PIONEERS OF PARTICIPATION
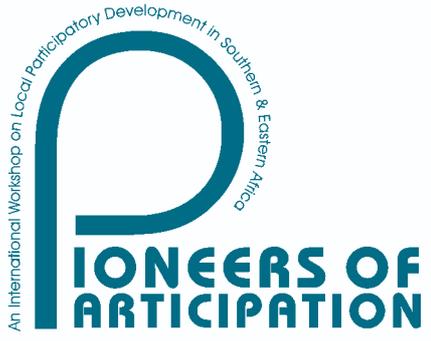
An International Workshop on Local Participatory Development in Southern & Eastern Africa

Cape Town 9-13 November 2009

EVENT REPORT

PIONEERS OF PARTICIPATION

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EVENT REPORT

Contents

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See annex two

SUMMARY LEARNING

Participation and empowerment

1. Decentralisation and democratisation of local governance works best with effective public participation. *Participation brings communities and interest groups directly into the decision-making process without the mediation of other players. Hence decisions taken, especially around development, are more likely to meet the needs of those affected by them.*

2. Citizens should have a right to participate, and not just an invitation. *For participation to really work, citizens need to know they can participate meaningfully, even when what they say may be unpopular with those in power. Without this, real problems will be ignored, and real solutions that meet people's needs are unlikely to be found.*

3. Public participation works best when citizens and communities are partners in decision-making processes. *Partnership means there is more incentive for communities to participate effectively, more buy-in to support decisions, and also more capacity to implement them.*

4. Public participation requires political will on all sides, effective mobilisation, especially of poor and marginalised groups, and carefully designed and empowered institutions. *International research shows that most successful cases demonstrate all three elements. This makes public participation a lot of work, but the rewards are worth it.*

Citizens and communities

5. The stakes for participation can be very high. *Many communities are poor and so public participation can deliver sorely needed services. Further, many African states have authoritarian or unstable political systems which make communities and leadership vulnerable to the backlash of powerful forces.*

6. Community empowerment is an end in itself. *Communities can do much to improve their own situation without the state, and measures taken to enhance local organisation and problem-solving should happen with or without more substantial public participation. Waiting for the state is not the way forward.*

7. All communities have some form of leadership, *with knowledge, skills and power. Some of this is more democratic than others, and needs to be taken into consideration when trying to organise and mobilise people into participatory processes. Where communities are represented by gate-keepers and undemocratic 'gatecrashers', effective leadership is stifled.*

8. Civil society structures should be independent of government, but also open to co-operation. *Independence is crucial to be able to represent the interests of a community or group without corruption, but does not mean opposition necessarily. Civil society organisation need to pursue all tactics, especially partnerships with genuinely democratic local governments.*

Central and local government

9. The role of local government is changing. *All round the world and in Africa local government is being asked to do more in respect of development and community-building, and to do it in a more democratic way.*

10. Local councillors need to be more responsive to, and involved with, communities. *Councillors need to reconnect with the people they represent. This may require new skills of brokering and building alliances with local communities. It also means respecting community champions rather than feeling threatened by them.*

11. Participation takes time and resources. *Getting to understand a community and the best way to organise it according to its character takes time and effort. Similarly, creating support and buy-in takes time and concerted effort.*

12. Participation works best when there is something meaningful at stake. *The more incentives people have to participate the more likely they are to participate, and to participate effectively. This typically means including communities in making key decisions, especially around the distribution of resources.*

13. Central government needs to provide leadership. *Many people in local government, both politicians and officials, do not have the skills, resources or even will, to implement public participation on their own. For this they need support. At minimum, innovation and spending on public participation needs to be enabled and incentivised through national law and policy frameworks.*

INTRODUCTION

Pioneers of Participation – The Event

What happens when you bring together 40 'pioneers of participation', working in both the state and civil society, from some seven countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, for five days to explore the challenges and rewards of citizen empowerment and participation in local governance? What experiences do they have in common across their diverse contexts? What are the lessons to be gained from their experiences, and how can these lessons inform policy and practice in Africa, and South African more particularly?

Participants addressed these questions in a five-day workshop in Cape Town, South Africa, in November 2009. Led by a partnership of the Citizenship Development Research Centre (CDRC), an international research project, and Isandla Institute, a South African NGO, 'Pioneers of Participation' was endorsed by the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) of South Africa, and made possible by support from the Department for International Development (DFID) South Africa, the Deutsche Entwicklungdienst (DED), and Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) South Africa. See Annex 1 for a short description of each partner.

The workshop brought together 40 people (22 South Africans, 14 from other African[1] countries, 4 from other[2] countries) involved in local government. These included elected representatives, appointed officials, service providers, NGO workers, community activists, academics and representatives from national government in South Africa.

The point of the workshop was to learn from each other, inspire each other and identify some possibilities for the way forward. To this end we examined some of the challenges facing public participation in our various contexts, where citizens are engaging in public life in increasing ways from voting in elections in the DRC, through mobilizing for housing in Zimbabwe, to participating in urban upgrading projects in South Africa.

The workshop objectives were to:

* discuss the benefits of, and incentives for, greater citizen engagements in local governance processes, and particularly those involving the delivery of services;

* showcase and examine practical working models of engaging citizens in decision-making around local governance and service delivery;

* consider the challenges and costs of promoting greater citizen engagements faced by local officials;

* identify practical and creative approaches to overcoming the challenges to promoting greater citizen participation in local governance;

* develop strategies, knowledge and a support network for 'Pioneers of Participation in Local Governments' across Southern Africa in a way that would raise the profile of this agenda and support its implementation.

Participants had plenty of space for sharing, learning and reflection on the challenges and opportunities for public participation, a well as some lessons for policy makers in South Africa. This was achieved through a mix of:

* Interactive sessions, which combined with inputs on research findings occupied most of the first two days workshop sessions. Carefully designed interactive sessions that combine a presentation of key findings from current research, the sharing and exchange of experiences, and open and frank discussions on both emerging research findings and the practical considerations for taking this agenda forward.

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1. Botswana, DRC, Kenya, Lesotho, Uganda, Zimbabwe.
2. Brazil, India, United Kingdom.

Event opening remarks: Learning from the south, and facing neither East nor West but forward

On the opening evening of the workshop, one of the organizers of the 2007 Champions of Participation workshop, Tricia Zipfel, reflected on the origins of Pioneers and the lessons that the north can learn from the south.

