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Participation and Accountability

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One of the key arguments in favour of decentralisation is that it can improve participation; as government is 'closer to the people' citizens are more likely, able and empowered to participate in political life and government is therefore held to better account. The resources below consider the impact of decentralisation on political participation and outline key mechanisms to improve participation and accountability at a local level. Several resources focus on the participation of groups who are often excluded from local political processes, in particular women.

Decentralisation and participation

The document below explores the impact of decentralisation on popular participation.

Manor, J., 2003, 'Local Governance', paper prepared for Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
When it works well, democratic decentralisation has many virtues. It almost always stimulates greater popular participation and civil society activity; it also increases transparency and uptake of government services and enhances accountability. Most crucially, strong decentralised systems can make government more responsive. However, it seldom works well, with successful examples being limited to Bolivia, the Philippines, a number of Indian states and a handful of other cases. Nonetheless, this report concludes that in most cases democratic decentralisation does bring improvement to LDCs to some extent.
Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=649

Improving participation

There are various methods of promoting the participation of excluded groups in local governance. They fall under two broad categories:

1. promoting the representation of excluded groups in local government, including in leadership positions, for example via these formal mechanisms:

- Party list quota system: political parties are bound to ensure that a percentage of their candidates are from minority or disadvantaged groups. This mechanism has rarely been used.

- Reserved seats for appointed representatives: a quota for appointed members of minorities or socially disadvantaged groups.

- This mechanism is used in several countries (e.g. Papua New Guinea). It has been criticised, however, for being ineffective in increasing the influence of excluded groups. This is because those appointed often end up being a 'mouthpiece' for those who selected them.

- Reserved seats for elected representatives: used as the basis for quotas in local government elections. This mechanism has also been adopted in several countries (e.g. India, Pakistan and Uganda).

2. promoting the participation of excluded groups in local meetings to discuss planning, budgeting and development projects. This includes activities throughout the project cycle, from planning to implementation to monitoring e.g. participatory budgeting.

These resources explore the design and implementation of these two broad approaches to participation in a development context.

UNDP, 2008, 'Designing Inclusive and Accountable Local Democratic Institutions: A Practitioner's Guide', Regional Initiative – Local Democracy in Asia, UNDP, Thailand

How can fair representation be promoted in societies that are deeply divided along ethnic, religious, caste and class bases? This study from the United Nations Development Programme looks at local democracy in Asia. It argues that evidence from the design of systems for representation and elections in divided societies suggests that an appropriately crafted framework can help nurture the accountability and commitment of political parties, while an inappropriate system can harm the process of democratisation. While focus is often on electoral systems, the choice between direct and indirect representation to higher tiers, the functioning of political parties and other elements usually have a stronger impact on the inclusiveness and accountability of the democratic institutions.
Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3320

Gaventa, J., 2004, 'Strengthening Participatory Approaches to Local Governance: Learning the Lessons from Abroad', Logolink
What mechanisms exist to enable citizens' participation in local government? What strategies could strengthen participatory governance? This paper from the National Civic Review surveys approaches to citizen engagement worldwide and examines the

institutional, legal and political elements necessary to promote participatory governance. It argues that greater citizen engagement can address issues of poverty, social justice and the democratic deficit, and stresses the importance of developing both the voice of citizens and the receptivity of governments.

Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=1993

Wong, S. and Guggenheim, S., n.d., 'Community-driven Development: Decentralisation's Accountability Challenge', The World Bank, Washington
How have community-driven development (CDD) projects contributed to the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms? This paper from the World Bank surveys CDD programmes in Indonesia, Cambodia and the Philippines to assess how far this approach improves accountability, service delivery and regulatory frameworks in local government. It argues that CDD presents great opportunities for enhancing civic participation, state responsiveness and cost-effective service provision, although, as a new development approach, it requires further evaluation.

Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=2000

Logolink, 2004, 'Resources, Citizen Engagements and Democratic Local Governance: A Topic Guide', Prepared for the International Workshop on Resources, Citizen Engagements and Democratic Local Governance, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 5–9 December, 2004
How can citizens become engaged in local budget policies? This guide from Logolink presents practical examples of local social activist engagement and suggests proposals for what can be done in the future. It argues that budgets are a political tool of government and have far-reaching consequences. They should be planned and implemented in ways that are inclusive, that facilitate political debate, transparency and meaningful participation, that ensure efficient implementation and allow governments to be accountable.

Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3361

Women

Several studies note that local government is typically dominated by men, which is likely to lead to the marginalisation of women's concerns and priorities. While the mechanisms outlined above have increased the participation of excluded groups, much of the literature stresses that the participation of women and social disadvantaged groups is still weak. This is often because they lack information about meetings or development projects; lack understanding of planning and budgeting; and/or lack of confidence in speaking out. There is a need for capacity building and training workshops to allow excluded groups to properly participate in local governance meetings.

