitor; people can invest what they have. And all contributions are valuable.'
  Amina Salihu
  Former Senior Special Assistant on Communication to the Federal Capital Territory Administration, Abuja, Nigeria
- Community representatives must be aware of the attitudes and perceptions of the people they are trying to influence.
- Political education is vital to increase understanding of the benefits of participation and the issues it raises.
- Having good community facilitators who value participation in its own right rather than simply use it in an instrumental way is important. They can support leaders to grow from within the community and help build the networks that will support them.
- Many participation projects focus on influencing decisions and devising plans, yet don't think about how to maintain that impetus into delivery.
- Make quick wins and benefits visible to the community to encourage trust in the process.
  'Winning trust through some quick and visible wins and attention to the bread-and-butter issues is essential. Then you can go on to talk about the strategic issues.'
  Amina Salihu
  Former Senior Special Assistant on Communication to the Federal Capital Territory Administration, Abuja, Nigeria

Building trust in the Philippines

'Where I live in the Philippines is locally very rich in minerals, fishing and forests. But there were many illegal activities and these resources were being exploited. The local community were mobilised – but local people were also benefiting so it was very difficult. I spent a year preparing to stand for Mayor against the local dynasty. I worked with the fishermen, the forest tribes and the women to get a vision for the town: our vision was to stand up for what is right, to care for each other and to care for the environment. An NGO helped with resources and tools. I won and when I was a Mayor I continued with my commitment to participation. We developed a plan for the town with ten principles. Over the last eight years, we have stopped the illegal logging and mining. And I have used my powers to protect the environment and social services. Once the people realise these changes are for their survival they will organise to protect them.'
Jerry V. Dela Cerna
Mayor, Municipality of Governor Generoso, Province of Davao Oriental, Philippines

11. UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

5. How do we overcome resistance and deal with power differences?

Power imbalances and resistance to change are constantly cited as barriers to participation. The problem can be a matter of organisational culture, structures or individual position and personality – but those who champion citizen participation need to find ways to deal with this.

Key messages

Effective participation needs people to understand and address power imbalances. Communities need to find powerful allies as well as to build strong organisations that can hold government, and others, to account. Community organisations should not underestimate the impact of small actions nor, on the other hand, the sheer power of numbers. And communities are more likely to be heard if they can offer solutions to those in power as well as challenging them.

Different types of power

Communities and civic organisers should be aware of the different types of power people hold.

- There are those who have 'power over' others. They can be from any sector and may derive their power to make decisions from many sources, including being appointed as a community representative.
- There are those who have the power to influence or to express views. Many people can exercise this kind of power – it is not a limited resource. It moves about and there is no need to compete with others, and in fact the more people have that kind of power the better. This is what 'empowerment' usually refers to.

Strategies to deal with formal power

One approach is referred to as the 'Australian rugby defence strategy'. Rather than being put off by the line-up of big and powerful people, look for gaps in the defences, make alliances and work out how to get through. Look for the ways round and for openings between people. Examples are:

- Use of informal power networks and alliances in the community to build community organisations can add strength. '*You often need to build alliances before approaching formal power holders.*' Prepare people collectively to have a shared vision and approach. '*Never pick a fight unless you have allies*' and '*Pick your battles carefully*' are two sound pieces of advice offered.
- Look for champions in the wider community. For example in the UK a bishop was nominated to chair a local partnership and gave weight to the community participation agenda.
- Find politicians and allies in the city council or other government agencies and work with and through them.
- Use the systems provided but challenge how they work. (One group wanted to get community representatives involved in the local authority scrutiny committee and was told it was not possible. In fact, when they pushed the idea, there was nothing to stop it happening.)
- Help make people into the 'right people' by providing support and training to ensure their involvement is effective.
- Identify those people who may sabotage your interests and tactics. How can you minimise their influence? How can you help them see the effect of their critical or negative behaviours?
- Keep your focus on the whole process. Identify the things you want to achieve, manage expectations, reflect on and evaluate progress.
- Use legislation as a useful lever to provide, for example, rights to information and minimum standards.
- Openly discuss power differences. Use of mapping exercises to explore changes in power structures and the people who exercise power can highlight the complexity and dynamic nature of power and the way in which too many institutions and groups make decisions in ways that are not transparent or accessible.

Citizen and community empowerment

How can people be supported to take up the opportunities for power and make good use of them?

- Demystify the 'decision-making structures' by teaching people 'how the city works'.[12] This helps people see the openings and potential of certain strategies.
- Encourage groups in the community to work together – rather than opposing each other – and agree on common aims and a collective voice. Democratic and collective processes in the community may need to be sorted out before challenging those who are elected or standing for election.
- Recognise where common interests do not exist, and where there is conflict and division.
- Promote the idea of reciprocity: 'we'll help you if you'll help us later'. In East London, TELCO, at the time a mainly Christian-based organisation, supported the local Muslim community to get a site for a mosque. Today the mosque is one of the strongest members of TELCO and helps community groups from all faiths get their needs met.
- Challenge the focus on citizens simply as 'individual customers', and instead campaign collectively for better services for all.
- Negative events can act as a catalyst for organising. Often people will get organised as a response to a terrible event such as a murder, or a local crisis such as escalating drug dealing. An existing network can mobilise very quickly around such an event.

Creating solutions

It is more empowering to move from opposing things to proposing solutions. Working locally to develop solutions to problems or draw up alternative plans shows what is possible and can transform the debate.

June 4th policy dialogue event

12. 'How the City Works', ©Rose Ardron – a course developed for Sheffield Community Empowerment Network.

Developing solutions from the bottom up

In Shropshire – a very rural and sparsely populated part of England – community-based planning and a village scrutiny process encouraged people to participate.

Community-based planning

At parish level, people came together to write a community plan for the things they wanted to change in their village. A formal protocol was signed by different tiers of local government which promised to take account of the locally developed plan; if the local council did not take account of the plan, the residents were able to challenge it.

There were several key factors which were necessary for the success of this commitment:

- The process involved building trust between staff working in services and the residents. Staff were originally worried about attending public meetings for fear of verbal attack by residents. However, once they attended they saw how constructive it could be.
- There was good facilitation with a positive focus. Setting the scene and making the meetings lively was important.
- The meetings were structured very carefully, with space for people to raise problems before focusing for the rest of the meeting on potential solutions.
- Each meeting came out with 16 actions which were then followed up.
- The meetings helped bridge differences. As in many rural areas people are dispersed, and unless there is a formal meeting to bring people together, they are often unable to talk to each other.

Village scrutiny process

A small village community was selected to pilot a formal scrutiny on how to improve access to services. The village was some distance from the nearest major town, had a sparse population and poor transport links. There was little community capacity and the councillor tended to act as a gatekeeper. In the end they worked with this gatekeeper so that he didn't stop the scrutiny process.

- Meetings were held in the evening to ensure that people could attend (about 80 attended).
- A household survey was also conducted, which had a 60 per cent response rate.
- A citizen camera was also passed around the community. The residents took photos of the things they wanted more (and less) of in their local community. Two hundred and fifty photos were submitted, of which 100 were of dog excrement; the other photos were of local services such as medical care and the Post Office. The recommendations have now been adopted for mainstreaming across the county.

6. Mind the gap! What is the best way to devolve power that matches rhetoric and reality?

This discussion focused primarily on the current situation in the UK and the potential gap between the commitment to participation 'in principle', even if it is set out in policy documents, and what actually happens on the ground. What can people who champion participation do to make it real?

Key messages

Devolution has to involve a real shift in power and resources from central government to local government and beyond that, to local communities. Central government should set the policy framework, provide incentives and guidance, and scrutinise what happens on the ground. But local government should be given more space and freedom to develop strategies with local people. They should be allowed to take risks and encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of participation rather than approach it with a 'tick box' mentality. Current developments in the UK reflect a rare policy moment – work is urgently needed to ensure these opportunities fall on fertile ground.