As a nation we British had a complete lack of understanding of what participatory government was all about. We saw a real lack of humility. There was an attitude that "we export democracy", but in the meeting we learned about real community participation, and we realized that the lessons were coming from South to North.

In framing the discussions for the workshop, workshop co-organiser Professor Laurence Piper, emphasized that public participation was about deepening representative democracy rather than challenging it, and that the often adversarial relationship between state and civil society could be transformed into something constructive:

When asked about when he stood on the Cold War, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first post-independence President, said 'We face neither east nor west, we face forward'. This is precisely the attitude that practitioners of participation should adopt – our task is not to side with the state or civil society but to make sure both work together to really meet people's needs.

This shift in practice, Piper added, requires a shift in attitude too. Thus the elected representative becomes a facilitator to empower people to speak for themselves; the role of government officials becomes to involve those affected by decisions, rather than relying only on experts; the role of civil society leaders becomes to engage constructively when appropriate, and not just to confront. Finally citizens themselves must take responsibility for being part of the process.

A key part of changing attitudes was flexibility and openness to partnership ideas. As Sofonea Shale, a participant from Lesotho, summed it up: 'participation is like water… there are many different ways of carrying it, of transporting it. It is up to each community to find ways that work best for themselves'.

* Study visits to selected community projects with particular challenges or initiatives of public participation. Opportunity was provided for direct interaction with various stakeholders.

* A one-day re-grouping and dialogue with policy-makers to share feedback from the site visits and workshop sessions concluded the workshop. The forum invited decision-makers' and development funding agencies' reactions to the challenges and lessons raised, given their various mission statements, policy commitments and strategic objectives.

Why the workshop?

Pioneers of Participation was an event inspired by the 'Champions of Participation' Workshop held in the UK in 2007, and organised by the Citizenship Development Research Centre at IDS, University of Sussex, in partnership with LogoLink and various donor organisations. This workshop bought together 44 people (20 from the UK and 20 from 14 other countries) in May 2007 to share experiences and lessons of citizen participation in local governance.

In addition to generating great insights, captured in the form of a report, a policy briefing and case studies, the workshop generated tremendous energy and enthusiasm and has inspired subsequent workshops and other events, including the Pioneers of Participation workshop.

Perhaps more importantly, the Pioneers event made sense as public participation in local governance is now firmly on the agenda across Southern Africa. Processes of decentralisation and democratisation are underway from Angola through to Kenya, and even in countries which have patchy democratic records like Zimbabwe forms of local democracy and community empowerment are being driven from below.

In South Africa the government, and more specifically the national Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), now COGTA, has repeatedly emphasized that community responsibility and citizen participation in local decision-making are important for improved service delivery, strategic leadership and local development in all its dimensions.

While inspired by the Champions event, Pioneers is innovative because of the particularities of the African context. Not only are trends towards decentralisation and democratisation relatively recent, but they are occurring in contexts where democracy is relatively new, and the state is often not strong, and where

many communities are poor. In a real way then, the practitioners working at the coal-face of citizen-state engagement are really 'pioneering' new relationships and practices.

Further, given that democracy and decentralisation are new trends, these new forms of governance are still being modified, or even designed, and practitioners are still gleaning the best way to get desired outcomes. We are all learning about democracy, and experimenting with new ways of building closer and constructive relationships between local government and local communities.

Opportunities for South African learning

While South Africa is often regarded as one of the more established African democracies, despite being a new democracy, the past ten years of local protests against poor service-delivery and poor local governance suggest that it too has much to learn in respect of constructive relationships between state and society at local government level.

Indeed, it is a remarkable fact of public participation practice that most of the wealth of 'good practice' comes from the democracies in the developing world. Perhaps the most dramatic example is the degree to which the Participatory Budgeting process that has evolved in Porto Alegre in Brazil has been emulated all over the world, including in the developed north. Notably in many of these instances the drive to deepen democracy initially came from outside government, but soon found partners in government.

In addition, there are many other initiatives from elsewhere in Southern Africa that feature new ways of mobilising citizens for better service delivery at the local level. Otherwise excluded and marginalised citizens have been mobilised to have a greater role in deciding on the kind and quality of services local governments have provided, as well as in maintaining and sustaining these services.

Many of these innovations have also had to deal with the question of how locally elected representatives engage and work with citizens in a participatory way.

SETTING THE AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

How do different countries, and especially African countries, experience public participation in local governance? What can we learn from different contexts? In order to frame the discussion for meaningful comparison, the following presentation and discussion took place.

"We face neither East nor West; We face forward": The promise of participatory governance in Southern and East Africa

PRESENTATION BY PROFESSOR LAURENCE PIPER, POLITICAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

Public participation, understood as integral to the decentralisation and democratisation of local governance, is an idea whose time has come in Southern Africa.

Similar institutional developments

In South Africa government has introduced a range of new participatory institutions like ward committees as well as special cadres of civil servants in the form of Community Development Workers (CDWs) to empower communities and citizens.

These initiatives are understood as, in significant part, contributing to the shared goal of enhancing service delivery. They are also seen as strengthening local government and further building the developmental state. Last but not least, they are intended to build constructive relations between state and society by involving communities in governance that directly affects their lives.

At the same time, the desire for greater participation in local government decision-making is manifest from below as many civil society formations and communities initiate engagement with local government, whether they are formal NGOs seeking to influence policy, social movements seeking access to information on housing plans, or local community groups protesting evictions from council property.

Notably, similar developments are occurring in many Southern African countries. Lesotho has experience of extensive public participation around water development, Mozambique has similar experience around environmental issues such as wetlands, and Angola has recent experience of successful civil society activism to establish constructive state-community dialogue around policy processes.

Furthermore in many of these countries, including Namibia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa, government has recently decentralised powers to local level or is exploring doing this. Given the emphasis on decentralisation and democratisation by the World Bank, international donors and, critically, various Southern African Development Community (SADC) policies[3] , it is safe to assume that these institutional and governance reforms will increase even further.

Similar histories and socio-economic conditions

Notably, Southern Africa is united not only by a shared commitment to more empowered and democratic local governance, but by similar histories and, generally speaking, socio-economic conditions.

