

**Conceptual Framework
on Public Participation and Development**

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1. Introduction

The concept of public participation has received considerable attention as a result of its current mainstream position in the development sector. The emphasis on public participation is embedded in contemporary development theories “emphasising the importance of effective and participatory governance for sustainable change, and of supporting the coping and livelihood strategies of the poor” (Khan 2003:295). While its importance is widely acknowledged, perceptions and expectations regarding the purpose, nature, scope and implementation of public participation has seen marked differences inevitably affecting its impact on public policy and development programmes (see for example Hickey & Mohan 2004; Cooke & Kothari 2001). The range of literature building on Arnstein’s seminal work (1969) points to different levels of participation or a participation continuum from passive, consultative, instrumentalist participation at the lower end to empowerment, collective action and transformation at the higher end.

In the South African context, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) points to participation with an understanding of development as being about “active involvement and growing empowerment” as opposed to “the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry” (cited in Marais *et al.* 2007:i). The potential benefits of participation are described as broadening and deepening democracy “by expanding the range of citizens engaged in making or influencing government decisions”, pointing to the empowerment of community members (Friedman 2006). Participation has been particularly emphasised as a central element of a pro-poor, developmental local government with the institutionalised space of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) highlighted as “the key mechanism for hearing local voices, engaging local energies, and – ideally – aligning budget and delivery decisions with local needs, rather than the other way around” (Marais *et al.* 2007:2). Yet experiences in the IDP processes and recent studies on the subject reveal a number of complexities in realising the vision of participation in the IDP process. Key criticisms include views that participation begins and ends at the initial needs assessment phase, is “formalistic and consultative”, and lacks the “substantive weight and authority needed to influence processes in a sustained and meaningful way” (*ibid.*:20).

Informative examples of participatory development practices can be found in the complexities of the housing delivery process in South Africa. Here, similar negative conclusions have been drawn, with many commentators expressing concern about the abandonment of community participation “in the name of speed and efficiency” (Engelbrecht 2003:279). However, the emphasis on speed and efficiency in terms of delivery pressures goes against the understanding that housing projects significantly require much more community participation in the context of attempts at building sustainable human settlements. As Khan (2003: xxiii) points out, it involves “a great deal more than bricks and mortar [including] access to land and secure tenure, appropriate infrastructure and services, the strengthening and reinforcing of (horizontal/positive) social capital, civic empowerment, deepening the access of the poor to the circuits of bureaucratic and political power, maximisation of choice and opportunities, and active measures to counter-act discrimination against vulnerable groups”. Referring to the value of the People’s Housing Process (PHP), a model of housing delivery based on strong community participation, Napier (2003) draws attention to some of the successes including a more appropriate product (the actual house), the development of skills through labour contributions, and organisational development through the empowerment of individuals and groups. Yet he also highlights the perception in government circles that the PHP can be slower than a contractor-driven process largely due to “the considerable amount of time invested in capacity and institution building” Napier (2003: 333).

Too many studies on participation focus on indicators of participation rather than taking this further to the more important analysis of impact, i.e. to what extent the form of participation has achieved its intended outcomes. Morrissey (cited in Marais *et al.* 2007:25-26) makes a useful distinction between three sets of indicators in measuring the value of participation. He refers to ‘process indicators’ (measuring extent and quality); ‘developmental indicators’ (measuring impact on self-development and community capacity in challenging imbalances and inequalities); and ‘impact indicators’ (measuring impact on policy or change). This distinction is useful in better capturing ‘material changes’ such as infrastructure, services, employment opportunities and also ‘relational changes’ such as changes in the distribution of opportunities, influence, resources, and decision-making (Marais *et al.* 2007:26). These insights are particularly valuable in exploring the value of participation as experienced in the South African context.

This report examines the assumptions that underlie the key debates around the effectiveness of participation of poor communities in the context of development. The goal is to contribute to the debate on whether the value placed on participation in the South African policy and development discourse is borne out in the implementation of projects, and whether and how it contributes to achieving better development outcomes. The study focuses on development processes that relate in some way to government programmes, although the cases examined may also have involved protest actions and independent activity by non-governmental actors.

The themes or questions that underpin the research are:

- What are the trade-offs involved in promoting participation in development? Does participation slow down delivery? Does it promote a better end-result? How is the quality of that result defined by the beneficiaries / participants (including material results and developmental / educational outcomes)?
- What are the ‘costs’ of *non-participation* that might not be ‘seen’ by implementers of development projects? What are the ‘costs’ of *participation* that might not be ‘seen’ by policy-makers?
- What kind of participation is desired by communities and why? What level of importance or value is attached to participation?
- What are the obstacles to implementing participatory approaches?
- What does a ‘successful’ participatory approach look like and what support is necessary to develop this?

Further discussion in the research team provided additional areas we would aim to cover during the research, including: the contested character of participation; platforms of participation; partnerships and linkages; and processes of participation.

2. Methodology

This was an empirical study looking at several actual cases, in underdeveloped communities within Gauteng Province, in which a development project was in process or had been completed. Two different methodologies were employed in order to derive insights on participation – more traditional social research methods for cases in which Planact was not involved in project implementation as well as action research methods for cases where Planact was involved.

Planact identified three sites in Gauteng for evaluation – City Deep Hostel (Johannesburg), Bantu Bonke (Midvaal) and Thinasonke (Ekurhuleni), drawing from an initial list of 6 possible case studies assuming various degrees of participation, forms of community organisation (political parties, community trust / civics, NGOs), revolving around several types of projects (in situ

upgrading, greenfield development, community project). Process evaluation was selected as a methodology, where stakeholders were asked to comment on the context, the process (what happened, when and why), and the impact of the decisions and events that took place during project planning and implementation.

The process evaluations were complemented by an action-research process in two sites - in Vosloorus Ext 28 in Ekurhuleni and Orlando East wards 29, 30 and 31 in Soweto - where Planact is currently working on participatory strategies with communities. Action research is a methodology that uses research as a basis for prioritising and carrying out practical activities. It differs from mainstream research in the sense that it is driven by the participants in the research process and is oriented towards practical action rather than merely producing a research report. Research is required at the start of an intervention to ensure that what we do is informed. Action research is a particular way of doing research that links the information that is gathered during research with an intervention based on an analysis of that information.

Planact's ongoing support activities in these sites were supported through the action research, mainly using quarterly reflection sessions with participants exploring questions stemming from the key themes of the study, and then prioritising actions identified through the process into plans for further work. In each site, four reflection sessions with project members were held, with the final session in each to present the findings of the report for verification, change and discussion with participants.

