

Report from

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Participation**

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List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BIG	Basic Income Grant
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CPP	Centre for Public Participation
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DDP	Democracy Development Programme
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EISA	Electoral Institute of Southern Africa
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IMPD	Institute for Multi Party Democracy
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NMA	Nomi, Muthhialu & Associates
SA	South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
US	United States

1. Welcome and Opening of the Conference

Thamsanqa Ngwenya, conference organiser and researcher at the CPP, opened and welcomed presenters and delegates to the first conference on public participation in SA hosted by the CPP. He contextualised the importance of the gathering by highlighting that the focus of the conference was underpinned by the following objectives:

- To strengthen the capacity and engagement of civil society organisations in public participation processes;
- To provide a platform for the various stakeholders (including government, policy implementers and civil society organisations) to share experiences in public participation;
- To stimulate the growth of new partnerships and concretise existing ones between the various stakeholders within the realm of public participation;
- To develop a set of clear guidelines around advocacy, training, best practice models that can foster greater interventions within public participation processes;
- To ensure that the dialogue and practice around public participation includes the voice of the voiceless and the marginalized; and
- To distill a set of research projects and advocacy programmes that can extend and strengthen the process of public participation in South Africa, the region as well as the continent.

The opening session was concluded with a plea from Mr. Ngwenya that the conference should not become another talk. Instead participants should strive to draw lessons (where applicable) from the conference that can be used to inform and strengthen their own work in this field.

2. Keynote Address: Dr. Blade Nzimande

Dr. Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Community Party (SACP), delivered the keynote address, “**Public Participation, Socio-Economic Rights and NEPAD**”. Dr. Nzimande began by locating the conference and its theme in the current circumstances of the international system, namely the invasion of Iraq, the marginalisation of the United Nations, and the increased mobility of the global anti war coalition. He noted that the new security doctrine of pre-emptive war as advocated by the United States, has generated a anti war movement, which has reached global proportions. In his opinion this represented an enhanced form of public participation where people from all parts of the world came together to show their solidarity for humanity even though they were not able to prevent the invasion of Iraq. He went further to suggest that even now after the removal of Saddam Hussein, the mobilisation of testimony in public hearings (both in the US and Iraq) is critical in assessing the validity and legality of the invasion. It within this context of transparency and accountability that Dr Nzimande emphasised the importance of public participation to any democratic order, which should not

be taken granted but instead nurtured and strengthened in the face of adverse conditions.

Against this backdrop, Dr. Nzimande's address covered the following issues:

1. The distinction and relationship between representative and participatory democracy;
2. Defining and seeking a common understanding of, and content to, some of the contemporary concepts and discourse around public participation;
3. NEPAD and the issue of public participation; and
4. Challenges that rise for centres like CPP and how to proceed forward with public participation.

1. Representative and Participatory Democracy

He noted that South Africa's democracy had progressed well in establishing and strengthening a set of formal democratic institutions like NEDLAC, School governing bodies, water committees, ward committees and many other institutions that support public participation in decision-making. Yet, in recognising these institutions, Dr. Nzimande was concerned about the extent to which the aforementioned institutions were being adequately used to enhance public participation. In response, Dr. Nzimande felt that South Africans were becoming complacent about such institutions and not effectively using them to mobilise and canvass the discourse and practice of public participation. For him this remained a critical challenge in the current context of our democracy.

Linked to complacency, was the issue of socio-economic rights. In this regard, Dr. Nzimande emphasised that the discourse of public participation should not be restricted to government only. To this end, he argued that economic power in SA still resides in the hands of the same class forces as under apartheid. Therefore if meaningful change is to take place and an effective political and economic democratic order is to be established then the question of redistribution of resources must be addressed. In this regard, Dr. Nzimande believed that the canvassing of socio-economic rights is a critical factor in the advocacy of public participation. This he argued was crucial given the fact that SA has attained political democracy without economic democracy. Moreover, he noted that it is a critical choice not only facing SA, but one that confronts the continent in the face of deepening poverty, widening gaps between the rich and the poor, rising unemployment, and increased job losses.

Dr. Nzimande went on to emphasise that in the current climate of democratic trends on the continent and in SA it is important for the discourse of public participation to confront the issue of socio-economic rights and economic participation so that the people can effectively participate in any democracy. He added that without the latter, even the most robust and sophisticated public participation institutions are meaningless if the masses are not able to optimise and effectively make use of them. Therefore, for Dr. Nzimande the inclusion of socio-economic rights in the sphere of public participation is

crucial for two reasons, namely, (1) it empowers the masses, and (2) creates an avenue for the economic and social dimensions of democracy to be effectively addressed.

2. Defining Public Participation

The basic argument posited here by Dr. Nzimande was that if we are to grapple and properly contextualise public participation, we also need to seek proper definitions of concepts and measures against which we assess public participation. In this regard, three questions were raised, namely:

- ❖ Who is the “public”?
- ❖ What do mean by Civil Society?, and
- ❖ What is Good Governance?

In responding to each of the questions, Dr. Nzimande highlighted the challenges, which exists in each category. In defining **who is the “public”**, there are definite contradictions that arise over race, class, and gender. In this regard Dr. Nzimande noted that while the public includes the rich, the majority of the public are women, black, workers and the poor and economically marginalized. Therefore when defining the “public” does one exclude the rich because of their access to resources in society? For Dr. Nzimande there is a strong belief that the public should principally focus on the majority of society (including the disabled and youth) who are confronted by unemployment, deepening poverty, and lack of access to accesses. This, in Dr. Nzimande’s opinion, strengthens public participation, and also assists in tackling fundamental challenges and contradictions that exist in society.

When addressing **what is meant by civil society**, Dr. Nzimande argued that the term was useful in a descriptive sense but obscured the fundamental lines of (class, racial, and gender) divisions and inequalities. He cautioned against seeing “civil society” players as equal since “civil society” is also confronted by socio-economic inequalities, which disable them from advancing their own interests. Instead Dr. Nzimande highlighted that the civil society sector is characterised by disproportionate forces concerned more with their own narrow interests and using the goal of public participation to do so. Again Dr. Nzimande emphasised that enhancing effective public participation meant focusing on the workers and poor of society. In other instances, Dr. Nzimande went on to point out, that “civil society” has taken on and assumed diverse forms of opposition to government. This, he believed, was a cover for permanent hostility to government thus ruling out any possibility for co-operation with the state. Dr. Nzimande saw the latter as problematic and a challenge in advancing public participation.

Finally the discourse of good governance on the continent and in developing countries in Dr. Nzimande’s view was heavily influenced by the discourse of the World Bank and IMF. In Dr. Nzimande’s view good governance has become synonymous with multi party democracy. This he argued represented a real challenge since multiparty democracies tended only to embody the competing interests of elites without substantive representation of the

masses. At another level, Dr. Nzimande highlighted that good governance has transformed the nation state to serve the interests of the actors of the global economy through privatisation and liberalisation. For Dr. Nzimande if there is to be genuine public participation then the first encounter would be to invert the current discourse on and practice of good governance so that it comes to mean measures to eradicate poverty, and confront the challenges of underdevelopment.

3. NEPAD and the issue of Public Participation

Dr. Nzimande highlighted two contending camps working in opposition to one another when it came to NEPAD. One is the rejectionist camp, which sees nothing good in NEPAD except for being a begging bowl to the Africa's development partners. While the other is the perfectionist camp, which is completely intolerant and hostile to any criticism of NEPAD and sees such criticisms coming from forces hostile to the continent. Both camps were rejected by Dr. Nzimande simply because he sees NEPAD as an important basis for action which requires engagement on both its strengths and weaknesses.

