

**Local Government Decision-Making:  
Citizen Participation and  
Local Government Accountability**

**A Literature Review**

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Decentralisation is justified by the assumption that local-level decision-making is essential to offset cumbersome and unresponsive decision-making at the centre. Additionally, it is functional to supporting 'realistic' development which will gain popular support (Tordoff and Young, 1994). However, this assumes that there is an effective decision-making process at the municipal level in which local citizens can participate and for which decision-makers can be held accountable which studies have shown is misplaced and misleading (Blair, 2000; Moore and Putzel, 1999).

### Decentralisation

Decentralisation demands a reassessment of the role of government and its relationship with its citizens, with the formal and informal organisations of civil society, and popular participation in ensuring the accountability of government (Mishra, 1994). However, there are significant political obstacles to devolved decision making and enhancing policy responsiveness at the local level: reluctance within central government, elite domination of power at the local-level, resource scarcity and dominant organisational structures, which may inhibit both decentralisation and the poverty reduction focus within local government.

Crook and Sverrisson (1999) conclude that decentralisation *can* positively increase government responsiveness to the poor and pro-poor development but this is dependent upon four separate variables.

- The relationship between central and local governments such that local governments are monitored for financial probity and accountable for implementation of pro-poor policies, and that these political relations are strong.
- That accountability is strengthened through enhanced participation.
- There are secure and adequate systems for allocating both administrative and financial resources.
- The length of time reforms have been in place.

There is no inherent reason as to why local government should automatically be more pro-poor than national governments and as such these institutional variables are key to strengthening decentralisation reforms, which might benefit the poor.

### Participation

Citizen participation involves focussing on civil society and the ways in which citizens exercise influence and control over the decisions that affect them, and responds to the dissatisfaction identified among the poor regarding the accountability of public institutions to citizens, notably poor citizens, and at their lack of 'voice' in service delivery (Narayan, 2000). The concept of citizen 'voice' implies an engagement with the state that moves beyond consultation to more direct forms of influence over spending and policy decisions (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001).

#### Spheres of participation:

Political participation supposes a two-way communication between representatives and electorate. These can include voting in periodic *elections*, *contacting and lobbying*, involving efforts by individuals or groups to influence officials and policy makers, and *campaigning*, conducted by political parties to rouse support and resources. Additionally, *group action* and *protest* focus on collective goals and are significant to mobilising people to make direct demands on government (Parry and Moyser, 1994).

#### Who participates?

New laws of democratic decentralisation open new opportunities for participation in local governance but specific attention needs to be placed on ensuring a poverty focus (Moore

and Putzel, 2000; Moore et al, 1999; Gaventa, 1999). Participation can be inhibited by social dynamics of exclusion and inclusion at the 'community level'. Guijt and Shah (1998) identify a complex of community differences including age, economics, religion, caste, ethnicity and gender. Some people are more inhibited in meetings, will not ask for clarifications and leave confused and frustrated, or are pressured into acquiescence and yet their attendance is still classified as 'participation' (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999). Indeed 'participation', rather than being fair and democratic, can be enforced from the top, with powerful individuals imposing decisions on other members.

Similarly, it is easier for local government/policy makers to access the more visible community elites rather than engage with the poor. It can take greater resources, time and effort to identify and work with the poorer sections of a community. In turn, local leaders are often accused of commandeering participatory initiatives to further their own connections with local elites for political gains rather than promote any active engagement with the poor (Hulme & Siddiquee, 1997).

#### Civil Society and Participation:

'Civil Society is promoted as the institutional solution to people-centred, participatory and inclusive development' (Devas et al., 2001:19). It can offer an organised force with which local government's can engage in a variety of ways:

- informal lobbying, negotiation and advocacy for change,
- participation in government poverty programmes,
- help set priorities, identify problems, and possible solutions
- provide labour and financial contributions, (Devas et al., 2001).

However, there is no guarantee that the interests of the poor are automatically represented. Community based organisations (CBOs) may be residential or sector based; they may be groups of the poor organised around a specific issue (such as informal traders associations), or business organisations of the elite. Formal organisations often act to reinforce patterns of inequality and social exclusion (Beall, 2001). Indeed, to portray civil society solely as a force for good would disregard the presence of self-seeking behaviour within (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

Studies have shown that civil society has often not been strong in engaging with local government (Blair, 2000). This can be explained by the functional nature of civic organisations and political history, as well as their general lack advocacy experience, weak links with community leaders, and low organisational capacity for accessing the poor, (Devas et al., 2001; Blair, 2000). Citizens, CBOs and NGOs previously excluded from decision making in government need to learn new skills of advocacy and effective policy influence, as well as form alliances and collaborative partnerships to guard against co-optation (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001).

#### Participation and outcomes:

Despite commitments to participatory initiatives, these practices are often unfamiliar to newly decentralised autonomous local governments. Local history, politics, tradition and skills/capacity all influence local governments' response to change in rules and procedures (Porter and Onyach-Olaa, 2001). Similarly, these conditions also affect the way local government interacts with community organisations, informal leaders, contractors and so on. These can not be ignored in the process of reform (Grindle & Thomas; Porter & Onyach-Olaa, 2001; Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

Local leaders' political skills are easily overstretched, skills and resources are lacking. Initiatives can also be undermined local government resistance, participation increases transparency which hence exposes the weaknesses in horizontal and vertical accountability within and between government and citizens (Porter & Onyach-Olaa 2001; Crook and Manor, 1995).

## Accountability

### Horizontal Accountability:

In the case of local government, bureaucratic accounting to elected officials is often weak. Many studies (Blair, 2000; Golooba-Mutebi, 1999; Kullenberg and Porter, 2001) identify factors which contribute to this deficiency:

- Incomplete attempts at devolution: civil servants are often unwilling to accept posting to local government and in an effort to ameliorate dissatisfaction, posts often remain tied to central government.
- Weak capacity of local government staff: often key to malpractice and poor internal accountability, particularly relating to book keeping
- Overstaffing at the lower end of the employment scales: often reflects the political interests of councillors rather than true staffing requirements, and so inhibits serious efforts at accountability.
- The skill differential between the more senior technocrats in government service, and elected councillors leaves councillors dependent on officials' recommendations and can create working tensions that can descend professional relations into political wrangling.
- Indeed, the capacity of elected representatives to decide, monitor and enforce accountability of officials is weak,
- Additionally, there is a lack of trust between different levels of local government and hence only limited legitimacy of local government in the eyes of community members

### Vertical Accountability:

#### ***j) Accountability of Elected Representatives to Citizens:***

Different mechanisms of official accountability to the public, (such as elections, political parties, civil society, the media, public meetings, formal grievance procedures and opinion surveys) all have clear problems (Blair, 2000: 32).

