

## **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: FROM A 'DEMOCRACY OF VOTERS' TO A 'DEMOCRACY OF CITIZENS'**

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Democracy has become the fulcrum of contemporary political and development discourse in Africa and seems more ubiquitous than ever in the continent's history. Democratic theorists of both the North and South associate Africa's democratisation process with the wave of pro-democratic protests for integration which swept the continent during the 1990s. This has led to 29 founding elections in Africa, between 1990 and 1994, including Benin, Zambia, Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, South Africa, etc<sup>1</sup>, and by 1998 seventy legislative and sixty presidential elections were held in 42 African countries.<sup>2</sup> Democracy has since become at once the language of a wide array of social actors on the continent, including political leaders, religious leaders, academics, analysts, activists, etc.

But, does the fact that most African countries now have the rules, procedures and institutional designs in place for holding competitive elections mean that citizens can exercise control of decisions that affect their lives? Or is democracy simply reduced to a way of competition amongst parties in which citizens are allowed to elect their representatives? Meanwhile, it's important to note that where elections were held concerns abound over the veracity of some electoral processes; some being hailed as genuine whilst others decried as little more than political theatre. Concerns also abound among mostly subordinate classes about the developmental spin-offs of democratic electoral processes.

Thus, the main theme of our inquiry relates to the meanings of democracy and their application in the African context. This short paper broaches a comprehensive range of issues spanning contemporary democratic and development discourses, including the dominant meanings of the concept of democracy, the development / democratic nexus in Africa and ways of overcoming the democratic deficits in Africa. The paper is structured as follows: The first section situates democracy within the wider field of democratic theory, the second section assesses the political dynamics that impinge on African democracies, the third section explores the development-spin-offs of Africa's democratisation process and the latter section develops several hypotheses for overcoming the democratic deficits in the African context.

### **What is democracy?**

Democracy is one of the most contested and controversial concepts in political theory. For Linz and Stepan (1996) democracy must meet three conditions: competition among individuals and organised groups (political parties), political participation in the selection of leaders and civil and political liberties.<sup>3</sup> For Schumpeter (1976)<sup>4</sup> and Weber (1970)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bratton, M. & van de Walle, N. (1997) 'Democratic Experiments in Africa: *Regime transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge University Press, UK, pp.197

<sup>2</sup> Gentili, A. M. (2005) Party, Party Systems and Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa: paper presented to Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 24-25 May 2005

<sup>3</sup> Linz, J.J. and Stepan, A. (1996) Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: South Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe, John Hopkins University Press, London

democracy is primarily a means of selecting a political regime in conditions of a modern bureaucratic society and the role of people are reduced to voters with little or no influence over decision-making.

For Satori (1962) democracy refers to the “power of the people” where power resides with the people.<sup>6</sup> Democracy, conceptualized in this way, could mean a direct form of democracy where people govern themselves, or an indirect/representative form of democracy where government is chosen by the people and as such deriving its legitimacy from the people. The key here is that a democratic system is one which has its roots in the people.

Mainstream literature of democratisation legitimates a representative form of procedural democracy where those who govern are chosen by the people and govern only on a mandate from them. Multi-party elections are presented as the essence of democracy. According to Friedman (2006) representation entails the idea of accountability whereby the representative is held responsible for the ways in which he acts in the name of those he claims to speak for. Representation also guarantees that the institutions of the state, such as parliament express the will of the people, and the principle of accountability of the executive to parliament ensures that the delegated power of government is not abused.<sup>7</sup>

However, the doctrine of representative democracy runs afoul when it's set beside the actualities of modern politics. Friedman (2006) asserts that a decision to endorse a candidate or party at the ballot box is a mandate to a particular person or group to govern – it is not necessarily an endorsement of every policy position advanced by the candidate. He argues that because a vote for a governing party cannot be assumed to denote support for any particular position, citizen support for any particular government policy initiative cannot be assumed.<sup>8</sup>

Hirst (1990)<sup>9</sup> argues that voters pick and identify with parties and party leaders, and they are usually ill-informed of the actual policy proposals of the parties – voters pick parties and people and not policies or decisions. It is thus a fundamental right of citizens to express their needs and preferences in government's decision making processes – instead of receiving ready made development formulas from above - and to hold government accountable in between elections.

