

## **Integrated Development Plans: moving from Consultation to Participation**

**by Sarah Watson, July 2011**

It is widely accepted that South Africa has one of the highest levels of inequality in the world, both in terms of income and access to resources. This wealth gap has led to widespread and often violent protests around service delivery and to increased citizen apathy, expressed through a general decline in the rate of voting in both national and local elections.

The legislative framework for local government stipulates that municipalities must promote the involvement of citizens (paying particular attention to the participation of marginalised and excluded groups), as well as harnessing their creative input by adopting inclusive approaches. Local government is further mandated to create conditions for local solutions to development problems, work in partnerships, and develop measures to build community capacity. The state has acknowledged the crisis in local governance, and created the Local Government Turnaround Strategy, a key part of which is the statement that "Local government is everyone's business. The strategy extends beyond government and must be owned across society". Cogta is currently reviewing the legislation and policy frameworks which govern public participation. Both Cogta and Salga (The South African Local Government Association) have indicated their interest in engaging with civil society around facilitation of community involvement.

eThekweni municipality has acknowledged (in its Community Participation Policy) that municipal governance is seen as "unresponsive"; that there is a lack of effective means of communication between councillors, officials and communities; a "general feeling that local government does not consult with the people when taking decisions on crucial matters"; and lack of knowledge amongst citizens about how government structures function. It seems that the participation strategies used in eThekweni and other municipalities do not adequately facilitate community input into active decision making. The current design of public participation processes deem participation to be an item on a compliance checklist. At the most current participation processes frame interactions with the community as consultation, used to legitimise decisions taken by politicians and officials.

In terms of the Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998), ward committees are the primary facilitators of community participation. This ward committee system is not well understood either by Council officials or by communities, and both the establishment procedures and functions of these committees are disputed and misunderstood. At best, the role of these ward committees is restricted to advising ward councillors. On the ground the experience has been that these ward committees are not fulfilling even this limited purpose, instead being used to push political party agendas or falling entirely into inactivity. The intended inclusion of marginalised or vulnerable groups including the poor, women and the youth is not being facilitated through the ward committee structures.

The Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is the document created by the Municipality which outlines proposed service delivery and other projects in a 5 year cycle, reviewed annually. The IDP should be the vehicle for creating the medium term vision for the city, the space where competing demands for resources are prioritized, and the standard against which service delivery should be measured. In reality, the IDP document is created by technicians far from the communities it is supposed to serve. The opportunity for use of local knowledge is lost and the use of somewhat technocratic language makes the document inaccessible to the majority of citizens. The scope of the IDP document is also very broad, meaning that for officials the document tends to be too general for their purposes.

The Department of Provincial and Local Governance (now renamed Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs - Cogta) has also noted in the Gender Policy Framework that “only 8.3% (of municipalities) shared IDP-related information with communities”.

In this context, it is clear that there is a need for interventions which strengthen the capacity of communities, CBOs, and other stakeholders to make informed, practical, strategic input to IDP processes, as well as structures to facilitate this input.

With this in mind, the Democracy Development Programme plans to take local governance issues to communities through a new programme, focussed on building capacity amongst civil society organisations to understand and influence the IDP. Tapping into existing spaces including Community Based Organisations is a key strategy for this project. CBOs thrived during the time of Apartheid, and the current government has failed to access the human and organisational resources in these groups. CBOs often have a large percentage of active women within their ranks, and harness the power of volunteerism. Participation in local governance can also be seen as a catalyst for community mobilisation.

The timing of this project is important – Cogta is in the process of developing the Policy Framework on Public Participation, first drafted in 2005 and still awaiting adoption. Indications from the Department have been that they are reviewing the ward committee structures in the light of the failure of these institutions to facilitate effective participation, and are receptive to constructive suggestions as to how to foster greater community engagement with local government processes. We hope to feed our learning from this and previous projects into the development of new policy to facilitate community participation in local governance.