*Elections:* Electoral choice is the key mechanism of accountability. However, the strength of this citizen power is dependent on the structure of the electoral system, the regularity of elections and the extent of genuine voter choice (Rakodi, 2001). Vote buying and vote bargaining are important elements (Devas et al, 2001). Those who are able to provide the greatest handouts, buy the biggest amounts of beer often win most votes. This system excludes those who cannot afford such political purchases (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999). However, in Bangalore, India, ward councillors are accessible and accountable to poor voters in fairly informal and fluid ways. They bargain their votes for the benefits that councillors can deliver.

*Proportional representation* may give better representation to minorities but still raise questions as to which citizen representatives are supposed to represent (Devas et al., 2001). In Uganda, female councillors acknowledge that while men have become more aware of women and child issues, this does not mean that decisions are more gender sensitive. Additionally, female councillors are found to be more hesitant and less vocal higher up the political system (Saito, 2000).

*Civil society* may be a useful entry point for government to access citizens, it can also act in anti-poverty reducing ways (Tendler, 1997; Guijt & Shah, 1998). Rent seeking and other corrupt practices are often reinforced by civil society activities where associations hold vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

Numerous *initiatives* attempt to engage citizens more intimately in the institutions of horizontal accountability (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). *Public meetings* are useful when

carefully facilitated; however councillors who fear public questioning can manipulate them by holding meetings at odd times or in obscure locations for example (Blair, 2000). Most governments have some form of *public complaints system*, suggestion boxes for example but this does not mean that either citizens use them or that governments take any notice of what is put to them. Other mechanisms include such tools as opinion surveys and polls, which can measure citizen satisfaction with government services.

Ideally, citizens and government need accurate and accessible *information* on available resources, performance, service levels, budget information, accounts and other financial information. Folscher et al. (1999) argue that only when civil society is armed with such information can there be informed public debate on allocation of limited resources and public acceptance of trade offs.

Local *media* are important mechanisms for spreading political news and public information, but do not have resources to undertake investigative journalism. Radio is a key media at the local level providing local news, talk shows and question and answer programmes to literate and illiterate, rich and poor citizens alike. Language and appropriateness are key to this (Blair, 2000; Kullenberg and Porter, 2001).

### ***ii) Accountability of Local Government to Higher Levels/Central Government:***

Accountability is more likely to have success where there is committed political will on the part of central government (Blair, 2000; Minogue et al., 1997; Tandler, 1997). Goloobamutebi, (1999) even suggests good leadership and effective supervisory mechanisms are more essential to accountability than participation in public affairs. For example, *incentives* can be used to combat corrupt practices, thorough district scrutiny of accounts and minimal standards reached before funds are released.

However, *inconsistencies* in central government often undermine this potential:

- Central transfers fall short of requirements,
- Unconditional grants are arbitrarily cut,
- Funds are sometimes withdrawn for certain services and abrupt changes are often made in modalities for fiscal transfers to local governments.
- Unrealistic budgets are approved
- Conflicts between Local Government and representatives of central government often factor in limiting the capacity for a central government role in local government accountability, encouraging secrecy and non-compliance between institutional levels.

## **Conclusion**

Shortcomings in conventional accountability systems are well known, and yet the monitoring of government performance and level of response to public interest is still deemed critical to effective local governance and service delivery.

Lack of transparency in budgetary procedures makes it especially hard for the electorate to judge government spending records (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001; Healey & Tordoff, 1995). Similarly, within government good information flows are key to effective institutional checks and balances. It is critical not to underestimate the importance of organisational systems and structures to provide the right incentives to improving that flow.

# **Local Government Decision-Making: Citizen Participation and Local Government Accountability**

## **A Literature Review**

### **1. Introduction**

The current spread of democracy has transformed the role of the State in development. The legitimacy of new democracies as a response to local needs has opened up a new agenda for governance. Crudely, the governance agenda emphasises accountability, transparency and participation in effort to combat problems of corruption and inefficiency. The World Development Report 1997 ['The State in a Changing World'] identifies 'making the state more responsive to people's needs, bringing government closer to the people through broader participation and decentralisation' (World Bank: 1997).

Decentralised, participatory development is assumed to bring about better policy outcomes as the policy-making process is brought closer to the people, is better able to respond to local conditions, and is in a better position to enable acceptable implementation. Decentralisation is justified by the assumption that local-level decision-making is essential to offset cumbersome and unresponsive decision-making at the centre. Additionally, it is functional to supporting 'realistic' development which will gain popular support (Tordoff and Young, 1994). Likewise, participation is based upon the belief that citizen participation is a democratic right, that when people are able to effectively voice their interests social justice is more likely to be attained, and that informed citizens should be involved in the governance of bureaucracies to keep them responsive to changing social needs (Oquaye: 1995).

However, this assumes that there is an effective decision-making process at the municipal level in which local citizens can participate and for which decision-makers can be held accountable. The reality in most developing countries is that these processes are weak. The case study countries can be characterised in this way although in both Kenya and Uganda significant efforts to reform the local authority decision-making environment are currently being pursued. It is critical to remember that all states are different and accordingly no blue-print strategy can be harnessed for establishing a decentralised, participatory state capacity. State institutions have developed over time and their practices are highly ingrained and legitimised by predominant power structures. Indeed, they are 'widely [recognised as] centralised, authoritarian, formalistic, inefficient bureaucracies incapable of experimentation, self-critical learning or imaginative change' (Thompson, 1995:1521).

The assumption that by increasing power and responsibility at the local level, local government policy and service delivery will automatically become more responsive to needs of the poor maybe misplaced and misleading (Blair, 2000; Moore and Putzel, 1999). In fact, it is often elites in society that traditionally work with local government to produce clientelistic relationships (Tendler, 1997). Therefore, local elite capture of decentralised power is a very real threat and can in practice mean increased exclusion.

Proponents of decentralisation identify a key role for NGOs and civil society in bringing about better government, improved accountability and participation in decision-making. Tendler (1997) found that where decentralisation has had some success it has been due to a three-way dynamic between local government, civil society and central government. Her conclusion is that, paradoxically increased and appropriate centralisation, as well as more sophisticated political skills at the national level is key to improved local outcome. This argument is explored further in section four.

The style and approach of decentralisation adopted by a country clearly holds ramification for the potential and scope for participatory development at the local level. In turn the forms

of participation at the local level may influence the capacity for institutional accountability and the role of citizens in holding local government to account. Many governments, encouraged by donors, have embarked on decentralisation programmes with little analysis of local level decision-making and accountability. For example, in Uganda the local council (LC) system provides representation and government administration down to the village level and the Local Government Act, 1997, has extended responsibilities and resources to these LCs. In Kenya the recently introduced Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) provides Local Authorities with substantially increased resources. However, the project has encountered problems over local accountability for the use of resources being transferred. This research examines current processes of decision-making in Kenyan and Ugandan local authorities for resource allocation. An understanding of the current political and administration local system will then inform initiatives to improve participation and accountability.