The research team developed a series of questions for interviews with participants in the specific projects, as well as other institutions and individuals associated with the projects. There were not a lot of resources for the actual research process, and in hindsight it may have been preferable to use participant observation as a method rather than straight interviews. This raises an important challenge for NGO research: on the one hand, it is important to deepen our understanding of the context we are entering into, to ensure that we are taking account of the local complexities when we do interventions; but on the other hand, certain deliverables and timeframes must be met which mitigates against developing a full appreciation of the context. It is not an either-or situation, and action research as a method allows development practitioners to go into an area, get some understanding, act on the basis of what is known, and over time, through an iterative process of learning by doing, gradually deepen understanding both of context, and of what works and doesn't work. It can not be a short term activity, and thus the action research component of this particular project must be understood in the broader context of the specific work Planact is doing in the two sites.

It was intended that the two different methodologies employed would produce a richer perspective on the question of whether and in what ways participation makes a difference in a development context, particularly from the perspective of the participant/beneficiary. Projects where Planact is not involved provide the opportunity to maintain more objectivity in consideration of the data gathered, and projects where Planact is involved allow the organisation to document its practice and the challenges and opportunities presented by promoting a participatory approach—in our view, this is an equally valid method of inquiry. It is expected that this will have an impact on Planact's own approach to capacity-building as well as allow us to contribute to debates on the importance of the participatory approach.

3. Critical reflections on development and participation

In the development world, there are few who would argue against the notion of public participation. The lack of definition of the term allows its broad use in many different contexts without

contradiction. But as a generic term, participation lacks context. Participation can be manipulative or spontaneous; forced or free; moral, amoral or immoral (Rahnema 1992). Used in this undefined way, we need to ask ‘participation in what?’ The most common answer we get is ‘participation in development’. But an uncritical attitude towards ‘development’ can easily lead us into acceptance of the status quo. The notion of development borrows from natural science a conception of transformation that moves toward an ever more perfect form (Esteva 1992). In this discourse, some countries or peoples are advanced while others are laggards. The aim of development is to narrow the gap between the laggards and the advanced countries, mainly by rooting out inappropriate characteristics in the laggard countries and replacing them with normative behaviours and actions that will bring them onto the path the advanced countries have already blazed. This provides an example of the de-contextualisation that occurs in the discourse, since there is no reference to the history of how some came to be advanced and others lagged behind (– i.e. slavery and colonialism, which remain at the root of the world economy); nor of who defines the criteria for what it means to be advanced or behind (the dominant powers); nor how the advance of some has necessarily led to the lagging of others (slavery and colonialism both benefited those countries that became ‘advanced’, and destroyed and collapsed those that became the ‘laggards’).

Gilbert Rist (1997:13) offers the following definition of development: “‘Development’ consists of a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another, which require - for the reproduction of society - the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations. Its aim is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand”. This encompasses the reality that development as we talk about it today is located within relations of capitalism which both destroys old systems and builds on their ruins others that conform to private appropriation of collectively generated wealth and the commodification of relations and things.

However, we must also understand the tensions and pressures that bring about a particular conceptualisation of development. It is not simply that elites decide what they want to do and then carry it out. They are forced into making compromises to retain hegemony. Therefore, development can be considered to have a number of components that are discursively inter-related but which may also produce internal contradictions and tensions. Following Rist’s definition, the first component of development is the development of the productive forces (e.g. infrastructure and the social systems that accompany it). In a capitalist society, this is controlled by private and state elites and its objectives are tied to private profit maximisation and accumulation of capital. The second component of development is market expansion, so that development is understood as the extension of markets into areas previously not commodified. These can be geographical areas as well as new sectors of investment. An example of the latter is the privatisation of water supply, once considered to be the responsibility of the state but gradually restructured and turned into a potentially profitable arena of enterprise. The third component of development is the meeting of ‘basic needs’ and social stability.

‘Basic needs’ is a constructed concept that emerged within the development paradigm. From an elite point of view, it converted the necessity people faced of living within tight material constraints, and the methods they used to do so, into a disease that had to be eradicated. Within the framework of developmentalism, poverty - and the needs attributed to those now defined as living in poverty - became “an abstract universal measure of underconsumption” (Illich 1992:94). The discourse of needs became a way of quantifying conditions of life and of creating “technical measurements of disembodied, specific needs that could be expressed in monetary terms” (Illich 1992:93). This is not to argue that there is no need for material security for all. Indeed, the content of this component is highly contested. Elites necessarily require a stable, mobile and skilled workforce, and this justifies expenditure on education, health, transport etc. But popular demands for these services and the

identification of additional needs may also force elites to provide more than they ideally would like to. Both these aspects of basic needs are incorporated into the third component of development. In a neoliberalising environment, elites will attempt to secure the third component by means of the first two components, i.e. to configure the meeting of needs in such a way that elites can appropriate surpluses for their own gain. Elites will attempt to bring a set of externally defined needs into a place without regard for the organic processes people are involved in to improve their conditions or for their own priorities. This facilitates the introduction of universally standard welfarist measures, regardless of context (e.g. 25 litres of water per person per day; a two-room RDP house) - although the precise amounts and the formulation of standards are the product of ongoing contestation.

There is a general tendency to think in binaries of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' when we consider orientation towards change in society. You are either for development, or against it. This is a product of the closing of debate on alternative pathways for South Africa, and was consolidated both through the negotiated compromises as well as the trajectory of accumulation in the post-apartheid period. Lipietz (1994) suggests the likelihood of three or four basic postures that emerge from the breakdown of a social formation. These are a conservative bloc (defenders of the prevailing order up until the crisis itself); a modernist bloc (advocates of change in the capitalist hegemonic system); a radical bloc (protagonists of a profound revolutionising of existing social relations); and sometimes a reactionary bloc (those favouring the return to a mythical 'golden age' prior to the crisis).

The African middle and nascent capitalist classes are hegemonic in post-apartheid South Africa. That is, they are the intellectual and moral leaders of a social bloc of forces (see Gramsci 1991) that include white monopoly capital and the organised African working class as the two other primary forces. Both of these other forces recognise their inability to tie the national interest directly into their own class interests, and therefore have pinned their interests to the leadership of the hegemonic African middle classes. This means the 'national interest' as defined within post-apartheid hegemony is wedded to the accumulation interests of the African middle classes as the primary force. Of course, this hegemonic fraction must, to some extent, compromise its own interests to ensure that it has the support of the other major class forces (white monopoly capital and organised black industrial workers). The path opened up in the process undoubtedly takes the form of modernisation of capitalist relations but without their destruction. As long as the basis of the economy in the private appropriation of collectively generated surplus value is accepted, 'development' will refer to the growth and expansion of this system. Post-apartheid hegemony is couched in the discourses of development, transformation and rights. Deracialisation of the economy and meeting 'basic needs' are both emphasised strategically. Relatively slim efforts (given the balance of power in the social bloc of forces that underpins that hegemony) have been made to deracialise the economy. The formulation of black economic empowerment (BEE) is central to this attempt, and has tended to favour a small elite rather than the mass of the black population. Three fundamental components characterise the BEE frameworks: i) redistribution of ownership through shares; ii) increasing black management in companies; and iii) skills development and training for black workers. This approach to deracialising the economy is very much skewed towards the accumulation interests of the middle classes. Even skills development and training for workers fits comfortably within the modernising framework.

