

The Politics of Democratic Governance

**Organising for Social Inclusion
and Gender Equity**

One World Action

Our Vision

A Just and Equal World, where there is no necessity for One World Action.

Our Mission

To create the power and opportunity for the poorest citizens to transform their own lives; and to challenge the international policies that make and keep people poor.

Our Values

We work with partners, South and North, in ways that respect different perspectives and build on the strengths of diversity; we believe strongly in gender equity and full participation of women in all development processes; we seek to put into practice the principles of good governance and democracy in our own organisation and behaviours.



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INDIA Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh

A Dalit woman with a flower attends the 2006 Vanangana conference in Chitrakoot. Vanangana, a women's group dedicated to human rights issues, receives strong support from the Dalit community.

Dalits are the outcastes or the schedule castes of India and are not part of the caste system. They are assigned to menial and defiling occupations such as manual scavenging (cleaning dry toilets), sweeping, disposing of corpses, skinning and tanning of animal hides, making footwear and digging graves. They are thought of as polluted and polluting and therefore left out of mainstream society

The name Dalit, drawn from the Marathi language, literally means 'crushed' or 'broken', but more generally means 'oppressed people'. It is a name that the outcastes in India took for themselves after rejecting the name Harijan which was given to them by Gandhi.

The name Dalit was first promoted by the Dalit leader Jyotirao Phule and the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra, India. The use of the name Dalit was encouraged by the iconic Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar and has enabled the development of a collective identity among all the outcaste people, despite their sub-caste, ethnicity or religion.

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Introduction

The Politics of Democratic Governance: Organising for Social Inclusion and Gender Equity was a two-day seminar organised by One World Action in London in March 2007. The event brought together activists at the forefront of democracy building in Indonesia, Guatemala, Brazil, Thailand, Nicaragua, Philippines, Malawi, India and Zambia with policy-makers in the UK and Europe to focus on how poor and marginalised people can have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Participants examined the challenges marginalised groups face in organising, engaging with, and transforming political processes. Looking at examples from a range of international contexts, the presentations and discussions considered the potential of new strategies and forms of political engagement that aim to build equitable, gender-sensitive, democratic and accountable governance.

Two central objectives for the seminar were highlighted. First: to create an environment for learning in which information, skills and experience could be shared through South/South, South/North, North/South and North/North circuits. Second: to provide opportunities for civil society leaders from the South to engage directly with and influence policy-makers and opinion-formers from the North, including representatives from the UK Department for International Development, the European Centre for Development Policy Management, the Trade Union Congress and Local Government, as well as academics and independent consultants.

Key themes of the event included: how marginalised groups can raise their capacity to make governments more accountable; the significance and challenges of women's participation in politics at local and national government levels; how existing conventions and programmes can be employed to promote greater social inclusion and gender equity; how civil society can tackle new challenges posed by decentralisation, globalisation and neo-liberalism; and how genuine participative democracy can be established and nurtured and new approaches to politics and change explored. It is hoped that this report will provide a valuable resource for civil society activists and organisers, policy-makers and opinion formers seeking to explore issues of democratic governance, social inclusion and gender equity in a variety of international contexts.

One World Action works with partners in Africa, Asia and Central America who are claiming their democratic rights in holding elected representatives to account and in promoting women's political participation. Partners are engaged in a wide range of actions and programmes but sharing a common goal of building democracy, equity and equality. One World Action is playing a leading role in the debate on democracy building in development as well as lobbying at the European and international level to challenge policies that impact on the poor globally. A strong focus of One World Action's partners' work is looking particularly at women and politics. For example, they are working to find approaches to challenges, such as: how to ensure the election of women councillors and their continued tenure of office; how pro-women policies should be implemented, institutionalised and sustained; how the women's rights agenda takes precedence over party political concerns and the impact of gender-based violence on women's political participation.

The remainder of this introduction defines some key terms associated with democratic governance and explores some of the new opportunities for political engagement produced through processes of decentralisation and democratisation. It also considers some of the key challenges to democratic governance associated with globalisation and neo-liberalism.

Democratic governance: Key concepts and terms

Democratic governance 'involves developing institutions and processes that are more responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens' (United Nations, 2002). More specifically, it seeks to promote greater participation of marginalised groups within political processes, through addressing inequalities associated with gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste, disability and sexuality, among other variables, and greater accountability of governments towards those who have traditionally been excluded from political action.

Political processes include both formal organised politics and non-formal political activism by civil society organisations or social movements engaging with local and national governments. As Anock Kapira of the Malawi Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (MANET+), puts it, 'politics is everywhere'. We can't run away from politics, we are always in politics'.

Most democratic states employ a system of *representative democracy* in which elected representatives are tasked with acting in constituents' interest, but not as their proxy representatives. In other words, representatives are elected by citizens, but are not bound to the people's will thereafter. Representative democracy has been criticised by civil society actors on the basis that it often does not provide for genuine democratic governance, but rather promotes the status quo by catering to the interests of political elites. In this context, calls for the development of more participatory forms of democracy have been voiced.

Participatory democracy, also referred to as *deliberative democracy*, seeks to create opportunities for all members of a society to make meaningful contributions to decision-making and strives to widen the range of people who have access to political processes. It 'treats its members as agents who are capable of deliberating on any prescribed set of values' (Bevir, 2006: 435). Direct democracy, in which elected representatives are absent or limited to serving as proxy representatives for the people, is one (contested) form of participatory democracy advocated as either a supplement to or replacement of traditional forms of representative democracy.

Decentralisation and democratisation: New and contested spaces

Within many countries around the world, governments are becoming increasingly decentralised, at least at a formal level. A wave of global democratisation is spreading across Latin American, Asia and Africa as well as the Middle East and post Soviet republics. Decision-making is being devolved to regional and local authorities and hence dispersed closer to the point of service or action. In some countries, entrenched political hierarchies and authoritarian structures are giving way to more lateral relationships and networks in which active citizen's organisations are playing a significant role.

In many contexts, these increasingly lateral networks are creating democratic channels for political action and change from the bottom-up. Civil society organisations, including campaign and advocacy groups, trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are playing a key role in constructing new relationships between citizens and state institutions. Alongside governments, they seek to increase people's engagement with political processes and their influence on decision-making as a means to establish accountable and democratic governance.

Strategies to promote democratic governance take different forms depending on the geo-political context. One World Action's partner organisations provide a host of relevant examples: in Thailand, the Campaign for Popular Democracy has set out to draft an alternative constitution establishing a progressive 'social contract' linking the State and its citizens. In Zambia, the National Women's Lobby has mobilised to increase the number of women representatives in government, whereas in Indonesia and the Philippines, civil society activists have taken the route of establishing new political parties that remain committed to representing the interests of the poor and marginalised.

Furthermore, in India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has enabled poor women workers to learn about and exercise their rights, while in Nicaragua and Guatemala, feminist political organisations, such as Grupo Venancia and Tierra Viva, are developing advocacy agendas to increase women's political participation and address issues of reproductive rights and gender violence. In Malawi,

Globalisation and global governance: Opportunities and challenges

MANET+ is working with HIV/AIDS positive people to enable them to articulate their needs and to engage in policy areas that affect their lives. In the UK, and elsewhere, governments are piloting new tools to promote citizen participation in political decision-making, such as e-democracy.

While these groups and initiatives all represent positive steps forward in processes of democracy-building, it is important to emphasise that there is no guarantee that decentralisation will necessarily be accompanied by democratic institutions and mechanisms that promote meaningful citizen participation. Government co-optation and elite capture remain salient threats in many national contexts. A key point to underline here is that there is often a significant gap between the rhetoric of decentralisation and the actual policies implemented, and this requires serious examination. Nonetheless, across a range of nations, decentralisation can enable state apparatuses to link more explicitly to marginalised people's priorities and concerns and provide opportunities for increasing grassroots input and action that previously would have been silenced or circumscribed. In the next two sections, some political and economic opportunities and challenges associated with democracy-building are considered in further depth.

