

“Participatory Governance?” Gender and Participation in Peru’s Local Institutions

Stephanie McNulty, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Government
Franklin and Marshall College
smcnulty@fandm.edu

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Introduction

In 2010, a small group of local officials and candidates sat and discussed the importance of Peru’s participatory budget (PB) process.¹ One female leader from Puno argued that it provides “civic education about the importance of participation” and helps the community “achieve consensus.”² A man from Lima stressed that it “provides a space for citizen oversight” of their local officials. A female political party activist noted that “it is a process where citizens can interact with their authorities.” Finally, a young politician, a twenty-three year old from the outskirts of Lima, stated that it led to “development with equality.” This small group of people reflected on the benefits of participatory budgets to the community and the participants themselves.

Their comments beg an important question. Are these benefits available to all political actors equally? Are participatory budgets truly “participatory”? If not, what does this mean for participatory governance projects meant to engage those citizens that have been left behind by corrupt or inefficient representative political institutions? This paper begins to analyze these issues by exploring gender and participatory budgeting in Peru.

In 2002 and 2003, Peruvians set up several participatory institutions through a national decentralization reform. These institutions were codified in the reform’s legal framework as part of efforts to clean up Peruvian politics after the corrupt and authoritarian Fujimori years. Reformers hoped to improve democracy and governance by devolving economic and political powers to subnational governments while also mandating that civil society organizations participate in newly established subnational institutions. A nationwide participatory budgeting process is one of the most important of these institutions.

This paper explores this effort in more depth and asks: Do women and men participate equally in Peru’s PBs? If not, why not? Finally, can steps be taken to make these institutions more inclusive? To respond to these questions, the paper unfolds in four sections. First, Peru’s experience with participatory budgeting, in the context of the rise of participatory institutions in Latin America, is described. Next, data are reported about the percent of women and women’s organizations that have participated in the process over time. The data show that women are not participating in equal numbers as men; the third section explores why. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the broader implications of this case, as well as recommendations for engaging excluded groups in participatory processes. While the main causes of female underrepresentation are hard and slow to change, there are some steps that can be taken to encourage more inclusive institutions.

The paper reports quantitative data available from Peru’s national government as well as information from primary documents written by organizations in Peru that monitor the PB. I complement this information with data gathered in Peru in a 2010 research trip. I interviewed twenty experts who work in municipal governments, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, or MEF (the governmental agency tasked with implementing the PB), and/or non-profit

¹ These views were reported to the author while observing a local candidate training program in Lima in July 2010.

² All translations mine.

organizations.

Peru is typical of many developing countries around the world that are experimenting with participatory approaches to rectify the perceived shortcomings of the representative democratic institutions. Thus, this case provides an important opportunity to study the inclusiveness of participatory institutions. The process was mandated from above, therefore, it has taken place nationwide over several years. Because each subnational government must comply with the process to receive its budget, the national government has tracked the number and gender of participants over time. Like many other countries, there are several groups of marginalized political actors, including women, but also indigenous and Afro-Peruvians. I argue that we can use women's participation as a proxy indicator for how "participatory" these fora are in countries that are struggling to improve transparency and accountability, as well as democratic governance, in subnational politics.

The Rise of Participatory Budgeting in Latin America

As countries around the world push for increased transparency and improved local governance, many cities and states are organizing participatory budgeting processes to engage new actors in politics. This particular way of developing budgets "represents a direct-democracy approach to budgeting. It offers citizens at large an opportunity to learn about government operations and to deliberate, debate, and influence the allocation of public resources" (Shah 2007, 1). Thousands of cities and towns in every region of the world, including the United States and Canada, are now experimenting with participatory budgeting techniques.³

The most well known experience with participatory budgeting is that of Porto Alegre, instituted in 1989 by the leftist Workers' Party. As Brazil transitioned towards more democratic rule in the 1980s, leftist activists in this city began to call for more open decision-making about city planning and, more specifically, budgeting. Slowly, a participatory budgeting process emerged.⁴ This process has spread to many cities in Brazil as well as around Latin America. Most processes, including that of Peru, are informed by this paradigmatic case to some extent.

Advocates argue that PB is good for democracy because it gives "marginalized and excluded groups the opportunity to have their voices heard and to influence public decision making vital to their interests" (Shah 2007, 1). Yet, as Archon Fung (2004, 28) notes, the success of participatory efforts "depend[s] upon the character of actual participation... Outcomes depend not only upon the presence of citizens in the aggregate, but also on the representativeness of those who choose to participate."⁵ For this reason, understanding who is actually participating in these new institutions is important. Are they, in fact, inclusive? Are PB processes reaching those groups that have traditionally been excluded from politics as usual in these contexts? This is an under-studied issue in the literature on participatory governance.