Worldwide, participation as a concept arose at precisely the time that capital moved onto the offensive (through its restructuring during and after the oil crisis of the early 1970s - the rise of the neoliberal project) and political forces on the left had become disorganised. In South Africa, there is broad recognition, including from the ruling party itself, that the conditions a left political project confront are not favourable. But ideas do not remain static and wait for the right time before reappearing. The failure to articulate a left project based on incursions into private appropriation of

wealth through decommodification and the construction of a solidarity economy meant other political projects came to the fore in South Africa, including what is referred to as the ‘1996 class project’ of private accumulation using the state both as a source of resources and as a power base to leverage concessions from the mainly white private owners of the economy. While participation is pushed onto the agenda through struggles from below, there is also strong contestation from above to channel it in technocratic directions in the service of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the dominant development project (Sinwell 2009). Participation is used as a way of saving costs, including by enabling the use of the unpaid or very poorly paid labour of beneficiaries to implement projects (Ballard 2008). Where successful, this appropriation of participation in the interests of elites by mainstream development institutions serves to reinforce existing power relations rather than weaken or transform them. ‘Participation’ is then converted into the reproduction of the dominant system. Nevertheless, there is no endpoint where one or other conception ultimately wins. Like development, practices of participation are continually reproduced through contestation, albeit within highly unequal relations of power.

A key theme that was to be explored in the research was around the trade-offs inherent in participatory approaches. This theme can be reframed in the light of a conception of ‘development’ as a process of modernising and refreshing capitalist relations. The dominant discursive framing of cost-benefit analyses focus on the extent to which participation leads to more efficient and effective outcomes, often measured in financial terms (“is this the most optimal use of available financial resources?”). However, we should not see the issue as all or nothing. Can we say that a little bit of participation is better than none? The answer to this depends on what kind of participation occurs in practice. Arnstein (1969:217) constructs a ladder of participation, from the lowest to the highest. The first two levels, manipulation and therapy, are described as ‘non-participation’ contrived as a substitute for genuine participation. The next three levels, informing, consultation and placation, are described as ‘tokenism’, where citizens may be heard but lack the power to ensure that their voice is heeded. Further levels have increasing degrees of citizen power: partnership, that allows for negotiation and trade-off; and delegated power and citizen control where citizens have full managerial power. The South African approach currently hovers somewhere between tokenism and partnership, although not necessarily open equally to all in practice. Ballard (2008) suggests two basic approaches to participation: on the one hand, it can be a mechanism for better informing officials and elected representatives about the needs of citizens. This information is then taken away and turned into programmes and projects. This is a technocratic approach to participation, where outside ‘experts’ determine what happens to information. A different approach to participation is as a way of allowing citizens to contribute to debates about the best way to meet social need. This incorporates both what people want and how these needs should be met. Dialogical theories such as those of Paulo Freire emphasise that both problem-posing and problem-solving methods must be “constituted and organised by the [participants’] view of the world, where their own generative themes are found” (Freire 1972:81). But it is essential that these approaches are driven by the timeframes and rhythms of the participating groups themselves, and not by the imposed timeframes of bureaucracy and government structure. This means facilitators must be able to spend time with participants rather than rushing to complete a task to meet their own deadlines. It is imbued with an activist rather than a bureaucratic spirit. A key outcome is not so much the tangible benefits as “a shared critical perception of the world, which implies a correct method of approaching reality in order to unveil it” (Freire 1972:82-83). This is something that can never be taken away from a person or group, regardless of where they find themselves.

We can list many possible benefits of adopting a participatory approach, and these can cross the ideological spectrum. On one end, participation can improve the efficiency of external resource use by displacing labour and costs to beneficiaries and improve legitimacy of government projects. A

little further in the spectrum, participation may avoid inappropriate interventions or projects, and can facilitate buy-in, which in turn is believed to lead to greater sustainability. Heberlein (1976) notes that participation in public activities can improve outcomes: “Community decisions that involve citizens are more likely to be acceptable to the local people. It is recommended that better community decisions should be beneficial to the average citizen”.¹ In the middle of the spectrum, accountability can also be improved by making the link between officials and their constituencies tighter (Ballard 2008:172-73). “Citizen participation in community affairs also serves to check and balance political activities” (Heberlein 1976) – participation is here seen as key to democratic accountability especially between electoral times and at local, everyday life scales for residents. In line with this understanding of constructing citizenship, Moodley (2007) argues that, through public participation, citizens can best articulate their own needs, help improve ownership of processes and improve legitimacy of government projects. It is a way of improving the quality of service delivery, is a powerful tool to help people understand the complexity of development problems and the need for devising integrated responses to difficult challenges, and helps participants to see the bigger picture by allowing them to fully understand the necessity to prioritise when they are confronted with a long list of needs. Moodley suggests that public participation is a way of breaking down the barriers between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and perceives that active participation allows communities access to once faceless bureaucracies. While there is value in some of these propositions, we can note that they tend to be instrumentalist in their approach, i.e. participation, is a means towards ends defined by external agents. Other benefits of participation emphasise more ‘intangible’ outcomes, where participation enables people to become active participants in processes that affect them, rather than passive recipients (or non-recipients). According to Bridges (1974) active participation in community affairs can enable individuals to realise their own power in making changes, and to get a better understanding of mixed-group dynamics. This improves appreciation of individual and group needs of others, and enables participants to better resolve conflicting interests for the general welfare of the group.

In reality it is very difficult to measure the precise contribution that participation makes to an intervention, because participation is one amongst many variables and cannot be quantified. It is not really possible to compare cases where there was participation of different types to see which type of participation is more effective. This goes for any social intervention or method, since the unique context and circumstances of any intervention will profoundly shape it. This reinforces the idea that we should not be looking for a blueprint that can be applied everywhere at all times. Rather, the local context and dynamics should drive the shape of the intervention.

4. Participation in post-apartheid discourse and practice

4.1 The struggle against apartheid, and the RDP

The internal struggle against apartheid generated a strong culture of grassroots democracy in the popular movements, albeit somewhat politically exclusive at times. Because the movements were built from the ground up, the affiliated structures demanded accountability from co-ordinating bodies, such as the United Democratic Front (UDF). At the same time, there was intolerance towards dissent and heterodoxy within the popular movement both inside South Africa and in the exile movement (see Marais 1998; O’Malley 2007). This is partly understandable in the conditions of state repression and secrecy, but has coloured the political culture in South Africa. In the African trade unions that grew from the early 1970s, shop-floor democracy was a fundamental building block of

¹ Heberlein (1976) cited in Ohio State University (n.d.) “Citizen Participation in Community Development” accessed online: <http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/1700.html>

the movement. The illegitimacy of systems of rule, both in the townships (the Black Local Authorities) and in the workplaces (despotic white management) were a key grievance, and demands included community-controlled development and worker participation in managerial decisions. Struggles for participation in a transformed system were key drivers of the resistance to apartheid.