While efforts to increase the representation of women in office have proved beneficial in places, many obstacles remain that prevent them from either performing well in office, or from being recognised when they do perform well. Many of those elected enter office unprepared, without proper knowledge and skills. Often, women's subservient social position, lack of political experience and expertise and lack of public support undermines their ability to positively impact local government. Further, while representation of women has been effective in breaking taboos and increasing the acceptance of women in the public sphere, there are still persistent perceptions of women as weaker leaders, leading to disapproval regardless of outcomes.

Beall, J., 2005, 'Decentralizing Government and Centralizing Gender in Southern Africa: Lessons from the South African Experience,' United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Occasional Paper 8, Geneva

Decentralisation is often thought of as an important way of increasing women's political participation. How well has this strategy worked in Southern Africa? This paper from the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development reviews the regional issues in Southern Africa through a study of five countries, especially focussing on South Africa. It argues that decentralisation holds real opportunities for women. However, the neo-liberal thrust of decentralisation policies and the tendency of local power holders to retain access to resources and decision-making has undermined women's advancement.
Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=1667

Johnson, D., Kabuchu, H. and Vusiya, S., 2003, 'Women in Ugandan Local Government: The Impact of Affirmative Action', *Gender and Development*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 8–18
Since the mid-1990s, the Ugandan government has introduced legislation to ensure that women are represented on local councils. What has changed as a result of this affirmative action? This article for *Gender and Development* looks at both the positive and negative impact of women's presence in local government. It finds that although there is now greater acceptance of women community leaders, their influence over public decision making remains limited.
Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=913

Duflo, E. and Topalova, T., 2004, 'Unappreciated Service: Performance, Perceptions, and Women Leaders in India', Poverty Action Lab, Boston
How do women leaders of 'reserved' Indian village councils perform in office, and how is their performance perceived? This paper studies the impact on the performance of policy-makers of reserving randomly selected village council leadership positions for women and on voters' perceptions of this performance. Villages reserved

for women leaders have more public goods, and the measured quality of these goods is at least as high as in nonreserved villages. Moreover, villagers are less likely to pay bribes in villages reserved for women. Yet residents of villages headed by women are less satisfied with the public goods received.

Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3353

Accountability

Improving participation and voice in policy-making is insufficient on its own – effective accountability mechanisms are also required to ensure that the voices of those who are encouraged to participate are not ultimately ignored. There are various types of local level accountability mechanisms. Democratic elections are the most obvious form of ensuring accountability as local government officials have to be responsive to local pressures or risk not getting re-elected. Other mechanisms vary and are context specific, for example participatory performance assessments, participatory budget expenditure tracking, report cards for service delivery and regular public meetings between representatives and their electorate.

World Bank Institute, 2005, 'Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in the Asia and Pacific Region', the World Bank Institute Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion Learning Program (CESI), World Bank Institute, Washington DC

What can be learned from social accountability initiatives in the Asia and Pacific region? This World Bank report summarises a review of such initiatives. It finds that social accountability tools are not confined to the public expenditure management cycle, and that initiatives that use advocacy and information strategies are more successful than those that do not. While governments sometimes take the lead in promoting accountability, different groups involved in social accountability mechanisms can link together in advocacy chains to hold the state accountable for pro-poor service delivery. Ultimately, government and civil society must collaborate.

Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3363

Crawford, G., 2009, 'Making Democracy a Reality? The Politics of Decentralisation and the Limits to Local Democracy in Ghana', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* **vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 57–83**

Has decentralisation enhanced local democracy in Ghana? This article from the *Journal of Contemporary Africa Studies* focuses on the relationship between decentralisation and local democracy through a case study of Ghana. Increased democracy through decentralisation has not occurred, and there are significant democratic deficits in decentralised government. These findings suggest that the key to enhanced

local democracy is the strengthening of downward accountability mechanisms, although such reforms will not be easily achieved.
Full summary available in alphabetical appendix or online at:
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3288

Case studies

- Narayana, D., 2005, 'Institutional Change and Its Impact on the Poor and Excluded: The Indian Decentralisation Experience', OECD Development Centre, Working Paper no. 242, OECD, Paris
  http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/16/13/34359085.pdf

- Devas, N. 2002, 'Local Government Decision-making: Citizen Participation Local Accountability, Examples of Good (and Bad) Practice in Kenya', Building Municipal Accountability Series, International Development Department, University of Birmingham, Birmingham:
  http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=229

- Blair, H., 2000, 'Participation and Accountability at the Periphery: Democratic Local Governance in Six Countries', *World Development*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 21–39.
  http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=637

- Work, R., 'The Role of Participation and Partnership in Decentralised Governance: A Brief Synthesis of Policy Lessons and Recommendations of Nine Country Case Studies on Service Delivery for the Poor', UNDP, New York.
  http://www.undp.org/governance/docs/DLGUD_Pub_participationandpart-nershippdf.pdf

Other resources

- Haider, H., 2008, 'Participation of Excluded Groups in Local Governance', GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC):
  http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=468

- GSDRC Topic Guide on Voice and Accountability:
  http://www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides/voice-and-accountability

- Logolink: Learning Initiative on Citizen Participation and Local Governance
  http://www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/index.htm

- The International Budget Partnership: http://www.internationalbudget.org/
  This website contains material on budgeting and accountability and subnational levels and on participatory budgeting.