Because the literature on this issue is still thin, female participation in participatory budgeting is an issue that is not extensively documented. An exception to this is Porto Alegre. In 1995, almost half of the general participants surveyed in Porto

³ See <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/> for more on the spread of participatory budgeting around the world.

⁴ For more information on this experience, see Abers 2000; Avritzer 2002, 2009; Baiocchi 2005, 2004, 2003; and Wampler 2008, 2007a, 2007b.

⁵ See Goldfrank 2011 and Moehler 2008 for similar arguments.

Alegre (47%) were women (Abers 2000). Nylén's (2003) survey also finds that women participate in the general meetings at relatively strong rates (44.2% of the delegates in Belo Horizonte and 39.6% in Betim). In the early years, while women participated in general meetings in equal numbers as men, they failed to hold leadership positions. This has changed with time and, according to the World Bank (2008, 23):

Men and women participate equally in the [participatory budget] and, in recent years, women have reversed the trend of under-representation at higher levels of representation. Historically... females tended to be under-represented in the ...Participatory Budgeting Council and the delegates' forum...By 2005, women participants for the first time slightly outnumbered men participants (52.8 percent), as did women councilors (53.5 percent) and women delegates (52.4 percent).

More recent documentation on Belo Horizonte and Betim (other Brazilian cities that have implemented the PB) demonstrate that women are participating in both meetings and leadership positions in equal numbers as men (Abers 2000; Goldfrank 2011; Nylén 2003; Wampler 2007a). Thus, women currently represent at least half of the participants in the PB process in Brazil. Beyond the Brazil cases, however, there is very little known about the extent to which women participate in these specific institutions.⁶

Peru's Participatory Budgeting

In 2002, Peruvians designed a sweeping decentralization reform to respond to the crisis of representative democracy facing the country. Alberto Fujimori, the president of Peru from 1990 to 2000, had fled the country in disgrace. Mounting evidence, in the form of videos shown on national television, showed his government bribing judges and members of Congress to implement his authoritarian agenda. Thus, the 2002 reform was passed during a period of widespread disgust about the lack of transparency and accountability. Actors from around the country clamored for changes that would move the country beyond "politics as usual."

The decentralization reform empowered several new levels of government, including regions (akin to states), provinces (akin to counties), and districts or municipalities. The stated goal of the reform, in addition to devolving political power and transferring resources to subnational governments, is to increase civil society's participation at the local level in an effort to strengthen Peru's fragile democracy.⁷ Each subnational level of government⁸ must undertake mandatory participatory budgeting processes, making Peru one of the most participatory countries in the world. The reform vaguely purports to promote gender equality.⁹ For example, the law that defines the role and function of regional governments states that the reform embraces several goals, including participation, inclusion, and equality (Law 27867 Article 8).

⁶ Some studies do document female participation in other kinds of participatory institutions. See, for example, Fung 2004 for more on Chicago's participatory policing efforts and Bryan 2004 for more on women's role in townhall meetings in the Northeast of the United States.

⁷ See Defensoría del Pueblo 2003, McNulty 2011, and Zas Fris Burga 2004 for a more detailed outline of the original legal framework.

⁸ Importantly, the national government's budget process is not included in this framework.

⁹ For more on the relation of decentralization and gender inclusion, see PRODES 2011.

The Participatory Budget Law (Law 28056), finalized in 2003, dictates that the capital investment costs¹⁰ of each regional budget must be developed with civil society input. A report by the World Bank (2010, 8) estimates that in 2007, Peruvians debated 36% of subnational budgets (an estimated \$393 million US dollars) in the participatory budget process. Following a series of steps—developed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance—the subnational governments must demonstrate that they have complied with this process in order to receive their annual budgets. No gender quotas exist in the national legislation, but the law does state that the process should embrace equality, equity, and tolerance.¹¹

Peruvians had begun to experiment with PB in some cities before the mandatory process was set up in 2003. Most were influenced by Porto Alegre’s experience as several Peruvian mayors heard about the project in conferences and other meetings. Around 2001, in an effort to ensure more accountable and transparent use of public funds, the Ministry of Economy and Finance became interested in these experiences and decided to experiment further. The MEF first launched a pilot project in 2002. The pilot program involved developing regional development plans, in a participatory and consultative manner, which would then serve to guide that year’s budget-making process. Twenty-two of twenty-five regions undertook the first step, designing regional development plans and budgets by convening and consulting civil society actors, and nine regions eventually qualified for funding for development projects.¹²

Thus, by the time the decentralization reform passed, several Peruvian cities had experience with participatory budgeting. The Participatory Budget Law institutionalizes the pilot program, considered by the MEF to have been very successful, at the national level. The Budget and General Accounts Congressional Committee worked closely with the Ministry of Economy and Finance to develop the legislation that would govern this process. At this point, some of the mayors who had led the earlier processes were members of Congress and oversaw the passage of the PB legislation.