The relationship between central and local government

Over the past 25 years the UK government has become increasingly centralised. In 1997 the new Labour government had little confidence in the capacity or willingness of local government to reform public services and raise standards, and they increased the degree of central control in order to drive change. As a result, many local authorities feel disempowered, and resent being told to devolve power to local neighbourhoods. If the government wants to empower local communities, it must also empower local authorities, recognise and celebrate the good practice that does exist, and introduce better measures for supporting and scrutinising implementation of participation policies on the ground.

Creating momentum

It is right for central government to drive policy and some pressure is good and necessary. For example, although some local authorities feel that partnerships were 'foisted upon' them, most recognise that this way of working is beneficial. The Neighbourhood Renewal Community Empowerment programmes bypassed local authorities until 2006, but provided a powerful incentive for the community sector to organise and assert itself within local partnerships. But at some point local government has to be persuaded of the benefits of this way of working in order to genuinely 'buy into' the changes and develop its own internal motivation. At this point central government needs to 'back off' and allow space for local government to develop local strategies for participation and empowerment.

Double devolution

Equally, local government needs to be prepared to 'let go' when it comes to empowering local communities, to stop micro-managing and be prepared to take a few risks. The neighbourhood management programme has provided powerful models for community empowerment which should be rolled out more widely. And UK pilots introducing participatory budgeting are also setting useful precedents and modelling good practice.

Raising standards

Residents and front-line staff need to be trained and supported – but this should be done jointly in order that the process leads to better mutual understanding and positive relationships. Participation needs to be written into the job descriptions of middle management staff so that they understand that these skills are an essential and integral part of the way they work with communities. Good practice from around the country needs to be highlighted and shared to avoid reinventing the wheel. A network of practitioners, similar to the Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, could provide an excellent source of intelligence and support. In reality, a mixture of incentives and obligations will be needed to generate the motivation to change working practices. This could include the use of minimum standards (as developed in Scotland[13]) and a 'chartermark', possibly linked to the Equalities Standard.

A looser framework

A dialogue between central and local government is needed to develop better ways to support and scrutinise participation policy. Centrally defined targets determined by deadlines for spending budgets, are not compatible with genuine community engagement. Participation needs to be inspected developmentally, rather than in relation to centrally defined targets, since the starting point for many areas is so different – both in terms of political understanding and readiness and also community capacity to take up the offer of involvement. Promoting the deeper meaning of this agenda should also be looked at since it is really about 'how a good city might work' and how 'politicians and people work together', and as such it has the potential to transform the future of society.

'This is back to the Greek notion where politics means how we organise [ourselves] to live together – a well-run city looks like this – it is politicians and people together. It is not one or the other. We might capture the imagination with that vision.'
Elaine Applebee
Acting Chief Executive, Bradford Vision, UK

A focus on the UK

Political rhetoric reflects a consensus that participation is a good thing but in the UK there are concerns that it is being treated as a panacea for intractable problems and lack of resources in local areas. The White Paper and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill represent a rare policy moment and a real opportunity for change in the UK. (For further discussion, see Chapter 6.)

But there remain barriers to overcome if it is to result in real change. The current and historic relationship between the three levels of community, local government and central government is a key complicating factor. There is no confidence that the new legal and policy changes will result in devolution of powers to the locality; or that locally there is much appetite for empowering communities. What is needed is a 'grown-up conversation' nationally and locally with political parties and elected councillors to turn the rhetoric into reality.

UK participants felt that the balance of power favours national government, and this needs to change. The gap between rhetoric and reality is partly because central government is naïve and unprepared for the complexities of implementing their own policy. Local practitioners end up managing engagement without the necessary power or resources. They are caught between layers of government and different expectations.

A learning network to enable people who champion participation to share practice and skills would be beneficial.

'We should be saying, how can we and others who know something about this support others who are trying? I don't know whether we [should] start a campaign around this table now about providing support? I would hate to come this far and then lose it.'

Elaine Applebee
Acting Chief Executive, Bradford Vision, UK

'It is important that central government has included community engagement in the White Paper – this has taken 30 years. We need to have a generational message to young workers that this [success] is rare and is key. But the problem is that the policy is going into largely unprepared ground. The most important thing is engaging practitioners… but all we have done [in Bradford] is to have written the strategy. We are on a spectrum through from really good to barely started. This is a developmental agenda. We need to get the message out that it is OK to be at ground zero. My fear is that people will have a go and do it as well as they can, and it won't work or it will be so difficult because they need the right support – and they will say that the policy isn't right.'

Elaine Applebee
Acting Chief Executive, Bradford Vision, UK

13. 'The National Standards for Community Engagement', SCDC (Scottish Community Development Centre). Available at www.scdc.org.uk/national-standards-community-engagement

Chapter 4
The site visits

The site visits to East London, Somerset, Bradford and Newcastle were an integral part of the Champions of Participation event, building on the learning of the first two days. The visits were a unique way to share international learning between the UK and international participants, and also involved many more local officials and community members in the UK.

The site visits to East London, Somerset, Bradford and Newcastle were an integral part of the Champions of Participation event, building on the learning of the first two days.

The aims were to:

- further explore issues relating to participation in a real-life local situation and with a wider group of people, themselves involved in developing community and local governance
- learn from local innovation and good practice, but also examine the difficulties people have faced and continue to face
- exchange ideas and experience between workshop participants and local people both nationally and internationally
- enable international visitors to better understand the UK context of participation in local government
- enable UK participants to gain exposure to efforts to promote citizen participation in local governance in contexts different from their own.

The site visits were not intended to simply 'show case' particular localities as examples of good participation in governance. Achieving meaningful citizen engagement with local government is not easy, and it was the process, including the difficulties, as well as the positive outcomes that would provide the best lessons. So host authorities and participants were encouraged to embrace an honest, 'warts-and-all' approach when exploring the realities of local experience.

Each host authority planned the programme for their group. They included opportunities to:

- meet councillors and others involved directly in local government
- meet other service-based leaders (e.g. health, police, housing, education) who have responsibility for building links with local communities, including supporting their role in governance such as crime prevention and other partnerships
- meet officials (from the local authority, local service provider, health/crime/housing partnerships) who are responsible for community involvement in local decision making and service delivery
- meet community leaders and residents with an interest or role in either representing or supporting their communities locally
- meet local voluntary and community sector representatives (e.g. Community Empowerment Networks) who are involved in developing community participation in LSPs/LAAs
- visit local schemes where communities are directly involved in decision making, especially where this involves devolved budgets, local action planning or other forms of devolution below the local authority level (e.g. Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, New Deal for Communities, Tenant Management Organisations)
- Explore other innovative approaches to participation and local governance – for example participatory budgeting, parish planning.

The four sites were chosen to provide a variety of perspectives – urban/rural; local authority led/LSP led; public sector/community and voluntary sector; north/south.

Valuing international exchange

The site visits were an opportunity for participants to understand four different areas in the UK, their histories and their people, and also for them to get to know each other better. Some international participants said they had seen processes and initiatives they would like to implement in different ways in their own countries.

Emmy Alividza M'Mbwanga from the Kenyan Local Government Reform Programme visited Somerset along with other participants and was enthused at the way that the council had devolved certain powers to area bodies to cover a large geographical area. She said, 'I was able to relate quite well to the rural area of Somerset. I was interested in the area level – as local government is able to meet people at the grassroots'.

Mike Huggins, City Manager of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, said, *'The experience of the site visit was a microcosm of participatory processes, of learning with others and of the valuable and penetrating insights gained from this kind of exchange. This was real co-creation through participatory processes.'*

Bradford

Bradford is a large metropolitan area in the county of Yorkshire in the north of England. It incorporates the city of Bradford as well as three market towns; two thirds of the district is rural. Bradford has some of the most affluent and also the most deprived areas within the country. It includes longstanding communities of South Asian and more recent Eastern European migrant workers.

The visit was hosted by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), Bradford Vision, which has forged a strong partnership across all sectors in the area in order to deliver better outcomes for local people. Although it works very closely with the council, it is unusual in that the LSP is not part of the council but is an independent not-for-profit company with a board of directors and a sizeable staff. Community development is a priority, building stronger neighbourhoods through 60 local action plans, investing resources in a small grants programme. They use participatory budgeting to bring communities together to determine the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for environmental improvements across the city and for a range of service improvements in Keighley, one of the market towns.

