



Nutritional improvement for children in poor urban areas of developing countries: Transforming community participation: lessons from Latin America

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Institute of Education, University of London

Pathways to better nutrition Series 2



NICK

Nutritional Improvement for children
in urban Chile and Kenya

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Urbanisation can bring many benefits but in many cities the rate of change has been so fast and so dramatic that local and national governments have been unable to cope. Urban growth has outpaced their ability to build essential infrastructures leading to widespread social inequity and social stratification environmental degradation, heavy migrant inflows, and a breakdown of the social support systems and networks. In these poor urban areas there is a strong and well established link between the various dimensions of disadvantage and child malnutrition (both undernutrition and overnutrition).

NICK (Nutritional Improvement for children in urban Chile and Kenya) is a three year study that started in October 2010 with funding from the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID) through the Economic and Social Research Council. This study helps the cities of Mombasa in Kenya and Valparaíso in Chile reduce child malnutrition using participatory action research to broaden stakeholder participation at municipal level to change the social determinants. These determinants control the everyday conditions in which people are living and include education, income, working conditions, housing, neighbourhood and community conditions, and social inclusion. It is envisaged that this study will contribute to existing knowledge and also serve as a useful guide for action not only in Kenya and Chile but also in other countries with high levels of child malnutrition.

The partners

The research team is led from the Department of Humanities and Social Science, Institute of Education, University of London and the research is being developed collaboratively with partners in Chile and Kenya.

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1. Introduction

'Participation' was one of the central leitmotifs of the latter 20th century, manifesting itself in bewildering range of guises, and commanding both widespread acceptance and determined critique. It has been defined as the principle that, "those who will be substantially affected by decisions made by social and political institutions must be involved in the making of those decisions" (EEC, quoted in Bullock et al. 1988: 630). Far from resolving the issue, this concise definition draws attention to the complexities of participation, as regards the composition of participant bodies, the nature of the involvement, and the impact. These seemingly intractable questions continue to present challenges in practice and inspire theoretical debates.

This paper presents an overview of literature on participation, drawing on a basic theoretical frame for drawing out the significance of participation in the context of the Nutritional Improvement for children in urban Chile and Kenya (NICK) project. Following a brief historical sketch of participation, there will be an assessment of contrasting conceptualizations and the role of education in enhancing participation, particularly through the ideas of Paulo Freire. In the second half of the paper there will be an overview of participatory experiences in Latin America, a region that has had a particularly rich history in this area, focusing particularly on three experiences that illustrate the theoretical categories established.

2. The changing fortunes of participation

While participation has in recent years been applied to a range of different spheres, two of these have been pre-eminent: political theory and international development. Strangely, despite substantial literature and practical experiences in both, until recently there had been little dialogue between the two, leading to an impoverishment of perspectives on both sides.

2.1 Participatory democracy

While democratic governments have become increasingly common around the world during the modern period, concerns have also grown that periodic voting is an inadequate mechanism for popular participation, and thus 'democracy' is not necessarily democratic. In fact, traditions of participatory democracy predate and coexist with our current representative democracies, most famously seen in ancient Athens, but also in different forms in the towns of the New England, Swiss Cantons and in contexts as diverse as South Africa, India and Afghanistan. In these experiences, citizens do not only choose representatives, but play an ongoing and active role in debates, decision-making and voting on individual policy matters, and with a much broader distribution of offices. These historical experiences, while inspiring in some respects, have often been characterized by significant restrictions in the category of 'citizen', with women and slaves excluded in Athens for example.

Rousseau's (1968 [1762]) work in the 18th century gave strong endorsement to a form of participatory democracy, although his notion of 'general will', with which all community members were supposed to identify, gave rise to concerns about subordination of the

individual to the collective. The following century, John Stuart Mill, in *On Representative Government* (1991 [1861]), argued that political participation and public activities such as jury service were essential to individual and societal development, leading people from selfish preoccupations to responsibility. Widespread attention to the idea of participatory democracy emerged in the 1960s, with the increased activity of civil society in many spheres, including movements of women, students, antinuclear campaigners, environmentalists and many others (Breines 1982; Epstein 1988, 1991; Evans 1979). The theoretical principles of participatory democracy have been further developed in Macpherson (1977), in the work of Carol Pateman (see, for example, Pateman 1970) – initially focusing on participation in the workplace, and more recently Barber (1984). New forms of technology have increased the feasibility of the ongoing universal participation required by direct democracy.