There are countries like Swaziland and Zimbabwe which are, for the most part, not operating in democratic ways and, particularly with regards to the latter, currently located on a negative development trajectory. However our concern is with the vast majority of Southern African countries which are both new democracies and developing countries. While there are important differences of degree on both these measures, it is fair to claim that all face challenges of empowering and developing their people.

This context is important as it means that the trends towards decentralisation and democratisation occur in contexts where democracy is relatively new, and *the state is often not strong,* and *where many communities are poor. Consequently there are particular dynamics to decentralisation and democratisation that will not be experienced so profoundly in developed contexts.*

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3 SADC. *'Chapter Four: Priority Intervention Areas' in* Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan. *P2. http://www.iss.org.za/AF/RegOrg/ unity_to_union/ pdfs/sadc/risdp/toc.htm*

Further, given that democracy and decentralisation are new trends, these new forms of governance are still being modified, or even designed, and practitioners are still gleaning the best way to get desired outcomes. We are all learning about democracy, and experimenting with new ways of building closer and constructive relationships between local government and local communities.

In short, Southern Africa finds itself in a time of governance innovation that affirms public participation. It also shares a generally similar history and condition. Taken together, this constitutes a window of opportunity to shape the future of democratic local governance.

The participatory model on the world stage

The trend towards decentralisation and democratisation (especially through participation) is a global trend endorsed by a wide, even contradictory, group of actors from the World Bank through to socialist political parties in India and Brazil.

Clearly then there are multiple reasons for endorsing the devolution of power to local participation, and many ways of doing this, but it remains a compelling idea drawn from the normative idea of citizen participation: that democracy means that those affected by decisions should participate in making them.

More generally, it has been suggested that this is one part of a more general trend in global politics to move from government as decision-making by sovereign states to governance as a process of decision-making involving multiple partners, some above the state, some below, sharing power. Clearly the state remains central, but it no longer acts on its own.

Recognition of this shift is also evident in the language we use to describe government (decision-making 'from above' below versus resistance 'from below', or government 'supply' and community 'demand') as compared to governance (notions of partnership, co-governance, power-sharing).

This reflects the core idea that local governance works best when it includes all role-players as partners in decision-making and implementation. *This shift in how we think about local power is reflected in a new language that talks about citizens and government solving problems jointly, or in John Gaventa's words, 'working both sides of the equation at the same time'.*

This insight is reminiscent of Kwame Nkrumah's famous words, '"We face neither East nor West; we face Forward". Although these words were spoken in the context of Ghana's emergence into the international community at the time of the cold war between the US and USSR, they can be re-framed to the context of relations between the local state and civil society.

Against the mistrust and partisanship on both sides the pioneer of participation looks to move forward with both sides rather than pick one.

The 'democratic deficit' and the benefits of public participation

Participatory democracy is an ancient idea in both Africa and the west, and has resonances of community, inclusive and collective debate, and making decisions by consensus. Furthermore these ideas have gradually re-emerged in political thought over the last few decades as many people around the world have come to feel a growing gap between themselves and their governments.

This feeling of a 'democratic deficit' as it is known suggests that representative democracy does not fully live up to our expectations of democratic governance, and that we need something new. That similar trends are evident in Southern and East Africa is clear.

At one level we continue to struggle to make democracy the only game in town, but part of this relates to the disaffection that many citizens feel with elected leaders who do not live up to their promises, and the experience of weak local governance which does little to enhance the lives of the communities they are intended to serve.

Participatory local governance promises some kind of solution to both these problems. If done correctly, public participation should be:

* Good for delivery of social goods
* Good for building effective states
* Good for local democracy

Of course, this is easy to state in theory and very much harder to do in practice. The challenge we face is working out how best to simultaneously empower and democratize local governance through participation in ways that actually work.

What is public participation really?

In response to this challenge, a number of initiatives around the world have experimented, and have had some success. These initiatives tend to have the following common characteristics – many of which resonate with the participatory democratic tradition referred to above. These include:

★ *The belief in a more* active and inclusive citizenship *where local residents are direct participants in their decisions that affect their lives and not just a passive audience.*

★ *A concern with* inclusion*, especially of poor and marginalised groups whose influence on formal decision-making is typically quite limited.*

★ *A related belief in* collective problem solving *where the community, civil society organisation and formal government structures work together in partnership to identify, debate, decide and solve problems.*

★ *An emphasis on* debate or deliberation *among stakeholders in problem-solving, which includes the use of expert knowledge when relevant, but is not limited to experts. All affected are encouraged to participate.*

★ *An orientation to solving problems in a way that is best for the whole* community*, and not just the powerful, wealthy, or most popular.*

★ *Greater* accountability *mechanisms which enable all participants to hold those making and especially implementing decisions to explain their actions.*

Making public participation work

Experience from around the world also shows that public participation often fails. Sometimes it does not improve services, or becomes hijacked by a political faction, or becomes a token activity conducted to meet auditing requirements of donors. Under what conditions then does it work?

International comparative research conducted by the Citizenship Development Research Centre (CDRC) at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) of the University of Sussex, suggests that successful participatory governance requires three things:

(i) the political will to make it work amongst elected leaders, officials and communities,

(ii) the appropriate institutional design which ensures that decision-making is issue focused, empowered, resourced and supported over time, and

(iii) the mobilization of communities, especially poor and marginalised groups, to participate meaningfully in decision-making.

This noted there are a number of initiatives in the region which are attempting to realize some form of partici-patory governance. Many of these are illustrated by the range of experiences that participants have brought to the workshop. Indeed participants were selected on the basis that they were pioneering some initiative of this kind. Thus amongst others we have:

★ Attempts at participation in local government policy-making processes to achieve a more transparent and just distribution of public resources. Examples include new government consultation processes in Lesotho and access to housing in Zimbabwe.

★ Exercises in participatory planning, including both large-scale and long-term visioning projects for cities like Imagine Durban in South Africa, through to annual development planning processes for local villages and wards.

★ Some cases are public-community, public-private and power-sharing partnerships where multiple players share a degree of responsibility and power in the decision-making process. Examples include partnerships around crime prevention in Gugulethu, voter registration in the DRC, and establishing a youth centre in Botswana.

★ New forms of transparency and scrutiny are also evident. Examples include the local government monitoring and the development of civil society scorecards for local governance in Kenya.

