Dialogue on civil society's contribution to local urban governance

Abstract

The present paper highlights some of the issues related to enhancing the involvement of civil society in local governance, based on experience gathered by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) of working with Governments and cities over the past 27 years. Inclusiveness traditionally encompasses both political processes (in particular, participatory democracy) and policy objectives (improving the living conditions of all groups, focusing on marginalized and minority communities). In some cases, though, inclusiveness is only a policy in the absence of participatory democracy. But without empowerment, civil society cannot make a genuine contribution to urban governance. There are arguments against an inclusive political process; but at the end of the day, the long-term social and economic benefits are larger than the costs. The paper reviews the initiatives that have been taken to surmount hurdles on the way to inclusiveness and empowerment. These include identifying stakeholders and interlocutors, balancing the responsibilities of formal government with the demands of diffused interest groups; overcoming elitist and gender dominance at the local level, dealing with divisive political patronage and the perceived high resource requirements for inclusive decision-making. Overcoming the dichotomy between civil society and government and focusing on their intersection is crucial for success. Inclusiveness and empowerment also demand transparency and accountability. Finally, inclusiveness and the role of civil society are not merely matters of policies and processes: if they are to work, they must be underpinned by certain core civic values.

Contents

Discussion points

- Inclusiveness is a fundamental tenet of good governance and relies on civil society empowerment;

- Statutes define the scope for civic participation, which institutional inventiveness and procedural reform can enhance without any major overhaul;

- Exclusion generates crime, slums and gender gaps, which in turn discourage investment and competitiveness;

- A high degree of local government transparency and accountability is critical;

- Core values must underpin inclusiveness and the role of civil society.

Dialogue on civil society's contribution to local urban governance

I.   Introduction

1.   Over the past two decades, a consensus has emerged on the critical importance of involving civil society in governance, particularly at the local level.[1] Indeed, a number of initiatives have effectively enhanced the involvement of communities, neighbourhoods, social groups and associations in decision-making as well as in policy and programme implementation. The experience gathered to date calls, however, for a closer re-examination of this important dimension of governance.

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[1]   UN-Habitat, 1996; United Nations, 2000; United Nations, 2001; United Nations, 2002.

2.   While the principle of participation by civil society is generally accepted, its practical implications have tended to be more complex. For some cities, the process of involvement has led to harnessing the latent force of the urban poor and asserting the citizenship of those who have been marginalized and excluded. In other cities, involvement by the population has been perceived as an impediment to growth and efficiency in this era of globalization. Furthermore, the growing phenomenon of emigration has led to increased diversity within cities, rendering it even more difficult to foster the role of civil society. In many cases, participatory processes have not been deep enough to alter the prevailing elitism in local leadership and the dominance of techno-bureaucratic administration. As a result, the voice of the poor often remains marginalized in local decision-making.

3.   The present paper highlights some of the issues related to enhancing the involvement of civil society in local governance, based on experience gathered by UN-Habitat of working with Governments and cities over the past 27 years. It examines the initiatives that have been taken to overcome barriers to inclusiveness and empowerment.

II.   Civil society as promoter of inclusiveness and empowerment

4.   Two notions help pinpoint the issues associated with the involvement of civil society in local governance: "inclusiveness" and "empowerment of civil society".

5.   Inclusiveness traditionally encompasses both political processes (and participatory democracy in particular) and policy objectives (improving the living conditions of all groups, focusing on marginalized and minority communities). In both cases, the main goal is to build structures which enable everyone, regardless of wealth, gender, age, race or religion, to participate productively and positively in the opportunities that cities have to offer.[2]

6.   For inclusive governance to function effectively, it is not simply a matter of providing a space for involvement. Empowering civil society stakeholders is also in order, so that they can take advantage of any space provided.[3]

7.   Authorities may have to take special action to enable civil society to participate effectively in the process of governance. Empowerment may require new institutions, new ways of working within existing organizations, and new rules for inter-organizational relationships.