Legal Framework

The current legal framework for Peru’s participatory budget is a compilation of several laws, decrees, and official instructions. The process is regulated in the Executive Decree D.S. 171-2003-EF, which outlines some definitions and the phases of the process. The Participatory Budget Law, or Law 28056, passed in mid-2003, states that the goal of the process is to strengthen civil society-state relations and to promote the just, rational, efficient, and transparent use of resources. It also intends to ensure society’s control over the use of resources. The process is regulated through instructions developed by the MEF’s National Public Budget office.

¹⁰ The remainder of the subnational budget is made up of fixed (or operational) costs, which are not debated.

¹¹ It is important to note that this budget process is different from “gender sensitive budgeting,” which is an analysis of the national budget to determine the extent to which gender issues are prioritized in national spending. UNIFEM defines gender sensitive budgeting as “the analysis of the impact of actual government expenditure and revenue on women and girls as compared to men and boys.” For more information about gender sensitive budgeting see <http://www.gender-budgets.org/>.

¹² See Zas Friz Burga 2004 for more on the pilot program.

The original participatory budget law outlined eight phases that occurred over the course of the year, including a call for participation, registration of participants (called participating agents, or PAs), a training period for both participating agents and a technical team, and several meetings during which participating agents prioritize and vote on actual regional investment projects. The final phase consisted of setting up an oversight committee to monitor regional spending and progress on prioritized projects. In 2009, the Peruvian government reformed the original Participatory Budget Law to reduce these eight steps to four. Law 29298 outlines the phases:

- 1) Preparation, or identifying, registering, and training participating agents.
- 2) “Concertation”¹³: During this phase the participating agents meet to discuss the region’s development plan¹⁴ and prioritize the “themes” of projects that should be funded in the new budget. This discussion should be based on the development plan. The technical team then evaluates each proposed project and, based on the agreed upon priorities, recommends the projects that should be funded.
- 3) Coordination among the different levels of government, which consists of meetings between the regional president and the local mayors to make sure that spending is coordinated, sustainable, and has regional impact.
- 4) Formalization of investment projects. This takes place during a regional meeting where participating agents are given a vote in the final project list. This final list is sent to two regional governmental bodies, the Regional Coordination Council and the Regional Council, for approval.

Once approved, the regional president sends a list of projects to the MEF, which evaluates their technical viability. While participation by the participating agents is an important aspect of the process, it is only one part of a long and complicated budget process that involves elected regional authorities and central government officials, all of whom can legally change the final list of projects that leaves the final participatory budget meeting.¹⁵

Who can participate in this process? Participating agents are defined as representatives from civil society, members of the Regional Coordination Council (made of up a combination of mayors and representatives from civil society organizations), and government officials. The national law allows each regional, provincial, or district government to determine the registration process for civil society organizations and codify it in a local ordinance. As such, registration criteria vary around the country. However it is common to mandate that a participating agent

¹³ “Concertacion” is a term that stems from the Spanish term “concertar,” a difficult concept to translate. Generally it means discussing issues and coming to agreement or consensus about them.

¹⁴ The regional development plan (called *plan de desarrollo concertado* in Spanish) is also an important part of the participatory decentralization framework. Every five years each level of government has to convene actors to discuss regional development priorities and document them in the plan. To view actual plans, go to the *Mesa de Concertación de la Lucha Contra la Pobreza’s* website at <http://www.mesadeconcertacion.org.pe>.

¹⁵ See Shack 2006 for a lengthy description of the entire national budget process in Peru and where the PB fits in.

representing a CSO should have formal legal status¹⁶ and work in the entire region/province/district, not merely representing one city or town.

An important distinction of the participatory budget in Peru is its corporatist nature. As a World Bank report (2008) notes, policy makers designing participatory institutions need to decide between two models: 1) opening up spaces for individual citizens to participate and 2) the “corporate model,” in which participants represent already organized entities (i.e. community or neighborhood groups, non-governmental organizations, etc.). Because Peru has a long history of corporatist structures in local politics, the PB design mandates that representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) participate in the Peruvian institutions.

While Peru is considered to have made great strides in terms of women’s representation in many areas, budgeting is not one of them. Although the presence of women’s organizations, among several other kinds of civil society organizations, is mentioned the most recent annual instructions, gender equity or concerns are not highlighted in any phase of the process (see MEF 2010). One interviewee, a former MEF official who was actively involved in designing the process, told me that they never explicitly discussed gender when writing the law. A senior official in the office that oversees the PB in the MEF told me that “the MEF has not followed the issue of women or gender.... We do not focus on the issue of gender participation because this is not our strength, we are not trained to do this.” Thus, gender has not been incorporated into the legal framework by the national government.