Bradford Vision has an interesting story to tell about bringing together different communities, empowering local groups, developing partnership working and managing relationships with and between public and private sector organisations including the council.

To start with, the workshop participants visited four local projects in different areas of the city, to meet business leaders and community activists and learn more about the city, each local area and the LSP's approach to regeneration and participation. Later the participants met with local political leaders and elected councillors to explore their understanding of citizen participation, followed by discussions with staff from the major public services such as housing, social services and police.

Learning and debate

Bradford Vision structured the conversations between the visitors and Bradford residents and staff using innovatory participatory methods. The following key conditions for effective participation were identified by the

workshop participants as:

- being confident that it will make a difference
- a blame-free culture
- people having power over how budget resources are used
- flexible approaches to building capacity
- active citizens who understand the whole picture
- partnerships that listen and act
- principled leadership
- a single ethos of participation from central government down to local communities.

The workshop participants also identified three uncomfortable truths:

- Dealing with complexity – governance, service delivery and the diversity of communities and their needs – is very challenging for the LSP.
- It is difficult to get the right balance between the very particular needs of individuals and trying to design a standard model of participation so that everyone has an opportunity to get involved.
- Conflicts within the community can make participation and consensus very difficult to achieve.

South Somerset

South Somerset is a beautiful rural area in the south west of England. It is one of the largest districts in the country (960 sq km) with ten market towns and a population of 160,000. Poverty here is often less visible and less concentrated than in urban areas, but it is nevertheless a real issue. Isolation, poor access to services and low-waged work are challenges for many people. South Somerset District Council has pioneered community consultation and devolved decision making, and has been awarded 'Beacon status'[14] for their work.

Four years ago the council decided that their centralised structure was not working. Both staff and councillors were frustrated with working in service silos which did not fit well with people's lives. They reorganised the council into four areas and dispensed with the service departments. Each area now has its own committee, integrated services and a community development team, and most budgets are devolved to the area committees. Staff have moved out of the central headquarters to local offices. One local government officer said, '*The council engages with its diverse and dispersed communities through a devolved democratic structure, we work closely with the community and embrace an innovative, value-for-money approach – working in an empowering way is in our DNA.*' There is a strong culture of volunteering, and of cooperation between politicians, staff and citizens.

The council's philosophy is to enable communities to find their own ways of meeting local needs rather than relying on the council to provide them. This principle was illustrated by visits to Crewkerne where community members organised the building of a swimming pool and now run it through community volunteers. At Holyrood Lace Mill participants learnt about the Mendip and South Somerset Community Safety Partnership. Local Action Groups around community safety work with the local police, community support officers, youth workers, etc. The partnership has an overall strategy around key areas of road safety, antisocial behaviour and vehicle theft. Participants also met the leader of a highly innovative restorative community justice project which works through local volunteers and in conjunction with the police to resolve local issues. The council enables projects and activities to happen – for example, the council supported the building of Ilton village hall in a poor area of west Somerset. The council gave support, insurance cover, access to resources, support to help people do good quality consultation; and volunteers did most of the work. In a rural setting, engaging with minority groups and deprived communities who tend to be scattered and not visible is challenging. This relies on good data and outreach work and the council employs an gypsy liaison officer to work closely with gypsies and travellers.

Learning and debate

- Elected representation needs to fit/complement the geographical and population ratio of the area:
  - Area committees
  - Ward representation
  - Forums.
- There has to be a purpose as part of a bigger plan to gain community buy-in to process and apply ownership of outcomes.
- Most volunteers need some form of reward or recognition.
- Evidence of financial or other benefits of community participation needs to be shown.
- Celebrate success and inform the public so that capacity of the whole process can be developed and enthusiasm can be built on and momentum maintained.
- Recognise, acknowledge and provide resources to the cost associated with community participation.
- Create structures and policies that allow effective communication upwards and across.
- Recognise the needs of diverse communities, i.e. inclusiveness and equal opportunities and rights.
- Recognise where the political power is and harness it.
- Recognise that cooperation and mutual understanding between elected councillors and officers with regard to participatory processes is productive.

Newcastle

Newcastle is the largest city in the north east region of England. Historically, it was a major sea port known for its ship building, coal, armaments and heavy industry. These older industries have declined and many people have moved away from the city. It is now one of the most deprived areas of the country, with high unemployment and poor health. Recently there has been a cultural revival which is bringing new life to the city. The city has experienced many attempts at regeneration and renewal over the last 25 years, and is currently exploring participatory budgeting to increase citizen involvement in deprived neighbourhoods and empower marginalised young people. Recent political changes have led to some uncertainty in the council but also opened up opportunities for change. Newcastle City Council hosted the visit.

Three years ago, the Liberal Democrats won control from what had always been a Labour stronghold. The workshop participants met one of the councillors, now part of the ruling executive. In the past he thought the council had been very top down; local people felt disengaged with the whole planning process and as a consequence there was a deep lack of trust. '*This was one of the main reasons why we*

14. The Beacon Scheme was established in 1999 as part of the Government's wider modernisation agenda. Highlighting a different theme each year, it recognises good practice in local authorities and aims to spread this more widely. Available at www.odpm.gov.uk/beaconcouncils

came to power. We've been focused on trying to change these mindsets and build on citizen planning from the grassroots. We went to the people and asked them – what is it that you want us to do? For us sustainability of programmes like area regeneration is very closely tied to the support of and engagement with the local citizens,' said an elected councillor.

The workshop participants also met people from local community engagement projects and officials responsible for community development, social inclusion and citizen engagement. They explored how the council is using two participatory methods to engage communities.

- Walker is the most deprived part of Newcastle. They have a 15-year £450 million regeneration programme. The Area Action Plan has been developed with local people through a local needs analysis; it will bring new housing, shops, transport and public amenities. They have also done a major community engagement exercise around the new City Centre Area Action Plan.
- UDecide is Newcastle's version of participatory budgeting which has been piloted with two groups. One project provided £30,000 for residents to spend on environmental improvements in three wards. The young people's project had a budget of £25,000 for city-wide projects. A group of 63 children and young people met to develop ideas under the headings of play, respect, sport and leisure and crime, and then voted on which ones would get funded. They made wise decisions and supported marginalised groups' ideas.

Learning and debate

Newcastle City Council recognises that community development is essential if they are to build and sustain effective citizen engagement for the long term; it supports people to get organised around their issues, develop their own networks and get involved in decision making and governance arrangements. The council has a strong tradition of community development, with 30 workers in three area teams and one city-wide team that works with communities of interest.

- In a long-term project and with many different interests, a key insight was the importance of creating spaces where different voices can connect with each other and people can see they are influencing real decisions.
- Regeneration takes generations. Regenerating Newcastle and citizen engagement will take time, but there is concern that local residents need to be convinced that the council is taking what they say seriously.
- The council has to be in for the long haul: you have to 'keep on trucking' and beware of 'project-itis' where short-term projects do not get the time to make a difference.
- Finally – 'its all about people'. Citizen engagement and community development is about bridging the gap between local people and politicians. But it is also about growing local leaders who can engage in the different places where decisions are made.

London Citizens

London Citizens is a broad-based community organisation that brings together community groups from all faiths and ethnic backgrounds to provide a voice and campaign vehicle on key issues for Londoners. The focus is on mobilising civil society rather than participating in governance arrangements. The approach draws heavily on the Saul Alinsky[15] tradition of citizen organising in the USA, and on the church-based groups for social change in Latin America.

London Citizens started ten years ago in east London, as TELCO (The East London Communities Organisation), and has now established 'sister' organisations in south and west London. Member communities pay a subscription which guarantees a measure of independence from the government. It is rooted in a network of faith-based organisations, plus schools, colleges, student unions, trade unions and other groups that are prepared to act for the common good and campaign together on key issues. London Citizens aims to find and nurture 'leaders with a following in the community' – people who have the ability to organise for change.

London Citizens believes that it is the dominance of business corporations that threatens family life. Local councils seem unable or unwilling to challenge them, but civil society has more power to make corporations responsive and accountable. The role of local and central government is to not get in the way of communities generating their own agenda for change; nor to undermine or corrupt civil society for its own ends.