These broad processes of participatory policy-making, planning partnership and transparency carry with them much more specific innovations that matter in citizen's everyday lives. Hence, at the workshop innovations were represented which link public participation to:

★ New kinds of skilling and education, for example community data collection, building houses, and learning about HIV/AIDS.

* Delivery of key social services, especially water and housing.

* Development of more effective forms of community security.

* New methods of consulting people such as theatre productions.

* New forms of organisation such as neighbourhood assemblies.

From all of these and other innovations represented at the workshop, much is to be learned. There is a great need to reflect upon and consolidate the lessons of leaders and practitioners in this field, to document them and to share them with others who are seeking to develop and sustain more participatory forms of governance in their own countries.

Some insights and questions emerging from discussion

Who defines public participation?

Unless we are careful, public participation can be used by anyone and for any purpose. Is public participation such a marvellous thing that if you put it in a container it takes the shape of the container? What then is public participation?

The metaphor of water as to be effective public participation must be able to take forms that are best suited to the context – it must be fluid enough for this. At the same time, like water has a basic structure, so does public participation:

* Public participation by who? *Those affected by decisions.*

* Public participation in what? *In decisions that affect our lives, especially those that matter most.*

* Public participation how? *In democratic ways that respect freedom and equality, build community and empower us.*

What about traditional authorities and conservative interests?

In much of South Africa traditional leaders do not want democratic practices, and in many countries such as Uganda, Lesotho and Kenya, you are seen as an enemy of the state if you do not overtly support the state. How can you have public participation in these contexts?

There are limits to where public participation is possible, especially if powerful elites and governments do not want it. However there is much communities can do to take power into their own hands. Further, we should not assume that all traditional leaders and elites are necessarily against public participation. In fact there are many examples of democratic practices within traditional societies such as lekgotla or pitso, and some traditional leaders have supported participation elsewhere in Africa. Perhaps even more threatening to participation is the idea that citizens are consumers or clients who must access their rights through buying them. Not all civil society is good either, some may not operate democratically themselves. Pioneers of participation can be found on both sides of the state-civil society equation, as can enemies of participation.

Can we have participation in fragile states, or in the context of war? In the DRC public participation is about political stability and security. In the DRC, accountability issues are really not the focus at present but everyday security issues like end to killings, violence, rape, etc. Public participation is an unlikely priority in the context of war, but as soon as peace-making begins, so can public participation.

Is there really one model for getting participation right?

Participation needs to be contextualised, different countries have different systems of government, and participation is a very long, very difficult, very complex process.

In sharing experiences through LogoLink (see annex 1), we have become more and more aware of different forms of democracies. Africa can choose from the experiences in Latin America. Flexibility seems important across all contexts even if the mechanisms of participation are, and should be, quite different. There is also richness in the African experience that we should tap into such as the Lekgotla/izimbizo. It is a mistake to conflate civil society with 'good' and government with 'bad'. Public participation is meaningful when it is empowering and can make a difference, can hold those in power to account.

CHALLENGES FOR PIONEERS

Much of the debate on the first day of the Pioneers of Participation workshop revolved around the critical challenges to public participation in their contexts.

Identifying Challenges

At the close of day one, participants were given the opportunity to move into small groups to discuss the challenges to participation that they had experienced. Their discussions were around what exactly was preventing participation from reaching its fullest potential in their area of interest. Across the six groups, 52 specific challenges were identified, and these were distilled into six broad categories.

The first were the "no brainers" – the problems that were common to all groups. These were problems and challenges around **political will and leadership** from both government and civil society.

The second was the recognition that **institutional frameworks** of public participation were incomplete. The groups commented on a lack of systems of accountability and trust. There were also challenges around 'invited' versus 'created' spaces, in other words, the difference between formal opportunities for consultation and participation and the often more spontaneous, organic, possibly reactive, civil society initiatives to engage the state outside of these 'invited' spaces.

The third area of concern was the **practice of public participation**. How is public participation initiated and communicated? Key issues were around planning, resources, challenges around sustainability, the jargon, the language, lack of information, lack of capacity or skills and a lack of resources.

The fourth category was the presence of **gatekeepers and gatecrashers**: those people who through their power relationships restrict other voices, disrespect rules and prevent the voices of the people from being heard. Traditional leaders were identified as a problem in some areas, as well as the influence of government and civil society, especially in the form of gangsterism.

The fifth category was that of **exclusion and marginalisation**. This could take many forms, including gender, cultural, and economic. Delegates were concerned that processes don't actively seek to hear the vulnerable and marginalised voices.

The final area of concern was around **political instability and security**. The implications are clear, as Vincent Tohbi, a delegate from the DRC, commented: "In my country people are just asking that they should not be killed and the women should not be raped". At a time when basic survival is a challenge, people are less likely to be concerned with broader issues of governance.

Reflecting on Challenges and Starting to Identify Solutions

Defining the challenges to participation was just the first step towards coming up with solutions for the problems that many pioneers of participation were facing. The participants had an opportunity to divide into groups of their choice, based on the six sets of challenges identified, and reflect on solutions.

Political will and leadership

In the experience of many participants, politics is a dirty game. Politicians have a will to provide services but there are challenges to this stated goal. These include everything from a lack of resources to an inability to cope with a shift in power to the community. Many politicians employ a strategy of deferred hope so they can stay in power. There is often a lack of transparency in decision making and a lack of accountability. They don't want to empower the community. They are not honest in providing feedback.

In South Africa there is a mismatch between legislation and the powers and functions that are provided. Participation should not be confined to the level of local politicians. For example, housing is a provincial competency. There is a need to create policy legislation where there is none, for example in Kenya, and in other areas the legislation needs to be simplified. So, what is required from the community? They need to confront issues without emotion - people have become so impatient, maybe because civil society is not providing leadership. The youth need to be mobilised and more involved.

Incomplete participation frameworks

The group who tackled this issue decided to focus on the situation in South Africa where there is a constitutional framework and the White Paper on Local Government that enable consultation but their intent has been watered down by the Municipal Systems Act and the Municipal Structures Act.

There is a need to make sure that there is a budget for public participation so that municipalities can not hide behind a lack of resources. If broader public participation doesn't happen, people will make sure they are heard through protests. We need to revisit the izimbizo (public meetings) and get them better structured and formalised. Public participation must become a core component of the key performance areas of individual officials. It must be one of the core functions of the municipality.