In addition to the legal framework for the participatory budget, two related processes are also being institutionalized in Peru. First, Peru is currently insisting that the entire national budget one that is results-based, called “Presupuesto por Resultados” or PpR. According to the MEF, the PpR is “a public policy strategy that links resource allocation to measurable results” (MEF n.d.). In 2007, Peru’s budget law introduced this aspect of the national budget into the legal framework.¹⁷ The government has developed eight results that national spending should work toward meeting: improved nutrition, prenatal maternal health, access to education, access to basic social services and the market, access to formal identity papers, improved water and sanitation, access to telephone and internet in rural areas, and access to energy in rural areas (MEF 2009). Clearly, women are part of this framework and women’s health is especially important for the first two results (nutrition and prenatal maternal health). Furthermore, the law dictates that gender outcomes, at least in these two areas, should be tracked in the national budget. However, in practice, this is not happening. In my conversations with budget specialists in 2010, the process was designed to slowly unfold, and discussions had taken place at the national, conceptual level mostly in terms of ministries and their programs (such as programs managed by the Ministries of Education and Health). The link to the PB still needs to be defined. Thus, while this reform might eventually promote more gendered PB processes, the process is very new and is not yet incorporated into the PB process (World Bank 2010).

A second national reform that has the potential to influence gender outcomes in the PB process, albeit indirectly, is Peru’s Equal Opportunity Law (*Ley de Igualdad de Oportunidades Entre Mujeres y Hombres*, or Law 28983). Passed in 2007, it states that each region has to

¹⁶ While regulations vary, to become legal most CSOs must demonstrate that it has a governing board, a constitution, a list of members, and some sort of legal representative. There is usually a fee associated with becoming legal as well. For more on these regulations, see for example Ling Ramirez Huaroto 2009.

¹⁷ See Chapter IV of Law 28411 (*Ley General del Sistema Nacional de Presupuesto*).

develop an Equal Opportunity Plan at the regional and provincial levels. This process is ongoing; as of June 2011, sixteen regional governments had adopted a plan (PRODES 2011). These plans should dovetail with already existing development plans, which outline the long-term goals of each region in terms of economic, social, and cultural development. Ideally, the two plans should complement each other, and then be translated into specific development projects, funded by the regional and provincial budgets. It is partly through these plans that gender issues could be addressed in the participatory budget discussions.¹⁸ As of 2011, however, the law was too new to be operationalized into budgetary allocations around the country.

The PpR and the LIO may have the potential to encourage more gendered outcomes in the future, but the current framework governing the annual PB process has no formal mechanisms that promote or mandate the participation of women. Rather, women and women's organizations are part of the diverse organizations that are invited to participate. The next section documents one indicator of the extent to which women are engaged in the process: the number of women and women's organizations participating in the process over time.

Who Participates? Documenting Gender Inequality

Are women attending PB processes in Peru? The easiest way to explore participation is by tracking the number of participants and the percent of those participants who are women.¹⁹ The Peruvian government monitors the number of participants, as well as some additional characteristics of participants, in a database that is available to the public.²⁰ Two indicators of women's participation are available: 1) the number of women participating in meetings and 2) the number of women's organizations represented in meetings. The data on participation are easiest to aggregate at the regional level, mostly because there are fewer units to track (compared to 25 regions, there are 1,838 districts and 195 provinces). Table One provides data on both indicators from twenty-four of the twenty-five regions.²¹

At the regional level, there had been a slow increase in the number of women who participate in meetings, which then declined last year. According to the Peruvian government's database, 27% of participants were female in the meetings to make the 2008 budget, 28% for 2009, 29% for 2010, and 30% for 2011. This number declined to 22% for the 2012 budget. Women are also not equally represented on the technical teams, making up approximately 25%

¹⁸ For more on the Equal Opportunity Law and the regional plans, see Aldave Ruiz and Vega Torres, 2009.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, quantitative data tell us nothing about the *quality* of any participants' experience in these meetings. Many of my interviewees emphasized that they are also concerned with the nature of participation. Do women speak when they attend meetings? Do they argue for specific projects that may benefit women and/or their families? In this sense, the analysis is limited. While not the perfect measure of participation, quantitative data do give us some insight into inclusion and participatory institutions and helps us start to better understand the democratizing potential of these experiments.

²⁰ See http://presupuesto-participativo.mef.gob.pe/app_pp/db_distedit.php. The government reports data based on the year that the budget is debated, not spent (i.e. 2008 data presented in Table One pertain to the *process* that unfolded around the country in 2007).

²¹ One region, Callao, is an area bordering Lima and given special status. Because it is not a typical region, I do not include it in this analysis.

of the team. This is important because this team is currently making the majority of funding decisions. Women are, however, more active in the regional oversight committees, making up around one-third of the participants for the past two years.

The second indicator, the number of women's organizations represented at the meetings, is much lower. Only 2 to 3% of the PAs that came to meetings officially represented women's organizations in the meetings. Interestingly, while the percentage of women declined last year, the percentage of women's organizations has mostly remained steady.

[TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE]

Beyond the regional level it is hard to estimate the number and gender of participants. The best study of all levels of government is the World Bank's 2010 analysis of the participatory budget. When documenting the participation by women in the 2009 regional, provincial, and district levels, the World Bank (2010, 47) finds that "women represent only 32% of the participating agents, 26% of the members of the oversight committees, and merely 20% of the technical teams."

Thus, one clear finding that emerges is that nine years after the establishment of PBs in Peru, women are not attending meetings in equal numbers as their male counterparts. The next section explores why so few women and women's organizations actually attend these events.

Barriers to Participation

What factors might account for this low level of participation by women and the organizations that exist to represent their interests? Because this issue has not been studied extensively, I rely on data collected during key expert interviews to highlight explanatory factors. When interviewing experts on the issue, I often asked them what might explain the lower rates of participation among women in general and the extremely low rate of participation of women's organizations. Responses clustered around two interrelated issues: 1) the "double burden" facing rural women due to economic and cultural factors; and 2) the weakness of women's organizations as a sector, which are the actual actor invited to participate in the Peruvian PB. Of course, these factors are complex and inter-related and I am not arguing that these are the only factors that explain women's under-representation. Rather, they stand out as holding much of the explanatory weight, so to speak, in a very complex social and political environment.

Economic and Cultural Burdens: "Desgaste General"

The combination of high levels of poverty in most areas of Peru and cultural norms about the role of women deters women's participation in PB meetings. Poverty in Peru is well documented. With a per capita GNI of \$8,389, approximately 34.8% of the population fell below the poverty line in 2009.²² Women are disproportionately affected by poverty, and are generally less educated and more vulnerable than men. More women than men live in both poverty and extreme poverty in Peru; for example, while 48.8% of men live in poverty, 51.2 % of women live under these same conditions (MIMDES 2010b). Furthermore, women earn approximately

²² See UNData at <http://data.un.org/>

32.5% less than men (MIMDES 2010b). Thus, women have fewer financial resources than men in Peru.

Poverty encompasses more than income. Women's disadvantaged situation in Peru can also be seen through other indicators. According to the 2007 census, while only 3.9% of the males in Peru do not have formal education, 10.8% of women lack formal education. Peru's maternal mortality rate is the second highest in Latin America. Illiteracy is more prevalent among female Peruvians as well. In 2009, according to the National Institute's Annual Household Survey, while 4.7% of males were illiterate, 15.1% of females could not read (MIMDES 2010b). Further, more women than men do not have titles to their land or access to a National Identity Document (DNI in Spanish), which are available to any citizen who has a birth certificate (MIMDES 2010a).

Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES in Spanish) many more women live in poverty and extreme poverty in rural areas, which are the kinds of areas in which many of the PB processes discussed in this article are taking place. Women's life expectancy in rural areas (71.1 years) is lower than urban areas (77.05 years). And, for every ten illiterate people in rural areas, six are female, whereas in urban areas, approximately three are women (MIMDES 2010a: 14-15). According to MIMDES (2010a, 53), "In rural zones, 40% of women do not have a DNI."

Poverty itself can present barriers to participation in participatory institutions. We know that there are several "costs" to participation, in the basic form of time and resources needed to get to meetings, leave families, and miss work. As one interviewee noted to me when I began studying PBs in 2005: "Participation can be expensive!" Thus, women's immediate disadvantage in terms of economic and non-economic resources presents one of the most obvious barriers to participation.

Yet, the barriers caused by poverty go beyond actual costs. The lack of education and identity cards are also obstacles to participation. To register for any PB meeting, one must provide their DNI number (see, for example, MEF 2010, Annex 5). This basic step is elusive to a very large number of women in rural areas. Further, all information about the PB is usually written. Calls for participation may be published in local newspapers or on posters. Almost all technical information provided in the meetings is written down. For women in rural areas, this also makes the process very difficult to take part in.

While poverty and its implications represent a first "burden" facing women around the country, it is generally accompanied by a second "burden": the responsibilities facing women in the domestic sphere. As one NGO worker writes, "One difficulty that limits gender equality in the PB process is women's reduced time to participate given the absence of shared domestic roles with partners" (Agüero n.d.). A 2009 survey, conducted by the Public Opinion Institute of the Pontificia Catholic University in Peru, confirms an unequal division of labor in the home of Peruvian families. When asked, "Who is in charge of the following tasks in your home?" the majority responded that women are in charge of cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning, which, as Jeanine Anderson (2009) notes, are the tasks that take the most time in a household. Men are more involved in shopping and taking care of sick family members, and overwhelmingly dominate household decision-making (Instituto de Opinión Pública 2009).

Thus, these factors combine to make up the infamous "double-load" facing women around the world. Asking them to attend governmental meetings adds a third burden. The rise of participatory institutions had led women to become, as one gender scholar in Peru noted, "worn-

down... When we expect women to participate in these additional meetings and workshops, they move from taking on a double-load to a triple-load.”