These calls for new forms of democracy have linked in with renewed attention to the notion of citizenship - and particularly 'civic republican' conceptions based on active involvement in politics (Crick 1964; Oldfield 1990; Heater 1999; Kymlicka 2002). Within these discussions of active citizenship, there have been tensions between conceptions based on volunteering, or limited forms of participation that do not challenge existing societal structures, and more transformatory forms of participation involving collective decision-making and action. These tensions mirror those relating to technical and political conceptions of participation in international development discussed below.

2.2 Participatory development

Participation in international development emerged in the context of the 'impasse' in development theory in the 1980s, and broader concerns that the 'beneficiaries' of development assistance were not sufficiently involved in decision-making. As such, it forms part of a range of approaches to development giving emphasis to popular agency, such as the capabilities approach (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2000). As will be explored in greater detail in the following section, the involvement of local communities in development has alternatively been seen either as a fundamental right and intrinsically valuable in terms of democratic participation, or as having instrumental value in leading to more efficient and sustainable development outcomes.

One very influential model has been Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) developed in the 1980s, particularly through the work of Robert Chambers (see, for example, Chambers 1997). Instead of relying on external experts to provide diagnoses and cures, local people were called on to apply their own unique understanding of their contexts to determine the development priorities and orientations, avoiding reliance on written communication. A number of other similar approaches subsequently emerged, including Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), as well as applications to research methodology in the form of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Participatory approaches have been adopted by the full range of development agencies, though often in the form of what Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) term the 'missing ingredient' approach, where participation is 'added in' to a development project in order to ensure its success.

However, the startling rise to prominence of participatory approaches and development was (perhaps inevitably) followed by disillusionment and critique. Rahnema (1992), for example, critiqued the co-opting of what was initially a radical proposal by powerful agencies, in the interests of economic efficiency rather than empowerment. The tide of critical voices

became associated with the title of the Cooke and Kothari (2001) collection, *Participation: the New Tyranny?* The critiques took a number of forms: lack of attention to power dynamics within communities -- on the basis of factors such as gender, and a myth of the homogeneous community; an excessively technical approach, based on rigid methodologies; the ignoring of the essentially political nature of development processes; and the focusing on the local at the expense of broader structural changes (Hickey & Mohan 2004).

Nevertheless, these critiques have been followed by new proposals for participatory approaches, acknowledging the limitations, and providing new opportunities for social transformation. Hickey and Mohan (2004), for example, propose that in order to move participation 'from tyranny to transformation', three processes need to take place simultaneously: mainstreaming and scaling up of participation across all levels of decision-making; broadening of the agenda to address the more political sense of agency and engaging with citizenship and participatory governance; and engaging with alternative development thinking and more radical alternatives to participation.

In particular, this renewed optimism has been achieved by the joining of the debates in development studies with those from political theory outlined above. These fields have been bridged by commentators aiming to respond to the critique of the isolation of local participation from broader power structures. Gaventa (2004), for example, has shown how community participation needs to be seen in conjunction with reforms to national governance. It is necessary in this way to address simultaneously the strengthening of citizen participation and voice, and the accountability and responsiveness of government.

Gaventa (2004) also makes an important distinction between three different types of space for participation: *closed* spaces, where there is no opportunity for involvement in decision-making; *invited* spaces, deriving from the efforts of authorities to widen participation (sometimes described as 'provided' or 'created' spaces); and *claimed* spaces, which are forged from below, through popular mobilization. This is an important categorization that will be drawn on in relation to the cases analysed below.

Much discussion on participation concerns obstacles that individuals and groups face in participating effectively even when spaces are opened in this way -- particularly the marginalized groups that are often the focus of international development initiatives. Central to the debate here are education and learning in their many forms. Before assessing the role of education, however, there is a need for a closer conceptual exploration of the idea of participation.

3. Towards a model of community participation

Participation can be considered a fundamental human right. Human beings, on the basis of their inherent dignity and capacity for rational thought, should according to this view be protected from subjection to the will of others. This entitlement can be conceptualized in a negative way (termed the 'liberty of the moderns' by Constant – 1995 [1816]), in the sense of individual liberty and protection from arbitrary state power. Yet it can also be conceived in a positive sense (the 'liberty of the ancients'), in which individuals are entitled to participate in decision-making that affects them. While the right to participation is not outlined in detail

in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it manifests itself in later rights instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. In this case it is not seen to be an absolute right, as participation will vary in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

If participation is considered to be a right, then it is not dependent on any benefits accrued. In this sense, people have the right to vote, contribute to discussions and policy-making, and hold public office, even if they have poor judgement and promote unwise courses of action. However, while the right to basic political participation is very widely accepted -- in the sense of periodic voting and standing for office -- there is far less support for this kind of fundamental right to participation in other spheres of life such as work, community development and so forth. More often, participation in these spheres is justified by the benefits that it might bring. These benefits can be categorized as having intrinsic value, direct instrumental value or indirect instrumental value.