Beetham (1999) incisively articulate this view. He argues that the core idea of democracy is that of popular rule or popular control over collective decision-making. Its starting point is with citizens rather with the institutions of government. Its defining principles are that all citizens are entitled to a say in public affairs, both through the associations of civil society and through participation in government; and that this entitlement should be available in terms of equality of all.<sup>10</sup> According to Ake (2000), democracy is about the realisation of

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<sup>4</sup> Schumpeter, J.A. (1976) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Allen & Unwin, London

<sup>5</sup> Weber, M. (1970) *Politics as Vocation*, in: Gerth, H.H. & Mills, C.W. (eds)

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni, S. (1962) *Democratic Theory*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, S. (2006) *The citizen as subject: The quality of democracy in Africa*: Paper presented at International Political Science Association Conference, Fukuoka, Japan, 2006

<sup>8</sup> Friedman et al

<sup>9</sup> Hirst, P. (1990) *Representative Democracy and Its Limits*, Polity Press, London

<sup>10</sup> Beetham, D. (1999) *Democracy and Human Rights*, Polity Press, London

human potentialities through active participation in rulership, but in liberal democracy, it offers only protection.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, our concern, in line with the theories of Dahl (1989)<sup>12</sup>, Beetham (1999), Ake (2000) and Gaventa (2006)<sup>13</sup>, is how to go beyond traditional understandings of procedural democracy, through creating more and supporting more participatory mechanisms of citizen engagement, which in turn are built upon, and support, more robust views of rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. From this perspective, the challenge is not only the spread and quantity of democracy, but also its quality and substance. Hence, whilst it is important to consider the extent to which politics comply with the minimum standards of the procedural democracy, especially as far as it relate to civil liberties, measuring democracy through the prism of “popular sovereignty” or “power/rule of the people” warrants a greater emphasis on the substance and quality of democracies.

### **The democratisation process in Africa**

Before peering into analysis of the political dynamics impinging on democracy in the African context, it’s important to clarify that we do not consider it helpful to think of democracies in Africa – *or anywhere else for that matter* - as either “consolidated” or “unconsolidated” democracies. A consolidated democracy essentially implies that democracy has become “the only game in town”.<sup>14</sup> It basically means that the political regime or ruling party faces no more threats of a reversal of their democratic gains, and that with a democratic constitution, an array of democratic institutions, rules and procedures the task of democracy has now been completed. The difficulty, though, with this approach is that it laces democracy with the state – democracy is considered synonymous good governance. The challenge with viewing democracy in this way is that important issues, such as accountability and citizen engagement in public affairs could easily fall through the cracks.

To the contrary, we see democracy-building as an ongoing process of struggle and contestation rather than the adoption of a standard recipe of institutional designs.<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, democracy is seen as a process that’s always under construction. Hence, in the context of Africa, our approach is to measure the extent to which African democracies have been able to transcend traditional understandings and practices of procedural or representative democracy – considering democracy in Africa as work-in-progress.

Since the beginning of the 90s, issues of democracy and human rights started to dominate the world’s interest in Africa. According to Friedman (2006), formal/procedural democratic processes are becoming increasingly secured in most Africa countries.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, it’s important to note that electoral processes in some African countries continue to be marred by accusations of bad practices, boycotts, gerrymandering, forms of repression and sheer violence.