While these factors combine to affect women’s rates of participation, what explains the extremely low percentage of women’s organizations participating? This is an important aspect considering the corporate nature of this reform. The organizations send representatives and, at least in theory, present potential projects to be funded. What is preventing women’s organizations from active participation in Peru?

Women’s Organizations

Women’s organizations, exactly the kind of organizations that would register for the process as a participating agent, are currently quite weak in Peru.²³ Before exploring this situation, a brief description of these organizations is warranted. Women’s organizations in Peru can be broadly divided into at least two groups. First, there are “feminist organizations,” which emerged in the 1970s as some women left traditional political parties, mostly from the left, to push forward a gender agenda (Rousseau 2006). Many of these organizations converted themselves into formal non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that sought to reform state “laws and institutions” (Rousseau 2006, 126).

A second group is made up of “popular sector women’s organizations,” or what many call *organizaciones de base (OSBs)*, or grass-roots organizations (Rousseau 2006, 126). These are often called “survival” organizations because many, like the Glass of Milk Committees (*Vaso de Leche*), soup kitchens (*comedores populares*) and mothers’ clubs (*clubes de madres*), exist to help women find the resources to feed their families. These organizations exist around the country. For example, the National Statistics Institute (INEI 2009, 9) estimates that in 2008, there were 47,637 Glass of Milk organizations, with an average of 47 per district. Over 15,000 *comedores populares* exist around the country (Blondet and Trivelli 2004). Among these grass-roots women’s organizations, we can further differentiate between rural and urban. Rural organizations are a bit smaller and poorer than those in urban areas.

Two specific challenges facing these organizations merit attention. First, they are plagued by organizational weaknesses. One survey of rural women’s organizations in five regions, found that the average number of members in these organizations is about 60 and most members are housewives who also maintain some sort of informal or agricultural employment (Flora Tristán 2005). Members reported the main problems facing their organizations, in order, as: 1) lack of participation by members; 2) insufficient financial resources; and 3) lack of training (Flora Tristán 2005, 27). Another problem that some mentioned in this survey, as well as several of my interviewees, is that there is not very much rotation among the leadership. Thus, these organizations have a number of areas that need strengthening.

The second challenge is the registration process to become “formal.” As noted above, to participate, an organization is usually required to be registered with the local government, thereby making it legally recognized. Law 25307, passed in 1991, outlines the process for OSBs to become formal. To meet the legal requirements, the organizations have to put together a portfolio of paperwork that demands technical knowledge. According to Beatriz Ling Ramírez Huaroto (2009, 5) of Flora Tristán, Law 25307 has not led to an increase in formalization

²³ There is a very large literature on women’s organizations in Peru. See, for example, Barrig 1998; Blondet and Trivelli 2004; Henríquez 1996; Vargas 1996, 1992. For more on *comedores populares* specifically see Barrig 1996 and Moser 2004.

because the process demands a “level of specialization that is not within reach of the majority of the members of the OSBs in Peru.” They simply cannot meet the legal requirements to register.²⁴

The low percentage of women’s groups is startling when you consider the fact that Peru has history of a relatively engaged sector of women’s groups around the country (see Vargas 1996 and 1992). This group of civil society organizations (“women’s organizations”) experienced a “boom,” i.e. an increase in number and power, in the 1980s. This could be traced to the ongoing democratization process, as well as the increase in survival organizations as a means to counteract economic problems (Schönwälder 2002).

Today, however, the sector as a whole is much weaker. Most attribute this problem to Fujimori’s era. Fujimori recognized that women were an important constituency and source of support. He promoted many reforms that strengthened women’s position in society, such as an electoral quota system and the creation of the Ministry of Women. It was later discovered that had developed a strong clientelistic network through the National Program of Foodstuff Support, which in essence exchanged food assistance for political support (Boesten 2003, 2010; Blondet 1999; Rousseau 2006). Since then, many of these organizations, especially grass-roots organizations, have experienced a decline in legitimacy. Stephanie Rousseau writes that the Fujimori years led to “disillusionment and divisions in the women’s movement” (2006, 119).

Thus, many of the exact organizations that would participate in Peru’s PB—rural grass-roots women’s organizations—are generally weak. Further, the legal requirements to participate in the PB are too difficult for most of the OSBs to meet (Ling Ramírez Huaroto 2009). Finally, they had declined in power and lost legitimacy in their communities since the Fujimori years. When describing this situation, one interviewee offered the following:

Today the women’s movement is mostly made up NGOs. The leaders from the popular movements are mostly gone. The women’s movement today does not include the masses, or popular sector, which really does not exist anymore since Fujimori co-opted traditional women’s organizations like *vaso de leche* and *comedores*. They lost their legitimacy and never recovered it.

This explains why so few women’s organizations are participating in these fora.