Participation may have intrinsic value in that it may be enjoyable, a source of positive contact with other community members and an opportunity for self-expression. Some conceptions of the good life see political engagement as being an intrinsic part of a truly human life (as in ancient Athens). More commonly, however, participation is seen in terms of its instrumental value. Instrumental benefits may be direct, in achieving the object of a development project, or these benefits may be indirect, through enhancement of democracy. For example, participation of community members in an environmental initiative may bring greater effectiveness in implementation of changes (such as greater acceptance of the need to use alternative fuel sources and avoid cutting down trees in the local area) through engaging in extensive discussions and debates on the topic. However, the benefits of participation are not restricted to these direct effects on the object of participation such as environmental protection. There are also knock-on effects on the enhancement of democracy. Through participation, individuals develop attributes such as their capacity for deliberation, management skills, democratic values, sense of efficacy, inclusive attitudes and public speaking skills; communities, in turn, benefit from more effective communication, enhanced ability to keep government to account, social cohesion and social capital. This strengthening of participatory capacities in the community is itself constitutive of development as well as enabling enhanced future effectiveness in carrying out collective actions.

The relationship can be seen in Figure 1. which shows how the instrumental indirect benefit feeds back into the participation, enabling communities to participate in increasingly effective ways.

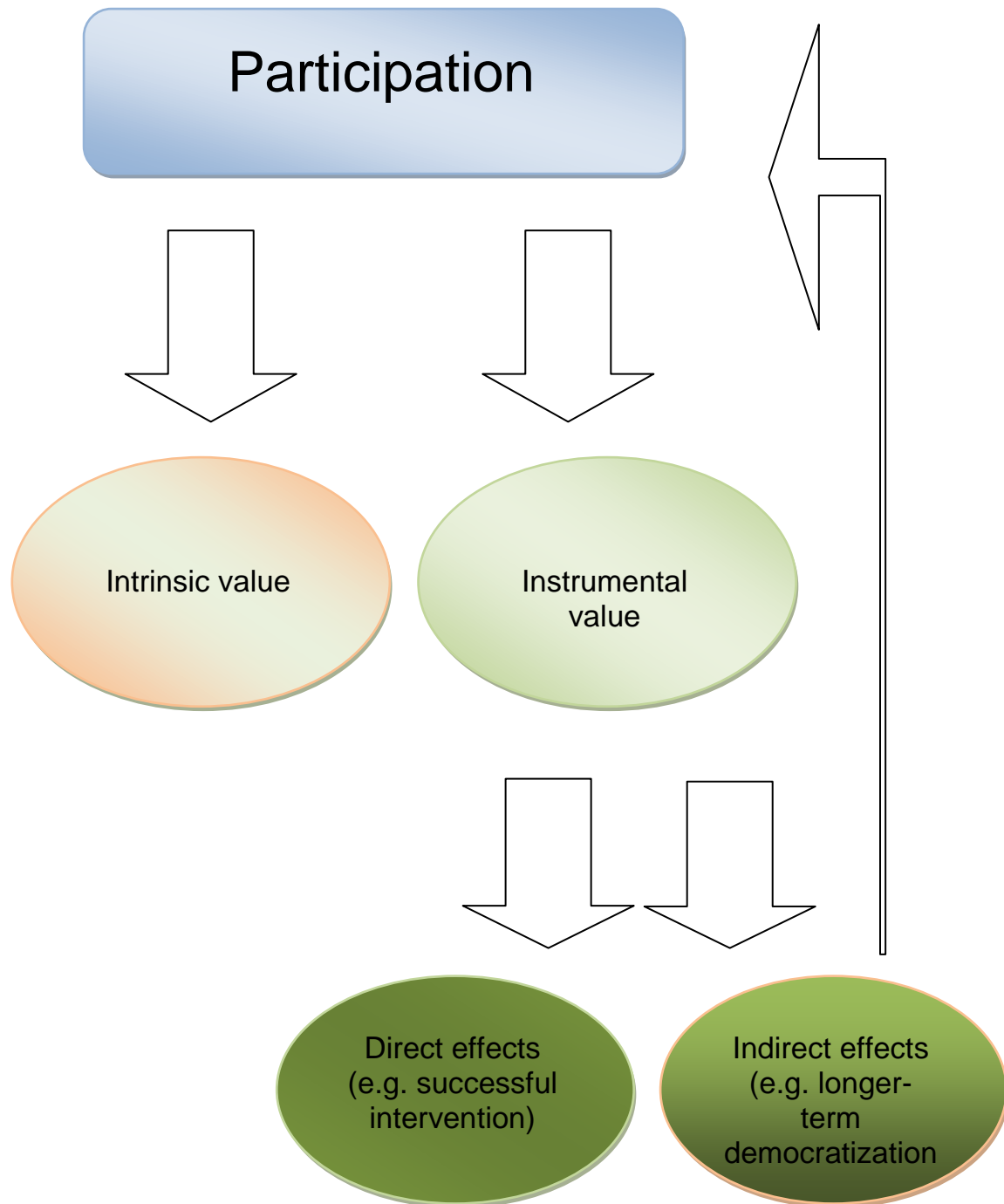


Figure 1 The potential benefits of participation

4. The link to education

Problems with participatory approaches can be divided into two types. The first type concerns restrictions of the degree of influence that the participants can have over decision-making, whether through deliberate attempts by the authorities to present a mirage of participation to legitimize decisions taken elsewhere, or more subtle constraints from a range of societal structures. Deeply ingrained social norms relating to gender or age --

amongst many other factors -- can prevent people from having meaningful participation. These restrictions can only be overcome by fundamental transformations in the nature of society.

The second type concerns restrictions in participation that stem from the abilities and dispositions of the participants themselves. In some cases the opportunity for participation is there, but people for a variety of reasons are unable or unwilling to take it up. While education in the long term can influence the first form above, it is this second form that provides the most fertile and immediate area for educational work. A range of educational theories, approaches, movements and initiatives have emerged to enhance the capacity of communities to participate effectively, some focusing on discrete skills such as literacy, and others on more fundamental changes in worldview.