A.   Legal reforms promoting inclusiveness

8.   The political dimension of inclusiveness includes the structures and processes that allow all stakeholders at the local level to participate in governance. The statutory framework defines the scope for civic participation and therefore has a strong influence on it. The past decade has been witness to significant progress in the devolution of power, authority and resources to municipal authorities. In most of those cases, however, such initiatives have not been pervasive enough to reach out as far down as the community and neighbourhood levels, which is essential for the engagement of civil society. One piece of legislation that has reached below the level of the municipality is Brazil's "Statute of the City" (Act No. 10.527 of 10 July 2001, see: Instituto Pólis. 2003), which effectively entrenches the participation of citizens and associations representing civil society. As it broadens the opportunities for citizens to participate in the decision-making process, the Brazilian statute provides for a variety of mechanisms, including public hearings, consultations, councils, environmental and neighbourhood impact studies, popular initiatives to put forward urban laws, and the practice of participatory budgeting.

9.   Reaching just as deep into civil society is the Philippines' Local Government Code of 1991, which ranks among the most forward-looking statutes when it comes to strengthening local governance. The code sets out the legal and institutional infrastructure for the expanded participation of civil society in local governance. More specifically, it calls on non-governmental organizations and other representatives from the private sector to sit on local service boards and development councils. These bodies are responsible for preparing development programmes as well as allocating funds (Local Government Code of the Philippines, Republic Act No. 7160).

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[2]   UN-Habitat, 2002.
[3]   Osmani, S.R., 2001; Gaventa, John, 2002.

10.   These are not the only current efforts to extend the space for inclusive people's participation in various parts of the world.[4] Such efforts notwithstanding, they leave open the critical issue of whether the battle for civil society engagement is primarily directed to the legal sphere.

A.   Local initiatives to promote inclusiveness

11.   Experience from different parts of the world demonstrates that institutional inventiveness and procedural reform can effectively enhance civil society involvement in local governance without imposing any radical or comprehensive legislative overhaul. Innovations can and do take place at the local level, such as: establishing people's councils (as has happened in a number of cities), introduction of participatory budgeting, city consultations for strategic planning, creation of savings and credit cooperative societies and local-to-local dialogues.

12.   To the extent that policy regimes encompass the interests and concerns of all urban social groups, they complement and reinforce the participatory aspect of inclusiveness. As is well recognized, policy regimes that determine the delivery and accessibility of goods and services affect the well-being and livelihoods of urban communities. Recent preoccupations – such as designing pro-poor policies for urban development, removing barriers for women to gain access to immovable assets such as land, affirmative action, and reconfiguring the city to tackle spatial inequity – all tend to underline the importance of policy goals, contents and strategies. In this respect, policy does not refer only to the macro-national policy for various sectors.[5]

B.   Inclusiveness as policy

13.   At this juncture, it is only natural to ask the question: Does genuine inclusiveness require both participatory democracy and an inclusive policy regime? Indeed, examples abound of inclusive processes that have had effects only on policy, improving the welfare of those that had been traditionally excluded. One of these is Malaysia, where local elections remain suspended and municipal councillors are appointed by their respective state governments; and another the city-State of Singapore, which has no autonomous local government system. Yet cities in both these countries seem to have addressed the concerns of marginalized groups with success. It is reported that Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, obtained the highest level of satisfaction from its residents when the democratically elected City Council was suspended and replaced by a Government appointed Commission; this became quite obvious when the residents elected the commission chair to the Tanzanian parliament to represent a constituency that includes the largest slum settlement in the whole country.

14.   In the light of experiences like those of Malaysia, Singapore, Dar es Salaam and others for whom inclusiveness is only a policy issue, one may wonder: Is there really a case for participatory governance as a political process? Or it is simply a perpetuation of political correctness?

C.   Arguments in favour of inclusiveness in political processes

15.   By many accounts, inclusiveness contributes to a better identification of needs and demands and to enhanced efficiency in implementation and outcomes, in addition to promoting sustainability and social harmony.[6] Inclusive governance has a good record of bringing greater equity, responsiveness and efficiency to local services. A recent review of the democratic experiences in Kerala, India, Porto Alegre, Brazil, and cities in South Africa has highlighted some further benefits of inclusiveness: it allows for a continuous and dynamic process of learning; promotes fruitful compromise and innovative solutions; and bridges the knowledge and authority gaps between technocratic expertise and local involvement.[7]

16.   For UN-Habitat, all these findings corroborate its own experience gained from working with cities in different parts of the world. For instance, the organization's Sustainable Cities Programme owes its success and growth for over a decade to the close involvement of civil society. Similarly, its initiative