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<sup>11</sup> Ake, C. (2000) *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*, Antony Rowe Ltd, UK

<sup>12</sup> Dahl, R.A. (1989) *Democracy and its critics*, USA

<sup>13</sup> Gaventa, J (2006) *Triumph, Deficit or Contestation? Deepening the ‘Deepening Democracy’ debate*, Citizenship DRC, Institute of Development Studies

<sup>14</sup> See Linz & Stepan et al, pp.5

<sup>15</sup> See for example Gaventa et al

<sup>16</sup> Friedman et al

Africa's democratic impetus is associated with the rise of the democratic movement of the 1990s, which embodied the demand for incorporation. According to Ake (2000), this demand occurred on two levels, on the level of elites as a demand for political incorporation and on the level of the masses as a demand for economic incorporation.<sup>17</sup> However, it's inconceivable to consider these as separate demands (an issue we'll return to later).

Continental political initiatives, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and later the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), gave further impetus to Africa's democratisation process. In 2002, the African Union adopted NEPAD which includes a Declaration on Democracy and Good Political Governance. The declaration affirms African countries commitment to the promotion of democracy and its core values, with special commitment to the rule of law and respect for civil liberties in terms of equalities, freedoms and opportunities.<sup>18</sup> NEPAD also introduces an African Peer Review Mechanism which allows states to submit to a peer review of their compliance with these norms – and in which the reviewers are required to consult civil society organisations.<sup>19</sup> According to Friedman (2006), the Peer Review is voluntary and there is little evidence yet of active attempts to protect African freedoms against the continent's governments.<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, the most recently completed South African APRM process became mired in discontent between the government and the civil society groupings over the quality of the consultative process on the country's APRM report and Programme of Action. This has led to key civil society groupings refuting aspects of the outcomes of the process.

Broadly, democracy in the African context, at least in academic circles, gets distinguished with adjectives, such as authoritarian and neo-patrimonial rule. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) distinguish three characteristics of patrimonial rule in sub-Saharan Africa, including “presidentialism”, “clientelism” and “state resources”.<sup>21</sup> “Presidentialism” implies the systematic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual, who resists delegating all but the most trivial decision-making tasks. They argue that whilst personal dictators, such as Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, etc emerged either from the army or a dominant political party, they consolidated power by asserting total personal control over formal political structures.<sup>22</sup>

Gentili (2005) asserts that democracy under this form of authoritarian rule remains an unfulfilled promise, because the mode of power remains basically authoritarian and functions on the basis of a hierarchy of networks and alliances with local tribal, ethnic constituencies or top-down absolute sovereignty of institutions which help to suffocate precisely the grassroots politicization of society which has been the backbone of the process of national liberation.<sup>23</sup> As a result, effective accountability and representation through popular democratic participation give way to personal rule and eventually to single party

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<sup>17</sup> Ake et al, pp.37

<sup>18</sup> The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, pp.3-4

<sup>19</sup> An African Peer Review Mechanism: a panacea for Africa's governance challenges? Policy brief 29

<sup>20</sup> Friedman et al

<sup>21</sup> Bratton and van de Walle, pp.61-68

<sup>22</sup> Bratton and van de Walle

<sup>23</sup> Gentili et al

dictatorships on the one hand, an to reliance on bureaucratic controls that fall victim to corruption, on the other.<sup>24</sup>

“Clientelism” refers to the awarding of personal favours among neopatrimonial cronies. Within the state, these favours typically take the form of public sector jobs and within society, the distribution of resources, such as licenses, contracts and projects. In return for rewards, ‘clients’ mobilise political support and refer all decisions upward in a mark of loyalty to patrons.<sup>25</sup> Voters, under such circumstances, rarely genuinely express their opinion since, for them, the ballot is essentially a token exchange in an immediate, highly personal relationship of dependency.<sup>26</sup> This situation induces conflicts and instabilities in the political system. These emanate from the conflicting needs of citizens to participate meaningfully in the democratic process and the need of the dominant political elite to entrench themselves.<sup>27</sup>

The third characteristic is the use of “state resource” for political legitimation, and is closely linked to the reliance on “clientelism”. For example, President Ahidjo of Cameroon kept a large proportion of his country’s oil revenues in a personal offshore bank account for his personal use.<sup>28</sup> In Nigeria, high-level corruption during the early 1990s led to the disappearance of oil revenues that were worth as much as a tenth of GDP each year.<sup>29</sup>

Evidence of actual political practices suggest that these forms of neopatrimonial rule continue to exist unfettered in the institutional system of African politics and pose serious threats to the durability of Africa’s democracy not only because they impede on the civil liberties of citizens, thus, creating a culture of political apathy and disenchantment among citizens, but they also severely limit the extent to which governments can be pressed to be more accountable and responsive towards their citizenries.