In the context of globalisation, there has been a simultaneous decentralisation and recentralisation of governance across the globe with the expansion of formal democracies at local and regional levels at the same time as the development of global institutions. The latter can potentially place constraints on the powers of weaker nations but can also form a focal point for exchange between these local and regional groups that bypass their own nation states and so provide opportunities for civil society organisations to effect change.

These forms of communication are enhanced by the development of contemporary information and communication technologies. While a digital divide shaped by nation, class and gender remains, the Internet and mobile phone have become important means of communication amongst activists and more generally throughout societies.

On a global level, international governing bodies 'are under increasing pressure to make more meaningful arrangements for citizen participation' (Glasius et al., 2006: 19). At the same time, 'civil society activists can use global links to expand the space for democratic participation', with the new phenomenon of international social forums providing one prominent example (18). Nation states continue to exercise some degree of political control, in particular, as conduits for the flows of international funding. But their ability to manage the economy is nonetheless undermined by the neo-liberal agenda which threatens democracy and social justice in a variety of ways.

Neo-liberalism: Threats to social inclusion and gender equity

The spread of democracy and market economies are both associated with globalisation but there is a clear paradox between the deepening of democratic institutions, practices of good governance and calls for gender justice on the one hand and the neo-liberal context that makes the realisation of these political rights more difficult on the other (Elson, 2002). In particular, while there have been significant advances in the development of democracy there has been far less progress towards social and gender justice, even though governments around the world have articulated their commitment to achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Neo-liberalism is associated with a range of economic policies that have adverse implications for the socially marginalised and women. It heightens economic instability, leads to flexible and casualised labour markets and growth in the informal sector and constrains public sector expenditure (Elson, 2002). When government services, such as healthcare are cut in favour of promoting 'individual' or 'community' responsibility, it is often women who pick up the slack. The detrimental impact of these cuts is often disguised through the use of civil society language which makes reference to 'state deregulation, user choice and community provision of welfare services' (Howell, 2006).

Thus as citizens are increasingly empowered through political rights, their economic rights are curtailed. Global civil society risks being appropriated by governments and international organisations to service neo-liberal social and economic imperatives that pose a significant threat to the achievement of social justice and genuine participative democracy. Neo-liberalism therefore produces significant challenges to the achievements of democratic governance and gender equity that civil society advocates must negotiate.

Outline of report

Drawing mainly on presentations and discussions from the seminar, this report explores some of the issues highlighted in this introduction in further depth. Chapter one explores the role of both top-down action on the part of governments and bottom-up action on the part of citizens in increasing participation in political decision-making processes. It considers donor-recipient relationships and the strengths and draw-backs of particular approaches to public consultation, e-democracy and participative budgets.

Chapter two examines how the election and continued tenure of women representatives in local and national politics might be achieved and how gender-sensitive policies may be implemented, institutionalised and sustained as a means to promote social inclusion and gender equity. Chapter three addresses the roles of social movements and political parties in organising and securing more active citizen involvement and state accountability, paying particular attention to the relationships between movements and parties. The report concludes by considering key challenges and ways forward.

Chapter One

Building and supporting democratic governance

Ensuring that poor and marginalised people have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives remains an ongoing challenge in both Southern and Northern countries. Building and supporting genuinely participative democracies necessitates both top-down action, on the part of governments, and bottom-up action, on the part of citizens.

On the one hand, national and global governing bodies need to facilitate and maintain effective structures for participation and change, including laws, frameworks and processes that address gender inequity and social injustice. Governments must also open themselves to internal and external scrutiny and allow for sanctions if performance is poor or rules are broken. On the other hand, citizens need to be politicised and mobilised. Marginalised people, including women, need to become aware of their rights and find the means and capacity to organise to exercise these rights. Excluded and disempowered groups of citizens need to have access to a variety of political channels and the ability to transform those channels to better reflect their specific needs, interests and priorities.

Many marginalised people are already engaged in a host of political activities, whether through protesting against unfair labour conditions, rejecting patriarchal notions that women belong 'in the home', or demanding that sexual violence be treated as a criminal act, rather than a private concern. Indeed, as the salient feminist slogan goes, 'the personal is political'. The challenge for marginalised groups lies in increasing their bargaining power to ensure that their political messages reach and *influence* decision-makers in public arenas in order to effect lasting positive change.

This chapter explores various strategies to increasing citizen's participation in governmental decision-making processes. It considers some of the challenges associated with development funding relationships; explores the advantages and

disadvantages of various participative democracy initiatives; and looks at two examples of marginalised groups that have successfully organised to increase the accountability of local and national governments to their citizens.

Development funding: Donor-partner relationships

In the context of democratic decentralisation, efforts to increase citizen's participation in politics and political decision-making are often linked to and conditioned by the relationships between the donors and recipients of development funding. There are a range of options for structuring donor-recipient relationships, each of which are associated with particular opportunities and constraints.

The British government's Department for International Development (DFID) has developed a contemporary model of governance structures which recognises the pervasiveness of politics, the need for citizen engagement and inclusion, and the requirement that governments be accountable to their citizens. Susan Loughhead, cited the Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn MP: 'What makes the biggest difference to the quality of governance is active involvement by citizens – the thing we know as politics' (Making Governance Work for the Poor, White Paper 2006). Democracy, in DFID's view is 'a process in which a state becomes more capable, accountable, responsive', it is about 'principles, values, institutions'. DFID is now taking a 'more complete view of governance' which looks at accountability and responsiveness as well as capability. It plans to work more with parliaments, judiciaries, electoral commissions (and 'even sometimes with political parties') and will ensure that civil society is at the centre of its governance and state building work.

DFID and the European Commission (EC) recognise that good governance – understood as the ‘rules, processes and behaviour by which interests are articulated, resources are managed and power is exercised in society’ (Leftwich, 2007) – builds upon local initiatives and energies and cannot be externally imposed.

Likewise the European Commission’s concept of governance has moved from a ‘narrow-technocratic concept’ to ‘a holistic definition’ including human rights, democratisation, rule of law, public sector reform, civil society and decentralisation. Jean Bossuyt is in no doubt that the Commission is right to put governance on the top of its political priorities. It does, however, in his view, face several challenges, for example, whose view of governance is being promoted; how can the Commission support societal transformation processes; how can it assess governance; and what does it mean for the European Commission/European Union to act as a ‘change agent’? – as he puts it, ‘there is a strong perception that the Commission’s primary role (and focus of interest) is management and administration’. As with other donor institutions there is also a gap between policy frameworks and practice in partner countries.

To create opportunities for citizen engagement, these bodies aim to build participation into the projects they fund via governments, either bilaterally, or more commonly in association with other institutions, such as the World Bank or United Nations. As will be discussed below, ensuring that citizens become the ‘makers and shapers’, as opposed to being ‘users and choosers’, of participatory projects is crucial, yet can be difficult in practice (Cornwall, 2003).

Independent consultant Elena Krylova highlights a number of dilemmas arising from external intervention (including financial support) with respect to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which, despite their differences, have all experienced a double transition from planned to state led market based economies and from authoritarian to formally democratic regimes. She raises important questions with respect to what the role of external agencies and donors should and should not be. While external funding provided an important resource for democratization in transition societies, such as the Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, she argues, it is imperative that approaches are grounded in the local political and social realities of the assisted societies rather than western liberal individualism which remains pervasive despite the stated intentions of donors.