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[4]   Further examples are described in Logo-link, Emma Williams, 2002; Nelson Saule, Júnior, Alejandra Meraz Velasco and Zuleika Arashiro, 2002.
[5]   Bevan, Philippa with Stephen Lister, 2000; UN-Habitat, 2001.
[6]   Logolink, ibid.; World Bank, 2002.
[7]   Heller, P., 2001.

to improve water delivery in Africa and Asia has proved that more efficient delivery does not by itself guarantee increased access for the poor. The experience of UN-Habitat also shows that inclusiveness maximizes the local knowledge of managers, promotes responsiveness and fosters accountability, which in turn ensures effective service delivery. Moreover, members of the community reach their highest degree of citizenship when they become the so-called "makers and shapers" of their own destinies with full agency in governance processes. Citizen participation gives meaning to democracy beyond the relatively narrow limits of the electoral process.[8]

17.   There is also evidence to suggest that "social capital" – shorthand for the richness and depth of civil society and the extent of citizens' engagement in it – has an important bearing on government performance. In his book *The Prosperous Community* and on the basis of his research in Italy, Putnam makes the point that where the concept of citizenship is stunted, government does not work. Where there are active community organizations, such as in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, and citizens are engaged in public issues, democracy works and economic development is effective. Putnam argues that it is critically important for marginalized groups to create social capital if they are to prosper. His argument in favour of social capital is largely socio-economic, but he does acknowledge that social capital has knock-on effects in terms of positive political outcomes.

18.   The consequences of exclusion – urban crime, proliferation of slum and squatter settlements, gender inequity – also act as disincentives to investment and competitiveness. These costs are far greater than any which inclusive political processes may impose. With respect to the proliferation of slum settlements for example, UN-Habitat has observed in its latest Global Report on Human Settlements that the poor play a crucial role in the improvement of their own living conditions and that their participation in decision-making is not only a right – that is, an end in itself – but also helps achieve more effective implementation of public policies. Consequently, involving the urban poor and those traditionally responsible for investment in housing development has greater potential for enhancing the effectiveness of slum-eradication policies. This calls for more inclusive urban policies as well as greater public sector accountability vis-à-vis the entire citizenry.

D.   Arguments against inclusiveness in political processes

19.   The experience of the past three decades demonstrates that promoting inclusiveness is fraught with a number of limitations that often confine it to a superficial and symbolic role. Participation and inclusiveness have often been limited to the downstream level, i.e., to a largely consultative role, with real decisions made upstream by elites and technocrats.[9]

20.   Recently, many municipalities have been grappling with the challenge of providing legally binding and unconditional privileges to newly arriving immigrants.[10] Unconditional inclusiveness may promote a disjunction between rights and obligations, which undermines a sense of personal responsibility, innovation, competition as well as efficient resource allocation. It is perceived as encouraging complacency and apathy, forcing decision makers to back those who do not contribute to their optimum.

21.   Furthermore, time-consuming inclusive political processes can lead to gridlock and inertia, hampering efficient administration. They can obscure genuine policy choices if they end up focusing on the lowest common denominator. Inclusiveness has the potential to hamstring decisive leadership. Experiments in decentralized political decision-making have occasionally led to increased corruption and inefficiency.

22.   Some suggest that inclusive governance leads to the empowerment of local elites, rather than consideration for the voices and interests of the more marginalized. Indeed the poor – including some non-governmental and civil society organizations – find that daunting obstacles stand in the way of inclusive governance, such as power structures, social exclusion and minimal individual and collective organizational capacity. In a number of instances local elites, through their control of elected councils, manage to steer most benefits their own way. Documented examples of such practices include upgrading

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[8]   Blair, Harry, 2000; Cornwall, A. and J. Gaventa, 2001.
[9]   Gaventa, John, 2002.
[10]   Stephen Moore; Izumi, Lance, 2003.

the schools which their own offspring attend, or giving priority to building a motor-racing circuit to reap the kickbacks for construction contracts and skim the gate receipts.[11]

23.   With particular regard to economically successful cities in Asia, others argue that inclusiveness is merely a fad. As a matter of fact, cities are at the moment going through a challenging period of resource constraints and cut-throat competition in the face of demands to cater to a host of social needs. If anything, they require more professional and effective management that can deliver the goods, particularly economic growth. This is appropriate in view of mounting political apathy and diminishing civic participation in both developing and developed areas of the world.