Meanwhile, democracy literature also laments the absence of a coherent strategy for building democratic linkages between Africa’s rural and urban settings inorder to democratise rural power. Mamdani (1996), for example, argues that the disjuncture in Africa’s democratisation process holds contradictory results in that whilst advancing democratic reforms at the urban-local/national levels, it leaves the post-colonial structure of hierarchical rural power virtually intact<sup>30</sup>. Thus, the unfettered structure of rural customary rule continues to conceive of people as subjects of their rural masters, rather than as citizens with rights.

The above brief analysis of the political dynamics impinging on Africa’s democratization process suggests that whilst Africa is celebrating wide-spread formal/procedural democratic reforms, the continent has still along way to go to deepen its democratic project. Venal political leaders and authoritarian political practices continue to mar the quality of democracies. But, more seriously, the analysis also exposes a fundamental weakness of

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<sup>24</sup> Gentili et al

<sup>25</sup> Bratton and van de Walle et al

<sup>26</sup> Putman, R (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey

<sup>27</sup> Edigheji, O (2005) ‘A Democratic Development State in Africa’: A Centre for Policy Studies Research Report 105

<sup>28</sup> Bratton and van de Walle et al

<sup>29</sup> Bratton and van de Walle et al

<sup>30</sup> Mamdani, M (1996) *Citizen and Subject*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, Uganda

formal/procedural democracy in that whilst it affirms equal political and civil rights, it offers no guarantee that these rights could be realized. For example, mal-governance in the context of procedural democracy undercut people's abilities to realize civil liberties and to hold their governments accountable. Meanwhile, in the absence of resources, poorer citizens will find it difficult to realize political equality. As illustrated above, those with superior economic resources have often more influence over the political elite and those in power.

### **The democratic / development nexus in Africa**

One of the foundations of democracy is how it contributes to the material well-being of particularly the marginal elements of society. According to Eme Awa (1991), democracy must be made to deliver some economic empowerment and a higher state of living for the people. A democracy that cannot deliver on the basic needs of people will be short-lived.<sup>31</sup> If democratic rights and liberal values of liberty and equality are to have any meaning they must be concrete, actually realized rights, and to enjoy liberty is not only to enjoy equality before the law, but also to have the capacities, the material and cultural resources to be able to pursue desired courses of action. Thus, political equality cannot be attained without a measure of economic equality, and without it democracy is likely to become a vehicle for the maintenance of elite dominance.<sup>32</sup> In this context, development and democracy are mutually reinforcing.

A report by Omano Edigheji (2005) found that the majority of African countries lack basic social and physical infrastructure. As a result, most people on the continent have no access to basic services, such as portable water, electricity, sanitation, roads and health care. The lack of access to basic medical care occurs against a backdrop of ravaging diseases; a situation which has become exacerbated with the increasing prevalence of the HIV and AIDS epidemic on the continent.<sup>33</sup> Recent HIV and AIDS statistics of prevalence rates in the sub-Saharan African region suggest no decline of the epidemic. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the most seriously affected region, with AIDS remaining the leading cause of death. According to the UNAIDS 2007 epidemic update report, the estimated number of persons living with HIV in the region is 33.2 million [30.6-36.1million], whilst the region accounted for 76% of the 2.1 million deaths due to AIDS recorded in 2007.<sup>34</sup>