4. Challenges for the Conference and Public Participation Groups

Dr. Nzimande concluded by posing the following set of challenges that he felt was critical to broadening the debate on enhancing public participation. They were:

- ❖ NEPAD should be mass driven and not only an intergovernmental forum. That it is government driven should not be an excuse to reject it;
- ❖ NEPAD should be driven by self reliance;
- ❖ Need to integrate into the AU civil society forum and ensure that it becomes a critical and effective platform;
- ❖ Need to ensure that the agenda of NGOs and other mass organisations is not set by donors but by ourselves;
- ❖ Research and support work must relate to, and support mass organisation rather than the other way round. Must draw on the experiences from the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles; and
- ❖ Must build a network of mass and NGO organisations in the region and the continent based on solidarity geared towards a vision of liberating ourselves from neo-liberalism and pursuing poverty eradication.

3. PANEL ONE: Public Participation and the African Experience

Prof. Roger Southall (HSRC): The Challenge of Public Participation in Africa

Prof Southall began by highlighting that public participation is a virtue in its own right and a fundamental dimension of democracy. He went on to argue that a healthy democracy is one in which the public actively participates in formal political activities or processes. Before actually commenting on public participation, Prof Southall briefly explored the two competing models of democracy (liberal versus participatory), which have been realized in Africa, and the region. He argued that it was important in understanding how these two models informed public participation.

Liberal Democracy in Africa

In general the experience of liberal democracy in Africa has been dismal. In essence it was a Western import to Africa, introduced by colonial regimes who did not practice what they came to preach in their colonies. The latter had two major aspects:

- Liberal democracy was imported into African societies in which conditions for its existence was barely established. While Western societies were overwhelmingly advanced in industrial, class, and labour relations, African countries were not;
- African rulers (and many intellectuals) identified and associated liberalism with Western imperialism and were uncomfortable with its liberating implications. This resulted in either outright abolition or systematic abuse of the basic freedoms (of opposition, speech, assembly) in country after country in Africa following independence.

Under these circumstances, Southall argues that participation in political processes by the public in Africa was extremely limited. Even where independence was won, public participation was severely inhibited, if not suppressed. In southern Africa, Southall highlights, that the majority of the populace was largely excluded from participation on the basis of race like in South Africa.

However, according to Southall, the changing nature of the international system at the start of the 1990s altered the way liberal democracy was viewed in Africa. The end of the Cold War along with externally induced decline of African economies and internally induced contradictions (notably mass protest against oppression and armed struggle against late colonialism and apartheid in southern Africa) brought about a democratic renewal in the 1990s. Even though the impact of the latter was uneven with states either plunging into civil war and/or collapsing, African states found themselves embracing the basic tenets of liberal democracy via the reconstitutionalisation of liberal rights and most notably, multipartyism and competitive elections.

In this context Southall asked how public participation has fared in Africa amidst the new re-assertion of the liberal democratic formula? He restricted his answer to four major points in which he highlighted the challenges that underpin public participation. These were:

1. *Competitive Electoralism*

In this regard Southall argued that competitive electoralism has become panacea of providing hugely important freedoms of association and expression. For Southall this importance also extended to the fact that almost all regimes, including those, which manifestly abuse power and are authoritarian in nature (like the regime in Zimbabwe) recognise the need for electoral legitimacy by claiming support from their populations as demonstrated by regular fair and free elections. According to Southall the return of electoralism has also provoked a wide ranging and innovative debate about the appropriateness of inherited electoral systems, and embraced a new recognition of the need for fair representation of segments of the population (majorities such as women and minorities such as ethnic groups) in legislatures and state institutions.

But for Southall the practice of electoral democracy has been widely flawed since the results from the many African elections have been hollow victories for ruling parties. He notes that in spite of the freedom by citizens to form political parties to challenge the dominance of the ruling party, this has not made any significant dent on the support that the ruling party enjoys amongst the majority (as in South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia). He goes on to say that where the ruling party enjoys such dominance this can result in arrogance, illiberalism, intolerance of minorities, and reluctance of rulers to render themselves adequately accountable to those who elected them. On the other hand, Southall asserts that, in situations where the ruling party fear that they do not possess the support of the majority, they too resort to suppression of freedoms and manipulation of the electoral game to guarantee their return to office (e.g. KANU in Kenya in 1992 and 1997, ZANU-PF in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2002, and MMD in Zambia in 2001). Yet, Southall, does not believe that decaying regimes can cling to power forever, since their failures or incapacities to rule (especially in the context of economic management) would generate popular oppositions, which can no longer be denied.

2. *Political Representation*

Southall argues that political representation of classes, groups and diverse opinions is central to the idea of liberal democracy, notably through the instrument of political parties. Even though Southall acknowledged the increasing presence of civil society in Africa during the last phase of democracy, he contends that the issue of political representation on the continent is problematic. For Southall, political representation in Africa has been divided along the lines of race (in southern Africa) and ethnicity. Moreover he noted that due to the absence of national unity in many African states, political representation by political parties have tended to represent rival groups (or ethnic coalition) rather than classes. In light of this, political representation had often tended to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

He went on to outline that political parties serve their functions of 'aggregation and articulation' of interests in an imperfect way. He argued that "apart from functioning poorly, intermittently and usually being dominated by their leaders, they have tended to substitute domination and incorporation of groups and diverse opinions for representation". In this regard he highlighted that party women's and youth groups, for instance, have commonly been instruments of 'interest suppression or control' rather than vehicles of 'aggregation and articulation'. In a similar vein, trade union and traditional authorities have been denied their autonomy. In short, Southall noted that ruling parties have attempted to impose their domination upon society, not least by often identifying political opposition with treason.

But Southall acknowledged that in recent years (notably the latest wave of democracy) considerable advances in the arena of political representation and public participation in politics have been made, especially in some societies of Eastern and Southern Africa. In particular he cited Botswana and South Africa as the two cases that were examples of a visible functioning representative democracy. In South Africa he highlighted the existence of National Economic Development and Labour Advisory Council (NEDLAC), which is an attempt to institutionalise the representation of the key interests of government, business, labour and civil society representatives to discuss economic policy. Southall, however, cautioned that such institutions appear threatened by what critics claim to be the emergence of democratic centralism within the internal democracy of the ANC and Tripartite Alliance.

3. Constitutionalism and Citizenship

The re-emergence of liberal democracy in Africa has brought a commitment to constitutionalism and citizenship, which is enshrined in the formation of entrenched Constitutions where political, social and economic freedoms are guaranteed. Yet Southall contends that despite such guarantees, in country after country these basic freedoms have been violated and abused through state violence on government opposition and brutality and torture within institutions of incarceration, that have been protected by judiciaries and other other organs of accountability. According to Southall rights guaranteed by constitutions are either unrealised (notably in the case of women, for even the most advanced African democracies remain highly patriarchal) or systematically denied to certain categories of the population. The inferior status of The San people in Botswana and the fact that "permanent residents" in SA are denied the right to vote are two cases in point.

4. Money and Democracy

In liberal democratic societies the existence of political parties are predicated on the financial contributions by groups or categories of people, who in return for their generosity, either exert overt or covert influence over policy making and implementation or are assured of access to resources. This, for Southall, is the crude reality of the intersection between money and democracy, which has come to characterise contemporary liberal democracies. And where the vast amounts of money that circulates during election, especially in the US, this means that public policy and decisions are for sale to the highest bidder.