III.   Practicalities of inclusiveness

A.   Problems in implementing inclusiveness

24.   Taking inclusiveness from theory to practice poses a number of challenges, including: identifying key stakeholders and interlocutors; balancing the responsibilities of formal representative organs of government with the demands of different interest groups; overcoming elitist and gender dominance at the local level; dealing with political patronage and its divisive tendencies; and the perceived high resource requirements for inclusive decision-making.

1.   Identifying interlocutors

25.   One of the challenges is to determine who are going to be what may be termed the "legitimate interlocutors" among the populace, and to define the participatory channels that can be made both accessible to, and genuinely representative of, all poor and working-class citizens. The more powerful members of the community are frequently those in leadership positions, whose role is also to articulate the concerns of the constituent groups. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the results of a research survey carried out by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in some neighbourhoods of Johannesburg, South Africa, in the mid-1990s: the residents of informal settlements were prevented from making themselves heard; backyard tenants attracted minimum attention; and the landlords dominated the entire participatory process in the formal township.

26.   The local level is also where the most deleterious distortion – gender inequity – tends to be more apparent. Women as a social group are often subsumed in the broader category of community, where their specific concerns are diluted. The often-prevailing patriarchal structures at the local level inhibit the full engagement of women, unless particular attention is given to removing any impediments one by one. [12]

2.   Complex relationships

27.   The relationship between representative and participatory democracy poses difficult conceptual and practical issues and tensions. Some elected politicians are uneasy with participatory governance because they see themselves as the legitimate decision makers: having been elected by citizens through the democratic ballot, they consider that such participatory processes are taking decisions and control away from them. This has been the case in Cebu, the Philippines, where elected bodies have severely constrained non-governmental organizations and local citizens councils in their efforts to broaden their scope of involvement in local governance.[14]

28.   The Philippines also provides a counter-example. The Philippine Urban Forum has supported and driven the two global UN-Habitat campaigns with vigorous backing from its constituent organizations, which include national government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector associations and non-governmental organizations. Indeed, this coalition stands as an exemplary demonstration of a partnership between central government, municipal authorities and civil society

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[11]   Blair, 2000; Rose-Ackerman, Susan, 2004.

[12]   Asima Yanty Siahaan; Myers, Roxane, 2002.

[14]   Felisa U Etemadi, 2004.

organizations, which goes to show that mutual good will makes it possible for different partners to work together.

29.   The relationship between civil society and formal institutions of local governance raises certain questions. Is inclusiveness better guaranteed if vibrant civil society organizations are co-opted into local government processes? Or does involvement in local government simply mean that civil society organizations and their leaders will become compromised by city hall bureaucrats? Is inclusiveness best pursued by oppositional civil society pressure groups that are not burdened with responsibility for implementation and can hold local government to account without fear or favour? The answers are not straightforward. It is certainly true that civil society groups are needed in a watchdog type of role, to scrutinize actions and exert pressure on local government. This is certainly true of the media. But, if all civil society organizations are consistently oppositional, it will not be possible to integrate civil society perspectives into local governance in any constructive sort of way. The nature of the engagement of civil society organizations will most probably depend on how genuine an interest is manifested by the local government in responding to their views.

30.   Evidence from different parts of the world point to a broad variety of relationships between civil society and local authorities. The UN-Habitat 2003 Global Report on Human Settlements provides an overview of community-based and non-governmental organizations in urban areas and points to the lack of uniformity in their relations with public institutions. Ezra Mbogori and Hope Chigudu single out three distinct patterns of relationship: collaboration, advocacy and opposition, and co-governance (or partnership). The most popular form of relationship, and one that seems to be on the rise, is collaboration.[15] As they define common goals and objectives, and collectively agree on strategies and action plans, civil society organizations and local authorities – in many cases, with the participation of central government agencies – forge a collaborative relationship in a whole range of policy areas. Many urban revitalization programmes in Europe and North America have adopted this approach. Similar examples can be mentioned in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