Africa's state of underdevelopment has been exacerbated by wide spread civil, ethnic and religious conflicts. This include civil wars in Nigeria in the 1960s, Liberia in the 1990s, the Ivory Coast in the 2000s, Angola for most of its post-independence period, the DRC, the religious war in Sudan, the genocide in Rwanda; the list is endless. Oxfam statistics (2007) on the economic cost of conflict in Africa estimates that 23 African countries had been ensnared in war/conflict since 1990, and collectively accounted for losses of approximately \$300bn, including Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, etc.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Awa, E. (1991) 'Democracy and Governance in Africa: Preliminary Statement', in: Aderinwale, A. & Mosh, F.G.N. (eds) Democracy and Governance in Africa

<sup>32</sup> Abrahamsen, R. (2000) *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*, Zed Books, London

<sup>33</sup> Edigheji et al

<sup>34</sup> UNAIDS 2007 AIDS epidemic update, World Health Organisation

<sup>35</sup> 'Africa's missing billions': Oxfam Briefing Paper (107), October 2007

Africa's democratisation process of political liberalization coincided with economic liberalization. This demand for simultaneous economic and political liberalization is a key characteristic of contemporary development theory and practice, an insistence that is fuelled by the fact that more or less all fully fledged democracies are also capitalist economies.

Rita Abrahamsen (2000) argues that democratic states are trapped between the demands by external donors for economic liberalization on the one hand, and the needs of political majorities on the other.<sup>36</sup> International development aid was deployed in many African countries to ensure political stability as an important catalyst for economic reform / economic growth. The 1989 World Bank report *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, for example, places the concept of governance at the heart of the donor agenda for Africa.<sup>37</sup> The report promotes a package of minimum liberal democratic norms – rule of law, democratic institutions, etc - as prerequisites for conducive and necessary economic growth. To match this rhetorical commitment to good governance, most donors introduced political aid conditionalities, which ties financial assistance to the implementation of reforms towards competitive, pluralist political systems in recipient countries.<sup>38</sup> The good governance agenda thus included both economic reforms and political demands. Political demands essentially had to pave the way for economic reforms.

Economic reforms were predicated on the insatiable quest for Africa's inclusion in processes of economic globalisation. The South African government in particular has touted Africa's inclusion in globalisation processes as a way of overcoming the marginalization effects of globalisation on the continent. Ironically, Africa remains a marginal player in globalisation processes. Hence, the jury is still out on the extent to which Africa will be able to influence economic globalisation processes. These processes have also a significant impact on decision making procedures in African countries. Lisa Thompson (2007), in line with Abrahamsen (2000), indicates that governments of the sub-Saharan region have shifted their policies in response to what they understand as economic globalisation, even if they are critical in their pronouncements about its effects.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, debates and decisions about economic policy has become increasingly depoliticised and desocialised, and turned into the terrain of technical experts and government bureaucrats.

But, more importantly, economic globalisation processes predominantly benefit the aspirations of the elite and middle classes of society. Capital-intensive export-driven economic policies have created new forms of social and economic exclusion in African societies. As a matter of fact, economic liberalization increases the changes of poverty owing to its negative effects. For example, it affects aggregate real wages, unemployment, underemployment, distributional patterns, etc. In this way, economic globalisation has widened the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', and overall has aggravated rather than alleviated the development concerns of African countries.

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<sup>36</sup> Abrahamsen et al,

<sup>37</sup> Abrahamsen et al, pp.30

<sup>38</sup> Abrahamsen et al, pp.31

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, L. (2007) 'The Contradictions between Globalisation and Development?': A perspective from Southern Africa

So, what does this narration tell us about democracy's ability to affect material change on the Africa continent? Firstly, whilst African citizenries now enjoy political and civil rights, the socio-economic conditions of the poor and vulnerable in most African countries have not changed. Secondly, economic liberalization programmes impede on the quality and substance of African democracies. It limits the national policy space of countries and the scope of popular influence on economic policy issues. It prioritizes the aspirations of external donors/investors and the local elite and middle classes over the demands for socio-economic improvement by the poorer sections of African polities. It thus fuels political tension between competing interests. In essence, economic liberalization promotes elite or exclusionary democracies in which certain sections of the population wield greater influence based on their economic status in society.