DFID and the EC only monitor financial accountability and allow recipient governments to meet their own specified targets with respect to citizen participation, social inclusion, gender equity and other relevant areas. This approach allows recipient states a significant degree of autonomy in managing development projects and initiatives to nurture democratic governance. Yet One World Action questions whether this approach risks taking decentralisation too far and eroding donor responsibility. When direct budget support from donor nations is given directly to partner governments in recipient nations to use at their own discretion, such funds may not reach those socially marginalised groups most in need of financial support. As Maria Alicias-Garen of the Institute for Popular Democracy in the Philippines stresses, ‘there are no guarantees that by giving our governments more money that this will trickle down to the poor, especially women’.

The Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), Philippines

The Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) was founded in 1986, the year the Marcos dictatorship fell. Since 1986, it has sought to strengthen and widen the emerging democratic space by strengthening progressive movements and building coalitions on crucial national issues. It has played a leading role in democratisation in the Philippines by building capacity among non-governmental organisations and people’s organisations to engage with local and national politics. Since 1991, IPD has been instrumental in bringing together a wide range of civil society groups to take advantage of the spaces opened up by the moves to decentralise power to locally elected councils by strengthening the relationship between local government and civil society.

In this respect, as Susan Loughhead explains, DFID prefers ‘capable accountable states that are responsive to the needs of the poor’. They bypass authoritarian states, for example, the current regime in Zimbabwe, by making grants through civil society organisations. With respect to the European Commission, a range of practical problems were identified with existing donor arrangements. Jean Bossuyt outlines suggestions for improvement with respect to internal governance within the EC in order to increase responsiveness to external needs.

While such policy initiatives represent significant positive steps, civil society activists stress the importance of continuing to rethink the way that donor support is given across the board. They urge policy-makers to explore strategies for supporting genuine forms of participatory democracy through engagement with civil society groups. As One World Action argues, 'donor governments cannot afford to view development as a technical fix or something that can be delivered by the State alone without simultaneously building a strong and active civil society base that can effectively work with government to ensure that the needs and interests of the poor and especially women are reflected in policy and practice'.

Participative Democracy: Consultation, participatory planning and e-democracy

Facilitating increased participation in governmental decision-making has become very popular on a world scale. Indeed, the 1990s was perhaps the decade of participation and empowerment. Discourses of participation drew on ideas from Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers, 1983) with the objective to draw on local knowledge in order to make plans more responsive and appropriate to local needs and to empower people by giving them influence in the decisions affecting their future.

Governments in different parts of the world have developed various means of increasing citizens' input in political processes. They have, for example, established fora at local, district and national level in which civil servants, elected representatives and representatives of civil society organisations can meet, discuss and agree priorities. New spaces for participation have been created through direct democracy initiatives, including targeted public consultations, e-democracy and participatory planning and budgeting. Moreover, new legislation, such as the Right to Information Act in India, may also allow for more effective citizen participation and scrutiny of the State.

Despite these positive developments, however, a certain disillusionment has been expressed regarding the extent to which people are able to participate in ways that allow real control over outcomes. Elena Krylova suggests with respect to the experience of participative democracy initiatives in the CIS, for

example, that people feel that they are 'bounced along by the process', that it is 'a bit of a gesture', as outcomes are not binding. Furthermore, in Nicaragua, the women's movement has become involved with discussing many aspects of social policy, but their proposals are not used. As Maria Eugenia Gomez of the Nicaraguan feminist advocacy group Tierra Viva argues, the current president is considered to act in a very demagogical way. Yet, should the outcomes of participation match the interests of the State, participation can be used to 'bypass the democratic processes'.

Two key concerns have thus been identified with respect to the efficacy of participation outside of the formal political realm. One is that there are often no formal connections between deliberations and outcomes. As Krylova suggests, 'participatory practices are rarely sustained after project completion or translated into governance practices within politics'. A second concern arises from the limited range of participants and lack of connection to the formal democratic process. Even the World Bank, in an evaluation of its own programmes, found that the 'powerful members of the community dominated the participatory process, and effective participation of women, the poor, and other excluded groups proved limited and elusive' (OED, 2000: 2). In these circumstances the legitimacy of the outcomes is questionable without endorsement through a democratic process.

Limited forms of participation can generate scepticism, disillusion and frustration. A further problem is that when state institutions engage directly with the socially marginalised, such groups are often treated as representatives of 'the problem' rather than as contributors to the solution. These concerns were raised within the Women Acting in Today's Society (WAITS) project, which consists of disadvantaged Black and ethnic minority women who work together in Birmingham, UK and have connections with a similar group working in Zimbabwe.

Women Acting in Today's Society (WAITS), Birmingham, UK

'We believe that women who experience difficulties in their lives are entitled to have their voices heard by policy makers and for their opinions to be respected... and that disadvantaged women should participate in policy discussions on terms which are empowering and which seek to enhance their capacity.'

WAITS, however, also provides a positive example of how civil society groups can, in some contexts, engage with and transform participation channels from the bottom up to better reflect their own priorities and interests. The WAITS project's objective is to develop a code of practice that will enable community-level women's groups to engage with government policy making in a structured way, replacing previous rather ad hoc approaches. Through collective discussion and intervention, the women challenged the terms of reference of existing participation mechanisms and took control over the process by deciding which issues were worth their time and which they were prepared to engage with, in addition to setting the procedures for their participation.

Participatory planning and budgeting

Participatory budgeting (orçamento participativo, OP) links active participation with formal politics. Participation is associated with control over resources in a way that combines participation at the community level with formal democratic structures stretching from the local level to the nation state. In Brazil, OP was introduced by the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT). The idea is that:

Citizens are encouraged to attend neighbourhood meetings to propose, discuss and vote on budget priorities in the area of public works and social services and to elect delegates to subsequent municipal forums where the sum of neighbourhood priorities is put to the final vote. The results are incorporated into the administration's budget proposal and submitted to the city council. An elected council of OP delegates follows subsequent deliberations, as well as the implementation of approved OP projects (Nylen, 2002:127).

Participatory budgets were largely successful in the Brazilian context, the first being introduced in Porte Alegre, followed by initiatives in Sao Paolo, and subsequently in a wide range of small and medium cities. In the municipalities governed by PT there was much more space for the parties to participate and be involved in policy-making. Social movements also remain very active in Brazil and promising connections have been established between these movements, formal politics and legislation, as discussed further in Chapter three.

Participatory planning is used quite widely in The Philippines at the local level. The Institute of Politics and Governance (IPG) and the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium work with Barangay (lowest level of government) officials across all regions to carry out participatory planning exercises which last five to six days. The outcome of the exercise is a detailed five-year plan and budget with a pledging ceremony that motivates community members and officials to commit time and funds to the plan. It is quite common for five-year plans to be completed in three indicating a high level of co-operation. Strong community organisation is a pre-requisite for effective participatory planning and implementation.

Through involving citizens in decisions about how financial resources are allocated at a local level, participatory budgets offer one approach which may help to ameliorate some of the problems that arise when development funding is employed unilaterally by states without input from constituents, and particularly socially marginalised groups.

E-democracy

Given the low degree of involvement in formal political processes, and especially in local affairs, e-democracy is one tool that has been employed in a number of countries as a means to increase citizen's involvement in local decision-making. For example, the local authority-run e-democracy programme in Bristol, UK, uses a range of technologies, including voting handsets, web-based tools and SMS (mobile phones) to broaden citizens' participation in political processes. SMS has been used as an effective organising tool in Thailand and The Philippines.

One concern is that e-democracy leads to decision making in isolation, with people simply voting on a set agenda rather than through active deliberation with others. However, in the case of Bristol, in addition to simple e-voting or responding to

petitions, there are e-enabled citizens' panels for online consultation as well as e-discussion forums where participants interact with each other and with decision-makers. People can also establish e-petitions which the public can vote on. Such procedures have been found to raise the participation rates of younger people, women, ethnic minorities and people with busy lives. Nonetheless, the council officials are the only ones who have total knowledge of the information relayed and have the capacity to choose whether or not to take note of the outcomes.