In Africa, Southall argues that the realities are starker since the state plays a central role precisely because capitalist markets are less advanced and tend to be export-oriented, highly dependent upon government contracts, and dominated by foreign companies, while the public sector is the major source of employment. Therefore, in this context, the lobbying of state officials by corporations and business interests for contracts and favours which takes place in Europe and America is no less intense in Africa with bribery and all sorts of backhanders together with corporate funding of political parties (overwhelmingly of those in power) coming to play a significant role in decision-making regarding the allocation of resources by government. Of course such deals, according to Southall, are hidden from the public eye and are designed to unfairly advantage ruling parties and enrich well-placed individuals.

In short, Southall argues that the intersection of money and democracy highlights the elite nature of liberal democracy where the decisions made and policies pursued overwhelmingly favour the interest of the rich over the poor. Moreover, the lobbying of government by elites becomes much more salient politically than participation by a “public” who although able to provide political input (via the media, parliamentary committees etc) lacks the financial clout and otherwise only possesses limited veto power in the form of the vote, strikes and demonstrations.

At this point Southall turned his attention to participatory democracy. In this regard he asked a complex yet thought provoking question: if the practice of liberal democracy is highly flawed, does participatory democracy provide a realistic alternative?

Southall responded by highlighting that advocates of participatory democracy see politics as being a continuous activity that is not confined to voting in elections at regular intervals. Instead they argue that decision-making should be taken away from the bureaucratic state and handed to smaller communities that will enable individuals and groups to produce laws and policies directly related to their needs. Moreover, advocates of the democratic model believe that participation could be facilitated by such devices as referenda, and other means of ensuring close consultation between government and people. Of course all of this is based on the belief that human nature is led by the notion of General Will. Southall notes that contemporary theories of participation believe that when General Will is realised individuals and groups would enforce sentiments of public spirit and morality in the process of democratic consultation and interaction. And that such processes are deemed to be a public good and in the broader interest of society.

Southall highlights that there are numerous difficulties with this model. These are:

- If selfish agendas cannot be curbed by General Will then the outcome will more likely be “Will of All”, which will no doubt perpetuate divisions between majorities and minorities;

- Elites will continue to emerge under a participatory system as much as in other political systems. This means that the widening of opportunities for political participation will tend to favour those who enjoy or who have a particular talent for participating. Therefore participating in politics for selfish sectional interests are likely to outweigh those, which are defined by a longer term, public interest.

In Southall's final analysis we somehow return to the importance of the central idea in a liberal democracy, namely constitutionalism which imbibes a separation of powers, the rule of law, judicial review and so on. This in Southall's opinion is critical for curbing illiberal excess and to institutionalise the moral values, which guide a democracy. Yet he argues that in Africa the idea of 'participatory democracy' retains a powerful hold upon the popular imagination, especially in southern Africa simply because of the widespread disillusionment with the limited returns to ordinary people of electoral democracy. This can be seen in the following ways:

- Domination by ruling parties which nullify parliamentary checks and balances;
- Diminished accountability by parliamentarians to their electorates because power is concentrated in the hands of party leaderships;
- Weakness of opposition parties to constitute "alternative governments";
- The centralization of power in the hands of presidents promotes autocracy, elite rule, corruption and state profligacy.

In light of these failures, Southall points out that some theorists, like Ken Good who, argue that African societies would be better placed if they adopt a participatory democracy. But the question remains is whether such an ideal can succeed in the current realities of the continent?

Southall concluded his presentation by sketching the way forward for participation and democracy. To this end he argued that to move beyond the impasse between the oligarchical nature of liberal democracy and the utopian dimensions of a participatory democracy would be to develop and build a set of ideas for a conception of democracy which:

- Recognizes the fundamental importance of the number of liberal tenets like the constitution which can guarantee and protect rights, a diversity of power centers within and outside the state and mechanisms to promote competition and debate about alternative political platforms;
- Demands that state officials and political representatives shall be held to continuous and systematic account;
- Restricts the influence of monied interests by setting unambiguous and strict limits to political party funding;
- Ensures societal conditions that facilitates political participation;
- Recognizes that grossly unequal distribution of material resources should be disallowed in order to create conditions for political equality;

- Understands that clear limits should be put on the extent of liberty which citizens can enjoy;
- Accepts that centralized state institutions are necessary devices for enacting legislation, enforcing rights, promulgating new policies and containing inevitable conflicts between particular interests.

To this end Southall argued that such a conception of participation and democracy is necessary given the realities of the world we live in. According to Southall the widening gaps in wealth and power between the globally rich and strong and the globally poor and weak are increasingly endangering our survival.

2. Claude Kabemba (EISA): To What Extent Does Democracy Encourage, Engender and Enhance Citizen Participation: Comparison of Relevant Case Studies

In his presentation Kabemba provided a telescope of the major developments in the Southern African region around democratic trends. His excursion pointed to the emergence of political liberalisation, pluralism and multiparty democracy that replaced political centralisation and one party states at the dawn of the 1990s. This change in the status quo meant that citizen participation was somehow ensured in the new dispensations. But the real question, which Kabemba interrogated, was whether this aspiration of most Africans has been achieved. He argued that the answer to this question would be found in his presentation, which would cover four broad areas, namely:

1. A conceptual framework for understanding public participation;
2. An assessment of the form and content of the current political liberalisation (or democratisation) in SADC in 1990;
3. The interface between Democracy and Participation; and
4. NEPAD and Public Participation

1. Conceptual Framework

Kabemba stressed that public participation is the cornerstone of any democratic system since the latter revolves around the people. But public participation was also critical to societal development. He identified 4 types of citizen-government interaction:

- ❖ Citizens' action which is initiated and controlled by citizens for purposes that they determined like lobbying, public demonstration, and protests;
- ❖ Citizen involvement, which is initiated and controlled by government to improve and/or gain support for decisions, programs and services like

- means of public hearings, consultation with advisory committees and attitudinal surveys;
- ❖ Electoral participation, initiated by government according to law to elect representatives; and
- ❖ Obligatory participation, which involves mandatory responsibilities of citizens, like taxation, and military services

In Southern Africa, Kabemba noted that electoral participation remains the most vivid and crucial form of public participation. Moreover he noted that there is a moral basis of public participation in administrative decision-making. He argued that the recent upsurge in interest in public participation in both developed and less developed countries is based on the following democratic values:

- ❖ The value of equality that refers to a democratic principle where all citizens should have equal opportunity to exert influence through political activity if they choose to do so;
- ❖ Sovereignty which refers to the notion of government as a creation of the citizenry rather than independent entity; and
- ❖ Quality of citizenship that refers to the idea that a politically educated citizen is able to exercise judgement, contribute to debate about polity is aware of societal problems, and of the difficulties in finding solutions to them. According to Kabemba's analysis, proponents of public participation believe the latter counters the sense of powerlessness felt amongst the poor and minority segments of the population.

2. Political Liberalization in SADC

Kabemba highlighted that the spread of democracy at the beginning of the 1990s saw democratisation take root in southern Africa and the continent in the form of multipartyism. He argued that the democratic changes were brought about through pressure from above (the international community) and below by the civil society groups in spite of their weaknesses. He highlighted that in most SADC countries the participation of citizens in the choice of their leaders is a decade old with competitive politics relatively entrenched. The question Kabemba raised in this regard was whether this constituted the strengthening of democracy in the region. He answered by saying that if the formal definition of democracy was applied where democratic institutions like periodic elections, protection of basic rights, free speech and assembly were entrenched, this would mean democracy has been strengthened. But is this enough? In Kabemba's opinion people's participation should not end with voting only, which appears to be the case in SADC. Their participation should also extend to and include involvement in the process of making laws and policies as well as their implementation. This is because citizens have constitutional rights that allow them to be involved in these processes in all spheres of government.