A key figure in the field of transformatory education is Paulo Freire. Starting with literacy development work with sugarcane cutters in the impoverished North-East of Brazil, he developed an influential approach to adult education. Freire mounted a stinging critique of the traditional approaches he termed 'banking education', which were seen to reinforce passivity and powerlessness in learners and to maintain inequalities and injustices in society (Freire 1972; 1976). Instead, he promoted a process of 'conscientization', through which people would develop insight into social reality, developing both understanding and the ability to participate via a dialectic of reflection and action. In the field of adult literacy specifically, he challenged technical approaches by promoting a simultaneous learning of literacy and development of political understanding, termed 'reading the word and the world'. He also emphasized that the curriculum needed to be based on a close understanding of the local community and local concerns, developed through meticulous initial research.

Central to Freire's thought is his attention to the political significance of pedagogy (Freire 1972; 1994; 1996). 'Empowerment' for Freire (not the term used in his own writing) involved not just the acquisition of useful knowledge and skills, but a fundamental change in relationship with the world. The 'oppressed' needed to move from a situation of objects of the whims of the powerful to 'subjects of history', understanding their ability to transform the world. This movement was seen to be possible only through the pedagogical practices of 'dialogue' - a horizontal relationship between teacher and learner where both learn - and 'problematization' - where familiar realities are presented for questioning and critique.

Freire's approach has been highly influential in the region of his birth, giving rise to a plethora of initiatives, many going under the term of 'popular education' (Kane 2001). A number of the community participation initiatives in Latin America discussed below draw directly on his ideas. However, Freire's influence goes far beyond Latin America. With his exile from Brazil at the start of the military dictatorship in 1964, he spent many years in Europe and North America and his influence began to extend beyond adult education to mainstream schools, higher education and even early years provision. Influences of Freire together with the ideas of Gramsci and the Frankfurt School led to the emergence of the 'critical pedagogy' movement in USA, and extending out to other parts of the world (e.g. Giroux & McLaren 1986; hooks 2003; Shor 1992).

Freire's ideas have suffered a range of critiques over the years - from conservatives, orthodox Marxists and feminists amongst others (Glass 2001; Weiler 1996) - although these have not diminished his influence. His writings (particularly the earlier works) are also

complex, and largely inaccessible due to the abstract academic style. Nevertheless, some very practical applications of his work have been made. One example is the REFLECT programme for adult literacy learning and empowerment run by ActionAid in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A number of the participatory approaches outlined above, such as PLA and PAR, have also been influenced by Freire's ideas on pedagogy, the culture circles that he developed for literacy learning in Latin America and his approach to research in the community.