Conclusions

As Latin America undergoes several simultaneous political processes—such as democratization, decentralization, women’s rise to political power, and the rise of participatory experiments—it is important to examine areas where these trends have converged. Women’s participation in local participatory institutions, such as participatory planning and budgeting, is one domain that has potential for promoting several of these processes including strengthening the quality of democracy and empowering women. Yet, this paper shows that women are not participating in PB processes in Peru at the same rates as men. As a result, the democratizing potential for these institutions is compromised.

When measured in terms of individual participation, women never exceed one third of the actual participants. This means that women are not getting the same chance to gain skills in public policy decision-making, improve their understanding of budgets and democratic processes, or gain leadership skills in local level settings. Further, a mere 2 to 3% of the

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the paperwork and cost of registration, see Ling Ramírez Huaroto 2009.

organizations sending representatives at the regional level are formally representing women in PB meetings. Because the organization can send an actual project proposal, this means that fewer proposals representing women and their particular needs are getting discussed in these fora.

A combination of factors explain the lack of female participation. Economic barriers, combined with the fact that women are expected to take on most domestic duties, make it very hard for women to actually attend meetings. Additionally, the weakness of women's organizations, which suffered a legitimacy crisis at the end of the Fujimori years, prevents many organizations from attending these formal processes. These barriers combine to prevent women from having an equal voice in the participatory decision-making processes.

This problem extends beyond women's organizations and women themselves, of course. Many civil society organizations in Peru are weak, facing financial and organizational difficulties. This has led a prominent social scientist in Peru, María Isabel Remy, to question the corporatist nature of Peru's participatory institutions. In her book, *Los Múltiples Campos de la Participación Ciudadana en el Perú*, Remy (2005) notes that the combination of reforms that open up policy making to a society typified by "deep organizational weakness" leads to new forms of elite rule, at best, and increased social conflict, at worst. While I do not argue that the exclusion of women in the PB, which is one of Peru's most successful and institutionalized forms of participatory governance,²⁵ threatens political and social stability, the lack of inclusion in this new institution is something that should be taken very seriously.

The nature of the causes for this under-representation is discouraging. These are structural factors—poverty, gender discrimination, and weak civil society organizations—embedded in complex realities that are very difficult to change. However, several national actors are working to promote women's participation in the participatory budget. For example, in Villa El Salvador, a shantytown near Lima, UNIFEM has partnered with the local government to promote more gender sensitive budgeting through the participatory budget process (see Pérez 2006). There is an office in the local government that works to incorporate gender into all aspects of local spending. This pilot program has been very successful; in Villa El Salvador's participatory budgeting process of 2008 (which allocated projects for the 2009 fiscal year), 25% of the participants represented women's organizations and 50% of the participating agents were women (Rodríguez 2010).

Furthermore, several Lima-based NGOs are also working with women's organizations in some regions to increase involvement in the PB. For example, Flora Tristán has worked with women's groups in Junín and Cusco to help them become formal and therefore meet the requirements for participation in the PB.²⁶ In interviews, NGO representatives referred to their work as very slow going. Once a women's organization could register, actually getting projects approved in the meetings and then funded by MEF had been very difficult.

We might also look to the Porto Alegre example for ideas regarding how to address the inequalities that are present in Peru's PB. While it is hard to compare one city's experiences to an entire country's, it is worth briefly examining the Brazil experience. In Porto Alegre, by 1995, six years after the first year that PB took place, women made up 47% of the general participants. Because Brazil's process is open to individuals, not organizations, we cannot compare the

²⁵ The World Bank (2010) and a Peruvian watchdog organization, *Grupo Propuesta Ciudadana* (2009), have both argued that the PB is the most successful PI set up since Fujimori fled the country.

²⁶ See Durand Guevara 2006 for a description of Flora Tristán's work in Junín.

percentage of organizations over time in these two countries. However, it seems that Porto Alegre has been able to achieve gender equity in PB meetings while Peru has not. What might explain this difference?

When measured at the national level, poverty and cultural norms about women do not appear to be less problematic in Brazil. In other words, Brazilian women face equally challenging cultural and economic burdens. In fact, the World Economic Forum's 2010 Report on the Global Gender Gap, which takes into account economic participation and opportunity, education, health, and political empowerment, ranks Peru higher than Brazil in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi 2010). According to the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index, reported in 2011, Peru ranks higher (meaning there is less inequality) than Brazil as well (UNDP n.d.). Nor does it appear that Brazil in general has more progressive cultural attitudes towards women. According to 2009 LatinoBarómetro data—the most recent year that has responses for both countries—more respondents in Brazil than in Peru agreed with the following two statements: “Women belong at home and men at work” and “Men make better leaders” (LatinoBarómetro. n.d.).