## **2. Decentralisation**

The current trend in decentralisation demands a reassessment of the role of government and its relationship with its citizens, with the formal and informal organisations of civil society, and to foster popular participation to ensure the accountability of governance.

The assignment of functions and responsibility for outcome in the hands of lower levels of an organisation should allow decisions to be made and implemented at this level. However, this corresponds to the type of decentralisation that is adopted, which is therefore dependent upon the links between the centre and the local offices of government (Slater, 1989). Decentralisation does not lend itself to simple definition but rests on deliberate change in the organisation of government so that authority to command, and responsibility for outcomes, are effectively localised throughout a country.

Mishra (1994:12) identifies four basic aspects of decentralisation: administrative decentralisation involves the decentralisation of authority to lower officials in the administration hierarchy of organisation; functional decentralisation in which line functions are passed to specialised units or departments; political decentralisation refers to the devolution of political powers from higher levels of political organisations to lower levels; and finally geographical decentralisation in which power and functions are decentralised to field offices.

Decentralisation of these different types can also differ in depth, (i.e. the extent to which real power is decentralised) (Devas, 1997). Deconcentration, for example, involves the delegation of central government functions or decision-making powers to its own officers in local offices. Devolution on the other hand, involves a more significant shifting of decision-making power from central to local government. Regional and local governments have their own separate budgets and have the authority to allocate resources and to work out multiple functions. Devolution implies a far greater potential for increased democratic decision-making (Rondinelli, 1981; Crook & Manor, 1995; 1994) and in turn justifies strengthening channels of participation through representation (OECD, 1995).

The decision to decentralise is political and the form it takes in implementation will reflect the political system within which it operates as well as the policy objectives of individual governments. In some countries it has been used in an effort to stabilise political control in the wider geographical areas. In other places decentralisation has been part of attempts to democratise the policy-making process and to enhance policy outcomes.

‘- democratisation of political power so aims at achieving democratic values in practice. That decentralisation aims at widening the area of people’s participation in

decision-making, micro-level political authority and autonomy through transfer of specific powers to people's representative institutions at the local-level' (Mishra, 1994:9).

The term is associated with objectives of 'self-reliance, democratic decision-making, popular participation in government and accountability of public officials to citizens' (Mishra, 1994:2).

By taking decisions to the local level, decentralisation finds further justification through increased efficiency in resource use. It is argued that decisions about resource use can be based on a proper assessment of local needs and priorities at the local level, which results in the more efficient allocation of resources. The problems of course are a) that the jurisdictions over which costs can be internalised varies between services (primary schools vs secondary schools vs Universities), so there are problems about the optimum size of local governments; and b) that resource availability varies hugely between jurisdictions. Indeed, this research questions the underlying assumptions of decentralisation as an adequate process by which local needs and priorities are established and resources allocated in Kenya and Uganda.

There are significant political obstacles to devolved decision making and enhancing policy responsiveness at the local level. Reluctance on the part of central government bureaucrats and politicians to devolve power when they stand to lose out, and elite domination of power at the local-level, may effectively eliminate any potential for local voices to be heard in the face of strong vested interests. In addition, resource scarcity and dominant organisational structures may inhibit more decentralised, participatory poverty focussed local government.

Indeed, as Crook and Sverrisson (1999) conclude, decentralisation may positively increase government responsiveness to the poor and pro-poor development but this is dependent upon four separate variables. First, the relationship between central and local governments such that local governments are monitored for financial probity and accountable for implementation of pro-poor policies, and that political relations are strong. Secondly, accountability is strengthened through enhanced participation. Third, secure and adequate systems for allocating both administrative and financial resources. Finally, the length of time reforms have been in place. There is no inherent reason as to why local government should automatically be more pro-poor than national governments and as such these institutional variables are key to strengthening decentralisation reforms which might benefit the poor.

### **3. Participation**

Within the decentralisation literature there is a notable absence of discussion on participation. Indeed, participation literature has built around community development agendas and in reference to the application of participatory tools of research and analysis. However, the concept has been increasingly used in relation to citizenship and citizen rights, as part of the democratic governance agenda (Gaventa, 1999).

Participation is highly clouded by rhetoric and often not clearly defined by agencies which attempt its implementation. Different understandings of participation stem from different philosophies about the development process and who is capable of, and entitled to, control it. It can be understood in terms of economic, political, cultural and social participation, and viewed either as a means to an end or as end in itself, with different implications for outcome.

Pretty (1995) summarises the many ways in which participation is used into a typology, along a continuum. It spans from a functional understanding in which participation is encouraged in order to increase project or policy efficiency to, at the other end, an



understanding which views participation as a fundamental right, for people to design and define their own development.

The practical application varies in scale, source and depth, (Goulet, 1989). This can range from small-scale participation within the family or household to mass participatory action at national levels. The breadth of issues covered within this range may be broad or sectoral. Participation may be driven from 'above' by experts or authorities, or from 'below' by citizens, or it may be catalysed by a third agent. The depth of participation might be reflected in the time at which people are introduced into the process. For example, at one end of Pretty's continuum, the community are brought in at late stages of implementation whereas at the other they themselves initiate the process.

Similarly, Oakley (1991) distinguishes between participation as a means and participation as an end. As a *means*, participation is used to better achieve goals or objectives of a project, such as service delivery (functional). Participation as an *end* is seen as a process in which people develop and strengthen their capability to directly intervene in or control development initiatives. Inherent in these different applications/understandings of participation are underlying philosophical differences concerning who is capable of and entitled to control the development process.

#### Spheres of participation:

Within the continuum of applications, participation can be political, economic or social. The distinction between these three types of participation however is blurred in practice. Political participation supposes a two-way communication between representatives and electorate. Breakdowns, manipulations and impasses visible in electoral systems in the developing world inhibit the effectiveness of these relations (Stiefel & Wolfe, 1994).

In addition to voting in periodic elections, Parry and Moyser (1994) identify four other forms of political participation. These are *contacting and lobbying*, involving efforts by individuals or groups to influence officials and policy makers, and *campaigning*, conducted by political parties to rouse support and resources. Additionally, *group action* and *protest* focus on collective goals and are significant to mobilising people to make direct demands on government. There is a body of literature that deals with the concept of citizenship and political participation, involving concepts of power, conflict, bargaining, participation and so on.

'[Citizenship a]t its most passive, it means being a subject, with limited political rights and even more limited responsibilities. More actively, it implies the right to make demands on the political system, to back up those demands with votes and to hold elected representatives accountable for their performance'. (Rakodi, 2001:5)

Citizen participation draws from both the concept of political participation and community participation in projects. It involves focussing on civil society and the ways in which citizens exercise influence and control over the decisions that affect them. Concern for citizen participation also engages participatory methodologies such as voter education, lobbying and advocacy in relation to political participation, and broader methods for planning, appraisal, training, awareness raising, and self development (Gaventa, 1999).