According to Seekings (2000), the civics, which constituted an important component of the internal resistance, went through four key strategic shifts between 1977 and the unbanning of the liberation organisations in 1990. Initially civic mobilisation was seen as a preparation for a future, undefined, period of political struggle. Later, civic struggles were understood as the basis for simultaneous political struggles. In the mid-1980s the concept of ‘people’s power’ was developed on the basis of insurrectionary struggles emanating from the Eastern Cape. The strategy envisaged street and area committees assuming a range of administrative as well as representative roles. These would include “organising services such as dispute settlement, policing, refuse removal and even health care”, as well as popular justice (Seekings 2000:73). The strategy dissolved the distinction between civic and political struggles. Yet by the late 1980s, political and developmental activities were again separated in strategic thinking, with strategy focused on struggles over development (*ibid.*:55-56). This turn was the product of the limits of the ‘people’s power’ strategy that saw the state respond with a combination of heavy repression and new developmental initiatives, both at local and national levels. Local level negotiations, led by the Soweto People’s Delegation which met the City Council in 1989, spread and were bolstered by the unbanning of the ANC and other liberation organisations in 1990. During this period, civic leaders felt the need to “begin to think of ourselves, in a sense, as a department of a government-in-waiting” (Eric Molobi, quoted in Seekings 2000:77). Cas Coovadia, another leader of the UDF, argued that civics had to engage with problems rather than just protest about them (cited in Seekings 2000). The turn to negotiations at both local and national levels opened the doors to the separation of political from development issues, and the grassroots movement was oriented to the latter, leaving the former to the previously exiled leaders of the ANC in particular.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was the outcome of this shift. It was the product of wide-ranging consultation and discussion in the popular movement and was also passed by private corporations for their buy-in. Although it started as a potential framework for progressive transformation, ultimately it was adapted to eliminate conflict with powerful economic elites (Marais 1998; Wood 2000). This can be understood as part of the process of consolidating the post-apartheid hegemonic bloc, which continues to include white monopoly capital as a key element. Principles of the RDP included that it should be a ‘people-driven process’, where “development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment” (African National Congress 1994:5). Presumably the active involvement is in meeting basic needs, referred to earlier in the same paragraph. A further principle of the RDP was the need for “thoroughgoing democratisation of the society”, and “the people affected must participate in decision-making” (*ibid.*:7). While “mass participation in [the RDP]’s elaboration and implementation is essential” this consolidated the ideological shift “from a largely oppositional mode into a more developmental one” (*ibid.*:131). In practice, forums were one of the key mechanisms for facilitating mass participation in policy formulation and implementation. At the local level, these took the form of community or local development forums that established a monopoly on legitimate development activities at local level (Swilling 1995). At the national level, while forums initially had some popular representation, this was increasingly reduced as small groups of technical experts took hold of policy formulation. In the electricity sector, for example, the National Electrification Forum (NELF) was established with representation from government, parastatals, big business, the trade unions and the national civic umbrella. After 1994, the NELF was disbanded and eventually replaced with the Electricity Working Group (EWG) that was a purely government structure in which unions

and civics were excluded. At best, the underlying logic was that the ANC in government was representing the interests of workers and residents. This brings us to questions of the state and its authority, which we will turn to shortly. From early on there was a tendency to “define development as a technical process that need[ed] the skills of private or government technocrats/professionals”, who had little time to engage in long-term community work, with the result that development became “about good ‘business plans’ drawn up by professionals, rather than about struggle and grassroots organising” (Swilling 1995:157).

When the RDP Office was closed in 1996, “the question could justifiably be asked whether the RDP indeed remained a ‘programme’ or whether it had been disaggregated into a compendium of poorly co-ordinated, conventional development projects” (Marias 1998:178). The shift from the RDP to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in 1996 is well recorded and underpinned what is now referred to as the ‘1996 class project’ by the left inside the Alliance. This process saw the increasing lack of responsiveness of the state to the grassroots, the growth of technocratic solutions and top-down delivery. In short, the majority of the population whose power is dispersed were marginalised from engaging in discussions about the economic, political and social trajectory; from policy formulation and from active participation in delivery. Increasing patronage and political exclusivity accompanied this, leading eventually to growing revolt both outside and inside the Alliance.

4.2 Participation in the era of neo-liberalising globalisation

During the GEAR period, a number of laws and policies relating to participation were passed. The right of citizens to participate in decisions affecting them is embedded in the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). According to s152(e) an objective of local government is “to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government”. Section 195(1)(e) states that a principle of public administration is that “people’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making”. Section 17 establishes that “everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions”. Theoretically, this gives protection to other ideas about participation such as mobilisations and marches to pressure government.

The White Paper on Local Government (DPLG 1998) entrenches participation in the following principles:

- To ensure political leaders remain accountable and work within their mandate;
- To allow citizens (as individuals or interest groups) to have continuous input into local politics;
- To allow service consumers to have input on the way services are delivered;
- To afford organised civil society the opportunity to enter into partnerships and contracts with local government in order to mobilise additional resources.

The role of the public forms part of the decision-making cycle in terms of report back and account to residents about council decisions, plans and budgets, informing people of new services, tariffs, developments and policies, and involving people in partnerships for delivery. The White Paper obliges local municipalities to develop mechanisms to ensure citizen participation in policy initiation and formulation, and the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of decision-making and implementation. The White Paper suggests the following approaches that can be adopted to facilitate this:

- Forums to allow organised formations to initiate policies and/or influence policy formulation, as well as participate in M&E;
- Structured stakeholder involvement in certain council committees, in particular if these are issue-oriented committees with a limited lifespan rather than permanent structures;

- Participatory budgeting initiatives aimed at linking community priorities to capital investment programmes;
- Focus group participatory action research conducted in partnership with NGOs and CBOs can generate detailed information about a wide range of specific needs and values.

There is a slippage into technocratic mode in the White Paper. For example, citizens are referred to as “service consumers”. This shift from citizens to consumers or clients of services delivered by the state is characteristic of the corporatisation of service delivery where business principles of profitability replace the idea of services as a ‘public good’. This alters the underlying managerial ethos of delivery organisations and changes the nature of political relationships between citizens and the state, including weakening the accountability nexus (McDonald and Ruiters 2005). The emphasis on forums and structured interactions foreshadowed the construction of narrow institutional spaces for participation that is characteristic of the South African political landscape today. The principles and approaches are reasonable enough, but it must be recognised that they can be used for vastly different political purposes. Policy is as much about what does not get done as about what is written in. For example, partnership with NGOs and CBOs to do participatory action research assumes the availability of significant resources and appropriate timeframes that can allow for deep and ongoing engagement with the grassroots. However, such resources have never been forthcoming from the state, and certainly not for independent formations of civil society. On the contrary, the state proceeded to draw funding streams to itself, starving out civil society organisations (CSOs) and only providing resources to those that acted as extensions of the state’s own service delivery functions (Kotze 2003).