The workshop participants visited Canary Wharf and the site for the London Olympics, they met the organisers of the 'Living Wage' and 'Strangers into Citizens' campaigns, and visited City Hall to find out what the Mayor's Office thought about London Citizens. They saw a positive working relationship with the Mayor of London and also with other elected representatives including members of the Green Party.

Visit to London Citizens

15. Seen by many as the founding father of community organizing, Saul Alinsky organised in poor neighbourhoods in Chicago in the 1930s and later set up the Industrial Areas Foundation to train organizers and support poor communities across the USA. Available at www.industrialareasfoundation.org/ and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saul_Alinsky

London Citizens' current campaigns are:

- Living Wage. London Citizens campaigned successfully for the big banks and finance houses in Canary Wharf to pay a living wage to their cleaners and other low wage staff who live locally and are often migrant workers. The Mayor of London has agreed to set a London wage rate that is higher than the national minimum wage in recognition of the cost of living in the city. City Hall, many university campuses, hospitals, major banks and finance houses now pay a living wage.

- Hotel staff, who are often migrant workers, are now organising for a living wage. Following a successful march and a lot of press coverage, they are now meeting with the management of the Hilton Hotel chain. In addition they are lobbying the Department of Trade and Industry, the Low Pay Commission and the HM Revenue & Customs (formerly the Inland Revenue) to target the hospitality industry and enforce the legal minimum wage.

- The Olympics. The London Olympic Village site is in east London and building it will mean the loss of houses, businesses and green spaces. While the promise of benefits to the community helped win the bid, TELCO is campaigning to ensure that promises of local jobs, better facilities and new affordable housing will be kept.

- Strangers into Citizens. As a result of the living wage activity with low-paid workers, London Citizens is now campaigning for a route for people who come to the UK without documents, or as refugees, asylum seekers or migrant workers, to become full citizens.

Learning and debate

- It is important to develop independent citizen-based organisations that can work with the government when necessary but that operate outside formal governance systems. Communities that are independent, well organised and that have a strong power base can set their own agendas and have more impact on formal processes than those that operate from a position of dependence.
- By working 'inside and outside' the state systems – for instance by using meetings, demonstrations and public exposure – it is possible to persuade corporations and the government to respond to the demands of local communities.
- Is London Citizens' principled stance of not taking government funding necessary to achieve independence of action?
- The systematic building of relationships is key to community organising – linking people in key groups, building networks of activists and mobilising large numbers of people for meetings or for direct actions. They have little investment in formal structures of governance.
- Politicians can become gatekeepers, determining agendas and controlling resources. London Citizens argues that councillors should forge strategic alliances with civil society organisations, taking a lead from them to tackle issues that affect the communities they are elected to represent.

'London Citizens sees community involvement as an "invitation to power" rather than an "invitation to participate".'

Neil Jameson
London Citizens

Chapter 5
Implications for different actors

What can the UK government, appointed officials, locally elected representatives, communities and civil society, and donors do to promote democracy and citizen participation in local governance? What are the roles played by the 'champions of participation' as government officials, elected representatives or citizen leaders at local and national levels? Every sector was represented at the workshop and each shared their challenges, listening and learning across different perspectives, roles and countries.

So what can different actors and sectors do to deepen the engagement and empowerment of local communities?

What could the UK government do?

1. Link and learn across departments
2. Learn from international contexts
3. Support ongoing participatory evaluation
4. Recognise that participation is at the heart of democracy
5. Recognise that participation takes time
6. Give clear guidance about standards for good practice
7. Recognise, value and listen to independent community voices.

1. Link and learn across departments

Two government departments, with similar aspirations, sponsored this workshop – the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). CLG has put community engagement at the centre of strategies to tackle poverty, transform public services and renew trust in local government. Together with the Office of the Third Sector, the Home Office, the departments of Health and Education, CLG is driving forward an empowerment agenda that affects all aspects of government policy in the UK. Joint learning and collaboration is essential if this combined approach is to make sense to people on the ground and to be manageable at local level.

DFID argues that participation is central to good governance and that this is the key to development and to combating poverty. Their new 'CAR' framework highlights are:

- capacity – the ability and authority of leaders, governments and public organisations to get things done
- accountability – the ability of citizens to hold leaders, governments and public organisations to account
- responsiveness – how leaders, governments and public organisations actually behave in responding to the needs and rights of citizens.

While 'joined-up government' has become the watchword across Whitehall for UK policy development, it is important also to recognise the lessons from international experience as provided through DFID. The Champions of Participation workshop has demonstrated the value of taking a broader view and suggests that a continuing dialogue between CLG and DFID would be helpful.

2. Learn from international contexts

The appetite for community involvement and the drive towards innovation, especially in newer democracies, offers some important lessons and inspiration for the UK. The local government White Paper and the new legal 'duty to involve' have created a 'critical policy moment' in the UK. But the experience of countries that already have a legal framework, such as Bangladesh, Brazil and South Africa, and a rights-based approach to participation, can increase UK understanding on how to make the reality live up to the rhetoric.

3. Support ongoing participatory evaluation

People who are committed to the aims of the White Paper should be part of a 'community scrutiny' or 'real time review' of its implementation. This new form of participatory evaluation and review could learn from the New Orleans Community Congresses[16], the 'big mama' workshops in South Africa[17] and the social audit processes in India, and make use of a series of deliberative events involving a broad base of civil society groups and citizens.

4. Recognise that participation is at the heart of democracy

Participation is not just a means of delivering government targets or driving service improvements. Around the world, participation is recognised as a means of tackling poverty, inequality and discrimination, empowering citizens, building strong communities and achieving social change. The bigger vision of 'democratising everyday life' should be at the centre of the government's approach.

5. Recognise that participation takes time

Regeneration takes generations. The culture of participation that is being created will take time to build; governments have to trust the processes that they are promoting, and allow them to flourish over the long term. The UK government's commitment to a 20-year national strategy for neighbourhood renewal is right – it should not renege on this commitment.

6. Give clear guidance about standards for good practice

In some areas, it takes time for commitment to citizen and community participation to be fully understood and accepted. Clear guidance about good practice standards of engagement would set a benchmark that all areas can work towards.

7. Recognise, value and listen to independent community voices

Don't just work with those in the formal partnership arenas but create ways in which independent community voices can be heard – like CLG's National Community Forum (NCF)[18]. Respect the fact that citizens can organise and lead social change in their own communities without government involvement. Acknowledge this and be open to working with them on their terms.

Joe Micheli

16. The New Orleans Community Congresses. Available at www.unifiedneworleansplan.com/uploads/CC3-Preliminary-Report-to-PRINT-32599.pdf
17. Public participation and deepening democracy: experiences from Durban, South Africa. Available at www.cpp.org.za/publications/critical_dialogue/vol3no1_2007/chapter1.pdf
18. The NCF is a bold experiment in trying to get the voices of local people heard in the corridors of power. Launched in January 2002, it is made up of 24 activists from diverse backgrounds, living and working in deprived areas. Their job is to provide a sounding board for Ministers and policy makers and to 'tell it like it is'. Available at www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=521

What could appointed officials do?

1. Communicate with the community truthfully
2. Create new alliances and communicate across the sectors
3. Provide effective leadership
4. Strengthen their own capacity to engage with the community
5. Accept that conflict and disagreement is part of the process
6. Allow participation to happen in many different ways.

1. Communicate with the community truthfully

In order to build trust, officials must be honest with local people about what is and what is not possible. Raising false expectations undermines confidence in the process, whereas a willingness to engage in honest and open dialogue encourages a mature relationship and a spirit of cooperation rather than conflict. It requires people to be realistic, and allows official assumptions and community aspirations to be open to challenge on a mutual basis. It also requires officers to share their knowledge and skills with the community and be open to learning and communicating with different people in different ways.

2. Create new alliances and communicate across the sectors

In every local authority and LSP there are people committed to community participation and empowerment who should work together as allies, strengthened by the government's drive to increase participation and the new opportunities this provides. New alliances and conversations across the sectoral boundaries will show what can be done.