Bristol Local Authority: E-Democracy

Advantages of e-democracy:

- ▶ More attractive to <50s
- ▶ High proportion of females registered
- ▶ Fairly representative for black and minority ethnic groups
- ▶ Fairly representative for disabled people
- ▶ Good for time-poor (busy) people
- ▶ Supports but does not replace traditional participation activities

A problem with these ad hoc forms of participation is the expectation that people will want to become involved in decision-making at this level and that such involvement will lead to more inclusive and harmonious outcomes which reflect the community's interest. Furthermore, there is an underlying belief that it is the lack of knowledge about community preferences, or a lack of presence at the negotiating table, that has prevented people's interests from being considered and, by implication, if they were, a more inclusive outcome would be obtained. There is, therefore, a rather simplistic assumption that wider participation will lead to the emergence of a singular community interest.

Power differences and material conflicts between individuals or groups, either within or between communities, are rarely addressed. Likewise, the existence of potential conflicts between community proposals and the interests of fund providers or the broader economic policies advanced by global institutions and economically powerful nations are often similarly sidelined. In this respect, more formal political structures which have institutionalised processes for dealing with conflict resolution may in reality be more inclusive.

Marginalised groups: Mobilising for change from the bottom-up

Engaging with and influencing governance from the bottom-up is crucial but often very challenging, especially in the context of the growing authoritarianism in several parts of the world. Two of One World Action's partner organisations, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Malawi Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (MANET+), however, provide inspiring examples of marginalised groups that have succeeded in influencing government decision-making through organising at the grassroots level.

SEWA, a trade-union for poor women workers, was born in Gujarat, India in the early 1970s when a group of female head-loaders came together to protest their unfair treatment by local merchants. It is now the largest membership-based organisation in India. Geeta, a Union Leader, described how SEWA effectively supported female stall holders in Delhi to form a committee to protest their eviction from a local market after it was closed by municipal authorities. The group took their claims first to local and then to national leaders, and were able to press for the development of a new market in an alternative location by holding the government accountable to the pro-poor policy that already existed in India. As Geeta asserts, 'with growing confidence and strength, we can now put our demands before government because we know our legal rights'.

SEWA demonstrates the significance of grassroots mobilisation to promote the interaction between different levels of governance in order to achieve social inclusion. In other words it is an illustration of 'ground to top and then top to the bottom' action. Organising must be needs-based, Sanjay Kumar, national co-ordinator of SEWA Bharat, stresses – organisation cannot be imposed. It is about 'people coming together to meet a need'. SEWA's co-operative way of organising is not only effective but also sustainable and economically viable. As, Kumar says, 'when groups face a crisis the co-operative way of working is more likely to sustain them'.

Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India

In 1971, Mrs. Ela Bhatt organised a small group of head loaders in the cloth markets of Ahmedabad city in Gujarat, India. This resulted in the fair treatment of the women head loaders by the merchants. This victory triggered off more groups who started organising themselves from different services. On an appeal from the women and the initiative of Mrs. Ela Bhatt, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was born on December 3, 1971. SEWA's success in Gujarat inspired other regions and SEWA organisations were started for unorganised women workers in other states. Together, ten member organisations form SEWA Bharat, with the mandate to highlight the issues of women working in the informal sector, and to strengthen the capacity of these women and the organisations that serve them.

In a country where political engagement is generally quite low and where there is little faith in the government's ability to deliver, the success of MANET+ is particularly marked. Through enabling people living with HIV/AIDS to join together to offer one another mutual support, MANET+ has succeeded in getting the voices of a marginalised group heard to the extent that their views are being taken into account in the formulation and implementation of national policy.

As Director of MANET+, Anock Kapira, explains, when the group first formed, the national government was not sure how to react to them. However, as a consequence of the network's advocacy work, people began to talk more freely about HIV/AIDS at the community level and the government began to see that HIV/AIDS positive people constituted a key partner group that would need to be consulted in decision-making processes. Today, MANET+ has secured representation in the National AIDS Commission and the government supports the Network's national awareness-raising events. Like SEWA, MANET+ attests to the great potential marginalised groups have to effect transformation in political processes from the ground upwards when they mobilise for change.

Malawi Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (MANET+)

Founded in 1997 by people living with HIV/AIDS, MANET+ not only lobbies the government on national policy around HIV/AIDS, it also fights against stigma and discrimination in all areas of national life and advocates for the greater involvement and acceptance of people living with HIV/AIDS at all levels. A key area of MANET+'s work is building capacity among local groups to articulate their needs and to engage politically in policy areas that affect their lives. The voices and views of local groups form the basis of MANET+'s strategies and policy positions. MANET+ also provides its community support groups with resources and training in needs assessment and information collection, project management, monitoring and evaluation as well as proposal writing.

Chapter Two

Women and politics: Participation at local and national levels

Widening women's involvement in politics is central to the project of establishing genuinely participative democracies. This is happening in a variety of ways in many countries experiencing decentralisation.

Growing numbers of women are seeking to promote women's rights and improve women's lives directly through standing for election to local councils or national parliaments and setting up cross-party organisations to put women's rights issues above party politics. Others are building alliances with elected representatives and sympathetic officials at local and national levels.

However, women in various national contexts continue to face a number of barriers to their political participation. Long seen as the domain of men, politics remains a highly gendered activity. For centuries women in both 'developed' and 'developing' nations have been excluded from political activity and confined to the home. The legacy of such historical exclusions lives on, with women vastly under-represented in local and national governing bodies worldwide. Thus, as Maria Eugenia Gomez of the Nicaraguan feminist advocacy group, Grupo Venancia, comments, 'one of the first challenges is to convince ourselves that politics is about women'.

Tackling the barriers to women's involvement in formal political systems remains a crucial aspect of achieving greater gender equity in political participation. Yet addressing gendered exclusions with respect to political participation also necessitates looking beyond electoral politics to gendered relations of power both within civil society and the so-called private sphere. As Gomez points out, 'democracy is not restricted to politics in the major formal mechanisms – democracy has to do with our daily lives'. Indeed, one of the central tasks of feminist political critics and activists has been to

interrogate the entrenched public/private divide that confines the activity of 'politics' to the masculinized public sphere while defining the feminized private sphere as a distinctly apolitical realm.

When thinking about the relationship between political participation and gender equity, it is important to avoid conflating the term 'gender' with 'women'. Gender is a relational concept that refers to the power relationships both within and between the groups that have been socially constructed and labelled as 'men' and 'women'. It is often necessary for women's and feminist groups to mobilise under the category 'women' to address gendered exclusions and to make their voices heard on gender-related issues. Yet it is also important to keep sight of the significant relationships of power and privilege that exist between women, who are differentiated on the basis of class, race, nation, sexuality, age, religion and ability, among other variables.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that men may also be marginalised or oppressed through gendered power relations, including narrow and/or heterosexist ideals of masculinity. Efforts to achieve gender justice cannot therefore be confined to the project of 'getting more women into politics', although this is an important beginning. They must also address the pervasive gendered constructs, roles and power relations which structure the wider social context in which political activity occurs. Securing a presence for women in parliament and local governing bodies, especially if a crucial mass of female representatives is obtained, may be one step forward in challenging these constructs.

This chapter focuses on the challenges and opportunities associated with women's participation in local and national politics, with specific attention to the work of One World Action's partner organisations in Zambia, Nicaragua and Guatemala. It explores not only how women's participation in electoral politics can be increased, but also how transformative gender-oriented policies and programmes can be implemented and maintained.

Grupo Venancia, Nicaragua

Grupo Venancia's main focus is to pursue advocacy strategies that strengthen women's leadership and increase women's political participation in a context where men still dominate all areas of political life. As a leading member of several Nicaraguan women's networks, Grupo Venancia contributes to strengthening spaces for women to effectively advocate laws and public policies that promote women's rights. They achieve this by training women to stand for local elections and working with existing women local councillors to ensure that gender rights are implemented and take precedence over party political positions. The lobby efforts of Grupo Venancia resulted in the creation of the Matagalpa Municipality's Gender Equity Commission as well as a commitment by the local council to assign one per cent of its budget for women's projects.