31.   An equally significant role for civil society as it engages in local governance is to undertake advocacy – public education, policy reform, campaigning, and citizen mobilization – and also defend and promote citizens' rights. In this role, civil society may find itself at odds with structures of local governance and, at times, the relationship may turn to confrontation. In essence, advocacy is an expression of civil society bent on defending rights and delivering tangible benefits and results. Such functions do not necessarily require civil society to maintain a confrontational relationship with public authorities. As examples we might take the experiences of the Triangle of Solidarity in Costa Rica, or of a coalition of non-governmental organizations in Calcutta campaigning for housing rights, or of the Pamoja Trust and Muungano wa Wanavijiji in Kenya: these undertakings all involve interactive dynamics between civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and public structures, and all lead to different outcomes.[16] The UN-Habitat Global Campaign on Urban Governance, in collaboration with the Huairou Commission, has documented the experience of women's groups grappling with the practical ways of claiming their citizenship. Their cases demonstrate how women at grassroots level can reconfigure power relationships to advance their interests and thereby transform the practice of governance.[17]

32.   Nonetheless, there is no denying the power imbalance between local government and citizens' organizations. Efforts to connect strong, recognized neighbourhood organizations and non-governmental organizations to government may lead to co-optation, and pre-empt the possibility for institutions of civil society to pursue their advocacy mission effectively. This can be even more complicated if a dependence on financing and facilities is also built into the relationship. In this case, the fates of neighbourhood organizations and governance structures are so tied to the structure of authority that they are unable to advocate a minority position with any degree of effectiveness.

33.   A highly important factor is the integrity of the civil society leadership and the vision of its membership. At the end of the day, and as field experience has shown, the nature of the relationship between civil society and local authorities cannot remain unchanged as it needs to respond to circumstances. Civil society organizations may therefore have to adopt the different modes of operation

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[15]   Mbogori, Ezra and Hope Chigudu, 1999; Evans, Peter.
[16]   Harry Smith, 2004; Eldrid Mageli, 2004; Jane Weru, 2004.
[17]   Forthcoming publication by UN-Habitat and the Huarou Commission.

described above as the environment changes. The integrity of those organizations will be critical when making the right choices.

B.   Changing patterns of citizen involvement

1.   Decline in citizen involvement

34.   Diminishing citizen involvement has been raising concerns of late, particularly in developed countries. Civil society's involvement with political processes and even its own vibrancy are on the wane. A prominent sociologist has referred to the "haemorrhaging of social capital" in describing the increasing fragmentation and mistrust in civil society. A 2004 report in the *Economist* recently described an even more ominous development affecting American communities, stating that people living in diverse areas were not just more suspicious of those who did not look like them; they were also more suspicious of their own kind!

35.   Lance Bennet disagrees with the above observation and suggests that "the withdrawal from traditional institutional politics may entail a more selective and rational process – and one that is far more tuned in politically – than implied by accounts of a social and political withdrawal. Replacing traditional civil society is a less conformist social world in which individuals were liberated from the grasp of governments: a society characterized by the rise of networks, issue associations, and lifestyle coalitions facilitated by the revolution in personalized, point-to-point communication".[18] This major change in the institutional architecture of civil society poses a sizeable challenge to any promotion of its engagement.

2.   Changing role of local authorities and distorted empowerment agendas

36.   New Zealand's experience epitomizes the significant change in the structure of local government over the past 10 years. Local authorities today are not simply a single organ, the "council" of former times, but comprise a number of entities. These may include business units that are operating at arm's length, so to speak; other trading enterprises; trust bodies; and joint ventures with other local authorities or private sector partners. This multifarious structure can have an effect on the relationship with civil society, especially where unelected directors and trustees make the decisions and communities are expressly left out of the process.[19]

37.   At the same time, since the 1990s what is perceived as the "community" has become a new focal point for central government policies, particularly when dealing with social issues. It has become fashionable to devise strategies aimed at harnessing the capabilities and resources of communities in policy programmes. Whether they promote it through neighbourhood participation, local empowerment or resident involvement in decisions over their own lives, authorities believe that inclusiveness is apt to reactivate self-motivation, self-responsibility and self-reliance. Such promotion has been a highlight of national government efforts to implement poverty reduction programmes, particularly in the northern hemisphere. In many cases, community organizations have found themselves turned into implementing agencies, substituting for local government.[20] As a result, changing forms of local governance and engagement with civil society have had the perverse effect of weakening local government. This has been the case with the Urban Programme carried out in the United Kingdom, according to Marinetto and, as described by Elander, with the Metropolitan Development Initiative launched in Sweden in 1999.[21]