### **Diagnosing the problem**

At this juncture it's important to note that it is not the attention of this paper to decry or even reject procedural democracy, far from that. Procedural democracy, as averred by Friedman (2006), has implanted democratic institutional frameworks in most African countries and secured political and civil rights for their populace. However, it's our contention that minimalist liberal meanings of democracy that largely reduce democracy to electoral competition - grafted on to economic liberalization - are out of sink with the hopes and aspirations of the African populace for a democracy of substance that will respond to their socio-economic demands and bring about improvement in their living conditions.

As illustrated above, procedural democracy based on electoral competition has failed in the political and socio-economic contexts of Africa to guarantee real access to rights and pro-poor development outcomes for Africa's poor and vulnerable masses. Rushed economic liberalization<sup>40</sup> tied to political liberalization has diminished democracy's ability to respond to the socio-economic demands of the African populace, which were embodied in the pro-democratic movement of the 1990s. Instead, it has promoted exclusionary and elite democracies in Africa, largely benefiting the economic aspirations/ideals of external donors/investors, the local elites and middle classes. In sum, our argument is that minimalist liberal meanings of democracy are too concerned with effecting transitions to democracy, whilst paying little attention to the quality and substance of the resulting political systems.

This is broadly the corollary of the good governance discourse that tends to conflate "democracy" with "good governance". In the World Bank lexicon, democratic governance is referred to as 'good governance' while authoritarian governance is considered 'bad governance'.<sup>41</sup> The problem with this approach is that it accepts as almost a given that a competitive political system laced with democratic elected leaders will produce democracy.

Hein Marais (2001) illustrates this point in the context of democratic participation in the South African government's national budget process. He argues that whilst the need for sound institutions and reliable systems is self-evident, accountability and participation are

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<sup>40</sup> A more gradual approach to economic liberalization is preferred, which is sensitive to the socio-economic needs of Africa's poor and marginalised masses

<sup>41</sup> World Bank (2000) *Can Africa Claim the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Washington D.C: The World Bank

not guaranteed.<sup>42</sup> In other words, there's no automatic overlap between democratic and good governance. Hein contends that democratic and good governance are not synonyms, nor do they automatically conflate. For example, in the case of South Africa, democratic participation in the drafting of budget is replaced with a nominally democratic process after the fact – in the form of perfunctory budget votes in Parliament.<sup>43</sup>

In this context, drawing on the theories of Pateman (1970), Beetman (1999), Abrahamsen (2000), Gaventa (2006) and Friedman (2006), we favour more participatory meanings of democracy – a 'participatory theory of democracy'<sup>44</sup> - that go beyond traditional understanding of representative democracy, through creating and supporting more participatory mechanisms of citizen engagement, which in turn are build upon, and support, more robust views of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Such a conception of democracy is perhaps more in tune with the aspirations of Africa's poor masses. The following section dissects this approach as a way to counter the limitations of procedural democracy.

### **The way ahead: From a 'democracy of voters' to a 'democracy of citizens'**

A participatory meaning of democracy broadens the political rights of citizens to issues of decision-making and extends rights to include socio-economic rights. It is based on a notion of citizenship which not only constitutes formal legal entitlements but also practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand and maintain existing rights. It thus offers the prospect of citizenship to be claimed from below through social mobilisation and struggle of citizens, rather than waiting for it to be conferred 'from above'.

The Kerala/India model of participatory democratic governance is instructive in this regard, and even though this model is situated at the local level (decentralized governance), its fundamentals could be exported to higher levels of governance. This model promotes maximum participation of citizens in governance, including elected representatives, voluntary agencies/organisations and ordinary people. Citizens participate in decision-making, implementation, monitoring and sharing of benefits and responsibilities of government activities. It thus fosters greater levels of accountability and transparency whilst obliterating mal-governing practices, such as nepotism and corruption. It also includes awareness building in order to develop the capabilities of citizens to engage meaningfully in processes of governance and public policy.