Rakodi (2001) distinguishes participatory democracy from representative democracy where citizen interests are met through rules and institutions: elected government, free and fair elections, universal adult suffrage, political competition, freedom of conscience, the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office, associational autonomy, institutional separation of powers, between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Participatory democracy carries the role of citizens further based on the premise that elections will always be an insufficient mechanism of citizen voice and accountability. In this sort of democracy therefore, citizens can directly participate in decision-making through

mechanisms such as direct discussions, referenda, associations etc. Issues of accountability are further examined in the section below.

This is clearly an important area of the governance agenda and numerous international examples illustrate direct participation initiatives currently being built into efforts to decentralise (Narayan, 2000). Participatory research has highlighted a despondency and dissatisfaction among the poor regarding the accountability of public institutions to citizens, notably poor citizens, and at their lack of 'voice' in service delivery. The concept of citizen 'voice' implies an engagement with the state that moves beyond consultation to more direct forms of influence over spending and policy decisions (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). Enhancing 'voice' through complaints, protests, lobbying, and direct participation, is understood to hold potential for improving responsiveness of public service providers to poor users of services.

Economic participation is apparent in the collective organisation for livelihoods and the distribution of income in which strength is gained by economically weak individuals through solidarity. This action may come in the form of co-operatives or unions for example. Social participation can be understood in terms of collective organisation for identifying, analysing and mobilising for collective action to tackle local problems, the improvement of social amenities for example. People-centred development calls for people to define the course of their own development and infers self-sufficiency and self-help, either in opposition to or independent of the state (Nelson and Wright, 1995). There is for example a strong tradition of self-help in Kenya (Harambee). However, the involvement of the state in social participation marks the murky distinction with political forms of participation. In Kenya, the Harambee has become much abused as a means of collecting money. Similarly in Indonesia, the tradition of *gotong-royong* has been abused by the authorities to oblige citizens – and particularly the poor – to contribute to the provision of local services and infrastructure.

#### Who participates?

Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) postulate that vagueness and confusion over the operational meaning of popular participation directly reflects reluctance in governments and donor organisations to seek precise definition and to consider participation in terms of social class and power.

Indeed, governments perceive citizen participation generally not as a goal in itself but as a means to achieving higher efficiency, and tend to draw away from practices which allow citizens direct control over the development process. Goulet's (1989) analysis of participation distinguishes between processes which work to empower hitherto powerless people to make demands for goods, and processes which mobilise people to contribute their resources to someone else's purposes. Of course, in practice this distinction is difficult to draw and interests are complex. For example, if a community builds a school it is in the interest of both the community (who may want the school) and the state (because it is saved money). However, generally the building of the school occurs because specific funds are available for that to be prioritised. While not necessarily in conflict to community interests, this distinction relates to the origins of control in the processes, either from 'above' or 'below'.

Hence, it might be assumed that where decision-making and resources are kept under tight central control, the potential for participation is constrained, people passively participate in others' agendas. Or as is argued by the proponents of the decentralised, participatory approach, where power is truly devolved to local-levels and supported by sufficient resource control, participation can be more responsive, enabling local people to set their own agendas.

Participation can be inhibited by social dynamics of exclusion and inclusion at the 'community level'. Guijt and Shah (1998) expose the 'myth' of community that often underlies attempts to encourage participation of citizens. They identify a complex of community differences including age, economics, religion, caste, ethnicity and gender. Indeed, all communities embody complex power dynamics which enable some greater access and control over decision making and decision makers. Some people are more inhibited in meetings, will not ask for clarifications and leave confused and frustrated, or are pressured into acquiescence and yet their attendance is still classified as 'participation' (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999). Indeed 'participation', rather than being fair and democratic, can be enforced from the top, with powerful individuals imposing decisions on other members.

Similarly, it is easier for local government/policy makers to access the more visible community elites rather than engage with the poor. In this way local government initiated attempts at enhancing citizen contact and engagement may not be targeted at the poor. It can take greater resources in terms of time and effort to identify and work with the poorer sections of a community. In turn, local leaders are often accused of commandeering decentralisation and participatory initiatives to further their own connections with local elites for political gains rather than promote any active engagement with the poor (Hulme & Siddiquee, 1997).

It is important to recognise the limitations to participation in order to attempt to put in to position mechanisms for bringing in the voice of the poor to policy debates. Moore and Putzel (2000) find that decentralisation is not necessarily pro-poor and indeed that the political mobilisation of the poor depends largely on the effectiveness and coherence of states and the policies they pursue.

New laws on democratic decentralisation open new opportunities for participation in local governance but specific attention needs to be placed on ensuring a poverty focus. Such mechanisms may involve participatory planning (Philippines, Bolivia, India), citizen education and awareness building initiatives (Bangladesh, India), training and sensitisation of local officials, participatory budgeting (Brazil) and so on (Devas et al., 2001; Gaventa, 1999). In Uganda, specific efforts at representation mean that a third of all councillors are women, and there have been marked shifts in their capacity to influence. The number of women councillors is so much greater that men are more exposed to their views, especially at the LC1 and LC2 levels (Saito 2000b).

However, female councillors acknowledge that while men have become more aware of women and child issues, this does not mean that decisions are more gender sensitive. Additionally, female councillors are found to be more hesitant and less vocal higher up the LC system. The different perspectives of ethnic groups can be similarly missed (Saito, 2000b). Representation does not automatically increase the capacity for marginalized groups to be heard in decision-making, as the case study of Uganda shows, but Blair's (2000) study of six countries illustrates more nuanced empowerment implications of direct representation. This study shows how local level participation can benefit minorities when they are the majority in the local area, representation increases the aspirations of otherwise minority or excluded populations. Similarly, representation among marginalized groups can increase leadership experience and impart skills new skills for wider leadership (Blair, 2000).

It cannot be assumed therefore that participatory initiatives (either political, social, and/or economic) are automatically executed in a manner which meet the multiple interests of the poor, these need to acknowledge and work with difference in order to facilitate more inclusive processes. The section below on participatory democracy outlines further direct mechanisms to facilitate citizens engagement in local governance - agenda and priority setting.

### Civil Society:

'Civil Society is promoted as the institutional solution to people-centred, participatory and inclusive development' (Devas et al., 2001:19). This includes a wide range of organisations that vary in their capacity and willingness to engage with local government. They can offer an organised force with which local government's can engage. They may be mobilised around certain issues and lobby their local government for change. For example, communities living on informal urban land may lobby, request and/or take mass action for public resources for infrastructure.

Relations between civil society and government may be through informal lobbying and negotiation, participation in government poverty programmes, as well as lobbying and advocacy for change. These organisations offer an important resource to help set priorities, provide labour and financial contributions, identify problems, and possible solutions (Devas et al., 2001). Contact is generally higher around times of elections and well organised groups can exploit this to their own advantage.