The difference is probably due to the fact that the Porto Alegre process is a political project of the left and in Peru it is mandated and multi-partisan. There is a substantive literature on the role of the left in promoting participatory institutions, especially in Latin America (e.g. Chavez and Goldfrank 2004; Goldfrank 2011; and Schönwälder 2002). As Daniel Chavez (2004, 3) notes, the “post-authoritarian, Latin American left proposes ‘deepening’ and radicalising’ democracy at the municipal level as an end in itself.” The Workers’ Party in Porto Alegre is an example of this. Although there are no gender quotas or other affirmative action policies in place in Porto Alegre’s PB, it began as a project to promote equality and serve the city’s neediest (Baiocchi 2004). Notably, the local government in Villa El Salvador has also been run by the left since the successful UNICEF pilot program, described above, began. Thus, it may well be that PB processes overseen by leftist political parties are more likely to work toward gender equity. Future research should develop this line of inquiry in more depth.

Again, the political party of the government in charge of the process is also difficult to control. Are there potential steps that can be taken that are easier to achieve? Several less difficult steps, outlined below, can make it easier for women and women’s organizations to participate.

- 1) Timing matters. The actual time of the meeting can deter potential participants. Villa El Salvador’s local government addressed this by surveying PB participants about the ideal time for meetings. They generally settled on early evening. It is also important to keep meetings short. One local government official noted in an interview that women often have to leave earlier than male participants, presumably to take care of household tasks, and they then miss the final vote on the specific projects to fund.
- 2) Provide childcare. Of course, evening hours are still difficult for families, especially the primary caregiver. For that reason, many advocates have called for onsite childcare at these meetings.
- 3) Adequately inform and train participants before meetings. Because more women than men are illiterate in Peru, information about the process has to be provided by radio, not only newspapers and the internet. Furthermore, participants must receive adequate training with training materials that can be understood by less educated participants (e.g. using pictures instead of words).
- 4) Local governments should make registration possible for weak organizations.

Flexible registration criteria will allow more diverse kinds of organizations to participate. In my own discussions with local officials, they often mentioned their power to “bend” some rules and allow organizations to participate. Local ordinances could require less strict standards than “formalization,” such as a list of members or a notebook that records the organization’s meeting schedule.

- 5) Incorporate quotas. Peru has had electoral quotas in place since 1997. Thus, it would not be surprising to most to mandate that the technical and oversight committees, for example, have 30% female members. This worked in Villa El Salvador, where each participating organization must send two representatives and at least one must be a woman or youth.
- 6) Streamline gender in the technical process. The MEF could make some relatively simple changes to the technical process to encourage more gender equity. The *Colectivo Interinstitucional*, a group of Peruvian NGOs that monitors the PB process, has recommended that the MEF set up a national database of indicators to capture project impact, for example. They recommend that these should include “indicators with a focus on gender and infancy” (Colectivo Interinstitucional de Presupuesto Participativo n.d., 18). In the most recent annual instructions, the MEF also provides a one-page sample format for investment project proposals (see MEF 2010, Annex 10). One line could be added asking about the gender of the project’s beneficiaries, for example. Adding language about gender in the instructions themselves would also represent a step forward.

An analysis of women’s presence in participatory budgets, as a proxy indicator for inclusion of traditionally marginalized actors, is important as more and more countries experiment with forms of participatory governance in an effort to improve transparency, accountability, service provision, and general decision-making about how to allocate scarce resources. The Peru case suggests that participatory institutions may not be as inclusive or democratic as proponents hope. The outcomes associated with each form of participatory governance is inevitably linked to the participants themselves. If the decision-making process is dominated by historically powerful elites, the outcomes will reflect that bias. To prevent this, concrete steps must be taken to promote inclusion. Merely creating institutions and opening the doors is clearly not enough.

Table One: Regional Data on Woman's Participation					
<i>Budget Year</i> ²⁷	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
Number of PAs	2592	3596	3129	2818	3213
Percent female	27%	28%	29%	30%	22%
Percent of CSOs that represent women's organizations ²⁸	N/A	3%	3%	2%	3%
Percent females on technical team ²⁹	N/A	25%	25%	24%	29%
Percent females on oversight committee ³⁰	N/A	35%	23%	32%	29%
Source: Author's analysis of data from http://presupuesto-participativo.mef.gob.pe/app_pp/db_distedit.php .					

²⁷ Data for the 2008-2011 budgets are compiled from sixteen regions. 2012 is the first year with information on all twenty-four regions.

²⁸ I included organizations called women's organizations, mothers clubs (*clubes de madres*), Glass of Milk committees (*Vaso de Leche*), and soup kitchens (*comedores populares*). These organizations are discussed in the next section.

²⁹ Data exist for twenty-four regions in 2009, twenty-two regions in 2010 and 2011, and twenty-three regions in 2012.

³⁰ Data are available for twenty-one regions for 2009, 2010, and 2012, and twenty regions for 2011.

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