As will be explored further below, Freire's ideas are central to resolving of the conundrum of how to enable marginalized communities to participate effectively in decision-making.

5. Experiences of participation in Latin America

If Latin America is a region of contradictions, this is no less true in the sphere of participation. While the countries comprising this region have historically been characterized by colonization, rule by small elites and systematic marginalization of workers and indigenous peoples, they have also been sites of radical democracy and participatory innovations that have been the focal points of worldwide attention. In some ways, the latter can be viewed as a response to the former, and certainly the vigorous assertion of civil society and democratic processes from the 1980s was a direct response to the removal of democracy during the military dictatorships that spread across the region in the 1970s.

One distinctive driver of the popular participation in Latin America has been the progressive wings of the Catholic Church. Endorsed by the Conference of Bishops in Medellín in 1968, liberation theology advocated a socially committed interpretation of Catholicism, addressing the demands for emancipation of the poor and oppressed. Liberation theology inspired thinkers like Freire, and led to the formation of a number of organizations promoting participation amongst marginalized groups, such as the 'Basic Ecclesial Communities' in Brazil and elsewhere. Other drivers for participation have included community organizations, progressive local authorities, radical national administrations like that of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and NGOs and international development agencies (although these latter agencies in general have less prominence than in many countries of Africa and Asia).

There will now be an analysis of three contrasting cases of participatory initiatives: the EDUCO¹ programme in El Salvador; the participatory budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil; and the Brazilian Landless Movement. These have been chosen firstly as they are interesting cases in their own right, attracting international attention for their innovative features. Yet they also represent different forms of participation: in the case of EDUCO, an 'invited' space promoted by the national government; with the Landless Movement, a 'claimed' space brought about through popular mobilization of marginalized groups; and in the case of Porto Alegre, something between the two, with a cyclical movement between neighbourhood claims and government action.

¹ Educación con Participación de la Comunidad

5.1 The EDUCO programme in El Salvador

The first of the cases corresponds to the notion of the *invited* space, in that the initiative stemmed primarily from the national government, and legitimization and finance was dependent on the centre. However, as with most examples, there was some blurring of the lines, with some elements of a *claimed* space due to the historical origins of the initiative in grassroots educational provision.

The EDUCO programme is one of a number of cases of promotion of school autonomy in Latin America. Many countries in the region (e.g. Chile, Brazil, Mexico) have implemented policies of decentralization of educational management to the regional or municipal level. Yet this process has gone one stage further in some instances, with management and financial responsibilities devolved to the individual schools and communities themselves. This form of initiative has been seen in the autonomous schools in Nicaragua, *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia and school-based management in Mexico (Gershberg 1999; Gerter et al. 2006; Kline 2002).

EDUCO was set up in 1991 at the end of the 12 year civil war that crippled El Salvador and its education system (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003). It formed part of a government reform programme aiming to revitalize public services through decentralization and in some cases privatization. The programme was established by decree, and supported by a World Bank loan, although to some extent it drew on spontaneous community initiatives to hire teachers for local schools during the conflict. Schools in the programme are run by a community association (ACE²), whose members are elected by the community, and which receives funds directly from the government in order to hire teachers and buy materials. The EDUCO schools are located in the poorest municipalities, with the focus primarily on preschool education and the lower levels of primary education.

As with many decentralizing initiatives, the intention was that the contractual relationship between teachers and the community would increase accountability and reduce teacher absence. In addition to improving the quality and reach of basic education, the initiative was also supposed to enhance social cohesion and democratic participation.

How successful has this initiative been in terms of its impact on educational provision (direct benefit), and on democracy in the community (indirect benefit)? In terms of the former, the programme has undoubtedly achieved its goals in expanding access. According to Reimers (1997), total preschool enrolment rates (4-6 year-olds) in rural areas increased from 15% in 1990 to 22% in 1992, with the programme supplying 37% of all preschool places by 1993. Enrolments in all EDUCO schools rose from 8,416 in 1991 to 206,336 in 1998, representing 40% of all rural enrolments (Cuéllar-Marchelli 2003).

In terms of quality, Reimers (1997) found that there was no significant difference in student achievement or repetition between EDUCO and traditional schools. This can be seen as something of a success for the former, given the greater socio-economic disadvantage of the pupils. A Ministry of Education study (Umanzor et al. 1997) also found no significant difference, and concluded that while EDUCO schools were in poor physical condition, they had more textbooks and libraries than traditional schools, and that teachers were more

² Asociación Comunal de Educación

responsible and hard-working. The World Bank evaluation conducted by Jimenez and Yasuyuki (1998), controlling for background factors, actually found higher achievement levels in language amongst EDUCO pupils, as well as lower levels of student and teacher absence. Sawada (2000) asserts that this increased teacher effort can be attributed to the 'piece rate payment', in contrast to the fixed wage in traditional schools.