Apart from the constitutional obligation the local spheres of government are legally bound to make sure that public participation occurs at local level, in terms of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000). The Municipal Structures Act establishes statutory ward- and municipal-level structures to ensure public participation, and requires annual reporting on the involvement of communities and community organisations in the affairs of the municipality. Section 72 of the Act states that a ward committee’s objective is to enhance participatory democracy in local government. Sections 16-22 of the Municipal Systems Act state that citizens should be given an opportunity to participate in the governance of their affairs and provides the systems to do so. Through these Acts, citizens are legally protected and afforded a space and opportunity to participate on governance issues.

In 2007, the National Framework on Public Participation (DPLG 2007) was produced. It defines public participation as “an open, accountable process through which individuals and groups within selected communities can exchange views and influence decision-making”. Elsewhere it is defined as a democratic process of engaging people, deciding, planning, and playing an active part in the development and operation of services that affect their lives”. The National Framework highlights four reasons why public participation is being promoted: i) it is a legal requirement to consult; ii) it can make development plans and services more relevant to local needs and conditions; iii) it can be used to assist with handing over responsibility for services and promoting community action; and iv) it can empower local communities to have control over their own lives and livelihoods. Some basic assumptions underlying the conception of public participation are that it:

- Is designed to promote the values of good governance and human rights;
- Acknowledges a fundamental right of all people to participate in the governance system;
- Is designed to narrow the social distance between the electorate and elected institutions;
- Requires recognising the intrinsic value of all of our people, investing in their ability to contribute to governance processes;
- People can participate as individuals, interest groups or communities more generally.

The challenge is in understanding how participation and participatory governance align with the economic structure, and the associated exclusion of millions from productive activity, which is protected by the state (with gradualist attempts to modify it while maintaining the underlying logic). By 2007, the popular energies generated in the final years of the struggle against apartheid had long been dissipated, and ‘participation’ was corralled into very tightly defined institutional channels. These channels were presented as the only ‘proper’ spaces for participation (Miraftab cited in Sinwell 2009:2), and any action taken outside of these channels was delegitimised. “Having established its moral authority as a supporter of participation, [the government could] now demand to know why it would be necessary to operate outside of those forums it has established for the purpose” (Ballard 2008:180). According to Miraftab (quoted in Sinwell 2009:2) it is a neoliberal policy to assign to “the state the agency to grant status [to] civil society..., and to define the spaces where citizenship can be practiced”. Denying that extra-institutional protests and struggles had any legitimate basis, the government blamed ongoing and at times widespread waves of protest on a ‘third force’ of *agent provocateurs*, ‘counter-revolutionaries’ (i.e. defined as those who acted outside of Congress Alliance structures) or opportunist members of the ANC who had failed to get leadership positions at local level. In turn, the latter was depoliticised and reduced purely to an internal struggle for control over power and resources. It is only very recently that there is some recognition in the ruling structures that perhaps the waves of protests in townships might in some way be justified (see, for example, Carrim 2009). High profile impromptu visits to what used to be called ‘oil spots’ - areas with high levels of protest - under apartheid, and even the wholesale sacking of local representatives have been reported.

Struggles for power internal to the ANC certainly were and are a factor in stimulating the mass action seen in recent years. The ANC itself had a lot to do with this, especially in its policy of parachuting politically-favoured ‘cadres’ into localities as councillors without any organic connection to their constituency. The citizenry ended up voting for the party instead of the individual without knowing which individual was going to be deployed to their area. As a result, political accountability was oriented upwards, and with it a willingness to toe the party line for purposes of career advancement. A recent survey conducted by Robert Mattes (2009:120) found that in 2006 only 14% of South Africans could correctly identify their local councillor by name. By comparison 70% of citizens in Uganda, Botswana and Tanzania could identify their local representative correctly by name.

Policies and legislation spawned a series of institutional participatory mechanisms, or ‘invited spaces’. By definition, these ‘invited’ spaces are at the state’s behest and on its terms, even if the government may genuinely be interested in hearing from the grassroots. This both tightens central control over legitimate expression, and pacifies and tempers the activities of the population, who wait for the moment to be told that they can participate (Ballard 2008). Participatory mechanisms established by the state included structures for community participation e.g. ward committees and ad hoc development forums); planning mechanisms e.g. community-based planning (CBP) and its placement in statutory Integrated Development Planning (IDP) processes; and participation in council meetings and public meetings at municipal or ward levels. These mechanisms have not quite lived up to their potential.

Few people take up these opportunities for a range of reasons. Ohio State University identifies some conditions that might encourage or discourage citizen participation:

- An appropriate organisational structure must be available to citizens to express their interests. If they view the organisation as cumbersome, time consuming, dictatorial, or grossly inefficient,

they will not join, will withdraw after joining, or their dissatisfaction may be evidenced by high absenteeism, or a general unwillingness to be supportive of cooperation.

- If positive benefits, ranging from personal to collective desires, can be gained there is a higher likelihood of participation. However, this seldom comes without costs. Those who participate assess that benefits are likely to outweigh the costs.
- Situations that may threaten people's life styles may elicit participation. Citizens will voluntarily participate in a community activity when they see some aspect of their way-of-life threatened.
- Citizens may participate because they feel an obligation or commitment to respond. Unselfishness is rarely sufficient by itself to sustain motivation for joining and remaining involved in volunteer associations. Personal values compel them to support a particular activity.
- Lack of information inhibits participation.
- People with lower incomes, less education, less occupation status, and lower standards of living are less likely to participate in voluntary associations than other people.

Hicks (2005)² notes that in the context of a growth in poverty and inequality, if citizens become increasingly sceptical and distrustful of political parties and institutions, and/or view them as corrupt, there is declining political participation. This widening gap between citizens and state institutions results in a 'diminished democracy'. With parties' focus characteristically being on electoral processes to the detriment of effective representation, links between citizens and the state are not being developed. The result: 'a weak democracy marked by poor representation' and lack of faith in participation. Revealing the consequences of superficial or cosmetic processes, Manor (cited in Hicks 2005) notes that "if ordinary people find that what at first appears to be an opportunity for greater influence turns out, in practice, to be a cosmetic exercise – if they gain little or no new leverage – then they will feel conned and betrayed". Sisk *et al.* (cited in Hicks 2005) suggest that "participatory approaches will suffer if people believe that they are being used to legitimise decisions that have already been taken or that the results of their efforts will not matter in the long run. Citizens and civic groups will quickly recognise when a process is a mask for a top-down decision-implementation and when the views of participants are genuinely sought".