He highlighted that in SADC there are two electoral systems which dominant, namely Proportional Representation and the First Past the Post system. He argued that the former (PR system) was favoured by SA to achieve unity but was criticised for its lack of accountability and effective participation while the

latter, although limited in their representation, seemed more favourable for greater level of participation and accountability of MPs to their constituencies. But is this case in SADC?

3. Interface between Democracy and Participation

Kabemba noted that while the right to vote is seen as the first primordial act of participation, the question that needs to be asked is to what extent this right has translated into credible participation of citizens in the day to day activities of states in SADC? And legislation alone does not ensure people's participation in governance. A general observation by Kabemba is that despite the achievements in multiparty democracy, elections have not translated into citizen participation in state affairs between elections. It seems that citizen participation in SADC is limited to the ballot box with very little involvement in policy formulation and implementation. He also noted that political culture impacts on citizen participation.

In general, Kabemba noted that the following factors that public participation in the region:

- ❖ **Elitist Democracy:** competitive politics in SADC is still dominated by elites, which excludes the majority of the population from active participation in political processes;
- ❖ **Inefficiency of parliamentary politics:** The adoption of First-Past-the-Post system has limited public participation because MPs have been unable to connect with constituencies;
- ❖ **External Influence:** the pressure from outside to adopt particular policies like the poverty alleviation strategy (which was drafted by experts from the World Bank and IMF) and other social policies do not take into consideration of the voice of the people or how their issues could be incorporated into such processes. For some theorists this indicates the emergence of choiceless democracies in SADC where the citizens have to accept the conditionalities of policies concocted by international technocrats;
- ❖ **Weak Civil Society Groups:** even though civil society has contributed to the emergence of multiparty political pluralism in the region, they are still marginalized from major political and economic decisions concerning matters concerning the people. Civil society organisations are still vilified in the region since their public policy alternatives and opposition to government initiatives are perceived as a threat to the state;
- ❖ **Focus of Democracy on Individual than on Group Rights:** by focusing on individual rights the poor as a group and citizens are neglected and ignored by governments. Again individual rights tend to supercede the rights of groups in a liberal democracy.
- ❖ **Weak Local Government structures:** such structures experience difficulties in establishing new participation norms, building co-operation among groups, integrating untrained staff, and rigidities in budgets and programmes. Also SADC governments have shown very little commitment to local government as an end in itself.

4. NEPAD and Public Participation

Kabemba acknowledged that NEPAD was a noble vision but had a controversial beginning. He noted that the marginalisation of people from the framework was a weakness on the part of the architects of NEPAD. He argued that the people should have been given a central position in the framework followed by an assessment of the capacities that exist on the continent to implement the plan. Instead of identifying the growth targets first and then working backwards to actual capacities available on the continent to achieve these targets.

Conclusion

Kabemba concluded by raising a few practical issues around public participation. He noted that a democracy enhances public participation, but asked whether in reality this was so. He went on to highlight that the continent needs to empower the people and find solutions for their problems by adopting a political approach that creates people power directed at building a common good. Such participation requires commitment and struggle as well as an organic civil society, which interacts with people on the ground, if it is to be meaningful. He acknowledged that democracy and public participation are indivisible if good governance is to be nurtured and enhanced. To this end he emphasised that the following must be entrenched to serve the people:

- ❖ Rule of Law
- ❖ Responsiveness of Institutions
- ❖ Consensus amongst groups
- ❖ Effectiveness and Efficiency
- ❖ Accountability
- ❖ Strategic Vision

He highlighted that participation cuts across all these characteristics ensuring that people have a voice, directly or indirectly, in decision-making.

Respondent: Dumisane Hlophe (Sunday Times)

Mr Hlophe began by applauding the speakers on the informative presentations that raised critical issues around the experience of public participation in the region and on the continent.

He then proceeded to raise several crucial issues, which he felt needed to be interrogated if a genuine understanding of public participation was to be attained.

His first response was to Dr. Nzimande who attacked the media for its liberal stance. Dr. Nzimande accused the media of singing only **liberal ideas** and not reflecting the **diverse ideological spectrums** that exist in society. Hlophe countered this statement by asking who is responsible for ensuring that this diversity of ideological views gets reflected in the media: is it the **media** or **political actors**? Hlophe said it is only when the political actors begin to articulate this diverse ideological spectrum that the media can reflect the

divergent political and economic ideas. He went on to say that in SA this was a critical debate especially given that **The Left** within the **Tripartite Alliance** was guilty of not articulating this diversity. He stressed that the media can only reflect the debates emerging from the ideological discourse but is not the starting point of ideas.

His second response was to Prof. Southall and Mr. Kabemba where he argued that both speakers missed a basic starting point in their presentation, namely **the role of the state**. He argued that public participation implies centrality of the state and therefore how the state operates, what are the dynamics that influence it and so on must be understood. In this regard Hlophe highlighted two points:

- ❖ **Governments are technical institutions**, which are built on **knowledge and expertise**. It is here that the assumption is made about the public being able to make a **unitary impact** on the state through public participation. But the **public is not a homogenous entity**. Instead it is made up of various groups, classes with diverse interests who compete with each other to exert their influence and control over the government. Therefore we need to ask which **public are we talking about?**
- ❖ Today, instead of democracy **we have “expertocracy”** which is based on **rule by expertise**. The assumption here is that those who are seen to be knowledgeable and the experts must rule. Yet where does public participation fit in this setting? It would appear that there is a **need for the people** to be capacitated. But again the question is which public?

His third response was deepening the understanding of public participation in the context of Kabemba’s presentation. In this regard Hlophe made four points:

- ❖ **Public Participation** at the **level of government** can be found in **service delivery programmes like The Masakhane Programme**.
- ❖ **Electoral Participation** where citizens choose and elect their leaders.
- ❖ **Obligatory Participation** like **paying taxes** is another **form of public participation**.
- ❖ Public Participation in the form of **Public-Private Partnerships**.

Hlophe concluded by raising a critical, which he saw as negatively impacting on public participation:

- ❖ Part of the problem that confronts public participation in Africa and the region is the **issue of messiah/liberation governments**. The idea of governments who stay in power under the guise of **“we have freed you”** leads to the **people internalising such sentiments**. The result is that the **citizenry becomes reliant and totally dependent on the government even for their economic liberalization**. This kind of attitude becomes destructive in the long term because people fail to realise that they also have a role to play in the improvement of their political, economic and social conditions. This has negative

connotations for public participation. But it also creates a backlash when the government is unable to fulfil these expectations of delivery of socio-economic resources. This is where the citizenry could become belligerent against their governments.

Discussion

Dr. Nzimande responded to some of Hlophe's assertion in the following way/s. Dr. Nzimande acknowledged that the role of the state is critical in the sphere of public participation. But countered that today the analysis of the state is lacking in depth. He went on to disagree with Hlophe's analysis of the messiah government theory by arguing that this was a bit too strong. He also did not believe that failure on the part of the government to deliver socio-economic services could transpire into dissent by the people against the state.