3. Provide effective leadership

Elected officials can bring together communities to express their issues in their own words, provide the overview and direction of movement for political leaders and their colleagues, and hold the formal structures – management and elected representatives – to account.

4. Strengthen their own capacity to engage with the community

Community engagement requires skills that do not always exist in the public sector: listening and facilitating; cultural awareness and understanding; a can-do attitude that involves risk taking. Local government should seek to recruit and develop multi-skilled officers, with both the right qualifications and the right attitudes, to relate well to local communities and cope effectively with the challenges of participation.

5. Accept that conflict and disagreement is part of the process

Communities are diverse and changing all the time and in poor areas they operate under considerable pressure. Even where officials have built positive relationships, conflict will occur from time to time and if handled well, this can be a positive process. But officials may need to access mediation and brokerage skills and to have the confidence to engage in debate and dialogue that allows conflicting interests to be explored. This will improve mutual understanding and help achieve real consensus.

6. Allow participation to happen in many different ways

Ensure that there is a variety of ways in which people can participate – not everyone was born to sit in formal meetings for hours on end. Different channels and methods of communication and informal networking opportunities can work wonders in breaking down stereotypes and reaching groups not already 'connected'. Spaces outside the formal processes for dialogue and for new communities to develop an identity and shared agenda are vital.

'Result: building alliances will bring better services. It's a win–win.'

'Your knowledge is important. Transmit it to the community without arrogance. Your truth may not be the same as the community's truth. Be open to learn with the community.'

What could locally elected representatives do?

1. Think beyond the ballot box
2. Be a champion of participation
3. Make use of access to information and knowledge in participatory processes
4. Reinvigorate local political processes.

1. Think beyond the ballot box

Participatory and representative democracy can and do work hand in hand. Councillors and political parties need to 'think beyond the ballot box' – this is not the only way to ensure legitimate representation and leadership.[19] Councillors are members and champions of their own communities, not just their political party, and as such have a wider duty and role in civil society.

2. Be a champion of participation

Elected councillors can become ambassadors and champions for community engagement: making alliances with their citizens, modelling participative principles and practice, and enabling communities to engage with service providers and other decision-makers.

3. Make use of access to information and knowledge in participatory processes

Working with citizens and local communities gives councillors access to information and knowledge. Participatory and deliberative processes can help councillors to take difficult decisions and resolve local conflicts.

4. Reinvigorate local political processes

Find ways to reinvigorate local political processes, for example by encouraging dialogue and debate between local government and communities. It is in everyone's interest for councillors to be more representative of their voters and to actively rebuild trust in democracy.

19. More information available here: "Representation, Community Leadership and Participation: Citizen Involvement in Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Governance." John Gaventa, 2004 http://www.ids.ac.uk/logolink/initiatives/info/NeighbourhoodRenewal.htm

What could community groups and civil society organisations do?

1. Seize the initiative
2. Avoid getting over-absorbed in formal structures
3. Go back to the grassroots
4. Work simultaneously inside and outside the system
5. Share learning and skills
6. Create and sustain alliances.

1. Seize the initiative
Civil society or community organisations should seize the initiative. Local communities need their own power base and their own agenda to take to the table, and then draw in elected representatives and officials for support.

2. Avoid getting over-absorbed in formal structures
It is important to engage with participation structures, without allowing civil power to become institutionalised. Often community groups become overly absorbed into participation structures not of their making. They should rediscover campaigning and activism outside the governance arena.

3. Go back to the grassroots
NGOs and the voluntary and community sector need to go back to their roots – involve and listen to people, create broad-based organisations that can build social solidarity and collective action. This is a good way to maintain independence and strength.

4. Work simultaneously inside and outside the system
Many VCOs and their allies have found ways of working inside and outside the system simultaneously, for instance by acting as points of contact for external people; by joining alliances; by making it clear what their principles are and withdrawing if they are not respected. When local councils have a duty to engage communities, the community presence itself becomes an important bargaining tool.

5. Share learning and skills
The new rights and responsibilities need new skills. Communities and citizens need to share learning about how to navigate the tensions of being both activist and partner.

6. Create and sustain alliances
Ongoing effort is needed to create and sustain alliances between civil society and local government: finding champions, designing processes, and supporting those who can be agents of change. Civil society as a whole should explore what to do to support local groups active in their communities.

What could donor organisations do?

1. Make participation the norm
2. Learn from international experience
3. Strengthen the capacity and skills of citizens to participation
4. Don't stifle local creativity.

1. Make participation the norm
Create a climate in which participation is expected as a standard practice – but make it a cultural shift from only being a means to deliver donor or government programmes to more genuine processes of engagement and empowerment.

2. Learn from international experience International experiences, successes and lessons have much to offer the UK context. Create opportunities for international sharing of good practice.

3. Strengthen the capacity and skills of citizens to participation
Support 'expert citizens' and build a strong citizen voice into project design, policy making and scrutiny, rather than just delivering projects.

4. Don't stifle local creativity
When funding participation efforts through governments and NGOs, encourage a balance between providing national (or international) standards for citizen engagement, and ensuring that local creativity is not stifled.

Tricia Zipfel

Chapter 6
UK policy dialogue

The government's White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, is the prelude to legislation and action plans that will put community empowerment at the centre of government policy. It includes a new legal duty on local government and partners to inform, consult and involve citizens and communities, and marks a key moment in UK policy on participation.

The new framework has the potential to make participation a right for citizens rather than simply an option for the government. So how is the government going to implement this policy? What can citizens and local authorities expect and are they ready to respond? Angela Smith MP, then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (CLG), joined the workshop on the final day to hear key messages from both UK and international participants. She said she was keen to take their experiences on board in developing the new framework for community empowerment.

A key policy moment in the UK

CLG's proposals in the White Paper and the legislative changes in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill will result in a legal duty on local government and partners to 'involve, inform and consult' citizens and communities.[20]This new right has been welcomed by civil society and community-based organisations in the UK, and by local government voices. The challenge now is to implement this and the other proposals in the White Paper, and address the implications for civil servants, local officials, voluntary and community sectors.[21]

The proposals make it clear that the government sees community participation as essential for delivering its core objectives of strong, cohesive communities, effective service delivery, and a revitalised democratic system in which citizens are actively engaged with the political process. They send a strong message not only to local communities, but also to service providers, government officials, local councillors, and to political parties who have a pivotal role to play in creating space for more participatory forms of democracy alongside existing representative structures.

'This is a key policy moment in the UK. There is a new consensus and strong support for participation across the political spectrum. The government is providing the lead through policy and legislation – but implementation will be critical. The government must hold its nerve – this is a long-term change agenda. Local government has to seize the opportunities that this moment offers. This is about more than being pragmatic about service delivery. It's about how we want to live together, and both participatory democracy and representative democracy are part of the "good government" that will make that aspiration real. What can we do to support government to make participation "just how we do things" here in the UK?'
Elaine Applebee
Acting Chief Executive, Bradford Vision, UK

What will be the impact of a new duty and a legal framework?

The benefits of enshrining the right to participate in legislation, and the desirability of adopting core standards for good practice, had been important themes running through the workshop. Developments in the UK suggested that the government was moving in this direction – but how would local people be able to use the new legal framework to challenge negative attitudes and develop a strong voice?

Angela Smith said that she believed that the statutory framework would lead to definite progress. She recognised how far there is still to go and that central government can do more to ensure maximum impact. However she didn't think her government colleagues underestimated the challenge. She said that the government's overriding commitment is to devolve powers and responsibilities to local areas, which means reducing central regulation and encouraging local flexibility. She asserted that the government is determined not to be prescriptive and that it will be up to local authorities to determine how they involve citizens, but in the clear knowledge there can be a legal challenge if the arrangements are not adequate.

Reuf Bajrovic, independent consultant in Bosnia, and **Joe Micheli**, Neighbourhood Management Participation Officer in the UK, argued that the proposed legal 'duty to involve' should be accompanied by prescribed mechanisms or minimum standards. They suggested that minimum and flexible standards, such as those set out in the National Standard for Community Engagement in Scotland, should be incorporated into the Audit Commission's inspection framework, and used as a benchmark in Comprehensive Area Assessments.