The practice of public participation

Those tasked with implementation may stifle the process through a lack of skills or resources. We need to empower our community through civic education so they can hold government accountable. There is a need to mitigate the flow of resources and responses, and sometimes this is best served by consulting smaller groups. There is sometimes a lack of implementation of policy frameworks. We need to have better sharing of information. We also find ourselves in situations where we are engaging the community for the first time in the final stage of a plan, rather than at the beginning. The community should be kept abreast with all changes. Problems identified by the group included weak ward structures and interference from political parties which try to derail or circumvent ideas that do not gel with party political aims or promises. There is often a lack of feedback.

Gatekeepers and gatecrashers

These are common. They tend to come from within the community and often tend to be more informed. They have knowledge, networks, resources, power and control. They can facilitate or block access. They can be faceless or may hide behind delegated authority. They set terms and conditions for entry into a community. Gatecrashers are often local leaders or politicians who come to a community when they see there is progress. They could also be communities of interest who feel left out of potential benefits or local delivery. They want to be recognized and they demand ownership, acknowledgement, control and benefits.

What is the solution? The first step is to identify the stakeholders and to recognise if they are likely to facilitate or block. Through community inclusivity you can accommodate them. You need to use the media and local resources to inform the community in an honest way. Identify quick wins in the area so communities can see that something is happening. You need to have rules of engagement: document meetings, keep a record of decisions that have been agreed so that everyone is held accountable.

Exclusion and marginalisation

People are often excluded for reasons over which they have no control. For example, the poor may find it difficult to access services if they have no documentation. People with HIV may be excluded and in many rural areas the people find that their needs are not prioritised. There are a number of strategies to address these issues. Suggestions included innovative ways of recognising informal documents, such as savings books. Policies need to be assessed and challenged where exclusion exists. We need a clear policy statement regarding inputs from marginalised groups to ensure their inclusion, and civil society should be involved in facilitating this. The government needs to develop outreach and ensure support for the formation of empowered, skilled interest groups.

There is a stigma attached to people living with HIV/AIDS, the indigent, the 'other' and voiceless. There is a use of language that is exclusionary. The attitude of officials is often arrogant and they are unwilling to learn. Community groups need to draw relevant officials into their programmes, and to collaborate with them. It is important to recognise the different levels of mobilising and organising, and to mobilise for accountability as well as participation. Exposure and partnership is a real need. Community groups need to find champions, but the government needs to identify and train them too.

Political instability and security

The delegates that discussed this topic were from South Africa and Uganda. They identified three key areas where instability was a hindrance to public participation. The first was party political violence, the second was war and the third was periodic conflict where peace building and development are still possible. It was felt that there were a number of policy gaps, with confusion over roles and responsibilities, especially in South African ward committees where political influence was great and many people are scared of losing their jobs if they speak out.

In Uganda there is policy around peace building and development but there is a lack of implementation. The government is perceived as corrupt and people do not trust it. So the local government does not always represent the people that fall under it. Practical solutions include civic education in schools to empower the youth and a policy review which results in a rethinking of the ward committee system, its accountability and tools. You can't implement public participation where there is a war. So you wait for peace...but sometimes it is difficult to tell when peace sets in and the difference between the two is blurred.

POSITIVE INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES:
Lessons from India, the United Kingdom and Brazil

There are many initiatives and examples of pioneering public participation across the world, particularly in the global South. On Day two, participants reflected on lessons that can be picked up from positive experiences of public participation from India, the United Kingdom and Brazil.

India

First to speak was Om "OP" Prakash who brought the wisdom of 25 years as a development practitioner when he explained the work he was involved with in the district of Madhubani. Situated in Bihar, bordering Nepal and Bangladesh, Madhubani is home to 3.5 million people. More than 76% of the area is rural so when it was decided to initiate a programme of participatory district planning, there were a number of challenges to overcome.

"The main purpose for the public participation plan was to create a pool of well aware, educated and empowered stakeholders," he explained. "There was some mistrust but a lot of work was done to create an identification with a common person who could make a difference. This 'person' took the form of Gainu Kaka... a character that everyone could identify with and who became a champion for the process.

"We did not have much data to start off with. We had to capture and prepare a preliminary document to analyse the situation in the region," he explained. It had traditionally been a top down process, from state, to district, to block, to village but as people began to realise that they had a voice, they began to reject the idea of a wish list in favour of a list of demands. No more begging, they said. We are demanding!

Finally, after many months of formal and non formal consultation the District Vision 2020 was prepared. For a state which previously had no vision document, it was an achievement of much pride, and OP had it placed on a website so it was accessible to a wide audience.

"Politicians started asking us to change the plan, but we said it was uploaded on the website and we had no password to change it. Millions of people had access to it, so the politicians had no choice but to back it and start to implement it," he commented.

OP issued a warning to the Pioneers in the room: If you start this process at village level, make sure that some aspect of the plan is executed as soon as possible, or you will lose the trust of the people. Now social audits are happening and every person has a voice. People who have never spoken in public before now have a voice, and are demanding to be heard.

United Kingdom

The situation in the UK, as explained by Tricia Zipfel, is quite different in terms of the number of people who are living in poverty (around 10%) but, interestingly, in seeking ways to give ordinary people a voice, it is innovations from the developing world that are often more useful and inspiring.

As she pointed out, the UK does not have a constitution, and there was nothing in the legal framework that enshrines the right of people to participate. "Even when central government provided funding for the tenant cooperative movement in the early 1990s, some local governments blocked it, until tenants were given a statutory legal right to take over their housing projects and a framework for participation was put in place. We learned the importance of having allies at the centre in order to get changes made locally.

Finally, last April a law was introduced which included a range of measures to increase participation. One of these was the "duty to involve" people in decisions that affected their communities, requiring local government to take participation seriously.

"I would have preferred the law to have included a '**right** to participate' rather than simply a 'duty to involve people'" she said wryly. "And legislation is all very well, but there is often a gap between the rhetoric at the top and reality on the ground. A lot more is needed if real power is to be transferred to local people with great ideas." But some councillors feel threatened by these developments. They see themselves as the only legitimate leaders and resist other forms of community participation and leadership. "We need to overcome

this sort of attitude which says 'get your tanks off my lawn! This is my turf!'"