This model of participatory democratic governance has produced wondrous development outcomes for the people of Kerala. Richard Franke (1999) enumerates sum of these achievements. According to Franke (1999), Kerala achieved significantly high quality of life statistics in 1997. With a 1997 per capita income of \$324, Kerala had a literacy rate of 91% versus 65% for all-India. Kerala's life expectancy was 67 for males and 72 for females, versus

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<sup>42</sup> Marais, H. (2001) South Africa '*limits to change*': the political economy of transition, ZED Books, London

<sup>43</sup> Marais et al, pp.259

<sup>44</sup> This concept is borrowed from Rousseau, J.J., in: Pateman, C. (1970) Participation and Democratic Theory, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK

62 and 63 for all-India, and Kerala's infant mortality rate was 13 per thousand compared with 65 for all-India. The Indian birth rate of 29 per thousand women of child-bearing age contrasts with 18 in Kerala.<sup>45</sup>

What is significant about the Kerala model is that people are conceived as makers and shapers of their own development, rather than users and choosers of interventions designed by others. Democracy is linked to socio-economic rights and systems and therefore offering real prospects for realizing material change in people's living conditions. In sum, the Kerala model converges the 'democratic' –linked to socio-economic rights- and 'good' governance agendas through an active notion of participatory democratic governance. It thus combines procedural/representative democracy with a deeper form of participatory democracy.

The key democratic lessons to be learned from the Kerala experiment are that:

- democracy is more than voting,
- it requires the greatest possible degree of equality among all members of society, and that
- it means activism and participation.

Meanwhile, an issue not broached yet relates to the role and influence of the international donor community in African democracies. Do donor agencies contribute to deepening democracies in Africa? And promote a democratic culture of citizen engagement? A study by Reitzes and Friedman (2001)<sup>46</sup> regarding donor funding in South Africa offers no clear-cut responses to these questions. The findings of the study could be summarized as follow:

- donor funding is either channeled through governments or civil society organisations. Governments approve all grants meant for civil society – creating a potential veto on 'troublesome' CSOs.
- funding is either meant to strengthen procedural democratic institutions – making them work better -, support the technical capacities of governments, support public advocacy, or to discover collective state-civil society positions – an approach which appears to assume that disagreement between government and CSOs, which democrats see as the stuff of democracy, is inimical to the health of the good governance agenda.
- Donor agencies are often bound by their own political mandates, which inform who they choose to support.
- Meanwhile, as argued by many critics<sup>47</sup>, the agendas of donor agencies in Africa are often geared at strengthening both liberal democracies and market economies, which all would not explicitly commit to, but which are often proclaimed in their promotional literature.

The above evidence suggests that donor funding has not made any significant contribution to deepening democracy in Africa, if anything, it's an obstacle to democratisation. Whilst lofty funding support is extended for strengthening democratic institutions, very little, if any, attention is paid to pressing governments to become more accountable to their citizenries. Meanwhile, the internal democratic structures and processes of beneficiary organisations are

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<sup>45</sup> Franke, R.W. (1999) Lessons in Democracy from Kerala State, India: University Lecture, 25 March 1999

<sup>46</sup> Reitz, M. & Friedman, S. (2001) Funding freedom? Synthesis report on the impact of foreign political aid to civil society organisations in South Africa, IDASA research report, no.85

<sup>47</sup> Such as Abrahamsen (2000)

hardly, if ever, a criterion: donors do not relate improvements in CSOs' internal democracy to broader democratisation and effective governance. Support for public advocacy does not explicitly focus on issues of citizen engagement, and therefore offers very little prospect for contributing to the realisation of citizenship participation in decision-making processes, in the recipient countries. Hence, future donor support in African democracies needs to pay greater attention to the establishment of vertical and horizontal accountabilities as well as the promotion of active citizen engagement in decision making on public policy issues.

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