Toby Blume from the Urban Forum argued that while the CLG White Paper is good, the 'duty to involve' only applies 'where appropriate'. There is a difference between the vision of the White Paper and the provisions of the Bill. There are also big differences between the community sector's understanding of consultation, engagement and participation and that of the government. He warned, '*I don't think central or local government are properly equipped to deal with the marathon [that is implementation]*'.

A detailed action plan is needed to ensure the new bill is implemented effectively. UK participants proposed a large-scale participatory process to scrutinise and hold to account those that are implementing the new policy frameworks.

Councillors, representative democracy and participation

The onus will be on local authorities to determine how to implement the proposals in the White Paper and meet the new legal requirements to involve people. The attitude and capacity of elected councillors will be crucial. Will they be able to take advantage of the opportunities that participation offers for them to have more influence over local issues?

Angela Smith acknowledged that *'…some councillors feel threatened by the prospect of more community participation and there are often tensions between civil society organisations and elected councillors. But this is a challenge we need to manage.'*

The government can create opportunities and provide leadership, but it will be up to champions in local government and the community sector to create the

20. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill became law on October 31 2007
21. In October 2007, CLG published *The Action Plan for Building Community Empowerment Success*. Available on www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communityempowermenteactionplan

spaces in which councillors see for themselves how participation can enhance their role rather than threaten it. It will certainly need political leadership and buy-in at the top.

Pam Giddy of the Power Inquiry[22] said that the emphasis on participation reflected the Power Inquiry's work to identify how politics itself needs to change if the democratic deficit in the UK is to be tackled. The Power Inquiry looked at why participation in formal political forums is declining, and whether formal politics could re-engage with citizens. Researchers drew on a range of international models for involvement in order to help redesign the democratic process in the UK and provide more opportunities for political participation between elections.[23]

Although every government policy document seems to use the language of participation, many participants felt it was not always clear what the government meant by it. The UK remains a centralised political system. Local political parties and politicians rarely work in their communities. The Power Inquiry had concluded that the reality of participation in the UK does not match up to the rhetoric. This analysis raises some important questions. How do we put participatory principles at the heart of the way that political parties and politicians 'do politics'. Does the UK need a new voting system locally? How do we get more local people from outside the political parties standing for election? How can we make governance bodies more attractive to activists in the community?

Matthew Warburton, Head of Strategy at the Local Government Association, argued that it is not enough to say that political parties or the government 'must do something' about the weakness of local politics. '*It's up to us all as citizens to ensure that participation reaches its potential. We allow the situation where 90 per cent of councillors belong to one of the three main parties*'. He added that good councillors have always encouraged community participation. However finding people with the right skills and confidence is hard. Local political leadership is not as representative as it should be: in England the average councillor is still white, male, aged 58 and getting older. There is a missing generation of people who do not get involved in local politics. So the question, for civil society, is how do we change that?

Neil Jameson of London Citizens challenged the assumption that local government was 'the only show in town'. Major employers, private corporations and the workings of the global market are critical to people's quality of life. Local politicians need to think about how citizens can engage with these issues too. Jerry de la Cerna from the Philippines supported this; he used his position as local mayor to challenge logging companies that were ruining the environment. Local government has to do more than simply administer services. It should seek to shape the local market, help rebuild communities and advocate for resources and support from central government. To do this local government needs to work closely with local residents.

The White Paper and the challenges of implementation

Angela Smith said that the government's approach to implementation will aim to strike a balance between centrally driven requirements and bureaucracy, and the need for greater flexibility so that local people and politicians can make more decisions and take more responsibility themselves. She emphasised that while the government was committed to giving more power and discretion to local areas, it would be up to local people to make it work. Identifying 'champions' within local government will therefore be critical. But one of the consequences of local devolution and greater freedom might be that services are different in different areas. This concern is often referred to as the 'postcode lottery', and getting the balance right will be a challenge for all politicians.

Participants urged the government to recognise the wider role of participation in terms of empowerment and as an 'end in itself'. While Angela Smith accepted this point, she felt it was important not to lose sight of outcomes. The new localism agenda, centred on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Area Agreements, is built around improving outcomes such as reduced crime and improved educational achievements. It is important that those who champion participation demonstrate that it is making a difference to the kind of outcomes that local people care about.

For those who work on the front-line delivering local services, there is a worrying tension between the requirements of participation and the dominant management culture that is risk-averse, very controlling, and focused on results in terms of meeting government targets. This leads to a short-term perspective that is not conducive to participatory processes or a more deliberative style of decision making.

Vivien Lowndes, Professor at De Montfort University, UK, emphasised that the benefits of participation are not just for citizens, but also for decision-makers. They need to resolve complex problems in situations where resources are limited and governance fragmented – and citizens can help: '*Citizens are the authors of joined-up government,*' she said. It is important that officially sponsored activities do not overwhelm the more organic and autonomous activities that arise in civil society. They are closely linked and both need support to be sustained and dynamic.

The government should seek to model the kind of attitudes, behaviours, and roles they want local politicians and officials to adopt. Instead of relying on the usual management model of evaluation, they could introduce participatory evaluation. This would enable stakeholders to consider for themselves the trade-offs and balance between outcomes and process.

'Without grassroots citizen action, it will be difficult to take advantage of the opportunities in the current policy climate. Movements from below will shape this conversation.'
John Gaventa
Professor at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK

22. The Power Inquiry was set up in 2004 to explore how political participation and involvement can be increased and deepened in Britain. Its work is based on the primary belief that a healthy democracy requires the active participation of its citizens. See more at www.makeitanissue.org.uk/about/
23. Power Inquiry research report, *Beyond the Ballot – 57 democratic innovations from around the world* (Graham Smith 2006). Available at www.makeitanissue.org.uk/Beyond%20the%20Ballot.pdf

Chapter 7
Learning from the champions

In many parts of the world there is a steady shift towards more open forms of participatory democracy. The context and starting point might vary in different countries – some governments welcome and support change, while others are resistant and may be openly hostile. But for those involved in this work, the language, the concepts, the approaches and the lessons are much the same.

Participation and empowerment

1. Community involvement is at the heart of sustainable change
2. Citizens should have the right, not just an invitation, to participate
3. Citizens should be 'makers and shapers' of policy and practice
4. Empowerment should be seen as an outcome in its own right

Citizens and communities

5. The stakes for participation can be very high
6. Community participation can take a variety of forms
7. Partnerships make tough demands on community representatives
8. Civil society needs to engage 'politically' beyond the government
9. Resources should be targeted to reduce inequality

Central and local government

10. The role of local government is changing
11. Participation should be part of mainstream local government practice
12. Changing political culture and entrenched views is difficult
13. Local politicians need to 'go deeper' into their communities
14. Participation takes time and resources
15. There needs to be something real on the table
16. Central government needs to provide appropriate leadership

Participation and empowerment

1. Community involvement is at the heart of sustainable change

The explosion of interest in participation is not simply a reaction to the crisis of legitimacy between citizens and the government. It also reflects recognition that community involvement is central to the international challenges we all face: of revitalising democracy, improving service delivery, tackling poverty and building strong, resourceful communities. Participation therefore is not an 'add-on', an optional extra, nor is it the 'icing on the cake' or a matter of packaging and presentation. Rather it is integral to achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes for people and it is essential for any kind of transformational change in society.

2. Citizens should have the right, not just an invitation, to participate

Participation should therefore be a right, not merely something that citizens do by invitation, and that right needs to be enshrined in some form of enabling legislation. In countries where it is written into the law, activists argue that it strengthens the position of communities who may face opposition from politicians or officials who do not value or respect their involvement. Even in countries like the UK, where the government is not restrictive or repressive, a clear statement that citizens have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and their communities empowers communities to actively seek change.