In terms of intrinsic benefits for social cohesion and democracy in the community, there is inadequate evidence to make firm conclusions, yet the little research there is casts doubt on its democratizing effects. First, it is not clear that a broad range of community members have been involved. School-based management is very often led by teachers and other education professionals, and in this case too, it appeared that the associations were dominated by school principals (Reimers 1997). In terms of the participant body, association members were clearly taken from the more educated members of the community, given the 95% literacy rate (compared to a 74% of overall literacy rate in rural areas) (Reimers 1997).

Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003) concludes that the programme has had a positive effect on social cohesion and encouraged closer relationships between school and community, but that this has varied significantly across communities, depending on factors such as existing social capital, time availability and skills. This points to the need for development opportunities for participants. According to Reimers (1997), the programme involves "parent schools", intended to strengthen the community associations and promote relations between school and community, but only in a very few communities were these actually functioning. There is little community awareness of the programme in general, with participation limited to members of the board of directors (Reimers 1997).

Furthermore, this predominantly top-down initiative has led to a degree of distrust among certain groups. There has been opposition to the programme on the part of teacher unions for example, and from others who view the initiative as a politically oriented move to co-opt political opposition. (EDUCO schools are located disproportionately in the former conflict zones, even though higher percentages of out-of-school children are found elsewhere [Reimers 1997]).

One of the obvious problems of invited spaces is that the participants may not be interested in participation, or at least not in the form being presented. In the case of EDUCO the results of participation - provision of education for their children - are very tangible and immediate, leading to high levels of uptake by communities. Nevertheless, insufficient attention has been paid to the question of who is actually participating, the nature of that participation and the developmental opportunities needed by community members to enhance their participation. The sustainability of the initiative will be fragile if ownership is not strongly felt by in the community. As Reimers (1997: 160) states:

The fact that spaces are opened for participation does not mean that those spaces will be occupied, and that the resulting quality of education will be better.... Teachers, administrators and communities that have for centuries operated under a top-down model of school management should not be expected to change overnight just because the Ministry has decided to begin a new approach....

5.2 The participatory budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil

There are also a range of initiatives that might be seen to occupy an ambiguous middle ground between 'invited' and 'claimed'. In these, there is often a cyclical movement between grassroots demands and opening spaces for participation on the part of the government. The case that will be assessed in this section is the policy of popular decision-making over budgetary priorities in the municipal government of Porto Alegre in Brazil. This is one of a number of cases in Latin America in which local governments have adopted participatory approaches, including a number of others in Brazil and elsewhere in the region (McCowan 2006).

The Workers' Party (PT³) emerged in the late 1970s in Brazil under the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as a new form of participatory grassroots party, bucking the trend of populist left-wing politics in Latin America. While the PT would in 2002 come to power in national government, in many ways it is at the local level that the most interesting experiences have emerged. The most famous of these was the municipal government of Porto Alegre, in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul from 1989-2004. While this state is relatively wealthy, the capital is characterized by intense inequalities, with a third of the 1.3 million population living in slum areas (Baiocchi 2003).

While the PT administration⁴ had a number of significant policy innovations, the best known of these is the participatory budget. This involved a proportion of the municipal budget being set aside, and allocated according to the priorities set by each district, following extensive deliberation (Abers 2000). The model of participatory governance is distinctive in that it did not rely on membership of existing civil society groups, and was not a mere consultation, but involved neighbourhoods allocating finances themselves and monitoring implementation. This model provides a significant break from clientelist relations between communities and local governments that predominate in Brazil. While the participatory budget was to some extent an innovation of the government, it was responding to demands made in previous years by neighbourhood associations in the city.

In terms of instrumental benefits, there was significant improvement to the city's infrastructure as a result of the participatory budget, particularly as regards housing, roads and running water. The proportion of houses with access to the sewage network rose from 46% to 85% between 1989 and 1996 (Novy & Leubolt 2005). Importantly, investment in the poorer districts exceeded that in the wealthier areas. The importance of these tangible benefits cannot be underestimated, As Baiocchi (2003: 64) states:

One key to the generation of these positive civic outcomes was that the reforms delivered public goods promptly to convince skeptical and time-pressed residents that participation is worthwhile.