With specific reference to South Africa, people may feel that their views will not be taken into account and that participation is a worthless exercise and linked to political power plays. Party politics, understood as the explicit interventions of political parties, tend to put many residents off participation. For example, political affiliation may play a major role in who serves on ward committees, which influences who is heard and who is not heard. Part of the problem here is lack of credible opposition parties. In any case, claims by ward committees to real representation of the community are questionable. Ward committees are restricted from acting independently of the councillor. For example, members cannot call a mass meeting without the councillor's direct involvement. They have no authority to challenge the council. Councillors themselves have fairly limited power, and this undermines the value of interacting with them in the first place (Benit-Gbaffou 2008). Many people are not aware or informed about IDP processes or time frames. A recent representative survey of people in the 14 Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) and eight Urban Renewal Programme (URP) nodes found that just 14% of rural residents and 11% of urban residents had even heard of IDPs in these nodes in 2008. This low figure is in nodes where government was explicitly focusing on integration and co-ordination (one of the key purposes of the programmes), so it is quite likely that it would be lower in other areas where government was not focusing such effort. Of those who had heard about IDPs, about 47%

² All references to the Hicks (2005) article were accessed online:

<http://www.cpp.org.za/main.php?include=docs/community.html&menu= menu/pubs.html&title=Documents>

participated in the process in the rural nodes and just 37% participated in urban nodes in 2008 (in urban nodes this was down from 52% in 2006) (Everatt and Smith 2008:50). Some people may simply prefer not to be involved in decision-making and trust that others will represent their interests or needs effectively. Participation mechanisms are often inaccessible to marginalised groups and individuals, especially in societies like South Africa that are deeply marred by inequality. These mechanisms do not “automatically benefit poor people and groups that have long faced social exclusion” (Hicks 2005). Not everyone who participates has equal power, and some people are excluded from participating because they have limited power (Edigheji 2004), even though rhetorically these are the people participation is aimed at incorporating into development processes.

The term ‘invented spaces’ (see Sinwell 2009; Cornwall 2002) was coined to refer to other unofficial but widely accepted and recognised forms of participation, e.g. demonstrations, picketing and marches. They are part of the political culture of the country. Civil society movements, churches, business as well as political parties were all active at a local level. In the post-apartheid era these forms of participation are theoretically protected as long as they operate within the legal framework. However, political power determines the extent of freedom to engage in these forms of protest. The handling of some local protests organised independently of the Alliance indicate a tendency to infringe on the legal protection of citizens involved in these protests. There are numerous examples in recent years involving social movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo in KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape Anti-Evictions Campaign, the Landless People’s Movement in Protea South and related Poor Peoples’ Alliance, and others. Other examples that emerged even from inside the Congress Alliance, such as the boundary disputes in Morafeng and Matatiele were also dismissed as the work of *agent provocateurs* until recently. It is possible that we are witnessing a shift in government strategy as a response to the persistence of protest, which highlights the lack of involvement of the grassroots in development. But we are not yet at the point where the underlying development project is being questioned.

5. The state, governance and participation

A gap will always be found between policy formulation and implementation in a society where there is a separation of planning from execution. This is partly because the planners often do not have the detailed knowledge of practice required to implement an action. It is also partly because the practitioners have their own intellect, and interpret and translate instructions from outside through their own understanding, knowledge, experience and interests. This can explain why nice-sounding language in policy has rarely translated into reality for the majority of the population. In order to understand this better, we need to have a firmer grasp on what the state is. One of the weaknesses of civil society in post-apartheid South Africa is its failure to theorise the state and its own relationship to the state. In the dominant apolitical, technocratic development model, the state is portrayed as a unified, altruistic force that exists for the benefit of the population at large. The starting point of the dominant understanding of the state is that “policy and people who implement it are well-intentioned and that their work constitutes a net social benefit” (Lipsky 1981:70). Most NGO development work starts from this premise, and critique of the state is limited to institutional form (Sinwell 2009). Responses to the perpetual gap between policy formulation and implementation (translating the nice-sounding words into practice) focus on reforming the institutions of the state like the ward committees, IDP process and other participatory mechanisms to get the state to be more responsive to the citizenry. This lack of clarity on the state is not unsurprising, given that state power itself is deployed to “produce and impose...categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world - including the state itself” (Bourdieu 1994:1). The state “incarnates itself simultaneously in objectivity, in the form of specific organisational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought...[It] makes

us forget that it issues out of a long series of acts of *institution* (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearances of the *natural*” (Bourdieu 1994:3-4).

We need to break down existing conceptions of the state. First and most importantly, we need to dispense with the idea that the state is unified. In this conception, elections cede authority for decisions to those who occupy the executive for a period of five years. The executive arm of the state (Cabinet, the provincial and municipal executive committees) then uses this mandate to develop priorities and plans which are sent to the public service for implementation. If the state was unified, there would be a seamless translation of the instructions from the executive arm into practical action carried out by the implementation arm (departments and officials). CSOs know very well that this is not how it works. Rather than a unified political force, it makes much more sense to understand the state “as the result of a relationship of contradictory forces, to see it as an ‘unstable equilibrium’” (Bayart 1993:196, citing Gramsci). The state itself is not internally coherent. “Political institutions...conspicuously fail to display a unity of practice...Manifestly they are divided against one another, volatile and confused. What is constituted out of their collective practice is a series of ephemerally unified postures in relation to transient issues with no sustained consistency of purpose” (Abrams 1988:79). Different types of power reside at different levels of the state, and these are in constant tension with one another and constantly contradict each other in practice and discourse. The state is not a monolithic entity but a contested terrain, both by forces in and out of the state but also between overlapping networks of power relations, each deriving their legitimacy from different sources (e.g. “elected by the people” for politicians; and “mandated by the centre” for departments and officials) and each with different material resources at their disposal. This resonates far better with our experience of a fragmented state, with different institutions and levels within the state often acting and talking at cross-purposes to one another. This is the character of any state, not only the post-apartheid South African state.