Gender equity and women's participation in electoral politics

Across many international contexts, women remain under-represented in both national and local governing bodies and are absent particularly from the upper echelons of power. In 2006, only 17 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide were women (although this represents an increase from 1995, when the figure was 11.3 per cent). Furthermore, only four countries maintained or surpassed a critical mass of 30 per cent parliamentary representation by women after elections in 2006 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2007). The fact that women compose roughly 50 per cent of most national populations and yet are consistently excluded from or marginalised within formal political systems means that most governing bodies fail to approximate any fair representation of their constituents.

This failure has significant implications for democratic governance. As Tamala Tonga Kambikambi, Chairperson of the Zambia National Women's Lobby argues, 'women are an integral part of society and should participate in decision-making in equal numbers to men. Therefore, a government that does not include women is undemocratic.' In this sense, ensuring the election of more women candidates to local and national governing bodies can be seen as an important component of democratic governance in and of itself. However, it is also imperative to address *which women* are being elected as political representatives, as it is clear that achieving greater representation of women as a group does not necessarily result in equal access for *all* women, but rather often those who are already privileged with respect to socio-economic class, education and other factors.

Furthermore, electing more women into positions of political power is not a sufficient means of achieving gender equity. There is no guarantee that women representatives will be more likely to pursue gender-sensitive programmes and policies simply because they are women. Indeed, many women who are elected to positions of power appear content to 'mime' the traditional political roles of men. That being said, there is some evidence to suggest that 'the feminisation of political decision-making does make a difference to policy outcomes' (Gray and Heenan, 1996:5).

Achieving gender equity on a broader societal scale requires the election of candidates who are specifically committed to transformative gender-oriented goals. Yet the problem is that, as women often remain a small minority in any given governing body, those women representatives who do seek to initiate positive change with respect to gender relations often end up toeing the party line because they lack the necessary formal collective support to effect changes. Furthermore, female representatives who ally with women's or feminist groups are often treated as suspicious and/or alienated by other members of government. From this perspective, it is important to consider not only that which facilitates the election and continued tenure of women representatives in local and national politics, but also, how gender-sensitive policies can be implemented, institutionalised and sustained.

Zambia National Women's Lobby

Since its inception in 1991, the Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) has been working towards making people aware of women's contribution to society and promoting women's representation and participation in decision-making at all levels. Since 1997, ZNWL has targeted its efforts on increasing women's participation in decision-making in local government. This is due to the realisation that most of the issues dealt with at local government level directly affect women: health, education, shelter, water, sanitation, roads, markets, and general livelihood. Women are often more aware of these issues and, therefore, better placed to tackle them. The ZNWL has spearheaded the production of a Women's Rights Charter in order to advance the human rights of women in Zambia.

Challenges to women's participation

The barriers associated with increasing women's participation in formal politics take different forms across various cultural and geo-political contexts. For example, in Zambia, regional voting patterns, problems with transportation and high candidate nomination fees tend to negatively affect women candidates, whereas in Nicaragua, religious fundamentalism and the influence of the Catholic Church have played a significant part in reinforcing traditional gender roles. Beyond these specificities, it is possible to identify some broad challenges that remain salient across a number of democratic states in both the North and South.

Patriarchal ideas that politics is a 'men's activity' (and that women's place remains in 'the kitchen') function powerfully to prevent women from both running and succeeding as political candidates in many (if not all) parts of the world. Speaking with respect to the Zambian context, Kambikambi remarks that, until quite recently, it would have been 'unheard of for women to stand up and address a public gathering'. In relation to Nicaragua, Gomez suggests that because patriarchal views of political life are so deeply entrenched, 'women have to fight twice as hard to be recognised, to demonstrate that they are capable of taking on a political role, and to be taken seriously'. Furthermore, in both Northern and Southern countries, those women that do serve as political representatives, are often still lumbered with

a 'double shift' of domestic work in the home (Crompton et al., 2005; Chant, 2006). This appears to be a key factor contributing to the low retention rates of female political representatives in many countries.

It is also crucial to acknowledge how sexist and patriarchal attitudes frequently intersect with racism and ethnocentrism to exclude and marginalise particular groups of women from electoral politics. As Esmeralda Judit Alfaro Joj of the women's advocacy group Tierra Viva emphasises, in the context of Guatemala, 'indigenous women's situation in political participation is very difficult due to their triple discrimination on the account of being women, indigenous and wearing distinct traditional clothing'.

Women, and especially poor women, often face significant financial barriers to their political participation. In most contexts, running for election for local, and especially national, government requires that a candidate access substantial financial resources. Kambikambi comments with respect to Zambia that 'most political parties could not adequately fund their candidates' campaigns. In fact, the ability to fund one's own campaign was one of the criteria used to veto some candidates'. As women are, on the whole, less economically well off than men, the necessity for significant financial resources puts many female candidates at an immediate disadvantage.

Mainstream political parties, many of which remain hierarchical and male-dominated, often provide inhospitable environments for the election of female candidates and for the pursuit of gender-sensitive policies. As Tamala Kambikambi stresses, 'men dominate political parties and tend to select other men to be named on party lists', thereby perpetuating the exclusion of women from participation in parliamentary politics. In some countries, political systems and parties are becoming increasingly authoritarian. Gomez suggests that in Nicaragua 'caudillismo' ('strong man politics') is resurfacing with new force. In this context, 'it is very difficult for women leaders to emerge who have a strong commitment to gender issues'.

A final, and particularly troubling, factor thwarting women's participation in formal politics is the persistence of gender-based violence. From Gomez's perspective, 'violence and the threat of violence affect all women in their daily lives'. Such violence 'constrains women's political participation and creates fear.' While gendered violence, including domestic

violence, is an issue that affects all women (in both Northern and Southern countries), poor and rural women often have fewer resources to seek protection and means or recourse than middle class and urban women. Moreover, particular groups of women (and men) are also subject to gendered forms of racist, casteist, homophobic and/or disablist violence which also curtail political participation, as well as causing serious physical and emotional trauma and even death.

It is important to remember that even when women are elected to positions of power this does not mean that they are participating in conditions of equality. Women in both national and local politics are frequently given marginalised roles and responsibilities (usually in areas that are already understood to be feminized such as social care) and thus often remain excluded from much high-level decision-making – as well as from economic policy which often appears to be gender neutral but can be highly gender differentiated in outcome as the earlier discussion of neo-liberalism indicated. Furthermore, high turn-over rates in women representatives mean that vital experience is lost every election period and it becomes increasingly difficult for dedicated representatives to implement lasting gender-oriented policies and programmes.

Strategies for change

As the discussion above has shown, the challenges to women's increased participation in formal politics are significant. However, they should not be seen as permanent or insurmountable. Advocacy groups such as the Zambia National Women's Lobby, Grupo Venancia and Tierra Viva are working to implement a range of measures to address these barriers and build genuinely participative democracies.

It is clear that positive change will not occur without the will of states. Top-down action on the part of governments and political parties is required both to increase the number of women representatives elected to national and local governments and to ensure that positive gender-oriented policies are developed and meaningfully implemented. In some contexts, structural changes to the electoral system itself have the potential to make a significant positive impact. Zambia, for example, went to the polls in 2006 under the 'first past the post system' (FPTP) and

only increased the level of women's representation by two per cent from the previous polls. A National Constitutional Review Commission has recognised the need to change Zambia's electoral system to a mixed member proportion system combining the prevailing constituency-based system with proportional representation (PR) as a means to improve women's representation in parliament. Within PR systems, central party organisers 'have greater influence over nominations and so, if they are committed to including more women, can do so' (Grey and Heenan, 1996: 2).