'People who were passive recipients are enabled to become active participants in their own development and self governance.'
Mani Shankar Aiyar
Minister of Local Governance, India

3. Citizens should be 'makers and shapers' of policy and practice

In a modern society, citizens cannot be treated as passive recipients of government policy or merely as users and consumers of public services. Even though providing more individual choice may be crucial, a well-informed 'customer' is not the same thing as an actively engaged 'citizen'. And in our rapidly changing and diverse societies, with inherent risks of conflict and alienation, people need to be encouraged to speak and act as part of a community, as well as exercising the freedom to make their voices heard as individuals.

'Democratising the state means people become the subjects of policy rather than the objects of policy. It is not only a better way to make decisions about how to meet the needs of the people, but it is about inclusion, respect and a new political culture – it is a project for the democratisation of everyday life.'
Olivio Dutra
Former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil

4. Empowerment should be seen as an outcome in its own right

While 'participation' describes the process whereby citizens exert influence, 'community empowerment' describes a fundamental change in the way a community sees itself and relates to others. The former is a means to an end, but empowerment should be valued as an outcome in its own right. Governments and funding bodies are beginning to understand this argument, but more work is needed to identify measures that sharpen the focus on community empowerment and enable us to monitor and assess change.

Citizens and communities

5. The stakes for participation can be very high

Participation can be a high-risk business for local champions, especially in the context of current or former authoritarian and military regimes, where speaking out could mean a person risking their freedom or their life. In parts of Eastern Europe, participatory democracy is a completely new experience. A new culture of openness and dialogue has to be pursued alongside the development of human rights. But even in the UK, participation demands a lot of those who get involved and can take its toll, especially on residents who give huge amounts of time on a voluntary basis and often struggle to keep up with government requirements and expectations.

Effective participation depends on 'champions' who need to be supported, whether they operate inside the government or within local communities.

6. Community participation can take a variety of forms

Three key ways in which communities can participate and contribute as active citizens were identified:

- self-help projects and community-led activities to transform an area, fill a gap in service provision or directly tackle a local problem
- partnership arrangements, working in collaboration with local government and others to develop strategies and address local needs, and acting as a bridge between partnership members and local people
- independent civil society organisations that mobilise communities to act collectively on issues defined by them, rather than by those in authority.

All three have an important and valid role, but they make different demands on citizens and their organisations.

7. Partnerships make tough demands on community representatives

In the UK, partnership working has become the accepted way to tackle complex problems, especially in deprived communities. But too often the rules of engagement mean that community representatives feel marginalised, and lack the resources they need to operate as equal partners. They are expected to be 'expert citizens', reflecting community views to partners and taking partnership decisions back to their communities. If they become

too involved in the partnership they risk losing touch with their community base. If they take an independent stance and challenge partners, they risk being even more marginalised.

8. Civil society needs to engage 'politically' beyond the government

In a thriving democracy it is important for the government to recognise the right of people to act politically through advocacy, protest and direct action to make their views heard and seek solutions – even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. This kind of participation is a powerful tool to achieve change. Communities should not always wait for the government to act, but should be empowered to organise, set their own agenda and take action on the issues that most affect them. This will lead to engagement not only with the government, but also with large employers, trade unions, and increasingly with global corporate institutions. Non-government funding bodies need to support these kinds of civil society organisations in order to protect their independence.

9. Resources should be targeted to reduce inequality

If participation is a key factor in the fight against poverty and in building strong, vibrant, cohesive communities, then resources to support involvement should be targeted at the poorest neighbourhoods and the most marginalised communities. We do not start with a level playing field in terms of quality of life or opportunities, nor in terms of power and the capacity to exert influence. In order to narrow the gap, we need to give priority to the most excluded groups and communities.

Central and local government

10. The role of local government is changing

Around the world, local government no longer operates merely as a subsidiary layer of central government concerned with local administration, law, order and service delivery. Rather it is expected to tackle poverty, deliver area regeneration, stimulate economic development and support community empowerment. In other words, local government has become a key agent of social change and is expected to work closely with citizens in delivering this complex agenda.

11. Participation should be part of mainstream local government practice

Participation should be seen as integral to the way local government works, not something done occasionally in an ad hoc and partial way. But mainstreaming participation throughout local government is not easy. There are resource implications. Politicians and officials need new skills and capabilities to work in this way. Effective participation also requires new roles in local government, reflecting a more participatory approach to public leadership and a management style that is more open, enquiring and responsive – less 'top-down' and more accountable. To achieve this, local government needs to support the people who can 'get participation right' at the outset, sustain it over the long term, and embed changes into the way local government and other organisations work.

12. Changing political culture and entrenched views is difficult

Real change is dependent on challenging entrenched and negative attitudes, whether they are held by people in the government who exercise power or by local communities who have very little. But changing people's mindsets and behaviour is not a quick-fix solution. The culture of decision making can be so deeply embedded that officials, politicians and community participants find it hard to adopt different ways of working together. Change involves building new relationships between citizens, their elected representatives and service providers. It means recognising and seeking to change the power imbalances that exist; taking risks and building trust; and accepting that conflict will arise but using it constructively to deepen understanding and build alliances.

13. Local politicians need to 'go deeper' into their communities

Councillors and politicians in the UK have been challenged by the White Paper and the Power Inquiry to connect better with the communities they represent. But not all councillors have the skills and resources to do this. They will need support to develop their own capacity to work with local people and be able to broker different views and potentially conflicting demands. The key task here is to build alliances with local communities, support their initiatives and work together to address local issues. It also means respecting other community champions and, rather than feeling threatened, recognising their role as legitimate leaders and spokespeople. Workshop participants felt that 'power' was not a 'zero-sum' game and that the willingness to share power with communities could prove to be a win–win situation for political leaders and community champions alike.

14. Participation takes time and resources

Key factors for effective participation include: at the outset making sure you really understand people's issues and needs; designing new spaces for engagement with local communities; investing time and resources to support and sustain this work over the long term; demonstrating political will and the leadership necessary to drive the process; being prepared to act so that participation leads to results that make a difference.

15. There needs to be something real on the table

People are most likely to participate if they believe their input will make a difference. They need to be confident that they will be listened to and that those with power will include them in making decisions. But they also need to be able to make informed decisions and this often means having information about budgets and a degree of control over spending decisions. Without this sense of real benefits, there is a high chance of 'consultation overload and fatigue'.

16. Central government needs to provide appropriate leadership

Getting the balance right, between central and local government is very important. Ideally central government should set out a strong policy for participation and empowerment and establish systems for public scrutiny and evaluation – possibly including minimum standards. But central government should then step back and allow local government and local communities to work out how best to implement the policy in a given situation – while of course maintaining close scrutiny to ensure progress is made.

In the UK, central government has taken a strong lead on empowerment and set the tone for what should be happening locally. But there are still too many centrally driven requirements that pull in the opposite direction, such as: centrally imposed targets which drive out local dialogue and devalue bottom-up solutions; short deadlines for delivery that make genuine participation impossible; and a stream of policy changes that result in communities constantly having to catch up with the policy process. This can lead to the breakdown of relationships and trust as local authorities adjust to changing government priorities and trusted staff members are redeployed to deliver them.

Conclusion

The **Champions of Participation** workshop brought together politicians, officials, community leaders and academics from all around the world to explore the implications of participatory democracy and community empowerment for local government. It is hard to convey within a written document, the buzz and excitement of this workshop or the value of the personal connections made between participants. Although the Champions of Participation workshop took place in the UK, it was also a rare opportunity, especially for people from Europe and the USA, to focus on innovations in newer democracies from the 'developing South'. A number of participants commented that the exchange had widened their horizons and opened up new possibilities – they said they felt both humbled and reinvigorated as a result.

The participants might have been diverse in terms of their backgrounds, but they spoke the same language and were motivated by similar values and ambitions. Their aims were to promote participation within local democracy and to build bridges between citizens and the state. They were committed to helping the most disadvantaged communities to have a voice and influence over the things that mattered to them. They wanted to understand better the barriers to effective involvement and the challenge of achieving a genuine redistribution of power. They saw this as the key to sustainable change – participation as a means of empowerment - as well as a tool for better service delivery.