In this fragmented state, the ‘street-level’ bureaucracy has a central role. Its everyday practices constitute the state in a fundamental sense: without these practices there is no state to speak of, at least at the interface with citizens. This is not only in the sense that the actions of public service workers actually constitute the services delivered by government (Meyers *et al.* 1998), but in the more profound sense that the state is “only a category which can be used to repeat or represent several specific practices - government practices, semi-government practices, bureaucratic practices, etc - as a grouping in specific sites” (Wickham 1983:491). The extent to which local level bureaucrats interpret and implement policies make them *de facto* policy makers as well as rule-followers (Leach *et al.* 2007:9-10). The bureaucracy translates and interprets instructions from the centre, in the process altering them. And it plays a critical ideological role in reinforcing the notion of the state as altruistic by devoting a high proportion of its energies in “concealing the lack of service and generating appearances of responsiveness” (Lipsky 1981:74) and by “constantly teaching, socialising, and signalling clients about the expectations and opportunities associated with” the programme (Meyers *et al.* 1998:11). The interaction between bureaucrats and citizens (converted into ‘clients’) is one of bureaucrats training citizens to behave in certain ways in the hope of receiving a service. Nevertheless, bureaucrats are not merely ‘representatives of the state’ but also people with histories and desires and agendas of their own. As such, they do “develop interests and perspectives of their own, sometimes in conjunction with specific external constituencies” (Heyman 2004:489). This dual role of the bureaucrat, both as an agent that materialises the state, but also as an individual who is also a citizen, makes local, contingent interactions very important in the way the state is perceived and the types of relations that are formed at the local level. As a result, “centres of power” (including state bureaucracies), have an incomplete and unstable relationship to the broad flow of social activity. They try to convert these flows into more stabilised institutional arrangements, but are never entirely successful at this, making them unstable and open to mutation

(Allen 1999:204). The local state emerges from the interaction between processes necessary for capitalist reproduction and contingent conditions within actual places. In this way, the local state is “a concrete terrain of class conflict that cannot be reduced directly from an abstract theory of its functions” (Chouinard & Fincher 1987:341).

We also need to challenge the notion that the state is altruistic. We should challenge our own thinking on this question both at the levels of the state as a whole and at the level of the incumbent government or political administration. The state as a whole “is the material condensation of the relationship of class forces in society” (Poulantzas 1978:128). The state will more or less represent the balance of class forces in the society. This takes us away from an instrumentalism that sees the state as always and everywhere a tool that is used by the capitalist class in its own interests. It opens the way to see the state as a contested terrain. Earlier we referred to the hegemony of the African middle and nascent capitalist classes, leading a social bloc comprising white monopoly capital and the organised black working class as the other core components. Struggles inside the state will primarily mirror the struggles within this social bloc. As we discussed earlier, post-apartheid hegemony is constructed around a particular notion of development, which aims to modernise and deracialise the inherited economy without questioning its fundamental base of private appropriation of collectively-produced surpluses. The state in South Africa was constructed on this base, and changing tactics and strategies (systems of rule) since the early days of colonialism, through apartheid and into the post-apartheid period have all had the goal of protecting this core. In this way, the state does serve capitalist interests, although those interests shift and change over time and systems of governance must adapt to these interests over time.

The ANC’s ascension to government in 1994 represents a new system of governance that no longer relies on racial exclusivity to protect private appropriation of surplus. The shift to racial inclusivity, initially in the (formal) political realm and far more slowly in the economic realm was a requirement for the recreation of conditions conducive to expanded private appropriation for a now expanded, deracialising capitalist class. Buy-in to this vision required the newly hegemonic African middle classes to tread a careful path between its own accumulation interests, the core interests of white monopoly capital and the interests of the organised black industrial working class. This has meant a difficult balance between using the state as a power base to realise its own core class interests, while simultaneously retaining fundamental features of the inherited capitalist system, and providing some kind of employment security for organised workers and (for a wider constituency) welfare for the majority of the poor and dispossessed.

Governance refers to a set of relationships that brings actors outside the state into processes of governing - thus governance is inherently a process of ongoing negotiation of relationships of power, but based on a pre-existing understanding of what the state does. The tactics of government make possible “the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not” (Foucault 1991:103). Shifts in government rationality and techniques of rule accompany the altered class alignments that produce a new hegemonic bloc. In post-apartheid South Africa, participation was incorporated into new techniques of rule that was increasingly shaped by a ‘new public management’ (NPM) ethos. This is a culture of turning an active public into atomised, passive ‘clients’ of the state, and the rise of a technocracy that increasingly removes decisions and control from the ground and places them in the hands of professional ‘experts’. NPM has accompanied neo-liberalisation and has drawn state agencies into the logic of the market (McDonald 2006). The rise of financial auditing in the state has become a core rationality of public service delivery, with financial rationality replacing professional expertise and other specialist activities (McDonald 2006). It is a

tool of control from a distance. Performance management, as another technique of NPM³, attempts to assert control over the ‘bureaucrat as individual’, eliminating as far as possible the use of their position for material self-advancement and enrichment. The assumption behind this is that each individual will automatically try to enrich themselves rather than improve their service. NPM seeks to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and to prescribe the choices of action available to state officials in an attempt to control these actions from the centre. When we are faced with high levels of corruption at local level, this may not seem like a bad thing. But it operates within the “calculative rationality of the principle” (McDonald 2006:27) (i.e. the state which protects private appropriation of wealth) as well as orienting accountability away from the citizens and towards the central state, which is viewed as a proxy for the citizens and replaces their authority. In the context of NPM, participation is linked to enhancing effectiveness of development, closely related to ‘delivery’ in the South African case. This ties effectiveness into sometimes unrealistic timeframes, especially when performance management systems privilege quantitative over qualitative targets. In the race to meet these targets, government officials are often critical of participation because of the delays it causes. They may take a short route by allowing only a few community representatives to give inputs into processes and call it public participation. This is what Arnstein referred to as tokenism. Effectiveness is also limited by the scarcity of resources in comparison to the wide range of needs that exist in communities.

6. The role of NGOs in participation and Planact’s intervention strategy

Placing participation in the specific context is critical for our understanding of the role it can play and what kind of contestation may develop around it. In South Africa, there are two main strands of participation: invented spaces in which citizens and civil society groupings define their own activities in order to express and/or meet their needs, and invited spaces which are controlled by the state and used to legitimise certain types of activity and civil society formations and delegitimise others. This does not mean that other forms of participation cannot exist; merely that they are not recognised in a positive light by government. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is a good example of a movement that was initially delegitimised but because of its persistence and organising capacity was ultimately recognised by the state and drawn into formal engagements with the state. However, the literature cautions on being too ‘state-centric’, i.e. focusing all efforts on gaining acceptance from the state. The state is not in total control of activities in society at any stage, and it is also skewed towards the interests of the holders of economic power in the society. This raises questions about tactics and strategies for the grassroots. It is not to say there should not be engagement with the state or contestation around formal channels of participation. But this must be one amongst a range of tactics and strategies that are employed to build an active citizenry that can identify their own issues and the solutions to those issues.

It is important here to reflect on some of the key factors that have impacted on the role of South African urban sector NGOs and their relationship to the grassroots and the state on the question of participation. In particular, given that the action research component of the study focuses on projects in which Planact is one of the participants, it is necessary to understand how Planact has viewed its role, its goals, and the limits of its capacity. Planact had completed a process of exploring its history vis-à-vis the context affecting NGOs, eventually published as a book, which provides some insight into these issues and their impact on Planact and to some extent the affiliated organisations in the Urban Sector Network⁴.

³ Others include performance appraisal, performance-related pay, quality assurance, total quality, management, and risk.

⁴ The Urban Sector Network was an umbrella organisation which brought several NGOs in different South African urban areas together for purposes of developing common projects, sharing lessons, and developing advocacy positions.