Other points and comments from the discussion are as follows:

- ❖ **Access and Resources:** Whose voice gets heard and do people get to have a voice in the media? Is it only those with access to resources that have their voices heard? Moreover questions were raised about how current debates are being articulated and whether they are effectively communicated to the relevant stakeholders?
- ❖ **Effectiveness of the channels for public participation:** Here concern was raised about the effectiveness of such channels and whether those in power were listening to what was being said. Furthermore, to whom is parliament and government accountable if they are not responding adequately to such channels?
- ❖ It was emphasised that the inclusion of the poor and illiterate in the discussion of public participation was crucial because it was these people who were most affected by policy decisions. There was an urgent call that such conferences must make special allowances to incorporate people from the grass root level so that they are given a space to share their experiences.
- ❖ A concern was raised that the language of the first panel was too academic and over the top of ordinary people to understand the content. The language appeared to dislodge people and exclude people from the debate.
- ❖ There was a call for an independent study of electoral processes to be conducted that would investigate and examine which system entrenches mechanisms of accountability and transparency as well as enhances public participation. Moreover it was emphasised that the electoral process is an interactive process and not just about delivery from one side.

- ❖ The role of the media should not be confined to just communicating the views of the elite or those with access to resources. It should strive to reflect balanced views.
- ❖ The hypocrisy of global/multilateral institutions that tends to set the agenda and determines which countries are democratic and which are not must be exposed. Must be able to ask the tough question: who defines Southern Africa's agenda?
- ❖ There was a call for the space to be created so that realities of public participation can be interrogated, especially questions around how the disabled are accommodated in sphere of public participation. Are public participation advocates, including government, receptive to the needs of the disabled?
- ❖ Lastly there was plea from the participants for the conference not to become another talk shop and that academics must recognise the realities of society in respect of public participation.

4. PANEL TWO: Civil Society and Public Participation

Dr. Ashwin Desai (DSF): Understanding the Importance of Civil Society in Promoting Public Participation: Analysing Achievements and Challenges

Dr. Desai began with a bold statement, which questioned the notion of democracy. In fact Desai doubted the existence of democracy in the world, which in his view was informed by the events that are currently sweeping the world like the situation in Iraq, the burgeoning of US imperialism, and the intra ethnic and tribal conflict that is prevalent in the largest democracy, India. From this brief introduction he questioned the ability of democracy to address the challenges found in society.

Desai continued to highlight that the presence of public participation in SA seems to be taking on a militant form in response to the changing nature of class relations in a post apartheid state. He highlighted that the changing nature of the class forces in society, which has been influenced by the macroeconomic policy of GEAR, has led to the emergence of a black bourgeoisie and corporate class, who have access to resources. Yet the majority of those outside of this class dynamic are struggling to survive in the face of rising unemployment, high cost of living and lack of access to service delivery. Such people are what Desai terms "The Poores" who are economically marginalized. Therefore in the face of such adversity, Desai asks what kind of public participation do these people get involved in, and what kinds of networks do they form. In response, Desai outlines that the illegal water and electricity reconnections, the rent and rate boycotts and so on have become a form of public participation by those that have been excluded from access to resources and services. Moreover this kind of participation has evolved into a network where people have begun to train one another in illegal reconnections. In essence The Poores engage in public participation that challenges the prevailing economic and social paradigm, but is also one that causes instability in society.

He raised other issues regarding the role of NGOs speaking on behalf of communities. In this regard Desai questioned whether NGOs were really aware of what the needs of the communities were and whether their prescriptions in addressing such needs were appropriate. Sometimes, in Desai's opinion, these organisations had very little connectivity with the people and were part of the problem rather than the solution. He concluded that social movements were becoming more confrontational and that there was a need to re-examine policy engagements.

Respondent: Dr. Chris Landsberg (CPS)

Dr. Landsberg began by refuting Dr. Desai's assertion about the notion of democracy. Landsberg claimed that he has no problem with the notion of democracy and that Desai's presentation was a bold one, which could be considered risky in certain circumstances. In responding to Desai, Landsberg argued that unless we take seriously the issues raised in the presentation,

then democracy would be threatened in the long term. In this context, he noted that the socio-economic challenges must be addressed.

Landsberg disputed Desai's claim that as long as democracy is controlled by elites, the majority are going to become anarchic. Landsberg countered this statement by highlighting that democracy should be appreciated for the inherent values it espouses. He goes on to substantiate that where the difficulties emerge is when democracy is equated with economic prosperity. He notes that a distinguish must be made between democracy and prosperity and that we must ask the question that if democracy is the worst form of government, then surely it is better than others. Moreover he contends that just because democracy has not been set up to deal with the socio-economic challenges, this does not mean that it cannot. He noted that the fundamental problem with policies like GEAR is that the people do not have a stake in them.

Another problem cited by Landsberg was the fact that the space for critical engagement or dialogue in the decision making process which directly affected the lives of the people was limited. Part of this dilemma, Landsberg highlighted, was due to the intra party democratic problems of the ruling elite. But this situation was also aggravated by the NGO sector that has positioned themselves as the voice of the people without sufficiently being connected to the people. In this regard Landsberg was concerned whether the space being created by NGOs was another form of organised elites speaking on behalf of the people. He cautioned that unless the space for policy engagement was created wherein people can participate, NGOs will be more of the problem.

Discussion and Comments

The discussion opened by raising concern about whether socio-economic issues and democracy are separable. SA was cited as an example of a democracy where the gap between the rich and poor was widening gaps. The speaker went on to say that if the people do not benefit from democracy then they do not have it.

The discussion proceeded to questions of promoting best practice around public participation, and enhancing the voice of the voiceless (like those of women) in fora on public participation so that experiences are shared. The gender dimension was particularly emphasised since it was noted that men and women share different experiences in the realm of public participation. Also raised in this context was: what does the politics of difference mean for participation?

It was also brought to the attention of the forum that a clear understanding of democracy needs to be achieved for public participation to succeed. In this context it was mentioned that democracy should not be measured in isolation of education. Moreover the discussions highlighted that relations with rural based communities and those in government were lacking. It was asserted that this detachment was because control measures that evaluate whether acts of parliaments and structures enhance the prospects of participation by

rural communities are lacking. To rectify the situation it was recommended that evaluation mechanisms should be set up and that the modalities specifically aimed at promoting public participation should be simplified so that it reaches the (rural) people.

It was asserted that there are interventions above and below the ground aimed at the promotion of public participation that specifically target input into the decision making process. The question raised was whether the views of the people from such interventions and structures are influencing decision-making. The impression was that such input was not reflected in the white papers that were being produced in parliament or the acts that were passed by government. To this end, there was urgency to recognise that there exists a difference between participation and decision-making. There was also a call for another form of public participation, which can influence the norms and values within organisations. This was seen as vital in creating honest and accountable organisations where democratic principles are consolidated.

Finally the discussions concluded with two controversial statements. One was that we are dealing with a quasi democracy. The criticism was that the procedures of a democracy exist but the substance thereof is lacking. The second was that SA offers an interesting model of public participation in spite of its difficulties and that maybe it could be a model to export to the continent.

Responses from Presenters

Dr. Desai responded to some of the issues. He started off by cautioning that the debate on public participation must not slide into anti-intellectualism. He was also flippant about exporting the SA model to the continent. In this regard he countered that SA is already doing this through the corporate sector where it is investing and selling SA products like beer in African markets. Moreover, he contended that SA capital has become mobile in Africa and that the danger was the export of the capitalist model. He also raised another question about the kind of public participation that exists for the aged, and pensioners whose pensions are less than the rents, service fees and so on that they have to pay? He ended by saying that the kind of vision needed for participation is to fight so that the issues and problems can come to fore.

Dr. Landsberg responded by asking whether the pressure to ensure that public participation is present in developing countries is also evident and established in donor countries. He was sceptical of the level of public participation in the established democratic societies abroad. Moreover he asked how seriously do we take democratic pluralism. He argued that the elite settlement in 1994 in SA defined a sense of elite participation in the country thereafter. He agreed that elites appear to enjoy greater participation. Nevertheless he argued that authorities should not close the space of activists lobbying for increased participation.