Despite the claims for civil society in governance, there is no guarantee that the interests of the poor are automatically represented. Community based organisations (CBOs) may be residential or sector based, they may be groups of the poor organised around a specific issue (such as informal traders associations), or business organisations of the elite. Formal organisations often act to reinforce patterns of inequality and social exclusion (Beall, 2001). Indeed, to portray civil society solely as a force for good would disregard the presence of self-seeking behaviour within (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

While government may harness civil society to form alliances for participatory governance, civil society also has a role in holding local (and central) government to account. This is explored more in the section on accountability below. Tandler (1997) found in Brazil that central government created a place for civil society in local governance. From this, civil society inevitably expanded to independently challenge the actions of government and to demand better services. However, in this case Central Government played an active catalyst role, creating clear spaces and responsibilities for civil society in local government accountability. Blair (2000) on the other hand, found that the role of civil society in the local political systems of six countries has not been strong. Part of the explanation can be the functional nature and political history of these organisations, as well as their general lack of experience of engagement with local government. There is little history of advocacy with local government or competition with other organisations to engage with government in this way.

In a study of urban governance and poverty, NGOs were found to have little role in negotiating the position of the poor. Perhaps this was because they also generally focused on small and/or specific programmes, they were not linked to advocacy, or because they only had weak links with community leaders or had low organisational capacity for accessing the poor (Devas et al., 2001). While there are some NGOs which play a critical role in facilitating the relationship between local government and citizens, they are generally found to fill service provision gaps. Citizens, CBOs and NGOs previously excluded from decision making in government need to learn new skills of advocacy and effective policy influence, as well as form alliances and collaborative partnerships to guard against co-optation.

Political parties are included by some as being part of civil society, notably in reference to Uganda where parties have been restricted since the rise of the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Political parties have a clear role in maintaining competitive political processes and hence accountability. Political parties have a role in increasing the political participation of general populations and sustaining political engagement. However, of course, party inspired factionalism can work as a negative force with ethnic, religious and clan divides. That said, in Uganda the prohibition of party activity has not prevented political intimidation or the violence still associated with election periods (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

Public information is key to informed public participation. Parties have a competitive incentive to ensure active information campaigns and to expose of corrupt activities (Blair, 2000).

#### Participation vs. representative democracy:

As acknowledged by Rakodi (2001) above, participatory democracy takes the role of citizens further based on the premise that elections will always be an insufficient mechanism of citizen voice and accountability. Citizens thus directly participate in decision-making through mechanisms such as direct discussions, referenda, associations and so on.

There may be conflict with representation if organised participation of this kind brings conflict to a head, and antagonises government–citizen relations; government may not meet citizen demands or citizens may openly criticise previously closed government institutions. Hence, effective participation requires proper facilitation to manage conflict and channel it productively (Porter, 2001).

Good facilitation recognises the different interests of stakeholders and acknowledges and works within present systems of formal and informal structures. Communities and local councils already invest in infrastructure and local services in diverse ways. In order to communicate and draw these together requires practice with interactive methods and consultative processes.

Elected local leaders, as already outlined above, tend to feel greater legitimacy to speak out in public forums. The UNCDF District Development programme in Uganda for example, found strongly held views of local councillors tended to overwhelm community voices in project planning consultations. Good facilitation is not about consensus building but rather seeks to bring out divergent interests and motivations, to acknowledge people's opinions and suggestions (Porter, 2001). PRA tools and other visual techniques are important aids to this process.

Mechanisms such as PRA (often imposed by donors) may help to inform policy and decision-making but can indeed also set up conflicts with elected representatives. There is a lack of trust between different levels of local government and often only limited legitimacy of local government in the eyes of community members. Thus, politicising officials can come between representatives and constituents (Porter & Onyach-Olaa, 2001). Time and resource costs of developing these committed participatory practices as well as the capacity and political issues associated, are crucial to the debates regarding their applicability in all contexts. There is concern that when such practices become drawn into routine administrative planning processes there may be negative impacts on the quality of the process. Porter and Onyach-Olaa (2001) argue that participation in planning is less important than creating 'an accountable, inclusive process within the broader frame of political representation at all levels and stages in the service planning and delivery cycle' (p.2). Accountability is further examined in the following section.

It is therefore critical that direct participatory initiatives are integrated into the representative political processes rather than be set up in competition. Participation is more than simple representation. Direct participation of citizens can influence decision-making and benefit accountability, but careful facilitation can be required to discourage violent conflict in certain contexts and avoid bulldozing systems already in place.

#### Participation and outcomes:

Despite commitments to participatory initiatives, these practices are often unfamiliar to newly decentralised autonomous local governments. Of course, central government officers often resist decentralisation itself and even within the local government offices there may be distrust and inefficiency, which hamper relations with citizens.

Official decision making processes may not be the way that actual decisions are made. Planning, appraisal, budgeting and service delivery processes often differ enormously across countries, despite the formal rules. Local history, politics, tradition and skills/capacity all influence local governments' response to rules and procedures (Porter and Onyach-Olaa, 2001). Similarly, these conditions also affect the way local government interacts with community organisations, informal leaders, contractors and so on.

This research looks at the specific mechanisms of formal participation and accountability in local government but tries also to examine the relationship between what is agreed through these formal decision making processes and what actually happens. This requires looking at the actual expenditures versus the budgeted expenditures, the actual services delivered and the distribution of benefits. This is a major research agenda of which only part can be tackled here.

A study in Uganda showed that people tend to have less interest in being involved with ranking priorities than in what actually happens on the ground. Enthusiasts sometimes overestimate the public's interest in meetings and in participating in public affairs (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999). This is particularly true when citizens see these meetings as ill organised, and without impact on what happens on the ground. For example, proposals taken from these meetings may come to nothing when resources to utilise and maintain them are not forthcoming. Hence, simply organising opportunities for participation is not sufficient if these do not influence outcomes.

In practice, planning and decision-making is often not linear but follows a more iterative path, with missed steps being revisited and changed along the way. This means earlier choices are sometimes changed in light of changing priorities and resource availability. Similarly, although significant efforts are made to draw people in to the decision making process, once priorities have been set, definitive decisions tend to be made by fewer people, generally the technocrats (town clerk and treasurer) based on more exclusive criteria (revenue availability). Thus, the actual decisions become less accountable and ultimately ignore the various implications of the wider discussions (Grindle & Thomas; Porter & Onyach-Olaa, 2001). There are studies (including this one) which show how councillors tend to prioritise and vote themselves increased allowances, which seriously pre-empt available resources (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

Indeed, there are major capacity issues which can undermine governments' attempts with participatory initiatives, and render them fruitless exercises. Local leaders' political and technical skills can be easily overstretched, as well as local resources. Participation can expose the relationship between officials and councillors and make allocation practices more transparent. Local government resistance to exposure and increased transparency reduces commitment to the concept of increased citizen participation in decision-making. Participation therefore has the potential to expose weaknesses in horizontal and vertical accountability, and to ultimately damage the relationship between citizens and local government (Porter & Onyach-Olaa 2001).