However the role of backbench councillors (the people who should be very close the ground) is also being strengthened and reinforced, and they are encouraged to really connect with their local communities rather than looking for direction to the halls of political power. For example, in the UK, one traditional way for local people to have a voice is through petitions. But these have often been a waste of time. Now local councillors are required to take petitions seriously, discuss them in Council and give a measured response, positive or negative.

Another very positive development is the introduction of asset transfers, whereby resources (land and buildings) owned by the municipal authorities are being trans-ferred to local community groups as meeting hubs, bases for advocacy or enterprise. The hope is that 'community anchor organisations' will become self-sufficient, better able to give a voice to people's needs and also make change happen on a self help, local community level.

"It is about taking responsibility for what we can do here and now. And the key is to find a whole range of different kinds of leaders … not just leaders who are a mirror of the political culture."

Tricia praised two other important new developments. The first is that the Audit Commission, which assesses local authorities' performance, now judges them on just 198 set targets (as compared to 1000 used previously) and the targets include evidence of participation, such as 'have people been consulted' and 'do the people feel that they have influence'. They are also using the language of local freedoms and accountabilities more and more, rather than focusing on accountability to central government alone.

The government is also providing funding for a network of civil society organisations to help local communities engage more effectively. "Many of the people involved in this infrastructure are keen to develop best practice and are looking to the global south, Africa, India and Brazil, for inspiration," she said.

Brazil

The experience outlined by Nina Best from Brazil gave a very different perspective and an encouraging example of how communities can be built in very adverse circumstances. Brazil was ruled by a dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, but during this time of oppression, a movement of the people was born from within the most deprived communities and has established itself as the present rulers of the country.

Nina told the story of how urban housing policies in Diadema, Sao Paulo – a tiny, incredibly dense community – became the heartland of the trade union and labour movements in the country. There was a huge influx of people into the region because of the industrial boom which started in the 1950s. Slums mushroomed and there were no services or infrastructure.

"It was the women who largely took up the fight for better housing conditions, and their struggle gave birth to the Labour Party which is now in government," she said.

The area is still spoken of as a large slum by many, but the people who live there have seen huge changes in terms of infrastructure. There have been major developments in three main areas: the creation of spaces for social participation in urbanisation and housing policies; improvement of living conditions of low income workers and their families; and, improved access to urban land to develop low-cost housing in appropriate locations.

"It was the first place that the Labour Party was given a chance to prove that they could govern, not just be in opposition. They proved what an engaged local government could actually do," Nina explained.

"Lots of work has been done to make people happier with where they are living, but beyond physical improve-ments are also rights awareness issues, a feeling of belonging. People now have a permanent and legal address; there is improvement in public health and public security, and vastly improved access to other public services and facilities."

POSITIVE LOCAL EXAMPLES:
Lessons from the Site Visits

The site visits to Khayelitsha, Manenberg and Joe Slovo informal settlement on Day Three were an important part of Pioneers, building on the learning of the first two days, and bringing to life many of the issues. They also allowed pioneers and local role-players to engage in debate and reflection to the benefit of both.

Khayelitsha: the Violence Prevention though Urban Upgrading Project

Anyone visiting the sprawling Harare region of Khayelitsha would be sure to be impressed by the work of the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrding (VPUU) initiative. Paved, well-lit walkways guide people safely from place to place, and 'active boxes' - prominent multipurpose community centres - provide a vantage point for teams of patrollers who are on the lookout for any criminal activity.

Focusing just on the infrastructure would, however, mean that only half of this success story would be told. In fact, the real success of the VPUU lies both in the drastic reduction in crime in Khayelitsha as well as the model of starting small and slow. Before the first brick was laid, 18 months of intense community consultation was carried out. Nothing was uncontested, nothing was taken for granted. The result is a uniquely sustainable project that has the people of the area proudly claiming it as their own.

The VPPU has also fostered a spirit of volunteerism in the community as the people have given of their time to learn the skills they need to keep crime off their streets. Infrastructure development also includes an informal traders' 'mall' which will be completed in December. The traders have formed a management association to run the building which they will own and will be paying rent for their new, lockable stalls. "These buildings will be here forever, but will VPUU be here forever? I don't think so, " the VPUU's Monde Marandla said. "So ownership and solutions must be found within the community itself."

Manenberg: Community self-governance through 'Proudly Manenberg'

Not so long ago, Manenberg was labeled as one of the most violent townships in the world. Today, Manenberg is known to enjoy the best form of democracy, "community ownership" and is led by the "Proudly Manenberg" social movement, well known for its uncompromising opposition to the current South African political system.

Proudly Manenberg is one of the few social movements in South Africa that does not recorgnise government and has surpassed it in building a local government of its own, comprising of street committees and other structures to take ownership of local developments. Mario Wanza, Vice Chairperson of Proudly Manenberg believes in building "a strong foundation which belongs to the people and is for the people," he said. Proudly Manenberg presently consists of 300 staff but this is soon to be increased to 1000 full time staff. Each earns a salary of R1000 per month, none of which is funded by government.

The organisation gets its funding from partners and international donors to implement service delivery projects such as housing, health care, education and recreation amongst others. The movement also owns a recycling business, a local security firm and an investment company which encourages the creation of jobs in the area. Proudly Manenberg is in the process of building a waterfront in the township to be owned by the community.

The Proudly Manenberg movement is based on the principles of the UDF and was founded in 2005 after a learner was killed outside the school grounds and the community decided that something had to be done to make their area a safer place. "We are sure that the path of community ownership and participation is the right one," Wanza said. "This year our theme is The People Shall Govern. It is indeed a struggle and the struggle continues!"

Joe Slovo

According to the residents of the Joe Slovo township, the trouble started when President Thabo Mbeki peered out his window while cruising down the N2 and noted that the cluster of shacks - the place many there had called home for 12 years - was an eye-sore for visitors arriving from the airport.

True or not, two years after the alleged incident, the South African Cabinet approved the N2 Gateway project, intended to beautify the city's main entrance, and to modernise the human settlements along the corridor. The residents at Joe Slove were given a choice. They could purchase a new home in the area (starting price R200,000), or they could accept government relocation to Delft, a community out of sight from those travelling from the airport to Cape Town. Community members refer to it as a "dumping ground." Most residents refused to move, yet few could afford the price of a new home.