As significant as these improvements to city infrastructure, were the effects on the enhancement of democracy. One success of the participatory budget was that its participants consisted of disproportionate numbers of the poorer segments of society, thus

³ Partido dos Trabalhadores

⁴ In Porto Alegre the PT in fact was part of a coalition of left-wing parties known as the Popular Front.

reversing the expectation. Despite very low numbers of women in legislative councils, the gender balance was even in participatory budget meetings (Novy & Leubolt 2005). The numbers of those involved rose steadily since the initiative's inception, although opinions are divided on the extent of participation (Navarro 2003).

According to Baiocchi (2003: 47), unlike the EDUCO programme, the initiative “offers a successful resolution of the problems of deliberation among unequals through its didactic functions”. Meetings were arranged to learn technical aspects such as procedures and rules, skills of budgeting and debating. In this way, the ever-present obstacle of uneven power relations between participants was mitigated by support for new participants and marginalized groups in developing their abilities and confidence in meetings. As one participant cited in Baiocchi (2003: 54) stated:

[T]here are many more poor people like me who are there with me, debating or helping in whatever way possible. And so I think the participatory budget is enriching in this way, because it makes people talk, even the poorest one. It has not let the suits take over.

Another important learning outcome reported by respondents in Baiocchi's study is a deeper understanding of the link between different levels -- particularly the neighbourhood and the city level - through coming into contact with tensions, synergies and compromises of decision-making relating to divergent interests. Furthermore, instead of taking the place of existing civil society organizations, the participatory budget actually led to an increasing number of active local associations (Baiocchi 2003).

The participatory budget has attracted considerable international interest, and has been replicated in many other Brazilian cities, as well as in parts of Europe. The success of the participatory budget is shown in part in the fact that the PT government was re-elected three times, and also came to power in the state government from 1999. On the other hand, one problem with government-led initiatives lies in their vulnerability to electoral defeat, although in this case, such was the recognition of the participatory budget that when the PT lost the 2004 election, the incoming government had to maintain it. Nevertheless, without active endorsement from above and below, its role as an authentic, rather than tokenistic and clientelistic, space for participation may be undermined.

5.3 The Landless Movement in Brazil

The last group of initiatives involves those in which participation is predominantly *claimed*, that is, it emerges from grassroots movements, without instigation by the state. There have been a wide variety of influential social movements in Latin America in recent years, including the Zapatistas fighting for indigenous rights in southern Mexico, the Penguin revolution of secondary students in Chile and the *piqueteros* in Argentina (Portillo & Reyes 2006; Starr et al. in press). There are also a range of community organizations and neighbourhood associations across the region that have adopted forms of participatory democracy (e.g. Privitellio & Romero 2005).

The Brazilian Landless Movement (MST)⁵ is perhaps the largest social movement in Latin America. Formed in 1984 from a range of peasant groups, many organized by progressive wings of the Catholic Church, it has grown rapidly in size, moving out from the south to cover the full expanse of the Brazilian territory. The main aim of the movement is to bring about agrarian reform, addressing the severe inequalities of land ownership (1.6% of owners control 47% of the land, while there are some 4.5 million landless peasants [Brandford & Rocha 2002; Caldart 2000]).

The movement has emerged almost exclusively from popular participation, with no initial state support (although it has subsequently drawn on public funds to deliver services in the communities). It employs forms of radical democracy in its workings, with all community members involved in discussions and decision-making (Carter, in press). These participatory forms are combined with elements of representative democracy, as two members of each community (usually one man, one woman) are chosen as representatives at the regional level, and two from the regional at the national level. The most intensive experiences of participation are in the *acampamentos* – the informal communities formed immediately after land occupation – and in which survival depends on efficient self-organization. The landless families organize themselves into sectors, each dealing with a particular necessity such as the hygiene, security, food, education and housing. This collective organization is seen by most to be a highly significant learning experience, and allows the landless families to move from an alienated individualism to an empowered community engagement. As Gorgen (1989: 17-18) states:

The time in the camp also serves as an apprenticeship for community life, living together, organizing to claim one's rights, learning about society, and preparing technologically and organizationally for the future use of the land.

The schools that the MST runs in its communities also follow participatory principles, with strong involvement of teachers and parents in management, curriculum and pedagogy (McCowan 2003; Kane 2001). Importantly, school also serves as a site in which – in addition to developing technical skills to aid in agriculture – young people can develop the awareness and abilities needed for participation in their communities and in the broader political sphere, following largely Freirean lines.