Crook and Manor (1995) found in their comparative research of two African and two Asian countries that neither participation nor decentralisation in isolation could adequately explain organisational performance. They concluded that decentralised participatory approaches could not be regarded as a catch all solution and that these were most likely to fail where 'institutions of social and economic domination substantially overlap with or correspond to those of the power structure of political institutions' (p.329). It can be argued that increased participation can create conflicts between local elite groups and the poor, which may in turn weaken enthusiasm for the devolution of power or even destroy it altogether.

#### 4. Accountability

Accountability to local citizens for the use of municipal resources has a direct bearing on whether or not the poor benefit through expenditure on improved services and infrastructure. The conventional assumption that decentralisation will lead to improved resource use, reflecting local needs and priorities, requires an effective system by which local citizens, including the poor, are aware of the policy and resource use choices, have some means of influencing decisions about resource use, and can hold those making decisions accountable. This requires mechanisms of democratic representation, civil society participation and transparent decision-making and accountability which may be lacking in local governments in Kenya and Uganda.

Tendler (1997) suggests that while there is plenty of literature on why governments have done badly, there is far less which analyses how they do or can perform well. Within the governance agenda accountability is identified as being key to sustaining trust and reciprocity within and between government and citizens (Rakodi, 2001). Accountability implies –

‘responsiveness to the demands of the governed, enforced by respect of the rule of law and an independent judiciary, together with elected bodies exercising oversight, widespread access to information and a free media. Weak accountability and lack of transparency is demonstrated by corruption, the misuse of public office for private gain’ (Adamolekun, 1999:9).

Accountability is therefore a direct limit on power. However, does democracy automatically enhance accountability? Healy and Tordoff (1995) propose that accountability in public resource management requires major changes in public institutional processes. A culture of accountability must be developed amongst politicians and within the bureaucracy. Therefore, democratic institutions are important to but cannot automatically bring about enhanced accountability. Tendler (1997) acknowledges that within a process of change it is essential that challenges and problems are identified and faced rather than ignored, and that dedicated and capable staff are rewarded and also protected from the actions of others (rent seeking co-workers, superior and elected officials).

Accountability refers to the level of government response to public interests, the extent of free public debate, scrutiny of public expenditure management and government performance monitoring (Healy & Tordoff, 1995). It can work in a number of capacities: political; fiscal; administrative; legal and constitutional. Accountability can work in different directions:

- Horizontal accountability of officials to elected representatives.
- Vertical (downward) accountability, elected representatives to local citizens.
- Vertical (upward) accountability of the local government to the centre.

Accountability is based on both public perceptions of what they see happening as well as formal accounting mechanisms. Audited accounts for example provide a broader analysis on what people can see directly. The media has an important role in informing citizens. Public information is important to enhance transparency in decision-making, and therefore to undermine clientelism.

##### Horizontal Accountability:

Government is answerable to citizens and hence government employees must be held accountable to elected representatives. Indeed, democratic governance can only succeed if all public servants are accountable. Some institutional forms of accountability include horizontal checks and balances such as reporting systems, and so on (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). In the case of local government, bureaucratic accounting to elected officials is often weak; Blair (2000) found that this is due largely to incomplete attempts at devolution. Civil

servants are often unwilling to accept posting to local government and in an effort to ameliorate dissatisfaction, posts often remain tied to central government. Hence, reporting is vertical rather than horizontal to elected representatives.

The limited capacity of local government staff often results in malpractice and poor internal accountability, particularly relating to book keeping. Overstaffing at the lower end of the employment scales often reflects the political interests of councillors rather than true staffing requirements, and so inhibits serious efforts at accountability. At the same time, the skill differential between the more senior officials and elected councillors leaves councillors dependent on officials' recommendations and can create working tensions that can cause professional relations to descend into political wrangling. Indeed, the capacity of elected representatives to decide, monitor and enforce accountability of officials is weak, often because of low levels of literacy and education. For example, in local government budgeting in Uganda, many councillors are unable to participate effectively budget decisions let alone hold officials to account for implementation, as budgets are written in English and they do not understand the details (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

Weak authority over staffing at the local level due to the continued central control over salaries, postings, and tenure, reduces the capacity for mayors (and indeed senior local civil servants) to discipline staff, (Blair, 2000). However in Karnataka, Blair (2000) found that horizontal accountability can be accommodated along side central government checks, albeit not perfectly. In this case, line ministries annually produced evaluation reports which assisted in promotions and postings, and elected officials then directed government civil servants in their jurisdictions.

Golooba-Mutebi's (1999) thesis provides vivid illustration of the effect councillors' pre-occupation with extracting personal benefits from their office (namely their own allowances and re-election) has on sidelining sub-county priorities. Councillors' inability to carry out checks on formal decision-making processes and practices (budgeting, expenditure management and so on) can in part be explained also by prevailing cultures. Where malpractice is commonplace, councillors may fear an environment based on internal and external checks, in case they too are exposed. Hence in some cases, elected officials simply choose not to act on inappropriate behaviour of local government officials.

Generally public opinion of horizontal accountability is low in most developing countries. Indeed, often all levels and positions within government are viewed with suspicion or even indifference (Kullenberg and Porter, 2001). Additionally, there is a lack of trust between different levels of local government and hence only limited legitimacy of local government in the eyes of community members. However, there is also dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of vertical forms of accountability (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001).

#### Vertical Accountability (downward): *Accountability of Elected Representatives to Citizens.*

The current development focus on good governance is based on theories of liberal democracy that assume accountability is ensured through representation. Electoral choice is therefore the key mechanism of accountability such that public office is forfeited if citizen confidence and support is lost. However, the strength of this citizen power is dependent on the structure of the electoral system, the regularity of elections and the extent of genuine voter choice (Rakodi, 2001). Public accountability is further supported by the operation of a free media, other mechanisms of government transparency as well as advocacy by civil society groups. Blair's six country study concludes that accountability mechanisms between elected officials and the public vary from 'reasonably effective to virtually useless' (2000:31).

Blair identifies clear problems with all seven mechanisms of official accountability to the public, which he examines (elections, political parties, civil society, the media, public meetings, formal grievance procedures and opinion surveys). He concludes that elections,



parties, civil society and the media are more useful mechanisms, but that at the same time, no one mechanism can realise effective accountability and that a mix of several mechanisms must take root and succeed over time (2000: 32).

'Elections can be fraudulent, parties can foment hostility and conflict, civil society can advocate the destruction of the body politic, the media can become captive of an authoritarian central government or self seeking elite elements, public meetings can turn in to controlled puppet shows, formal redress procedures can be manipulated by demagogues, and opinion surveys can be doctored to show false results. Just because these mechanisms are in place in other words does not mean that they will inevitably conduce to the public good' (Blair, 2000: 32)

Elected officials are most clearly held to account through free fair, and regularly scheduled elections, in countries where there is universal suffrage. But these only occur periodically and can therefore only address broad issues, specifically where government wrong doing is actually publicised. Additionally, election processes are often flawed, based upon intimidation and vote buying practices. Interestingly, despite their importance to accountability and indeed as an information providing mechanism for local people, local election procedures and impacts have not as yet been well studied (Oluwu, 200).