Planact was initially formed in the mid- 1980s as an organisation of urban professionals supporting civil society formations in the Mass Democratic Movement to conceptualise and advocate for alternatives to the inequitable development policies and programmes of the apartheid government. Much of the thinking within Planact was aligned with the concept ultimately codified in the RDP (as noted above) of people-centred development, and its practice involved supporting civics and unions in their efforts to realise this goal (Royston 2009). In the negotiations for a new democratic government, civil society formations, including NGOs, pushed for a number of measures that ultimately made it into government policy documents, but by no means did they win on all fronts, a function of the unequal power relations that characterised the negotiations (Bond 2009; Swilling 2009). A number of commentators have observed that while civil society organisations had benefited directly from foreign funding flows prior to the advent of non-racial democracy in 1994, a decided shift in funding in support of the new government occurred (Kuljian 2009), and many civil society organisations failed or became exceedingly weakened in the post-apartheid era. Swilling (2009) chronicles the demise of the civics in particular, associating this with the formation of SANCO (South African National Civic Organisation) as a national organisation that focused on entrenching its tenuous position within the Alliance instead of continuing to support grassroots movement-building. Faced with a funding crisis Planact and many other NGOs had to rapidly shift to providing services to the new state, in Planact's case focusing on building local government institutions through training on integrated development planning, local economic development, and the role of councillors and later ward committee members in building participatory democracy. Ultimately Planact and the other urban service organisations recovered some degree of donor funding to focus on training and facilitation at the grassroots—however, in the context already described in which civil society was very weak and fragmented, and the state was considered democratically legitimate and also controlled a huge amount of resources, the focus became on promoting pro-poor and participatory, people-centred approaches within the programs and resources now available through the state.

As Narsoo and Carey (2009) capture, for the USN organisations the tensions involved in this role were considerable, as the NGOs struggled with staffing and funding challenges as well as marginalisation by various state institutions because of the perceived criticism coming from the NGOs, and eventually the Urban Sector Network also dissolved, further weakening the position of the affiliates. Yet these organisations and a number of other NGOs did attempt to construct a cohesive value position in undertaking the work that they do, and central to this value position is a rights-based approach to the issue of participation. As Davids (2009: 199) summarises, the thrust of this was to assist the poor, in particular, to:

- take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Constitution and other legislation to participate in their own development and governance;
- push the boundaries that were set over the first 12 years of democracy, thus ensuring that the spaces poor and marginalized people need in order to address their issues continues to grow, rather than stagnate or contract; and
- question local government policies, practices and trends that constrain poor people's participation and, where appropriate, to challenge and seek to change them.

While indeed these activities may be considered state-centric, it is not the case that there was an uncritical acceptance of state policies and these NGOs saw their place as simply helping to implement them. In fact, NGO collaboration on research and advocacy in the areas of housing and land rights (including programmes such as the People's Housing Process), poverty, and building participatory democracy were consciously focused on bringing a grassroots perspective to decision-making. This has fallen short of movement-building and perhaps has had limited impact, but in

Planact's view it has helped to bring an alternative perspective to the narrowly-construed technocratic implementation of development projects.

In Planact's own conceptualisation of its work, as reflected on by staff in the course of the action research, community participation practices form a key part of the overall strategy to contribute towards building an active citizenry effectively able to participate in exploring various alternatives towards positive social change and, wherever possible, positively impacting on decision-making with regards to development projects and policy processes. Planact strives to utilise participatory approaches with community members in designing appropriate strategies in which community members are agents in their own development to a point of "ownership" of the development process. Planact regards this form of participation as a means to instill dignity and confidence amongst community members, particularly those formerly disempowered and those who continue to be marginalised, so that they are recognised and empowered to operate as active citizens. This involves building a genuine relationship between the various stakeholders based on the core values of respect, empathy, trust, equality and commitment. Planact believes that it is important to network with community groups and broader civil society organisations to learn from each other's efforts to discover and promote alternative people-centred development approaches – hence Planact's positioning as a learning and advocacy-oriented organisation. These ideals closely align with the view that participation "has to do with the redistribution of power that enables ... those presently excluded from political and economic processes, to be deliberately included [since] it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform" (Arnstein 1969).

While Planact attempts to work with these underlying ideals and beliefs, it is not always a simple process from belief to direct action since there are numerous other factors impacting on the ways in which the development process is framed. This involves a range of pressures from donors, politicians, government officials and some community members who hold different understandings of how development should unfold – particularly related to ways of holding on to power or often simply a case of fear of not having been exposed to different ways of doing things. Participatory practices require a significant time investment, as well as sensitive, skilled facilitation and commitment to the process. Bearing all of this in mind with an awareness that participation is but one (albeit very important) part of creating positive social change, Planact values genuine participation as an important entry point for institutional and systemic change.

7. Conclusion

Returning to the key themes that initially framed the research, we have now framed the reflections on participation in the context of an understanding of 'development' that is indisputably linked with the capitalist system and that does not challenge this system. Indeed, it is an integral part of that system. In line with the broader understanding of development outlined above, development in South Africa has three primary components: i) the reproduction of capitalist relations; ii) the deracialisation (and modernisation) of the capitalist system, including weak attempts to increase formal participation in the economy through increasing access to wage work; iii) the incorporation of a wider welfare component to secure political stability and basic survival for those who are structurally marginalised from the formal economy. Participation is an aspect of this development project that has some room for contestation but is built around state-defined and -driven (and hence top-down) plans for realising these three development tasks. Trade-offs of promoting participation are mainly captured within this narrow framework and focus on ways that participation can assist with these tasks. Identifying costs of participation and non-participation therefore requires us to look more closely at the specific content of concrete participatory activities. This will enable us to place the concrete forms of participation on a continuum of 'non-participation' through to 'full citizen power' which in turn will

allow us to examine the extent to which the specific forms of participation challenge dominant relations of power. Costs of non-participation or participation will be viewed in this light, rather than in a technocratic light of the extent to which participation impedes or assists in the efficiency in realising the reproduction of capitalist social relations through the three development tasks. When we look at the types of participation favoured by communities, we must first consider that communities are heterogeneous and not undifferentiated entities. Power relations come in here, and the specific relations in a concrete setting must be understood. We also need to bring into the picture broader power relations that impact on ‘communities’ (differentially) and shape views of what is desirable. As Warf (1986:274) says, “power relations necessarily enter into the self-understanding of subjects as ideology, the unwritten parameters of interpretation”. Similarly, when we aim to uncover the obstacles to implementing participatory approaches, we will take a grassroots perspective rather than a technocratic perspective. Underpinning this approach is the proposal that the state’s interests are not identical to the interests of the grassroots, even though they are ideologically presented as such. In the case studies we will aim to look beyond this ideology, to reveal its discursive and material effects in the areas of study.

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