The workshop came at an important time, both in the UK and internationally. In the UK, shortly after the workshop Parliament approved the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, placing a statutory duty on local authorities to inform, consult and involve citizens and local communities. Hazel Blears MP, a new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Governance, has put community involvement at the heart of her agenda, including widespread promotion in the UK of participatory budgeting, an innovation which started first in Brazil. Launching her Action Plan for Empowerment, she stated, 'Local action is more important than ever. Getting more communities involved in decision making will be the key to finding the solution to some of the biggest challenges facing the country'.

At the same time, just as opportunities for engagement continue to emerge in the UK and internationally, there remains a challenge: to embed participatory practice within local governments so that the changes work and are also long lasting. We hope that the lessons from this workshop will help champions of participation in communities and governments around the world to face the challenge, and to turn the rhetoric of empowerment and local democracy into reality.

Annexes

Annex 1: Information about partner organisations

Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability at IDS
The Citizenship DRC is an international network of researchers and activists exploring new forms of citizenship that will help make rights real. Funded by DFID since 2001, it works with research institutions and civil society organisations in seven different countries - Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK.
www.drc-citizenship.org.uk

Logolink at IDS
LogoLink is a global network of practitioners from civil society organisations, research institutions and governments working to deepen democracy through greater citizen participation in local governance. LogoLink encourages learning from field-based innovations and expressions of democracy which contribute to social justice.
www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/index.htm

Department for International Development (DFID)
DFID is the part of the UK Government that manages Britain's aid to poor countries and works to get rid of extreme poverty. For DFID international development refers to efforts, by developed and developing countries, to bring people out of poverty and so reduce how much their country relies on overseas aid.
www.dfid.gov.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG)
CLG is a UK governmemt department working hard to create thriving, sustainable, vibrant communities where everyone has a say in shaping their environment. CLG aims to deliver this by: working to offer more choice and better quality in pulic services; addressing the issues of climate change; building cohesion; tackling anti-social behaviour and extremism.
www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/

Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)
The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better. The IDeA uses experienced councillors and senior officers, known as peers, who support and challenge councils to improve themselves. It enables councils to share good practice through the national 'Beacons Scheme' and regional local government networks.
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=1

Annex 2: Local government structures in England[24]

- In mainly urban areas, there are unitary councils which are responsible for all the functions of local government – for instance social care services, education, housing, street cleaning and refuse collection, planning, leisure facilities. There are 116 of them.
- In mainly rural areas, there are two pillars of local government. County councils cover a large geographical area and are responsible for services such as education and social care. District councils cover a much smaller area and are responsible for very local services such as street cleaning and refuse collection, housing, local planning. There are 34 county councils and 238 district councils.[25]
- In some areas there is a third tier of elected government – parish, town and neighbourhood councils. There are 10,000 of them.
- Each area is split into electoral divisions called wards, and each ward is represented by one or more councillors. There are 20,000 councillors.
- There are no elected regional bodies except for the Greater London Authority. There are different regional administrative bodies including nine decentralised government offices which have civil servants from most of the national government departments.
- Councils have different management arrangements, but most have both executive and non-executive councillors, and a few have elected mayors with executive powers.
- All councils have scrutiny arrangements – councillors who are not in executive positions are responsible for scrutinising and holding the executive to account for its decisions.
- All councillors have responsibilities to their wards and their electorate to represent their views and communicate between the council and citizens.
- Around 75 per cent of local government funding comes from central government and the rest from a local property tax.
- Councils are required to take a lead in partnerships which include public agencies such as police, health services, employment services, the voluntary and community sectors and business organisations. They are called Local Strategic Partnerships and are responsible for consulting on and delivering a community strategy for the whole area.

24. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have different arrangements. For information about legal frameworks which support participation in other countries see www.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/legalframewks.htm
25. Proposals to increase the number of unitary authorities will change these numbers during 2008/9.

Annex 3:
List of participants

UK Participants

Elaine Appelbee, Acting Chief Executive, Bradford Vision, Local Strategic Partnership for Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Rose Ardron, Community representative and Chair of the Burngreave New Deal for Communities Partnership Board; member of the LSP Board, Sheffield
Keith Black, Development Manager, Merseyside Network for Change, Liverpool
Zena Brabazon, Neighbourhood Management/ lead Officer, Haringey Council
Alice Brickley, London Citizens, London
Rosalie Callway, International Policy Officer, Local Government Association
Diana Conyers, Institute of Development Studies
Nuala Conlan, Participation Lead Officer, Community Involvement and Development Unit, London Borough of Southwark
Valerie Cotter, Partnership and Local Action Manager, Sheffield City Council
Clare Greener, Rural Policy Manager, Shropshire County Council
Vince Howe, Neighbourhood Renewal officer, Newcastle City Council
Shazia Hussain, Tower Hamlets Partnership, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Karen Jewitt, Councillor, London Borough of Croydon
Maryanne Kelly, Head of Local Government Citizen Engagement, Department of Communities and Local Government
Diana Martin, Neighbourhood Management Co-ordinator, Salford City Council
Joe Micheli, Neighbourhood Management Participation Officer, Barnsley MPC
Shah Newaz, Principal Policy& Performance Officer, Performance and Development Service, Rochdale MPC
Janet Parry, Senior Manager, Sheffield Homes (ALMO)
Angie Singleton, Councillor, South Somerset District Council
Carmel Stevenson, Moulsecoomb Community Activist, Brighton East Brighton NDC
Sarah Tighe-Ford, Equalities Manager, East Brighton NDC
Andrew Towlerton, CP Lead Officer, Rotherham MBC
Marilyn Taylor, Professor of Urban Governance and Regeneration, University of Western England
Tricia Zipfel, Consultant

International Participants

Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, Honourable Minister for Panchayati Raj, Youth Affairs and Sport, India
Emmy Alividza M'mbwanga, Kenya Local Government Reform programme, Ministry of Local Government, Kenya
Julio Andrade Ruiz, Director of Participation and Citizen Relations Department, Malaga City Council, Spain
Reuf Bajrovic, Independent Consultant, Sarajevo, Bosnia
Gerry Bulatao, Chairman of the Board, Consortium for the Advancement of People's Participation Through Sustainable Integrated Area Development, Phillipines
Jerry v. de la Cerna, Mayor, Municipality of Governor Generoso, Province of Davao Oriental, Phillipines
Masha Djordevic, Project Manager, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary
Claudio Duarte, Provincial Health Dept, Pernambuco State Government, Brazil
Olivio Dutra, Former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil
Anju Dwivedi, State coordinator, PRIA (NGO), India
Cynthia Hedge-Morrell, City Councilwoman, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
Janine Hicks, Centre for Public Participation, South Africa
Mike Huggins, City Manager, City of Eau Claire, Eau Claire Wisconsin, USA
Sylvia Ivanova, Council of Europe, Bulgaria
Morten Lauvbu, Responsible for the CLEAR project in Øvre Eiker Municipality, Norway
Silvana Lauzan, Corporacion Participa, Chile
Subethri Naidoo, Governance Advisor, DFID, South Africa
Amina Salihu, former Senior Special Assistant on Communication to the Federal Capital Territory Administration, Abuja, Nigeria
Peter Spink, Local Governance Innovations Network, Brazil
Ming Zhuang, NGO worker, sociology researcher, China Participatory Urban Governance Network (CCPG), China

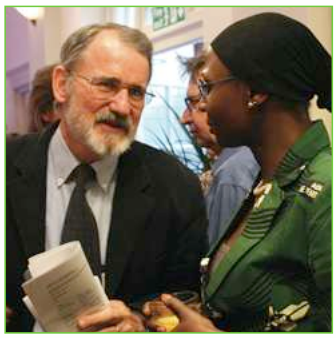
Resource people

Pam Giddy, Power Inquiry
Viven Lowndes, de Montfort University
Mark Robinson, DFID
Angela Smith, CLG
Matthew Warbuton, LGA

Facilitators

John Gaventa, IDS
Rose Nierras, Plan UK/Logolink
Aaron Schneider, IDS
Joanna Wheeler, IDS
Fiona Wilson, IDS
Tricia Zipfel, Consultant





















The Champions of Participation event in May 2007 brought together 44 people (24 from the UK and 20 from 14 other countries) involved in local government.

LogoLink
Learning Initiative on Citizen Participation and Local Governance

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