However, a study of city governance in Asia, Africa and Latin America did examine local election processes. It was found that vote buying and vote bargaining are important elements of urban governance (Devas et al, 2001). Significant concentrations of poor people combined with ward-based elections, seem to produce a greater responsiveness of councillors to their constituents compared to the at-large electoral systems. In Bangalore, for example, ward councillors are accessible and accountable to poor voters in fairly informal and fluid ways. They bargain their votes for the benefits that councillors can deliver. Accordingly, local level elections are keenly attended. In Bangalore this is reflected in the much higher electoral turnouts in low income than higher income wards. Systems of proportional representation or mixed systems as in Johannesburg, may give better representation to minorities. However, quota systems raise questions as to how far those occupying reserved seats are really representative of those they are supposed to represent (Devas et al., 2001).

Although electoral turn out is often high at the local level, in Uganda it has been found at that the very local village level failing councillors are not voted out and there are high re-election rates (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999). These dynamics are partly explained by the lack of alternative candidates at this very local level, and also to a prevailing culture of deference to authority. However, there is another dimension involving the personal costs of standing for election where vote buying is part of the process. Those who are able to provide the greatest handouts, buy the biggest amounts of beer often win most votes. This system excludes those who can not afford such political purchases (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999).

The political system context of a locality also has implications for vertical accountability. The Barangays system throughout the Philippines, and micro-regions as found in Recife, Brazil, both present examples of accessible elected local bodies that have some influence on decisions on expenditure and can respond to local priorities and encourage active civic engagement. Similarly, the structure of local government executives has implications. There are inherent checks and fewer risks in a system in which local councillors hold executive powers. A directly elected executive mayor on the other hand has a more direct relationship with citizens but is less accountable and holds considerable power. That said, an appointed chief executives/mayors are not locally accountable at all. In Kumasi, Ghana, for example, the appointed mayor was able to effectively bulldoze elected Assembly members (Devas et al., 2001).

Although civil society was found to have an important role, in the six countries examined by Blair (2000) civic associations were not found to be very effective at the local level. Similarly, local media is limited. Although it is an important mechanism for spreading political news, local media do not have resources to undertake investigative journalism and mainly provides an important public information service. It is notable that the radio is often a key media at the local level providing local news, talk shows and question and answer programmes to literate and illiterate, rich and poor citizens alike.

Civil society is not a homogeneous and ever virtuous institution (Tendler, 1997; Guijt & Shah, 1998). Although a useful entry point for government to access citizens, civil society may act in anti-poverty reducing ways. Rent seeking and other corrupt practices are often reinforced by civil society activities where associations hold vested interests in maintaining the status quo. This goes against the assumptions of civil society in bringing about better government, in which local government is vulnerable to citizens' expression of their needs. Tendler goes further to postulate that representation of the poor is not always a pre-requisite to their needs being better served (1997:154).

Numerous current initiatives attempt to engage citizens more intimately in the institutions of horizontal accountability (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). New institutional checks and balances have been introduced in some countries including such initiatives as public hearing, and public auditing, which is intended to bring to light expenditure discrepancies. There are also participatory information-generation exercises, (such as civil-society initiated public opinion surveys), evaluations of public spending from the perspective of particular social groups (such as Women's budgets), citizens' juries to evaluate public policy, and the establishment of parallel services to demonstrate effective alternative approaches to service delivery (2001: 8).

Increased participation, as already discussed, is intended to bring about increased demands for accountability. Participatory budgeting in Brazil involves citizens directly in budgetary options and resource availability. In Recife public meetings are held in the micro-regions and delegates are elected to prioritise expenditure options. Impact has been limited and the executive is still firmly in control, setting the initial agenda and budget priorities, but participatory budgeting processes have made budgetary choices more transparent, especially since the executive is required to publish information both about the budgetary options and about implementation. Despite limitations, one of the most significant features of participatory budgeting found in Recife is the increased accountability that has developed in relation to implementation of expenditures (Devas et al., 2001).

#### Vertical Accountability (upward):

##### *Local Government to Higher Levels/Central Government.*

Civil society can have an important role in holding local government to account, however research in Brazil has identified a clear role for central government in encouraging this dynamic (Tendler, 1997). Central government encouraged and assisted civic associations and worked through them to ensure tight control of local government. A three way dynamic was created by the central government, messages were delivered to the public about government programmes. In this way citizens were informed as to what exactly local government civil servants should be doing and not doing, while at the same time these messages emphasised the importance of these programmes which in turn provided officials with a sense of recognition and respect. In Tendler's opinion, this indicates an implicit contradiction within decentralisation that often goes unrecognised, that more centralisation and central sophistication lies at the heart of successful decentralised local governance. Accountability is more likely to have success where there is committed political will on the part of central government (Blair, 2000; Minogue et al., 1997).

Indeed, because downward accountability is usually so weak there is a clear need for upward accountability. Golooba-Mutebi, (1999) suggests good leadership and effective supervisory mechanisms are more essential to accountability than participation in public affairs. Indeed, the capacity for people to perform properly is crucial.

‘Emphasis must be placed on creating independent and effective supervisory mechanisms capable of preventing or combating malpractice regardless of the kind of leadership in place, for even where there is no effective leadership they can help minimise incidents of malfeasance, incompetence or sheer dereliction of duty’ (Golooba-Mutebi, 1999:233).

Incentives can be used to combat corrupt practices, thorough district scrutiny of accounts and, as Golooba-Mutebi (1999) found in Rakai district, Uganda, salaries might be withheld when discrepancies are found. The UNCDF has tested the use of performance measures in its local government district development programme in Uganda. Local governments must meet minimal standards before they can receive development funds. These include ensuring sufficient financial accounting practices, that working committees are in place and capable of steering investments through the design, appraisal and implementation process. Additionally, local governments report on their performance, submit their accounts to audit and must ensure periodic monitoring of investments in order to maintain quarterly payments (Kullenberg & Porter, 2001).

In the UNCDF programme, higher levels of government periodically assess local governments to previously negotiated standards. Incentives to perform well are crucial to institute accountability and in this Ugandan case these include additional funds for successful local governments and reduced funds for poor performers. It is however recognised that incentives and sanctions for public sector accountability are notoriously difficult to devise and institute (Kullenberg & Porter, 2001).

The institutions and legal frameworks needed to promote accountability are often not strong. These include the press, effective judicial and accounting systems and also central government itself. Inconsistent central government actions can undermine this ability to call local governments to account. Central transfers fall short of requirements, unconditional grants have been arbitrarily cut, funds are sometimes withdrawn for certain services and abrupt changes are often made in modalities for fiscal transfers to local governments.