38.   The distinct spheres of civil society and government must be neither confused nor kept radically apart: indeed, overcoming the dichotomy between them and focusing on their intersection is crucial for success. Initiatives aimed at enhancing citizen participation must go alongside others that seek to strengthen accountability, responsiveness and transparency. The ultimate objective is none other than a more active and involved civil society – apt to convey the demands of the citizenry – complemented by a responsive and effective municipal authority which can deliver public services as required. The result: "strong, aware, responsible, active and engaged citizens along with strong, caring, inclusive, listening,

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[18]   Bennet, Lance W., 1998.
[19]   Good Governance Group.
[20]   Marinetto, Michael, 2003.
[21]   Elander, Ingemar, 2004.

open and responsive democratic [local] government". This is the basis from which to draw the line between initiatives that promote inclusiveness simply for the sake of increasing efficiency, and those that genuinely aim at deepening democracy and promoting citizen involvement.[22]

C.   How inclusiveness can be made to work

39.   What are the different ways of nurturing civil society empowerment and inclusiveness? What are some of the facilitating procedures and instruments? How effective have they been?

1.   Legislative framework

40.   Devolution of power, authority and resources from the central to municipal level is a prerequisite for effective citizen involvement, but it is not a sufficient condition on its own. More thorough decentralization also calls for steps to enable and encourage municipal authorities to involve citizens in the running of their city. Such steps typically include consultative processes, both political and administrative, such as public hearings and meetings as well as other participatory forums. Nonetheless, as detailed below, effective community empowerment can take place in the context of a national policy that levels the playing field for civil society and smoothes out any distortions caused by local idiosyncrasies in its relationship with local government.

41.   Brazil's "Statute of the City" Act of 10 July 2001 is a good example of a legal instrument that seeks to secure citizen involvement. The Act entrenches in law and gives political validation to the participation in local government of citizens and associations representing various segments of the community. Along similar lines, in 1998 Viet Nam adopted its decree No. 29 on effective democracy in the communes. The decree made it an obligation for local officials to provide detailed information to communities on a range of issues, from national legislation to local projects. Viet Nam's decree also made it mandatory to seek public consultations, approval, and supervision on a number of development activities at the local level. Such activities include the communal budget, land management, the outcomes of investigations against corrupt officials, and social services.[23]

42.   Similar examples – though of a more limited scope – can be found in the United Kingdom's 1999 Local Government Act, which made it a legal requirement for local authorities, as well as other local service providers such as police and fire authorities, to consult users about different aspects of their service provision. Similar examples can be found in Bolivia, with the enactment and implementation of the Popular Participation Act, and in the Philippines with the 1991 Local Government Code.

2.   Participatory structures

43.   As pointed out above, legal instruments that empower citizens at the local level call for the creation of institutional structures and procedures, but the route of legal reform can be long and arduous. In many cases, statutory law provides these institutional elements. But the contribution of administrative reform is not negligible, as epitomized by the so-called "citizen oversight committees" of South Carolina, United States, and the "mesas de concertación" ("consultation round-tables") in the Argentine cities of Lima, San Salvador, Cotacachi and Córdoba. The "mesas" are forums for participatory governance bringing together local government, the private sector, non-governmental and community-based organizations to discuss, debate and agree on proposals for the development of their own communities.[24]

44.   In the Philippines, 12 non-governmental organizations in Cebu City have formed a coalition called "Kaabag sa Sugbo", which represents a different kind of institutional development for inclusiveness. The coalition effectively enhanced the communities' ability to engage with the local authority dialogue, participation and negotiation. Kenya provides a further instance of the power of such coalitions: in Nairobi, a federation of the urban poor ("Muungano") assisted by the Pamoja Trust has built the capacities required to develop solutions for people's well-being together with municipal and national government.

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22   Gaventa, op.cit.