The session ended with participants agreeing that greater discussion was needed on the role of women and the media in public participation.

5. COMMISSIONS

5.1. Commission One: Government and Public Participation: Opportunities and Models for Effective Engagement

The commission began with a video entitled “Linking the Village to the Local”, which was a project funded by the British Development Agency, DFID. It was carried out by a group of consultants called Khanya – Managing Rural Change. The project was designed to highlight and examine sustainable livelihoods in rural areas by understanding how the process operates from the micro level (i.e. village level) up to the macro (national) level. In addressing the issue of sustainable livelihoods, the architects of the project saw two focus areas, namely 1) the planning system and 2) service delivery. The project planners focused on the planning system, which was seen as the centre of power through which service delivery could be improved and thereby lead to enhanced sustainable livelihoods for rural based communities. In short the video was to provide participants with a particular model of public participation.

The model adopted by the consultants in the project was called the Community Planning Process, which is based on a four-country study. The underlying basis of the model was not only to encourage people to become involved in the planning system but also to strengthen the linkages between the communities and local and provincial governments. The principles of CPP were:

- Focus on poor people
- Systems must be realistic
- Systems must be integrated

Discussion

It opened with a series of questions on the Community Planning Process model. These included:

- ❖ How is performance measured on both sides of the model i.e. at the community level and from the local government level?
- ❖ What is it that government is trying to do at the provincial or national legislature in terms of improving sustainable livelihoods?
- ❖ What is the effectiveness of the model? What about the experiences in the other countries where the study is being conducted?
- ❖ How are groups or structures empowered within the context of the model?

The consultant responded by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the model:

Strengths

- ❖ Tried and tested tool.
- ❖ Vulnerable people were targeted.

- ❖ Linked people to the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and resource allocation of the local government authorities, which is seen as the mechanism to improve livelihoods at the local level.

Weaknesses

- ❖ Model needs to be strengthened in terms of capacity building.

The discussions became more broadly focussed on the public participation in general, which at periodic intervals also referred to the video. These are summarised as follows:

Challenges

- ❖ What levels of awareness exist for the public to know that there are public participation channels that enable them to participate effectively?
- ❖ What impact does participation have on the outcomes of policy processes like the budget?
- ❖ How do NGOs and CBOs address the issue of political conditionality, illiteracy in rural areas when promoting public participation?
- ❖ Is there sufficient capacity in government to cope with public participation?
- ❖ How is public participation defined? What is the objective of Public participation?
- ❖ How do the disabled access public participation channels effectively? Are the needs of the disabled adequately catered for in such structures in terms of accessing information?
- ❖ Who is the public?
- ❖ How can real partnerships between government and the NGO/CBO sector be forged when more often than not both sides accuse each other of malpractices? Can solutions be achieved in such a hostile climate?
- ❖ Government is inaccessible.
- ❖ Who are the decision-makers?

General Points and Recommendations

- ❖ Where public participation has been successful at the local level, these positive initiatives must be made more public by the media in their reporting. This can help to replicate similar initiatives in other areas.
- ❖ Public education must become an integral part of public participation, which at present is missing in the debate. This is because public education educates communities and the general public on how to participate effectively.
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation is urgently needed to measure whether public participation is taking place and how effective are the output. The important question here was who is responsible for ensuring this.
- ❖ Emphasis to re-examine the broader issues in government especially development and the neo-liberal economic policy.

- ❖ Ensure that government structures has appropriate systems in place to accommodate public participation, especially in the context of procedural systems
- ❖ Must ensure that the space for critical engagement is created and strengthened
- ❖ Must understand the different contexts of public participation i.e. public participation for fulfilling a legal obligation, public participation for effective service delivery, public participation for improving plans and services and public participation for empowerment.
- ❖ More resources are needed to ensure that public participation is enhanced through texts, radio, and other way/s which also incorporate the needs of the disabled.
- ❖ Consultation processes in parliament needs to be long term so that the necessary space is created for engagement.
- ❖ If poor people want to be reached by the government and NGOs then the first step is to integrate the two concepts of public participation and rural areas.
- ❖ Government needs to be made more accessible and interact with the people, especially outside of the cities through radios and imbizos
- ❖ Recognition that there are different mechanisms and levels of public participation depending on what it is that people are hoping to achieve. At grassroot level people are striving for better access to resources and service delivery like housing, employment. This informs the way these communities engage with local authorities. Therefore for effective participation at the community level with local government there needs to be greater capacitation for interaction.
- ❖ Government processes and public participation can be enhanced if:
 - ✓ Real partnerships are forged with key stakeholders who have the space but also the gravitas to engage in processes critically and effectively.
 - ✓ Current public participation processes are strengthened and brought to the attention of the public instead of reinventing the wheel.

5.2. Commission Two: Civil Society and Public Participation

This commission began with a presentation by Black Sash on their Basic Income Grant (BIG) strategy. The presentation highlighted how Black Sash engaged with BIG:

- ❖ Formed a coalition of groups across a variety of sectors that were interested in BIG and wanted to engage with government on the strategy by making submissions on the policy.
- ❖ Biggest challenge was trying to persuade government to give them the space to do so and to get the relevant government structures and departments to engage with the coalition.
- ❖ Managed to succeed by:

- ✓ Engaging relevant government departments and structures in a consultative forum
- ✓ Lobbied various stakeholders who had a vested interest and could make a strategic impact on the process
- ✓ Took advantage of international forums to lobby or advertise and get the issues around BIG noticed
- ✓ Built internal capacity by broadening the issues through FAQs, fact sheets, and having the relevant data available
- ✓ Conducted endless research on the subject
- ✓ Use the information to assess the impact that BIG would have on the livelihoods of people.

Discussion

The discussion raised issues in respect of the presentation, general challenges that confront CSOs in the context of public participation and a broad set of questions and recommendations. It is summarised as follows:

- ❖ The link between policy and deliverables is a critical interface between people accessing the benefits of a good policy, namely deliverables, and a policy that meets the needs of the people. An urgent was issued for civil society actors involved in public participation to monitor and assess whether this link between a good policy and people accessing the deliverables is being realized on the ground. It was also emphasised that the role of the CSOs in public participation should also concentrate on issuing a report card on the successes and failures of service delivery. In addition, CSOs should also focus on building capacity for engagement as well as facilitating the exchange between themselves and government.
- ❖ The question of access was also mentioned not only in the context of deliverables but also in the realm of access to information, which should not only be available to the “expert organisations”.
- ❖ The issue of the voice of the voiceless was raised as a critical inquiry into who is this voice of the voiceless? And does this voice articulate the interests of those they representing? Whose interests are being represented? Can communities play this role themselves? The discussion here referred to issues of defining who is the public.
- ❖ A caution was issued that civil society is fragmented and that different organisations and individuals are doing things in different spaces. This fragmentation must be recognised since it generates an understanding that civil society cannot achieve everything; there are limits to what it can achieve.
- ❖ A critical question was raised as to why does civil society want to play a role in public participation and where did they get this mandate from? Also raised in this context was questions over who has the mandate over the people is it the political parties or NGOs representing the needs of the people.
- ❖ It was emphasised that it was the responsibility of the people to revive and rehabilitate street committees, which can used to strengthen our democracy.