Through decentralisation efforts, Ugandan local governments are much more aware of their rights and are likely to defend them. However, new procedures and regulations are still unclear and unfamiliar, legal provisions are sometimes contradictory (or open to misreading/manipulation). Also, lack of political restraint to keep expenditures within an approved budget limit and to observe rules and regulations for financial management further inhibits good practice. Corruption and collusion disrupt revenue collection, contracting and the accountability of politicians. However difficult, tying funds to performance is a crucial element in decentralised planning and financing.

It is leaders at higher levels rather, than local electors, who usually dismiss non-performing officials. There are questions as to the ability of central government to monitor and act appropriately, consistently and transparently. Where government is weak and accountability is not a part of the institutional culture, these mechanisms are often not well established or working. Creating flows of information from local government, such as budgets and accounts is one thing, but this is of little value, if either central ministries are too overburdened to monitor them, or the information itself is of such poor quality that it indicates very little. Additionally, conflicts between local governments and representatives of central government (for example the District Commissioners in Kenya, the DRCs in Uganda), encourage secrecy and non-compliance between institutional levels, reducing the effectiveness of local government accountability to central government.

Both political science and economics literatures have indicated the importance of political institutions in determining corruption, and political accountability. However, it is clear that developing adequate checks and balances for particular contexts may take time, either as a result of slow institutional learning process or because of some underlying feature of corruption (Lederman, Loayza, and Soares, 2001)

#### Specific Mechanisms of Accountability of Local Governments to Taxpayers and Clients:

Public meetings are (as already outlined) useful mechanisms for participation and hence accountability when carefully facilitated, however they can be manipulated by councillors who fear public questioning. For example, Blair found in Karnataka that elected officials were holding meetings at odd times or in obscure locations (2000). Formal grievances are usually fielded through the courts but these are often seriously over stretched and backlogged. In Bolivia vigilance committees ambitiously plan for local infrastructure investments and monitor municipal budgets. If they feel a municipal council has mishandled monies they can set in motion a suspension of central government funds, through a special committee of the Senate.

Most governments have some form of public complaints system, suggestion boxes for example. However, this does not mean that either citizens use them or that governments take any notice of what is put to them. Other mechanisms include such tools as opinion surveys and polls, which can measure citizen satisfaction with government services as well as report card system in Bangalore. These may work well but are difficult to replicate, analyse and disseminate. Blair (2000) suggests that perhaps if the service were commercialised there would be more scope to take this approach forward in developing countries.

If people are to hold their governments to account they must have access to information about what governments are doing. Similarly, within government good information flows are key to effective institutional checks and balances. The section below details this further. With clear information about resource allocations citizens are likely to be more willing to pay taxes. Increased participation and effective accountability can ease this relationship so that people can see the connectivity of taxes and benefits (Saito, 2000). This again illustrates the importance of information about resources and performance. Ablo and Reinikka (1998) find that in a study of health clinics and education in Uganda, the introduction of user fees can provide incentives to users to demand better accountability of their service providers.

*Information:* Elections present only crude mechanisms of accountability. They are held only every 4 or so years, and address only the broadest issues. This section has shown how it is only when people know what is going on can they hold their government to account. This in itself may be enough to discourage councillors to make information on local government decisions publicly available. Political and administrative information can easily remain the property of the inside few, the media however can mitigate against this. However, at the local level it is rather unrealistic to expect local newspapers and radio to carry out investigative journalism but rather they play an important role in providing public information. These can both reach and reflect the concerns of a wide audience – government, opposition, civil society and so on. Local news, talk shows, and question and answer programmes are critical local level mechanisms. Language is key to this and to making information accessible to the general public (Blair, 2000).

Ideally, citizens and government need accurate and accessible information on available resources, performance, service levels, budget information, accounts and other financial information. Folscher et al. (1999) argue that only when civil society is armed with such information can there be informed public debate on allocation of limited resources and public acceptance of trade offs. South Africa now has an emerging consensus that transparency, sound public finances, economic success and pro-poor budgeting are inextricably linked. Indeed, transparency is key to systematic accountability.

Freedom of the press can reduce informational problems between citizens and government. Its role is in publicising government trends and any wrong-doings on the part of the government. Decentralisation can affect the rigor of transparency, since smaller constituencies may be more able to monitor the performance of elected representatives and public officials, (Lederman, Loayza and Soares, 2001). Local participation in government processes can increase the flow of information and hence accountability, although as outlined in the section above, this can bring its own problems.

Within government too, knowledge of entitlements (such as grant allocations and so on) is essential to effective planning. It enables local governments as well as communities to prioritise according to known levels of resources rather than developing 'wish lists' that are based on no understanding of the available resources (Kullenberg and Porter, 2001). Indeed, to engage with government officials on development budgets, communities and their representatives must know the size of the resource basket, as well as terms of access and conditions of use.

The UNCDF used local artists and communications specialists to engage citizens (and local governments) in the District Development Programme. They produced brochures, cartoons and illustrations to communication design and goals. A high degree of ownership and commitment were attributed to these investments (Kullenberg and Porter, 2001). However, effective communication needs to reflect the literacy and capacity of different audiences. Simply posting notices or holding public meetings is not enough in many contexts. Information needs to be presented in a rapidly understandable form and conveyed through appropriate media. Information campaigns that are poorly conceived or executed can cause unrealistic expectations. Or add confusion to an already complex process. Finally, central ministries must play a key role in ensuring this communication, but may be wary of violating the independence of local governments. However, information is fundamental to accountability. Without it systems of sanctions and political accountability are seriously weakened (Kullenberg and Porter, 2001).

## **5. Conclusion**

Shortcomings in conventional accountability systems are well known, and yet the monitoring of government performance and level of response to public interest is still deemed critical to effective local governance and service delivery. Lack of transparency in budgetary procedures make it especially hard for the electorate to judge government spending records (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001; Healey & Tordoff, 1995). It is evident that while democratic institutions may be a necessary condition of accountability they are not sufficient to guarantee success.

This literature review has been carried out to feed directly into comparative research on local government accountability and citizen participation in decision making, in Kenya and Uganda. This research specifically examines issues of local accountability and participation in the context of budgetary allocations, decision-making about actual resource use and outcomes in terms of benefits, the extent to which the poor benefit from expenditures. In the context of budgetary allocations, it is difficult for officials to present complex financial information in a way that can be understood by the general, and often illiterate, public. However, only when civil society is armed with information can informed debate on allocation of limited resources occur (Folscher et al, 1999). At the same time, more open and strategic public expenditure approach needs support from realistic budgeting, scrutiny and approval from above as well as an open culture of penalty for incompetence or fraud (Healey and Tordoff, 1995). Indeed, transparency, sound public finances, economic success and pro-poor budgeting are inextricably linked (Folscher et al., 1999).

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