23   Mark Mattner, 2004.

24   Bur, A., Stevens, A. and Young, L., 1999.

45.   As part of its Global Campaign on Urban Governance, UN-Habitat has developed a tool-kit to support participatory urban decision-making, which takes a four-phase approach, including: preparatory and stakeholder mobilization; issue prioritization and stakeholder commitment; strategy development and implementation; and follow-up and consolidation. The emerging innovations in this domain include participatory budgeting, electronic governance, city consultations, environmental planning and management, measuring performance and governance and local-to-local dialogues.[25]

46.   Even more than fostering citizen empowerment through institutional structures, a high degree of transparency and accountability in local government is critical. It has been noted that transparency enhances civil society engagement in the public arena by ensuring that citizens are well informed. With transparency, every stakeholder becomes aware of a local authority's achievements and setbacks. This motivates collective commitment as citizens identify with processes, results and outcomes. Through transparency, the boundaries of responsibility and action become visible, which in turn makes it easier to determine the locus of accountability.

47.   A recent UN-Habitat Campaign publication, in collaboration with Transparency International, shows how to encourage transparency and accountability in local governance. It is based on 99 case-studies from around the world, highlighting the best methods and instruments. These include: processes that enable communities to participate in the monitoring and assessment of local government; measures to improve stakeholders' access to information; measures to promote ethical behaviour and integrity among stakeholders; and the streamlining and simplification of administrative procedures as well as structural innovations to promote participation and accountability.

D.   Spatial and physical dimensions of inclusiveness

48.   In its various forms, the organization of urban space and the physical configuration of neighbourhoods have been both an expression of a community's social, political and economic relations within the city, and also a factor impinging on its development. In cities of the developing world, the legacies of residential differentiation and rigid zoning have continued to exacerbate stark inequities, further compounding exclusion and alienation for a majority of urban residents.[26]

49.   A new movement is emerging which brings together planners, architects and developers. Among other things, it seeks to restore a sense of neighbourhood and community empowerment. It advocates a renewed relationship between building as an art and community-building, through citizen-based participatory planning and design. This new movement stands as an alternative to motor vehicle-oriented planning and development. The prototypes of this new urban planning include Seaside, the Haile Village Centre in Gainesville, and Celebration near Orlando, all three in Florida, and Harbor Town in Memphis, Tennessee.[27] Outside the United States, Auroville in Pondicherry, India, also illustrates this approach.

50.   In his critique of the so-called "New Urbanism" developments in North America, Robert McCarter pointed out that that type of approach could not result in sustainable communities. In economic terms, those homes are beyond the reach of the average urban dwellers, they still rely on the motor vehicle and remain instruments of segregation. He observes that "…the sustainable possibilities inherent in New Urbanism are usually substituted by imagery that suggests, but does not deliver sustainable community".[28]

51.   If the achievements of New Urbanism are unable to promote a genuine sense of community, then can others respond to the spatial and physical distortions that undermine a broader collective engagement of civil society? Has New Urbanism any relevance to cities in developing countries? Furthermore, is collaboration between planners, architects and developers conducive to inclusion? Does the monopolization of the function of spatial design by a closed group of technocrats and financiers not reinforce the very alienation that participatory governance is trying to counter?

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[25]   UN-Habitat, 2001a.

[26]   Montgomery M.R. et al., 2003.

[27]   Steuteville, Robert, 2000.

[28]   Mark Mattner, 2004.

E. Civic standards and values

52. Inclusiveness and the role of civil society are not just about policies and processes. If they are to work, some core values must underpin them. Where the groups that are empowered are hostile to diversity or to other groups, civil society empowerment cannot work. Empowerment involves the promotion of civic standards and values that emphasize inclusiveness, including a sense of citizenship. Local authorities must promote a sense of trust, reciprocity and solidarity in a proactive manner. These values are very different from those of consumerism, a notion which may be confused with citizenship, especially when many community empowerment schemes involve a quasi-consumerist approach. This is the case with those public consultations using focus-group techniques, which are indistinguishable from private sector marketing practices.

IV. Conclusion

53. For all its many handicaps, the involvement of civil society in local governance is a necessary condition if the challenges of urban development are to be overcome. While inclusiveness is not predicated upon specific practices, structures and procedures, it remains a fundamental tenet of good governance. What it does require, however, is an adequate degree of empowerment for civil society to engage fully in partnership arrangements. The wealth of experiences of inclusive governance and empowerment available must be shared, adapted and developed to suit different contexts. The current visible shift away from marginalization to consultation to participation, and the concurrent trend of promoting partnerships, are positive developments which must be encouraged.

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