Government commissions and advocacy groups in other countries have recommended the implementation of quota systems to increase the representation on women in government also. While participation quotas remain a contentious political strategy, it is clear that such measures can help build a 'critical mass' of women in parliament, which is understood by many feminist theorists and advocacy groups as essential in order to provide a base of support for effecting gender equity related policy changes. For example, as the number of female representatives elected in parliament has grown, the Zambia National Women's Lobby has been able to establish a 'Women in Politics' forum. Bringing together women representatives across the political parties to address gender-oriented issues, the forum represents one space in which the women's rights agenda can usefully take precedence over traditional party concerns. Like Grupo Venancia in Nicaragua and Tierra Viva in Guatemala, the Women's Lobby also works with women candidates and representatives to build skills, capacity and confidence and to raise awareness, disseminate information and develop agendas with respect to gender-oriented issues.

Efforts to achieve a critical mass of women in governance should not proceed with the assumption that men will not (or should not) play an important role in supporting positive gender-oriented change. Indeed, as Kambikambi argues, gaining men's support for measures to achieve greater gender equity in electoral politics (as well as in societies more broadly) is crucial to the success of such initiatives: 'Women need men to buy in, so that they understand that we are not trying to usurp power from them just like that, but to develop a situation that will benefit everyone'. The Zambia National Women's Lobby works with a men's political network to increase men's understanding of gender issues and elicit crucial support for gender equity initiatives.

In order for women's rights and gender equity policies and programmes to be pursued and implemented on a broader scale, specific institutions dedicated to addressing gender issues need to be developed – as well as adequately supported and financed – at the government level. In many contexts, such institutions already exist, but have been routinely marginalised and under-funded, and thus remain largely ineffective. Thus, it is vital that pressure is put on governments to support such bodies so that they may play a more effective role in tackling gender inequalities and women's rights abuses.

As a means to create more just and equitable conditions for the political participation of women, addressing the 'feminisation of poverty' (Chant, 1997, 2006) is essential. From Gomez's perspective, 'making visible women's contribution to the economy, which they are doing in conditions of disadvantage, is an important task.' States need to both support women's economic initiatives so that they are more profitable and sustainable and implement measures to compensate for the inequities that have led to women's, and especially poor women's, disadvantaged socio-economic position. At the same time, the notion that economic growth necessarily leads to gender equity in any particular nation must be interrogated. As Gomez stresses, 'if there aren't redistribution policies, then economic growth won't result in equality'. Measures which ensure that wealth trickles down to socially marginalised groups, including women, thus need to be put in place and actively monitored. Moreover, if women are to engage more meaningfully in politics, at both formal and informal levels, it is clear that patriarchal attitudes and the gendered division of labour in the home must be addressed.

Tackling gender-based violence (as well as persecution and violence on the basis of race, ethnicity and sexual-orientation) also needs to be made a priority within government agendas. In many contexts, gendered violence remains either completely ignored or ineffectively addressed by state and local governments. In this respect, Gomez emphasises the utility of making local and national governing bodies 'see that the security of women is also a part of citizen's security, the latter of which they do care about'. Advocacy groups such as Grupo Venancia and Tierra Viva are working on the ground to support victims of violence in Central America, to highlight the reality, roots and expression of violence to both government and the public, and to advocate

for policies to address gender-based violence and its effects. While progress remains slow in the absence of substantive state support, there have been some advances at both local and national levels, such as the creation of *comisarias* (women's police stations) in Nicaragua. Vital future improvements in this area depend on the will and support of national and local governments.

Tierra Viva, Guatemala

Working in an area where there is a high incidence of violence towards women and a systematic denial of their basic rights, Tierra Viva works to influence political decision-making at local and national levels to take into account women's rights in all levels of the decision-making process. They set up local groups and work with women leaders (mostly indigenous women, many of whom were displaced during the civil war) to develop advocacy agendas on sexual and reproductive rights and gender violence. They are one of the very few organisations in Guatemala who are prepared to campaign openly for abortion rights. Tierra Viva have lobbied for proposed laws on sexual harassment and on the political autonomy of the Presidential Secretariat for Women, the government body set up to coordinate policies which promote gender equity.

Whether as a means to support the implementation of electoral system change, participatory quotas, the democratisation of political parties, the maintenance of gender-equity oriented institutions or other progressive measures, it is crucial that governments are held accountable to the relevant declarations they have already signed up to. For example, the Peace Accords signed by the Guatemalan government clearly outline the necessity of ensuring women's ample participation in the construction of democracy, the African Union Congress declares that women should constitute 50 per cent of parliamentary representatives and the Nicaraguan Political Constitution declares that the political system should provide for representative and participative democracy.

At the international level, the vast majority of the world's states have signed up to proposals for gender equity contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and, most recently, the Millennium Development Goals. Feminist and women's advocacy groups, as well as other active citizen's organisations can, and do,

address the gap between policy and practice by putting pressure on local and national governments to fulfil their responsibilities as set out in these and other relevant directives and legislation. In Zambia, the National Women's Lobby has emphasised the importance of encouraging governments to learn from and replicate the positive work that has been done to increase women's participation in political decision-making in other countries, such as Mozambique and South Africa.

Advocacy groups are also working from the bottom up to try to ensure that existing progressive legislation and policies are not abandoned or repealed when new parties come into power. As Gomez emphasises, 'this is the real challenge – to ensure that the advances which we make are not reversed.' In Nicaragua, as well as many other countries around the world, such efforts have been particularly crucial with respect to legislation concerning reproductive rights, which are under threat as authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism have become increasingly intertwined.

Building alliances with more progressive parties in relation to particular policy issues or campaigns may provide a useful strategy for women's advocacy groups in some contexts. However, such alliances are susceptible to mainstream or conservative co-option, which can result in the watering down of progressive or radical goals (or their abandonment in the long-term). They can also ignite problematic fissions within women's advocacy groups, which can raise significant problems with respect to their internal strength and influence over time. The challenge for women's and feminist groups is thus one of 'working "within and against the party" – of having direct and strong links to political parties and yet avoiding an over-reliance on allies within political parties who can become hostage to a hierarchical and male-dominated party system' (Molyneux and Razavi, 2002: 29-30). The issue of alliances between social movements and political parties is discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Social movements and parties: Securing influence and accountability in contemporary governance

How can socially marginalised groups press their demands and secure greater influence within the State and how can those in power be made accountable to these groups? This chapter considers the relative merits of social movements and political parties in this respect and the dilemmas experienced by activists as they operate in the spaces within and between these possibilities. These concerns are addressed by referring to the case studies from countries represented at the One World Action seminar, with particular reference to Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Brazil.

Democratic expansion within a neo-liberal context

Almost all states are formally democratic but current forms of democracy are frail. In principle, everyone has an equal voice but it is a weak voice (Wainwright, 2003). Voting only at election times limits the degree of citizen engagement and influence. In some countries with a long history of democracy, electorates have become disillusioned with representative democracy. Voting figures and the degree of citizen engagement in political affairs have fallen. Here in the UK, and elsewhere despite radical oppositional movements securing power, the needs of the most socially marginalised and women continue to be under-represented.

While the process of democratic decentralisation taking place in almost all countries is fraught with shortcomings, including elite capture, it is nonetheless opening some scope for local decision-making. In these circumstances, Northern

and Southern countries face the challenge of constructing new, more inclusive and accountable relationships between citizens, government and the State that protect the interests of marginalised groups. From the perspective of Syaiful Bahari, Chair of the People's Confederation Party (PPR) in Indonesia, 'there is an urgent need to create an alternative system of politics and governance that empowers ordinary citizens. The traditional political elites cannot be trusted to take into account the needs and interests of the poor.' In this context, social movements have played a significant role in enabling marginalised groups to exert influence and ensure greater governmental accountability.