- ❖ In recognising the fragmentation of civil society it must also be acknowledged that civil society is heterogeneous in composition, structure and affiliations. Some are aligned to political institutions and others are not. Question is how do we define civil society? Does this include the business or private sector? Who is excluded?
- ❖ Noted that the media needs to be transformed so that civil society can be given the space to make strategic interventions publicising its work, forums, and agenda. In other words the civil society must be given the space within the media to have its voice heard.
- ❖ Another critical issue that was raised related to the structure and status of civil society in Africa. It was highlighted that generally civil society structures in Africa are weak, and almost non-existent. Therefore the concern was that we cannot speak of democracy and public participation in such societies where either civil society was weak or lacking. The immediate issue was to address how civil society can be strengthened in such contexts before talking about how civil society can enhance public participation.
- ❖ Need to interrogate how civil society can become more effective in the sphere of public participation.
- ❖ A critical concern raised was whether CSOs were becoming an organisation of organised elites and that their role and function should be evaluated.
- ❖ Questions were also raised on how solidarity amongst CSOs can be enhanced and in what way/s CSOs can add value to their work. In this context it was noted that CSOs must be innovative and creative in their roles.
- ❖ The co-optation of CSO officers into government posed a real threat to stability of CSOs.
- ❖ CSOs need to confront their own power structures and identity issues if they are to be effective in the work.
- ❖ CSOs were in competition with each other over limited resources. This contestation shifts capacity, interests, and the role of CSOs.
- ❖ CSOs need to transfer their tools and experience to CBOs so that the latter is empowered. Concern raised here was whether they (CSOs) would still have a space to exist or would they want to?
- ❖ CSOs must ensure that the proceedings of the conference are communicated to the communities that are they representing and who could not afford the conference fee. This would be valuable, as it would indicate that something more is taking than just discussions.

5.3. Commission Three: Public Private Partnerships

Shaun Mackay, from CPS, gave a brief presentation on *The Role of Business and the Donor Community in the Facilitation of Public Participation*. He highlighted that public participation should be based upon:

- ❖ Transparent management which generates support from the public
- ❖ Public knowledge and concerns
- ❖ Sustainability of decision-making

He went on to say that public participation should be present in the design, execution and evaluation of policy tools. He then highlighted three sets of proposals related to public participation. These are as follows:

1. Proposals related government policies and programmes for public participation:
 - ❖ Generate effective policy for public participation at the state level. Identify and develop different mechanisms and methods for public participation at various phases of decision-making.
 - ❖ Improve technical capacity for public participation by strengthening public knowledge – here the role of the private sector and donors are critical.
 - ❖ Authorities should give timely, constant information throughout the decision-making process.
 - ❖ Provide technical and financial resources for participatory processes (including donors and the private sector).
 - ❖ Provide public funding to communities affected by a project to contract technical, legal, and training resources (including donors and businesses).
 - ❖ Promote and undertake early participation processes.

2. Proposals to strengthen public participation deals with the linkages between actors:
 - ❖ Generate mechanisms to create trust among the different actors.
 - ❖ Generate trust between the State, public, and businesses
 - ❖ Generate a culture of participation
 - ❖ Generate public indicators in projects of the impact of likely decisions
 - ❖ Generate ways and spaces to exchange experiences, for example through disclosure or essentially through dissemination

3. Proposals to strengthen citizen participation refers to strengthening civil society:
 - ❖ The State, Business and Donors should generate mechanisms to support social organizations, legal, and financing mechanisms
 - ❖ The Government should contribute to generating participatory values.
 - ❖ Civil society itself should generate instruments and resources independently to become stronger.

Mackay then shared a few thoughts on the potential of Business and Donors in facilitating public participation.

Business has its own lobbying and advocacy officers whose reach extends to the legislative and executive. This allows the business community access to obtain timely, relevant and useful information, which informs their lobby and advocacy strategy. Moreover they are well resourced, understand the formal

political environment, have the ability to leverage influence (by building personal relationships) with powerful, influential and key decision-makers. It is here that the caveat for them to provide real assistance beyond the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility exists. They can do this by providing real community enhancement by making investments in the communities where they trade, provide services or do their core business. What is needed is social development support that businesses and donors can provide.

He argued that businesses and donors can do very well in following as an example, Public Outreach in conjunction with Government, as well as informing, assisting, and involving people in significant public issues. The Poor in particular and community members in general often struggle to find and understand reliable information on policy issues that affect their future. Therefore, through facilitation of public meetings, extensive media appearances and public speaking, technical assistance, and electronic and print publications, or by funding them, business and donors can play a crucial role in enhancing public participation, and also advancing community empowerment and social development.

Discussion

The discussion can be summarised as follows:

- ❖ Is this kind of partnership desirable and how does it impact on public participation?
- ❖ How does this kind of partnership impact on weak states? Does it address the issue of weak states? Is the market seen as a solution? Can the market address issues of inequality or does it perpetuate it? It was noted that in SA the issues around deracialising the economy still remained a controversial debate. Since progress on the latter has been slow in SA we have a dual economy based on a white rich versus black poor. It was suggested that business could redress this situation through black economic employment, and thereby facilitate and enhance engagement and participation of the majority in the economy.
- ❖ However BEE was criticised for being elitist driven. There was a greater need to obtain public input on such strategies aimed at equalizing society. This was also reflected in Africa where more often than not public participation was elitist driven because it was those who have resources that can participate. Again it was emphasised that the majority needs to be empowered and it here that donors and business can make a contribution.
- ❖ Suggested that an alliance be formed between business sector and the poor. This could help facilitate skills training and also allow the voice of the poor to be heard more directly, instead of relying on NGOs acting as their voice.
- ❖ A pro-poor agenda was critical to pursue, especially in SA where such a policy seems lacking. A platform debating this agenda could be formed. GEAR was not a pro-poor agenda. The people instead of NGOs must set the pro poor agenda.

- ❖ More space in institutions like NEDLAC must to be created for the participation of people from the ground. These institutions are lacking the voice of the people from the ground.
- ❖ Must recognise that within the context of social redress and upliftment one of the specific problems experienced by business is the lack of skilled and semi-skilled workforce. SMEs must be given the necessary information to address the shortage of skilled workforce and made aware of training programmes that cover this. Government must also promote the existence of funds that cover the costs of training programmes, like the Skills Levy Act and how business can access them.
- ❖ There was a general consensus that an analysis of what business is doing must be conducted. It was noted that charity was not enough. There had to be more meaningful interventions where business could give back to communities.
- ❖ It was recommended that business should empower and provide the capacity for disabled people to participate as well as create conditions of employment for them.
- ❖ Important issue raised concerned accountability of NGOs: is it to the people they represent or to the donors who fund them? In this respect it was asserted that even the agendas of NGOs should be examined to determine whether it reflects the interests of the communities and not those of the donors.
- ❖ Issue of service delivery was important to the people. Therefore the notion of public-private partnerships must be defined so as determine the benefit to both parties (i.e. the people and the business sector). Also noted in this regard was whether the environment was conducive for partnerships. Moreover questions were raised about the authenticity of the partnerships and how were communities going to influence business to see that the public are the architects of their own lives.
- ❖ There was urgent plea for policies, campaigns and public processes to be translated into local and indigenous languages so that the masses are marginalized. The politics of language must be addressed and the mindset of government and people speaking in different languages has to be redressed so that both speak with a common voice and a common agenda. This was important to narrow the gap between the government and the people as well as between the private and the public. In this regard intervention and not interference was needed which Donors and NGOs could play a role where the former could fund such initiatives while the latter could act as facilitator.
- ❖ It was the duty of communities to showcase positive achievements in terms of public participation, which could attract the attention of donors to provide funding to enhance and strengthen such initiatives. However, it was cautioned that sometimes the latter may not yield the desired results.
- ❖ The public must be aware of donor activities