⁵ Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra

The instrumental benefits of participating in the movement are plain to see. The movement has won an area the size of Switzerland for land reform, with 135,000 families benefiting. There are also as many as 2,250 schools established in the communities, with secondary and adult education also available, and even higher education courses in partnership with established universities (Caldart 1997; MST 2004). However, these gains have not been made without significant costs: landless families face serious threats from landowners in some cases, as well as hardship and deprivation in the early stages of settlements before farming has been established.

There are also significant gains in terms of the democratization benefits of participation, with previously fragmented communities – many coming from urban shanty-towns – gelling into cohesive units to organize their own affairs, develop the ability to negotiate with the state, and in many cases secure their constitutional rights. Particular efforts have been made in the area of gender equality and the promotion of women's active participation and leadership. There are gains, therefore, in terms of political empowerment as well as social cohesion. However, there are those who question the nature of democracy in the movement. While the MST has emerged from 'below', there is a core group of founders and other influential figures that wield disproportionate amounts of power, and there are also concerns about discouragement of independent critical thought and excessive pressure to follow the movement's unified line (Brandford & Rocha 2002; Navarro 2002).

Nevertheless, despite inevitable limitations, the Landless Movement still represents a highly significant innovation in terms of participatory organization. Rather than being satisfied with its material gains, it aims to 'prefigure' the democratic egalitarian society it aims to create in its everyday practices (McCowan 2010).

6. Conclusion

All three of the initiatives reviewed above have been successful in terms of the direct benefits achieved: in expanding educational access in El Salvador, improving city infrastructure in poor neighbourhoods of Porto Alegre, and developing viable agricultural communities for landless people in Brazil. However, in terms of the make-up of the participating body, the nature of participation and indirect benefits relating to democratization, there are significant differences. Two key factors emerge from the analysis. First is the importance of a pedagogical dimension both before and during the participatory process. Poverty or lower levels of education in this way are not seen to be an absolute impediment to participation, but initiatives must have built into them an educational dimension. Second, participants must be involved in the design and development (and not just implementation) of the initiative. As Gaventa (2004: 34) states: "participation as freedom is not only the right to participate effectively in a given space, but the right to define and shape that space".

As seen above, EDUCO was hampered by ineffective preparation for community members participating in the associations. This lack of preparation affected both the make-up of the associations (restricted to those few community members with higher levels of education) and the effectiveness of the functioning of the association. In contrast, both the participatory budget and the Landless Movement had in place training programmes designed to enhance the ability of marginalized groups to participate. This is not to say that in either of these initiatives there were not challenges of uneven participation - with factors of social class,

education, gender, age and race/ethnicity still presenting obstacles, although to a lesser extent than in the wider society.

As shown particularly in the case of the Landless Movement, educational preparation for participation involves not just the discrete skills of communication and knowledge of procedure, but a fundamental shift in the relationship to society and development of a broader political awareness. In both the participatory budget and the MST there was evidence of a movement from individualistic to community-based consciousness as a result of participation. In this way, Freire's ideas provided a cogent underpinning to the challenge of building authentic participation for marginalized communities.

In relation to the second point of participants' involvement in programme design, there needs to be an element of 'claim' for successful participation, in that local communities must have ownership over and give value to the processes. The partial success of EDUCO even in the absence of sustained support for the associations is that they were to some degree built on grassroots initiatives during the conflict. In both the Landless Movement and the participatory budget, there was strong popular involvement in defining and shaping the spaces as well as participating in them (Gaventa 2004). Even in the case of a radical movement such as the MST, however, it is essential to interact constructively with the state and take advantage of invited spaces and constitutional rights.

As seen in the model of community participation above, a significant aspect of the indirect benefits of democratization is that they feed into instrumental benefits in a positive cycle. As in the example of Porto Alegre, the democratizing effect on the city, particularly the empowerment of the poorer neighbourhoods, would ensure that in future years - even in the absence of a participatory budget - governments would be held to account to a far greater extent.

Finally, there are clear implications for research from this initial review of literature. It is important to acknowledge the distinct benefits of participation (intrinsic, direct instrumental and indirect instrumental) when researching and evaluating experiences. An exclusive focus on the direct instrumental benefits, as seen in many evaluations, is problematic as it both ignores the diverse motivations people may have to participate, as well as the creation of the conditions for sustainability of the change. In part, this lack of attention can be explained by the difficulties in showing a clear and immediate impact on the embedding of democracy. However, despite the challenges, this focus must be maintained. Social transformation depends on a virtuous cycle of initial participation and ongoing democratization in conjunction with tangible benefits to communities.

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