When a fire swept through the township, burning nearly 3,000 shacks, the community was galvanised. It enlisted the help of iKhayalami, a non-profit organisation dedicated to upgrading informal settlements. The thousands that lost their homes began to rebuild their homes in 'blocks,' leaving safer and more attractive paths between neat rows of self-built homes. They also acquired higher-quality materials and began work on communal toilets.

Meanwhile, a small group approached the local MP to ask how the government could help them to rebuild safer homes. The negotiations were fruitless; politicians labelled the group obstructionist. "We were never anti-development," said Mzwanele Zulu, the organiser leading the community. "We came to them for development, but we want to be involved in what kind of development."

Infuriated by the lack of political response, residents protested. They barricaded the N2 on 11 September 2007, and were dispersed by a hail of rubber bullets. They were threatened with eviction; organisers were arrested (though charges were later dropped). The movement shifted its strategy yet again, enlisting the help of social movements like Slum Dwellers International and the Information Settlement Network.

With a small team of lawyers, the community took the government to court, culminating in a recent decision ordering the government to cooperate with the community on its development plans for the area and to provide a number of homes to residents.

The community continues to take control of its own development. It has initiated a community savings scheme, built a community hall and started its own forum. Zulu says their work sends a message to complacent politicians. "Away with councillors," he said, "We want community structures, democratic structures that represent our communities."

BUILDING ON POSITIVES:
Implications for Different Actors

On the final day of the workshop, delegates were given a chance to prepare messages for delivery at the Policy Seminar later in the day. The Policy Seminar sought to speak explicitly to the South African context, while drawing on the collective insights and experiences of participants at the Pioneers workshop.

The messages to **central government** were: South Africa has an enabling framework but there are real obstacles to realising our vision. These include complex and constraining laws and a lack of clarity regarding the oversight role of province and national government. The Government must support implementation by resourcing and institutionalising public participation.
We need a national strategy that enables creative integrated local plans that are flexible in terms of scale and issues. We need a strong lead from the top

The messages for **elected councillors** were: Listen to the people: Take up the issues that come through ward committee and formal participation processes but don't be limited to these spaces or feel threatened by initiatives that originate elsewhere and don't necessarily follow the formal processes and structures provided. Be a people's hero: Don't succumb to partisan politics and represent the interests of all community members. Make sure you have the capacity and support you need to be a public participation pioneer.

The messages for **local government practitioners** included a suggestion that public participation should be carried out in the way the existing legislation intended. Professional integrity and ethics must be upheld. Monitoring and evaluation tools should be enhanced by naming, shaming and rewarding practices of departments.

The message for **civil society** was that community structures should be independent but also open to cooperation. Community structures must be capacitated so the community can represent themselves. Weaknesses can be resolved by building learning networks.

The message for **political parties** was that they should distinguish between public participation and political competition. Public participation is not a threat to political parties. There needs to be recognition of the value of public participation from all political parties and a common position on public participation as non-partisan. In so doing, they would also identify with their voters and demonstrate that they can listen to the people. Political parties should explore internal democracy within the party structures. They should have checks and balances, and they should engage within and without.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY DIALOGUE

The policy messages summarised above were presented at a Policy Seminar to which a variety of actors and stakeholders in local governance were invited (see annex 3 for a participants list). Participants welcomed the opportunity to share their conclusions and calls for action, and the panellists who were invited to take part in the policy dialogue could not fail to be moved by the impassion-ed calls to action that delegates made.

The delegates who discussed **donors** had the following messages: We need to overcome the reality of uneven access to funds and to take into account the capacity differences between NGOs and community-based organisations and national networks. Local skills should be recognised as knowledge: donors should invest in skills enhancement and make better use of existing capacities.

The panel, chaired by Shanaaz Majiet, Independent Consultant, covered a wide range of interests and concerns. Panelists included Yusuf Patel, Deputy Director General in the National Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Phumelele Stone Sizani, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Rural Development, Annnette May, a researcher at the Community Law Centre, UWC and Reuben Baatjies from the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

"Listening to your feedback was exciting and striking," Patel said. "There is nothing that I can disagree with. We are at a stage where we are beginning to reflect on these issues as a country. Our Minister has been leading a similar dialogue in the past few months. This discussion and its call for honest reflection and assessment resonates with this process."

Patel said that the nine-year-old local government system was built on a great policy framework, but he admitted that there were a significant number of

negative and bad practices that were putting the system at risk. "We need to find a way to reconnect with our initial vision, to deal with these fault lines as they are appearing. We need a turnaround strategy," he said. "We also need to be careful not to over-romanticise community structures, and to create more than one structure of government. There is politics in communities as well."

Patel's assertion that the municipalities did not always show commitment to public participation was supported by May when she said "public participation has become so regulated that it has just turned into a chase for com-pliance. This has stifled creativity and the voices of the community."

She placed the responsibility to change this situation in the hands of civil society. "One of our greatest achievements is that we have the right to public participation entrenched in the law," she said. "That means we have specific rights and duties that have to be fulfilled. On other words, communities can go to court and get a ruling on whether public participation has happened. Civil society has a duty to ensure that there is oversight and monitoring on what the municipality does. Once a year the Mayor has to report on public participation; we must hold them to account. Civil society is sometimes organised around being reactive to issues, but we also need to engage with the municipalities on medium and long term issues."

Looking at the issues from the point of view of SALGA, Baatjies agreed that the framework was in place, but said "the devil is in the detail" as the law and the inter-pretation of the policy on the ground do not always agree, especially where there is a lack of capacity in municipalities. Baatjies also highlighted the political tensions between the Mayor, the Municipal Manager and the Speaker which had resulted in a lack of ownership of the public participation process. "There needs to be a mindshift away from 'us and them'. It is often seen that if you don't work within the bounds of the state, you are outside the state. This is a lose-lose situation," he said.

When Sizani took the floor, he issued a call to action to the communities and shifted the focus away from the strictly legislative issues of public participation. "We have neglected the organs of peoples' power and that is why we are in this quagmire," he said. "I agree that activism is required, there is no contradiction in doing

so within the structure. There are 63 service delivery protests currently on throughout the country. You can't agitate someone who is satisfied to protest. The communities are unhappy, and there is a social distance between the community and its leaders. This creates a fertile ground for protests. If you enforce public participation, you must make it possible for people to attend meetings. In order for South Africa to go forward, make sure that tried and tested methods of allowing people to participate are used. Stop trying to be unique!"