Social movements

Given the problems identified with formal political parties and systems of representation, especially with respect to the under-representation of women, it has been argued that socially marginalised groups might secure more effective representation by remaining a social movement. In this respect, there have been some very powerful and effective social movements based on single issues (or a multiplicity of issues) affecting women and the socially marginalised. For example, the Maria Elena Cuadra movement (MEC) in Nicaragua, working with the Central American Women's Network (CAWN), has campaigned in a range of sectors for women's labour rights and their demands have been endorsed by the National Employment Policy.

While social movements are effective ways of drawing attention to specific immediate needs and

problems, they can be difficult to sustain in the long term. In the case of Thailand, for instance, mass mobilisations, called the Assembly of the Poor, were generated, in which more than 10,000 gathered on particular days, but it was difficult to convert this mobilisation into more radical and deep-seated social transformation at the national level because people tended to drop out of the movement once their immediate individual needs were met. As Suriyasai Katsila, Secretary General of the Campaign for Popular Democracy in Thailand, comments, 'the Assembly of the Poor became a means of addressing the immediate problems of the mouth and the stomach... There was no way of building discipline and maintaining momentum over time'.

By contrast, in Brazil, formal mechanisms have been established to incorporate the demands of grassroots social movements associated with land reform into formal policy-making. Following years of dictatorship, these mechanisms were built into the nation's 1988 Constitution, which established processes to enhance the land rights of the indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, rural peasants and the urban poor. In particular, in both rural and urban areas, ownership of unoccupied land that is used productively for five years is now transferred to the user.

Land-reform movements in Brazil have been involved with direct land occupancy through cooperatives, associations and *Mutirões* (a process by which landowners or tenants build or improve their homes through unpaid collective labour at the weekend with government supplied materials). They have also been instrumental in forming the National Platform for Urban Reform, which is similarly concerned with housing and land rights. With the support of the Lula government, a National City Council (consisting of government, civil society and the private sector) has been established and, through a related housing scheme, a Bill first introduced in 1988 to establish support for low income housing finally became law in 2005. This law, which allows funds (currently used to repay foreign debt) to subsidise low income housing programmes, challenges the Brazilian's government capacity to meet external financial commitments linked to the neo-liberal agenda.

The Brazilian case demonstrates the need for social movements to press the state to implement transformative policies even when these exist within the Constitution. Leticia Osorio, Legal Officer of the Americas programme of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) points out that,

'despite the progress made in the past few years in clarifying and strengthening the right to housing in international human rights norms, the national Constitution and laws, this right continues to be brutally violated in Latin America in general and in Brazil in particular.' Such violations particularly affect 'women, members of indigenous communities, blacks, children and individuals with disabilities.' States may be politically committed to transformative social changes yet, in practice, it can be difficult to put all the necessary mechanisms in place. Continued mobilisation of social movements helps the state to respond positively to those pressing for reform.

Social mobilisation can be especially effective when consisting of a diversity of social groups. As Osorio comments, 'the Brazilian experience shows that social participation is possible and fruitful when the different social segments (NGOs, grassroots movements, activists, professional entities, etc.) engage together in actions that are built in conjunction with civil society and based on a strategic political platform'. She emphasises that while 'the unification of all social movements to work together for common causes is far from being a reality', productive 'seeds are being sowed.'

This need for constant vigilance and mobilisation to enact already legally established rights and measures highlights the tension between political rights and social and economic rights and the limitations of the governance agenda for securing the economic and social transformation demanded by the socially excluded and marginalised.

Protest movements are invaluable for demonstrating the strength of support for particular issues and maintaining pressure on governments to change. Yet unless such movements engage simultaneously with more conventional political institutions, as in the case of Brazil above, it is not clear how their varied aspirations can be translated into social practice. In the cases of Indonesia and Thailand, maintaining mobilisation proved to be difficult in the long-term. Additionally, political mobilisation in social movements can be extremely costly in terms of time and, in extreme cases, in terms of people's lives.

Furthermore, only rarely will there be total unanimity on anything but a simple issue; people will remain divided by social class, gender, caste, ethnicity, age, ability and cultural outlook. While particular social movements may capture the local popular and intellectual imagination from time to time, more

formal structures are necessary to aggregate interests and generate sustained pressure for social transformation. Some form of representative decision-making through spatially hierarchical structures would allow for negotiation and compromise around specific issues as long as there was a broad commitment to more abstract ideals/ideology. In this respect, formal politics and political parties, despite their limitations, may be more enduring.

At the same time, social movements are necessary to maintain pressure on and support for leaders once they have been elected and to press for political reform and to make formal democracy more inclusive and accountable (see Rakodi, 2002). Rather than standing back and criticising the elected about their lack of commitment and failure to deliver (and clearly some politicians are attentive to the socially marginalised only at election times), it is important for grassroots movements to maintain connections with politicians to press their claims, especially in the case of women who are massively under-represented within formal political structures. Social movements are engaging with formal politics in different ways.

Two of the contributors to the One World Action seminar highlight the dilemma of whether to remain a social movement or become a social-movement-based political party. Akbayan! (Citizen's Action Party), established in 1998 in the Philippines, has three representatives in the Congress and a number of mayors and local councillors. Perserikatan Rakyat (PPR), set up in 2005 in Indonesia, began life as a coalition of people's organizations but disillusionment with existing political parties led them to form their own. So far, PPR has had to remain outside parliament; it is blocked by laws governing elections and political parties. PPR, however, provides support at election times for reformist and progressive candidates to run against the traditional elites that dominate local politics.

Perserikatan Rakyat (PPR), Indonesia

A culture of top-down planning is deeply embedded in Indonesia after decades of authoritarian rule. However, there are many innovative citizen-driven initiatives at grassroots level which are using the spaces opened up by decentralization and the lifting of restrictions on independent political activity to reinvigorate local politics. One such initiative is Perserikatan Rakyat (PPR), an independent political party based on a coalition of grassroots groups representing the interests of the marginalized. PPR transformed itself into a political party in 2005 and today is active in 20 of Indonesia's 33 provinces. As it is blocked from entering formal electoral politics due to electoral and party regulations, it is primarily concerned with strengthening the participation of marginalised groups in local politics and governance and raising political consciousness.

PPR seeks to build from the grassroots upwards and, similar to the CPD in Thailand, retains close and more continuous links with the people by drawing on members' skills and technical knowledge to offer practical help with respect to building schools, or advice on lower cost organic farming methods. In this way, poor people develop skills and receive education, rather than simply being recipients of favours and food from mainstream parties at election time. In addition, marginalised people develop the capacity to represent themselves, while PPR retains accountability by maintaining open and continuous channels of communication with the people. As it is currently unable to enter parliament, PPR focuses on raising political consciousness and strengthening participation among socially marginalised people.

Political parties and movements: Opportunities and limitations

The conventional and most frequent form of formal representative democracy takes place through political parties (although in some countries, such as The Philippines, the linkages between elected representatives and the political party are weak resulting in little accountability). When there is dissatisfaction with existing parties in terms of their elitism, their failure to enact existing and new legislation – and thereby to represent the interests of people who brought them into power (particularly their ability to reflect the interests of women and the

poor) – a common response is to form new but more democratic and accountable parties.

Initially, new parties aim to encompass disaffected groups by consciously addressing substantive policy and communication failures through developing pro-poor policies and establishing interactive channels between the party and the people. Akbayan! in the Philippines and PPR in Indonesia are using the new spaces and opportunities for citizen engagement created by the election of more democratically inspired governments following the ending of authoritarian regimes. These alternative parties aim to redress the elite hijacking of new political spaces and to 'invert the priorities' to ensure that the poor and the marginalised are more effectively represented.

The Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), Thailand

As power has been devolved to provincial and sub-district level in Thailand, there is an ongoing attempt to try and define civil society's role in local governance and to marginalise those sections that are perceived as a threat to the status quo. The Campaign for Popular Democracy, established in 1979 and reactivated after the military coup in 1991, is one of the few credible organisations leading the call for democratic change in Thailand. In 1997 it played a lead role in drafting and mobilising public pressure for a democratic constitution and today CPD is part of a network of more than 30 organisations united by a desire for democratic change. CPD's main strategy is to mobilise broad support for political reform, to build synergy between public officials and social activists and to get people involved in development planning and local citizen participation, especially around local elections.

These political movements are driven by the desire to be inclusive and this, together with their limited funds, means they operate very differently from mainstream political parties. CPD, like PPR and Akbayan!, builds from the grassroots upwards and maintains close contact with the people by offering specialist skills and knowledge to assist in everyday life. While remaining committed to political action and engaging with social movements, both Akbayan! and PPR opted to become political parties, in part because of the difficulty of sustaining social movements in the long-term. As Etta Rosales, a Congressional Representative of Akbayan! writes, the party is committed to redressing elite domination of

political processes by forming links between the 'repertoire of people power/social movements and formally based political parties in order to consolidate democracy'.

Akbayan! believes that with globalisation, the scale of contemporary issues are too big and too interconnected to be addressed through any particular social movement. Political parties are therefore necessary to aggregate issues and coordinate different interests (i.e. women, labour, gays and lesbians, fisherfolk, etc.) in order to have a greater chance of enacting social transformation. From Rosales' perspective, this process can be 'tricky and tough', but working with and maintaining strong links with a diversity of social groups is essential in order to avoid becoming a vanguard party, and hence losing touch with the people.

Akbayan! (Citizen's Action Party), Philippines

After 20 years of dictatorship under the Marcos regime, formal democracy in the Philippines was restored in 1986 through a broad "people power" movement. This democracy, however, favoured only the political and economic elite of the country. It was within this context that the idea of building an alternative citizens' political party to deepen Philippine democracy first emerged. Akbayan! came into being in 1998 and in the same year the new party tested its strength by participating in the local and party-list elections and won seats in the Congress (House of Representatives) and in several local government units. To date, Akbayan! is the most vigorous and determined effort from the Philippine progressive community to break the hold of traditional politicians and political parties on Philippine politics and to contribute to the development of a political party system that is based on programmes and accountabilities, and not on political opportunism.

If elected in sufficient numbers, alternative parties like PPR and Akbayan! are more likely to try to implement progressive national legislation and to ensure that the commitments made by states to international declarations (such as CEDAW) are enacted. However, besides a lack of governmental commitment or political will, other factors such as insufficient resources or externally imposed policies can also limit the local introduction of progressive legislation. Thus citizens also need to take some responsibility by providing continuing support for the

elected through social pressure or social movements as a means to indicate the widespread support for the radical policies the party may be trying to implement.

In some cases, it may be necessary for different factions of a particular party to maintain some degree of autonomy to ensure their specific interests are not submerged by more powerful ones, something especially important for women. As Maria Eugenia Gomez points out with respect to the Nicaraguan context, 'now we are convinced that it is necessary to participate in political institutions, but this will only be useful if we do it from the women's platform in a collective form with obligations, support and a commitment to women's rights'. Pressure from social movements on the party is likely to increase the responsiveness of national politicians and international institutions to stronger pro-poor and gender equity agendas.

A key question, therefore, is not whether political parties or social movements are more effective in securing social inclusion and gender equity, but rather, how people might effectively participate *in both* in order to effect more progressive outcomes. In this respect, it is important to 'engage with the dominant political system but not be dominated by it' (Wainwright, 2003:199), that is, to engage with the State but maintain real democratic and participatory links with an expanded active electorate.

Participation in organised politics will achieve little without the commitment of the elected to social, economic, cultural and political transformation. The establishment of widely accepted rules and procedures can facilitate this process. Likewise, governments will achieve little either unless citizens are politically mobilised. Furthermore, neither of these forms of governance will be effective from the perspective of the socially marginalised unless there is both the capacity and commitment to challenge not only the symptoms or outcomes of the current economic and social framework but also the framework itself, that is, the broader processes of neo-liberalism and patriarchy which generate the inequalities. Working together across the different lines and structures of governance can secure positive and transformative social outcomes even in the context of an oppressive and non-egalitarian neo-liberal economic model.

Conclusions

Transforming politics: Challenges and ways forward

Drawing on illustrations from a wide range of contexts, seminar participants exchanged ideas and knowledge about how socially marginalised people, including women, can exercise their rights and express their interests in new democratic spaces. The opportunities and challenges associated with developing structures and processes to achieve equitable, gender-sensitive and accountable forms of democratic governance provided a key focus.

The process towards decentralisation which is taking place in almost all countries is opening some scope for local decision-making. Through signing up to the Millennium Development Goals and other key international declarations, the global community has committed itself to addressing poverty, recognising human rights and achieving gender equity and social inclusion. Yet the dominance of neo-liberal economic thinking makes the realisation of these goals increasingly challenging. While new legislation enables citizens to scrutinise state institutions and demand greater accountability, the implementation of legislation remains a challenge in many countries. Crucial decisions, such as those associated with budget preparation and trade negotiation, are taken behind closed doors. In addition, violence and security concerns are closing down opportunities for civic activism.

In this context, both top-down action on the part of governments and bottom-up action on the part of citizens are required to build and support effective democratic governance on a global scale.

Governments must remain accountable to existing progressive legislation and sanctions must be enforced when governments fail to fulfil their commitments. Policy-makers need to continue rethinking the way that donor support is given by focusing their efforts on strengthening genuine participatory democracy. In this vein, governing bodies need to facilitate structures, policies and processes that enable meaningful participation in

decision-making by those traditionally excluded from politics. Public consultation programmes, participatory planning and budgeting and e-democracy initiatives all have the potential to strengthen democracy. In order to be understood as legitimate, however, these approaches must be developed and shaped by their participants and include formal mechanisms to ensure accountability. Participation programmes must also take account of diversity and conflicts among and between various groups in any social context.

Initiatives to increase the representation of women and secure their continued tenure in government remain crucial. However, specific attention also needs to be paid to addressing gendered relations of power though the development and effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programmes. The creation and maintenance of institutions dedicated specifically to addressing gender issues is crucial in this respect. Efforts must also be made to address pervasive patriarchal, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory attitudes, which function to perpetuate women's and other marginalised people's exclusion from political processes.

For socially marginalised groups, organising is crucial to the success of political action. Social mobilisation and the sharing of knowledge and experience across geo-political borders (while recognising contextual specificity) helps to provide the information base, solidarity and courage for grassroots initiatives to pursue effective social change. Socially marginalised groups need to work both within and outside the state from bottom to top and top to bottom to ensure that transformations, including legislative changes, are established and effectively implemented.

Political parties, social movements and more direct forms of democracy can be complementary and it is

important to maintain channels of communication across these different democratic forms – to engage with the state but to maintain real democratic and participatory links with an expanded active electorate sensitive to the specific and socially differentiated outcomes for variably situated people, especially those marginalised by gender, ethnicity, caste, ability or other social difference. Women's advocacy groups, in particular, have to work both within and outside the party to ensure that their voices are present within formal channels of communication but not subordinated or co-opted.

In sum, building democratic governance globally requires that structures and relationships of power are transformed to address the needs and interests of the poor and socially marginalised. Maintaining a commitment to deepening democracy across all levels of political activity is paramount. Achieving these goals necessitates both the will of States and aware and enabled citizens and, as such, calls for a holistic, multi-stranded approach. As One World Action stresses, building fundamental solidarities across diversity and fragmentation is crucial to achieving 'a democratic world that is also a peaceful one'.

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