- ❖ The issue of donor conditionality was raised as a challenge and that donors tend to align themselves with groups that are like-minded. What about those communities that do not fit the profile?
- ❖ Accountability and transparency mechanisms are needed to monitor business activities, otherwise this will degenerate into the situation like that of the Niger Delta where communities are fighting against the malpractices of the oil company Shell. There was a call to combine people's interests and profitability. Moreover bargains concluded between communities and business must be enforced so that business cannot pull out if they feel things are not working out to their satisfaction.
- ❖ The issue of democratic decentralisation and participation was raised in the context of ward committees. The plea was for civil society to optimise the use of such structures as well as participatory budgetary committees to ensure that the agenda gets put on the table.
- ❖ Bloated bureaucracies was seen as an obstacle to effective participation and engagement with local government

General Discussion Continued (25/06/03)

Following the report from the commissions, the plenary was opened to the house for further clarifications and contributions. The chair, Chris Landsberg, began by highlighting two ideas, which he noted was at the core of public participation:

1. In South Africa the gap between policy and implementation is widening. It would seem that we are good at arriving at sophisticated policies yet fail in communicating and implementing them.
2. The emergence of NEPAD, which encapsulates a norms and values framework, indicates that African governments are sincere and committed to publication participation. The problem remains operationalization of the framework.

The discussion can be summarised as follows:

- ❖ A caution was issued about using the terms NGOs and Civil Society interchangeable. This makes questions of legitimacy more complex.
- ❖ Donors play an important role in strengthening participation. Noted that donors must also consider funding CBOs directly.
- ❖ Awareness of donor activities and information can be accessed through information gateway called "Thusinang".
- ❖ Questions were raised about Chapter 9 Institutions in SA (Human rights Commission, Gender Commission etc.) and whether they have been called to account on how they enhance and strengthen public participation in the country since they are the interface between the public and the government.
- ❖ The youth must be accommodated in the process of public participation.
- ❖ A caution was issued that while donor funding was important in providing communities with necessary means to engage in

sustainable development initiatives, the danger is that communities can become too reliant on these organisations and less self sufficient.

- ❖ The development of poverty reduction strategies, cost benefit analysis and municipal-community based partnerships were emphasised.
- ❖ The plurality of public participation was stressed.
- ❖ It was noted that CSOs seem to be adopting a private sector identity.
- ❖ Perception that public participation can only operate through institutions and as a result it becomes bureaucratised. Public participation must extend beyond the formal institutions; it must also accommodate those people who are not part of formal institutions.
- ❖ A critical point raised was whether NGOs were the foot soldiers of the donors.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. The youth can engage in public participation by encouraging schools through their curriculum of civic education to foster greater awareness around issues that relate directly to their communities. For example, lobbying for better environmental practical through Science projects can be advertised as the connectivity between their lives and the community in which they stay.
2. The CPP in association with other relevant organisations must develop a best practice monitoring and evaluation model to evaluate the interface between government and the people in the context of public participation.
3. The electoral system in SA must be evaluated so that a mixed electoral system can be installed which better accommodates public participation for ordinary people.
4. Current public participation methodologies must be audited as well as research must be conducted on the plurality of groupings in civil society and mechanisms in government, and the authenticity of partnerships between, government, business, civil society and the people. This research must reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the methodologies, partnerships and where do the gaps exist so that the practitioners can facilitate an integrated pro-poor agenda.
5. Chapter 9 institutions should be made more responsive to their mandate.
6. All forms of the media should be utilised to disseminate the information around public policy. For example developing community based radio stations.
7. Greater pressure should be exerted on government to expand funding for programmes (especially those relating to economic literacy) that seek to expand and broaden the knowledge of public policy to communities.
8. Public participation should be concentrated at the family level to make a strategic impact.

9. Traditional leaders must be given a space to engage in public participation processes since they play a critical role in rural areas.
10. An information database should be developed to outline the areas where institutions are working, the kind of work they are doing, and how they can be contacted.
11. An investigation should be conducted to assess what strategies can be employed to incorporate people at the grass root level into the decision-making process in those areas, which have impacted on their lives.
12. Must develop mechanisms that allows for the representation of those people who are not part of organized institutions.
13. Street Committees must be revived as support structures in strengthening public participation.
14. Capacity building must be entrenched to strengthen civic education.
15. Like-minded organisations must work together to avoid duplication.
16. Issues around donor influence must be re-examined
17. The Internet must also be utilised as form of information sharing and public policy awareness tool.
18. Civil Society should provide methodologies for participation.
19. Research should be conducted into indigenous methods and tools for participation, which can be used to enhance modern methodologies.
20. The marginalized, especially women, youth, and the disabled, must be given the space to strengthen their interaction in public participation.

7. The Way Forward

The conference ended with a roundtable of approximately ten key resource individuals drawn from organisations representing the research, academic, media, and civil society sector to discuss what the next steps should be. The roundtable produced the following broad clusters, which were derived from the conference. These were:

- ❖ Monitoring and Evaluation
- ❖ Developing and Strengthening Capacity
- ❖ Research and Advocacy
- ❖ Strategies to include the marginalized

In the discussions, it was agreed that research projects and civic education programmes would be developed in line with the broad themes identified above. This it was noted would ensure that the outcomes of the conference are taken further and developed in order to enhance public participation.

In light of these considerations, the following projects have been identified in collaboration with strategic organisations to enhance the progress of public participation within SA. These are:

1. An evaluation of current public participation mechanisms

This project is aimed at assessing work that is currently being done within the sphere of public participation as well as drawing on the successes and challenges thereof. It is intended to provide a comparative analysis of current public participation mechanisms with a view of developing a best practice model as well as increasing government awareness of such mechanisms and the institutions carrying out this work. Potential partners for the project include CPP, CPS, HSRC, Khanya, IMPD, Black Sash, and IDASA.

2. Advocacy Campaign for Making Constituency Offices More Effective

This programme is to be developed by CPP in conjunction with HSRC, DDP and relevant CBOs.

3. Skills and Resource Audit

This project is intended to audit the organs involved in economic literacy, civic education, budget training, and advocacy. The DDP would spearhead this project.

4. Enhancing Chapter Nine Institutions in Public Participation

CPS together with the HSRC would drive this project.

5. Empowerment of and Strategies to include The Marginalised in Public Participation

This project is aimed at empowering the youth, women, the poor and the disabled to strengthen their capacity to engage in public participation. Moreover it will assess the methodologies of public participation as well as the prospects of a pro-poor agenda. This project falls within the ambit of project one.

6. Challenging Business

This project is aimed at structuring an initiative around increased public participation and business. In addition it would develop a framework to integrate business into civil society structures. BusinessMap was identified as a possible collaborator to conduct the research in this regard while CPP would explore the possibility of a national debate on bridging the gap on business and public participation. The Plough Back Trust was also identified as a possible partner for the project. HSRC and CPP would explore links on developing a component of the project analysing the role of black elites and black economic empowerment within the sphere of public participation.

7. Public Participation and Public Policy

This project intends to investigate the impact of closing the gap between public policy and implementation as well as analyse the potential of actors and/or institutions that are available to assist in creating platforms and linkages in respect of the former. Partners are still to be identified for the project.

8. Donors and Public Participation

This project would investigate the availability of funding from government agencies for public participation. The project is aimed at analysing whether there exists a domestic donor culture as well as philanthropy where CSOs can make applications to government agencies and the private sector for funds to initiative public participation programmes. The CPP would liase with relevant organisations to investigate tax regime donations that can be used in this context.

Finally the HSRC has offered to include a chapter on '**The State of Public Participation in South Africa**' in the next edition of its annual **State of The Nation** publication as part of the research findings distilled from the above projects.