"People must stop waiting for services and take action," he said. "We need to start governing the spaces. Why do you wait? Let us go and do what we need to do on the ground."

In closing, Mirjam van Donk, from Isandla Institute and co-organiser of the workshop, asked some key questions that could shape the way forward: "How do we move from rhetoric and intent to a practice that transforms, recognises and validates communities? How can we move from compliance to commitment? How can technical skills be used by communities to help them shape their own destiny?"

"As one of the participants said on the first day, participation is like water. It can take various shapes and forms depending on the context. Like water, participation is a vital resource, in this case for local governance and delivery. At the same time, participation is made possible by actual delivery, by seeing evidence of real changes and benefits on the ground. Without participation development and governance are very limited indeed. Like water, participation can be turned off or be allowed to flow, even turning into a current. It is very fluid, so it is difficult to direct and contain."

"For participation to be real and meaningful, the notion of trust is key," Van Donk added. "Without trust, there is little possibility that participatory initiatives will take off or be sustained."

"It is clear that the pioneers of participation who are here today are passionate. Passion can be unrequited, but we hope in this case it will be contagious," she concluded.

It is hard to convey the interest and excitement that the event generated in this kind of a format, or the value of personal connections made between participants. Although the Pioneers workshop took place in South Africa, it was a rare opportunity to learn about experiences and innovations from elsewhere in Africa, and come to a better understanding of other forms of

community empowerment and democratic practice. A number of participants reflected that they felt inspired to take the Pioneers spirit forward in their daily work and into new initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The Pioneers of Participation workshop brought together 40 officials, elected representatives, NGO workers, community leaders and academics from 7 countries in southern and eastern Africa to explore the experiences and possibilities for public participation and community empowerment for local government.

The participants may have been diverse in terms of their countries, languages, backgrounds and so on, but we spoke the same language when it came to democratic values and ambitions. Their aims were to promote democracy in local governance and build constructive relations between states and citizens, joining in partnership to meet the real needs of communities. They were committed to ensuring that the disadvantaged secured a better voice in governance, and more influence over decision made that affected them. They wanted to understand the barriers to participation better and how to achieve genuine co-operation and partnership between communities and government. This was seen as a ways of improving service delivery, but also as a way of bringing about democratic change for the better.

The workshop came at an important time, both in South African and in Africa. In South African the national government is grappling with a 'turnaround' strategy for local government in order to make it more effective and more responsive, and to overcome the large scale failure of delivery and accountable local governance which has seen popular protest grow steadily over the last ten years. In Africa, and especially in the countries represented at the workshop, governments are embracing the idea of decentralisation of political power to the local level, and the democratisation of local governance, including through new forms of public participation. Pioneers of Participation looks to support and embolden practitioners engaging in these new forms of democratic innovation to advance

democracy over patronage and corrupt co-option, elite indifference and popular distrust and apathy.

At the same time, just as opportunities to engage continue to emerge in Africa, the challenge remains to embed participatory practices in communities and local governance, usually in contexts where national democracies are quite new, and sometimes quite weak. Through enhancing community empowerment and local democracy, Pioneers can contribute the larger democratisation project on the continent too. We hope the lessons from the workshop will help Pioneers in their communities, organisations and governments to face these challenges and to turn the rhetoric of empowerment and local democracy into a reality.

Annex 1: Information about partner organisations

Citizenship DRC

The Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC) is a global network of researchers and activists exploring new forms of citizenship that will make rights real. It works with research institutions and civil society organisations in seven different countries – Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK. The Citizenship DRC's aim is to increase understanding of how to support the efforts of poor and marginalised groups to define and claim their rights. The network focuses attention on the relationships between poor and marginalised people and the institutions that affect their lives, and how these relationships can be changed.

Isandla Institute

Isandla Institute's mission is to act as a public interest think-tank with a primary focus on fostering just, equitable and democratic urban settlements. This is advanced through innovative research and advocacy interventions. Isandla Institute's development practice dictates that it functions as an experimental 'hot house' where policy ideas about the reduction of urban inequality, poverty, racism and social exclusion are nurtured. Conceptually, our work revolves around 'the right to the city' and, more particularly, how poor people in South Africa can claim and enjoy that right.

African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (ACCEDE)

ACCEDE was established at the School of Government in September 2007. The goal of establishing ACCEDE is to form a research space within which to mobilise scholars and resources towards a *constructive but critical examination* of the factors and policy environments which support or inhibit the development of a more inclusive citizenship in the region and continent. ACCEDE projects focus on questions of governance and development from a citizen-centred viewpoint, prioritising the role of grassroots organisations and movements in their quest for more inclusive, democratic policies.

COGTA

The Department for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) was established to shift away from the narrower mandate of the former Department of Provincial and Local Government and to respond decisively to the enforcement and coordination weaknesses and failures observed in Government over the past 15 years.

DFID-Southern Africa

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) aims to tackle world poverty. The DFID Southern Africa office in Pretoria works on growth and poverty reduction in South Africa and in the region. DFID-SA regional programmes are structured around three key theme areas, namely growth, trade and investment; resilient livelihoods, and peace and security.

DED

The German Development Service is one of the leading European development services for personnel cooperation. It was founded in 1963: since then more than 15 000 development workers have committed themselves to improve the living conditions of people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Almost 1 200 development workers are currently working in 47 countries. Their aims are to fight poverty, promote a self-determined, sustainable development and to preserve natural resources. The German Development Service also offers its services to international clients.

GTZ SLGP

The Strengthening Local Governance Programme (SLGP) of the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) is the German contribution to the South African-German partnership programme on strengthening local governance and local democracy. The programme advises and works closely with the Department of Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the National Treasury. The advisory services to these national partners and selected South African municipalities are concentrated on achieving more effective intergovernmental cooperation; improving municipal service delivery; and, institutionalising development-oriented relationships between actors from the public sector, the private sector and civil society.

LogoLink

LogoLink is a global action learning, research and advocacy network of practitioners from civil society, research institutions and governments working to promote greater citizen participation in local governance with the goal of deepening democracy and social justice. LogoLink is coordinated by the Polis Institute (Brazil) in conjunction with nine regional partners in East and Southern Africa, Latin America, North America, South Asia, South East Asia and China.

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